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Message from the President of the United States, with communications from the Government of Yucatan, representing the state of suffering to which that country is reduced by an insurrection of the Indians, imploring the protection of the United States, and offering, in case it should be granted, to transfer the dominion and sovereignty of the peninsula to the United States.

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MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

WITH COMMUNICATIONS

From the government of Yucatan, representing the state of suffering to which that country is reduced by an insurrection of the Indians, imploring the protection of the United States, and offering, in case it should be granted, to transfer the dominion and sovereignty of the peninsula to the United States.

APRIL 29, 1848.

Read, referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations, and ordered to be printed.

*To the Senate, and House of Representatives
of the United States:*

I submit for the consideration of Congress, several communications received at the Department of State from Mr. *Justo Sierra*, commissioner of Yucatan, and also a communication from the governor of that state, representing the condition of extreme suffering to which their country has been reduced by an insurrection of the Indians within its limits, and asking the aid of the United States.

These communications present a case of human suffering and misery, which cannot fail to excite the sympathies of all civilized nations. From these, and other sources of information, it appears that the Indians of Yucatan are waging a war of extermination against the white race. In this civil war, they spare neither age, nor sex, but put to death, indiscriminately, all who fall within their power. The inhabitants, panic-stricken, and destitute of arms, are flying before their savage pursuers towards the coast, and their expulsion from their country, or their extermination would seem to be inevitable, unless they can obtain assistance from abroad.

In this condition, they have, through their constituted authorities, implored the aid of this government, to save them from destruction, offering, in case this should be granted, to transfer the "dominion and sovereignty of the peninsula" to the United States. Similar appeals for aid and protection have been made to the Spanish and the English governments."

Whilst it is not my purpose to recommend the adoption of any measure with a view to the acquisition of the "dominion and sov-

ereignty" over Yucatan; yet, according to our established policy, we could not consent to a transfer of this "dominion and sovereignty," either to Spain, Great Britain, or any other European power. In the language of President Monroe, in his message of December, 1823, "we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety." In my annual message of December, 1845, I declared that "near a quarter of a century ago the principle was distinctly announced to the world, in the annual message of one of my predecessors, that 'the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European power.' This principle will apply with greatly increased force, should any European power attempt to establish any new colony in North America. In the existing circumstances of the world, the present is deemed a proper occasion to reiterate and reaffirm the principle avowed by Mr. Monroe, and to state my cordial concurrence in its wisdom and sound policy. The re-assertion of this principle, especially in reference to North America, is at this day but the promulgation of a policy which no European power should cherish the disposition to resist. Existing rights of every European nation should be respected; but it is due alike to our safety and our interests, that the efficient protection of our laws should be extended over our whole territorial limits, and that it should be distinctly announced to the world as our settled policy, that no future European colony or dominion shall, with our consent, be planted or established on any part of the North American continent."

Our own security requires that the established policy, thus announced, should guide our conduct, and this applies with great force to the peninsula of Yucatan. It is situated in the Gulf of Mexico, on the North American continent, and, from its vicinity to Cuba, to the capes of Florida, to New Orleans, and, indeed, to our whole southwestern coast, it would be dangerous to our peace and security if it should become a colony of any European nation.

We have now authentic information that, if the aid asked from the United States be not granted, such aid will probably be obtained from some European power which may hereafter assert a claim to "dominion and sovereignty" over Yucatan.

Our existing relations with Yucatan are of a peculiar character, as will be perceived from the note of the Secretary of State to their commissioner, dated on the 24th of December last, a copy of which is herewith transmitted. Yucatan has never declared her independence, and we treated her as a State of the Mexican republic. For this reason we have never officially received her commissioner; but, whilst this is the case, we have, to a considerable extent, recognized her as a neutral in our war with Mexico. Whilst still considering Yucatan as a portion of Mexico, if we had troops to spare for this purpose, I would deem it proper, during the continuance of the war with Mexico, to occupy and hold military possession of her territory, and to defend the white inhabitants

against the incursions of the Indians, in the same way that we have employed our troops in other States of the Mexican republic in our possession, in repelling the attacks of savages upon the inhabitants, who have maintained their neutrality in the war. But, unfortunately, we cannot, at the present time, without serious danger, withdraw our forces from other portions of the Mexican territory now in our occupation, and send them to Yucatan. All that can be done, under existing circumstances, is to employ our naval forces in the Gulf, not required at other points, to afford them relief; but it is not to be expected that any adequate protection can thus be afforded, as the operations of such naval forces must, of necessity, be confined to the coast.

I have considered it proper to communicate the information contained in the accompanying correspondence, and I submit to the wisdom of Congress to adopt such measures as, in their judgment, may be expedient, to prevent Yucatan from becoming a colony of any European power, which, in no event, could be permitted by the United States; and, at the same time, to rescue the white race from extermination or expulsion from their country.

JAMES K. POLK.

WASHINGTON, *April 29, 1848.*

List.

Mr. Sierra to Mr. Buchanan, translation, November 24, 1847.

Mr. Buchanan to Mr. Sierra, December 24, 1847.

Mr. Sierra to Mr. Buchanan, translation, March 7, 1848.

The same to the same, translation, April 3, 1847.

The same to the same, translation, April 18, 1848.

The governor of Yucatan to the Secretary of State of the United States, translation, March 25, 1848.

Translation of a decree of the government of Yucatan.

Mr. Sierra to Mr. Buchanan.

[Translation.]

WASHINGTON, *November 24, 1847.*

SIR: On the occasion of the reception which you were pleased to grant to me on Monday the 22d instant, I placed in your hands the credentials of my appointment as commissioner and special agent of the government of Yucatan near that of the United States, which you designed to accept with your characteristic kindness and courtesy. In the short conference between us, you admitted, as most expeditious and simple, the plan, that I should present the points which the government of Yucatan might have to expose to the just consideration of the government of the United States in a series of

memorials, in order that you and the national government being thus minutely informed with regard to them, such measures might be taken as should be considered most just and conformable with the policy of the United States. According to this agreement, I am about to present you the first memorial; before doing which, however, you will permit me to exhibit a slight sketch of the political situation of Yucatan, which is the more necessary, as I observe with regret in some newspapers of the Union, that an exact idea does not seem to prevail with regard to it, or at least that the dignity and good faith of the people have been forgotten, as well as the extent of the sacrifices which they have made, and will continue to make, in order to preserve their actual position, maintaining the most rigid and honest neutrality in the war now existing between Mexico and the United States.

Yucatan, sir, has been an integrant part of the Mexican nation ever since the consummation, in 1821, of its political independence of Spain, of which it was, like the other provinces of New Spain, a colony. Being in full and absolute liberty to do whatsoever might seem most suitable for her interests and welfare, Yucatan incorporated herself spontaneously in the new nation, until the dissolution of the ephemeral empire founded by Don Augustin de Iturbide. Not knowing the course which the affairs of Mexico might take, she then remained independent, her internal administration being conducted in all respects agreeably to the republican system, while awaiting with calmness and prudence the termination of the discussions of the constituent Mexican congress, which was assembled in the latter part of the year 1823. The result of these discussions was the compact of October 4th, 1824, which founded the confederacy of the Mexican United States; and this compact was deliberately accepted by Yucatan, which became incorporated in the new republic. If by this act, immature indeed, she ceased to enjoy all the exceptions to which she might and should have aspired, from her geographical position, from her poverty, and from various other moral and material elements comprehended within herself, it was, nevertheless, believed that she might thus better develop the principles of that beautiful theory which has made the republic founded by the immortal Washington a free, great, happy, and powerful nation, and that her social condition would continue improving. In this she was sadly decided. You, Mr. Secretary, well know to what extreme the folly and the delinquencies of those who have been charged with the direction of the affairs of Mexico have brought the adjoining republic. The fate of the Mexican people, worthy indeed of a better lot, has constantly depended on the military factions which have succeeded each other without interruption, bearing down the republic, pillaging it, and turning it to their own advantage in every way, until it has at length been left without blood and without life. One of these factions destroyed the federal compact, and by the most base and unworthy abuse of force, by the excesses of a brutal soldiery, misguided by a crowd of generals and other officers, brave men for most part when engaged in oppressing their fellow-citizens, the

Mexican republic fell prostrate and powerless. Yucatan underwent the same fate with the other States; but it was not without a powerful effort. In 1840, her people broke out in insurrection, beat the forces of Mexico, and proclaimed the federal system compatible with union. In the meantime she separated herself from Mexico; she formed a constitution worthy of the most civilized people, and proclaimed the most sane and clearly established principles, preferring to suffer all the acts of injustice of the Mexican government, all the oppression and abuses of the faction in power, rather than desist from one of its just pretensions. What did the Mexican government, or rather General Santa Ana, who had constituted himself the supreme dictator of the republic, do under these circumstances? The whole world knows, the United States well know, as they unanimously applauded and bestowed the utmost encomiums on the honor, the valor, and the energetic constancy of the people of Yucatan in resisting an army of eleven thousand men, and a squadron such as Mexico had never before possessed; nay, more than resisting them, as the enemy were met, and the conditions of peace were dictated to them.

This peace was based on the convention of December 14, 1843, which secured to Yucatan the first and most essential exceptions to which she was rightfully entitled, and especially relieved her from the immediate influence of the military force, the only means employed by the Mexican government for the oppression of the people. On these bases she accepted incorporation, consenting to follow the lot of Mexico; but General Santa Anna blindly and obstinately violated the convention of December. On the first occasion, he caused the order of February 21, 1844, to be issued, closing the ports of the republic against the principal productions of the soil and industry of Yucatan, and subjected the country to new and more unjust vexations. Yucatan remonstrated against these acts of violence. She protested in the most solemn manner, and would not engage in another war, because some hope was entertained that justice would be done to the country. Vain was the hope! Instead of obtaining what was so justly demanded, the people learned with indignation that the convention of December, though containing the express provision that it should not be subjected to alteration, had been discussed in the chamber of deputies, and that this body had gone so far as to declare it null and void, and of no force. Yucatan then made a solemn declaration, of January 1, 1846, whereby she resumed her sovereignty, and convoked an extraordinary congress, to fix definitively the destiny of the country.

The war now existing between Mexico and the United States then came on. The Mexican government took some measures, and even sent Colonel Don Juan Cano to induce Yucatan to cooperate in the war. Yucatan openly resisted a pretension so absurd and untimely; and refused to make a sacrifice which, besides being entirely useless to Mexico, and immensely prejudicial to Yucatan, as she desired to preserve her commerce and friendly relations with the United States, offered no other result than the renewal of the

war, so soon as Mexico should find herself in a situation to attack Yucatán; as it was clearly seen and proved that, only in consequence of the critical position in which the Mexican government had placed itself towards the United States; did it endeavor to draw Yucatan and compromise her in this unfortunate struggle. Don Juan Cano returned to Mexico, bearing the decided negative of the government of Yucatan.

At that time, unhappily for my poor country, the fatal man who has caused the misfortunes of Mexico was in exile in the neighboring island of Cuba. General Santa Anna, by intrigues and management, induced some influential persons in Yucatan to believe that some moral force, and the support of the public opinion of the country, was necessary to overthrow General Paredes, who was laboring for the establishment of a foreign monarch, and to make an honorable peace with the United States; which he was certain to be enabled to effect. The men in power believed him in good faith, and caused the extraordinary congress to issue the decree of the 25th August, 1846, by which Santa Anna was proclaimed president of the Mexican republic. The people of Yucatan, however, resisted such a declaration, which would involve them again in the disturbances of Mexico. They arose and proclaimed the programme of the 8th of December last, declaring that it was not their desire to follow the lot of Mexico in the present war. The existing government was then organized, which sent Justice Don Jose Robira, and then me, to repeat these sentiments to the government of the United States; for though one or another insignificant and senseless faction may have endeavored to oppose the progress of the legitimate government of Yucatan, they have been immediately and energetically repressed, without effecting anything else by their plans than to excite some barbarous tribes to make a savage war on the white race. I have in my possession despatches from my government, dated 26th of October last, fully sustaining this assertion.

You have thus, sir, presented to you a slight but exact sketch of the political situation of Yucatan, which will probably end in a formal declaration of its absolute independence, as may be agreed by a convention summoned according to the plan of the 8th of December last, but for the meeting of which the time has not yet arrived.

Don José Robira executed the honorable mission confided to him to the entire satisfaction of my government. He spoke freely and at length with your excellency; he declared, in the name of the government of Yucatán, the firm resolution of that people not to follow the lot of Mexico, but to remain neutral in the present contest, offering to proceed, in this matter, in the most frank and honorable manner, and to oppose any faction which, either under the influence of the senseless views of Santa Anna, or guided by their own base and personal passions, should attempt to disturb the order of things established in the country, or to endanger its pacific relations with the United States. The government of Yucatan has thus acted, not from any mean or dishonorable motives, but in order

to secure the interests of the country; not from servile fear, of which no one has a right to accuse a people who have given such heroic and repeated proofs of civic and military valor, but because it is their first duty to see to their own preservation, provided it be not by base or dishonorable means; and certainly it is not base or dishonorable to resist a participation in the fatal results of a war on the side of those from whom Yucatan has received nothing but repeated acts of injustice. Upon what grounds could my country be reproached for such conduct?

Nevertheless, Mr. Secretary, the port of Laguna de Terminos, belonging to the State of Yucatan, and all its dependencies, have been occupied, in a military manner, by the naval forces of the United States, since the acknowledgement and acceptance of the neutrality of Yucatan; and, what is more injurious to our small and insignificant vessels, and the fruits of our soil and industry, a duty has been laid on them so exorbitant and ruinous as to be, in many cases, greater than the value of the goods themselves introduced. This is one of the points which the government of Yucatan has charged me to submit to the justice and the correct principles of the government of the United States, and to this object the present note is directed; which I earnestly pray the Hon. Mr. Buchanan to consider, and to give me notice, in the manner which he may judge most convenient, of the resolution taken by the national government on a subject of the most vital importance to Yucatan.

The city of Carmen, (Laguna,) from its insular position, is separated from the main land of Yucatan; and the people of Yucatan have great interests there invested in commercial houses and industrial enterprise. Its relations extend to all the neighboring towns and farms in the territory of Yucatan, and even to those situated in the province of Peten, and the republic of Guatemala. Consider, sir, how ruinous and destructive must be a tariff of duties, so extremely onerous on effects and merchandise, introduced from absolute necessity into Carmen; for on this introduction depends, literally speaking, the preservation of the enterprise of the citizens of Yucatan at that place. In the dependencies of the Laguna de Terminos nothing is produced but Campeachy wood, and every thing for the subsistence of the people must be introduced from the continent. The condition of Laguna, and of the interests at that place, is rendered infinitely worse than that of the ports of Mexico occupied by the forces of the United States.

I have just been in Vera Cruz and Tampico, and I know from information there received, from sure and certain sources, that all the productions and goods coming from the interior of Mexico, from places subject to Mexico, and consequently inimical to the United States, pay them the lowest duties; while at Laguna, from the mere physical and natural necessity of crossing a small arm of the sea, the fruits of our soil and industry, and our little vessels, are charged with duties so heavy and ruinous. Why is this difference Mr. Secretary? Why is Yucatan, whose neutrality is acknowledged, treated in a manner by no means equal to that in

which places occupied by the enemy are regarded, when it has, on the contrary, so much right to the consideration of the United States? Even though the military occupation of Laguna were explained, by no means can a tariff of duties be defended, the produce of which forms but an atom in the immensity of the vast and powerful resources of the United States, but which, to my country, causes incalculable loss and injury, not the least being that of its appending pretexts to one or another faction for embarrassing the government of Yucatan in the course which it proposes to pursue, and will pursue in the present war. All this has been stated verbally and in writing to Commodore Perry, whom I had the honor, by order of my government, to visit on board the sloop-of-war *German town*, off Vera Cruz, in the latter part of September. The commodore will, no doubt, have taken into consideration the powerful reasons alleged by the government of Yucatan, and I hope that they will be received favorably by the government of the United States.

Other inconveniences, no less serious and important, arise from this state of things. In Laguna there is no court of justice, nor district nor circuit judge, nor anything, in fine, equivalent to an institution so necessary to guarantee the rights of individuals. The decisions on confiscations flow from the authority of the military governor, without any *resource* or appeal to any court whatsoever. I do not mean by this to say that the gentleman who now performs the functions of governor of Laguna fails in the observance of the most rigid principles of equity, or does not punctually follow the regulations in force on such matters; but, in addition to the inconvenience of this state of things, the governor may err in the application of the regulations; in which case the aggrieved party has no *resource*. This has just happened; and the victim is an unfortunate and honorable trader of Yucatan, (Jose Jesus Cotaya) who has been suddenly reduced to misery, after many years of labor, by an omission, almost involuntary on his part, in making a declaration of the goods which he was bringing from Campeachy to Laguna in a canoe or small vessel under his care. On this point I shall address your excellency separately in another note, accompanied by the proof of the claim of Cotaya.

The government of Yucatan knows that the motive alleged for the military occupation of Laguna is to prevent the contraband trade, which might be carried on through the interior routes, with the adjoining state of Tobasco. This contraband trade is not impossible, as your excellency well knows that self-interest and desire of gain are so powerful with many individuals, that they are in many cases not to be withheld by the distant consideration that their conduct might injure their country. This is not the fault of any government, so long as it employs all the means to prevent it. This might be effected without giving to the government and people of Yucatan reason to regard the occupation of the island of Carmen as a moral attack on their honor and dignity, and a physical attack on their material interests; whilst they, on the contrary, regard that occupation as entirely useless and ineffectual for the object pro-

posed by the United States in the present war with Mexico. The government of Yucatan, therefore, authorizes me to solicit from the justice of the government of the United States the cessation of the occupation of the island, promising on its part to display the utmost zeal, activity, and efficiency in the repression of the contraband trade, leaving the vessels of the American squadron, which the government of the United States may think proper to maintain at that port and its dependencies, free to co-operate in such suppression. Our government desires the cessation of the occupation of the island, not only because it considers this to be in all respects just, but because it disapproves, in fine, of this ominous tariff of duties, which weighs upon our little vessels and upon the produce of the soil of Yucatan, whose citizens suffer in their own homes from a ruinous tax, laid upon them by a friendly nation, from whose justice they confidently hope for reparation of these evils.

I have the honor to solicit this from your excellency, and at the same time to offer you all the respect and consideration with which I have the honor to be your excellency's most obedient servant,
JUSTO SIERRA.

To the Hon. JAMES BUCHANAN,
Secretary of State.

Mr. Buchanan to Mr. Sierra.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, December 14, 1847.

SIR: Important and pressing duties connected with the meeting of Congress, have thus long delayed my answer to your note of the 27th ultimo. I have now, however, received the instructions of the President on the points which it presents, and hasten to communicate to you his decision.

After an interesting historical sketch of Yucatan since the termination of the Spanish dominion over it, you present two requests to the government of the United States.

1. That the duties now imposed at Laguna, under the authority of the United States, on the vessels and productions of Yucatan, may be abolished.

2. That the naval forces of the United States may cease to occupy the port of Laguna and island of Carmen.

I shall first advert to your second request.

The President feels the strongest disposition to grant to the government and people of Yucatan every indulgence not inconsistent with the official exercise of our belligerent rights against Mexico. With every desire, however, to cultivate the most friendly feelings with her, he yet believes that the duty which he owes to his own country, forbids him, for the present, to relinquish the possession of Laguna. The position of Yucatan is peculiar. The President cannot recognise her as a sovereign and independent State. She must still be considered as a portion of the Mexican

republic, but yet as neutral in the existing war. Had she preserved her neutrality from the commencement of hostilities until the present period, it is more than probable the naval forces of the United States never would have taken possession of Laguna. It is true that a contraband trade in arms and munitions of war was carried on between that port and the neighboring province of Tobasco; but yet we might have borne this injury rather than have exercised the unquestionable right of arresting it by seizing any portion of a State which professed neutrality. But the extraordinary congress of Yucatan, by their decree of the 25th August, 1846, converted her neutrality into open war against the United States. After she had thus made herself our enemy, the port of Laguna, on the 21st December, 1846, was unconditionally surrendered to our naval forces. It is true that Yucatan has again become neutral, but it cannot be denied that she has ever since been distracted by civil dissensions, and that the enemies of neutrality and partisans of Mexico are in open rebellion against her government. Under these circumstances, the President cannot consent to surrender Laguna. That port, from its peculiar position, presents extraordinary facilities for carrying on an illicit trade in arms and munitions of war with Tobasco. From information, on which the President fully relies, it would be impossible for the authorities of Yucatan, with the best possible intentions, to prevent this illicit traffic. To surrender Laguna would, therefore, be to furnish the means to Mexico of seriously annoying the forces of the United States, and prolonging the existing war.

To your first request, that of not exacting duties at Laguna on the vessels and productions of other ports of Yucatan, the President is inclined to give a favorable response. Whilst he deems it necessary to hold this port for the purpose of preventing Mexico from receiving military supplies from it to be used to our injury, no sufficient cause, perhaps, exists for the continuance of these imposts. Commodore Perry will, therefore, be instructed by the Secretary of the Navy to abolish them, unless he may have reasons to the contrary not now within the President's knowledge. It is, however, to be distinctly understood that this instruction will be confined to the productions of Yucatan carried to Laguna in her own vessels, and is not to interfere with the inspection of such vessels and the execution of the revenue regulations by officers of the United States; nor to sanction any trade whatever between Laguna and any of the ports of Mexico.

The privilege thus accorded will continue so long as Yucatan shall, in good faith, maintain her neutrality, but shall immediately cease the moment this is violated.

The claim of Mr. Cotaya, to which you allude, shall be referred to the Secretary of the Navy, after you have presented it in form, accompanied by the proofs in its support.

I avail myself of this occasion to offer to you the assurance of my very high consideration.

JAMES BUCHANAN.

To Señor Don JUSTO SIERRA, &c., &c.

Mr. Sierra to Mr. Buchanan.

WASHINGTON, *March 7*, 1848.

SIR: In some of my anterior notes I made known to the government of the United States, through the channel of the Secretary of State, the horrible and incalculable evils and misfortunes which the people of Yucatan were suffering from a war, forced upon them by the barbarous Indian tribes who live on the eastern frontier of Yucatan, who have evidently been armed and incited thereto by some secret power. This savage and exterminating war has assumed such a formidable aspect, that I can, in compliance with my duty, no longer refrain from invoking, frankly and conclusively, the sympathy and humanity of this highly civilized republican government in favor of that people, who are every way worthy of a better fate. In the name of humanity and civilization I am compelled to demand that this government will dictate all such measures as may be within its power; and, if possible, by a prompt intervention, put an end to this war, which threatens to produce the most lamentable consequences to the American policy.

Although I have not received any recent despatches from my government, I am in possession of positive information that the war waged by those barbarians has taken a frightful direction; that numerous hordes of them have advanced to the very gates of the capital, and are committing the most unheard-of excesses, ruining and devastating everything before them. Under these circumstances, a Spanish vessel of war presents itself, and offers to the people of Yucatan, in the name of the captain-general of the island of Cuba, aid and support. This opportune offer, evincing the lively sympathy of Spain in favor of her ancient colonies, was accepted without hesitation; in consequence of which, a portion of the forces, arms, and munitions of war belonging to the Spanish crown have been disembarked in the ports of Yucatan.

I have been notified of these facts from a source entitled to my confidence, and consider them as indubitable; and, whilst I claim for them full credit, they prove that the situation of Yucatan is truly desperate, and total extermination awaits her, unless some friendly hand is extended to succor, liberate, and save her from the horrible dangers with which she is menaced. I therefore, in virtue of instructions and orders received from my government, in anticipation of the foregoing events, request that the government of the United States will be pleased to take, without loss of time, such measures as it may consider necessary to protect the people of Yucatan from the brutal oppression of her barbarous assailants. It is not necessary that I should remind the honorable Secretary of State, that humanity, civilization, and sound policy, all unite in exacting this duty at the hands of the United States. Prompt aid, given with that alacrity and good will which, I believe, is characteristic of the intelligent, free, civilized, and, above all, eminently religious people of this country, would produce the most beneficial results, and at once put a stop to a war which, otherwise, might become general.

In conformity with the orders of my government, I am authorized to ask, on account thereof, the aid and assistance of two thousand troops, and a half million of dollars. If it is possible, the succor here required can be furnished to my unfortunate and exhausted country, I doubt not the terms will be humane and rational. I will, therefore, not vacillate a moment in accepting them, in the name of my government. If the honorable Secretary of State wishes more amplified information on any of the foregoing points, it will afford me the utmost pleasure to give it, either verbally or in writing, as he may esteem most convenient.

The gravity and transcendent importance of this subject was readily seen by Mr. Buchanan, at the interview he was pleased to give to me yesterday. I reiterate my most earnest supplication, to which end I invoke the sacred name of humanity, of liberty, and of civilization, that he will firmly and attentively view the events now taking place at Yucatan, in which, most assuredly, are involved questions of the greatest magnitude.

I beg the honorable Secretary of State will have the goodness to favor me with an answer as soon as practicable, in order that I may be able to communicate to my government whatever may be the determination of the government of the United States. In the meantime, I renew to Mr. Buchanan the profound consideration of respect of his obedient servant,

JUSTO SIERRA.

An official translation by JOHN BALDWIN.

Mr. Sierra to Mr. Buchanan.

[Translation.]

COMMISSION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF YUCATAN AT WASHINGTON.
Washington, April 3, 1848.

SIR: In compliance with the most special orders, which I have just received from my government, and following most minutely its instructions, I have now the honor once more to address the honorable Secretary of State, upon a topic most important, grave, delicate and admitting no delay; as otherwise the most fatal consequences may result to unfortunate Yucatan, so worthy of a better fate. I will be brief, as much so as I can be, on a matter of such immense interest for my country.

On a former occasion, and especially in my note of the latter part of last March, I invoked, in favor of my country, the sacred names of humanity, liberty, and civilization, feelings, all of which characterise the people of the United States. I again, sir, invoke those names, and moreover the name of justice.

I solicit the formal intervention, the active and efficient co-operation of the United States, in consequence of the bloody and most

cruel war, under which the people of Yucatan are now suffering. And if, conformably with the constitution and laws of the republic, its executive power should not possess the authority requisite, of itself, to determine on this point, I formally ask that this, my note, together with those relating to it, and which I have already delivered to the Department of State, be submitted to either of the two branches of the legislature, as a memorial addressed by the government of Yucatan, in the name of the nation which it represents.

The war of the barbarians, that atrocious and savage war, in which neither sex nor age is spared by those fiends, is now of a character truly formidable for Yucatan. The barbarians have destroyed with flames four towns, and more than fifty hamlets; they have swept away about two hundred farms, and many other cotton and sugar plantations; they have ravaged immense fields of grain; they have murdered hundreds of white families, and, in fine, they are masters of the whole eastern, and nearly the whole western portions of Yucatan. Works which the civilization of three hundred years, and the efforts of our ancestors erected, have disappeared wherever the accursed race, which now repays with fire and blood the immense benefits received by it, from the people of Yucatan, has placed its impious feet.

The numerous hordes of that race fall with surprising rapidity upon the defenceless villages, leaving them reduced to ashes, and then withdraw to the impenetrable forests of the country, setting our troops at defiance, wearing them out, disheartening them, and driving them to despair. The fewness of the wants of that race, the facility with which they support all kinds of privations, the extraordinary rapidity of their movements, all those circumstances have given them a superiority, almost irresistible. Their numbers, moreover, are augmented extraordinarily, and their means of carrying on war, instead of diminishing, actually increase. My government, indeed, sent a commissioner to that of Balize, to intreat that the sale of arms and munitions of war, to those barbarians, should be prevented; and the latter government answered that this should be done. But, sir, knowing as I do the condition of the Indians of my country, I believe that no sale is made to them there. The arms and munitions which they have, are given to them, and will continue to be given to them, gratuitously. The British government of Balize, may act as it has promised; yet without diminishing, in any way, the resources of the Indians. Recollect, sir, what is now going on in Central America, with regard to the unworthy and intolerable farce of the kingdom of the Mosquitos.

The result of all this has been to paralyse all communication throughout the country; to destroy a great portion of the profits from the soil; to extinguish the revenues from the custom-houses; to render impossible the payment of the public dues; to annihilate commerce and industry, and, in fine, to plunge the whole country into misery, prostration, and despair. The government, without resources of any kind, deprived of the means of carrying on the war efficiently, in order to bring it to its termination, is now in

the most embarrassing and difficult position; notwithstanding the active exertions of all the citizens, who have placed everything at its disposition, their persons as well as their property; but without being able to derive anything therefrom, all being ruined and destroyed. The government cannot support the immense number of troops which it needs; nor has it arms nor munitions to give them, all having been exhausted; nor has it the means of buying them abroad. In fine, sir, the country is falling to ruin, and its white population on the point of being extinguished by the savages, unless it should receive the sympathy, protection, and support of civilized nations.

The people of Yucatan cannot allow themselves to be murdered and destroyed without employing every means in their reach to avoid it. They must, therefore, appeal to some foreign power, invoking in their favor, the rights of humanity and the sympathy which an enlightend and civilized people should extend to another of the same character. And to what nation can we apply, except to the powerful republic which stands at the head of American civilization, which we hold in such esteem, and from which we expect to derive our future prosperity and advancement? Mexico regards us as her enemies, and is moreover prostrated by the events of the last year, Spain has nobly and generously offered us her aid but we have as yet made no use of it; England is probably well disposed to assist us, as my government has strong reason to believe. Any aid which either of those two powers can give us would be of very little importance or expense to them; whilst to Yucatan it would be of infinite value. Observe well, sir, and when you see that what we ask is not much, you will be convinced that Spain and England do not require greater efforts to afford them.

But, in addition to the reasons which I have presented for applying in preference to the United States, there are other considerations, which you will allow me to explain concisely. There is a declaration, made by Mr. Monroe, President of the United States, in his message to the legislative body in December, 1823, establishing—that the American government would regard any measure on the part of the European powers to interfere in the affairs of the independent nations of America, by attempting to extend their political system over those nations, as injurious and prejudicial to the public peace and security. In the annual message addressed to Congress by the present President, Mr. Polk, in December, 1846, this same principle of non-intervention by European nations is repeated and confirmed. So that, agreeably to these doctrines, the government of the United States would oppose the intervention of England or of Spain in the affairs of Yucatan. Thus, if such intervention should take place, as it is more than probable that it will, Yucatan would be involved in difficulty, and the condition of that country would be infinitely more unfortunate than it is now; because, in addition to all the evils of the present war, it would be exposed, on the other hand, to become the theatre of another war; since, though these doctrines of Mr. Monroe and Mr. Polk

may be a declaration of the principles of the United States, the other powers may, or may not accept them, according to their own political views and objects.

Under these considerations, I cannot persuade myself that the United States, acting, moreover, on other motives, more noble than those of policy, will not hasten to protect their brethren in Yucatan, and redeem them from the miserable condition in which they are plunged. The co-operation, the direct intervention, if Yucatan should demand it, would cost nothing to this powerful nation, when compared with the infinite advantages which Yucatan would derive from it.

Although I may seem importunate in taking up your time, sir, so much longer, I cannot omit to copy here, literally, a paragraph from the last despatch from my government. It is as follows:

“Considering that so much enthusiasm has been shown, especially in the United States, in favor of the Greeks, whose condition was by no means so sad, and whose prospects were by no means so dreadful as those now threatening Yucatan—considering that the strongest sympathies are now manifested in behalf of Italy, not, indeed, to rescue that country from destruction, but to improve its political condition, by supporting the generous views of a wise pontiff—is it possible that Yucatan will not receive an assistance which would cost so little, but would be of such immense importance, to save her from so terrible a danger? Such indifference would be unworthy of civilized nations.”

Sir, the situation of Yucatan is now certainly precarious and miserable, as she is reduced to the absolute necessity of soliciting foreign aid to save her people from extermination. But in her days of prosperity, in those days which I trust in God will return, she had an annual revenue of a million of dollars, sufficient to cover all her expenses. She still has considerable public property, and lands, fertile and rich, of which she can dispose. I mean hereby to say, that if that country is now fallen and miserable, it is in consequence of the war of the barbarians; peace will come, and with it will be re-established all the resources of the country; and all the expenses and troubles which may be employed by the United States, at this time, in aiding and protecting her, may be repaid.

Thus, sir, I conclude by asking, in the name of the government of Yucatan, and with the greatest warmth and urgency, that assistance be given to that country: 1. In arms and ammunitions of all kinds; and, 2. In armed forces, of such a number and of such a character as this government may think proper.

I pray the Hon. Mr. Buchanan to grant me an answer, in order to calm the anxiety of my government and my country. The situation of Yucatan is horrible, and every day passed in expectation of this assistance is a day of agony and wretchedness.

I have the honor to repeat to the Hon. Mr. Buchanan, the assurances of the respect and great consideration, with which I have the honor to be his most obedient servant,

JUSTO SIERRA.

To the Hon. J. BUCHANAN, *Secretary, &c.*

Mr. Sierra to Mr. Buchanan.

[Translation.]

WASHINGTON, April 18, 1848.

SIR: Notwithstanding I have not had the honor to receive any answer to the very urgent notes which I directed to the Department of State on the 7th of March last, and on the 3d of the present month, new and still more urgent orders from my government oblige me again to address the government of the United States, even at the risk of being considered importunate, and subjecting myself to the charge of endeavoring to withdraw the attention of the department from other more urgent and important subjects. Yet the actual situation of Yucatan is so overwhelmingly so horrible, and so desperate, that I cannot do otherwise. Within the next two months the white race of Yucatan will have disappeared from the country, unless the protection of these United States should be extended over that unfortunate people.

I need not waste time in drawing the pitiable and alarming picture which that country presents, according to the last advices which I have received, dated the 27th of March, because it would be of an odious and bloody character. In the sacred name of the living God, the affrighted people of Yucatan appeal to the humanity of their happy and more fortunate neighbors, the people of the United States, to save them from utter extermination. Yucatan only wants arms, ammunition, and a few troops, together with a very small quantity of money. I invoke this aid, by all those sacred ties which unite the family of men, and request that the demand may be brought to the knowledge of the representative body of the nation; and above all other things, I ask that you will have the goodness to give me a decisive answer, by which the future conduct of the people of Yucatan may be guided. There are moments, sir, in which any delay signifies "death and extermination."

I have the honor to renew to you the assurances of my respect.

JUSTO SIERRA.

This is a translation of the present note.

JUSTO SIERRA.

[Translation.]

From the Governor of Yucatan to the Secretary of State of the United States.

MOST EXCELLENT SIR: The most unfortunate occurrences have placed Yucatan in a critical and almost desperate condition. This government has exerted every means in its power for the salvation of the country, and now that it has exhausted all, without finding any one capable of alleviating the difficulties which surround us,

the immense accumulation of evils afflicting this State obliges me to resolve on certain measures, which the imperious law of necessity and the right of self-preservation authorize.

The white race—the civilized class of this State—is now attacked in an atrocious and barbarous manner by the aboriginal caste, which, rising simultaneously in insurrection, by an instinct of ferocity, is making a savage and exterminating war on us. Everything is ravaged and destroyed, the towns are delivered to flames, and all, without consideration of sex or age, who fall into the bloody hands of these barbarians, are murdered without pity, and with the most cruel tortures. Their forests, their fastnesses, their customs, and other particular circumstances, render the Indians terrible enemies; and when to this is added their numbers, excessively superior to those of the other castes, it will be at once seen how difficult it is to restrain them; and how easily they may elude the means employed to attack and pursue them; and the difficulty becomes the greater, in consequence of the want of funds to support the expenses, and to obtain the necessaries for carrying on the war. All the resources on which we *formerly* relied have disappeared; the public property is daily melting away, as well by the destructive spirit of our savage enemy as from the paratization of industry of every kind, all our productions being wasted, and the whole country rapidly falling into absolute ruin.

By this faithful statement of the condition of Yucatan, your excellency will see that it is indispensable to take a decisive measure, and to make a last effort, in order to save, if possible, some portion of the country, the portion which has not yet fallen into the power of the barbarians; that is to say, under their destroying axe, or their incendiary torch. I have therefore determined to appeal to the extreme measure suggested by our great necessity—that of soliciting the direct intervention of powerful nations, offering the dominion and sovereignty of the country to the nation which will assume the charge of saving it. With that object, I address myself to your excellency.

The causes and antecedents of the great calamity which afflicts the people of Yucatan are obvious. I shall, therefore, not waste time in adverting to those painful circumstances. Facts, public and notorious, will have already convinced your government, that the people of this State, now so unfortunate, have always tended to advance in civilization and in social amelioration. There was a time in which this spirit of progress was beginning to develop itself; but a blind fatality, a mystery of fortune, has cut short the career of its glory, and involved it in misfortune, and even in humiliation.

The generous nation, which aspired with such noble resolution to ameliorate its physical and moral condition, finds itself now obliged to seek, at a venture, some aid for its preservation, some resource to prevent it from being absolutely struck out from the civilized world. May it fulfil its destinies! Rome herself, the proud queen of the world, did she not rapidly disappear, from one of those inexplicable and dreadful caprices of blind fortune? In the midst of the distress and imminent danger of Yucatan, I address

myself through the medium of your excellency to the government of the United States, and solicit assistance efficient, prompt, powerful, and calculated to fulfil its object. This nation will properly acknowledge a service so important; and in its name I offer in that case to your nation the dominion and sovereignty of this peninsula, employing the faculty to do so given to me by the accompanying decree. Seeing, as I have already declared to your excellency, with entire frankness, that Yucatan has no other hope of safety than in the determination of a foreign power to favor her with assistance as promptly as possible, I find myself obliged, in like manner, to apply with this object to the Spanish and the English governments, through their respective ministers in Mexico, and the captain general of Cuba and the admiral of Jamaica.

I pray your excellency, in the name of this unfortunate people, to obtain from your government the protection which I find myself obliged so urgently to solicit; and that you will ask from the commissioner of this government residing in Washington any accounts, explanations, or declarations which your excellency may judge necessary or useful with regard to this important affair.

In conclusion, I have the honor to offer to your excellency the assurances of my entire consideration and esteem.

God and liberty. Maxcanu, March 25, 1848.

SANTO. MENDEZ.

JOSE R. NICOLIN,

Secretary of Government

M. F. PERAZA,

Secretary of War and Marine.

[Translation.]

DECREE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF YUCATAN.

Office of the general secretary of the government.

His excellency, the governor, has been pleased to address to me the following decree:

“The constitutional governor of the State of Yucatan to its inhabitants:—Be it known that the Congress has decreed as follows:

“ARTICLE 1. The government is empowered to take any measures, executive or legislative, which it may judge necessary, for the restoration of peace, the consolidation of order, and the amelioration of all the branches of the public administration.

“ART. 2. Notwithstanding what is contained in the preceding article, the government cannot—1st. Augment or diminish the established contributions; but, if it should believe it to be absolutely necessary for the salvation of the State, it may do so with the consent of the council. 2d. Nor can it exercise judicial functions,

nor impose any other penalty for political delinquencies than banishment from the country, or transportation to some other part of the peninsula for two years.

ART. 3. These powers shall cease on the 1st of September next, when the chambers meet at the second constitutional period.

ART. 4. All the acts which the government may do, in virtue of the faculties herein conceded, may be examined by the legislative chambers at their next ordinary session.

ART. 5. The congress shall close its extraordinary session on the day when it receives from the government the communication of its sanction to the present decree.

JUAN ANTONIO RAMIREZ,
Deputy President.
PANTALEON BARRERA,
President of the Senate.
JOSE M. MENA,
Deputy Secretary.
ALONZO AZMAR PEREZ,
Senator Secretary.

Wherefore I order it to be printed, published, circulated, and carried into effect.

SANTIAGO MENDEZ.

To Don JOSE R. NICOLIN.

MAXICANU, *January 14, 1848.*

I communicate it to you for your information and future purposes.

MAXICANU, *January 14, 1848.*