

Under these circumstances, what is the duty of the United States? As I do not intend to intrude myself on the attention of the Senate again, without absolute necessity, on any question relating to Oregon, I desire to say now that I shall vote for the notice to terminate the convention of 1818, continued in force by that of 1827—a convention which Great Britain treats as recognising a right of joint occupancy, but which has in reality been for her an exclusive occupancy of the whole territory north of the Columbia. I am in favor of extending the authority of our laws and the jurisdiction of our courts over the territory; and in doing so, I would, while the convention is in force, specially except British subjects, and direct them, when charged with infractions of our laws, to be delivered up to the nearest British authorities. I would make this reservation, for the express purpose of preventing, as far as possible, a conflict of jurisdiction, and to avoid all cause for imputing to us a disregard of treaties, or a desire to produce collision or disagreement of any sort. And in order to facilitate the extension of the authority of the Union over our fellow citizens in that remote district of our country, and to remove, as far as possible, the obstacles to a more free and efficient intercourse between us and them, I would establish at once a chain of military posts, with competent garrisons and armaments, from the remotest navigable waters which flow into the Mississippi, to the eastern face of the Rocky mountains, stopping there so long as the convention continues in force. Duty, honor, policy—all demand these measures at our hands: and I trust they will be executed with promptitude and decision.

Will these measures produce war? I cannot believe that they will. I cannot believe it, because they furnish no just ground of provocation. The right to give the notice is reserved by treaty. The right of extending our laws over Oregon is a right similar to that which Great Britain has already exercised for a quarter of a century. The establishment of a chain of posts to the Rocky mountains wholly within our own territory, invades no right in others. It has been inferred, from an expression in a public document, that there is danger of an immediate war, and that a sudden blow may be struck. Sir, I cannot believe it. A war waged against us on account of any one or all of the measures referred to, would be a war of plain, unmixed aggression. No nation, in the present age, could embark in such a contest, without drawing down upon herself the condemnation of all civilized communities. She would find herself opposed and restrained by public opinion, which, in our day, rules the conduct of nations more powerfully than the arm of force. I hold, therefore, immediate war to be out of the question. Nor can eventual war take place, unless the assertion of our just rights shall be forcibly resisted. But I will not venture to pass judgment on what the future may bring forth. Collisions may grow out of these measures—collisions ripening, through influences and events which we may be unable to control, into open warfare. I should deeply deplore such a result. The interests of humanity, great principles of political right, self-government, freedom, individual rights, all suffer when the voice of the law is silenced by the tumult of war. "*In-*

*ter arma silent leges*," is an adage, of the truth of which history has furnished too many fatal proofs. I would do much to avert such a calamity. I would do anything not inconsistent with the public honor, to avoid a contest which would be disastrous to both parties, no matter what should be its final issue. But beyond this I never can go. And if exemption from war can only be purchased by a surrender of our just rights, I cannot consent to make the purchase. But if war cannot be averted, I trust we shall not commit the great error of undervaluing our adversary. With some opportunity of observing the condition of Great Britain near at hand, I have no hesitation in saying that she was never capable of greater efforts than she is at the present moment. I know that her inordinate distension contains within itself an element of vital weakness. It is not in the order of human society that so extended a dominion should remain long unbroken. But I have not yet been able to detect, in the condition of her body politic, the unerring symptoms of that decay which precedes and works out the dissolution of empires. She has great abuses to struggle against. The Senator from Ohio has well and graphically described them. She has enormous burdens to sustain; but she has great strength to bear them. Her soldiers are not like those of Rome in her latter days, enervated in vigor and relaxed in discipline. You will find them in every quarter of the globe, under the fiery heat of the equator, and amid the frosts of the arctic circle, braving the elements, and setting danger and toil, in every form, at defiance. But, sir, I pretend not, with my narrow foresight, to look into the future. It is possible that her hour may be near at hand. But we know that the last struggle of the strong man is always the most desperate, and sometimes the most dangerous to the antagonist who has brought him to the ground.

I say this in no spirit of timidity. I say it in a spirit of prudent forecast—with the desire that we may go into the contest, if it shall come, with the assurance that we have to deal with a strong adversary and not a weak one; and that our preparation may be commensurate with the means of offence to which we shall be exposed. I have no doubt of our ability both to defend ourselves, and to give back effective blows in return. We were never so strong as we are at the present moment: strong in our position, strong in our means, strong in the spirit and energy of our people. Our defenceless condition has been greatly overstated. We have been told that our coast is denuded. I have heard, whether on this floor or elsewhere I do not know, that there is scarcely a gun mounted for the defence of the commercial metropolis of my own State. There cannot be a greater error. There are hundreds of guns, of heavy calibre, in the city of New York, ready, at the very hour in which I speak, to receive an assailant, and as many more, which can be placed in position in an emergency, and this independently of guns afloat. In thirty days I believe the city might be rendered, with a skilful engineer, and with the means which might be placed at his command, prepared—well prepared—against a maritime assault. But, sir, I turn away from all these fore-