

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,

ON

A resolution relative to the abrogation of the 8th article of the treaty with Great Britain of the 9th of August, 1842, providing for maintaining a naval force on the coast of Africa, &c.

JUNE 13, 1854 — Read, and ordered to be printed in confidence for the use of the Senate.

The Committee on Foreign Relations, to whom was referred the resolution submitted by Mr. Slidell, on the 29th May, 1854, "that, in the opinion of the Senate, it is expedient, and in conformity with the interests and sound policy of the United States, that the eighth article of the treaty between this government and Great Britain, of the 9th of August, 1842, should be abrogated; and that, should the President of the United States concur in this opinion, he be requested to signify to the government of Great Britain, in conformity with the eleventh article of that treaty, the wish of this government to terminate the said eighth article," have had the same under consideration, and now respectfully report:

That by the eighth article of the treaty with Great Britain, made at Washington, on the ninth of August, eighteen hundred and forty-two, commonly known as the Ashburton treaty, "the parties mutually stipulate that each shall prepare, equip, and maintain in service, on the coast of Africa, a sufficient and adequate squadron, or naval force, of vessels, of suitable numbers and descriptions, to carry, in all, not less than eighty guns, to enforce, separately and respectively, the laws, rights, and obligations of each of the two countries for the suppression of the slave trade; the said squadrons to be independent of each other; but the two governments stipulating, nevertheless, to give such orders to the officers commanding their respective forces as shall enable them most effectually to act in concert and co-operation, upon mutual consultation, as exigencies may arise, for the attainment of the true object of this article; copies of all such orders to be communicated by each government to the other respectively."

By the eleventh article of the same treaty it is declared that the eighth article shall be in force for five years from the date of exchange of the ratification, and afterwards until one or the other party shall signify a wish to terminate it.

The policy of stipulations of this kind, with any foreign power, may well be questioned on general grounds; but your committee do not think it necessary to enter upon so large and debateable a field of discussion, and will confine themselves to an examination of the question whether, admitting the propriety and expediency of the measure at the time of its adoption, with the imperfect or erroneous information then possessed, it be not proper and expedient now to abrogate it. It was then supposed that the most efficient mode of suppressing the slave-trade was to employ numerous cruisers on the coast of Africa, and the very caption of the treaty indicates the results that were expected to be obtained by it. It is entitled "A treaty to define and settle the boundaries between the Territories of the United States and the possessions of her Britannic majesty in North America, and for the final suppression of the African slave trade, &c." It was believed that the best point for the employment of a naval force for the attainment of an object which the people and government of the United States desired quite as earnestly as her Britannic majesty and her subjects, was the coast of Africa. An experience of twelve years has demonstrated the fallacy of that opinion.

Large squadrons have been kept up during that period, by the two powers, at an enormous expense in money, and with a lamentable loss of life and destruction of the health of the officers and men employed in that noxious climate. And what has been the result? Let the record show. The British squadron comprises several steamers, counting, in all, twenty-seven vessels, carrying about three hundred guns and three thousand men. The annual expense of the squadron is £706,454—about \$3,500,000. This is the expense proper of the squadron. That of auxiliary establishments on the coast, connected with this service, and which might otherwise be dispensed with, is estimated at from £300,000 to £500,000. Take the lowest figure and you have \$1,500,000 to add to the direct cost of the squadron, making a total annual expenditure of five millions of dollars. In 1845 alone the number of deaths of officers and men was 259, of officers and men invalided, 271.

The United States have four vessels and eighty guns on the coast of Africa, being about one-eighth of our whole naval force afloat; and, as the estimated expenditure of the navy, after deducting special objects, such as transportation of the mail in steamships, improvement of navy-yards, &c., is \$8,351,171, the annual cost of this squadron may be fairly calculated at \$800,000, or \$10,000 per gun. This, it will be observed, is considerably less than the cost per gun of the British squadron, which is about \$11,700.

It is a subject of congratulation, however, that for the last four years the mortality of our officers and men employed on this service, bears a favorable comparison with that of other stations. This the Navy Department attributes to the extraordinary sanitary measures adopted by the officers of the squadron.

France, at one time, obliged herself to keep up an equal force with Great Britain on the coast of Africa, say twenty-six vessels, but finding the engagement too onerous, she applied to the British government for a modification of the treaty, which was conceded, and she now has

only twelve vessels so employed. There are no precise data on which the expenditure of France can be established, but estimating it by the proportion of vessels employed, say twelve to twenty-six, it would be about \$1,600,000. The annual joint expenditure of England, France, and the United States thus appears to be \$7,400,000.

Mr. Hutt, the chairman of the select committee of the House of Commons, appointed to investigate this question, stated on the 19th of March, 1850, "that the number of slaves exported from Africa had sunk down in 1842, the very year of the negotiation of the Ashburton treaty, to very nearly 30,000. In 1843 it rose 55,000; in 1846 it was 76,000; in 1847 it was 84,000, and was then in a state of unusual activity." Sir Charles Hotham, who commanded for several years on the coast of Africa, and who is one of the most distinguished officers of the British navy, on his examination before the select committee, thus replied to queries propounded to him:

"Was the force under your command in a high state of discipline, generally speaking?"

"I thought so.

"Were your views carried out by the officers under your command to your entire satisfaction?"

"Entirely so.

"What was the result of your operations; did you succeed in stopping the slave trade?"

"No.

"Did you cripple it to such an extent as is, in your opinion, calculated to give to the slave trade a permanent check?"

"No.

"Do you consider that the slave trade has been generally regulated by the strength and efficiency of the British squadron on the coast, or by the commercial demand for slaves?"

"I consider it is entirely dependant upon the commercial demand for slaves, and has little or no connection with the squadron.

"You think that the present system is open to many grave objections on other accounts, and that it will not succeed?"

"Experience has proven the present system to be futile."

The total result of the operations of our squadron during twelve years has been the capture of fourteen vessels.

The African slave trade has, it is believed, been entirely suppressed in Brazil, and, in this hemisphere, the remaining colonies of Spain—Cuba and Porto Rico—are its only marts. Your committee think that, if the American flag be still employed in this nefarious traffic, now prohibited by every Christian nation, and surreptitiously tolerated by Spain alone, the abuse can be more efficiently corrected by the employment of our cruisers in the vicinity of those islands.

It would seem to be almost superfluous on the part of your committee to say that, in recommending the adoption of the resolution under consideration, they repudiate the most remote intention of relaxing, in any degree, the stringency of our legislation on the subject of the African slave trade. Its continuance, while it is so justly odious on moral grounds, is in every way prejudicial to our commercial and agricultural interests.

The abrogation of the eighth article of the Ashburton treaty does not necessarily imply the purpose of withdrawing our squadron from the coast of Africa. A portion of it indeed must necessarily be retained there to protect our commerce. Its only effect will be to enable the Executive to employ the force now stationed there at any other point where its service may be more useful. We should still be bound by the eleventh article of the treaty of Ghent to use, in the language of that article, "our best endeavors to promote the desirable object of the entire abolition of the slave trade." And none can doubt that it will continue to be faithfully observed, as it has heretofore been, in letter and spirit.

Your committee recommend the adoption of the resolution.