

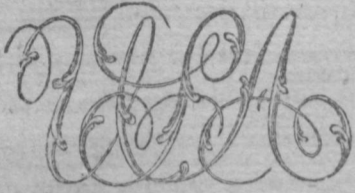
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CONGRESS.

PHILADELPHIA.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 1792.

IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE.

On the Bill providing for the Defence of the Frontiers.

Question under consideration,

A MOTION to strike out the second section of the bill, which contemplates the raising of three additional regiments of infantry, and a squadron of light dragoons, amounting in all to three thousand and forty men, exclusive of commissioned officers.

In favor of the motion, and against the proposed augmentation of the military establishment, it was urged,

That the Indian war, in which the United States are at present involved, was, in its origin, as unjustly undertaken, as it has since been unwisely and unsuccessfully conducted;—that depredations had been committed by the whites, as well as by the Indians; and the whites were most probably the aggressors, as they frequently made encroachments on the Indian lands, whereas the Indians shewed no inclination to obtain possession of our territory, or even to make temporary invasions until urged to it by a sense of their wrongs: a proof of this unencroaching disposition on their part, plainly appeared in their conduct, after the victory they lately obtained over our troops; for, when, flushed with success, they might have swept the country before them, and penetrated as far as Pittsburgh, they contented themselves with the advantage they had gained over their invaders, and did not attempt to invade our territories in return, although there was no where at hand a sufficient force to check their career.

The mode of treating the Indians in general, was reprobated as unwise and impolitic; the Indians are with difficulty to be reduced by the sword, but may easily be gained by justice and moderation: and although their cruelties are alleged as reasons for a different conduct, and the sufferings of the white people pathetically deplored, these narratives, (it was said) are at best but ex parte evidence;—we hear nothing of the sufferings of the Indians; but if Cornplanter's speech were read, it would set the matter in a very different point of view, and furnish a complete answer to all the charges of their accusers.

Peace (it was said) may be obtained from the Indian tribes, at a much less expence than would be necessary for the support of the war:—to persevere in hostilities, would be wasting the public money to a very bad purpose indeed; for supposing our arms crown'd with victory, what are the advantages we may expect to reap from our success?—we can only gain possession of their lands—a possession, that must long continue unproductive of the smallest benefit, as we already possess land sufficient; more, in fact, than we will be able to cultivate for a whole century to come.

Instead of being ambitious to extend our boundaries, it would answer a much better national purpose rather to check the roving disposition of the frontier settlers, and prevent them from too suddenly extending themselves to the western waters: if kept closer together, and more nearly connected with the old settlements, they would be more useful to the community at large, and would not so frequently involve us in unnecessary and expensive wars with the Indians: but if permitted to rove at pleasure, they will keep the nation embroiled in perpetual warfare, as long as the Indians have a single acre of ground to rest upon.

If the citizens of the United States were recalled within their proper boundaries, there they might, for years to come, cultivate the soil in peace, neither invaded, nor invading. As the country progresses in population, and our limits are found too narrow, it will then be soon enough to contemplate a gradual extension of our frontier: but in the mean time, it is an idle profusion of blood and treasure, to carry war beyond our present line of forts: it is only exposing our arms to disgrace, betraying our own weakness, and lessening the public confidence in the general government, to send forth armies to be butchered in the forests, whilst we suffer the British to keep possession of the posts within our territory.

As long as Britain is suffered to retain those posts, we can never hope to succeed against the Indians; nor ought we to trace our late misfortune to any other source than her still holding them in her possession: were they in our hands, the Indians could not carry on their operations against us with the same degree of vigor as they now do; for it is from those forts that they obtain their supplies of arms and ammunition, with which they can be, at all times, plentifully furnished, as long as things continue on their present footing.

Until those posts are in our possession, it will be vain to send our armies into the wilderness. A body of five thousand men, sent out against the Indians, under the present circumstances, would be as effectually defeated as the smaller ones have already been: in those wilds, our troops have no friend at hand, to furnish them with supplies, or to give them intelligence of the approach and operations of the enemy; whereas the Indians, receiving both aid and information from their friendly neighbors, can preconcert their plans, and chuse, according to their own convenience, the place and the hour of attack, as they did before.

It was here observed by an honorable gentleman on the other side of the question, that we ought undoubtedly to get possession of those posts; and that we might have long since obtained it, if we had only laid a reasonable embargo on all the British shipping in our ports; though he doubted, whether it would at present be worth while to take such a step, as the English have lost so great a portion of our carrying trade, in consequence of the additional tonnage laid on their vessels.

In favour of the motion, it was further urged, that supposing even the war to have been originally undertaken with justice on our side—supposing also, that the national honor and interest called for a continuance of hostilities; yet, as it was by no means either necessary or prudent to invade the Indian territory, as this had been attempted in two successive campaigns, and the event had, in both instances, been such, as to afford no very flattering prospect from a third expedition of the same kind: it was thought much more advisable to content ourselves with defending the frontier;

and this might be done, without making so great an augmentation in the military establishment.

The only use of regular troops on the frontier, is to garrison the forts, and to have a standing force in the neighbourhood, to form a station, to which the militia may resort either for protection or supplies: but as to active service, the frontier militia and rangers were pronounced to be by far preferable to the regular troops, as being more expert woodsmen, and better habituated to the Indian mode of fighting. To defend the forts, a small number of regulars would be sufficient; the present establishment of two regiments would, if completed, be amply adequate to the purpose; and when assisted by such forces as might at all times be collected on the frontier, would be able to repel every inroad of the enemy.

Experience has proved, that the sudden and desultory attacks of the frontier militia and rangers, are ever attended with better success than the methodical operations of a regular force; the former are better calculated for expedition and surprise, making unexpected sallies, scouring the country in small bodies, harassing the Indians, and intercepting their straggling parties, by whom their motions are unobscured; whereas, when a body of regulars take the field, encumbered with baggage and heavy artillery, the unavoidable slowness of their movements affords the enemy an opportunity of watching all their operations, collecting their whole force, and skulking in the woods around them, till they can seize the favorable moment to strike a sudden blow, which they generally do with success, but which they could never attempt, if exposed every hour to the unforeseen attacks of our woodsmen, who would keep their attention constantly engaged in all quarters, and thus prevent them from uniting in large bodies.

It was further observed by some gentlemen, who even admitted the propriety of invading the Indian territory, that to effect this with success, it was by no means necessary to make such an encense in the military establishment, as that contemplated in the bill: the miscarriage of the former expeditions could not (they said) be alleged as a sufficient reason: for it is well known, that the former establishment was far from being complete: the regulars, intended for the service of the last campaign, were to have been above two thousand two hundred; the President was besides empowered to raise two thousand five hundred levies in addition to the regulars; and these would together have constituted an army of about four thousand seven hundred men: had such a body been employed, we might reasonably have expected much better success against the Indians, whose numbers were so far inferior, the whole force of the Wabash tribes not amounting to above eleven or twelve hundred warriors, who never could keep the field for any length of time, but must be soon obliged to disperse, without venturing an attack upon an army of such superior strength.

Instead of this, our army consisted of only about twelve hundred men, and of these not above four or five hundred were regular troops: besides, had even this force been sufficient if employed in season, the delays, that had taken place in the execution of the plan, would alone have been sufficient to defeat the intended purpose. During the winter, the law was passed for raising the additional troops to carry on the war with greater vigor; the whole summer was spent in the business, and the few men that we did enlist, were not raised till late in the fall: collected at length at the head of the Ohio, they fruitlessly loitered away their time, till they finally erected a monument to our eternal disgrace and infamy.

Whatever troops are to be employed, ought to be raised with diligence and dispatch, if we wish to avoid a similar miscarriage in our next attempt: the army ought not to enter the Indian country, till their whole force is complete—difficulties however and delay, equal to those of last year, may be expected in enlisting the men and we shall have the officers in pay a considerable time, without any soldiers: perhaps the former pay of the troops was too low; and proper effective men were unwilling to accept of it; if so, let it be raised; let the men be well clothed and fed; and they will more readily engage in the service: probably also the term of three years was an objection with many, who would otherwise have joined our standard: if enlisted only for six months, the ranks will be sooner filled; and this ought to have considerable weight with those who advocate the augmentation of the military establishment, as they cannot but know, that if we set about enlisting the number of men contemplated in the bill, and in the manner there prescribed, they cannot be raised time enough to render any service in the next campaign.

The information, contained in the report on the table, was not, it was said, to be implicitly relied on: that report was made by a man, who had not personally visited the frontier: others, who had been on the spot, were of opinion, that if 2000 levies had been raised last year, they would have been sufficient not only for the defence of the frontier, but even for any offensive operations, that might have been thought necessary: such troops, collected in the vicinity are more competent to the undertaking, than the troops now in contemplation: no complaint had been made of their conduct; whenever they were tried, they behaved as well as the regulars, and in the action under General St. Clair, they gave equal proofs of their valor.

It was further urged, that the frontier militia are not only equal, but infinitely superior to any regular troops whatever, for the defence of the borders, and that they are in fact, the only force that can be effectually employed in expeditions against the hostile Indians, whose mode of fighting is familiar to them, and does not strike them with that degree of terror, with which it inspires those men who enlist on the regular establishment:—these latter being collected in the heart of populous cities, where the face of an Indian is seldom seen, hardly know, whether the Indian and his horse are not the same animal: and when they approach the enemy, at the very first shout, even before he is in view, they are terrified at the idea of savage barbarity, which they have ever been taught to reflect on with horror; and being incapable of resistance, they commit their safety to flight. To prove the superiority of the militia, gentlemen need only contrast the dispatch and success of the expedition conducted by General Scott, with the delays, disgrace and mortification which attended that under General St. Clair, and consider the difference of the expence on those two occasions.

The expence of such an army as the bill contemplates, is an object well worthy of serious consideration, especially at the present moment, when there is scarcely a dollar in the treasury. Gentlemen would also do well to advert to the progress of this business, and consider where they were likely to stop, if they went on at the present rate:—at first, only a single regiment had been raised, and the expence was about 100,000 dollars; a second was afterwards added, which swelled the expence to about 300,000; and now a standing force of 5168 men is contemplated, at an annual expence of above a million and a quarter. Can this be justified in the present state of our finances, when it is well known

that the Secretary of the Treasury, having been requested by the members from a particular State, to build a light-house on a part of their coast, declined the undertaking, and alledged the want of funds, as the reason?

Our resources however might be made to answer for the support of such a force as that, which was intended for the service of the preceding year, and there would be little complaint or dissatisfaction among the people: very few murmurings were heard against the former establishment: but such a one as is now contemplated, will be thought extravagant, will breed discontent among the citizens of the United States, and perhaps afford our neighbors in Canada an opportunity to take advantage of our divided situation, and involve us in a war more dangerous than the former which separated us from Great-Britain.

Apprehensions (it is said) are entertained, that the object contemplated in raising those additional troops, is not so much to punish and coerce the Indians, as to have a standing regular force equal to what the British have on this continent. This is said to amount to about six thousand men, including those in Canada: but it is to be remarked, that the British nation has not above one thousand men within the limits of the United States; and yet with this handful of troops, they not only keep the Indians in awe, but even, in opposition to the wishes of the United States, retain possession of those posts, which should have been ceded to us pursuant to the terms of the treaty:—why then is it necessary, for the purpose of establishing posts and garrisoning them, to increase the standing force to so large a number, as that contemplated in the clause under consideration?—During our late arduous struggle for liberty, when we had to cope with the most powerful nation under heaven, the commander in chief had never at any one time above ten thousand men, under his own immediate command; and if with so small a force, we were able to effect so glorious a revolution, there can be no necessity of going such lengths at present, for the sake of establishing a military character—it is strange policy indeed, to raise five or six thousand men, to oppose a handful of Indian banditti, whose utmost amount does not, from the documents on the table, appear to exceed twelve hundred.

We are preparing to squander away money by millions: and no one, except those who are in the secrets of the cabinet, knows for what reason the war has been thus carried on for 3 years:—but what funds are to defray the increased expence of maintaining such a force as is now contemplated?—The excise is both unpopular and unproductive:—the impost duties have been raised as high as is consistent with prudence:—to increase them would be but to open a door for smuggling, and thus diminish their productiveness: and if those sources of revenue fail, if our finances be thus exhausted in unnecessary wars we shall be unable to satisfy the public creditors, unless recourse be had to new taxes, the consequence of which may, with just reason, be deplored; whereas, if we but keep our expences within bounds, if we nurse our finances, we shall be respectable among the nations of the earth, nor will any nation dare to insult us, or be able to do it with impunity.

During the course of these observations, an honorable gentleman asked, whether this was a day set apart for rhetorical flourishes, as the galleries were open, and he saw the short-hand writers stationed at their different posts?

At an early stage of the debate, an honorable gentleman had suggested, that, instead of passing a law for raising at all events the additional regiments, which, for his part, he did not think necessary, the house (if they finally determined the present establishment to be insufficient) would perhaps do better to appropriate a certain sum of money, to enable the executive to call in such additional aid, as circumstances may require.

To this it was objected, that it is the duty of the representatives of the people in all appropriations of the public money, to make them for certain specific purposes;—to act otherwise on the present occasion, would be setting a precedent, that might, in its consequences, prove highly injurious: for, although the greatest confidence may safely be reposed in the virtue and integrity of him who now fills the presidential chair, it is impossible to foresee what use may hereafter be made of the precedent by his successors, or how far it may be carried.

Against the motion for striking out, and in favor of the proposed augmentation of the military establishment, it was urged,

That as to the justice of war carried on against the Indian tribes, that was a question which could not admit of a doubt in the mind of any man, who would allow that self preservation and indispensable necessity are sufficient causes to justify a nation in taking up arms:—if the present war be not in every respect justifiable, then there never was, nor ever will be a just war: it was originally undertaken, and since carried on, not for the sake of conquest, but to defend our fellow-citizens, our friends, our dearest connexions, who are daily exposed, in the frontier settlements, to all the rage of savage barbarity, to which they, with their wives and children, must soon fall victims, unless we speedily fly to their assistance:—and although there are some people, who utterly deny the justice of any war whatever, this doctrine, however fine in theory, will hardly ever obtain in practice: for, is it to be imagined, that any set of men are of such a passive disposition, as calmly to look on, whilst their friends and relations are butchered before their eyes, and to refuse giving them every assistance in their power?

The murders and depredations, which have, for years past, been repeatedly committed by the savages, loudly call for redress:—from various documents of unquestionable authority, now in the hands of the Secretary at War, signed and attested by the executive and legislature of Kentucky, by the district judge, and the captains of the militia, it appears, that from the year 1783 to 1790, there have been, of the inhabitants of that district, or of emigrants on their way thither, no less than fifteen hundred persons either massacred by the savages, or dragged into captivity; two thousand horses taken away; and other property plundered or destroyed, to the amount of fifty thousand dollars; and there is good reason to suppose, that on the other frontiers of Virginia and Pennsylvania, the number of persons murdered or taken prisoners, during the abovementioned period, would furnish a list of one thousand or fifteen hundred more.

The white people, it is true, have sometimes committed depredations on the Indians: but the instances have been rare [the honorable gentleman who spoke, did not recollect above one or two] of their making unjust attacks upon the savages, nor did they on those occasions commence hostilities against them, till exasperated by the strongest provocations, that could possibly stimulate the human heart: this circumstance may be justly allowed as some palliation of the offence:—even in these instances, however, a few individuals only were concerned; and when the affair came to the knowledge of the State, ample reparation was made