

THE HIGH, PLAIN, YET DIZZY GROUND OF INFLUENCE:  
AMERICAN VIEWS ON REGIME CHANGE AND THE  
EUROPEAN REVOLUTION OF 1848

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# THE HIGH, PLAIN, YET DIZZY GROUND OF INFLUENCE: AMERICAN VIEWS ON REGIME CHANGE AND THE EUROPEAN REVOLUTION OF 1848

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This Working Paper examines American attitudes towards the European Revolutions of 1848 and the national debate over whether and how, to support foreign political reforms and regime change. This foreign policy debate was in many respects the most “modern” of those which took place during the American Republic’s first century, in that the protagonists anticipated many of the arguments and policy options that later emerged when the United States became a world power. Most of the proposals for an active U.S. response to the Revolutions of 1848 (but not all) stopped short of military intervention and focused on the ability of the United States to shape world public opinion in a way that would facilitate the cause of human rights and liberalized regimes. Rufus Choate, a leading Massachusetts politician and orator, aptly captured this perspective when he described the approach of his friend, Senator and later Secretary of State Daniel Webster.

. . . to occupy the high, plain, yet dizzy ground which separates influence from intervention, to avow and promulgate warm good-will to humanity, wherever striving to be free, to inquire authentically into the history of its struggles, to take official and avowed pains to ascertain the moment when its success may be recognized, consistently, ever, with the great code that keeps the peace of the world, abstaining from everything which shall give any nation a

right under the law of nations to utter one word of complaint, still less to retaliate by war.”<sup>1</sup>

Webster was in many ways the central character in this mid-19<sup>th</sup> century search for ways to maximize American *influence* in favor of regime change without crossing the line into direct political-military *intervention*. Webster’s soaring *rhetoric* about human liberty seemingly put him on the side of those who challenged the perceived tradition of American non-involvement in the political affairs of Europe. But at the same time, Webster’s official *actions* were cautious, taking into account the fragile state of the Union and the limits of American power.

This Working Paper begins with a brief discussion of the historical background of the U.S. approach to regime change as news of the Revolutions of 1848 first reached the American shore. The intellectual and political impetus for a more assertive approach to foreign policy and for the promotion of foreign regime change came largely from a new generation of Democrats, who sought to advance Ameri-

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Gilman Brown, ed., *The Works of Rufus Choate, with a Memoir of his Life*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1862), I: 520.

can interests and ideals through territorial expansion, free trade, and support for liberal movements abroad. The New Democrats sought to overcome factional and intellectual resistance to such activism from within their own party and from the opposition Whigs, who traditionally held that America's world-historic mission was one of democratic example rather than the conquest of foreign territories or the subversion of other regimes. Nevertheless, the Whig persuasion also contained a strain of activism on behalf of human rights, especially strong rhetorical support for republican government and national self-determination. The New Democrats thus had potential allies among up-and-coming progressive Whig politicians and advocates of the Free Soil movement. This raised the prospect that a political majority might emerge across parties in favor of a more activist or even interventionist foreign policy – a national majority that might transcend differences over slavery.

The possibility of such a domestic political coalition first emerged when the unpopular July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe was overthrown by yet another French Revolution in February 1848. Section II considers the official and unofficial American reactions to this revolution. The U.S. Minister in Paris, Richard Rush, almost immediately recognized the new Republic, an action that was ratified by the Polk administration on the grounds that early and favorable U.S. action towards republican government in Europe could encourage and strengthen the stable development of such regimes. The U.S. Congress – then in the midst of controversy over ratification of peace with Mexico – debated the wisdom of a policy of active encouragement of republican governments in France and elsewhere in Europe. These deliberations revealed substantial opposition among Southern Democrats and conservative Whigs even to

rhetorical support for the latest experiment in French republicanism. This section examines closely the arguments of the most prominent advocate of caution in response to foreign regime change, South Carolina Democrat John C. Calhoun. Calhoun's expressions of caution generated the first major defense of an activist foreign policy towards the French Revolution from leading Democratic Senators such as Michigan's Lewis Cass and Illinois' Stephen A. Douglas. Those who wanted to use the French Revolution as a means to highlight their opposition to slavery and American territorial expansion soon diverted the debate, however, especially in the House of Representatives.

As the revolutions spread across the continent, the American government and public had to grapple with the policy issues raised by other forms regime change, including the unification of Germany (presumably but not necessarily on republican and confederal lines); and the autonomy or independence of Hungary from the Hapsburg Empire. Section III reviews the approaches of the Polk (Democrat) and Taylor-Fillmore (Whig) administrations towards these developments. Both administrations adopted or embraced diplomatic policies that were sympathetic towards the prospective new regimes but that stopped short of outright intervention. Congressional members again debated whether and how the United States should proceed, especially after Austria, with the aid of Russian troops, suppressed the Hungarian Revolution. Cass and Whig grandee Henry Clay argued about the former's proposal to withdraw U.S. diplomatic recognition of Austria to protest the intervention and to signal American support for a future Hungarian independence movement. Whig Secretary of State John Clayton and his successor, Daniel Webster, engaged in an acrimonious public controversy with

Austrian diplomat, the Baron Hülsemann, about his allegations of improper American interference in Austro-Hungarian affairs. The Hülsemann dispute provided additional grist for Congressional advocates and critics of an activist American foreign policy.

Section IV examines the most important of these public debates over the proper American approach towards regime change, which was triggered by the appearance of the Hungarian revolutionary leader Lajos (Louis) Kossuth. The Taylor administration successfully urged Kossuth's release from confinement in Turkey and, with Congressional approval, dispatched a U.S. frigate to convey him to the United States, where presumably he would live out his life in quiet exile. But Kossuth and many of his American supporters saw his release merely as the next step in a second Hungarian Revolution, which would be enabled (according to his most aggressive U.S. supporters) by an American-British-Turkish military alliance directed at Austria and Russia; or by some other type of "intervention for non-intervention." But most New Democrats, such as Douglas, and progressive Whigs, including New York Senator William Seward, carefully avoided taking such provocative ground. They argued that active American moral and diplomatic support would alter the political climate in Europe sufficiently to allow a future Hungarian revolution to succeed on its own terms, if the Hungarians were truly capable of self-government. The critics of such an approach, such as Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden, argued that it was impossible to establish a clear line between moral-diplomatic support for the Hungarian cause, and outright military intervention. Either the United States would find itself on the slippery slope that led to war for matters that were not vital to the nation, or it would be forced to back down in humiliating fashion.

As noted in Section V, these conservative Whigs, aligned with the Fillmore administration, and a strong majority of Southerners of both parties, constituted an effective opposition to the New Democrats and progressive Whigs on the Kossuth issue. As the nation slid deeper into domestic crisis over slavery during the 1850s, the prospect of a new political coalition based on an assertive foreign policy and an aggressive approach to foreign regime change, disappeared.

This Working Paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive or definitive account of the American response to the Revolutions of 1848, but rather to highlight the substantive arguments that emerged during the public debate. Three limitations must be noted in particular. First, the controversy over the future of slavery increasingly dominated American domestic politics and affected the debate over the proper response to the European revolutions. The Paper identifies the points at which the foreign policy debate was directly affected by arguments about the peculiar institution; but the entire subtext cannot be disentangled entirely in a limited monograph. For instance, one of the main options for promoting regime change in the Western Hemisphere, filibustering expeditions, a tactic which became increasingly identified with the promotion of slavery, is not covered in any depth. Second, some of the political alignments during the foreign policy debates of the late 1840s and early 1850s were dictated by factional and personal differences within the parties rather than by high-minded substantive considerations. Third, Americans were not always fully aware of the differences between their own concept of republican self-government and those espoused by various European revolutionaries, who often sought dramatic social change that would have been unacceptable in the American context.

## I. Background

Most historians of American foreign relations now recognize that it is inaccurate, or better put, incomplete, to describe the United States approach to the world (or Europe) during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as “isolationist.” The rapid growth and importance of American international commerce alone generated important financial, diplomatic and strategic interests outside of North America and the Western Hemisphere. Since the days of their own Revolution, Americans naturally sympathized with liberal reforms and independence movements abroad, notably the French Revolution of the 1790s, the Spanish-American revolts after the War of 1812, and the Greek independence movement of the 1820s. These sympathies generated political pressures which influenced U.S. foreign policy to a greater or lesser degree, especially when the sense of national interest coincided with aims of foreign revolutionaries (as with the Republican Party and the original French Revolution). Americans saw themselves as the wave of the political future and at the cutting edge of the Enlightenment project for promoting the rights of mankind and self-government, as so memorably set out in the Declaration of Independence.<sup>2</sup>

That said, the default position of the United States when it came directly to supporting foreign regime change was represented by the Washington-Adams policy of neutrality, enshrined in Washington’s Farewell Address: that of non-entanglement in the European system of

alliances (and thus non-involvement in European wars); and of non-interference in the domestic affairs of others. John Quincy Adams famously articulated this position in his July 4, 1821 Address:

America, with the same voice which spoke herself into existence as a nation, proclaimed to mankind the inextinguishable rights of human nature, and the only lawful foundations of government. America, in the assembly of nations, since her admission among them, has invariably, though often fruitlessly, held forth to them the hand of honest friendship, of equal freedom, of generous reciprocity. She has uniformly spoken among them, though often to heedless and often to disdainful ears, the language of equal liberty, of equal justice, and of equal rights. She has, in the lapse of nearly half a century, without a single exception, respected the independence of other nations while asserting and maintaining her own. She has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings, as to the last vital drop that visits the heart. She has seen that probably for centuries to come, all the contests of that Aceldama the European world, will be contests of inveterate power, and emerging right.

Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the

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<sup>2</sup> This important strand of American foreign policy is highlighted by Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Foreign Policy from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

champion and vindicator only of her own. She will commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Historian David Hendrickson summarized the traditional American view: “that every people had a right of revolution that could not be denied; outsiders were obliged to recognize that new status when it was achieved but should neither foment revolution nor come to the aid of despotic governments against internal enemies. To do either would be illegitimate intervention and equivalent to aggression. Self-government...meant above all freedom from external rule.”<sup>4</sup>

The practical problem for those Americans who hoped for a better world and liberal regime changes abroad was the apparent strength of foreign despotisms. These regimes typically united to preempt or suppress any experiments in liberalism or popular revolution within themselves and among their neighbors. Republican government or national self-determination,

proceeding naturally in individual countries as the people better understood and exercised their rights, seemed impossible. Historian Sean Wilentz characterized the depressing circumstances facing democrats around the world in the early 1840s:

That situation was terrible. In Britain, the Reform Bill of 1832 had left the vast majority of urban and rural workingmen disenfranchised. Radicals from William Cobbett (who wrote an admiring brief biography of [Andrew] Jackson) to the Chartists were struggling through one setback after another, on the road to Chartism’s collapse in 1848. In France, the hopeful revolution of 1830 had produced a stockjobber monarchy that hesitated not at all to repress popular republican stirrings in blood . . . In Ireland, Daniel O’Connell’s nonviolent mass movement for repeal of the union with Britain was stirring great crowds, but getting nowhere fast against the obdurate ministry of Sir Robert Peel. Across the face of Europe, nationalist as well as democratic aspirations remained stifled by Metternichian reaction.<sup>5</sup>

Under these circumstances, to a growing number of Americans, forbearance in the political affairs of others simply conceded the game to the forces of reaction, because despotism observed no such niceties. The growth of American economic power, and the nation’s latent military potential, apparently provide the United States with options that the preceding generations had lacked to exercise influence

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<sup>3</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Address before the U.S. House of Representatives*, July 4, 1821, at <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3484>.

<sup>4</sup> David Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), p. 322.

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<sup>5</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), pp. 562-3.

abroad. Paradoxically, as the American Republic grew stronger, it also became a greater ideological threat to European despotisms, which might soon decide to unite and extirpate the republican contagion in the New as well as the Old World. The default position of non-entanglement and non-intervention remained strong, especially given the national divisions over slavery and concern with the prospect of popular revolt *within* the Union (Dorr's rebellion in Rhode Island). But two distinct groups of party leaders and publicists searched for a way out of the narrow constraints of principled and pragmatic non-intervention.

### *The New Democrats*

The intellectual and political impetus for a more assertive approach to foreign policy and the promotion of foreign regime change came largely from a new generation of Democrats, who sought to advance American interests and ideals through territorial expansion, free trade, and support for liberal movements abroad.<sup>6</sup> They included such politicians as Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, Robert Walker of Mississippi, and James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, and journalist-activists like John L. O'Sullivan and George Sanders. Veteran Democrats such as Louis Cass of Michigan, although sometimes lumped in with other conservative "Old Fogies," sympathized with the aims of the New Democrats. Louisiana's Pierre Soulé succinctly captured their goal by characterizing "the mission of America" as casting the deciding weight in the scales of repub-

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<sup>6</sup> In this section, I use the term "New Democrats" to cover a spectrum of similar opinion in the Democratic Party, from the Young Democrat faction of the mid-1840s to Young America in the early 1850s – while acknowledging the difficulties that any such generalization about policy views can create.

licanism throughout the world.<sup>7</sup> The dominant policy questions for these New Democrats concerned how precisely to "expand the area of freedom" -- how much weight could the United States effectively wield to promote liberalization and regime change? On which scale of power and influence – political, economic, diplomatic, and military – should it seek to make the difference?

The New Democrat agenda in the Western Hemisphere was famously captured by O'Sullivan's invocation of Manifest Destiny. "And that claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us." Under Manifest Destiny, regime change would occur through a natural and peaceful process of "Americanization." American emigrants would fill up adjoining territories, assume positions of leadership alongside local allies, regenerate the common population (to the extent possible given cultural and/or racial limitations), develop republican self-government, and naturally gravitate into the Union. The process of regime change and self-determination within the borderlands might have a violent local revolutionary phase if it became necessary for the enlightened to overthrow despotic rule, but the final outcome would be the peaceful and voluntary accession as equal partners in the Union. The local rights and customs of the new states would be respected under the federal principle. "Communities grow up mostly by immigra-

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<sup>7</sup> Siert F. Riepma, "'Young America': A Study in American Nationalism Before the Civil War," Ph.D. dissertation, Western Reserve University, 1939, p. 292; Amos Aschbach Ettinger, *The Mission to Spain of Pierre Soulé, 1853-1855: A Study in the Cuban Diplomacy of the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp. 174-7 (mission).

tion from the United States. Such communities therefore invariably establish the same form of government which they left behind and *demand* admittance into the Union. The government does not *demand* of them that they come into the Union.” The process of Manifest Destiny would eventually encompass North America and the Caribbean and possibly the entire Western Hemisphere.<sup>8</sup>

For the New Democrats, Texas was supposed to be the prime example of cultural assimilation, political regime change, and incorporation into the greater American Union. As historian Daniel Walker Howe observed, “The Texian [sic] revolution broke out over economic and constitutional issues not very different from those that provoked the American Revolution.” American settlers, many with their slaves, had settled in northern Mexico with the encouragement or at least the benign neglect of the central government. When that government attempted to restore an earlier, more centralized constitution, one that abolished slavery, the Anglo-Texans (including some Hispanics) first sought to create a separate state within a federal Mexico and later declared independence with a manifesto carefully modeled on the American version of 1776. They drafted a constitution similar to that of 1787 (and which also sanctioned slavery). Volunteers like former Tennessee Congressman Davy Crockett crossed the border to aid the revolt. President Jackson professed official neutrality but did little to restrain the filibusters or prevent the Texans from obtaining money and supplies from the United States. (This approach was in con-

trast with much stricter American efforts to restrain filibustering against British Canada.) Jackson also dispatched the U.S. Army to the Sabine River, which the Mexican government took as a threat to intervene if the revolution seemed on the verge of collapse. When the independence of the new Texas Republic was acknowledged by Santa Anna after his defeat at San Jacinto, the United States government quickly recognized the new regime (despite the protests of the Mexican government, which refused to accept Santa Anna’s action) and began negotiations for Texas’ accession into the Union.<sup>9</sup>

Outside the Western Hemisphere, the New Democrats did not completely rule out the possibility that “the wisdom of democratic convictions would become so self-evident, that populations world-wide would desire U.S. protection.” Levi Woodbury of New Hampshire wanted “to extend the blessings of our government as widely as practicable.... States might be admitted, not only contiguous, but ... even Europe.” The more common theme, however, was that of helping European republicans achieve enlightened regime change and, where appropriate, national independence. The New Democrats’ advocacy of aggressive commercial diplomacy was part of this campaign. As historian Spencer Riepmann noted, the New Democrats believed that the “friendly intercourse” of free trade, with the stimulating powers of “press-steam-

<sup>8</sup> Robert D. Sampson, *John L. O’Sullivan and his Times* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003), p. 199 (demand). O’Sullivan’s famous expression of Manifest Destiny appeared in the *New York Morning News*, 27 December 1845. He also used the term in an article in the July-August 1848 issue of the *Democratic Review*.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 661-2; 669-70; George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 194; Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire*, p. 165. To avoid complicating the election campaign of his chosen successor, Martin Van Buren, Jackson waited until his last day of office to recognize the Texas Republic. Jackson was at best ambivalent about Texas’ independence, which he thought might complicate American efforts to annex the region.

commerce-cotton-electricity” would quietly bring about “triumphs over horary despotism and barbarisms.” Revolutions against monarchs anywhere would abolish old feudal barriers to commerce and open up ports and markets for American shippers and for U.S. suppliers of grains, cotton, and raw materials.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond that, O Sullivan had written that Manifest Destiny included a mission to spread four freedoms around the world: conscience; person; trade; and the “universality of freedom and equality.” Regime change, from despotism to democracy, was the logical outcome of the four freedoms. “Why should not England be republican?” the *Democratic Review* asked. The New Democrats were also intrigued with the idea that republican movements in Europe at the very least might deter monarchs from intervening forcefully in the Western Hemisphere. A new American diplomatic style, marked, for instance, by wearing plain republican clothes rather than elaborate ceremonial uniforms, would be one means of peacefully influencing European opinion and encouraging liberal opinion.<sup>11</sup>

The New Democrat paradigm of peaceful regime change through Manifest

Destiny and the New Diplomacy did not always meet the requirements of the real world. History sometimes needed a little help to overcome those who forcibly resisted change. Despotism would not always quietly go into the dark goodnight of extinction. In the Western Hemisphere, the New Democrats accused Britain and France of attempting to encircle and contain the United States; and of waging ideological war against republicanism by supporting monarchical ideas and factions in Central and South America. Britain – the oppressor of the Irish and the alleged center of the moneyed interests that sought to dominate the U.S. government and economy – was the particular *bête noire* of the Democrats, New and Old. Slaveholders warned against an international abolitionist conspiracy, centered in London, whose philanthropic pretensions covered Britain’s plan of world domination through the destruction of the U.S. economy and the fomenting of slave rebellions. The monarchies were said to oppose the progress of Manifest Destiny and democracy by retaining and expanding their territorial possessions in the New World; supporting existing native regimes (e.g., Mexico) and emerging regimes (e.g., Texas), and enforcing restrictions on free trade.<sup>12</sup>

The New Democrat agenda in the Western Hemisphere was also challenged by domestic opponents of territorial expansion. From the early days of the republic, there had always been a strong political viewpoint that opposed territorial over-extension on

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<sup>10</sup> Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-61* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 130; Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire*, p. 180; Levi Woodbury, *Writings of Levi Woodbury, LL. D. Political, Judicial and Literary*, 3 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1852), I: 357; Riepma, “Young America,” pp. 40-1, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, pp. 562-3 (four freedoms); Henry Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations, 1830-1871* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), p. 4; Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, p.104.

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<sup>12</sup> Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations*, pp. viii-ix; Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, p. 118; Donald S. Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy 1848-1852* (Columbia: U of Missouri Press, 1977), pp. 18-22; Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, p. 183.

classical political grounds. These critics argued that further expansion would lead to war, or the danger of war, and thus would require a dangerously large and expensive military force.

To New Democrats, the fate of Texas after 1836 demonstrated the risk that these countervailing external and internal forces would frustrate the natural process of republican regime change and peaceful assimilation of new territories into the Union. The Whigs and some anti-slavery northern Democrats had blocked the annexation of Texas for nearly a decade. During that period, some Texas leaders promoted the idea of a permanently independent Texas Republic (or at least they kept that option open to provide them with diplomatic leverage). An independent Texas, aligned with Britain, was a nightmare for the New Democrats. The Lone Star Republic would have a secure market for its cotton and the support of a major European ally in what a multi-polar Western Hemisphere security system. Texas might well expand to the Pacific and become a major power in its own right, competing with the United States for territory and influence. New Democrats and slaveholders of both parties feared that the British alliance might become so necessary and attractive to the Texans that the new regime would be persuaded or compelled to abolish slavery if it was spurned by the United States.<sup>13</sup>

The New Democrats thus confronted the possibility that Manifest Destiny would be truncated and result in the United States being encircled by number of new and unfriendly regimes, including Texas, California, Oregon, Cuba, and Canada.

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<sup>13</sup> Donelson to Calhoun, 8 January 1848, *Papers of John C. Calhoun* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959-), vol. 25: 105 (hereafter referred to as *PJCC*); H.W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson, His Life and Times* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), pp. 545-6; Howe, *What hath God Wrought*, pp. 671-7.

Lord Ashburn, for instance, spoke of a new “Pacific republic” governed neither by Britain nor America. These nations might be republics (slaveholding or abolitionist), clients of Britain or France, or even monarchies. The French historian and statesman François Guizot proposed: “What was not good for Europe under the form of a universal monarchy would not be good for America under the form of universal republicanism.” Thomas Jefferson had been relaxed about the idea of “sister republics” populated by Anglo-Saxons emerging on the far side of the continent but under the circumstances of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the New Democrats were not. Even loyal American emigrants would be tempted by the lure of power and driven by necessity to support independent and even non-republican regimes if they were excluded from the Union upon declaring their independence.<sup>14</sup>

The New Democrats conceived of a variety of policy tools to deal with the “unnatural” resistance to the spread of republican government. They believed it was sometimes essential actively, even forcefully, to defend and accelerate the process of republicanization and Americanization. The most controversial option was filibustering, in which American citizens and sympathetic native exiles would infiltrate or invade an “oppressed” territory and overthrow the existing regime, after which the new government would petition to join the Union. The most famous filibusterer of the 1840s was Narciso Lopez, a Venezuelan, who engaged in several campaigns against Spanish rule in Cuba with the aid of American volunteers and financial support. Filibustering was justified not only as a means of relieving the oppressed by bringing them republican government but also as a defensive instrument to prevent

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<sup>14</sup> Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, p. 122-23 (Ashburn); Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire*, p. 179 (Guizot).

regime changes detrimental to American interests and security. For example, filibustering against Canada was designed not only to trigger a revolt against British rule but also to preempt local advocates of independence like William Lyon McKenzie, who declared his aversion to “American democracy as it presented itself in the form of political corruption, crass materialism and human slavery.” Many Southerners, and some northern commercial interests, supported or were sympathetic to Lopez because of fears that Spain might transfer the island to Britain or France; or, worse, abolish slavery there. Even more worrisome was the prospect of a slave revolt on the island that would turn Cuba into a second Haiti.<sup>15</sup>

Few prominent Democrats, New or Old, were willing publicly to support the flouting of domestic and international laws that prohibited organizing filibustering expeditions on American soil. Slaveholders and businessmen understood the importance of the rule of law when it applied to their own interests. New Democrat Stephen Douglas argued that filibustering was actually counterproductive. According to Douglas, history demonstrated that such campaigns, at least without the active support of the U.S. government, were almost certain to fail and thus weaken the forces of native resistance. However, Douglas and other New Democrats drew the line against the active suppression of filibusters outside the territory and waters of the United States, which they claimed was not sanctioned by American law. Some were prepared to argue for amending U.S. neutrality legislation to

give the benefit of legal doubt to filibusters. The same argument would later be made for those who wanted to find private means of supporting European revolutionaries.<sup>16</sup>

That left coercive diplomacy as the preferred instrument of the New Democrats in the Western Hemisphere when the passive options failed. Coercive diplomacy required credible military options and a willingness to resort to war. President James Polk, who shared many of the predispositions (if not the romanticism) of the New Democrats, was unwilling to wait for time and goodwill to resolve the outstanding issues of the day: the status of the Oregon territory (which status, after a period of bluster, he decided to compromise with Britain, despite the opposition of some New Democrats and anti-slavery Whig nationalists like John Quincy Adams); the security of Texas, whose existence and boundaries remained in dispute with Mexico; and America’s future ambitions on the west coast and the Pacific Ocean, which Mexico, Britain and France wished to truncate. In his Inaugural Address, he stated what became known as the Polk Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine: “We must ever maintain the principle that the people of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny. Should any portion of them, constituting an independent state, propose to unite themselves with our Confederacy, this will be a question for them and us to determine without any foreign imposition.”<sup>17</sup>

The crisis with Mexico brought several important strands of New Democrat policy together. The Polk administration and its New Democrat allies hoped not only to fast-forward the process of extending the area of hemispheric freedom; but also to

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<sup>15</sup> Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor & Millard Fillmore* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p. 74 (McKenzie); Thomas Chaffin, “‘Sons of Washington’: Narciso Lopez, Filibustering, and U.S. Nationalism, 1848-1851,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (Spring 1995): 94.

<sup>16</sup> Chaffin, “Sons of Washington,” pp. 92-9.

<sup>17</sup> Howe, *What hath God Wrought*, p. 809; James K. Polk, Inaugural Address, 4 March 1845, at <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3550>

overcome domestic limits against expansion by taking advantage of a new wave of patriotism to create a new and more favorable party alignment. Although Polk's Whig critics accused him of a pro-southern, pro-slavery agenda, he viewed his policies as aiming to bring about national unity.<sup>18</sup>

When coercive diplomacy with Mexico failed, Polk used the opportunity of a Mexican attack on U.S. troops in disputed territory to ask Congress for a declaration that a state of war existed. For the New Democrats, the territory to be acquired as a result of the war – as an “indemnity” from Mexico – would be freed from Mexican misrule and would extend the area of human liberty and happiness. According to the activist *Democratic Review*, there was a great danger in conquering only to enslave, but “a free nation, which shows equal toleration and protection to all religions, and conquer only to bestow freedom, has no such danger to fear.” O’Sullivan generally opposed the use of force on behalf of Manifest Destiny but he felt that war was justified in this case, in part because it would destroy Mexico’s “mock republic,” with its temptation to be “the cat’s paw of European monarchies to assail the progress of republican institutions.” Some New Democrats believed that the shock of the war might regenerate Mexico’s failing republican institutions; Commodore Robert Stockton argued that the war should be fought “for the express purpose of redeeming Mexico from misrule and civil strife.” Others of the “All-Mexico” movement argued that this regeneration could take place only by incorporating all Mexican territory into the Union after a probationary period during which the business community and other agents of

liberalization would reform her institutions.<sup>19</sup>

New Democrats perceived an even broader purpose in pursuing Manifest Destiny actively in the Western Hemisphere. As the New York *Herald* wrote about the Mexican War, American assertiveness on behalf of human freedom in the New World would “lay the foundation of a new age, a new destiny, affecting both this continent and the old continent of Europe.” By successfully attacking European monarchical interests and possessions in the Western Hemisphere, the United States would undermine the power and legitimacy of those monarchies at home and create new opportunities for liberal reform and revolution in those regimes. The outbreak of revolution in France, which occurred just as the United States had completed its military triumph over Mexico, struck the New Democrats as something more than mere coincidence. Their next challenge was to take advantage of the favorable momentum created by the success against Mexico – to develop tools and policies that would assist the European revolutionaries and to create an enduring domestic political majority that would embrace the vision of expanding the area of freedom.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, p. 584-6.

<sup>19</sup> Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny; a Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935), p. 178, (*Democratic Review*); Simpson, *John L. O’Sullivan*, p. 203 (Sullivan); Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire*, p. 180 (Stockton); Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, p. 131-2. A few anti-slavery advocates fell into the All-Mexico camp as well, on the assumption that some or all of Mexico’s nineteen states could apply for admission to the Union as free states and thus tilt decisively the constitutional balance against the slaveholding interests. Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, p. 611.

<sup>20</sup> Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, p. 582 (*Herald*); Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, pp. 120, 131-2; Chaffin, “Sons of Washington,” p. 84.

### *Progressive Whigs and Free-Soilers*

The New Democratic movement, it should be stressed, was not monolithic nor did it represent a majority even within the Democratic Party. The Democracy was divided by factional and personal rivalries – most notably within the key state of New York – and by growing sectional differences over whether the expansion of American sovereignty also meant the expansion of slavery. These divisions made it difficult to promote an activist American foreign policy. On the other side of the political fence, the Whig Party also represented a substantial barrier to the development of a national majority supportive of an assertive American foreign policy.

The objectives of the New Democrats ran counter to the opposition Whig Party's long-standing "persuasion" that internal improvement, rather than external expansion, represented the proper path of republicanism. According to the Whigs, America's world-historic mission was one of democratic example rather than the conquest of foreign territories or the subversion of other regimes. That mission had been badly tarnished by the war of aggression against Mexico. Whigs did not reject entirely the long-term possibility of territorial expansion if it came about through "masterly inactivity," in the words of New York's William Seward; and if it reflected the organic development of the conditions of freedom that would make voluntary accessions to the Union genuinely possible. American expansion in the present circumstances, however, inevitably brought up the divisive question of slavery in the new territories and the existence of the Union itself. The Whigs were much more interested in *commercial* expansion, especially in the Pacific and Asia. New York's William Seward argued that American-led globalization (to use a modern

term) would extend the "civilization of the world westward ... across the continent of America," across the Pacific to Asia, on through Europe until it reached "the other side, the shores of the Atlantic Ocean." The United States would "furnish a political alembic which, receiving the exhausted civilization of Asia and the ripening civilization of Western Europe, and comingling them together ... would disclose the secret of the ultimate regeneration and reunion of human society throughout the world." The progressive Whig approach to the world was "based on the equality of nations of races of men. . . . One nation, race or individual, may not oppress or injure another, because the safety and welfare of each is essential to the common safety and welfare of all. If all are not equal and free, then who is entitled to be free, and what evidence of his superiority can he bring from nature or revelation?"<sup>21</sup>

The Whigs regarded Britain more as a rival in the competition for markets than as a strategic and ideological enemy, as did the New Democrats. Whig administrations were prepared to cut deals with London (e.g., the Webster-Ashburton Treaty) and to seek access to British capital for the development of the American economy, especially after the Panic of 1837. Some Whigs admired British culture and the stability of British political institutions.

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<sup>21</sup> George E. Baker, ed., *The Works of William H. Seward*, 5 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1887), 1: 91, 247-9; 3: 13, 113; 4: 124, 128; *Congressional Globe*, 36<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, p. 251 (hereafter referred to as *Congressional Globe*, with Congress and session indicated in abbreviated fashion). See also Ernest N. Paolino, *The Foundations of the American Empire; William Henry Seward and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1973); Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire*, p. 289; Charles Vevier, "American Continentalism: An Idea of Expansion, 1845-1910," *American Historical Review* 65 (January 1890): 323-35.

Daniel Webster, who served as Secretary of State in two Whig administrations, had once implicitly classified Britain along with the United States on the side of free institutions.

It cannot be denied that the great political question of this age is that between absolute and regulated governments. The substance of the controversy is whether society shall have any part in its own government. Whether the form of government shall be that of limited monarchy, with more or less mixture of hereditary power, or wholly elective or representative, may perhaps be considered as subordinate. The main controversy is between that absolute rule, which, while it promises to govern well, means, nevertheless, to govern without control, and that constitution system which restrains sovereign discretion, and asserts that society may claim as a matter of right some effective power in the establishment of the laws which are to regulate it. The spirit of the times sets with a most powerful current in favor of these last mentioned opinions. It is opposed, however, whenever and wherever it shows itself, by certain of the great potentates of Europe.<sup>22</sup>

Whig foreign policy was, of logic and necessity, open to the possibility that independent “regulated” regimes would develop on the periphery of the United States; and that cooperation, rather than competition, could mark America’s relationship with those regimes. As Whig

elder statesman Henry Clay, an opponent of Texas annexation, wrote in 1844:

...it is probable that there will be a voluntarily or forcible separation of the British North American possessions from the parent country. I am strongly inclined to think that it will be best for the happiness of all parties that, in the event, they should be erected into a separate and independent republic. With the Canadian republic on one side, that of Texas on the other, and the United States, the friend of both, between them, each could advance its own happiness by such constitutions, laws, and measures, as were best adapted to its peculiar condition. They would be natural allies, ready, by cooperation, to repel any European or foreign attack upon either. Each would afford a secure refuge to the persecuted and oppressed driven into exile by either of the others. They would emulate each other in improvements, in free institutions, and in the science of self-government.<sup>23</sup>

Hawaii was another case where the Whigs were prepared to accept the existence of an independent regime – and a monarchy at that – rather than to seek or compel its annexation, which was the preferred Democratic policy. American missionaries and businessmen, to be sure, had already influenced the native Hawaiian regime, so much so that by the 1840s the islands appeared to some visitors like a transplanted New England. The indigenous population had suffered greatly from Western diseases.

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel Webster, Independence of Greece, 19 January 1824, *The Papers of Daniel Webster* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England 1974-), Speeches and Formal Writings, 1: 89-104.

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<sup>23</sup> Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire*, p. 179; Congressional Speech, 17 April 1844, *The Papers of Henry Clay*, 11 vols. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959-1992), 10: 45.

To deter European powers (particularly France) from attempting to conquer Hawaii, the Whig Tyler administration announced a *de facto* American protectorate over the islands. To some contemporary scholars, this was a classic example of American commercial and cultural imperialism, regime change in substance if not in form. From the Whigs, however, enlightened missionaries and economic activity had assisted Hawaii's rulers in adapting Western ideas and forms of "regulated" government to their own circumstances while protecting essential native sovereignty.<sup>24</sup>

The Whig persuasion did include within it a tradition of activism on behalf of human rights, especially strong rhetorical support for republican government and national liberation movements. Henry Clay had been a notable defender of the Spanish American independence movements after the War of 1812. He had gone so far as to push the Monroe administration to revise the neutrality laws to favor the revolutionaries, to recognize their governments, and to promote the idea of a republican alliance in the Western Hemisphere to counteract the despotic Holy Alliance. Clay and Webster also spoke out strongly in favor of American moral support for Greek freedom from the Ottoman Empire. The Whigs' humanitarian sympathizers considered themselves natural allies of the middle-class reformers of Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Young progressive Whig politicians such as Seward and Ohio's Joshua Giddings, and journalists such as Horace Greeley, saw the opportunity to revive this Whig tradition

of support for republican government and human rights abroad. In part, they perceived the need to counter New Democrats in the contest for immigrant voters who had fled European poverty and oppression. But they also believed it possible to link the politically-attractive appeal for human rights abroad with a campaign for human rights at home. They imagined a domestic political coalition united by its opposition to the expansion of slavery, which would include northern Democrats who had become disgusted with that they regarded as the domination of their party by southern slaveholders, and those who were drifting away from both parties in support of the Free Soil movement. According to historians Daniel Walker Howe and Timothy Roberts, the Free Soilers "saw themselves as challenging the political status-quo in the United States and welcomed the revolutions in Europe as heralding a world-wide change in public opinion, one that might sweep away all established tyrannies, including American racial slavery." The United States could serve as a beacon to the world only if it restricted the spread of slavery as a step towards its ultimate abolition. The progressive Whig-Free Soil position tended to emphasize the defensive, not aggressive, role of the United States in the process of the spread of liberty abroad. America would help protect liberty where it had been previously established, but not force liberty on other peoples.<sup>26</sup>

These progressive Whigs' argument linking global liberty, republican government, and legitimate regime change was self-consciously opposed to that of the position of the New Democrats, whom the progressive Whigs associated with slavery and its expansion. For instance, after word

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<sup>24</sup> Howe, *What hath God Wrought*, p.706-7; Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, pp. 208-12.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy M. Roberts and Daniel Walker Howe, "The United States and the Revolutions of 1848," in R.J.W. Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, eds., *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848-1849: From Reform to Reaction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 169.

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<sup>26</sup> Roberts and Howe, "The United States and the Revolutions of 1848," p. 168.

of the European disturbances of 1848 reached the United States, Greeley's *New York Tribune* offered this comparison: "The 'revolutions in Europe' which the *Tribune* has favored all look to the Enfranchisement and Elevation of the Laboring Class – the Cultivators of the Soil – as their chief end. The 'revolution in Cuba' proposes to leave the cultivators of *her* soil in the position of beasts and chattels, subject to be flogged or starved, sold or tortured as the caprice or fancied interest of the landlord caste shall dictate."<sup>27</sup> The possibility existed however that on particular issues involving foreign regime change, such as Hungarian independence, progressive Whigs, Free Soilers, and New Democrats might find enough common ground to move American foreign policy in a new and more assertive direction.

## II. The First Test: A New French Revolution

The outbreak of revolutionary politics and violence in Europe against the established orders was hardly unexpected to serious observers on both sides of the Atlantic; but the speed, scope and sweep of events proved astonishing. What began immediately as a popular revolt against despotism in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies spread to the rest of the Italian peninsula. In France, the unpopular July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe gave way to another French Revolution and a Republic was established. In the Austrian Empire, the notorious reactionary, Prince Metternich was deposed and the various constituent nationalities in central Europe (especially the Hungarians) and in Italy sought autonomy or independence. Rioting encouraged by republican or socialist leaders occurred

throughout the German lands, including Prussia. Monarchs wavered, abdicated or promised to accept written constitutions. An assembly in Frankfurt began the process of creating about a united, liberal, and constitutional German state. The Chartists planned a massive demonstration in London.

The Revolutions of 1848 first touched American citizens already in place on the continent. Most of them sympathized with and even supported the revolutionary causes. Their public writings and private correspondence shaped much of the initial reaction to events back in the United States. Margaret Fuller, who had been reporting on European events for the *New York Tribune*, worked in the hospitals in Rome while her husband, an Italian count, fought against French interventionists. She urged Americans to contribute money or weapons to the revolutionary cause. George Sanders, who was in Europe attempting to sell surplus U.S. muskets to the revolutionaries in France and elsewhere, supposedly fought at the barricades in Paris. Others joined the revolutionary forces in Italy.<sup>28</sup>

Americans with official responsibilities struggled to formulate a definitive response to these rapidly-moving events and regime changes. With the end of the Mexican War, the U.S. Navy had begun to reconstitute its Mediterranean Squadron, with orders to show the flag as widely as possible. That flag and any symbolic manifestation of America quickly become a rallying point for revolution. On Washington's Birthday, 1848, Frederick Engle, the commander of the USS *Princeton*, anchored at Messina, reported that the local revolutionaries, upon seizing a fort, celebrated by saluting the Stars and Stripes. As the

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<sup>27</sup> Chaffin, "Sons of Washington," p. 91 (*Tribune*).

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<sup>28</sup> Information and quotations in this and the following paragraph taken from James A. Field, Jr., *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 216-224.

Navy went about its business protecting American commerce and interests in the midst of revolutionary violence ashore, the commander of the USS *Jamestown* noted: “Where liberal opinions have been struggling with despotic rule, it [the *Jamestown*] has been greeted with pleasure by the liberal party and its presence has afforded them encouragement to contend more obstinately with their oppressors.” The American consul at Palermo recognized the new Sicilian government (an act subsequently disavowed by the State Department.) The Austrian government, upon hearing (erroneous) rumors that an American warship had supplied revolutionaries in Venice, warned that it would sink such ships. Engle considered offering Pope Pius IX refuge if he so requested in the wake of radical violence in the Papal States. The American consul in Rome issued numerous passports to the defeated republican leaders and U.S. officials throughout Europe gave shelter to refugees.

The man most on the spot was the American Minister to France, Richard Rush. Rush, the son of a signer of the Declaration of Independence (Benjamin Rush), was an experienced public servant and diplomat. He had served as Attorney General, Acting Secretary of State, Minister to Great Britain, and Secretary of the Treasury. He was a friend of John Quincy Adams, a Whig, but now counted himself as a Jacksonian Democrat. Although Rush, like other informed Americans, had been generally aware of the unpopularity of Louis Philippe’s regime, he was stunned by the revolutionary events of February 23-25, 1848, which had “come like a thunderclap” and resulted in the abdication and exile of Louis-Philippe. The day after the Provisional Government was proclaimed and declared itself republican, Rush was approached by an old friend and naturalized American citizen, Major Guillaume

(William) Tell Poussin, who had ties to the revolutionary leadership and was acting (Rush supposed) with their authority. Poussin appealed to Rush to take the initiative, in his capacity as Minister of the United States, to recognize the provisional government.<sup>29</sup>

Rush was well aware of the standard American policy toward diplomatic recognition, established by Thomas Jefferson during the first French Revolution: “It was their rule, in all their foreign intercourse, to acknowledge every new Government abroad, when seen to exist *de facto*, without inquiring by what means it was set up or what its form.” But there were caveats to this rule. No American minister had ever granted such recognition on his own authority. The case of the Spanish-American Revolutions, although somewhat different in character, had added a further qualification: the United States would take its own interest into account as to the character and timing of recognition.

Poussin argued that the Provisional Government was in control of the situation but, as Rush noted in his journal, “the Revolution had been sudden in the extreme. Hardly could we believe our eyes in seeing a Republic, where a Monarchy stood firm, apparently, a week ago; and which was only first attacked by force five days ago. Were the barricades yet removed? Frenchmen might think the Republic stood firm; but could the world believe it?” Poussin pushed him, arguing “that my taking the step, would add immediate strength from abroad to France in her new position. Would I withhold my aid to Republicanism? Did I

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<sup>29</sup> The following account, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from Richard Rush, *Occasional Productions, Political, Diplomatic, and Miscellaneous, including, among others, A Glance at the Court and Government of Louis Philippe and the French Revolution of 1848* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1860), pp. 355ff.

not wish well to that cause?" Rush told Poussin that he personally wished that cause well; but that he could not contemplate such an action without having received any official notice of the Provisional Government's existence. He also had to be sensitive to accusations that he, or the United States, was somehow involved in the fomenting the revolution.

Under these circumstances, to be sure of his ground, Rush could have requested instructions from his government; and/or coordinated his actions with those of the Diplomatic Corps, especially the British Ambassador, in order to avoid a diplomatic upset at a time when the United States was still technically at war with Mexico. But Rush calculated differently:

I might be thought hasty in inferring the new Government of France to be a Government de facto, so very soon; yet it was apparent to me, as to all, that it was exercising the actual powers of Government, in ways the most telling, with none to thwart it. No party, no class, was moving against it. All seemed to acquiesce, silently, if not share the enthusiasm that was rallying all to its support. Would it be right or expedient in me to wait for instructions before recognizing it? A month, or more, must elapse before instructions could reach me. Was it for me to be backward, when France appeared to be looking to us? The Nation whose blood flowed with ours in our Revolution, and whose sympathies in our cause were still a tradition, ever ready to excite our sympathies for her? Most especially would these spring into life, when she announced herself to the world as a Republic. I could not be blind to the satisfaction with which our People would regard

her great name as enlisted on the side of Republicanism.

Rush admitted to having his doubts about the long-term viability of republican government in France. "Yet I was unwilling to scrutinize too closely, at first, the considerations which might seem at war with the hope of its full success. I therefore felt it my duty, after weighing every consideration, to lend my Representative name towards cheering it on. I believed I should have the approbation of the Government and people of the United States by anticipating instructions. The old feeling of good will towards France was still so much in the American heart, that the formularies of diplomacy, founded in good sense for the most part, would be grudgingly accepted as an excuse for lukewarmness in their Minister when France had started up before his eyes as a Republic. They would hail its first birth, and hope for the best afterwards. With the more reason would they do this, when so much of the high intellect, so many of the good names and a portion of the great names, of France, were seen to go with the Republic from the beginning."

"Hail its first birth, and hope for the best afterwards." Rush here expressed an emerging doctrine, embraced by presidents of both parties. Although the United States could not overtly foment revolution and regime change, it had the right and opportunity to try to influence those critical first moments after birth, when the viability and direction of the new regime was still in question. By being the first to recognize infant republics or constitutional monarchies (there would be some debate on the qualifications of the latter form of government) – even or especially if their future was in doubt – the United States could expect to exercise greater influence over events than if it proved overly cautious. At the level of material interest, of course, Rush also

realized that the United States might expect a republican France to be less inclined towards joining a monarchical coalition aimed at containing the United States in the Western Hemisphere; and more inclined to accept the free trade promoted by Democratic administrations.<sup>30</sup>

When Rush, along with the rest of the Diplomatic Corps, received notice that a Foreign Minister (Alphonse de Lamartine) had been designated by the Provisional Government, he went as soon as possible in full diplomatic dress to the Hotel de Ville, the headquarters of the government.

Conducted into the room where the Provisional Government was sitting, I addressed myself to its President and Members, by saying that, too distant from my Country to wait instructions, I sought the first opportunity of offering my felicitations to the Provisional Government, believing that my own Government would transmit to me its sanction of the early step I was taking; that the remembrance of the ancient friendship and alliance which once joined together France and the United States, was still strong among us ; that the cry would be loud and universal in my Country for the prosperity and greatness of France under the new institutions she had proclaimed, subject to ratification by the national will; that, under similar institutions, the United States had enjoyed a long course of prosperity; that their institutions had been stable; and while they left to all other countries the choice of their own forms of government, they would naturally rejoice to see this great

nation flourish under forms like their own, which had been found to unite social order with public liberty. I concluded with a repetition of the hope General Washington expressed to the French Minister, Adet, at Philadelphia, in 1796 : that the “friendship of the two Republics might be commensurate with their existence.”

Rush’s initiative began to pay immediate dividends. Representatives of the South American republics, following Rush’s lead, also recognized the new regime, as in effect did the Papal Nuncio (albeit for different reasons). “Two good things have quickly happened for the Provisional Government,” Lamartine noted, “the Nuncio’s letter, and Recognition by the American Minister, the one representing the head of the Church, the other the head of Republicanism in the World.” The European monarchies, which faced their own revolutions, were predictably much slower to acknowledge the Second Republic. “As much as I was able to learn, all were plump and decided against doing anything,” Rush informed Secretary of State Buchanan. His recognition of the Provisional Government was “displeasing to the whole diplomatic corps of Europe, assembled at this great central point of Europe.” The British Ambassador, Lord Normansby, had tried to discourage precipitate action by Rush when the latter, as a matter of diplomatic courtesy, had informed Normansby of his intentions.<sup>31</sup>

One of Rush’s major concerns was that new French Republic, following the path of its revolutionary predecessor, might

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<sup>30</sup> Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations*, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Rush, *Occasional Productions*, p. 458 (Lamartine); J.H. Powell, *Richard Rush, Republican Diplomat* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942), pp. 262 (plump), 270 (displeasing).

attempt to foment revolution and regime change throughout Europe by means of propaganda or armed intervention, sparking a continent-wide war that would draw in the United States. Rush was aware that the provisional government was under considerable pressure by radical elements and foreign émigrés to do precisely that. He was therefore pleased to report that Lamartine had refused the request for arms and money by a delegation of Polish exiles determined on liberating their country, and had declined to meddle in the revolutionary developments in Italy and Belgium. Lamartine offered reassurances to foreign nations that republican France did not seek to disrupt the family of nations or engage in war; that if war were forced on the French people, the republic would only be the “intellectual ally of nations desiring to live by the same principles as its own. France, as a republic, aimed not at setting the world on fire, but only to shine from her place on the horizon of nations.” Over the next few months, according to Rush’s biographer, the American Minister “became more and more its [France’s] apologist among the foreign representatives. He discounted the exaggerated stories in the antagonistic English press of violence in Paris; . . . He construed his official dispatches with great care, so their publication in America would counteract the influence of British anti-republican propaganda.”<sup>32</sup>

### ***The Polk Administration Responds to the French Revolution***

Rush wondered how his unprecedented actions would be received by his superiors. He was old enough to remember how James Monroe, while serving as U.S. Minister to France in the mid-1790s, had

<sup>32</sup> Rush *Occasional Productions*, pp. 459 (intellectual), 470 (fire); Powell, *Richard Rush*, p. 265.

been censured by the Washington administration for his too-effusive identification of the American cause with that of the first French Revolution. As it turned out, Rush need not have worried. He had estimated accurately the views of the Polk administration and the American public.

Rush’s first dispatch arrived in Washington on March 30, 1848, along with reports from other American officials in Europe. Reports soon filled American newspapers news of widespread upheaval throughout the continent. Public meetings and parades in support of the French republic were held in major American cities. By one estimate, one hundred thousand people celebrated the event in New York City on the evening of April 3, with French, German and Italian speakers on the review stand. Newspaper opinion was strongly favorable, irrespective of party affiliation. Americans were particularly impressed by what seemed to be the relatively peaceful and bloodless transfer of power in Paris. Progressive Whig Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* featured a prediction that the European revolutions would spread “until all Europe is one great and splendid republic . . . and we shall all be citizens of the world.” Irish-Americans sponsored rallies and distributed propaganda calling for revolution in their homeland.<sup>33</sup>

Americans proposed more specific and material ways to show their support for the French and republican causes in Europe.

<sup>33</sup> William Thomas Kerrigan, “‘Young America!’: Romantic Nationalism in Literature and Politics, 1843-1861,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1997), p. 103; Eugene N. Curtis, “American Opinion of the French Nineteenth Century Revolutions,” *American Historical Review* 29 (January 1924): 255-7; Richard C. Rohrs, “American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (Autumn 1994): 262-3; Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 15 (splendid); Roberts and Howe, “The United States and the Revolutions of 1848,” p. 167.

The New York *Herald* suggested that the United States “create a naval academy, build twenty large steamships, and prepare to fight alongside the French rebels,” in anticipation of a half-century of war between despotism of liberty. George Sumner, the brother of Charles Sumner, a rising star in Massachusetts politics, advocated intermediate steps, such as reducing American tariffs on selected items manufactured in France. This would aid the French economy and help the mass of French workers avoid starvation, thus aiding the prospects for the success of the republican experiment. New York financier George Law offered personally to subsidize the arming of European revolutionaries. Private citizens in the United States geared up to join the fighting. George B. McClellan, the future commander of the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War and just now fresh off a successful stint in the Mexican War, planned to join the Hungarian Army as a military adviser.<sup>34</sup>

The New Democrats were particularly eager to identify themselves with the French Republican cause. They viewed the European revolutions as part and parcel of the same historical movement towards human liberty, and of the contest between republicanism and despotism, which had compelled the United States into war with the Mexico. The New Democrats argued that the European monarchies, especially England and France, had attempted to contain and weaken the American republic in the Western Hemisphere. If those monarchies now were in the process of being overthrown, the United States would find itself with a much freer hand to dictate terms to Mexico and to expand the area of republican freedom throughout North

America and the Caribbean. 1848 was also an election year and Democrats such as presidential contender Lewis Cass believed they were in a strong position “to play up to the ethnic loyalties of immigrants with truculent gestures to old world monarchies.”<sup>35</sup>

There was, to be sure, a strong undertow of private doubt about events in France created by the overhang of the unhappy results of the original French Revolution and the Revolution of 1830. The *National Intelligencer* warned, “the movement in France has brought about one of those extreme changes for which that headlong people are remarkable.... the Gallic people delight in war, in military glory, and want in the braver instincts which [support] law, right and freedom. We do not of course deny the right of revolution, as a natural right. But we regard it as a right not to be lightly resorted to by *any* people,” especially a people with a history of like that of the French, with the Terror in the background. Conservative Whigs and southern Democrats were especially cautious. The southerners distrusted any violent change in the social and political order and the French Republic’s emancipation of slaves in its West Indian colonies was a particular concern. (Radical and anti-

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<sup>34</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 15 (steamships); Eyal, *Young America Movement*, pp. 106, 128.

<sup>35</sup> Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, p. 205; Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, pp. 92-3, 106; Howe, *What hath God Wrought*, p. 830 (gestures). As Eyal notes, the New Democrats (Young Americans) were often uninformed about the actual conditions and political alternatives in Europe, including proposed socialist panaceas. Some of the European revolutionary leaders were bent on setting up republics; others on national autonomy; still others on drastic social change. As Roberts and Howe (“The United States and the Revolutions of 1848,” p. 153) observe, in many parts of central and Eastern Europe the revolutions reflected the national aspiration of ethnic groups, an objective that did not translate easily to Americans, who defined their citizenship in terms of a republican ideology.

slavery newspapers of both parties, by contrast, had already hailed the French for proclaiming the absolute incompatibility of republican government and human slavery.) Some Whigs expressed their typical concern for legal order and opposition to mob rule. The *American Whig Review* and the *North American Review* warned against revolutionary violence and incipient socialism, expressed sympathy for Louis Philippe, and anticipated that France was likely to end up in despotism. They lamented the financial situation in that country caused by the revolution and its socialist doctrines. Massachusetts Whigs Edward Everett and George Ticknor feared that the French people were too inexperienced to exercise political power wisely. This concern was compounded by fears that European instability would damage international trade and the American economy, which was still struggling with the after-effects of the Panic of 1837. Charles Sumner observed that “the feeling in Boston is counter to the revolution.... Mr. Cabot told me that I was the first person he had seen who had hope in the future of France.”<sup>36</sup>

The key figure was President James K. Polk, who was closely associated with the New Democrats and who was just now wrapping up the nation’s military triumph and territorial gains from the war with Mexico. “It is the most remarkable, as well as the most important event of modern times,” Polk noted in his diary, after receiving Rush’s first dispatches from Paris. “...Great sensation has been produced by

the Revolution in France, & the people of the German States and of Italy were making large demands on their sovereigns and the latter were making large concessions to their subjects. It is impossible to anticipate what the effect of the French Revolution may be upon the other Powers of Europe. One of two things will probably happen; either there will be a general war, or more liberal institutions must be granted by every European sovereign to their subjects than they have hitherto enjoyed.” Privately, Polk expressed his concern to Rush that the French would not be able to “restrain all tendency to anarchy and bloodshed.”<sup>37</sup>

Publicly, however, the administration embraced the French republican cause without reservation. Secretary of State James Buchanan approved Rush’s actions, including his “eminently judicious” comments at the Hotel de Ville. “The great principles of popular sovereignty which were proclaimed in 1776 by the immortal author of our Declaration of Independence, seem now to be in the course of rapid development throughout the world,” the President added.<sup>38</sup> Polk’s Message to Congress on the subject indicated that prompt American recognition of the French Republic may have been decisive in the success of the Revolution:

This great event occurred suddenly, and was accomplished almost without bloodshed. The world has seldom

<sup>36</sup> *National Intelligencer*, 27 March 1848; Rohrs, “American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848,” p. 365; Howe, *What hath God Wrought*, pp. 793-5; Curtis, “American Opinion of the French Nineteenth Century Revolutions,” pp. 259, 261-2 (feeling), 266-72; Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations*, p. 11; Edward L. Pierce, ed., *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 4 vols. (Boston, Roberts Brothers, 177-1893), 3: 271.

<sup>37</sup> *The Diary of James K Polk During his Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, 4 vols. (Chicago: McClurg and Company, 1910), 3: 413-4; Rohrs, “American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848,” p. 370 (anarchy).

<sup>38</sup> Buchanan to Rush, 31 March 1848, *The Works of James Buchanan, Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, 12 vols. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), 8: 32; Michael Morrison, “American Reaction to European Revolutions, 1848-1852: Sectionalism, Memory, and Revolutionary Heritage,” *Civil War History* 49 (2003): 117 (principles).

witnessed a more interesting or sublime spectacle than the peaceful rising of the French people, resolved to secure for themselves enlarged liberty, and to assert, in the majesty of their strength, the great truth that in this enlightened age man is capable of governing himself. The prompt recognition of the new Government by the representative of the United States at the French Court meets my full and unqualified approbation, and he has been authorized in a suitable manner to make known this fact to the constituted authorities of the French Republic. Called upon to act upon a sudden emergency, which could not have been anticipated by his instructions, he judged rightly of the feelings and sentiments of his Government and of his countrymen, when, in advance of the diplomatic representatives of other countries, he was the first to recognize, so far as it was in his power, the free Government established by the French people.

The policy of the United States has ever been that of nonintervention in the domestic affairs of other countries, leaving to each to establish the form of government of its own choice. While this wise policy will be maintained toward France, now suddenly transformed from a monarchy into a republic, all our sympathies are naturally enlisted on the side of a great people who, imitating our example, have resolved to be free. That such sympathy should exist on the part of the people of the United States with the friends of free government in every part of the world, and especially in France,

is not remarkable. We can never forget that France was our early friend in our eventful Revolution, and generously aided us in shaking off a foreign yoke and becoming a free and independent people. We have enjoyed the blessings of our system of well regulated self-government for near three-fourths of a century, and can properly appreciate its value. Our ardent and sincere congratulations are extended to the patriotic people of France upon their noble and thus far successful efforts to found for their future government liberal institutions similar to our own.<sup>39</sup>

Buchanan, in a series of dispatches and public statements, further developed the argument that regime change was a process, not a single moment in time; and that the United States had the right and interest to influence the early and decisive stages of that process. The Polk administration, Buchanan explained, believed that the United States should retain its “cherished principle” of “leaving to other nations the choice of their own forms” of government, based on the “sacred regard for the independence of nations.” The policy of recognizing *de facto* governments, whatever their character and without inquiring into the question of their legitimacy had led, as Buchanan pointed out, to “some strange anomalies in our history. The Pope, the Emperor of Russia, and President Jackson were the only authorities on earth which ever recognized Don Miguel as king of Portugal.” That said, the United States “could never be indifferent spectators to the

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<sup>39</sup> Message to Congress, 3 April 1848, James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 10 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), 3: 2429-30.

progress of liberty throughout the world,” and therefore it had a particular duty to serve the cause of human liberty by recognizing the change of a regime to a republic, and by encouraging others to do so. “It was right and proper that the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States should be the first to recognize, so far as his powers extended, the Provisional Government of the French Republic. Indeed, had the representative of any other nation preceded you in this good work, it would have been regretted by the President,” Buchanan informed Rush. Any waywardness by the United States in offering such recognition might be construed as disapproval and hamper the movement to republican government.<sup>40</sup>

By offering its early and decisive diplomatic seal of approval upon nascent republics, the United States gained a certain moral authority to offer advice and counsel during the critical days when the new regime was being constitutionalized. Buchanan sought to exploit that influence now in France through the intermediary of the American Minister. The Secretary of State told Rush that “in your intercourse with the authorities of the new Republic, you will be often called upon in conversation for information respecting our political system, State and National, which they seem to have adopted as their model, and also for your opinion how far this system ought to be changed or modified so as best to adapt it to the peculiar position of the French Republic. Your intimate and enlightened knowledge of our Government, both theoretical and practical, will enable you to impart much valuable information and advice to the French authorities.”<sup>41</sup>

First, the United States should press France to avoid, “by every honorable

means,” a war with the monarchical powers of Europe, a course which (although Buchanan was too politic to say so) had led to the destruction of the first experiment of liberty in France and the rise of Napoleon.

By abstaining from all aggressive movements, France will probably be able to perfect her republican institutions in peace.... If the new Republic can preserve peace with honor, it will avoid the many dangers to liberty which must always follow in the train of war. In a conflict with the great Powers of Europe, France would be compelled to put forth all her energies. She must increase her armies to the highest war standard; and may have to maintain them in the field for years. The sympathy of common dangers and the glory of common victories, throughout a long and successful struggle, are calculated to excite feelings of enthusiastic attachment in armies towards their triumphant commander. Under such circumstances, the history of the world proves that soldiers are too prone to forget their country in admiration for their leader. From Caesar to Cromwell, and from Cromwell to Napoleon, all powerful Republics have been destroyed by successful generals fresh from their fields of glory. It would be most lamentable, indeed, should the new Republic split upon this rock. In that event, the very means which she had adopted to defend her liberties against the foreigner might be employed to establish a military despotism at home. Such a catastrophe would probably, for many years, arrest the progress of constitutional freedom throughout Europe.

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<sup>40</sup>Buchanan to Rush, 31 March 1848, *Works of James Buchanan*, 8: 32-3.

<sup>41</sup>This and the quotes below, *ibid.*, pp. 32-7.

The French should certainly avoid participating in any crusade for liberty or otherwise interfere in the domestic concerns of other nations (and, by extension, the new government should not be led to assume that the United States would support France in any such crusade):

Even with a view to the extension of human liberty and free government throughout the world, France can do more by her peaceful example than she could accomplish, powerful as she is, by the sword. The example of a great and enlightened nation, in the midst of Europe, prosperous and happy in the enjoyment of constitutional freedom, could not fail to produce an irresistible influence in ameliorating the political condition of neighboring nations. Free institutions are in their very nature progressive, and if permitted to extend themselves by their own intrinsic power and excellence, they must gradually and surely pervade the civilized world. The people of each independent nation will then decide for themselves what degree of liberty is best adapted to their condition, without the forcible intervention of other nations. If France can maintain peace with honor, a general war in Europe between opposite and contending principles will be avoided; and the cause of the human race will not be staked upon the result of a few great battles, nor be decided by mere brute force.

Republican France, of course, might not have a choice in the matter. “If war must come, she ought carefully to avoid even the appearance of being the aggressor,” Buchanan advised. “Should she then be

attacked by the Monarchical Powers of Europe for adopting a Republican Government, this would be an outrage on her rights as an independent nation. It would be an attempt to punish the French people for having chosen that form of Government which they deemed best calculated to promote their own happiness, and to force upon them a Monarchy by foreign bayonets. Such an invasion of their most sacred rights would be condemned by all just and wise men in every nation, and would be reprobated by an irresistible public opinion throughout the world.” Outraged world public opinion would certainly include that of the United States, although Buchanan gave no indication about how the United States might choose to support France in that event.

The second recommendation that Buchanan proposed that Rush provide to the French was to find some manner to emulate the American system of federalism. Theory and practice had demonstrated that “State Governments are the citadels of liberty and the watchful guardians of the rights of the people against the encroachments of Federal power.” A centralized republican government in France (and indeed, in the United States) was bound to be unstable. “When such a Government is overthrown at the Capital all is lost. There never have been any other organized Governments in reserve throughout the provinces, similar to those in the United States, to which the people could resort, and around which they could rally. A revolution in Paris has always decided the fate of France.” The French should therefore establish state Governments, or some substitute for them. The ancient provinces of France might have served that purpose but, unfortunately, they were no longer in existence. But “why may not the whole territory of France be divided into a convenient number of States, grouping together for this purpose those departments

whose geographical position, peculiar interests, and local feelings would render their population homogeneous? Governments similar to our State Governments might then be established in each of these divisions.” Buchanan acknowledged that this would be a difficult task and therefore “on this subject I speak with some diffidence and give you merely my impressions. I know that centralism would add strength to the Executive power, and render it more formidable to the enemies of France; but, at the same time, there is some reason to apprehend that the adoption of this system might endanger both the liberty and the stability of the Republic.”

Rush and other Americans had already taken it upon themselves to give French officials advice very much along these lines. Rush circulated information about the American system to his friends and contacts in the new government, conversed with members of the French constitution-making body (the Committee of Eighteen), and provided the prominent French economist Michel Chevalier with a copy of *The Federalist*. George Bancroft, the American Minister to England, crossed the Channel to join Rush in urging a bicameral and federal system to influential Frenchmen, including Alexis de Tocqueville. (Bancroft also expressed optimism that the revolutions in France and throughout Europe might even lead to the downfall of the British monarchy.) Rush also showed Tocqueville Buchanan’s memorandum on republican government. Edward Everett wrote to Tocqueville, warning that the failure to embrace these two principles might well doom the new republic.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of April, however, Rush was convinced that the new government would not be federal. The French, he advised Buchanan, “are very prone to centralization, and fear that they could never construct on the basis of their departments, anything like our State Sovereignties. But the French were a ‘wonderful people’ as Washington said, and wonderfully improved, since he said it. Even in working out things their own way, let us hope that they may work them out right at last.” Rush was encouraged that French officials were considering American advice in the right spirit, rather than taking it as a source of irritation or as interference in their domestic affairs. “The new Government of the [French] Republic would view with a just susceptibility, foreign Governments mixing up counsel with the expression of their good wishes,” Lamartine told Rush, in remarks that Lamartine saw were later printed in the semi-official newspaper of the French government, “but, in the intimate relations which exist between the French Republic and that of America, every word that the latter may address to us will be received on the score of perpetual friendship. The Senate, the Legislative Body, and the Executive power of the United States may be convinced that their wise counsels serve in advance as a law to the French Republic; not only will it follow in their path, but it will follow the examples which they give of the order of regular institutions, of attention to its neighbours, of solicitude for labour, instruction, and the prosperity of the people. The names of Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson are inscribed on the banner of the new Republic; and if France is fortunate enough to find in its future annals names worthy of these, liberty will assume its real

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<sup>42</sup> Timothy M. Roberts, “‘Revolutions Have Become the Bloody Toy of the Multitude: European Revolutions, the South, and the Crisis of 1850,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 25 (Summer 2005): 262; Rush, *Occasional Productions*, pp. 489-90;

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Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations*, p. 12.

character on the old Continent, as it has done on the other side of the Atlantic."<sup>43</sup>

### *The Senate Debate on Congratulating the French*

News of the French Revolution reached Washington at a particularly sensitive moment for the U.S. Congress. The Senate had just given its advice and consent to the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo, which ratified the victory over Mexico and the transfer of significant territories to the United States. The future of these territories, however, was already the source of huge controversy. The Senate had voted down an attempt to attach the Wilmot Proviso to the Treaty's resolution of ratification but that was hardly the end of the matter. In any case, it was unclear that Mexican authorities, in the midst of serious political turmoil, would or could authoritatively ratify the Treaty. The war might continue and the question of even greater territorial acquisitions, up to and including "All Mexico," might reemerge. The longer the fighting went on, however, the greater the danger of European intervention against the United States.

It was at this point that Democratic Senator William Allen of Ohio, an ardent New Democrat expansionist, introduced a resolution congratulating the French people "upon their success in their recent efforts to consolidate liberty by embodying its principles in a republican form of government;" and requesting that the President transmit the resolution to the authorities in Paris. Allen's formal expression of sympathy was part of a long-standing, albeit controversial, American legislative tradition of offering rhetorical support to a foreign people in the process of recovering, or

establishing, their liberties through a change of regime. The assumption was that such rhetorical support mattered; or, negatively put, the absence of public expressions by Republican America would discourage the cause of liberty and liberal regime change.

Allen may have believed that such a resolution would pass easily and thus serve to heal domestic political wounds opened by the Mexican War – especially by answering accusations that the United States had lost its legitimacy as an advocate of liberty by its alleged aggression against Mexico. "I desire, for one, to contribute my humble efforts to remedy this evil of which have heard so much complaint – that in our discussion here the public mind has seldom been directed to the great question of public liberty – that we have been distracted by ideas of conquest, and had lost sight of ideas of liberty.... I will not presume that any man, affecting to represent the American people, would be unwilling to say on their behalf that they congratulate the French people upon the establishment of the liberties of France."<sup>44</sup>

If Allen harbored such sanguine hopes of easy passage and national unity, they were soon dashed. New Hampshire Senator John P. Hale, an ardent free-soiler, proposed to amend the Resolution by adding congratulations to the French people for "manifesting the sincerity of their purpose by instigating measures for the immediate emancipation of the slaves of all the colonies of the republic." Hale told the Senate that "the French people have not made a mere empty declaration of their attachment to the cause of liberty. They have not declared the people free, yet retained their fellow creatures in bondage. They have thus done something which deserves the congratulations of the whole world." While the United States "were

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<sup>43</sup> Powell, *Rush* (wonderful); Rush, *Occasional Productions*, pp. 485-6.

<sup>44</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30: 1, pp. 549, 567.

departing from the faith of our fathers ... and entering upon the adventurous experiment of a foreign and aggressive war [with Mexico], not for the purpose of promoting liberty, but of extending and perpetuating the institution of human slavery," France had entered upon a revolution with the opposite purpose at the forefront. "But in the dawning of this revolution in France, I behold the sun of hope arise again, his beams of golden light streaming along the eastern horizon. I am now inspired by the hope, that even if we fail here – that even if liberty should be driven from this her chosen asylum, the divine principle would still live and would find a sanction among the people of another land; ..."<sup>45</sup>

Hale's provocative line of argument gained no traction in the Senate and received little overt attention. His amendment was defeated, 28-1.<sup>46</sup> Of greater political salience, however, was the tacit resistance to the Resolution offered by a group of conservative Whigs and southern Democrats, who favored a more qualified message or none at all, in light of the uncertainties surrounding the developments in France and suspicions about the intent of the new French revolutionary leadership. South Carolina Democratic Senator Andrew P. Butler warned that "when I offer congratulations to the Goddess of Liberty, I will not do it with a firebrand in my hand.... It may be, in the wild excitement of France, that we shall see the light of her republic only in the fires that are destroying the very framework of society.... I am willing, sir, to sanction what the people of France have done. I am willing to give every encouragement to the development of an enlightened

and irresistible public opinion; but I will not sanction all of the doctrines and options that have come from the Provisional Government."<sup>47</sup>

Whig Senator Samuel Phelps of Vermont declared that he was prepared to "rejoice in the progress of liberal principles" but "I do not desire to witness the supremacy of the mob. I must pause before I pronounce a decided opinion upon a revolution coming like an earthquake." Phelps observed that the original French Revolution, which excited such great hopes, had then "proceeded step by step from anarchy to iron despotism ... that had threatened Europe and the world ..." The revolutions in Spanish America likewise proved to be a profound disappointment. The United States had fought a war with Mexico because, according to its supporters, "we shall take into our hands the government of this poor miserable people, incapable of governing themselves, to whom we offered by a few short years ago our heartfelt congratulations upon their success in establishing free and republican institutions."

Let us look to probabilities. They [the French] are a people that are disposed to revolutions.... When the wheel of revolution begins to revolve, who can affect to tell where it will stop? When the doctrines of universal equality are preached, who can tell what effect is to be produced?... And if these doctrines of universal equality are to be preached, if they are to receive the sanction of Congress, it behooves gentlemen to inquire of themselves

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<sup>45</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, p. 568; *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, Appendix, pp. 457.

<sup>46</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, p. 465. By contrast, two anti-slavery amendments in the House precipitated a protracted and bitter debate.

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<sup>47</sup> Curtis, "American Opinion of the French Nineteenth Century Revolutions," p. 255; Rohrs, "American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848," p. 365; *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, Appendix, p. 466.

to what to what extent they will carry us.... if we are to endorse all the revolutionary movements that are made, where are we to stop? Why, we may have a thousand fanatical theories in our own country – some of them, perhaps, well founded, but others of the most wild and extravagant descriptions. No man ever saw a revolution in which the doctrines which gave rise to it were not carried to extremes.<sup>48</sup>

Kentucky Whig Senator Joseph R. Underwood argued that Congress should exercise circumspection. “If France succeed, her example will be followed, I doubt not, by more than half of Europe. If she fails, not only may the chains of monarchy be riveted more closely in Europe, but her failure may seriously affect the safety of republican institutions throughout the world.” Underwood feared that premature and unconditional congratulation of the French could actually harm the cause of liberty and the prospect for positive regime change by encouraging European monarchies to treat the developments in France as an ideological threat – especially, in Underwood’s view, because the French were a poor people on whom to place such a high-stakes gamble. Individual Americans might express sympathy, but the government should wait. Whereas Senator Allen and his supporters believed that a quick and unanimous resolution of support would buttress the French Republicans, Underwood thought that careful Congressional deliberation – a debate that demonstrated caution and constructive criticism – was a better mechanism to aid France. “If the report of this debate should ever be read in France, it would give me great pleasure if

the few remarks which I intend to make could be considered by the French people, for in them, I believe if they were duly weighted, they would find something to aid them in their effort to establish liberty, as the great principles to which I desire to direct to your attention, are everywhere absolutely indispensable, alike in the establishment and maintenance of free institutions.” For instance, “when the rights of man are involved, at home and abroad, the paramount duty is to obey a rule.” The French, according to Underwood, must also avoid the fatal error of allowing legislative assemblies to be supreme.<sup>49</sup>

### *Calhoun: Reflections on Regime Change*

The most prominent voice in favor of caution was that of South Carolina Democrat John C. Calhoun, who proposed delaying consideration of Allen’s resolution until the course and outcome of events in France could be better evaluated. The Senate was being asked to act without complete information about events in France, which was now governed by a self-proclaimed Provisional Government. “To act upon it now would be premature. The people of France have done much.... But the time has not yet arrived for congratulation. Much remains to be done. The real work to be performed is yet before them. They have decreed a republic, but it remains for them to establish a republic.” This or any revolution, Calhoun argued, was not in itself a blessing. “We must look to the consequences and the end. We must await termination of the movement.” Calhoun wished well to France – “sincerely do I wish her well” – and, for public consumption at least, he was prepared to acknowledge that

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<sup>48</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, Appendix, pp. 463-4, 466-7.

<sup>49</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, p. 569; *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, Appendix, pp. 464-5.

there were grounds “for a good deal of encouragement.” But for the most part, “I see tremendous difficulties resulting from the social condition of France, and the composition of her people.”

The success of the French people will, in my opinion, depend, at least in a very high degree, upon the fact whether she can prevent war – that again depending on two circumstances: one, whether she may have the self-control to abstain from improper interference with surrounding countries; the other, whether they may have the moderation and good sense to abstain from assailing France.... It is due to France, to the civilized world, and to themselves, that European powers should observe strict non-interference. If she succeed, it will be an admonition to all Europe, that the time has arrived when they must agreed to yield to liberty in a constitutional and stable form. Thrones will fade away, and freedom and republican institutions become the order of the day. If, on the contrary, standing aloof and avoiding all contest, France shall fail in this great undertaking, after a fair trial, without the interference of the other Powers, it will do more to put down liberty under a republican form of government, than any other event which could occur.

American policy, to the extent that it could influence events, should be aimed at the encouragement of such a “fair trial” for France. Official congratulations by the United States, instead of encouraging the French and discouraging outside intervention, would probably have exactly the opposite effect. “The first step” to a fair

trial “consists in quiet looking on, and as little interference as possible,” Calhoun explained. “To France, the people everywhere will extend their sympathy, but I contend that the governments themselves ought to be prudent and abstentious in the expression of their sentiments. If we, as a Government, extend our congratulations in this formal and solemn manner, others may take the opposite and denunciatory course, and between the two, that result will be produced which must eventually overthrow the revolution – an appeal to arms.”

Although Calhoun did not say so explicitly, he feared that American encouragement of the French republicans would foster their natural sentiment (as they displayed in 1791-1792) to proselytize Europe; thus polarizing the continent into opposing camps of anarchical revolution and reactionary despotism. Under such circumstances, France itself could not long remain a republic:

I suppose it will be out of the question to go back to a constitutional monarchy. The Bourbon family in all its branches, is, I take it, now odious to the French people. They will hardly think of restoring the old imperial dynasty of Napoleon. An aristocracy they cannot think of; and what then must be the result, if they fail to establish a republic? If it come to contests within, or wars without – if it shall be necessary to resort to force, to repress internal discord, or overcome foreign assailants – quite a possible case – France may find herself in the embrace of a military despotism. Such a result would furnish no ground for congratulation either on our part, or that of the civilized world.

Calhoun urged that, at a minimum, Congress should wait the results of the deliberation of the French National Convention, which had been called by the provisional government for the end of May. His motion to lay the Allen Resolution on the table, however, failed, by a vote of 14-29.<sup>50</sup>

Privately, Calhoun was even more pessimistic about the developments in France than he was prepared to admit publicly. He believed that Revolutions of 1848 throughout most of Europe were premature at best and entirely wrong-headed at worst. Harold Bailey, the Attorney General of South Carolina and a political ally of Calhoun, understood his reticence: “I was very much gratified by the course you took upon the French Revolution – you might indeed have gone further, but it was enough to clear your skirts of participating in the delusions to which this great event has given birth, and it was not necessary, & would have been unwise, to incur the hazard of countenancing the absurd fallacies of legitimacy & royal domination, by a marked condemnation of the Parisian *emeute*.”<sup>51</sup>

It is worth a digression here to consider Calhoun’s overall views on revolution and regime change. He agreed with the assessment of Andrew Jackson Donelson, the American Minister to Prussia, that the most important role of the United States was to serve as an example of the benefits of a free government. Donelson wrote to Calhoun: “When we can say to the old world that our system is administered

with less tax than that of any other, and that it secures life and property, we do more for freedom than we could if we had all the soldiers of Europe under our orders. This is not an American vanity, but is admitted even by many Princes, as I have had occasion to know in repeated instances.”

America’s foreign policy of non-intervention likewise had an important effect in Europe, Donelson argued: “it is encouraging to find that the great powers have also learned that the principles of the Holy Alliance have become inapplicable. Except in the case of an ambitious state seeking to destroy the balance of power by conquest, intervention is no longer thought of; and a league of monarchs, as contradistinguished from the people, with the view of guaranteeing and maintaining their personal pretensions, is admitted everywhere to be an absurdity. This is the fruit of our example as a free Government, which is destined to do still more if it can be preserved in its original purity.” Donelson insisted to Calhoun that the aggressive war with Mexico had damaged that image in Europe and it was therefore imperative for the U.S. government “to exhibit a forbearance and magnanimity in the negotiation for peace.” Donelson told Calhoun that the proper American example of ordered liberty at home and moderation abroad would encourage European liberals to “gradually introduce and strengthen the Representative principle” rather than simply to overthrow their monarchies and leave their nations in chaos.<sup>52</sup>

Calhoun, in embracing such a viewpoint, did not think of himself as a reactionary but rather as a clear-eyed realist. “It is clear, that the old monarchies on the continent of Europe are about coming to an

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<sup>50</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, p. 568-9. In his remarks to the Senate Calhoun did not raise the issue of slavery. Calhoun was informed directly about developments in Europe from a variety of sources, including the American Minister to Prussia, Andrew Jackson Donelson, and his daughter, Anna Calhoun Clemson and her husband, Thomas G. Clemson, the American *charge d'affaires* in Brussels.

<sup>51</sup> Bailey to Calhoun, 20 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 335.

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<sup>52</sup> Donelson to Calhoun, 3 March 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 221-2; Donelson to Calhoun, 8 January 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 105.

end. The intelligence and progress of the age have out grown them; but it is by no means certain, that they are so advanced and enlightened on political science, as to substitute more suitable ones in their place,” Calhoun wrote to his correspondents in Europe. The likely result of the revolutionary upheavals in Europe was “anarchy, revolution, & finally to a worse state of things, than now exists.” If the monarchical parties attempted to intervene, especially if they were provoked by American verbal interventionism, “it seems to me, looking on from this distance, that interference would but increase the flame and spread it more widely.”<sup>53</sup> The French had evidently made progress since the disaster of the original Revolution but France’s political culture and intellectual history offered particularly infertile grounds for “free popular Government.”

She has no elements out of which such a government could be formed; and if she had, still she must fail from her total misconception of the principles, on which such a government, to succeed, must be constructed. Indeed, her conception of liberty is false throughout. Her standard of liberty is ideal; belongs to that kind of liberty which man has been supposed to possess, in what has been falsely called a state of nature, a state supposed to have preceded the social and political, and in which, of course, if it ever existed, he must have live[d] a part, as an isolated individual, without Society, or Government. In such a state, if it were possible for him to exist in it, he would have, indeed, had two of

the elements of the French political creed; liberty and equality, but no fraternity. That can only exist in the social and political; and the attempt to unite the other two, as they would exist, in the supposed state of nature, in man, as he must exist in the former, must and ever will fail. The union is impossible, and the attempt to unite them absurd; and must lead, if persisted in, to distraction, anarchy and finally absolute power, in the hand of one man.<sup>54</sup>

Calhoun believed that “this false conception that is upheaving Europe ... is at the same time threatening our institutions. Abolitionism originates in it, which every day becomes more formidable, and if not speedily arrested, must terminate in the dissolution of our Union, or in universal confusion, and overthrow of our system of Government.” He feared that “what is called the progress party, both in this country and in Europe, have not advanced in political knowledge beyond Dorrism; that is, the right of a mere majority to overturn law and constitution at its will and pleasure. They must be cured of this radical and most dangerous of all errors, before they can substitute in the place of those that may be overthrown, better Governments.” A government based on the principles of Dorrism, “would be, but the absolute form of popular government, and not the constitutional form of such governments; and must, of necessity, soon degenerate, where the revenue and disbursements are great, into absolute government of the monarchical form.”<sup>55</sup> France and other would-be republics in Europe faced near-

<sup>53</sup> Calhoun to J.E. Calhoun, 15 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 322-3; Calhoun to Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, 7 March 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 230; Calhoun to T.G. Clemson, 22 March 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 263.

<sup>54</sup> Calhoun to Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, 23 June 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 497-8.

<sup>55</sup> Calhoun to Mrs. Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, 23 June 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 497-8; Calhoun to J.E. Calhoun, 15 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 322-3.

insuperable structural obstacles, even aside from their simplistic majoritarian prejudices:

So long as the present revolutionary governments shall continue the heavy burthens imposed by those they have overthrown – so long as they shall collect the present amount of revenue and continue the present extravagant disbursements, they will be exposed, not only to reaction, but to convulsive movements, one after another, to be terminated in purely military governments. But great & difficult is the task of reducing taxes & disbursements. In old governments they cannot be reduced, to any great extent, as is the case all over Europe, without coming into conflict with the two most powerful interests, the stockholders & the army.<sup>56</sup>

Calhoun did perceive some limited grounds for optimism on the European scene as a whole. “Had such a revolution, so wide and so rapid, occurred 50 years ago, I would have despaired, and regarded it, as the commencement of a great retrograde movement in the most advanced and civilized portion of the world.” The problem was “its rapidity, extent, and too thorough and radical character, especially in France,” which threatened to undermine the possibility of gradual, guided reform tailored to the history, culture, and institutions of the specific societies. Calhoun rejected the argument that history, in the end, was progressive, that retrograde movements were impossible.

It ought never be forgotten, that the past is the parent of the present and that the past condition of Europe,

which has given birth to a state of advanced civilization, far exceeding any heretofore known to the world, could not be a bad one. It may have, indeed, contained, within itself, causes calculated to retard, or prevent a farther progress, but these ought to have been removed cautiously, as experience pointed them out, without overthrowing all at once the peace of Governments, and the social condition of communities, which led to such great and happy results; especially as such an overthrow must of necessity be accompanied by such universal embarrassment and distress, and run the hazard of a retrograde, instead of an advance movement, in the condition of the race.<sup>57</sup>

Calhoun saw two particular bright spots in Europe. First, England had not succumbed to its native form of Dorism, the Chartist movement. Calhoun had opposed English policy in the Western Hemisphere, especially its promotion of abolitionism, but he believed that England itself was a bulwark of stability in Europe. “I regard it of vast importance, that Great Britain should resist the shock, that has overturned so many Governments; and, of course was gratified to learn that she had passed successfully the crisis caused by the movements of the Chartists,” Calhoun wrote in mid-May 1848. He regarded the failure of the Chartists as “the turning point of affairs in Europe.” Had there been an English revolution, “it would have greatly increased the force and prolonged the period of the convulsion, through which Europe is now passing. But as it is, it will contribute, I hope, not only to shorten it, but to guard thereby against one

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<sup>56</sup> Calhoun to Donelson, 23 May 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 428-9.

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<sup>57</sup> Calhoun to Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, 28 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 366-7.

of the greatest dangers to which she is at present exposed. I refer to that which may be apprehended from Russia, in case Europe should be thrown into a state of distraction and disorder for any considerable period. In that event, her power might prove irresistible and her sway be extended over the greater part of the Continent.”<sup>58</sup>

Second, Calhoun was relatively optimistic about the chances for meaningful political reform in the German lands. The character of the German people, in contrast to that of the French and other European nationalities, “is well suited to establish and maintain constitutional Governments,” due to their history and institutions. “Germany seems to be in a fair way to be completely revolutionized, and I hope permanently improved. I have much more hope for her, than France,” he concluded in mid-April 1848. “Her old institutions, as I suppose we may call them now, furnish an excellent foundation, on which to erect, if not a federal Republic like ours, a federal constitutional Government, United at least in a Zollverein league, and something more intimately united politically, than at present. If the States of Germany should not attempt too much, the events, which have occurred may do much to strengthen them and better their condition.” The Germans also had a “dread of France from the experience of the first revolution,” which might increase their propensity for moderate politics and reliance on a federal system. If Germany set the proper example for the rest of Europe, with “a firm stand to preserve its nationality, to adopt wise constitutional reforms, and to form a more intimate commercial and political Union,” Calhoun hoped that it would “have a powerful and salutary reaction on France, and might lead to some stable constitutional form of Government

<sup>58</sup> Calhoun to J.E. Calhoun, 22 May 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 425-6; Calhoun to T.G. Clemson, 13 May 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 398-9.

with her. Otherwise, I see little hope of such a result.”<sup>59</sup>

Calhoun was pleased to learn that his Congressional remarks recommending a cautious approach to the French revolution had been widely circulated in England “and drawn forth high compliments,” possibly contributing to the failure of the Chartist movement. He was anxious to provide broader analysis and guidance on the nature of politics and political reform for both a European audience and his own countrymen. This was his *Disquisition on Government*, the timing and content of which was influenced by events in Europe. “What I propose to publish on the subject of Government is not yet prepared for the press,” he wrote to his son in the spring of 1848, adding, “I do not think anything will be lost by the delay. I do not think the public mind is yet fully prepared for the work, nor will be, until there has been such failure and embarrassment in the French experiment (which will be made under highly favorable circumstances) as will bring into distrust and doubt, Dorrism, so as to prepare the public mind to have its errors and consequences pointed out, and to reflect seriously on the question; What are the elements, which are indispensable to constitute a constitutional popular Government ... I wait the meeting of the Convention in France and the German Diet with deep interest. They will afford much light by which to judge the future.”<sup>60</sup>

I look, perhaps, with greater solicitude for the unfolding of the great events now in progress in Europe, as they afford me an

<sup>59</sup> Calhoun to Baron von Gerolt, 28 May 1848 *PJCC*, 25: 441-3; Calhoun to T.G. Clemson, 13 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25:313; Calhoun to J.E. Calhoun, 15 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 322-3.

<sup>60</sup> Calhoun to J.E. Calhoun, 22 May 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 425-6; Calhoun to J.E. Calhoun, 15 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 322-3.

opportunity to test the truth or error, of the principles, which I have laid down in my elementary discourse on Government.... I cannot doubt the correctness of the principles, I have laid down, for they are drawn from facts in the moral world, just as certain, as any in the physical; but I am solicitous to see, how far they are subject to modification in their practical application to the present condition of the civilized world, which is so very different from any, that ever preceded it in many respects. There are powerful, long established, and widely extended errors now at work, which tend to universal disorder and anarchy throughout Christendom; while on the other hand there are powerful causes in operation to counteract them, and which, I trust, and believe, in time, will overpower them, and give a fairer prospect, than has ever yet existed, to the cause of real liberty and civilization. But in the meantime, it is to be feared, there will be great disorders, conflicts and suffering.<sup>61</sup>

As historian Timothy Roberts notes, “The *Disquisition* shows a southern mindset grappling with a tumultuous transatlantic world – rather than revolutionary uprising or popular majority, the concurrence of all interest groups regarding vital public matters would be required.” Calhoun expected that “the work will hit the lines both here and in Europe; and, I think, cannot fail to make a deep impression.”<sup>62</sup>

In the event, the *Disquisition* would not be published until after Calhoun’s death in 1850. But in his Congressional speeches over this period, including those concerning the Revolutions of 1848, Calhoun laid out one of the *Disquisitions*’ major themes. That is, “the most false and dangerous of all political errors ... a hypothetical truism ... that ‘all men are born free and equal.’” Calhoun cited here the formulation offered in the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, whose principal drafter was John Adams. According to Calhoun, the equivalent “form of expression” in the Declaration of Independence – that all men are created equal -- “though less dangerous, is not the less erroneous.” Calhoun went on to argue that expression was literally, politically, and socially untrue; and that its inclusion in the Declaration had nothing essential to do with the justification for American independence. “Breach of our chartered privileges, and lawless encroachment on our acknowledged and well-established rights by the parent country, were the real causes, and of themselves sufficient, without resorting to any other, to justify the step. Nor had it any weight in constructing the governments that were substituted in the place of the colonial. They were formed of the old materials and on practical and well-established principles, borrowed for the most part from our own experience and that of the country from which we sprang.”

“Liberty,” Calhoun asserted, “is the noble and highest reward bestowed on mental and moral development, combined with favorable circumstances. Instead, then, of liberty and equality being born with man; instead of all men and all classes and descriptions being equally entitled to them, they are prizes to be won, and are in their most perfect state, not only the highest reward that can be bestowed on our race, but the most difficult to be won – and when won, the most difficult to be preserved.”

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<sup>61</sup> Calhoun to Mrs. Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, 28 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 366-7.

<sup>62</sup> Roberts, “European Revolutions, the South, and the Crisis of 1850,” p. 269; Calhoun to Andrew Pickens Calhoun, 24 July 1849, *PJCC*, 26: 512-4.

Revolutions like those of the French in 1789 or 1848, based on philosophical abstractions that placed liberty as the beginning, rather than as the end, of civilization, were doomed to failure.

The attempt to carry into practice this, the most dangerous of all political error, and to bestow on all, without regard to their fitness either to acquire or maintain liberty, that unbounded and individual liberty supposed to belong to man in the hypothetical and misnamed state of nature, has done more to retard the cause of liberty and civilization, and is doing more at present, than all other causes combined. While it is powerful to pull down governments, it is still more powerful to prevent their construction on proper principles. It is the leading cause among those which have placed Europe in its present anarchical condition, and which mainly stands in the way of reconstructing good governments in the place of those which have been overthrown, threatening thereby the quarter of the globe most advanced in progress and civilization with hopeless anarchy, to be followed by military despotism.

Calhoun believed that domestic radicals in the United States were attempting to introduce these same “poisonous fruits,” which had long been dormant, back into American politics through the anti-slavery movement and through the demands that the United States intervene in the European revolutions.<sup>63</sup>

According to Calhoun, the Polk administration had opened the doors to abolitionism and interventionism by taking

“the wrong direction given in reference to our exterior relations, specifically, the war with Mexico. Calhoun had strongly supported the annexation of Texas to secure the position of slavery in the Union and to preempt British abolitionist agitation; but he opposed the war with Mexico because “it has added a heavy debt, prevented thereby the reduction of duties & disbursements, & greatly increased the patronage of the government.” This was precisely the disease that plagued European despotisms and that had been the underlying cause of the Revolutions of 1848. Calhoun feared that the continuation of the war with Mexico, if the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo did not hold, would only accelerate this process in America by leading to a “violent and successful effort . . . to conquer and hold in subjection the whole country” of Mexico.<sup>64</sup>

Calhoun saw the same dangerous spirit at work when Polk sent a Message to Congress in April 1848, warning that “our own security” required American intervention to prevent the Yucatan peninsula – then in the midst of a civil war after claiming independence from Mexico – “from becoming a colony of any European power . . . and at the same time to rescue the white race from extermination or expulsion from the country.” According to the President:

...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 toward the coast, and their expulsion

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<sup>63</sup> Calhoun, Speech on the Oregon Bill, 27 June 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 534-7.

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<sup>64</sup> Calhoun to Donelson, 23 May 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 428-9.

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 sovereignty' over Yucatan," Polk stated, "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." Polk cited the Monroe Doctrine and his own 1845 emendation on that Doctrine (the Polk Corollary) to justify opposition to such a transfer and to provide humanitarian relief to the "white race." Due to the demands of the Mexican War, Polk recommended only that American naval forces in the Gulf provide the "white race" with unspecified assistance. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, shortly thereafter, called for military occupation of the Yucatan.<sup>65</sup>

Calhoun shook his head at this. "I did hope that the experience of the Mexican war—that precipitate and rash measure, which has cost the country so dearly in blood and treasure—would have taught the Administration moderation and caution, and

induced them to shun any course of policy calculated to plunge the country in a similar cost and sacrifice. Who can form an estimate of the expenditure, the sacrifice of life, and the difficulties to which the adoption of the President's recommendation in this case would lead?" Calhoun was prepared "on the score of humanity, to go as far as we can with safety and propriety in this case. How far that is, I am not prepared to say; but I cannot possibly support the course of policy recommended by the President, as I understand the message." Polk was wrong in mixing "what ought to be an appeal purely to our humanity, with the consideration he has" – that is, the threat to U.S. national security if Britain or France intervened and took possession of the Yucatan. That threat, in Calhoun's mind, was specious. The European powers, rocked by the aftermath of revolutions of 1848 and continental rivalries, had neither the interest nor capability to intervene. Further, if Britain or France did occupy the peninsula, the Yucatan did not sit astride any key shipping routes, unlike the island Cuba, for which Calhoun indicated he was prepared to fight.<sup>66</sup>

Calhoun was particularly disturbed by Polk's invocation of the Monroe Doctrine as justification for his recommendation. As Secretary of War, Calhoun had been involved in the Cabinet deliberations that led to Monroe's statements in his Annual Message of December 1823. This in Calhoun's mind gave him an authority that Polk lacked. In Calhoun's view, Monroe had set forth a *policy*, not a *doctrine* – a policy confined to a particular time and place and not meant to be applied in all circumstances for all time. Polk's Corollary, in effect, meant to Calhoun "whenever any

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<sup>65</sup> Message to Congress, 29 April 1848, Richardson, ed., *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, 3: 2431-3.

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<sup>66</sup> The following is taken from Remarks on the Occupation of the Yucatan, 29 April 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 371-3; and 15 May 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 401-10.

power on this continent becomes involved in internal warfare, and the weaker side chooses to make application to us for support, we are bound to give them support for fear the offer of sovereignty of the country made be made to some other power and accepted.... It puts it in the power of other countries on this continent to make us a party to all their wars; and hence I say, if this broad interpretation be given to these declarations, we shall for ever be involved in their wars.”

As to the question of regime change and self-determination, Calhoun saw no indication that England, unlike the Holy Alliance of yesteryear, had “manifested any disposition to interfere in order to oppress the people of Yucatan, or to change the character of their government from a republic to a monarchy.” Assuming that Britain did intervene in this case, and even assuming she claimed sovereignty (both of which events Calhoun doubted would happen), “she comes at the request of the Yucatan, and only to aid to rescue the people of Yucatan from extermination and expulsion [by] the Indians.... in this case, the tender of sovereignty is voluntarily made on the part of Yucatan.” Calhoun, to be sure, “would not wish to be understood as defending the opposite, that we should never resist their [European] interposition. This is a position which would be nearly as dangerous and absurd as the other. But no general rule can be laid down to guide us on such a question. Every case must speak for itself – every case must be decided on its own merits.”

In the case of the Yucatan, Calhoun believed that while the conflict there had degenerated into a race war, its origins were in violent factional politics among the whites – by whom Calhoun meant “the Spanish or white race – and in that we include the mixed races – who overthrew Spanish power.” These factions attempted

to call in the aid of Indians through promises that could not be kept, setting off the current cycle of conflict, during which the whites displayed no courage and very little evidence of patriotism. “All this tends very much to weaken my sympathies,” Calhoun remarked, and to incline him to do no more than humanity required, such as sending in food and clothing or offering to expatriate whites to Cuba or some other location.

The particular case of the Yucatan also revealed certain general truths about politics and the legitimate means of political reform, whether in the Western Hemisphere or Europe.

The people of Yucatan, after they threw off the Spanish yoke, acting on the idea that all men are qualified to enjoy the blessing of liberty, and ought of right to possess it, liberated the large mass of their population, consisting of aborigines in a state of ignorance and subjection, and raised them to a level with themselves, by making them citizens. The result is such as we this day witness. They were too ignorant to appreciate liberty, or exercise the rights it conferred; and instead of gratitude, they have turned round and murdered those who conferred it on them, and laid waste and devastated the country. Such are the fruits of a misguided, misjudging philanthropy, combined with erroneous political notions, which are so prevalent at the present time in more enlightened and civilized countries, but which, whenever reduced to practice, must lead to disastrous consequences.

This pattern, unfortunately, held throughout all of central and south America. “The white and mixed races led in casting off the yoke of Spain. They, everywhere,

elevated the Indian race to an equality with themselves. It was done most imprudently, and inculcates as solemn lesson.”

They conferred upon the Indians full political rights, subjecting them at the same time to unequal civil burdens. When they gave them the power of voting – the highest political power – they imposed a tax upon them exclusively of a most onerous character, so as to throw almost the whole burden of supporting the Government and the Church upon them. If the order had been reversed; if they had given them all civil rights, and dealt out to them more sparingly political rights, elevating the more intelligent, and extending the basis of suffrage as the intelligence of the Indian population increased, a very different result might have taken place. . . . All will, I fear, be revolutionized in turn, and the whole of them subjected to one melancholy fate, in spite of what we do.

“If the white race be overthrown and Indian ascendancy established, there will be a directly opposite tendency to end in a despotic government like Haiti,” Calhoun concluded. “Perhaps a capable man may at first be elevated to power, and may govern tolerably well, but it will undoubtedly follow the course of Haiti. The tendency of power will be downwards, until it comes to the very bottom, and end in a savage state.”

For the United States to intervene in the Yucatan to try to prevent such a downward spiral was difficult if not impossible in its own right. But it would set a dangerous precedent for further interventions throughout Spanish America. “The first duty of every nation is to itself – and such is the case preeminently with the

United States,” Calhoun insisted. “They owe a high duty to themselves – to pursue a line of policy which will secure their liberty. The success of their great political system will be of infinitely more service to mankind than the security of the ascendancy of the white race in the southern portion of this continent, however important that might be. But, if instead of pursuing this wise policy, such a course be entered upon as that recommended in the message of the President, I fear that, sooner or later, the ruins of our Government will be added to those which have fallen [in Europe] within these last few months” during the Revolutions of 1848.

But, while I see the greatest reason for caution, I think this Government, upon all occasions, ought to give encouragement and countenance, as far as it can with safety, to the ascendancy of the white race – that it ought to be the guardian of civilization, progress, and liberty of this continent, in reference to those portions of it where they are exposed to this danger. I will not say that in no case should we ever give them military aid, but for a case to justify this, it must be an extraordinary one, and to be judged of its intrinsic merits, and not judged by a general rule.

### *The Case for Sympathizing with the French People*

Calhoun’s intervention to delay consideration of the Allen resolution prompted New Democrat and progressive Whig Senators to make the positive case for an early, prompt, and favorable American response. Allen explained that he had deliberately offered a simple resolution of congratulations precisely to avoid this sort

of discussion. “I sought to find a language which I believed to be the most proper, the most dignified, and most respectful –when one nation was speaking to another nation – without going into detail or giving any reason for what we did, except the great reason of popular liberty. I knew, sir, that any attempt to go into detail would involve the discussion of all parts and principles of the French constitution.” Such a course would turn the Senators into “advisors rather than congratulators of the French people” and prevent unanimous and easy passage of the resolution, both of which were necessary if American sympathy was to have any effect in France. If the Senate remained completely silent or worse yet rejected the resolution, Allen believed that this would not only repudiate the policies of Minister Rush and the Polk administration, it would also repudiate the clearly-expressed sentiments of the American people.<sup>67</sup>

Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois, like Allen one of the most vocal New Democrats, argued that there was no reason to wait – “now is the time, when our sympathies are needed. . . . They would not thank us for it after the struggle is over and the great work completed.” Douglas disagreed with Calhoun’s assessment that the failure of the revolution in France would set back the cause of human liberty (with the implication that the United States should not be in the position of encouraging premature changes of regime). “If they fail now, you will find that another movement will be generated which will bring success with it. This is the first step. It may be that they may leap at a single bound from monarchy to a republic – from comparative despotism to freedom. It may be that it will require a slower, a more protracted process, interrupted and embarrassed by difficulties, subjecting them to trials and sacrifices. The revolution may be the work of years. But

whatever may be the process, slow or rapid, our sympathies are with France in this glorious work, and the utterances of these sympathies should be prompt, full, and cordial.... The presentation of this [Allen] resolution, and its postponement for the reasons stated, that we doubted the success of the revolution, and that it was not yet safe or prudent to express our sympathy, will have the effect of casting a shade upon this movement.”<sup>68</sup>

Whig Senator Henry S. Foote of Mississippi likewise expressed concern about the effects that a prolonged American debate of the Allen resolution would have on the morale of the French republicans. He cited with disapproval a prominent Whig newspaper which “in the most solemn and formal manner, expressed sentiments hostile to the movements in favor of freedom in France.” But of even greater concern to Foote were the remarks attributed to Henry Clay – “whose reputation and influence are diffused throughout the world” – “that every effort to establish freedom in France had been a ‘signal failure.’” Foote and other supporters of the Allen resolution, following on Douglas’s line of argument, sought to demonstrate instead that “the march to freedom in France has been steadily onward during the last fifty years – that not a single retrograde movement has been made, so far as the progress of the great principles of liberty is concerned – and that, even under the imperial government, these great principles were continually in the advance.”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, p. 569.

<sup>69</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, p. 570. From the context, it seems likely that Foote was speaking of Clay, although he does not refer to him by name. In fact, Clay wrote privately: “My own opinion is, that our sympathies and congratulations were due to the French people for the revolution they had effected. In expressing these sentiments, we should not have been committed to the sanction of any future excesses which may be perpetuated in the progress of the revolution, if any such should unfortunately occur. . . . No one can doubt my

<sup>67</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, Appendix, p. 455.

This line of argument required something of a rehabilitation of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. Kentucky Whig Senator John J. Crittenden (otherwise an advocate of caution – “I have my fears about it, but I allow my hopes to preponderate”) was among those prepared to challenge Calhoun’s negative assessment of the original French revolution and the subsequent evolution of French politics. “But whether this revolution [of 1848] itself is to form the basis, to be the proximate cause of a great amelioration in the condition of mankind, I know not, I cannot not anticipate,” Crittenden stated. “But however that may be, of one thing I am satisfied – that its ultimate consequences cannot but be for the good of humanity.

The French Revolution of 1789, with all its carnage and tumults, and terror which it spread throughout the world – of it who can say, that from the blood and carnage good to mankind has not accrued? The earth and the sea have covered up the victims of that revolution. They are no more. They have disappeared from the sight of mankind, and we can only look back and mourn over them as over other events that have occurred. But the great principles of liberty involved in this contest have lived to grow, and increase, and spread abroad among mankind. A new world of intellect has been opened – a new sense of freedom has been spread through the civilized world. The ideas and principles to which it gave rise, though for a time they

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feelings and sympathies who has any recollection of the course which I took in regard to the Spanish American Republics, and to Greece.” Henry Clay to Samuel Haight, 15 April 1848, *Papers of Henry Clay*, 10: 443; Curtis, “American Opinion of the French Nineteenth Century Revolutions,” p. 261.

seemed to be trampled upon by the iron heel of tyranny, yet live, and I trust in God will become more universally extended. So it will be with this revolution.

Even if the French Revolution of 1848 finally went down “in crime and disaster,” as its American critics predicted, the original events for Crittenden were still worth acknowledgment by the Senate.

It has shown to the world the power of public opinion. . . . It was not the power of a mob under temporary excitement, not by a sudden outbreak of popular feeling. No, sir; there was a great and majestic feeling pervading the whole of the people. That feeling it was that took from the sword of his [Louis Philippe] army its edge. The *ultimo ratio* of kings was here at an end. Public opinion overruled it. A mighty moral change was proclaimed by a Power that is above all thrones, greater, more exalted, more irresistible than all their impregnable ramparts and fortifications. The change is strange and grand! The movement of the people, produced as it was by a deep sense of what was due to themselves, is to be applauded. Sir, I congratulate them.<sup>70</sup>

Louis Cass, Democratic Senator from Michigan and candidate for the party’s presidential nomination, agreed. “Whatever may be the result of this movement, the cause of freedom must gain by it,” Cass insisted. “Nations, which have long slumbered in the quiet of despotism, cannot suddenly awake and wisely exercise the new power they find in their possession. Time,

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<sup>70</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, Appendix, p. 466.

and experience, and knowledge, are necessary to teach us how to guard the general principles by just securities, and, while sustaining the rights of all, how to check the passions of each.” Unlike Calhoun, Cass believed that if peoples and nations were to make the successful transition from despotic to liberal regimes, they must be prepared to take large steps and run great risks. “But, if every struggle is a trial, it is also a lesson. Something is learned at every step. The movement cannot be long either stationary or retrograding.” Cass calculated that there had been twelve or thirteen fundamental changes in government in France since 1789, including seven different phases of monarchical rule. “Now, what chance is there, that such a form of authority can survive the attacks to which it must and will be exposed, especially considering the rapidly advancing opinions of the French people?”<sup>71</sup>

Senator Daniel Dickinson, a New York Democrat, agreed that the French had “solved a great and interesting problem in human government. America had demonstrated to the world that man was capable of self-government; but France has established another great fact, scarcely less important to the oppressed people of Europe, that the force of opinion is mightier than armed men, and that monarchy can be overthrown and deprived of its illegitimate power by social convulsion.” While skeptics argued that the original French Revolution, too, had been achieved through social convulsion,

Dickinson and other “congratulationists” pointed to the lack of bloodshed and apparent ease of regime change in 1848, as evidence of the improvement in the character of the French people over those five decades. “If it is said that the French people are too impetuous for a republic, it may be answered, they are too impetuous for a monarchy. They have tried every other form of government unsuccessfully, and now, in erecting a republic, if they but copy our federative system – the great secret of our strength – the expectations of the most sanguine must be realized.” The original French Revolution had been led by elites often under the sway of irreligious philosophers, who fired the passions of the ignorant masses (the elites, in turn, succumbed to military despotism). But, in Dickinson’s view, the new revolution reflected the health and power of mass public opinion.

Dickinson added another accomplishment of the French people, one that could not be rolled back even if their revolution failed and monarchy was restored. “They have spoken in a voice and a language” – that of freedom of opinion and the rights of man – “that has already been heard throughout Europe, inculcating the doctrines of liberty and equality, that has brought the oppressed and plundered masses to their feet, with joyous expectation, and has caused corrupt and stultified monarchy to feel its thrones rocking and the earth trembling beneath it... Ireland has already caught the sound, and is looking forward with renewed hope to her hour of emancipation. Austria is ringing with the shouts of liberty from Hungary and the Bohemian hills; throughout Italy, Germany, and even in England herself, under the pretense of giving, terrified and dismayed monarchy is restoring to man rights which

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<sup>71</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30: 1, Appendix, p. 465. Even the cautious Underwood accepted this point: “every effort made by any people to obtain free government does aid in qualifying them for sustaining popular institutions. The effort itself, even if unsuccessful, is salutary. It is like a child learning its lesson. Nations cannot be taught the principles of liberty in a day. We did not so acquire our liberties. The progress was gradual; until now the principles of free government have taken deep root in the American mind.” *Ibid.*

were wrested from him during physical ages.”<sup>72</sup>

Senators on both sides of the argument recognized that the viability of the change of regime in France depend on how other (monarchical) powers reacted; and the impact (if any) that an American declaration of sympathy might have on those powers. Calhoun and others had warned that American expressions of sympathy might bring about an ideological polarization of Europe into republican and monarchical camps, to the point of setting off a European war. Douglas rejected the argument that “the expression of our sympathy and congratulations may elicit counter-expressions from other Governments.” In fact, “if Russia, Prussia, and Austria want to issue denunciatory declarations, let them do so. Are the people of France likely to be deterred by any declaration from such sources?” Douglas asked. “Not at all. But they do feel deeply interested to know what republican America thinks of this movement, because the United States of America is the only republic upon earth, or the only one that deserves the name. All republicans throughout the world have their eyes fixed upon us. Here is their model.” The American model, however, was not that of a self-absorbed republic, but one that would not “hold a silent tongue” or “cast a damper” on the hopes of revolutionaries in France or elsewhere.<sup>73</sup>

Georgia Senator Herschel Johnson, another Democrat, also challenged the argument that an American resolution of sympathy would “afford a pretext for Russia, Prussia, and Austria to abuse and discourage, and perhaps, oppose” Republican France. “Will they be restrained by our silence? Can they gaze with approbation or unconcern upon the heavings

of a great political volcano, whose throes may subvert every throne in Europe? No, sir; whenever they shall feel themselves in danger, by the conviction that France is likely to succeed, their murmurings will be stirred; and I shall be most agreeably disappointed, if all Europe is not involved in bloody revolutions.” Under these circumstances, “I feel that France will gain infinitely more by our congratulations than our silence.”<sup>74</sup> The republicanization of France, coupled with the active sympathy of the United States, would awaken other peoples throughout Europe, who in turn would place demands on their native despots and thereby would prevent these despotisms from uniting to suppress the French people.

In the course of the Senate debate, it became apparent that a majority would support some sort of resolution of sympathy. Conservative Whig and southern Democratic Senators searched for a more qualified formulation than that offered by Allen. The Senate Committee on Foreign Committee offered an amended version that praised the French people for “their successful efforts *thus far*.” The French were also urged to pursue “moderation, humanity, regard for order, and veneration of Christianity.” That draft was defeated by a vote of 19-13. When the Allen resolution came to a final vote, the skeptics either voted for it or, like Calhoun, left the floor, allowing it to pass unanimously. The House vote registered only two opponents, both northern Whigs. A motion was then made in the House to reconsider that vote, a procedural maneuver that allowed skeptics of developments in French to register their opinion without formally opposing a resolution of sympathy. The House defeated that motion, 123-46, all of the latter being Whigs. Abraham Lincoln, a first-term Whig, voted against the motion to

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<sup>72</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1 Appendix, p. 456.

<sup>73</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, p. 569.

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<sup>74</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, Appendix, p. 460.

reconsider and thus identified himself with the activist majority on this issue.<sup>75</sup>

***The End of the Debate: Public Support,  
Private Doubts***

The near-unanimity of legislative opinion therefore masked deep skepticism about the future of the French Republic (a fact that was not lost on the French). The Charleston *Courier* reported in mid-April that “many persons had two sets of opinions on the revolution; while they would express no doubt in public as to the capacity of the French for self-government, they informed their confidential friends that France would hardly adhere long to any constitution, being too easily led into war.”<sup>76</sup> For instance, Daniel Webster, who was associated with conservative Whig economic interests but was also an old friend of liberal causes abroad, privately criticized the “red” policies of the republican government in Paris, such as guaranteeing work for all French citizens, establishing national workshops, and reducing the number of hours in the workday. Webster concluded:

France must be governed, and can only be governed in one of two ways; either a fierce democracy, in the shape of a directory, or some such thing, or by some individual holding imperial power. As to a government of regulated, restrained, constitutional liberty, it cannot exist in France, in my opinion, for any length of time. Her present rulers are poets, editors, pretenders to

literature, and idealists. They have none or few, who are men of sense, comprehension, and experience in affairs. Look at their constitution. It undertakes to guarantee to all Frenchmen, not only liberty and security, but also, "employment and property." How can any government fulfill such a promise?<sup>77</sup>

Many southerners, meanwhile, believed that the “rush into Socialism” by the French Republican government was of a piece with “that still more cruel absurdity of immediately emancipating the slaves in all the Colonies of France.”<sup>78</sup>

The Democratic Party platform, however, which was adopted in May 1848, offered no hesitancy or reservations:

The Democratic National Convention of the thirty States composing the American Republic, tender their fraternal congratulations to the National Convention of the Republic of France, now assembled as the free-suffrage representatives of the sovereignty of thirty-five millions of republicans, to establish government on those eternal principles of equal rights for which their Lafayette and our Washington fought side by side in the struggle for our own national independence; and we would especially convey to them, and to the whole people of France, our earnest wishes for the consolidation of their liberties, through the wisdom that shall guide their counsels, on the basis of a

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<sup>75</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, pp. 591-2; *Congressional Globe*, 30:1, Appendix, p. 466; Rohrs, “American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848,” p. 365; Curtis, “American Opinion of the French Nineteenth Century Revolutions,” p. 255.

<sup>76</sup> Curtis, “American Opinion of the French Nineteenth Century Revolutions,” pp. 255-8 (adhere).

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<sup>77</sup> Webster to Richard M. Blatchford, 12 July 1848, in Fletcher Webster, ed., *Private Correspondence of Daniel Webster*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1857), II: 280.

<sup>78</sup> Curtis, “American Opinion of the French Nineteenth Century Revolutions,” p. 258 (emancipating).

democratic constitution, not derived from grants or concessions of kings or parliaments, but originating from the only true source of political power recognized in the States of this Union, the inherent and inalienable right of the people, in their sovereign capacity, to make and to amend their forms of government in such manner as the welfare of the community may require.

The platform also recognized “the recent development of the grand political truth, of the sovereignty of the people, and their capacity and power for self-government, which is prostrating thrones and erecting republics on the ruins of despotism in the Old World.”<sup>79</sup>

The Whigs, struggling to create a viable electoral coalition around Mexican War hero (and slaveholder) Zachary Taylor, took no position on the French Revolution of 1848. The Free Soil Party, which declared its independence of the “slave power” that dominated the other parties, was likewise silent.

Within a few months, the skeptics of the latest French republican experiment seemed to be vindicated. The French Constitution did not embrace federalism or a bicameral legislature. The June 1848 riots in Paris, which led to some five thousand deaths (contemporary estimates ranged as high as thirty thousand), confirmed the fears of many Americans that the French lacked the ability to maintain a stable liberal order. Although American journalists in Europe like Charles Dana insisted that such violence was necessary to root out the last remnants of aristocracy and counterrevolutionary sentiment, the election of Louis Napoleon as

President persuaded most American liberals that the French nation was unable to overcome its excessive military spirit. They anticipated the likely revival of French imperial aggression, disconnected from the legitimate promotion of republican governments throughout Europe.<sup>80</sup>

Richard Rush, the earliest (if still cautious) American sympathizer with regime change in France, reached the same conclusion. Napoleon’s triumph indicated to Rush that “the masses, meaning the peasants and laborers ... neither intended nor desired a prolongation of the Republic.”<sup>81</sup> In a subsequent eulogy for John C. Calhoun, Rush praised him for being one of the new Americans “not carried away by the great shock in Europe in 1848.”

He did not believe that by suddenly “proclaiming” Republics, they were to be made. He knew that change was not always for the better, and when too rapid could scarcely be good. He knew all excellence to be of slow growth, with nations as persons; that it comes of patience, education, and long training. His mind, full of light, inferred that such quick convulsive movements in the other hemisphere, must be the work, with rare exceptions, of a few selfish or deluded men in some places, and, in others, of what Lord John Russell called, in the House of Commons, “a society of circulating revolutionists.” The real masses, he believed, would be placed by so violent an overthrow of existing things in a worse condition than they were before. He saw also that these suddenly

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<sup>79</sup> 1848 Democratic Party Platform, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29574>

<sup>80</sup> Roberts, “European Revolutions, the South, and the Crisis of 1850,” p. 263; Kerrigan, “Young America!: Romantic Nationalism,” pp. 106-107.

<sup>81</sup> Morrison, “American Reaction to European Revolutions, 1848-1852,” p. 121 (promulgation).

"proclaimed" Republics were totally different from ours. His knowledge of the Constitution of the United States, and everything that led to the establishment of our Republic, taught him this. He believed that the inherent tendencies of Republics starting into life instantaneously, were to disorder. He feared their deteriorating influences upon us. More especially did he fear it from our predisposition summarily to applaud all movements against existing authority in Europe, no matter what their nature, or who their instruments. He appreciated too much the immense value of our own institutions, to behold without grief the danger of disparagement to them by the odium likely to be brought upon Republics through the abuses of that word abroad.<sup>82</sup>

Rush did not abandon the cause of liberalism and reform abroad, but he now believed that it would best be promoted through closer ties between the two great liberal Anglo-Saxon regimes, rather than merely by sympathizing with those on the continent who proved to be radicals (and ineffective ones at that). He argued that the increase of American power now allowed the United States to deal with Britain on fair and equal terms. The two had a number of interests in common which suggested the value of an alliance that would be beneficial to both.

We are part and parcel of Christendom, and it is not longer possible that a great nation like this can be wholly detached from its movements, lest we should get into "entangling alliances." This was a wise rule when we would have been

the weak part, perfectly wise. Then, concerted movements of any description might have become entangling to us. Amidst the agitations of the present and uncertainties of the future of Europe, where else can we so well look as to England for national characteristics intermediate between arbitrary systems of government on the one side, and socialism and communism seeking to ally itself with power on the other? What nation is so near to us in the great attributes of national and individual freedom, or runs so parallel with us in the prosperity resulting from both? Certainly no other.<sup>83</sup>

Margaret Fuller had a rather different perspective: "The struggle is now fairly, thoroughly commenced between the principle of Democracy and the old powers, no longer legitimate. The struggle may last fifty years, and the earth be watered with the blood and tears of more than one generation, but the result is sure. All Europe, including Great Britain, is to be under Republican Government in the next century."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Rush, *Occasional Productions*, pp. 108-9.

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<sup>83</sup> Powell, *Richard Rush*, pp. 275-6. Rush was responding to the anti-British argument in William Henry Trescott, *A Foreign Policy for the United States*.

<sup>84</sup> Larry J. Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 74-5 (watered).

### III. The Revolutions in Central Europe and the Hülsemann Affair

Despite the growing disillusionment with France, many American foreign policy activists found new hope in the revolutionary developments in central Europe. From his post in Berlin, Minister Andrew Donelson warned American citizens against participation in political upheavals in Prussia and elsewhere; but he soon became an enthusiast for the efforts of the Frankfurt Assembly to establish a united and liberal Germany. He noted that the American Declaration of Independence and the U.S. and state constitutions were being circulated and studied by reformers in Berlin and Frankfurt. Donelson urged the U.S. government to send a naval detachment to the Baltic to be “ready for eventualities;” the arrival of the frigate USS *St. Lawrence* and the appearance of American naval officers in Berlin were taken by the Germans as signs of fraternal republican sympathies. The Frankfurt Assembly, facing war with Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein, inquired about the prospects for purchasing warships from the United States and requested that an American naval officer serve as admiral of the Navy of a united Germany. The German representatives also asked that American junior officers be assigned to help crew the ships.<sup>85</sup>

Donelson was aware of, and approved, Rush’s initiative in Paris to recognize the Provisional Government there. He believed likewise that prompt American recognition of a united German government could promote U.S. commercial interests and, of greater importance, affect the liberal evolution of the development of the new

German regime. Donelson requested authority from the President, “without taking any part in the struggle of the German states,” to follow his own discretion about whether to recognize the new regime. After receiving no immediate response from Washington, he decided to travel to Frankfurt and act as he saw fit.<sup>86</sup>

The Polk administration and many leading American opinion makers were very much of the same mind as Donelson to anticipate events in Germany. The President disavowed a private citizen who claimed to be acting as a U.S. envoy to the Frankfurt Assembly; but in July 1848, Secretary of State Buchanan ordered Donelson to proceed to Frankfurt as the accredited American representative to that body (he was later nominated and received Senate confirmation as Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to the Federal Republic of Germany). He was instructed to recognize the new government if he deemed it to be operating successfully and to promote American commercial interests (e.g., through reciprocal tariff reductions). The President assumed that the Berlin mission would be closed once the United States had been notified that the federal government had assumed responsibility for German foreign relations. In his Annual Message to Congress in December 1848, Polk reaffirmed “the great and fundamental principle of our foreign policy of noninterference in the domestic concerns of other nations,” and the right of peoples to determine their own form of government; but Polk also hailed “the efforts in progress to unite the States of Germany in a confederation similar in many respects to our own Federal Union. If the great and enlightened German States, occupying, as they do, a central and commanding position

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<sup>85</sup> Arthur James May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions* (Philadelphia, 1927), pp. 8-11; Field, *America and the Mediterranean World*, p. 226.

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<sup>86</sup> May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 14-5.

in Europe, shall succeed in establishing such a confederated government, securing at the same time to the citizens of each State local governments adapted to the peculiar condition of each, with unrestricted trade and intercourse with each other, it will be an important era in the history of human events. Whilst it will consolidate and strengthen the power of Germany, it must essentially promote the cause of peace, commerce, civilization, and constitutional liberty throughout the world.” The Polk administration responded cautiously but affirmatively to the German request for naval assistance, authorizing two officers to provide advice and permitting a Germany warship to be outfitted in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.<sup>87</sup>

As noted above, Calhoun was one of those enthusiastic about the possibility of regime change in Germany. He was presented with an unexpected opportunity to influence that process in May 1848 when Baron Friedrich von Gerolt, Prussia’s Minister Resident, solicited Calhoun’s suggestions for the constitution of a united Germany. Calhoun acknowledged the limits of any outside advice. “Every constitution, to succeed, must be adapted to the community for which it is made, in all respects; and hence no one, in forming a constitution for itself, can derive much aid from that of others.” He lacked “that full, accurate knowledge of the existing institu-

tions in Germany ... or of the character, feelings, and opinions of the German people, or the different interests of the communities of which they are composed, that is indispensable to form a constitution which would suit them, or to pronounce with any certainty, whether the proposed plan, or any other, would.”

That said Calhoun felt confident in warning that “it seems to me that the project errs in proposing to base the Constitution on *national unity* and to vest the union, or Empire, as it is called, with so vast an extent of power, as it does. It strikes me, that it would be impossible to induce the several communities of which Germany is composed” – above all, the great monarchies of Prussia and Austria – “to agree to it.”

But even if it could be adopted, it strikes me, that it would not be advisable. A constitution based on national unity, and with such extreme powers, would, it seems to me, form too intimate and close a union, for a people divided into communities, with political institutions so very different and interests so very conflicting.... experience has shown, that the tendency to concentrate all powers in the federal government is far stronger than that towards dissolution, contrary to the anticipation of many of the most experienced and wise of our statesmen, when the Government went into operation. Judged, then, by our experience, the constitution proposed for Germany, would end either in absorbing all the powers belonging to the Governments of the several communities and concentrate the whole in the Empire; or what is more probable, a conflict would occur between it and them, resulting from the Union being closer, than what the

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<sup>87</sup> May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 26-8; Roberts and Howe, “The United States and the Revolutions of 1848,” pp. 164-5; Polk, Annual Message to Congress, 5 December 1848, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29489>; Field, *America and the Mediterranean World*, pp. 226-7. But by October 1848, the Navy sent orders that its officers were to observe strict neutrality among the contending parties and avoid any indication that it recognized revolutionary regimes. Field, *America and the Mediterranean World*, p. 224.

interest and the sympathy of the parts would permit, which would end in the dissolution of the former.

Calhoun was therefore “inclined to think, that the existing confederation should be preserved, but improved and strengthened.” The Diet might be invested with powers related to foreign affairs and military defense, and to preserving the harmony among its member communities, “but with no more [power], than may be indispensable for either purpose. . . . It would be safer, at first, to give too little rather than too much power. It would be easier to add, whatever experience might show to be necessary, than to divest the Diet of such as may be found mischievous.” Calhoun took no position on the character (republican, monarchical, or mixed) of the German federal regime or its constituent members.<sup>88</sup>

When Donelson received positive instructions from Secretary of State Buchanan in July 1848, he presented himself to the Frankfurt Assembly’s temporary executive, the Hapsburg Archduke John, as the duly accredited American representative. He told the Archduke that American opinion strongly favored efforts to unite Germany. In November, he told the Prussian King, Frederick William IV, who was one of the possible contenders for the crown of Germany, that “the United States, though attached to the scheme of federal unity does not obtrude its example or experience on other sovereigns.” American recognition of the Frankfurt Assembly was not intended to make the United States a party for or against

“any scheme of reform which was of doubtful bearing on the prospects of the German states whether viewed as a Federal whole or as sovereigns.”<sup>89</sup>

Donelson, however, had distinct personal views about how regime change in the German lands might lead eventually to a republican federation. In a letter to Calhoun, Donelson speculated that “the attempt at Frankfurt will have the good effect of enlightening the public mind, and preparing monarchs to abdicate positions which the changes of society make no longer necessary. Some of them I believe would now do so if they could be sure of the quiet possession of their personal estates.... No people will consent to be taxed to keep up two sets of Kings [for the central government and the states]: and if they submit to the one created at Frankfurt it may be expected that after he shall have assisted them in dethroning the local monarchies, these last will unite in depriving him in his turning this privilege: and then there will remain nothing but republics united as ours by a limited constitution, but possessing more centralizing powers.”<sup>90</sup>

The Prussian monarch had something different in mind. He cracked down on reformers in his own lands and prorogued the Prussian assembly. Donelson and other American diplomats began sending back to Washington a chain of reports indicating the failure both of German unification and of the liberal revolutions.

This negative turn of events coincided with the inauguration of the Taylor administration, which took a generally more cautious view of an active American role in European affairs and of expansion in the Western Hemisphere. The new Secretary of

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<sup>88</sup> Calhoun to Baron von Gerolt, 28 May 1848, printed with commentary in Merle E. Curti, “John C. Calhoun and the Unification of Germany,” *American Historical Review* 40 (April 1935): 476-8. For a discussion of the divisions among the Germans, see Mike Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), pp. 117ff.

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<sup>89</sup> May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 15-17 (attached).

<sup>90</sup> Donelson to Calhoun, 8 July 1848, *PJCC*, 25: 573-4.

State, John M. Clayton had been an opponent of the Mexican War while in the Senate, but he also had the reputation of not being “averse to introducing a little ‘eagle-screaming’ into his diplomatic intercourse, for the purpose of rousing popular enthusiasm for the Government.” Clayton instructed Donelson to assure the Archduke John of America’s sympathies and willingness to “cheer” new governments “in every progressive movement that has for its aim the countless and priceless blessing of freedom.” Donelson, however, was told to adopt a lower diplomatic profile and if no progress was made towards German unification, his mission in Frankfort would be abolished. Clayton added that “we should not renew the experiment of sending a minister to another Government before it should be organized and capable of treating with us.” Donelson was recalled in September 1849 and the mission “for the present” was suspended. The Taylor administration also withdrew American support for the creation of a new Germany Navy.<sup>91</sup>

***Austria and Hungary: The Views and Activities of William H. Stiles***

When the revolution broke out the Habsburg lands in the spring of 1848, the American *charge* in Vienna, William H. Stiles, expressed optimism that the Austrian monarchy might be substantially liberalized as a result. He believed, however, that a

republican government was beyond the capabilities of the mass of the peoples of the empire and the leadership of those in the radical movement.

Stiles, along with the other American diplomats in Europe, had to walk a fine line between his sympathies and official duties. He dispelled the claims of a delegation which purported to bear official American promises of financial and military aid to the Viennese revolutionaries. In December 1848, a friend of Louis Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian (Magyar) cause for autonomy and later independence from Austria, approached Stiles and asked him to intervene diplomatically “for the settlement of the differences now existing between the imperial government and the Kingdom of Hungary.” Stiles demurred: “I frankly stated, on that occasion, the difficulties which such a step suggested to my mind, arising from the fact that it was a domestic quarrel between the government of the Austrian empire and one of its dependencies, and with which no foreign power could properly have any concern.” Stiles (as he reported to Secretary of State Buchanan) told the Hungarian intermediary “that it was a subject which the United States had ever regarded with peculiar jealousy, and that I could not, therefore, reconcile it to myself to be in any manner instrumental in committing her; that, besides, so extensive, as I understood, had been the preparations made by the imperial government for the subjugation of Hungary, that it was scarcely to be expected that it would, at this eleventh hour, listen to any proposals of settlement short of the unconditional submission to imperial authority.”<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Mary Wilhelmine Williams, “John Middleton Clayton,” in Samuel Flagg Bemis, ed., *The American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy*, 10 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), 6: 9-11 (eagle screaming); May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 25-9; Field, *America and the Mediterranean World*, p. 227. The Taylor administration also recalled Richard Rush and replaced him with a new minister regarded as being friendly to Louis Napoleon, William C. Rives. Roberts and Howe, “The United States and the Revolutions of 1848,” p. 171.

<sup>92</sup> The following account is taken from Stiles to Buchanan, 12 December 1848, William H. Stiles, *Austria in 1848-9: Being a History of the Late Political Movements in Vienna, Milan, Venice, and Prague . . . [and] a Full Account of the Revolution in Hungary*, 2 vols. (London: Sampson Low, 1852), 2: 401-4.

Stiles' interlocutor responded that Kossuth and the Hungarian government had been unable to communicate its desire for a settlement and reconciliation to the imperial authorities in Vienna. He pleaded for the United States to serve as a conduit of such a communication to avoid the immense bloodshed that would be result if the conflict escalated.

I then inquired whether the object for which the interposition was sought was the separation of Hungary from Austria; or, if not, whether it was to gain time in order to make a more successful resistance; that if either of these objects were in contemplation, I could not listen for one moment to the application. On being solemnly assured to the contrary, and that no other end was in view but an amicable adjustment of the impending difficulties, I stated that the only ground upon which I could consent to interfere was that of humanity, and to save the useless effusion of blood; that such an appeal I should not consider myself justified in resisting; but that even in that event, my interference, if approved by the imperial government, would simply go to the extent of opening the door of reconciliation between the opposing parties, and by which the unhappy differences which distract the two countries might be, between themselves and through the instrumentality of their respective authorities, peaceably and satisfactorily arranged.

Stiles immediately contacted Prince Schwarzenberg, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, stressing that "I had no disposition to interfere between the Austrian

government and one of its provinces, and that I would only take such action or pursue such a course in the matter as might be agreeable to the imperial government." Schwarzenberg responded that "matters had progressed too far—that they could enter into no negotiation with rebels, and that nothing short of unconditional surrender could now be submitted to by the government."

A week later, Stiles received an official written plea from Kossuth himself, asking the United States to initiate a negotiation with the imperial government for a military armistice during the winter. Stiles decided again to approach the Austrian authorities, including Field Marshal Windischgrätz, while warning Kossuth:

...in the mean time, as the matter is attended with great difficulties arising from the facts, first, that the controversy is a domestic one, and Austria may, consequently, be unwilling to permit of any foreign interference; and, second, that as the preparations for the attack of Hungary on the part of the imperial government are said to be very extensive, and any delay in their operations they may conceive detrimental to their interests, I can hold out to you but little hopes of success in obtaining the desired armistice. For the cause of humanity, however, and to prevent the useless effusion of blood, the only ground upon which I can consent to take any step toward opening the door of reconciliation between Austria and Hungary, and by which the difficulties which now unhappily distract the two countries may be adjusted between themselves, you may rest assured that no exertion on

my part shall be spared which may be calculated to effect so desirable an object.

Windischgrätz, as Stiles predicted, would have none of it. “I can do nothing in the matter.” “I must obey the orders of the emperor.” “Hungary must submit.” “I will occupy Pesth with my troops, and then the emperor will decide what is to be done.” “I have received orders to occupy Hungary, and I hope to accomplish this end—I cannot, therefore, enter into any negotiations.” “I can not consent to treat with those who are in a state of rebellion.”

Stiles, like his colleagues Rush and Donelson, was naturally concerned that his diplomatic activism, however limited, might meet with the disapproval of his superiors in the Polk administration. “Before closing this communication, I have only to add, sir, that as in this (to me) entirely novel situation, I have endeavored to act with all the circumspection which the delicate nature of the subject so imperiously required; as I have studiously avoided the least step which I thought could in any manner compromise my country,” he wrote to the Secretary of State, “and as, if any error has been committed, it has been done for the sake and in the cause of humanity, I trust that the course which, without time for special instruction, I have thought proper to pursue in this matter, will not meet the disapprobation of my government.”

Secretary of State Buchanan subsequently approved Stiles’ actions but offered no encouragement for taking any more ambitious steps in the future.

...I am gratified that your prudence and ability were equal to the occasion. In our foreign policy, we must ever be governed by the wise maxim not to interfere with the domestic concerns of foreign

nations; and from this you have not departed. You have done no more, in your own language, than to attempt to open the door of reconciliation between the opposing parties, leaving them to adjust their differences without your intervention. Considering there was reason to believe that the previous offers of the Hungarian government for a reconciliation had never reached the imperial government, and that no other practicable mode of communicating these offers existed, except through your agency, you acted wisely in becoming an intermediary for this purpose alone. Had you refused thus to act upon the request of Mr. Kossuth, you might have been charged with a want of humanity, and been held, in some degree, responsible for the blood which has since been so profusely shed in the war. The president entirely approves your conduct.<sup>93</sup>

Stiles reflected on the larger implications of the Hungarian Revolution for European reform and liberal regime change. “[I]f Hungary is subdued (which will most certainly be the case, from the superior strength and discipline of the imperial army), such a result will only aggravate the feelings of hostility which now exist; and as a country determined to be free cannot, in these days, be held in subjection for any length of time by mere military force, this very conclusion may lead eventually to the liberation of Hungary and in total separation from the Austrian empire,” he wrote in December. In the spring of 1849, after the Hungarians issued a Declaration of Independence and Russian troops came to the aid of Austria and non-

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<sup>93</sup>Buchanan to Stiles, 9 February 1849, Stiles, *Austria in 1848-9*, pp. 405-6.

Magyar ethnic groups, Stiles concluded that this had now become a struggle between “peoples and thrones” and warned that if Russian intervention succeeded in suppressing the rebellion, all of Europe was at risk to Russian despotism. He contended that the Hungarians had a sound legal basis for claiming independence. Stiles, Donelson and Rush all predicted the likelihood that Russian intervention would provoke a European-wide war.<sup>94</sup>

Stiles’ dispatches influenced the attitude of the otherwise cautious Whig administration of Zachary Taylor. Although conservative members of the party warned about getting too far ahead of events, the cause of Hungary drew the particular support of the Progressive Whigs as well as New Democrats. Secretary of State Clayton had received numerous petitions and requests from Hungarian immigrants and visitors to dispatch a diplomatic envoy to their homeland. Public meetings, including one in Philadelphia chaired by former Vice President George M. Dallas, implored the United States to recognize Hungarian independence. In Illinois, Whig Congressman Abraham Lincoln served on a citizens committee that drafted resolutions offering sympathy with the Hungarian people; calling on the United States to acknowledge Hungarian independence “at the very earliest moment consistent with our amicable relations” with Austria; and opining that the immediate acknowledgment of that independence was “due from American freemen, to their struggling brethren, to the general cause of Republican liberty, and not a violation of the just rights

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<sup>94</sup> Stiles, *Austria in 1848-9*, p. 403 (subdued); Merle E. Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852, A Study in Diplomatic Relations* (Northampton, Mass: Smith College, 1926), pp. 150-2; May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 33-40; Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution*, p. 312.

of any people.” Other public meetings, such as in Philadelphia, went even further – the United States should recognize Hungary “not with reference to the success or defeat of the revolutionary progress there but because our republican brethren are fighting for liberty.”<sup>95</sup>

Senator Crittenden, a close friend of the new Secretary of State, urged Clayton to find some means to voice American sympathy for the Hungarian people and to denounce the interference of despotism in the struggle for freedom. If he were President, Crittenden reflected, he would “speak aloud the great doctrines of liberty and free government.” Clayton responded: “You never wrote a more sensible letter in your life than that in which you gave me your lessons in diplomacy. I agree with you in everything, and you will see *by-and-by* that I have sent an agent to recognize the independence of Hungary on the first favorable indication.... The same policy (sympathy with the advance of republican principles) will characterize all my course, if the President will allow me. On this subject do you write to me to give me a loose rein. Some of my colleagues (*who are noble fellows*) are somewhat young and tender-footed. We must keep up with the spirit of the age.”<sup>96</sup>

Clayton’s agent to Hungary was A. Dudley Mann, an American diplomat based in Paris, whom Clayton instructed to proceed “towards” Hungary and to gather accurate information about the situation in

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<sup>95</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 24; Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 2: 62; May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 48-49 (brethren).

<sup>96</sup> May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, p. 51 (speak); Clayton to Crittenden, 11 July 1849, Ann M.B. Coleman, ed., *The Life of John J. Crittenden*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1862), I: 344-5.

Central Europe. Without departing from the “established policy of non-interference in the domestic concerns of other nations,” if Mann determined that Hungary was “able to maintain the independence she had declared,” the United States wished “to be the very first to congratulate her, and to hail with a hearty welcome her entrance into the family of nations.” Mann was authorized in that instance to recognize Hungarian independence and conclude a commercial treaty with the new regime. President Taylor left no doubts about his sympathies in the matter, according to Clayton. Kossuth’s efforts at reform and the amelioration of his countrymen’s conditions had been opposed by a policy of “immobility, backed by the bayonet.” The “best wishes” of the United States attended Hungary, whose cause offered “the interesting spectacle of a great people rising superior to the enormous oppression” that had “so long weighed her down.” Senator Crittenden, when apprised of Clayton’s orders, approved wholeheartedly. “It is glorious and will please our people to see the majesty of our Republic exhibiting itself on all proper occasions, with dignity and fearless front, in the eyes and to the teeth of kings and despots.” Clayton asked Crittenden to reinforce this line of argument whenever he met with President Taylor.<sup>97</sup>

The United States was again pressing the boundaries of accepted diplomatic practice and the law of nations, in this case with the hope that prompt American recognition of Hungarian independence might influence world public opinion and deter or limit outside intervention.

<sup>97</sup> Clayton to Mann, 18 June 1849, in John Bassett Moore, “Kossuth: Sketch of a Revolutionist, Part II,” *Political Science Quarterly* 10 (June 1895): 262-3; Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 25-6; Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, pp. 151-3 (glorious); May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, p. 53.

According to John Bassett Moore, one of the nineteenth centuries’ leading authorities on international law, Mann’s instructions conferred such powers as “had never before and have not since been confided to any representative of the United States.” Some American activists thought the United States should have been even more aggressive and not waited for Mann’s fact-finding expedition. A leading progressive Whig journalist wrote after the fact: “We have no doubt that the timely interposition of the United States and Great Britain in the recognition of the Government of . . . Hungary . . . would have caused the Czar to hesitate before enslaving Hungary.” Former President John Tyler thought that the United States should have registered strong protests in Vienna and if they were not taken into account, the United States should withdraw Stiles from Austria and expel the Austrian representative from the United States. Mann’s friend, George Sumner, actively promoted the Hungarian cause in the English press and met that summer He met with Foreign Secretary Palmerston to encourage official recognition by London. Mann may have shown Sumner his instructions with the idea that they would be passed on to such key British officials and opinion-makers.<sup>98</sup>

Mann himself was of the view that “the question whether continental Europe shall be under Cossack or republican rule hereafter will, in all probability, be definitively decided on the plains and in the passes of Hungary.” By the time he reached Vienna, however, it was too late to proceed further. The massive Russian intervention decided matters. In late August 1849, Kossuth fled to Turkey. The Hungarian armies soon surrendered. For some conservative journals such as the *Richmond*

<sup>98</sup> Moore, “Kossuth, Part II,” p. 264; Gamaliel Bailey, *The National Era*, cited in Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 24, 31; Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, p. 154.

*Whig*, this was a reminder that “every nation had the degree of liberty which it deserved.” Had the Hungarian people been capable and deserving of freedom, no force on earth could have conquered them. But Horace Greeley and other Progressive Whigs and New Democrats argued that the United States should not give up the fight. He recommended widely disseminating pamphlets in Europe that would stir up the minds of the oppressed peoples. President Taylor’s critics took to the newspapers to attack him for not recognizing the independent Hungarian government before it was defeated.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the failure of his mission, Mann believed that much had been accomplished. Newspapers in England and the United States printed the gist of his instructions from Clayton, which had met with “unqualified praise of all Europeans, animated by humane and generous sentiments. To crowned heads and monarchists it cannot be otherwise than exceedingly unpalatable.” Despite speculation that the European autocracies might sever diplomatic relations with the United States on this account, Mann told Clayton that they were aware “that their strength would be greatly impaired by such a suspension of intercourse.” Mann had not lost his enthusiasm: “It is in our power to save continental Europe from the yoke of cruel oppression prepared for its neck. What a mission! What a glory will not accrue to the administration of Gen. Taylor if it performs a noble duty.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 26-7 (Cossack); May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, p. 50 (deserved); Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor & Millard Fillmore*, p. 85.

<sup>100</sup> Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, pp. 167-7 (unpalatable). But see Mann’s cautionary views detailed in Spencer, *Kossuth and Young America*, p. 27.

American diplomatic activism towards Hungary did not go unnoticed by Austrian authorities. The Austrian *charge* in Washington, Baron Hülsemann, had reported regularly to Vienna during the previous decade about the expansionist tendencies in the United States. He urged his superiors to avoid any breach of neutrality during the Mexican War because it might encourage American intervention in the European revolutionary movements. He also recommended that Vienna try to influence Spain to sell Cuba to the United States before American filibustering expeditions against the island succeeded. But the events of 1848 indicated to Hülsemann and his superiors that the United States was edging towards a provocative role in Europe. The Austrians followed closely the movements of the American Mediterranean squadron, which the U.S. was rumored to be planning to use to intervene on behalf of central European revolutionaries. They also followed efforts by the United States sought to obtain basing rights for its ships in the region. As reports of alleged Austrian and Russian atrocities in Hungary began to circulate in America, “public opinion is so enraged against Austria,” Hülsemann reported, “that scarcely an editor admits anything favorable to her.”<sup>101</sup>

The Austrian government, meanwhile, had somehow obtained a full copy of Mann’s official instructions (the United States could always disavow accounts of them that had been published in the newspapers). Hülsemann’s diplomatic colleagues in Washington agreed with him that the Mann mission constituted interference in Austrian affairs, according to the standards non-intervention standards established by the Americans themselves.

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<sup>101</sup> Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, pp. 144-45; Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 30 (enraged).

Hülsemann discussed the matter with Secretary Clayton in hopes that President Taylor's Annual Message in December 1849 would address the matter satisfactorily or at least not make matters worse. Hülsemann did not succeed. Clayton insisted that the United States had not interfered in Austrian affairs because Mann was authorized to recognize Hungary only if it had in fact established its independence. The President's Annual Message expressed sympathy for the Hungarians and officially approved the Mann mission.<sup>102</sup>

***The De-Recognition Debate: Cass versus Clay***

Americans found it particularly difficult to accept the suppression of the movement for Hungarian independence. The failure of republican regime change in France could be ascribed to domestic reasons peculiar to France. The French were

certainly at liberty to reject American advice about constitutionalizing their revolution. But the egregious external intervention by Russia in Hungary doomed what seemed to be a promising attempt at liberal nationalism. It was as if Louis XVI had taken the British side in the American Revolution and sent French troops to America to fight against George Washington. American activists sought some effective way to protest against Russia's action and to dissuade despots from similar interventions in the future.

In the Senate, Lewis Cass introduced a resolution that would instruct the Senate Foreign Relations Committee "to inquire into the expediency of suspending diplomatic relations with Austria." Cass thereby introduced a new American tool to support the right of regime change and to marshal world public opinion on behalf of the cause of human liberty. In addition to the rapid, even preemptive *recognition* of revolutionary regimes, the United States could *withdraw* recognition from states that interfered in the internal affairs of other states, especially to suppress regime changes. Cass argued that the increased interrelationship among "the nations of Christendom" caused by the general progress of the age – scientific, commercial, and the like – had "broken down the barriers of space which separated nations, [and] have opened each to the knowledge and business of all." The members of this political family thus could not be indifferent to the "internal agitations or external dangers" that might threaten each of them. Nor could they be indifferent to a globalized public opinion that passed judgment on their actions.

The age is an inquiring and an observing one; and the facility and rapidity of communication, among the proudest triumphs of human knowledge, come powerfully in aid

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<sup>102</sup> "I have scrupulously avoided any interference in the wars and contentions which have recently distracted Europe. During the late conflict between Austria and Hungary there seemed to be a prospect that the latter might become an independent nation. However faint that prospect at the time appeared, I thought it my duty, in accordance with the general sentiment of the American people, who deeply sympathized with the Magyar patriots, to stand prepared, upon the contingency of the establishment by her of a permanent government, to be the first to welcome independent Hungary into the family of nations. For this purpose I invested an agent then in Europe with power to declare our willingness promptly to recognize her independence in the event of her ability to sustain it. The powerful intervention of Russia in the contest extinguished the hopes of the struggling Magyars. The United States did not at any time interfere in the contest, but the feelings of the nation were strongly enlisted in the cause, and by the sufferings of a brave people, who had made a gallant, though unsuccessful, effort to be free." Zachary Taylor, Annual Message to the Congress, 4 December 1849, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29490>:

of this disposition to judge and approve or censure passing events, as their character and circumstances may justify. This public opinion, imbodyed by the press in the daily journals it pours forth, is borne through the civilized world, pronouncing the judgment of the present day, and anticipating that of posterity. There are none so high as to be beyond its censure – none so low as not to be encouraged by its approbation. The frontiers of a country may be armed at its approach. But it will pass them. It may be checked, but it cannot be stopped. It is stronger than the bayonet – more vigilant than the suspicions of despotism.<sup>103</sup>

The United States should make “this first effort to rebuke, by public opinion, expressed through an established government, in the name of a great republic, atrocious acts of despotism, by which human liberty and life have been sacrificed, under circumstances of audacious contempt for the rights of mankind and the sentiments of the civilized world, without parallel even in the age of warfare between the oppressors and the oppressed.”

...I do not recollect that any formal act has been adopted, rendering the censure more signal and enduring. If we take the first step in this noble cause, where physical force, with its flagitious abuse, if not conquered, may be ultimately restrained by moral considerations, we shall add to the value of the lesson of 1776, already so important to the world, and destined to become far more so,

by furnishing one guarantee the more for the preservation of human rights where they exist, and for their recovery where they are lost.... Now, sir, I say it without reservation, that a Power thus setting at defiance the opinion of the world, and violating the best feelings of our nature, in the very wantonness of successful cruelty, has no bond of union with the American people. The sooner the diplomatic intercourse is dissolved – and dissolve with marks of indignant approbation – the sooner we shall perform an act of public duty, which, at home and abroad, will meet with feelings of kindred sympathy from all, wherever they may be, who are not fit subjects for the tender mercies of Austrian power.

Cass acknowledged that American suspension of diplomatic relations with Vienna would not itself restrain the immediate march of Austrian despotism – that must wait “till she is stayed by one of those upheavings of people, which is as sure to come as that man longs for freedom, and longs to strike the blow which shall make it his.” Despotism was tenacious. But “many old things are passing away; and Austrian despotism will pass away in its turn.” Liberalized global opinion, led by the United States, would accelerate this process of revolution. The bulwarks of despotism “will be shaken by the rushing of the mighty winds – by the voice of the world, wherever its indignant expression is not restrained by the kindred sympathies of arbitrary power.” The American Republic was not alone. Expressions of support for liberalism were possible not only in republics but in constitutional monarchies, “some of the most enlightened nations of the earth,” where “practical freedom” could be

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<sup>103</sup> This and the following taken from *Congressional Globe*, 31:1, Appendix, pp. 54-8.

enjoyed. Cass pointed to a recent petition, signed by over eighty members of the British Houses of Commons and Lords, which expressed concern about the suppression of the Hungarian revolt on the grounds of “internal liberty, national independence, [and] European peace.”

Cass insisted that the American people “do not undertake to judge what forms of government are best adapted to the conditions of the other nations of the earth, and, least of all, to attempt the establishment elsewhere of their own.” However, because there was an overwhelming difference between constitutional monarchy and despotism, by implication at least, the United States was at liberty to align itself with enlightened public opinion in those non-republican regimes in moral support of revolutionary “uphevings” that transformed despotisms into constitutional monarchies, if not immediately into republics.

That said, Cass argued that the United States should be sparing in its expressions of “interest and sympathy.” “The value of this kind of moral interposition would be diminished by its too frequent recurrence. It should be reserved for great events – events marked by great crimes and oppressions on the one side, and great exertions and misfortunes on the other, and under circumstances which carry with them the sympathies of the world, like the partition of Poland and the subjugation of Hungary.” “We are in an age of progress,” Cass insisted. Those who still had the “*spirit of standing still*—conservatism,” must give way to evidence that “both in the moral and physical world . . . change is one of the great laws of nature.” Conservatism “little becomes a country like ours, which is advancing in the career of improvement with an accelerated pace unknown in the history of the world.”

Senator Hale, the Free Soiler, immediately muddied the waters – or

clarified the issue, depending on one’s point of view – by asking why Russia, and not Austria, was the object of the resolution of de-recognition. Hale pointed out that Cass had admitted on other occasions that Austria had a legitimate claim under the law of nations for resisting Hungarian independence, whereas Russia did not. Hale touched on a sore point for the New Democrats, for whom Britain was the main foreign enemy and for whom Russia was therefore a natural ally. As before, however, the Senators elected not to debate Hale’s line of argument, which led naturally to a condemnation of domestic slavery.<sup>104</sup>

The debate instead took another direction. During the course of his speech, Cass said he had anticipated “with confidence the cordial support of the distinguished Senator from Kentucky” – Henry Clay – based on Clay’s strong support for the independence of Spanish America and Greece in decades past. (Whether Cass really expected that support or if he was merely trying to score political points against his Whig rival is unclear – Cass also tweaked Clay for being a “more zealous disciple of the *stand still* school than he was some years since.”) Clay, in fact, opposed Cass’s resolution, which he regarded as direct proposition to suspend diplomatic relations with Austria, rather than a genuine call for an inquiry by the Foreign Relations Committee. Clay portrayed himself as a sincere friend of the “noble cause of the Hungarians,” one who had sincerely hoped that the Hungarians would have been able to maintain their independence from Austria. In that case, Clay remarked, the United States would have been fully justified in recognizing Hungary, just as it had done with the Spanish American republics (something that the Monroe administration had done tardily, in Clay’s opinion). Hungary’s inability to do so, in

<sup>104</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 31:1, pp. 113, 117, 293.

Clay's opinion, stemmed partly from internal weakness -- specifically, from the failure of its revolutionary leadership -- but primarily from the intervention of Russia.

But facts were facts for Clay; and the suspension of diplomatic relations with Austria would do precious little good under the existing circumstances. The United States, under the form of punishing Austria, would only punish its own citizens and merchants by denying them the services that an American minister in Vienna could provide. Clay concurred with Hale that Russia, not Austria, had been the primary instrument of Hungary's demise. But this did not justify the United States in withdrawing recognition from Russia, either. "What principle does it involve? It involves the principle of assuming on the part of this Government a right to pass judgment upon the conduct of foreign Powers ... and to follow it up by some direct action, such as suspending intercourse."

But where is to be the limit? You begin with war. You may extend the same principle of action to politics or religion -- to society or to social principles and habits.... there is no limit or restriction as to the extent to which we may go in our investigations of the conduct of foreign nations, and as to the extent we may go in pronouncing our judgment upon that conduct. We may say, in reference to Turkey, your religion tolerates polygamy; unless you change your religion, and your habits of social life, we will cease all intercourse with you.

More worrisome, in Clay's opinion, was the tendency of Cass' resolution to assume "the right of interference in the internal affairs of other nations." There was an existing political relationship between

Hungary and Austria: "The House of Hapsburg were the lawful sovereign, the more especially as they were originally elected by Hungary." However justified the Hungarians might have been in seeking their independence, the United States, in the midst of an ongoing European civil war, had no right or duty to recognize their existence as a nation. There was now certainly no such independent nation to recognize or support (which, presumably, would be the indirect intent of suspending diplomatic relations with Austria). Interference in the internal affairs of other nations was "in direct contradiction to the whole policy of this Government, first laid down by Washington and pursued by every successor he has had down to the present day." Clay was doubted that it would be possible to adhere to Cass's rule of acting only in the most important and egregious circumstances. "And if we were to permit ourselves to interfere in cases of this kind, where, again, I ask, are we to stop? Why should we not interfere in behalf of suffering Ireland? Why not interfere in behalf of suffering humanity wherever we may find it?"

Clay challenged Cass' notion of progress. This was not the progress that Clay had advocated throughout his career, that of the American System of internal improvement, but rather the false "progress" of manifest destiny. "I am afraid it is progress in foreign wars. I am afraid it is progress in foreign conquest -- in territorial aggrandizement. I am afraid that it is progress as the disturbers of the possessions of our neighbors throughout this continent, and throughout the islands adjacent to it." Cass's resolution to de-recognize Austria was offered in that same spirit -- it will "open up a new field of collision, terminating perhaps in war, and exposing ourselves to the reaction of foreign Powers, who, when they see us assuming to judge of their conduct, will undertake in their turn to

judge of our conduct.” The threat to suspend diplomatic relations was, in effect, a threat to “denationalize nation after nation, according as their conduct may be found to correspond to our own notion of what is right and proper in the administration of human affairs.” The idea that foreign powers, typically governed by non-republican regimes, would tolerate that behavior without some sort of retaliation was naïve and dangerous.<sup>105</sup>

Senator Underwood, a consistent opponent of an activist foreign policy, proposed a substitute resolution that would express the sympathy of the American people for “popular movements to reform political institutions inconsistent with the enlightened opinions of the age;” but adding that “they disclaim the right to meddle with the domestic policy of other nations.” Senator Foote offered a substitute version favoring an activist policy. The Senate never took action on any of these resolutions and the all-consuming debate over what became the Compromise of 1850 truncated further deliberation. But Cass and his allies did not let the matter drop completely. Democratic newspapers praised Cass’s resolution as an expression of American opinion; and attacked the Whig administration for a pusillanimous policy that favored the divine right of kings and that was hostile to the cause of liberty in Europe.<sup>106</sup>

In March and April 1850, Cass and his Congressional allies proposed to increase American leverage over the prospects for future regime change in central Europe – and to force the Taylor administration’s

hand -- by removing all funding for the American legations in Vienna and Berlin; and by adding appropriations for “a diplomatic agent to the Central power of Germany at Frankfurt,” although – as Senator William R. King of Alabama pointed out – that Assembly was defunct and there was no evidence that an effective German central government now existed. But Cass wanted to make a point of protesting the Taylor administration’s “arbitrary and unwarrantable” decision to “suppress” Donelson’s mission to Frankfurt. In Cass’s view, the withdrawal of America’s recognition of a united and liberal German had come precisely “at a time when that mission was likely to prove highly advantageous to the cause of freedom.” “There is the fountain of liberal principles,” Cass insisted, referring to Frankfurt. “It is that point to which every German wishing his country to be free – wishing for the progress of liberal principles – turns his attention. Let us sympathize with this feeling, and do what little we can towards its encouragement. If there is to be a regeneration in Germany, it must depend on the central authority.” In Cass’s view, American diplomacy must anticipate and encourage opportunities to bring about regime change through actions such as recognition and de-recognition, and not merely ratify changes – especially counter-revolutions – after the fact.<sup>107</sup>

### *Daniel Webster and the Search for the Middle Ground*

With the Congressional controversy over America’s policy towards central Europe as a backdrop, the Austrian diplomat Hülsemann and Secretary of State Clayton continue to spar privately about allegations of American interference in Austrian affairs.

<sup>105</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 31:1, pp. 115-6.

<sup>106</sup> May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 61-3; *Congressional Globe*, 31:1, pp. 103-6, 113-4, 244, 293; *Congressional Globe*, 31: 1, Appendix, pp. 43-7, 84-91. New Democrats derided the Whigs as “the Austrian Party.” Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor & Millard Fillmore*, p. 86.

<sup>107</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 31:1, pp. 583, 745-6. The defunding measure was defeated 28-17.

Hülsemann suggested that Austria might retaliate by suspending the Treaty of Commerce, which would damage American cotton trade to Venice and Trieste. The Austrian government also sent Hülsemann accounts of Hungarian atrocities to in American publications, which countered reports of Austrian and Russian brutality. But Hülsemann and the Austrian government decided not to press the United States for an official disavowal of the Mann mission, in part because of the sensitive question of how exactly they obtained a copy of his instructions.<sup>108</sup>

In April 1850, the Taylor administration, in response to a resolution originally introduced by Senator Douglas, reignited the controversy by sending the Senate documents related to Mann's mission, including his instructions (deleting only a reference to Austria's "iron rule" within its empire). The packet of documents included a statement by the President that reiterated the fact that the United State had not accredited any agent to Hungary and had received no official communication from the *de facto* Hungarian government. If Hungary had successfully achieved its independence, however, "we should have been the first to welcome her into the family of nations."<sup>109</sup>

The Austrian government, with Russian diplomatic support, now ordered Hülsemann to register a written protest to Washington (the text of which he was allowed to soften somewhat). Because of the death of President Taylor, Hülsemann waited until late July 1850 to deliver an informal note to the new Secretary of State, Daniel Webster. After several months of discussion between the two men, Hülsemann

delivered a formal statement of the Austrian position on September 30. The Mann mission, Hülsemann insisted, could not be construed as innocent fact-finding; it rather betrayed the fact that the United States was "impatient for the downfall of the Austrian Monarchy, and even sought to accelerate that event by the utterance of their wishes to that effect[.]" The wording of Mann's instructions left no doubt about America's lack of neutrality and its intent to interfere: "it designates the Austrian Government as an iron rule [the phrase deleted from the text sent to the Senate], and represents the rebel chief, Kossuth, as an illustrious man; while improper instructions are introduced in regard to Russia, the intimate and faithful ally of Austria." Austria would have been justified in treating Mann not as a diplomat but as a spy and thus (Hülsemann did not add, but the implication was clear) subject to execution.

Hülsemann lectured the United States on the criteria it should have applied if it sincerely wished to maintain its professed policy of non-intervention. The American government should have realized that "a contest of a few months' duration could neither have exhausted the energies of that Power [Austria], nor turned aside its purpose to put down the insurrection. Austria has struggled against the French revolution for twenty-five years; the courage and perseverance which she exhibited in that memorable contest have been appreciated by the whole world." Furthermore:

All countries are obliged, at some period or other, to struggle against internal difficulties; all forms of government are exposed to such disagreeable episodes; the United States have had some experience in this very recently. Civil war is a possible occurrence everywhere, and the encouragement which is given to

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<sup>108</sup> Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, pp. 156-61.

<sup>109</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 39; Zachary Taylor, Message to Congress, 28 March 1850, Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, 5: 41.

the spirit of insurrection and of disorder most frequently falls back upon those who seek to aid it in its developments, in spite of justice and wise policy.

Hülsemann added that the Austrian government would not have protested formally if President Taylor had not provoked them by publishing Mann's instructions; and that Vienna was still "disposed to cultivate relations of friendship and good understanding with the United States." He fired a shot across the American bow, however, by warning that relations could not be seriously disturbed again "without placing the cardinal interests of the two countries in jeopardy," code words for war (or at least overt Austrian opposition, in conjunction with its European allies, to American commercial interests and territorial expansion). If the United States continued to "take an indirect part in the political movements of Europe, American policy would be exposed to acts of retaliation, and to certain inconveniences, which could not fail to affect the commerce and industry of the two hemispheres."<sup>110</sup>

Webster had joined the Cabinet after the death of Taylor in large part to support the successful implementation of the Compromise of 1850, which he had been instrumental in bringing about while still in the Senate. In doing so, Webster suffered much political damage in the eyes of Progressive Whigs, who hated especially the strengthened Fugitive Slave legislation that was part of the compromise. Webster decided to go public with his diplomatic clash with Hülsemann as a means of reinforcing unionist sentiment as well as recovering his own political position.

Webster, as noted in Section I, was an opponent of Manifest Destiny and of aggressive American expansionism and interventionism. But Webster, like Cass, believed in the power of American rhetoric to "shape the battlefield" of public opinion, at home and abroad, on behalf of human liberty. Webster prided himself on his own particular abilities to marshal the rhetoric of human freedom and progressive regime change, and he was not prepared to cede this ground to the New Democrats or to Cass. He believed there was a solid and defensible middle policy of wielding influence, between the extremes of indifference and outright intervention. Webster pointed to the case of the American Revolution, in which "the majestic eloquence of Chatham, the profound reasoning of Burke, the burning satire and irony of Colonel Barré" influenced American fortunes.

...there was not a reading man who did not feel stronger, bolder, and more determined in the assertion of his rights when these exhilarating accounts from the two Houses of Parliament reached him from beyond the seas. He felt that those who held and controlled public opinion elsewhere were with us; that their words of eloquence might produce an effect in the region where they were uttered; and, above all, they assured him that, in the judgment of the just, and the wise, and the impartial, his cause was just, and he was right; and, therefore, he said, "We will fight it out to the last."<sup>111</sup>

Webster's famous Congressional speeches on behalf of Greek independence in 1824 and the American mission to the Panama Conference in 1826 were among the

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<sup>110</sup> Hülsemann to Webster, 30 September 1851, *The Works of Daniel Webster*, 20<sup>th</sup> ed., 6 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1890), 6: 488-90.

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<sup>111</sup> Speech at the Kossuth Banquet, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, Diplomatic Papers, 2: 98.

pillars of his claim to reputation as a great orator, an American Pitt or Burke. Those speeches had introduced many of these themes that would guide Webster's subsequent policies. The United States could not avoid being drawn into the "great political question of this age ... that between absolute and regulated government." Webster insisted, "it would be impossible for us, if we were so disposed, to prevent our principles, our sentiments, and our example from producing some effect upon the opinions and hopes of society throughout the civilized world. It rests probably with ourselves to determine whether the influence of these shall be salutary or pernicious."<sup>112</sup>

The United States could exercise that salutary influence primarily by demonstrating the viability of free institutions through its own growth and prosperity; and recommending their adoption, in whole or part, to other nations. However, according to Webster, America also had an active role in defending the underlying basis of free government – that is, "to resist the establishment of doctrines which deny the legality of its foundations." Those doctrines, which the European despots proposed to introduce "as part of the law of the civilized world;... enforced by a million and a half bayonets," were (1) the divine right of kings – "that all popular or constitutional rights were held as grants from the crown;" and (2) the right of forcible interference in the affairs of other states, "to control nations in their desire to change their own government, whatever it may be conjectured, or pretended, that such a change might furnish an example to the subjects of other states." Webster trusted that "every enlightened man throughout the

world will oppose" the claim of forcible interference, which was "in open violation of the public law of the world." It was especially important that "those who, like ourselves, are fortunately out of the reach of the bayonets that enforce it, will proclaim their detestation of it, in a tone both loud and decisive." Enlightened Americans must realize that there were no limits to the claims of despotism: "Why are we not as fair objects for the operation of the new principle, as any other of those who may attempt a reform of government on the other side of the Atlantic?"

In making this argument, Webster was compelled to address two obvious criticisms. First, that the "thunder ... rolls at a distance. The wide Atlantic is between us and danger; however others may suffer, we shall remain safe." Second, that American opposition to forcible interference must either be limited to feckless rhetoric or else lead to war.

As to the claim that American geographic isolation was sufficient protection for its own free institutions, Webster rejoined:

I think it is a sufficient answer to this to say, that we are one of the nations of the earth; that we have an interest, therefore, in the preservation of that system of national law and national intercourse which has heretofore subsisted, so beneficially for all. Our system of government, it should also be remembered, is, throughout, founded on principles entirely hostile to the new code; and if we remain undisturbed by its operation, we shall owe our security either to our situation or to our spirit. The enterprising character of the age, our own active, commercial spirit, the great increase which has taken place in the intercourse among civilized

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<sup>112</sup> The following summary is taken from Webster's speeches to the House of Representatives: Independence of Greece, 19 January 1824, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, Speeches and Formal Writings, 1: 89-104; The Panama Mission, 14 April 1826, *ibid.*, 1: 201-35.

and commercial states, has necessarily connected us with other nations, and has given us a high concern in the preservation of those salutary principles upon which that intercourse is founded. We have as clear an interest in international law, as individuals have in the law of society.

Webster insisted that Americans had a duty to those threatened by despotic interventionism, one that included but went beyond narrow American interest: “What do we not owe to the cause of civil and religious liberty? To the principle of lawful resistance? To the principle that society has a right to take part in its own government? As the leading republic in the world, living and breathing in these principles, and advanced, by their operation, with unequalled rapidity in our career, shall we give our consent to bring them into disrepute and disgrace?” As to whether an expression of sympathy did struggling peoples any good, Webster responded: “I hope it may. It may give them courage and spirit, it may assure them of the public regard, teach them that they are not wholly forgotten by the civilized world, and inspire them with constancy in the pursuit of their great end.”

The young Webster had insisted that American opposition to despotic transgressions of the law of nations did not mean war or forcible intervention in any European cause.

Sir, this reasoning mistakes the age. The time has been, indeed, when fleets, armies, and subsidies, were the principle reliances even in the best causes. But, happily for mankind, a great change has taken place in this respect. Moral causes come into consideration, in proportion as the progress of knowledge is

advanced; and the public opinion of the civilized world is rapidly gaining an ascendancy over mere brutal force. It is already able to oppose the most formidable obstruction to the progress of injustice and oppression; and it as it grows more intelligent and more intense, it will be more and more formidable. It may be silenced by military power but it cannot be conquered. It is elastic, irrepressible, and invulnerable to the weapons of ordinary warfare.

The United States, according to Webster, could give substance to this “moral cause” and “public opinion” by means other than expressions of sympathy – that is, by promoting and defending its own rights and the law of nations, properly understood. “We stand as an equal among nations, claiming the full benefit of the established international law; and it is our duty to oppose, from the earliest to the latest moment, any innovations upon that code which shall bring into doubt or question our own equal and independent rights” – or the equal and independent rights of other nations. The United States, for instance, defended and advanced the law of nations through its traditional stance of neutrality in foreign wars and by the Monroe Doctrine, both of which stood in opposition to the despotic doctrine of intervention.

As to the particular means that the United States might employ to defend its rights and the law of nations – including the use force, which could not be ruled out – that was a matter of prudent adjustment to the existing circumstances. But Webster disagreed with those who argued that “we should wait till the event comes, without any previous declaration of sentiments upon subjects important to our own rights and interests.” Explicit declarations “are often

the appropriate means of preventing that which, if unprevented, it might be difficult to redress. A great object in holding diplomatic intercourse is frankly to expose the views and objects of nations, and to prevent, by candid explanation, collision and war." Illiberal declarations, such as those made by the Holy Alliance, could legitimately be countered by liberal declarations.

Those were Webster's views over two decades before the Revolutions of 1848. He believed that they applied with full force to current circumstances. Webster, as noted above, had been a private skeptic about the prospects for success for republican France, but he had held out higher hopes for Hungary until the "despotic power from abroad had intervened." Russia's suppression of Hungarian independence spurred him to revive publicly his arguments about defending the law of nations. In a speech in Boston in November 1849, while still a Senator, Webster had protested against the Czar's demands to Turkey to surrender Kossuth and his associates, a demand "made in derision of the established law of nations." Americans had "wept" at the failure of the Hungary's efforts to establish a free government, but the Czar's demands made Webster even "more indignant." The Czar was the supreme lawgiver (and executor) within Russia, "but thanks be to God, he is not the supreme lawgiver or executor of [inter]national law, and every offense against that is an offense against the rights of the civilized world. If he breaks that law in the case of Turkey, or in any other case, the whole civilized world has a right to call him out, and demand his punishment." The whole world, Webster claimed, "will be the tribunal to try him, and he must appear before it, and hold up his hand, and plead, and abide by its judgment."

How were such protests to be effectual? Would not "mere force" exercised by despots like the Czar subdue "the general

sentiment of mankind?" To the contrary, Webster argued, the use of force in violation of the law of nations would "diffuse" (that is, spread) "that sentiment, and destroy the power which he most desires to establish and secure." The blood of Kossuth, like that of Abel, "will mingle with the earth, it will mix with the waters of the ocean, the whole civilized world will snuff it in the air, and it will return with awful retribution on the heads of the violators of national law and universal justice." Webster professed not to be able to see the precise time or means in which such retribution would be exacted, "but depend upon it, that, if such an act take place, then thrones, and principalities, and powers, must look out for the consequences." Those consequences would be the violent overthrow of despotism. Webster argued that the "great republic of the world" had been given the providential mission and destiny to rally world public opinion in such cases, "with a voice not to be disregarded" – as long as Americans "take care of their own conduct ... with hands void of offense."<sup>113</sup>

### *Webster and the Hülsemann Letter*

Hülsemann's written protest about the Mann mission now provided Webster with an opportunity to lay develop these principles of American foreign policy publicly and authoritatively, as well as to promote the cause of Union and to defend his own political flank. Webster's reply to Hülsemann is remembered by history primarily for its nationalistic bombast but it was hardly an unconsidered or reflexive rebuttal. Webster took three months to formulate a response. He asked William Hunter, a

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<sup>113</sup> Speech to the Festival of the Sons of New Hampshire, 7 November 1849, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: National Edition*, 18 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1903), 4: 211-3.

senior clerk in the Department, and Edward Everett, an experienced diplomat and noted orator in his own right, to prepare initial drafts. Webster consulted those drafts when formulating the final text.<sup>114</sup> “If you say that my Hülsemann letter is boastful and rough, I shall own the soft impeachment,” he wrote to his friend, George Ticknor. “My excuse is twofold: 1. I thought it well enough to speak out, and tell the people of Europe who and what we are, and awaken them to a just sense of the unparalleled growth of the country. 2. I wished to write a paper which should touch the national pride, and make a man feel *sheepish* and *silly* who should speak of disunion.” Webster’s ranking is not unimportant. As historian Donald Spencer notes: “Webster’s response to Hülsemann primarily sought to impress upon Europe the reality of the United States’ emerging power, and to voice official support for liberal revolutionaries who were struggling against old world monarchs.”<sup>115</sup>

In his reply to Hülsemann, Webster dismissed allegations that Mann’s mission constituted interference in the domestic affairs of Austria or was disrespectful towards that power. Webster insisted that the Mann mission and the approach of the United States towards the revolutions in central Europe were consistent with the “neutral policy, which has invariably guided the Government of the United States in its foreign relations, as well as with the

established and well settled principles of national intercourse, and the doctrines of public law.” The U.S. government was surely entitled to inquire into the circumstances of Hungary’s claim to independence. Beyond that, Mann had not entered Hungary or tried to communicate with any of its leaders. He had not recognized Hungarian independence precisely because he was unable to find a stable and firm government there. Webster insisted that the President’s Message to the Senate, which published Mann’s instructions, was not a public manifesto, but was purely a matter internal to the government of the United States. Any foreign protest based on that Message therefore constituted Austrian interference in *American* domestic affairs.<sup>116</sup>

Webster extolled the virtues of the American system of government and compared “the power of this Republic, at the present moment ... spread over a region, one of the richest and most fertile on the Globe,” with “the possessions of the House of Hapsburg, [which] are but as a patch on the earth’s surface.” As to Hülsemann’s threats of economic retaliation, Webster responded, “the Government and people of the United States are quite willing to take their chances, and abide by their destiny.” If Mann had been treated as a spy, “the Cabinet of Vienna may be assured, that if it had carried, or attempted to carry, any such lawless purpose into effect, in the case of an authorized Agent of this Government, the Spirit of the People of this Country, would have demanded immediate hostilities, to be waged by the utmost exertion of the Power of the Republic, military and naval.”

Webster argued that the American people and their representatives would

<sup>114</sup> Moore, “Kossuth, Part II,” p. 264. Among other political considerations, Webster was considered to be a serious candidate for the 1852 Whig Party presidential nomination.

<sup>115</sup> Webster to Ticknor, 16 January 1851, George Ticknor Curtis, *The Life of Daniel Webster*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1870), 2: 537. Spencer, in *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 42, goes too far however in saying that “it was, therefore, representative of the Young America movement and of Webster’s commitment to its principles.” Webster consistently distinguished himself from the Young America/New Democrat agenda.

<sup>116</sup> Webster to Hülsemann, 21 December 1851, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, Diplomatic Papers, 2: 49-61.

naturally express their sympathy for such extraordinary events that “appeared to have their origin in those great ideas of responsible and popular governments, on which the American Constitutions themselves are wholly founded.” Nor could they suppress “either the thoughts, or the hopes, which arise in men’s minds, in other countries, from contemplating their successful example of Free Government.” Webster acknowledged that “that the prevalence on the other continent, of sentiments favorable to Republican Liberty, is the result of the re-action of America upon Europe; and the source and centre of this reaction has doubtless been, and now is, in these United States. The position thus belonging to the United States is a fact as inseparable from their History, their Constitutional organization, and their character.” But he reminded Hülsemann that there was another side to the story, represented by “the powers composing the European Alliance,” whose contrary views about politics stem from “the History and Constitutional organization of the Governments of those powers. The Sovereigns, who form that alliance, have ... in their Manifestoes and Declarations, denounced the popular ideas of the age, in terms so comprehensive as of necessity to include the United States, and their forms of Government. It is well known that one of the leading principles, announced by the allied Sovereigns after the restoration of the Bourbons, is, that all popular, or constitutional rights, are holden no otherwise than as granted and indulgences from crowned heads.”

Thus, according to Webster, America would and could not be deterred from expressing its opinions and sympathies. That was its right under the law of nations and a legitimate means of shaping world public opinion. The United States refused to be “gagged” while the successors of the

Holy Alliance promoted their doctrines of despotism. Webster insisted that American expressions did not constitute interference in the affairs of other peoples or hostility towards existing regimes. Russia and the United States, for instance, had always maintained relations “of the most friendly kind,” which “have never been deemed by either party to require any compromise of the peculiar views upon subjects of domestic or foreign policy, or the true origins of Governments.” The United States was prepared to give as well as get in this debate, confident that the tide of progress and enlightened opinion was on its side – “the government of the United States heard these denunciations of its fundamental principles without remonstrance, or the disturbance of its equanimity.” But it did draw the line when the European alliance “felt it their right to interfere with the political movements of foreign states,” and it rejected absolutely the notion that “neutral powers should await the recognition of the new Government by the parent state” before themselves recognizing governments “brought by successful revolutions into the family of Nations.” Despots were on notice, further, that Americans would cheer even louder when the cause of liberty abroad was endangered by outside intervention.

Hungary, Webster argued to Hülsemann, met any objective standards for national independence. “The Hungarian People are three or four times as numerous as the inhabitants of these United States were when the American Revolution broke out. They possess in a distinct language, and in other respects, important elements of a separate nationality, which the Anglo Saxon race in this Country did not possess.” Webster later elaborated on the criteria for national self-determination as they applied to Hungary and prospectively to all nations seeking independence and popular sovereignty:

Thus it is evident that, in point of power, so far as power depends upon population, Hungary possesses as much power as England proper or even the Kingdom of Prussia. Well, then, there is population enough, there are people enough. Who, then, are they? They are distinct from the nations that surround them. They are distinct from the Austrians on the west, and the Turks on the east; and I will say, in the next place, that they are an enlightened nation. They have their own history, they have their traditions, they are attached to their own institutions – institutions which have existed for more than a thousand years.... She has shown through her whole history, for many hundreds of years, an attachment to the principles of civil liberty, and of law and of order, and of obedience to the Constitution which the will of the great majority has established.... It ought to be known that Hungary stands out from it above her [Eastern European and Asian] neighbors in all that respects free institutions, constitutional government, and a hereditary love of liberty.<sup>117</sup>

As political scientist David Hendrickson observes: “External self-determination (freedom from foreign rule) was a necessary condition of internal self-determination and was itself fundamental to the ‘liberty and independence’ these nineteenth-century Americans prized.”<sup>118</sup>

If Webster’s reply to Hülsemann was to have its intended effect of shaping foreign and domestic opinion, it would have to be made public. The Senate, prompted no

doubt by Webster, within a few days passed a resolution asking the President for the relevant correspondence between the United States and Austria. The administration did so, and included the Webster letter. The Senate debated whether to print and thereby publicize these documents, which were certain to have an inflammatory affect on public opinion. Cass told his colleagues that if these documents, and especially Webster’s argument, had been available at the time when he offered his resolution about withdrawing diplomatic recognition from Austria, the resolution very likely would have been adopted.

A number of Senators, however, including Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, objected to a resolution to print ten thousand copies, claiming that it was too expensive to circulate a document that contained nothing new about American foreign policy doctrines. Henry Clay warned that publicizing the Webster-Hülsemann exchange would only exacerbate relations with Austria long after Hungarian independence had been lost. He noted that Americans would be displeased if Vienna had sent an agent with authority to investigate the revolt of an American State. The resolution failed by three votes, 21-18. Upon a motion to reconsider by Douglas, the Senate subsequently agreed to print five thousand copies. Clay was the only member to vote against the final motion to print.<sup>119</sup>

Webster’s letter, as he intended, produced an immediate sensation in America. According to American diplomats, it also had an effect abroad. The American Minister to Great Britain, Abbott Lawrence, told Webster that the principles of the Hülsemann letter would elevate the position of the United States at home and abroad and that it would strengthen those

<sup>117</sup> Speech at the Kossuth Banquet, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, Diplomatic Papers, 2: 101.

<sup>118</sup> Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire*, p. 21.

<sup>119</sup> Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, pp. 166-7, 168-9fn; Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 35.

who were promoting civil rights. Abbott provided Lord Palmerston with a copy of the letter. The American envoy at The Hague and in Vienna reported that the friends of liberty and free government praised the letter and its author. The Washington *Union* predicted that the reply would circulate throughout Europe and inspire new confidence in republican institutions.<sup>120</sup>

The Austrian government was not among those disposed so favorably. Webster's reply to Hülsemann could have triggered decision by Vienna to break diplomatic relations with the United States. The Austrian government, however, decided to take the high road and express its hope for the reestablishment of the long-standing friendly relations between the two nations. (Webster probably calculated that he could offer such insulting language without provoking a real crisis and that even if he had, Austria itself did not pose a strategic or military threat.) Hülsemann was instructed, however, to repeat his insistence that the Mann mission – along with Stiles' earlier offer of mediation, and President Taylor's expression of sympathy for the Hungarians in his Message to the Senate – constituted unwarranted interference in Austrian affairs. The Austrian government noted that Russia had recalled its ambassador from Paris because of expressions of sympathy for the Polish people that had been made in the French Chamber of Deputies. Even so, Hülsemann told Webster, the Austrians would not take official cognizance of his note.

For what would it serve to contest the glory which Mr. Webster invokes for his country, having assured Europe of the preponderant influence

of republican ideas, an influence for which it is doubtful that Europe is grateful to America? To what end would it serve to recall to Mr. Webster in reply to the pompous description which he has made of the growing prosperity of the United States, that this confederation contains the germs of disunion which the central government has up to this time tried in vain to extinguish? The question whether North America owes its prosperity exclusively to its liberal institutions, or to fortunate circumstances independent of man's will, would equally furnish material for endless discussion. But we do consider the mission of Mr. Mann as an interference in our domestic affairs and we maintain our protest.

The Austrian diplomat took the edge off his note by expressing satisfaction with President Fillmore's recently-published Annual Message, which contained an assurance of America's intention to abstain from all interference in the affairs of foreign powers.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 58-59.

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<sup>121</sup> Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, pp. 164-7 (Hülsemann reply).

#### IV. The Kossuth Affair

Despite the close of the Webster-Hülsemann correspondence, the issue of Hungary did not go away. Over the previous year, Congress and American public opinion had become increasingly interested in the fate of the exiles from the Hungarian Revolution, in particular, Louis Kossuth. After Kossuth fled to the Ottoman Empire in late 1849, the Czar and the Austrian Emperor had demanded his extradition. The British government had urged the Porte to resist these demands and to assure the safety of the Hungarian refugees. At one point it appeared that the Sultan would demand Kossuth's conversion to Islam as a condition for his continued protection. A number of Polish exiles had already converted to protect their status.<sup>122</sup>

During his confinement, Kossuth addressed a public appeal to Americans. He asked for armed assistance and claimed that "a shot fired by an English or American vessel from the Adriatic would be like the trumpet at the city of Jericho." State legislatures and private groups in the United States passed resolutions and formulated petitions urging the federal government to seek Kossuth's release. Senator Soulé of Louisiana offered a resolution in Congress requesting the President to intercede on behalf of the Hungarian exiles. George Sanders, Samuel F. Colt and other Americans in Paris urged the U.S. legation in Constantinople to express concern for Kossuth's safety and to defend his right of sanctuary. They proposed that, if necessary, the U.S. Navy should provide shelter to the Hungarian refugees and offer its services in

defense of the Sultan if he was attacked by Russia or Austria. The United States government was not willing to go this far but in January 1850, then-Secretary of State Clayton had instructed the newly-dispatched American Minister to Turkey, George P. Marsh, to seek Kossuth's release, with a promise to transport him to the United States in a public vessel. This came with the reservation that the United States did not intend "to interfere, by entangling ourselves in any serious controversy with Russia or Austria." Marsh provided Turkish officials with extracts from Presidential Statements and Congressional speeches to buttress his plea.<sup>123</sup>

In February 1851, Senator Foote introduced a new resolution calling upon the Executive to intervene on Kossuth's behalf. The resolution was adopted by both Houses and signed by the President on March 3. (The Senate approved the resolution without a roll call; the House vote was 126 to 42.) Secretary of State Webster, who had called for American intervention on Kossuth's behalf while a private citizen and who was now basking in the glow of support for his letter to Hülsemann, instructed Marsh to renew his efforts. Webster also reaffirmed that the United States had "no desire or intention to interfere in any manner with questions of public policy or international or municipal relations of other governments." The Turkish government welcomed the opportunity to resolve its own dilemma and, despite formal Austrian protests, agreed to the arrangement. On September 10, 1851, Kossuth and approximately sixty other refugees boarded the USS *Mississippi*.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Moore, "Kossuth: Part, II," pp. 258-9.

<sup>123</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 43 (Jericho); John H. Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852* (Buffalo: East European Institute, 1973), pp. 36, 38; Field, *America and the Mediterranean World*, p. 229.

<sup>124</sup> John W. Oliver, "Kossuth's Appeal to the Middle West, 1852," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 14 (March 1928): 483; *Congressional Globe*,

Kossuth's Congressional sponsors assumed, or professed to assume, that he and his followers would take up permanent residence in the United States and live out their lives in "retirement," along with thousands of other refugees from the failed European revolutions. Webster wrote to Marsh, confirming that this was the expectation of the U.S. government. America would play its traditional role in offering asylum – a role which was consistent with law of nations – as a humanitarian measure; and (although Webster did not say so) as a means of offering indirect encouragement to future revolutionaries, who would feel able to run greater personal risks knowing that they had a permanent refuge if their efforts at regime change failed. Over the summer, however, Hülsemann provided Webster with documentary evidence that Kossuth retained his revolutionary ambitions. The Austrian diplomat had inserted items in American newspapers that reported Kossuth's inflammatory conduct while aboard the *Mississippi*. (Kossuth, for example, was said to have declared that he did not seek asylum in the United States but would be "an avenger ... against the oppressors of a holy cause.") Webster and Fillmore again offered Hülsemann assurances that the United States would treat Kossuth as a private individual and would not encourage his projects against foreign governments. The United States, for instance, would not offer Kossuth a cannon salute when he arrived in the United States.<sup>125</sup>

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31:2, pp. 580, 777; Field, *America and the Mediterranean World*, pp. 230-1; May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 72-74.

<sup>125</sup> Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 47; May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, p. 74 (avenger); Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, pp. 172-7.

Kossuth, meanwhile, diverted the *Mississippi* to stops in the Mediterranean and in France, where he proclaimed the imminence of another European revolution. His presence provoked widespread demonstrations and occasional outbreaks of violence. This caused considerable difficulties for the ship's captain, John Long, who had been ordered to preserve strict American neutrality during the voyage. Kossuth eventually left the American frigate at Gibraltar and made his way to England, where he received a generous welcome from liberals such as Richard Cobden, and from sympathetic Americans, including Robert J. Walker, former Secretary of the Treasury. Walker publicly criticized Russian intervention in Hungary and anticipated an impending conflict between liberty and despotism in which England would be supported by "millions" of Americans who would flock to Europe to fight for the cause of liberty. "England and America combined, need not fear the despotisms of the world in arms." The radical press in England called for an "Anglo-American Republic" that would lead the democratic movement, with an American force "raising the standard of universal democracy" in Europe. Given Walker's status as a former U.S. government official and prominent Democrat, Kossuth may well have taken his views as representative of American opinion, or at least that of the Democratic Party. This impression was reinforced when Kossuth received a wildly enthusiastic reception when he reached New York City in December 1851 aboard a private vessel, the *Humboldt*. His arrival included a cannon salute by the order of the commandant of forts, which Kossuth interpreted as recognition of his "official character" by the U.S. government.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, pp. 53, 66-7 (combined); May, *Contemporary*

During his seven-month stay in the United States, Kossuth sought to raise private funds in support of renewed revolutionary activity, but he also advocated more direct and official American support of Hungarian independence – what became known as a policy of “intervention for non-intervention.” In a series of speeches – one estimate is that he delivered over five hundred talks – Kossuth proposed an explicit replacement for the doctrine of neutrality and non-interference in European affairs set out in Washington’s Farewell Address, and for the geographic division between the Old and New Worlds established by the Monroe Doctrine. He argued that Russian expansionism into central Europe represented the leading edge of a threat to the prospects for national independence and liberty around the world. The Czar realized that his despotic rule was insecure so long as free governments existed anywhere; after conquering the continent, Russia would turn against the United States, playing upon its sectional differences.

To address this threat, Kossuth insisted that Americans must go beyond vague expressions of sympathy and support for the law of nations. The Monroe Doctrine should be extended to the gates of St. Petersburg; and the United States should commit itself to a foreign policy that actively promoted democracy, liberty, and resistance to Russian tyranny. Tangible aid, not appeals to world public opinion, would be required to win Hungarian freedom and the liberty of other nations. Specifically, the U.S. government should be prepared to recognize Hungarian independence and warn Russia that it considered intervention in Hungarian affairs to be a violation of the law of nations, a violation to which America

could not be indifferent. To give credibility to that policy, the United States should form an alliance with England and send an American fleet to the eastern Mediterranean to protect key trade routes and to bolster Turkey, Russia’s regional enemy, whose army was capable of defeating Russia if supported by the U.S. Navy. (A few years later, Kossuth would advocate American participation in the Crimean War coalition against Russia.) The U.S. government should offer assistance to the Hungarian cause in the form of a gift or a loan. The United States should also reinterpret or amend its neutrality laws to allow private citizens and businesses the maximum leeway to aid the Hungarian cause.

Kossuth, as a rule, insisted that he did not intend to embroil the United States in a European war. He argued that a forward American policy of this sort would deter the Russians, in part (one might infer) by posing the prospect of an English-Turkish alliance aided by American naval and logistical support. He argued that just as the Monroe Doctrine had prevented war in the New World, the extension of that doctrine to Europe on the principle of “intervention for non-intervention,” would have a similar effect on the continent. But occasionally Kossuth acknowledged that “...should Russia not respect the declaration of your country, then you are obliged – literally obliged – to go to war . . . But you are powerful enough to defy any power on earth ... give to humanity the glorious example of a great people going to war, not for egotistical interest, but for justice, for the law of nations ... It will be the last war, because it will make nations contented – contented, because free.” Kossuth’s supporters warned him that such overtly warlike rhetoric would defeat his cause, and he more typically argued that “a war on this account by your country is utterly impossible.... such a declaration of just principles would

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*American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, p. 79; Riepma, “Young America,” pp. 110-11 (raising); Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, p. 182.

ensure to the nations of Europe ‘fair play’ in their struggle for freedom and independence, because the declaration ... will be respected.”<sup>127</sup>

During his subsequent travels around the United States, Kossuth tailored his message to regional sensibilities. In the West, where there were large numbers of new European immigrants, he spoke about national liberation and warned of the Russian threat. In New England, he emphasized the need for Americans to extend the blessings of liberty. In the South, he warned that Russia might close off the European cotton market once it came to dominate the continent. He also noted that Hungary and the South both favored states rights and were opposed to centralization and foreign interference. At the end of his stay in America, he called for a union of the Hungarian, Italian and German exile communities in the United States. A free Germany would provide a bulwark against European despotism and a rallying point for republicans elsewhere (the Germans, as the largest refugee community, would also provide votes and influence to the proper, forward-looking elements in American politics). Kossuth studiously maintained a position of neutrality concerning slavery in the United States, however. As he told an anti-slavery group in New York: “that as I have avowed it in Europe and everywhere, that I claim for my sovereign nation the independent right to dispose of its own domestic affairs, and that I, therefore, feel it

to be my duty to respect this principle in every nation, as I wish to see it respected in my own.” Kossuth explained this as a matter of consistency – for instance, when in England, he had not aligned himself with the Chartist movement and avoided an invitation to attend a working men’s reception. He also evaded questions about his stance on the Irish question.<sup>128</sup>

Over the ensuing months, various important and would-be important figures put forward ideas for actualizing Kossuth’s ideas about American intervention on behalf of non-intervention. A Tammany Hall delegation of Democrats, led by Daniel Sickles, told Kossuth that they were confident that the United States would take part in the future war for freedom. One hundred thousand men would join that war and millions more would contribute money and energy, overriding the hesitancy of the moneyed interest. Horace Greeley, from the progressive Whig perspective, argued:

Yes, KOSSUTH has visited our shores—even as I write, his presence hallows and ennobles this chief city of the western world. He is here, though unconsciously, to rebuke the degeneracy and factiousness of our partisan squabbles, the hollowness of our boasted love of liberty, if we turn a deaf ear to the cry of the oppressed in either hemisphere, the sordidness of our common life and the meanness of its aims. He is here to arouse us to a consciousness of the majesty of our national position and the responsibilities it involves; to show us that we cannot safely sleep while despots are forging chains for the yet unfettered nations, as well as

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<sup>127</sup> May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 90-1; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 85; Kossuth, Speech to the Bar of New York, in P.C. Headley, ed., *The Life of Louis Kossuth* (Auburn, NY: Derby and Miller, 1852), p. 441; Kossuth, Address at the Congressional Banquet in Washington, 7 January 1852, in Mayo W. Hazeltine and others, eds., *Masterpieces of Eloquence*, 25 vols. (New York: Collier & Son, 1905), 14: 5806.

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<sup>128</sup> Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, pp. 140, 144, 147-8 (avowed); Riepma, “Young America,” pp. 238-9.

to bind more securely their present victims; that, even if we have no regard for others' rights, we must assume an attitude of resistance to the expanding dominion of the Autocrat if only to secure our own. That "God hath made of one blood all the nations that dwell on the face of the earth,"—that we should "do to others as we would have them do to us,"—that we have no right to repel solicitude as to the fate of tyranny's victims, by the callous question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"—that the free nations of earth cannot afford, even were they base enough to wish, to leave each other to be assailed in succession by the banded might of despotism, and so overwhelmed and crushed—these are solemn truths which Governor Kossuth is among us to proclaim and enforce with the earnestness of a martyr's conviction and an exiled patriot's zeal.<sup>129</sup>

Massachusetts Governor James Boutwell declared that the United States should assert the right "to interfere in favor of any republican or constitutional regime, whenever and wherever it might be threatened by a European monarch." The Massachusetts state legislature concurred, declaring that it was the "duty of duly constitutionally governed nations to cultivate intimate relations so that if an emergency should arise they might easily combine against despots." The governor of Pennsylvania declared himself in favor of military intervention against Russia and a prominent group of citizens in the capital endorsed the "Harrisonburg Resolutions," which embraced Kossuth's program. The Pennsylvania legislature endorsed the

principle of intervention for non-intervention. At a public meeting in Pittsburgh, former Congressman Moses Hampton urged the U.S. government, if Russian interference in Hungarian affairs persisted, to "remonstrate with Emperor Nicholas, use all diplomatic means. But if they fail, write your commands at the point of the sword, and seal them with the cannon's mouth."

The Ohio State legislature resolved that "an attack in any form upon them [the Hungarians] is a most dangerous weakening of our own influence and power; and that all such combinations of kings against people should be regarded by us now as they were in 1776, and so far as circumstances will admit the parallel, should and will be so treated." The Ohio Senate offered the Hungarians a form of lend-lease, to loan "all the public arms and ammunitions of war belonging to the state, which remains undistributed, to be returned in good order upon the achievement of Hungarian Liberty." The Democratic Party of Ohio's state convention warned that "rather than witness the utter extinction of republicanism as a fact, and a principle in Europe," the United States should be prepared to "encounter the shock of arms in the field of battle."<sup>130</sup>

George Sanders, an ardent New Democrat, now back in the United States as editor of the *Democratic Review*, argued that "we must transfer the field of war to the soil of Europe, and change the issue from a

<sup>129</sup> Greeley, introduction to Headley, *The Life of Louis Kossuth*, p. x.

<sup>130</sup> The secondary sources cited in these two paragraphs do not always distinguish clearly between direct quotes and paraphrases of these documents. Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 109 (Boutwell), 123; May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, pp. 94, 113 (Massachusetts legislature); Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, pp. 97, 119 (weakening; undistributed); Oliver, "Louis Kossuth's Appeal to the Midwest – 1852," p. 486 (remonstrate); Riepma, "Young America," p. 154 (extinction).

contest, whether the monarchs will be heard us here, to a contest whether they and their impious practices shall for an hour longer be tolerated there.” Sanders insisted that the neutrality laws that prohibited the exportation of weapons were unconstitutional. He told Kossuth that he and his friends were prepared to crew and arm a steamer and put it at the Hungarians’ disposal, with more ships to follow. The *Detroit Free Press*, from the home state of Lewis Cass, argued that “an American force in the battlefield of Europe, raising the standard of universal democracy, would call forth every people of the continent.” The display of the American flag alone “would strike terror and despair to the hearts of old Despotism, conscious of its doom. Its very coming would mean victory.” An officer in the Army Corps of Engineers, speaking at a Jackson Day banquet hosted by the Democrats, argued that leading military men had studied the problem and concluded that “in any contest with the United States, Russia could not float an inch board [sic] anywhere below the low water mark, except by sufferance.” If the United States decided to intervene, “we could knock at the gates of St. Petersburg” before the Czar could recall his forces from Hungary.<sup>131</sup>

### *The Opposition to Kossuth Emerges*

While Kossuth was beginning his tour of the United States, Whigs and Democrats were scrambling to position themselves for the election of 1852. For a time it appeared that “Kossuth mania” might prove to be a winning issue for whichever Presidential candidate could best associate with the Hungarian cause. However,

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<sup>131</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 45 (battlefield), 114 (Jackson Association), 117-8 (transfer); Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 91.

Kossuth’s unwillingness to remain in quiet exile, and his insistence on direct U.S. support, soon generated a public backlash in a nation increasingly divided about its role in the world and the nature of its regime at home.

Many – not all – abolitionists and strong anti-slavery activists turned against Kossuth because of his unwillingness to condemn slavery along with Russian and Austrian despotism. William Lloyd Garrison wrote a one hundred page “Letter to Louis Kossuth concerning Freedom and Slavery in the U.S.,” which castigated Kossuth as a hypocrite. Many – not all – southerners opposed Kossuth because his rhetoric of human rights and national liberation held disquieting implications for slaveholders, especially when linked to calls for intervention by the national (federal) government on behalf of liberty. Southerners like Calhoun criticized such calls for intervention as a dangerous innovation in traditional American foreign policy, one that had been surreptitiously introduced by the radical northern anti-slavery movement. The *New Orleans Bulletin* noted that Kossuth’s supporters included noted anti-slavery politicians like Seward, Hale, and Giddings. “If we sanction interference we will be the first who will be interfered with; if we become a consenting party to the project of overthrowing European forms of government our own institutions will be the first to be crushed beneath the juggernaut wheels of unlicensed, unconfined radicalism and fierce, relentless and bigoted fanaticism.”<sup>132</sup>

Francis Bowen, the editor of the *North American Review*, the bastion of intellectually conservative Whiggery, argued that the so-called Hungarian Revolution was not a movement in favor of national

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<sup>132</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 103, 106 (juggernaut).

independence and republicanism but actually was a “war of races,” in which the “arrogant, cruel, and tyrannical” Magyars sought their own state in order to dominate ethnic minorities, particularly the Slavs, which had enjoyed the protection of the Austrian Empire. Orestes Bronson and the Catholic hierarchy in the United States warned that Kossuth represented radicalism and aggressive Protestantism. Irish immigrants opposed Kossuth’s appeal for an Anglo-American alliance. Interventionism, one New York writer claimed, was the “great question” of the day, because it had proved remarkably adaptable to annexationist schemes: “The annexation of Texas and the Lopez expedition in Cuba – both peculiarly southern measures – were only parts of the same platform of universal, everlasting intervention which is now becoming the reigning idea of Northern and Western State, as expounded by Webster, Kossuth, Cass, Kinkel, and all the rest.... We are in the midst ... of a radical, total, unextinguishable revolution ... which will be productive of the most momentous contingencies that this country has ever seen.”<sup>133</sup>

The Whig administration of Millard Fillmore was placed in a difficult position by these countervailing forces of public opinion. Webster, who had recently fanned the flames of American nationalism with his reply to Hülsemann, now leaned hard in the other direction. He was especially concerned that “Kossuth mania” might spill over into greater political support for aggressive expansionism and filibustering in the Western hemisphere, which would in turn generate a political backlash that would destroy the Union. “You cannot fail to see

how very probable it is that a more warlike administration than that which now exists is likely to come into power fifteen months hence,” Webster wrote to his Abbot Lawrence. “There is not only existing among us a spirit favorable to further territorial acquisition, but a zeal also for intervention in the affairs of other states, of a fearful character and already of considerable extent. This spirit has gained great strength and vivacity from Kossuth’s visit and speeches. At one time the whole—or nearly the whole—city of New York seemed quite crazy.” Webster hoped that sober minds from North and South would abate the Kossuth fever, but he feared that a large section of the Democratic party intended to take advantage of his presence “to bring the country, if they can, to the doctrine and the practice of intervention.” “I am at a great of a loss what to do, and what to say. I hope I may be able to steer clear of trouble, on both sides.”<sup>134</sup>

The President’s Annual Message in December 1851, delivered just before Kossuth’s arrival in New York, had already reflected these countervailing pressures. Fillmore cited Washington’s maxim of friendly relations with all, but entangling alliances with none, and reiterated the line of argument from the previous Message that had drawn praise from Hülsemann. “Our true mission is not to propagate our opinions or impose upon other countries our form of government by artifice or force, but to teach by example and show by our success, moderation, and justice the blessings of self-government and the advantages of free institutions. Let every people choose for

<sup>133</sup> Francis Bowen, *North American Review* 70 (January 1850): 121; 72 (1851): 238-40; Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 43; Riepma, “Young America,” p. 160 (unextinguishable).

<sup>134</sup> Webster to Abbot Lawrence, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: National Edition*, 29 December 1851; 4: 633-5; Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 46; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 98; Webster to Paige, 25 December 1851, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: National Edition*, 18: 499.

itself and make and alter its political institutions to suit its own condition and convenience.” However, Fillmore was not willing simply to ignore Americans’ interest in favorable conditions for liberal regime change: “while we avow and maintain this neutral policy ourselves, we are anxious to see the same forbearance on the part of other nations whose forms of government are different from our own. The deep interest which we feel in the spread of liberal principles and the establishment of free governments and the sympathy with which we witness every struggle against oppression forbid that we should be indifferent to a case in which the strong arm of a foreign power is invoked to stifle public sentiment and repress the spirit of freedom in any country.” Fillmore left it to Congress to determine the manner in which “Governor Kossuth and his companions” should be received and treated.<sup>135</sup>

In his correspondence with Lawrence, Webster took credit for the Message, which “will have shown you the ground on which I stand, with the entire *concurrence* and *support* of the President, and the other heads of department. You perceive how difficult it is to prevent these lawless invasions of other countries, but we shall do all we can.” Webster was especially fearful that if the “miserable government” of Mexico collapsed, it would invite “aggression and ... cupidity in all quarters.” He favored a policy, if it could be sustained, “to uphold Mexico and save her government from disunion, for the reason that it is better for us that Mexico should be able to maintain an independent government, than that she should break to pieces and fall into

other hands, even though those hands were our own.”<sup>136</sup>

### *To Welcome or not to Welcome Kossuth: The Senate Debates*

With these domestic and international variables in mind, Webster decided that he could not go too far in the direction of caution and cede the high moral ground on the matter of Kossuth. He persuaded Senator Foote to introduce a resolution of welcome to Kossuth, offering the Senate’s “profound respect” for the Hungarian cause. Foote made no secret of the fact that he had been put up to it by the Secretary of State.<sup>137</sup> Foote chastised those Whigs who were reluctant to offer such a courtesy. “I discover in certain quarters that hints have already been given, that it would be a dangerous thing for Kossuth to be allowed to come to this country and deliver such bold and soul-stirring harangues in favor of the great principles of which he is the champion, from the fear that his eloquence might have the effect of unduly liberalizing the minds of the people of America, and might impart a still more republican cast to the minds of thinking millions in this country.”

...there is a great struggle going on at this moment in all parts of the civilized world between the principles of freedom and the principles of slavery. The tyrants of the earth have combined for the overthrow of liberty. In some instances open attempts are made to break down

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<sup>135</sup> Fillmore, Annual Message to Congress, 2 December 1851, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29492>

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<sup>136</sup> Webster to Abbot Lawrence, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: National Edition*, 29 December 1851; 4: 633-5.

<sup>137</sup> Riepma, “Young America,” p. 128. Foote also introduced a resolution calling for the relief of the Irish who had been exiled after their abortive revolution of 1848

political and religious freedom. In others, the means employed by the enemies of freedom are more disguised and insidious, but not all less dangerous. At such a moment does it behove [sic] the American people to join the side of despotism, or to stand by the cause of freedom? We must do one or the other. We cannot avoid the solemn alternative presented. Those who are not for us are against us. Those who are not for freedom are for slavery.<sup>138</sup>

Foote's observation – "those who are not for freedom are for slavery" – triggered the predictable rejoinder of the staunch anti-slavery Senator from New Hampshire, John P. Hale: "Exactly." Hale offered an amendment to the Foote's resolution that expressed sympathy not only for Kossuth but for the "victims of oppression everywhere," such as the Irish and, implicitly, American slaves, an implication which the southern members of both parties immediately resented.<sup>139</sup>

Lewis Cass expressed dismay that once again, such divisions were squandering the weight of America's moral authority in the world. "I had hoped that this resolution would have met with no opposition, for we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that it will lose a great part of its value, both at home and abroad, unless it meets with the unanimous consent of the two Houses of Congress." Cass argued that Kossuth represented a cause even greater than that of national (Hungarian) independence, as important as that was – "he comes here as the representative of a sacred cause – of a great and glorious cause, involving the human rights in every nation of the globe." Cass opposed Hale's formulation of the problem, meant clearly "to bring up the old question of slavery.... I am, therefore,

opposed to this abstract declaration as to the rights of man, though I believe in my soul I am just as good a friend to them as the gentlemen from New Hampshire.... When a proposition comes up of any practical description, in which the rights of man are concerned, I will go as far as any gentleman."<sup>140</sup>

Senate opposition to Foote's resolution of welcome grew as reports of Kossuth's more strident rhetoric in New York reached Washington. Senator Underwood, a consistent opponent of an activist foreign policy, agreed with Cass's premise about the need to avoid abstract and unconditional statements about human rights, but he drew the opposite conclusion. "But every Senator must perceive that if we commence the system of complimenting foreigners for distinguished services in their own country in behalf of human liberty, there is no end; there is no limit to the exercise of this power, from this time forever." They would be legitimizing "that intervention in the affairs of other nations which has been hostile to the genius of our government and to the practice of every administration from Washington down to this day." Underwood and Senator Clemens of Alabama also challenged Kossuth's credentials as a republican. They noted that he had asserted while in England that a monarchy as well as a republic could serve the cause of freedom; and they cited Hungarian revolutionaries who had opposed the formation of a republican government in 1848-9. Clemens characterized Kossuth as a dictator and the leader of a war to establish the supremacy of the Magyar race. Senator Dawson warned that if a resolution of welcome passed, Kossuth would proceed to Washington on the mistaken assumption that the U.S. government endorsed his policy agenda and the policy of intervention for non-intervention. "Is it not, then, due to

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<sup>138</sup> *Congressional Globe*, pp. 32:1, pp. 22-3.

<sup>139</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, p. 23.

<sup>140</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, pp. 23-5.

candor -- do not honor and magnanimity require us to announce to Kossuth that this Government has no such design?" Dawson asked. If a resolution of any sort was passed, he favored an amendment that would "announce to him that he is mistaken; that he is not to come to the seat of Government of this great nation under the expectation that this Government gives any pledge, or any assurance, that they will sustain him at any time."<sup>141</sup>

### *Seward and the Progressive Whig Case for Kossuth*

To prevent defeat or the narrow passage of the Foote Resolution, progressive Whig William Seward offered a substitute that merely expressed a "cordial welcome" to Kossuth and his associates. Seward believed that the Secretary of State had persuaded Foote, a supporter of Webster's presidential aspirations, to introduce his original resolution in order to take political advantage of Kossuth's visit – and to preempt Seward's role as the leading exponent of Kossuth's cause and the progressive Whig case for promoting liberty abroad.<sup>142</sup> Over the next few months, Seward attempted to reclaim that role and to set out his understanding of a proper forward-policy for the United States. In coming years, Seward would appeal to a "higher law" than the Constitution to condemn slavery; here he appealed to a "higher and greater tribunal" than the U.S. Congress.

It is a tribunal whose existence and jurisdiction and authority we have

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<sup>141</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, pp. 21-2, 25-6, 52, 71-2; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 76.

<sup>142</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 74-5; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 81fn.

acknowledged, and to whose judgment-seat we have already called the Turk, the Austrian, and the Russian, to account for their action in regard to Hungary and to Kossuth. It is the tribunal of the public opinion of the world—the public opinion of mankind. Sir, that tribunal is unerring in its judgments. It is constituted of the great, the wise, and the good of all nations—not only of the great, and wise, and good who are now living, but of the great, the wise, and the good of all ages. Before that tribunal, states, great and small, are equal. Ay, before that tribunal the proudest empire is equaled by its humblest citizen or subject. Yes, the Indian and the serf are equal there to the American Republic and to the Russian Empire.<sup>143</sup>

When America was called before the tribunal of the public opinion of the world to justify its response to Kossuth, it would be more than entitled, it would be required, to explain that it had done everything that was not positively forbidden by the law of nations to promote human rights and liberalized regime change. "I believe that no man will deny the principle, that a nation may do for the cause of liberty in other nations whatever the laws of nations do not forbid. I plant myself upon that principle. What the laws of nations do not forbid, any nation may do for the cause of liberty in any other nation, in any other country.

Now, the laws of nations do not forbid hospitality. The laws of nations do not forbid us to sym-

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<sup>143</sup> Seward text taken from *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, pp. 88-9. See also pp. 41-2, 66-7, 72-3; and 32: 1, Appendix, pp. 243-7.

pathize with the exile—to sympathize with the overthrown champion of freedom. The laws of nature demand that hospitality, and from the very inmost sources of our nature springs up that sympathy. . . . Sir, the laws of nature require—the laws of nations command hospitality to those who fly from oppression and despair. And this is all that we have done, and all that we propose to do....

I shall be told, that we may not intervene in this, which is a domestic affair of a foreign government. It is true that we may not intervene in the affair of any government for unjust purposes, nor can we intervene by force for even just purposes. But this is the only restraint imposed on us by the law of nations. That law, while it declares that every government has the absolute right to deal with its own citizens, according to its own laws, independently of any other, affords a large verge and scope for the exercise of offices of courtesy, kindness, benevolence, and charity. It is Montesquieu who says that ‘the law of nations is founded upon the principle, that every nation is bound in time of peace to do to every other nation all the good it possibly can, and in time of war, the least evil it possibly can consistently with its own real interests.’

The failure to offer Kossuth the common courtesy of a “warm, generous, a cordial welcome” would not only demoralize the American public and “discourage the hopes and expectations of the friends of freedom throughout the world,” it would “encourage the advocates of oppression throughout Europe in their efforts to prevent the transition of the

nations of that continent from under the system of force to the voluntary system of government which we have established and commended to their adoption.” Seward pointed out that England had already shown its willingness to honor Kossuth and offer him exile. “Are you prepared to give the world evidence that *you* cannot receive the representative of liberty and republicanism, whom England can honor, shelter and protect?” America would effectively cede its pride of place as a defender of human liberty to England, the nation that most New Democrats professed to hate most of all (although Seward did not make that point explicitly).

Seward was willing to grant that prudential considerations must enter into calculations about precisely how far the United States should push the boundaries of activities permitted under the law of nations. He did not believe, for instance, that “intervention in the affairs of Europe,” particularly military intervention, was required. “Mr. President, I am a lover of peace. I shall never freely give my consent to any measure which I shall think will tend to involve this nation in the calamities of foreign war. I believe that our mission is a mission of republicanism. But I believe that we shall best execute it by maintaining peace at home and with all mankind; and if I saw in this measure a step in advance toward the bloody field of contention in the affairs of Europe, I, too, would hesitate long before adopting it. But I see no advance toward any such danger in doing a simple act of national justice and magnanimity.”

Seward was not prepared to accept the slippery-slope argument made by critics of an activist foreign policy – that because the nation could not easily distinguish among legitimate and illegitimate means to support for regime change abroad, it must categorically and preemptively reject all such means.

Again, Mr. President, it will be said that if we adopt this resolution, it will, however harmless it be in itself, furnish a precedent for mischievous intervention, either by ourselves in the affairs of other states, or by other states in our affairs hereafter. To admit this argument is to admit distrust of ourselves. We certainly do not distrust our own sense of justice. We do not distrust our own wisdom. So long as we remain here, then, we shall be able to guard against any such abuse of this precedent. Let us also be generous instead of egotistical, and let us believe that neither wisdom nor justice will die with those who occupy these places now, but that our successors will be as just and as wise as we are. So far as the objection anticipates an abuse of this precedent by foreign states, I have only to say, that if a foreign state shall ask of us just what we now propose, and no more, we shall have no difficulty and no ground of complaint.

Seward also addressed the critics of Kossuth, who challenged his *bona fides* as a champion of liberalism and republicanism. Unlike many of the New Democrats, Seward was willing to accept constitutional monarchy, as well as wholly popular government, as a legitimate regime for those seeking to overthrow the despotisms of Europe. He was willing to place such monarchies on the side of liberty. Seward also embraced civic nationalism, rather than ethnic nationalism, as the *logos* for liberalized regime change.

Kossuth's first public action in early youth, was an effort, through the Hungarian Diet, to extend equal

privileges of representation, of suffrage, and of taxation, to all the people of Hungary, without distinction of rank, or caste, or race. For his fidelity to the great cause of human equality and freedom, he was imprisoned three long years in a dungeon in the castle of Buda by the hand of the Austrian despot. When he came out from that captivity, he commenced that career of agitation for the restoration of the constitution of his country, which ended with success in the year 1848. When he had wrung that charter from the Emperor of Austria, his constitutional king, the first exercise of Hungarian authority by the legislature which he directed, was an act which abolished all the feudal tenures, that brought land within the reach of all, and put the Croat, the Wallachian, the Elyrian, the Jew, and the Magyar, upon the same platform of equality before the law, equality before the government, equality in representation, equality in suffrage, and equality in enduring the burdens of government. It was for this that he was hunted from his native land and came an exile to your shores. Who pursued him there with reproaches of falsehood to freedom? Not the Jew, the Croat, or the Slav, but the tyrant of Austria, who has reduced all the people of Hungary, of whatever rank or race or caste, to the level of slaves.

According to Seward, despotisms naturally combined whenever efforts were made to overthrow the government of one of their kind. Those who advocated the cause of constitutional liberty, whether of a monarchical or republican form, must also

recognize their common cause. “Now whatever people leads the way at any time in any crisis in this contest for civil liberty, becomes the representative of the nations of the earth. We once occupied that proud and interesting position, and we engaged the sympathies of civilized men throughout the world. No one can deny, that recently Hungary assumed that same position; and the records of our own legislature show that we, in common with the friends of civil liberty in Europe, held Hungary to be the representative of the nations of the earth in this great cause. We had a messenger [Mann] on the verge of the battlefield ready to acknowledge her independence.” By the same token, “whenever a nation thus assumes to open this controversy for liberty, in behalf of the nations of the earth, some one man more than another becomes identified with the struggle by his virtues, by his valor, by his wisdom, or by his sufferings, until he eclipses others who may be associated with him, and comes to be regarded by the country itself, in whose behalf he labors and struggles, and by mankind, as the representative of that nation, and of that cause.” Such was the case of William Tell and Switzerland, William Wallace and Scotland, and of course Washington and America. Although Seward made a point of praising the “towering fame” of Hungary and Kossuth, he implied that even if any particular country or any particular leader fell short of perfection in its pursuit of liberty, the benefit to that cause from such “leading” nations and men outweighed those failings and ought not be overly dwelled upon if they were on the right side of the great struggle.

Seward had no doubt that this struggle was soon coming to a great climax, one of fundamental importance to the United States. “We cannot extinguish sympathy for freedom elsewhere, without extinguishing the spirit of freedom which is the life of our

own republic.” For those who wanted a more material and practical justification for supporting the Hungarian and similar causes, Seward added:

Again, sir, you may reject Kossuth; you may, if you please, propitiate despotic favor by trampling the exiles of all Europe under your feet. But what will you have gained? This republic is, and forever must be, a living offence to Russia and to Austria, and to despotic powers everywhere. You will never, by whatever humiliations, gain one friend or secure one ally in Europe or America that wears a crown. It is clear that the days of despotism are numbered. We do not know whether its end is to come this year, or next year, or the year after; in this quarter of a century, or in this half of a century. But there is to come, sooner or later, a struggle between the representative and the arbitrary systems of government. Europe is the field on which that struggle must take place. While the representative principle is gaining strength among the people, the power of Russia is seen to culminate. That struggle will be between Russia, whose power extends across the whole northern part of the Eastern Hemisphere, and all the people of Southern and Western Europe. If the Russian autocrat prevail in that contest, we shall be left without friends or allies in the Eastern World. Is it wise to deny ourselves the benefits of alliances with states kindred in political interests and constitutions? Far otherwise; true wisdom dictates that we lend to European nations, struggling for civil liberty, all possible moral aid to sustain them

until they can mature and perfect their strength for that great conflict, through which they are doomed to pass. The nations that we thus lawfully aid to raise up, will constitute a lasting and impregnable bulwark for ourselves.

### *Douglas and the New Democrat Case for Kossuth*

Senator Douglas, for his part, sought to push forward the distinctive New Democrat argument, which differed in important respects from that of Seward and the progressive Whigs. “We should not close our eyes to the fact, that a great movement is in progress, which threatens the existence of every absolute government in Europe. It will be a struggle between liberal and absolute principles – between Republicanism and Despotism. Are we to remain cold and indifferent spectators when the time of action will arrive, and the exciting scene shall be presented to our view? Will it not become our duty to do whatever the interests, honor and glory of the country may require, in pursuance of the law of nations, to give encouragement to that great nation?”

Douglas cited several common instruments of that policy of encouraging liberalization and regime change: “to recognize every republican government as soon as it was established; to open regular diplomatic intercourse and negotiate treaties of commerce; and to extend the hand of friendship and every possible courtesy.” Kossuth’s policy axiom – non-intervention in the affairs of others – was an axiom of the law of nations, one that every nation ought

to respect. Douglas supported an explicit endorsement of that axiom by the Senate, one that would authorize the interposition of any state that had sufficient interest in the matter at hand to vindicate the law of nations. In the case of Russian intervention, Douglas judged that either the United States or Britain would have been justified to intervene on behalf of Hungary, if either had chosen to do so.

That was water under the bridge, however. Douglas raised the question of how the United States ought to respond if another alliance of despots formed to destroy the remaining vestiges of liberty in Europe. He would not commit the United States to a blanket policy of non-intervention, “as most Senators have.” To say that the United States would not intervene gave the green light to despotic intervention – precisely as the American hands-off policy had encouraged Spain to execute Lopez and American citizens caught in the recently failed filibustering attempt against Cuba. On the other hand, Douglas would not commit the United States in advance to intervene. That might be looked upon as bluster, an empty threat. The United States instead should retain control over its own actions by deciding each case as it arose.

Douglas’ line of argument suggested an intriguing possibility. If England and America both had been entitled as a matter of duty and interest to intervene on behalf of Hungary (even if neither had), would not it make sense, as Kossuth and some Progressive Whigs had argued, to join with England in future joint action on behalf of the cause of freedom? Douglas, however, would not back down from his long-standing view that Britain was the enemy of liberty as well as of the manifest destiny of the United States. Here was a central point of difference with the progressive Whigs.

Sir, something has been said about an alliance with England, to restrain the march of Russia over the European Continent. I am free to say that I desire no alliance with England, or with other crowned head. I am not willing to acknowledge that America needs England to maintain the principles of our Government. Nor am I willing to go to the rescue of England to save her from the power of the Autocrat, until she assimilates her institutions to ours. Hers is a half-way house between despotism and republicanism. She is responsible, as much as any power in Europe, for the failure of the revolutionary movements which have occurred within the last four years. English diplomacy, English intrigue and English perfidy put down the revolution in Sicily and in Italy, and was the greatest barrier to its success even in Hungary. So long as England shall by her diplomacy, attempt to defeat the liberal movements in Europe, I am utterly averse to an alliance with her to sustain her monarch, her nobles, and her privileged classes.

For Douglas, Britain would have to undertake fundamental reforms, in fact alter its regime, before any Anglo-American cooperation was conceivable. The immediate litmus test for London was to “do justice to Ireland, and the Irish patriots in exile, and to the masses of her own people, by relieving them from the oppressive taxation imposed to sustain the privileged classes, and by adopting republican institutions.... Republicanism has nothing to hope, therefore, from England so long as she maintains her existing government and preserves her present policy.”

I wish no alliance with monarchs. No republican movement will ever succeed so long as the people put their trust in princes. The fatal error committed in Italy, in Germany, in France, wherever the experiment was tried, consisted in placing a prince at the head of the popular movement. The princes all sympathized with the dynasties from which they were descended, and seized the first opportunity to produce a reaction, and to betray people into the hands of their oppressors. There is reason to believe that much of this was accomplished through British diplomacy and intrigue. What [is] more natural? The power of the British Government is in the hands of the princes and the nobility. Their sympathies are all with the privileged classes of other countries, in every movement which does not affect the immediate interests of their own kingdom.

“The peculiar position of our country requires that we should have an *American policy* in our foreign relations, based upon the principles of our own Government, and adapted to the spirit of the age,” Douglas argued. He rejected the argument that a resolution of welcome for Kossuth should be opposed on the grounds that he asked more of the United States than it was prepared to give. Douglas said that he would not provide any satisfaction or encouragement to despots by muting the nation’s support for revolutionaries like Kossuth – but he would neither mislead Kossuth by inciting hopes that might not be realized.<sup>144</sup>

Senators continued to try to shape the debate through various alternative formulations. Illinois Senator James Shields, a New Democrat supporter of Stephen

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<sup>144</sup>*Congressional Globe*, 32:1, p. 70-1.

Douglas, along with Free Soiler Hale and progressive Whig Charles Sumner offered various substitute resolutions calling for the creation of a committee of introduction for Kossuth. Senator John Berrien, a Georgia Whig, offered an amendment that would reaffirm the established policy of the United States of refraining from all interference with the domestic concerns of other nations. That amendment was defeated by a vote of 27-16.<sup>145</sup> Senator Isaac P. Walker, a Wisconsin New Democrat, introduced a resolution (never voted on) that pushed the forward policy into outright interventionism:

Whereas, the signs of the times are portentous of an approaching struggle in Europe, between the republican masses for constitutional government on one side, and the advocates of monarchy for absolute governments on the other; and whereas, it pressingly behoves the representatives of the American people, and of the united sovereign States of America to seriously consider, and betimes to inquire into the relations of the Government and country in this struggle, and their duty in view of it to themselves, to foreign nations, and the international law; therefore,

*Be it resolved*, That the Committee on Foreign Relations be instructed to inquire into, and report upon the expediency of an open declaration by Congress, to foreign nations and the world, that the United States hold strictly to the policy and principle that each individual nation, state, or

power possesses, for itself, the exclusive right and sole power to take care and dispose of its own internal concerns, without and exempt from the intervention and interference of any foreign government, state, confederacy, alliance, or power whatsoever; and that any such Intervention or interference by, or on the part of any foreign government, state, confederacy, alliance or power, constitutes an infraction of the law of nations, authorising and justifying the interposition of any or all other governments, confederacies, or powers, at their discretion, to prevent such intervention, and to repair such infraction of the law of nations.

*Resolved further*. That the same committee be instructed to inquire, also, into the expediency of requesting the President of the United States to cause negotiations to be opened with all other constitutional governments, with a view, and to the end of obtaining their co-operation with the United States in the declaration aforesaid, and the policy and principle thereof, and in the observance, defense, and maintenance of the law of nations in this respect.<sup>146</sup>

In the end, a large majority adopted Seward's substitute but a subsequent resolution to print Kossuth's letter of thanks passed by only one vote. A spirited debate also took place in the House. Seward's proposed language was originally defeated in that body, but the House acquiesced 181-16 once the Senate passed the measure. The Senate then passed a resolution to receive Kossuth in the Senate chambers. William

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<sup>145</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32: 1, pp. 83, 86, 185; Riepma, "Young America, pp. 134-7; May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, p. 83.

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<sup>146</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, p. 111.

Hunter, Clerk of the Department of State, carried the official invitation to Kossuth in New York.<sup>147</sup>

### *Kossuth in Washington*

While the Congressional debate was in progress, President Fillmore had sent his son and private secretary to New York, to inquire unofficially about Kossuth's plans. Kossuth apparently interpreted this as an urgent invitation to Washington. He told young Fillmore that he was confused and upset by the reported dispute in the Senate and was not inclined to travel to the capital under those circumstances. When Hunter made the invitation official, however, Kossuth made plans to travel to the capital, with festivities and fund-raising activities planned at stops in between.<sup>148</sup>

Daniel Webster continued to try to maintain his self-understood role as the balancer among what he regarded as foreign policy extremists and as the defender of the American national interest, rightly understood. He warned Abbott Lawrence that "a large section of the Democratic party intend taking advantage of his presence to bring the country, if they can, to the doctrine and practice of intervention." Webster informed another friend: "I shall treat him [Kossuth] with all personal and individual respect, but if he should speak to me of the policy of 'intervention,' I shall 'have ears more deaf

than adders.'" On the other hand Webster and Baron Hülsemann were no longer on speaking terms over the administration's allegedly improper conduct with Kossuth, such as the cannon salute (which Webster insisted was a matter for the Navy Department, not the State Department), and over the invitation to Kossuth to visit Washington. Webster insisted that their communications take place only in writing. Hülsemann, meanwhile, informed the President that he could no longer remain at the capital while Webster remained in office. He also indicated that the Russian minister might also withdraw in support of his Austrian colleague.<sup>149</sup>

When Kossuth reached Washington, Webster arranged for an audience with the President and his Cabinet. Whig Senator Seward and Illinois Democrat James Shields escorted the Hungarian revolutionary. What was supposed to be a courtesy visit went poorly. Webster, based on a previous discussion with Kossuth, had assured Fillmore that Kossuth would not "make a speech," in the sense of not pressing for American intervention. Kossuth, apparently under the impression that Webster meant that he was not supposed to speak at length, kept his remarks brief. But he spoke as if the United States had already committed itself to the Hungarian cause by obtaining his freedom, inviting him to Washington and treating him as a head of state. Kossuth added, "the star-spangled banner was seen cast in protection around me, announcing to the world that there is a nation, alike powerful as free, ready to protect the laws of

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<sup>147</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 144; May, *Contemporary American Opinion of the Mid-Century Revolutions*, p. 84; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 84.

<sup>148</sup> Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 81.

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<sup>149</sup> Webster to Abbot Lawrence, 29 December 1851, Webster to Abbot Lawrence, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: National Edition*, 29 December 1851; 4: 633-5; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 92; Webster to Blatchford, 30 December 1851, *The Papers of Daniel Webster, Diplomatic Papers*, 2: 96; Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, pp. 181-3, 187.

nations, even in distant parts of the world and in the person of a poor exile.” He quoted from the part of the President’s Message that spoke of America’s support for the cause of freedom, but without noting any of the President’s prior insistence on non-interference. Kossuth was possibly so forward because he had somehow gained the impression from Webster or others that the United States was prepared to recognize Hungary immediately upon the occurrence of another uprising; and that the American naval squadron in the Mediterranean was now prepared to cooperate with England (and Turkey) on behalf of the liberal cause in Europe.<sup>150</sup>

Fillmore, apparently caught off guard, replied somewhat frostily:

I am happy, Governor Kossuth, to welcome you to this land of freedom – and it gives me pleasure to congratulate you upon your release from a long confinement in Turkey, and your safe arrival here. As an individual, I sympathized deeply with you in your brave struggle for the independence and freedom of your native land. The American people can never be indifferent to such a contest; but our policy as a nation in this respect has been uniform, from the commencement of our government; and my own views, as the chief executive magistrate of this nation, are fully and freely expressed in my recent message to Congress, to which you have been pleased to allude. They are the same, whether speaking to Congress here, or to the nations of Europe. Should your country be restored to independence and freedom, I should

then wish you, as the greatest blessing you could enjoy, a restoration to your native land; but, should that never happen, I can only repeat my welcome to you and your companions here, and pray that God’s blessing may rest upon you wherever your lot may be cast.

Fillmore saw to it that the *New York Herald* published this exchange, and it was reprinted in other Whig newspapers and pamphlets.<sup>151</sup>

“The President received him with great propriety, and his address was all right; sympathy, personal respect and kindness, but no departure from our established policy,” Webster recorded hopefully. Senator Shields, a New Democrat, had a somewhat different view: “The administration has treated him shabbily. You ought to have seen Fillmore when he was received, as rigid as a midshipman on a quarter-deck. He got himself into position and tried to look dignified, but the dignity of intellect and refinement was not there. You have read his (Fillmore’s) reply, it was worse spoken than it read.”<sup>152</sup>

Webster continued to seek to define the middle ground. To offset Fillmore’s cold reception to Kossuth, Webster decided to attend a Congressional dinner honoring the Hungarian. He insisted to Fillmore, and later to Hülsemann, that he was doing so in a private capacity, not as Secretary of State. “I have come to the conclusion that it is well for some of us to go to the dinner this

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<sup>150</sup> Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, pp. 101-2 (star-spangled).

<sup>151</sup> See, for instance, *American Whig Review* (February 1852): 188.

<sup>152</sup> Webster to Blatchford, 31 December 1851, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: National Edition*, 2: 502; Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 87-9; Thomas J. McCormick, ed., *Memoirs of Gustav Koerner, 1809-1896*, 2 vols. (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1909), 1: 579 (Shields quote).

evening,” he informed Fillmore. “The President of the Senate is to preside, and the Speaker of the House is to act as Vice-President. It has been said that assurances have been given that nothing shall be said that shall justly be offensive to these gentlemen as anti-intervention men. But what chiefly influences me, is, that I learned yesterday that preparations were making for a good deal of an attack upon us, if no member of the administration should pay Kossuth the respect of attending the dinner given to him by members of Congress, of all parties, as the nation's guest. I wish the Heads of Department could see their way clear to go, as I think I shall go myself. In the present state of the country, especially in the interior, where Kossuth is going, I should not like unnecessarily to provoke popular attack.”<sup>153</sup>

In his prepared remarks at the Congressional banquet, Webster reiterated his views about the importance of the role of the United States in marshalling world public opinion on behalf of the law of nations and the rule of comprehensive non-intervention; and of the right of a distinct and self-sufficient people to determine their own form of government free of foreign interference. “There is nothing that satisfies the human mind in an enlightened age, unless man is governed by his own country and the institutions of this own government. No matter how easy be the yoke of a foreign power, no matter how lightly it sits upon the shoulders, if it is not imposed by the voice of his own nation and of his own country, he will not, he cannot, he *means* not to be happy under its burden.” This was the great truth and objective of the American Revolution and it ought not be denied to other nations, to the extent that they met certain criteria for true national self-determination. “Wherever this is, in the

Christian and civilized world, a nationality of character – wherever there exists a nation of sufficient knowledge and wealth and population to constitution a government, then a national government is a necessary and proper result of nationality of character.”

Webster argued that Hungarian independence, rightly understood, would benefit Austria itself. “The imposition of a foreign yoke upon a people capable of self-government, while it oppresses and depresses that people, adds nothing to the strength of those that impose that yoke. In my opinion, Austria would be a better and stronger government tomorrow if she confined the limits of her power to the hereditary and German domains, especially if she saw in Hungary a strong, sensible, independent neighboring nation; because I think that the cost of keeping Hungary quiet is not repaid by any benefit derived from Hungarian levies or tributes.” As to the proper form of government for Hungary, Webster acknowledged that “we would be glad to see her, when she becomes independent, embrace that system of government which is most acceptable to ourselves. We shall rejoice to see our American model upon the Lower Danube and on the Mountains of Hungary.” However, that was not the first or necessary step.

The first prayer shall be that Hungary may become independent of all foreign power – that her destinies may be entrusted to her own hands, and to her own discretion. I do not profess to understand the social relations and connection of races, and of twenty other things that may affect the public institutions of Hungary. All I say is, that Hungary can regulate these matters for herself infinitely

<sup>153</sup> Webster to Fillmore, 7 January 1852, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, Diplomatic Papers, 2: 96-7.

better than they can be regulated for her by Austria; and, therefore, I limit my aspirations for Hungary, for the present, to that single and simple point, – Hungarian independence, Hungarian self-government, Hungarian control of Hungarian destinies.

Webster concluded his remarks by offering a toast to “Hungarian Independence, Hungarian control of her own destinies – Hungary a distinct nationality among the nations of Europe.”<sup>154</sup>

After the Congressional banquet, Hülsemann angrily addressed a private note of complaint to Fillmore. The President responded that he had not yet had time to read Webster speech; but if Webster’s remarks reflected views other than those that the President had expressed in his Annual Message, and in his response to Kossuth at the President’s Mansion, they were not to be understood as reflecting the policies of the U.S. government. Fillmore refused Hülsemann’s suggestion that he disavow Webster’s speech through an anonymous editorial in the semi-official Whig newspaper, the *Republic*. But the President went so far as to prepare a written statement to the Russian Minister, Alexander Bodisco, which affirmed that Webster had not expressed the views of the U.S. government.<sup>155</sup> Webster himself instructed the American *charge* in Vienna, Charles McCurdy, to assure that government that the United States did not countenance intervention or “involving this Government in European wars from causes affecting only the nations of Europe.” Webster’s guidance included the following:

You may say, in as explicit terms as you may judge proper, that neither the President nor his Cabinet countenance any such thing as "intervention," or involving the Government in European wars, from causes affecting only the nations of Europe. Public men in this Country, as well as private men, are accustomed to speak their opinions freely. This belongs to our system, and although in this respect individuals may sometimes be indiscreet, yet there is no where any power of control; and there are some public men, as well as private individuals, who are ready to take a part in the troubles, and in the wars of other States. It is believed however, that the sober sense of the country will settle down on more prudent and pacific ideas. While there is no probability that the Government will lend aid or countenance to Kossuth, there is no reason to suppose that the amount of private contributions made for him will be large. On the whole, the enthusiasm felt for him is not increasing; and having visited most of the large Northern Cities, where there has existed the greatest readiness to subscribe, his success elsewhere is not likely to be distinguished. And I venture to say, that the "Intervention" feeling will doubtless subside gradually and rapidly, if nothing should take place, calculated to kindle it into a new flame.<sup>156</sup>

On the other hand, Webster refused to patch up the strained relationship with

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<sup>154</sup> Speech at the Kossuth Banquet, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, Diplomatic Papers, 2: 101-5.

<sup>155</sup> Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, p. 192.

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<sup>156</sup> Webster to McCurdy, 15 January 1852, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, Diplomatic Papers, 2: 109-11.

Austria by offering his own an unofficial disclaimer through party newspapers, a step that Fillmore may have wanted this Secretary of State to take. Webster, however, did agree to publish a modified, toned-down version of his speech. After reports from the U.S. diplomatic representatives indicated considerable disquiet on the part of European governments about the reception of Kossuth, and a general expectation that a major shift in American foreign policy was in the offing, Webster agreed to publish an interview in the *Republic* that reaffirmed the doctrine of non-intervention.<sup>157</sup>

Domestic critics of an activist policy towards Hungary and Europe also came forward. When Kossuth paid a courtesy visit to Henry Clay, who was on his sickbed (he would die within a few months), the one-time Whig advocate of global human rights expressed his “liveliest sympathies” with the Hungarians. Clay argued however that the practical effects of providing “material aid” to Kossuth by the United States would probably be war with one or more European powers. Clay pointed out that the United States lacked the means to carry out military operations on the European continent; and that a maritime war would “result in mutual annoyance to commerce, but little else.” Once the United States engaged (ineffectually) in such a war, it would have (effectually) abandoned its “ancient policy of amity and non-intervention in the affairs of other nations.” The European powers would feel justified “in abandoning the terms of forbearance and non-intervention,” which they had so far preserved towards the American Republic. “After the downfall, perhaps, of the friends of liberal institutions in Europe, her despots, imitating and provoked by our fatal

example,” might turn upon the United States in its hour of weakness and exhaustion.

“Sir,” Clay concluded, “the recent subversion of the republican government of France [by Louis Napoleon’s coup of December, 2, 1851] and that enlightened nation voluntarily placing its neck under the yoke of despotism, teach us to despair of any present success for liberal institutions in Europe.”

But if we should involve ourselves in the tangled web of European politics, in a war in which we could effect nothing, *and in that struggle Hungary should go down, and we should go down with her*, where then would be the last hope of the friends of freedom throughout the world? Far better is it for ourselves, for Hungary, and for the cause of liberty, that ... we should keep the lamp burning brightly on this Western shore as a light to all nations, than to hazard its ultimate extinction, amid the ruins of fallen or falling republics in Europe.<sup>158</sup>

Clay and his Whig Party supporters made certain that his admonitory remarks to Kossuth were widely published. Georgia Whig Congressman Alexander Stephens organized a Congressional dinner to counter the earlier pro-Kossuth affair, held on the occasion of Washington’s Birthday. “The dinner is an anti-Kossuth affair, or at least it is intended as a demonstration in favor of the neutral policy of Washington,” Stephens informed Senator Crittenden, who he asked to provide the keynote for the evening.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>157</sup> Curti, *Austria and the United States, 1848-1852*, p. 192; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, pp. 110-2.

<sup>158</sup> Remarks to Kossuth, 9 January 1852, *Papers of Henry Clay*, 10: 944-6; Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 94. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>159</sup> Coleman, ed., *The Life of John J. Crittenden*, 2: 27, 34.

Crittenden had been a cautious supporter of Senate efforts to hail the French revolutionaries of 1848, but the turn of events there and elsewhere in Europe left him very much of Clay's mind when it came to Kossuth. The recent execution of Crittenden's son by Spanish authorities in Cuba, in the wake of a disastrous filibustering expedition by Narciso Lopez, could not have been far from Crittenden's mind.

In his dinner address, Crittenden stressed two related themes from Washington's Farewell Address – the necessity of Union; and the imperative “to be jealous of all foreign influence, and enter into entangling alliances with none.” Crittenden acknowledged that the use of force was a legitimate means to defend the rights and liberties of a people that had already exercised those rights or who whose “heart” was “prepared for liberty,” who understood “what it is, and how to value it.” If such a people obtained arms, “I'll warrant you they will obtain and sustain their freedom. We have given the world an example of that success. But three millions, scattered over a vast territory, opposed to the most powerful enemy on earth, we went triumphantly through our Revolution and established our liberties.” The implication, of course, was that if the Hungarians possessed such an understanding of liberty, and the sort of leadership capabilities possessed by men like Washington, they would have been able to overcome foreign intervention quite on their own.

Setting the internal situation of Hungary aside, Crittenden asked if the United States would ever be justified in intervening to tip the balance on behalf of a nation fighting for its liberties. Crittenden agreed that the United States possessed such a right, but “it is always a question of expediency.”

There are cases so connected with our own interests, and with the cause of humanity, that interference would be proper. But still, it is a question for the sound discretion of this people, – a question always of expediency, – whether you will or will not interfere; and it is just because it is a question of that character, and because our passions and sympathies may often tempt us to err upon it, that Washington has made it the subject of this emphatic admonition. It is not because we have not the right to interfere, but it is because we have the right, and because we are surrounded by temptations – by the temptations of generous hearts and noble principles – to transcend the limits of prudence and of policy, and to interfere in the affairs of our neighbors, that he has admonished us. Washington, with that forecast and that prophetic spirit which constituted a part of his character, saw through all this. He knew the warm and generous natures of his countrymen. He knew their susceptibility, and he knew where the danger of error was; and it is there that his wisdom has erected, as far as his advice can do it, a bulwark for our protection. He tells you, “Stand upon your own ground.” That is the ground to stand upon.

Crittenden argued that there was comparatively little that “the bayonet and the sword can do. The plowshare does a thousand times more than either. The time was when arms were powerful instruments of oppression; but they cannot do much now, unless they are aided by the mercenary and degenerate spirit of the people over whom they are brandished.”

Our mission, so far as it concerns our distant brethren, is not a mission of arms. We are here to do what Washington advised us to do, – take care of our Union, have a proper respect for the Constitution and laws of our country, cultivate peace and commerce with all nations, do equal justice to all nations, and thereby set an example to them, and show forth in ourselves the blessings of self-government to all the world. Thus you will best convince mankind. Seeing you prosper, they will follow your example, and do likewise. It is by that power of opinion, by that power of reformation, that you can render the mightiest and greatest service that is in your power towards the spread of liberty all over the world. Adopt the policy of interference, and what is its consequence? War, endless war. If one interferes, another will interfere, and another, and another, and so this doctrine for the protection of republican liberty and human rights results in a perpetual, widespread, and wider-spreading war, until all mankind, overcome by slaughter and ruin, shall fall down bleeding and exhausted.<sup>160</sup>

In other words, national and personal liberty must be established first by and among a people striving to obtain the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them. Foreign attempts to support the cause of republican liberty and human rights would actually generate a wider war that would harm the particular cause of a people like the Hungarians, as well as that of humanity at large.

<sup>160</sup> Coleman, ed., *The Life of John J. Crittenden*, 2: 27, 34.

Even some New Democrats had begun to put some distance between themselves and Kossuth. Stephen Douglas, a leading candidate for the party's presidential nomination in 1852, resisted efforts by Young American George Sanders to identify him with a highly aggressive U.S. policy towards European revolutions. Massachusetts Democrat Caleb Cushing warned Douglas of the peril of having his name associated with the cause of the European "Reds," thus affronting the Catholic vote, making the party appear to be the tool of "professional agitators," and threatening the unity among northern and southern Democrats. For Douglas, Manifest Destiny and international republicanism were not precisely identical; he was prepared to be sympathetic with but not wedded to the latter cause. Douglas' main interest was in expanding American territory in the Western Hemisphere, which put him strongly at odds with Great Britain (and, *inter alia*, made him a strong supporter of the Irish cause). At the Congressional banquet honoring Kossuth, and at a Jackson Day dinner, Douglas stressed these expansionist and anti-British themes rather than the cause of Hungarian or European revolution. He used those occasions to attack the Fillmore administration for interfering with filibustering expeditions against Cuba and to support a policy of intervention for annexation.<sup>161</sup>

### *The Final Senate Debate on the Revolutions of 1848*

In mid-January 1852, Kossuth, disappointed at his reception in Washington, departed the capital to tour the country in

<sup>161</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, pp. 107, 116; Riepma, "Young America," pp. 158, 164-7, 181 (Reds). In addition, Sanders, by his personal attacks on the other contenders for the nomination on Douglas' behalf, also alienated much of the party establishment and irritated Douglas.

support of his cause. Rhode Island Senator John H. Clarke, a Whig, then introduced a resolution designed to take the political initiative away from the supporters of an activist American foreign policy. (Congressman Brown of Mississippi placed a similar resolution before the House.) Clarke asked the Senate to endorse formally the advice given in Washington's Farewell Address ("why quit our own to stand on foreign ground?") and in Jefferson's First Inaugural ("peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.") America, Clark insisted, was doing "far more ... for the liberation of man by our quiet and peaceful example" than by "resorting to war and putting at hazard the rich inheritance of freedom."<sup>162</sup>

New Democrat and progressive Whigs responded with their own legislative language. "I have seen Cass and we mean to amend it [Clarke's resolution] in a way as to indicate a determination to throw our weight with the great Liberal party of the world..." Senator Shields told Gustav Koerner. Cass's substitute resolution would have the Senate warn that the United States would not watch "without deep concern" another violation of Hungary's nationality.<sup>163</sup> Seward proposed a more general statement:

The United States, in defense of their own interests and the common interests of mankind, do solemnly protest against the conduct of Russia ... as a wanton and tyrannical infraction of the laws of nations. And the United States do further declare, that they will not hereafter

be indifferent to similar acts of national injustice, oppression, and usurpation, whenever or wherever they may occur.<sup>164</sup>

The ensuing debate provided the advocates of an activist policy with their final opportunity to define an approach that would offer a plausible middle ground between war on the one hand, and feckless and offensive rhetoric on the other.

Seward, who had been supporter of Kossuth from the beginning and remained so to the end of his stay in America, made the strongest case for the progressive Whigs, building on the principle of "what the laws of nations do not forbid, any nation may do for the cause of civil liberty, in any other country."<sup>165</sup> As to those who claimed that the affairs of Hungary were foreign to us, Seward responded: "How is it foreign? Does it not arise in the family of nations, and are we not a member of that family, and interested in its welfare, and therefore in the laws by which that welfare is secured?" For those who argued that material interest should be the sole guide for the national interest, Seward responded that Republican Hungary would offer greater commercial opportunities for the United States. But just as man does not live by bread alone, "so it is true of nations, ... States live and flourish not on merely physical elements, but just in the proportion that law, order, peace, justice and liberty are maintained in the commonwealth of nations." The United States would be forced to expend far more money on armaments "if we, by silence or pusillanimity, encourage attacks on the common welfare of nations!" Those who questioned Kossuth's credentials as a leader or a genuine republican missed the essential

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<sup>162</sup> Riepma, "Young America," pp. 197-8; *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, p. 298; *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, Appendix, p. 144.

<sup>163</sup> McCormick, ed., *Memoirs of Gustav Koerner*, 1: 579; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America 1851-1852*, p. 104.

<sup>164</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, p. 310.

<sup>165</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, p. 42.

point. “Freedom, sir, often undervalues, and sometimes mistakes her friends, but tyranny is never deceived in her enemies.”

Seward met the defenders of presumed teaching of Washington’s Farewell Address of non-intervention on two grounds. In the ordinary sense, the times had changed, and American foreign policy must change with it. But Seward also offered a more dynamic interpretation of the Address. Why should the United States accept the understanding of the Washington’s Great Rule cultivated by the government presses of Napoleon III and Franz Josef, that is, of American non-interference to allow the self-preservation of monarchies and despotisms? Washington surely never meant to grant immunity to tyrants. Seward quoted Washington’s remarks to the Minister of the French Republic, Pierre Adet, in 1796, that his “anxious recollections, his sympathetic feelings, and his best wishes, were irresistibly excited whenever he saw in any country an oppressed nation unfurl the banner of freedom; and that, above all, the events of the French Revolution had produced in him the deepest solicitude, as well as the highest admiration.”

Seward recounted that Congress and the American people added their voices and public demonstrations in support of the original French Revolution: “Sir, were not these ceremonies a demonstration of sympathy with democracy in Europe? The victories thus celebrated were won from the Allied Powers combined to oppress France by force. Were not these ceremonies a protest against their unlawful intervention?” To be sure, the United States did not aid the French cause – it maintained a policy of neutrality and non-intervention – because France then proved to be a deranged and disorganized regime. “What less than madness would it have been to have entered into closer alliance, and to have assumed

more intimate ties with a nation whom they could not have aided, and in going to whose help they would have been certain to have perished?” If America had been stronger in the 1790s and if Revolutionary France more stable and disinterested, Seward implied, the United States, and Washington, might well have adapted a different and more assertive course.

Seward went on to recount official and unofficial American expressions of sympathy for the revolutions in Spanish America and Greece during the 1820s – “Who can say now how much they did not contribute towards the gratifying result?” – and for France in 1830 and 1848, and for the freedom of Irish prisoners held by Britain. Seward maintained that the American expression of sympathy for Hungary “is not an intervention, or we have done little else than intervene in every contest for freedom and humanity throughout the world since we became a nation.... The question, therefore, is not whether we shall depart from our traditional policy but whether we shall adhere to it.” When had Americans ever sympathized with or tolerated a falling despotism or successful usurpation? For those who argued that “we can promote the cause of freedom and humanity only by our example,” Seward countered, “but what should that example be but that of performing not one national duty only, but all national duties. Not those due to ourselves only, but those which are due to other nations and to all mankind. No dim eclipse will suffice to illuminate a benighted world.” Relative power and circumstances may vary policy, but they cannot alter principles. Americans were well able distinguish between “intervention in the domestic affairs of a nation and opposition against the flagrant act of a strong foreign power in attacking without just cause or motive a weak but brave one struggling with its proper enemy.”

In the case of Hungary, Seward argued that an official American protest against Russia's action – or a protest in anticipation of future intervention by the Czar – was not a menace or a pledge of war. It was perfectly acceptable under the law of nations. If Russia or Austria took such unreasonable offense, “who are Austria and Hungary, that we should fear *them* when on the defense against an unjust war? ... in a defensive war levied against us on such a pretext, the reason and the sympathies of mankind would be on our side, cooperating with our own instincts of patriotism and self-preservation. Our enemies would be powerless to harm us, and we should be unconquerable.” Second, according to Seward, protests were not feckless. The American flag and American principles had become respected by the peoples of Europe, who “are no longer debased and hopeless of freedom, but, on the contrary, are waiting impatiently for it, and ready to second our expressions of interest in their cause.

The British nation is not without jealousy of us. Let us only speak out. Do you think they would be silent? No sir. And when the United States and Great Britain should once speak, the ever-fraternizing bayonets of the army of France, if need were, would open a mouth for the voice of that impulsive and generous nation. Who believes that Russia, as despotic as she is, would brave the remonstrances of these three great Powers, sustained as they would be by the voice of Christendom? Sir, I do not know that this protest will do Hungary or European democracy any good. It is enough for me that, like our first of orators [Webster] in a similar case, I can say, ‘I hope it may.’

In the event of another Hungarian uprising, Seward insisted, the United States could choose the time and form of recognizing the new nation, which “with its political influence and commercial benefits, will be adequate to prevent or counter-balance Russian intervention.”<sup>166</sup>

Whig Joshua Giddings, one of the leaders of the radical anti-slavery movement, set out his own plan for encouraging liberal regime change in Europe. The U.S. government should immediately open correspondence with the Emperors of Russia and Austria, and all other governments, whether monarchies and republics, “to request their cooperation for the maintenance of the law of nations, and the establishment of universal peace,” and specifically “to maintain that principle in the law of nations, which gives protection to feeble powers who now are, or may hereafter be, found struggling for freedom and independence.”

Resolved, That we hold the self-evident truth, that the people of every nation have an indefeasible right to alter or abolish their form of government and to institute a new one, laying its foundations on such principles, and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall appear most likely to secure their safety and happiness.

Resolved, that the best interest of mankind, the dictates of natural justice, and the law of nations, forbid the armed intervention of any foreign power to defeat or suppress the will of a people who are striving to reform or perfect their government.

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<sup>166</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32: 1, Appendix, pp. 243-7.

Resolved, that it is the duty of all civilized nations to unite their influence to prevent such armed intervention, to maintain the law of nations, and to restrain each government within the sphere of its legitimate rights.

The United States, Giddings asserted, might be neutral between belligerents but not between right and wrong. The rights of governments and nations were the same in Europe as in the Western Hemisphere. The fundamental distinction that the United States should insist upon was between illegitimate intervention in violation of the law of nations, and legitimate intervention on behalf of that law. It did not matter whether the struggling nation – in this case, Hungary – established a monarchy, oligarchy, or republic. Self-determination was the key. Giddings was confident that such a declaration would have an important effect – “as a people, we possess great moral influence among civilized nations.”

If a new revolution did break out in Hungary (and Giddings had no doubt that it would) and if Russia should indicate a disposition to interfere, the United States should anticipate events and protest formally to Russia in the name of liberty. Britain was America’s natural ally in an alliance to maintain the law of nations and to offer credible protests, just as the two powers were cooperating to suppress the African slave trade. Contrary to the views of anti-British New Democrats like Stephen Douglas, Giddings argued, “we ought not to refuse protection to the people of Hungary because we cannot give protection at the same time to the people of Ireland.” By the same logic, Giddings reasoned pointedly, Britain should be prepared to overlook domestic slavery in the United States as an

obstacle to international cooperation between the two English-speaking powers.

As to the efficacy of the American (and British) protest, and to the argument that the United States would be obliged to go to war if Russia refused, Giddings responded: “The age we live in is emphatically an age of progress. Men and nations are now taught to rely more upon reason, upon truth, upon justice, than in former times; and less upon the power of arms – of physical force. Wars are not as fashionable as they were fifty years hence.” The Russian government “is controlled by men of wisdom, by statesmen of enlarged views. They, sir will, never look with indifference or contempt upon the solemn protest of this government,” especially if united with the protest of England and the support of Turkey.

The United States and its allies also had legitimate recourse short of military action, one that was even more effective than war. Here Giddings proposed to generalize Cass’s idea of withdrawing diplomatic recognition from Austria into a general principle, thus anticipating the ideas of Woodrow Wilson by half a century.

The stipulations on the part of part of each Government will doubtless be, that in the case any nation shall violate the principles of justice, of international law, all civil and diplomatic intercourse will be withdrawn from such offending nation. That, having disregarded the law of nations, on which the safety and security of each depends, she thereby becomes unworthy of associating with civilized Governments, and henceforth shall be regarded and treated as an outlaw from the commonwealth of nations, left alone in her savage Barbary, and cut off from all commercial and

diplomatic intercourse with civilized governments. This mode of enforcing respect for the law of nations would be far more efficient than war; while it would save the vast expenditure of blood and treasure, and would avoid the appalling crimes and guilt always attending an appeal to arms.<sup>167</sup>

Cass again took the lead in making the case for a distinctly Democratic foreign policy activism, one that relied on public opinion rather than armed force to underwrite successful regime change. The law of nations and the course of human affairs, Cass argued, are progressive.

We believe in the right and in the capacity of man for self-government – not that he is everywhere prepared for institutions like ours. We know, while we regret, that he is not. But we believe that he is everywhere fitted, even now, for taking some part in the administration of political affairs, greater or less, in proportion to his experience and condition; and that everywhere, with time and practice, he may improve himself and his government till both become as free as the state of society will permit. And certainly the expression of warm hope that this time will come, and come speedily, is consistent with every respect for other Powers.

Natural improvement in society, if allowed to translate into political institutions, would lead to liberal and republican regimes. Unfortunately, Cass observed, the successors of the Holy

Alliance were repressing these reforms and the spirit of people for freedom. “The accumulated oppressions of ages and the capacity of endurance stretched to the utmost tension, now meet face to face, with existing power, in a struggle for life and death; and the contest will go on, though there may be fitful intervals of apparent repose, still it will go on till one or the other is finally vanquished.” Cass claimed to be confident in the ultimate victor – “can it be that such an unmitigated despotism will long be permitted to revel in the wantonness of its own power and passion?” The unsuccessful efforts of Kossuth and the other European revolutionaries were not in vain; they were the means by which the capacity of men for self-government was improved. “Trials and sufferings are the school of nations. Every effort is a lesson, and every defeat but prepares them for a new contest, and stimulates them to greater exertion, and the very process of preparation and resistance teaches them what are their rights, and how they are to be acquired and maintained.”

The American role in this great drama was not to engage in a crusade or in inflammatory “propagandism” but to do what the nation could to ensure a fair battlefield – “that whenever a struggle is commenced to overthrow an arbitrary Government, other despotic Powers should not be permitted to take part in the contest, and with foreign bayonets decide the issue.” The United States, in its diplomacy and public pronouncements aimed at shaping international opinion, must resist the argument of Russia and other despotisms that they were entitled to intervene (as Czar Nicholas claimed) “in case the reaction of revolutions near him should tend to endanger his own safety, or the political equilibrium on the frontiers of his Empire.” For Cass, this was an even more dangerous principle than that of the balance of power, “that fertile source of war and oppression.”

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<sup>167</sup> *Congressional Globe*, pp. 32:2, pp. 143-5.

But the danger of opinions, or in other words, the principles upon which a government shall be founded, can give no just cause of offense, unless there is a Quixotic attempt to carry them elsewhere by direct interference. No one accuses Hungary of such folly. She had enough to do without constituting herself the armed champion of propagandism.... her people sought independence, and they sought to introduce free institutions; though I do not understand that it was ever determined whether the government should be a constitutional monarchy or a republic. But the establishment of a republican government is compatible, not only with the public law of the world, but with the condition of Europe, where such governments have existed from the earliest ages, and some of them are yet struggling to maintain that position.

Russia's intervention in Hungary, according to Cass, was intended "not merely to propagate the principles of despotism, but to establish its power, lest a rumor might cross the Carpathian Mountains, and tell the bearded Muscovite, that there was such a thing as liberty in the world, and men who periled life and fortune to obtain it." In following this despotic logic, Russia struck "not only at personal liberty, but at public independence, and especially offensive to the free States of the world, both by the violation of a great principle dear to them, and by the example of an armed intervention to put down the personal freedom in Hungary, and to threaten it wherever else its manifestations might be near enough to be unwelcome to the Russian Czar." The doctrine of despotic interference, if taken to

its logical conclusion and interpolated into the law of nations, meant assuming "to exercise surveillance over other Governments of the world." All independent governments, not merely republics, must take exception to this assertion, because "the spectator of injustice today may be its victim tomorrow; and none of the barriers against ambition and tyranny can be broken down without danger to the civilized world."

Cass had no doubts that the regime best able to speak up in defense of the rights of personal liberty and national independence was the United States, just as it had done in 1823 with the Monroe Doctrine. "And though it has not been wholly efficacious, it has no doubt contributed, with other causes, to the stability and independence of the American States, and to check the spirit of colonization.... If the maintenance of national independence on this side of the Atlantic is dear to us, and the interest we feel in it allows us to express our opinion upon its just inviolability, I see no reason which forbids us to extend the same views elsewhere; as we have material interests, as well as natural sympathies, connected with the immunity of all nations, and the course we shall adopt is therefore a question of expediency, and not of principle."

What American policy was expedient in the case of Hungary and in anticipation of renewed revolution (and despotic intervention) in Europe? Cass denied that if the United States did not go to war after pleading the case of human rights, it would lose its self-respect and the respect of the world. The United States had not gone to war when it pronounced the Monroe Doctrine. There were numerous other examples in diplomatic history where protests and declarations had not led to military action. Although the United States had no interest in entangling itself in questions of the European balance of power or dynastic rivalries, it did have a vital

interest in a proper, progressive understanding of the universal public law of nations. Those who insisted on following a strict interpretation of Washington's Farewell Address failed to appreciate that silence in the face of violations of the law of nations implied assent and the acceptance of precedent. "To mark their disapprobation of the act and of the doctrine, that their silence might not be construed into acquiescence, and that when, in the mutation of political affairs mutation of political affairs, the proper time should come, they might interpose effectually, if they should desire it." Here Cass tiptoed up to the argument that the United States might indeed strongly "interpose" itself directly and even militarily when its national power had increased to the point where it could effectively level the playing field.

Our present duty and policy are to place our views upon record, thus avoiding conclusions against us, *and reserving all our rights and all our remedies, whatever they might be*, for future consideration, when the proper exigency may arise, when the political vicissitudes of Europe may strengthen the force of opinion there, by increasing the number and power of the free States, which would be as much interested as we are in this great question, and whose views would be similar to our own. I have no doubt that there are violations of the public law – and this, in my opinion, is one of them – which would justify the armed action of any nation, although it is no part of the task I have imposed on myself to define or even to enumerate them.... I think we should limit ourselves, *for the present*, to the declaration of our opinions of great questions and there stop, leaving the future to disclose

our proper obligations and our proper line of policy.... The day may come, will come indeed, when we may act without hesitation, as we may act without apprehension. To that day let us dismiss questions of force.

In the present instance, Cass suggested that by protesting against the principle of despotic intervention, the United States introduced a critical element of uncertainty into the future calculations of Russia and other would-be interventionists – "that the Power itself, contemplating the step, might pause and review its position and pretensions, and the consequences to which it might be led; not knowing, of course, what measures might follow these appeals to its sense of right should they fail to be effectual." He did not expect to make a convert of Nicholas to the principles of republicanism but the Czar presumably understood his self-interest well enough, just as his predecessors had understood their interest in a promoting liberal maritime law of nations together with the United States, in opposition to the pretensions of England. World public opinion should remind Nicholas that "power today may become weakness tomorrow. Monarchical life of one hour may be terminated the next day on the scaffold. The light of reason may yet penetrate the Boetian darkness of a Russian atmosphere. This public opinion is gaining strength, and is moving onwards, and will bear all before it, like the waves of the ocean lashed into a fury by the storm." The Czar, in a future contingency, must be taught to weigh the relative threats to the existence of his regime. Would the "bearded Muscovite" be more likely to question Nicholas's despotism because Hungary had become independent and liberal and peaceful; or because he heard the enlightened voice of mankind united in protest against his ruler?

Even if American-led or supported world public opinion could not directly aid the downtrodden masses in raising themselves up, Cass concluded, it might at least provide them with indirect or deterrent protection against their rulers.<sup>168</sup>

Senators Robert Stockton of New Jersey and Pierre Soulé of Louisiana made the case for an even more assertive New Democrat foreign policy, as compared with that of Cass. As a naval commander, Stockton had been at the pointed end of Manifest Destiny and was instrumental in taking possession of California for the United States during the Mexican War. Stockton argued that the United States, as the lone effective republic in a sea of monarchies and despotisms, should go beyond a policy of promoting the law of nations that called for mutual non-interference in the domestic institutions of other nations. “I desire to know how the oppressed and fettered nations of the earth, are to break their chains, and maintain themselves against the armies of despotism, if the law of nations reads that there should be *no interference* in their behalf. I cannot give my consent to any proclamation of principles, which may be construed to abridge the right and sacred duty which belongs to this Government, to do whatever it may choose to do in aid of any people who are striving to throw off the yoke of despotism.” Americans should not, “from unworthy affairs or false conservatism, hastily decide that we have no concern in the condition of the world beyond our own boundaries; and precipitately resolved that in no event and under no circumstances shall we interfere in behalf of oppressed nations.”

The United States, to be sure, “should not recklessly interfere with the affairs of foreign nations. We should count the cost, weigh well the duty and necessity,

and be sure that our objects are practical and obtainable, consistent with the principles of our Government and promotive of human liberty and happiness.” But the United States should insist on an interpretation of the law of nations – which Stockton insisted was in fact the correct reading of the main authorities – “that no nation has a right to interfere with the domestic concerns or the municipal institutions of foreign countries, or to stir up to rebellion their citizens or subjects. But they all agree to the right to intervene when a people have actually risen and are striving to throw off intolerable oppression.”

It is my deliberate opinion, sir, that we not only have the right, but that it would be our duty, under some circumstances, in our own good time, when the condition is proper, and it may be practical, to assist any people who rise to achieve their liberties and to establish a republican government. Sir, it has been practiced by all nations from time immemorial; and all the paper promulgations which will ever be made will never stop this practice among nations. The only way in which it can be arrested, is by appealing to their interest and safety – by boldly declaring we will intervene whenever it suits us.... this Government has an indisputable and perfect right to interfere whenever, by such interference, she can promote her own interests and advance the cause of liberty – whenever, by such interference, she may successfully rescue from the grasp of tyranny an oppressed nation, whom she may see fit to assist and to place among the independent nations of the world.

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<sup>168</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:2, pp. 159-65, 308-9.  
Emphasis added.

Stockton, upon closer examination, decided that the ancient and modern law of nations is actually “the law of the strongest,” under which “nations have generally exercised this right” of intervention “for the purposes of oppression and injustice, and in hostility to the rights of mankind.” In the early days of the American Republic, Britain and France, as the stronger powers, ran roughshod over the United States with their interpretations of the maritime law of nations. However, the growth of American power, so recently reflected by the victories in the war with Mexico, signaled that “a better time is coming, the time when the United States might insist upon the law of nations as it saw fit,” and “interpose against the oppressor and in favor of the oppressed.” If the United States pursued a policy based on mutual non-intervention – which despotisms would honor only in the breach – “it would raise a wall up, around this Republic, as high as heaven, and would shut in the light of liberty from surrounding nations.” It would violate the principles of the Monroe Doctrine. “Does anyone doubt, that if this country felt itself bound, under no circumstances and at no time, to interfere with the affairs of Europe, that before many years monarchical governments would be established in the whole Southern portion of this continent? Does any one doubt that, before many years, the island of Cuba would be a dependency of Great Britain?”

Stockton insisted that this policy of selective American intervention on behalf of liberty “may not be promoted by war, except under peculiar circumstances.” In the case at hand, he was certainly not prepared to go to war with Russia over Hungary – “partly because Russia is our old, and true, and faithful friend, and partly because Hungarian liberty, through the instrumentality of the United States, is at present an idea Utopian and impracticable.” Stockton however did not rule out cases where such circumstances

existed and where war would be a legitimate instrument by which the United States could assist national liberation and regime change. In fact, he foresaw a titanic struggle between the tyrants and “this growing Republic” over the right of intervention on behalf of the oppressed and the “inherent principle of nationality.”

In peace let it be maintained with unfaltering tenacity; in war let it be asserted by all the power of arms; and when the great contest begins, as before 1900 it must, between free principles and the right of self government and despotic power, then let it be inscribed upon all our banners – everywhere – wherever they float, on every sea, and land, and ocean and continent, where the warfare rages, let it herald the advent of freedom and national independence, and the discomfiture of tyranny and oppression.<sup>169</sup>

Contrary to some advocates of a more assertive American foreign policy, however, Stockton would have nothing to do with an alliance with Great Britain to promote liberty and national independence, or a joint Anglo-American policy of interference for non-interference. Britain was on the other side of the regime question as far as Stockton was concerned: “I have not found in her traditions or her histories, one forward step in the cause of free government which she has taken except by compulsion. Look at her, and you will see a country whose government is monarchical and whose institutions are essentially aristocratical, the most prominent feature of which is the degradation of the masses. There, sir, the land, the operative capital, the law-making power, are in the hands of a

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<sup>169</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, pp. 438-9.

comparative few; while all the rest are reduced to a state of practical slavery of the worst kind – obliged to work for masters who are under no corresponding obligations to provide for their wants.”

The issue in the coming struggle, disguise it as you may, is between kings and republicans; and in my judgment, has commenced in the amicable struggle now going on for British or American ascendancy on the ocean. The national sensibilities of both sides are keenly awakened and excited with reference to the contest. For my part, I desire the ascendancy of republican principles. All kings are alike to me. I desire the ascendancy of my country over all others – I desire, from my heart, success in the gigantic struggle for supremacy on the ocean. I desire to see the trident of the seas wrenched from the tenacious grasp of that haughty and kingly empire – not for the purpose of ambitious extension – not to tyrannize or dictate, in the spirit of an intermeddling propagandism; but to hasten a time when the sword shall no longer be the arbiter of national disputes.

“When the United States shall become the most powerful of all the nations of the globe, then I believe the time will have arrived when the principles of right reason, of humanity, and of Christianity, will exert their natural and superior power in making war no longer the last resort for the settlement of national quarrels. If we shall then presume to dictate, we shall dictate Peace as the sovereign law of all nations, and War as the violation of that universal law,” Stockton concluded. The future Pax Americana, unlike the faux Pax Britannica, would establish the conditions for successful

regime change by establishing barriers against the use of force by outside powers.<sup>170</sup>

Louisiana’s Pierre Soulé offered a southern version of New Democrat activism. “I am decidedly against this country being pent up within the narrow circle drawn around it by the advocates of a policy of impassiveness.” The real world intruded. Americans might try to console themselves with the idea that “we should confine ourselves to extending our commercial relations with foreign countries without every entangling ourselves in their politics,” but the two realms could not be made distinct. “Commercial intercourse will, and must of necessity, beget political entanglements. The question is not how you may avoid them – they will defy your prudence, and put in default all your diplomacy – but the question is, how will you meet them with the least possible danger to your peace and prosperity? You could not, if you would, disconnect yourselves at this day from Spain, England or Russia. They stand nailed to your sides.”

What! speak you of isolation? Have you not markets to retain for your present excess of production and markets to secure for the surplus of your future wealth? Can you rely on the sympathies of Princes, Kings or Czars for a continuance of those relations which alone can enable you to retain the advantages which you enjoy on the old continent? In vain seek you to remain isolated. The tendencies of your political organization, your commercial as well as your social interests, that thirst after the unknown, which you can neither compress nor satisfy, will throw you

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<sup>170</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32: 1, p. 51.

forcibly into contact with foreign powers.

What precisely did America's need to deal with its global commercial entanglement have to do with Louis Kossuth and the Hungarian Revolution? Soulé argued that "the East" represented the great market for the American future and that Russian expansion threatened this market. "Her policy is essentially exclusive, antagonistic to your interest." Russia, if successful in her drive to conquer Turkey, would exclude American commerce from the Mediterranean and what might become "the great reservoir and entrepot of eastern commerce." Austria and Hungary had once posed a barrier to the "devouring ambition of the Cossack" but Hungary was now suppressed and Austria little more than a Russian province, a highway on the Czar's road to Constantinople. This movement had a domino effect among the European powers that manifested itself in the suppression of liberty as well as commerce. "Know you not that violence and oppression are contagious, and that their triumph in any point of time, or on any point of the globe, reacts on the moral world?" "See you not England herself succumbing to the continental coalition? How anxious she seems not to give offense to European despots! Mark her condescension to their biddings.... Lord Malmesbury bends in humble compliance to the remonstrances of France and Austria, and narrows the circle of the liberties conceded to European exiles; and Lord Derby inaugurates his advent to power by withdrawing the bill which extended the electoral franchises of the British subjects; and this is England belying her past, as if she no longer recollected those proud days of her glory..."

The negative dynamic of despotic power and the suppression of liberty and commerce spilled over into the Western

Hemisphere, according to Soulé, because "while she [Britain] shows herself so submissive to European despotism, see how menacingly she rides our waters, and how arrogantly she deals out her protectorate to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Kingdom of Mosquito." French and British squadrons patrolled the Gulf of Mexico, looking for opportunities to seize Cuba – while the Fillmore administration remained hostile to the "expeditions" (filibusters) that sought to aid in the liberation of the European colonies. "Was it love for non-intervention that prompted this policy which branded [Lopez's failed invasion of Cuba] with deadly names, and doomed the invaders to an ignominious slaughter? Sir, I disapproved then, as I disapprove now, the reckless undertaking; but those who engaged in it had stout and noble hearts; they were enthusiasts – maniacs, if you choose – but enthusiasts – maddened by the most disinterested and lofty aspirations."

Soulé offered his own prescription for an assertive American policy once the nation realized the interconnectedness of the global economy and governmental systems. The United States should actively push Britain, France, and Spain out of the Western Hemisphere through all legitimate means; and then take a more aggressive tack on the continent against the despots, particularly Russia. The liberation of Europe might become a joint American and British interest, if London could finally be persuaded to stand "by those principles which her Chathams and her Cannings had so proudly proclaimed to the world."

Sir, believe me, it is our interest, and if not our interest, our duty, to keep alive, by good offices among the nations of Europe, that reverence for the institutions of our country, that devout faith in their efficacy, which looks to their promulgation through-

out the world as to the great millennium which is to close their long calendar of their wrongs. Let their flame light up the gloom and dispel the darkness which now envelop them.... Onward! onward! To stand still is to lie lifeless – inertia is death. Had Mahomet stood still, would he and the mountain have got together? Had the colonies stood still, would this be the Government it is? Had Jefferson and Polk stood still, would Louisiana be ours? Would Texas, would California, sit here in the bright garments of their sovereignty?<sup>171</sup>

### *The Anti-Interventionist Counter-Argument*

Soulé hardly represented the dominant opinion in the South or in the Democratic Party, as Alabama Senator Jeremiah Clemens made clear. Clemens said he wanted to address those who would go far beyond the recommendations of Cass and who demanded for “material aid” for Hungary (although from the tenor of his remarks, he clearly believed that Cass’s line of argument itself led to direct intervention). In his prepared remarks during the debate over the Clarke Resolution and in prior statements, Clemens attacked the premises of the New Democrats and progressive Whigs – that Hungary was a viable nation with a legal and moral claim to independence from Austria; that American support would make a difference in deterring or preventing outside powers from intervening successfully; that Kossuth and

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<sup>171</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, Appendix, pp. 349-53.

his associates represented the cause of liberty and republican government; and that an alliance with England offered a viable means of conducting an activist American foreign policy.<sup>172</sup>

To counter the case for Hungarian independence, Clemens argued that “not... every part of an empire, whether it be called a province, state, or department, is a nation. Hungary is and has long been a part of the Austrian Empire, and is no more independent of the Chief Executive than is New York of the General Government.” If a minority of a nation was dissatisfied and wished to change its form of government, “there is no recourse but revolution; and not until that revolution is successfully accomplished can they claim a place among the nations of the earth.” Common language, ethnicity, or local law did not automatically constitute a nation. Clemens also scoffed at those who pointed to the law of nations as establishing a right to nationhood. “The nation does not exist which has not regarded all such laws whenever prompted by interest to do so. To take care of its own interest, to provide for its own security, is, and always has been the ruling principle of every nation, irrespective of any public law.... A right without the means of making it respected is a mockery.” Hungary could not maintain its independence in the face of Russian opposition and it evidently could not persuade neighboring powers that it was in their interest to assist it in doing so. Clemens did not see why it was in America’s interest, either, as far removed as the United States was from the scene.

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<sup>172</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:2, Appendix, pp. 179-82. Clemens complained, however, that the interventionists argued that “we can intercede with Turkey for the Hungarian – with France for the Arab – with England for the Irishman; but not a word is spoken here of the fifty sons of America who were murdered in Cuba” in the latest unsuccessful filibustering expedition.”

We can expect nothing as a favor from other nations, and none has a right to expect favors from us. Our interference, if we interfere at all, must be dictated by interest; and therefore I ask, in what particular manner can we be benefited? Russia has done us no injury; we have, therefore, no wrongs to avenge. Russia has no territory of which we wish to deprive her, and from her there is no danger against which it is necessary to guard. Enlightened self-interest does not offer a single argument in favor of embroiling ourselves in a quarrel with her.

Clemens disputed whether the United States had the power, even if it had the interest, to make the difference in a battle for Hungarian independence. By Kossuth's own admission, Russia could put one hundred thousand troops into the field within thirty days, and Austria at least as many. Once the United States gave advance notice of its intention to interfere, these forces and more "would be collected at the most convenient points, and an attempted revolution would be crushed before we heard it had begun." Privateers against American commerce would swarm the ocean "and the rich fruits fathered by the arts of peace will be sacrificed to the demon of folly." The national debt would soar to support the necessary quadrupling of the size of the navy, an enormous expansion of the army, and the necessary improvements in coastal fortifications. "I need not depict the unenviable attitude in which we would then be placed. Involved in a war without an object, our ally vanquished, the very chains we sought to loosen riveted with tenfold strength, the miserable victims of their own and our folly piling curses on us, with the sneering taunts of the victors

adding the last mortification to the Quixotism of America." But even assume the United States somehow succeeded in a war with Russia, "I fear success even more than defeat."

Commit our people once to unnecessary foreign wars, let victory encourage the military spirit already too prevalent among them, and Roman history will have no chapter bloody enough to be transmitted to posterity side by side with ours. In a brief period we shall have reenacted, on a grander scale, the same scenes which marked her decline. The veteran soldier who has followed a victorious leader from clime to clime, will forget his love of county in his love for his commander, and the bayonets you have sent abroad to conquer a kingdom will be brought back to destroy the rights of the citizen and prop the throne of an emperor.

As to the argument that an alliance with Britain would solve the strategic dilemmas associated with a policy of intervention for non-intervention, Clemens scoffed: "A league with England, out of which any good could arise to America, is an Utopian dream, of which a school-boy should be ashamed." Britain would offer "nothing in exchange for our share in the common danger and the common expense. The policy of England is known to the world, and all history is false if she ever formed an alliance without a selfish end in view." For those who saw an ideological affinity between the two Anglo-American regimes, Clements insisted that "British freedom is not freedom as we understand it, and praises of the British constitution" by Kossuth and some American interventionists – with "the hereditary king and heraldry

nobility which disgrace it ... do not furnish the highest evidence of a clear conception of the principles of civil liberty.”

To those who claimed that it was the divine or Manifest Destiny of the United States to expand the area of freedom, and that America should not be guided by self-interest, Clemens responded: “I prefer waiting for some clearer manifestation of the Divine Will” than Louis Kossuth. As Clemens had argued in an earlier debate, Americans should examine more closely the form of regime that Kossuth and his associates proposed to establish. “Sir, I think it well enough to enquire, before we enter his school, when he became a republican. If I have read the history of that struggle aright, it was not until defeat and misfortune had overtaken him. In the zenith of his power – in the pride of his high place as the Dictator of Hungary, he saw no beauty in universal equality, and knelt at no altar erected to Freedom. The contest in which he was engaged was not a contest between despotism and republicanism. It was a war of races.” Kossuth and his associates were the oppressors, not the oppressed; “the supremacy of the Magyar element was the leading idea.” Rather than rebelling from the Emperor of Austria at the outset, the Magyar leaders “petitioned him, in the humblest of terms, not for liberty, not for the security of their own rights, *but for aid to enable them to keep another people in subjection.*” The Magyars had long been one the central props of the Hapsburg monarchy and Clemens had no doubt that they would revert to that form of non-republican regime if they ever achieved their independence. “Our aid, then, if given at all, will not be given to a republic but to a monarchy,” and a peculiarly oppressive one at that.

Clemens rejected the idea that there was a practical middle ground between rhetorical and political support for the

Hungarians, and the use of military force to realize that support. Kossuth clearly understood this – as did many of his American supporters – and they sought to encourage the use of high-sounding words and slogans like intervention for non-intervention, as the first step to preparing public opinion for war. Clemens cited Andrew Jackson’s warning in his Fourth Annual Message that official words themselves could constitute intervention in the affairs of others, and that America should avoid the slippery slope that began with seemingly harmless rhetoric.

In the view I have given of our connection with foreign powers [Jackson wrote] allusion have been made to their domestic disturbances or foreign wars, to their revolutions or dissensions. It may be proper to observe that this is done solely in cases where those events affect our political relations with them, or to show their operation on our commerce. Further than this it is neither our policy nor our right to interfere. Our best wishes on all occasions, our good offices when required, will be afforded to promote the domestic tranquility and foreign peace of all nations with whom we have any intercourse. Any intervention in their affairs further than this, even by the expression of an official opinion, is contrary to our principles of international policy, and will always be avoided.<sup>173</sup>

Senator Jacob Miller, an anti-slavery Whig from New Jersey, argued that party politics, and specifically the search for “foreign votes,” explained much of the pressure for words or action to “intermeddle

<sup>173</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:2, Appendix, pp. 179-82; *Congressional Globe*, 32: 1, pp. 52-3.

in the political affairs of Europe.” The object of the immigrant and slaveholding interests was to assault the policy of the Fillmore administration and elect a Democratic President who would “change the well-established policy of the Government” and remove the prohibition against American filibustering in the Western Hemisphere. To support his point that much of the support for European revolutionaries was aimed at creating a climate to support filibustering, Miller quoted from a speech by Senator Douglas in New Orleans: “They [the administration] employ the American Navy and Army to greet the volunteers and seize the provisions, ammunition, and supplies of every kind which may be sent in aid of the [Cuban] patriot cause, and at the same time give free passage and protection to all men, ammunition, and supplies, which may be sent in aid of the royalists, and they CALL THAT NEUTRALITY.”

Miller asked his colleagues to consider the implications of changing the much-derided “stand-still” policy of Washington and his successors. The so-called modern law of nations, Miller argued, had always “secured to certain leading Powers the right to intervene with the internal affairs of nations, in order to maintain the balance of power.” That so-called right of intervention “has ever been the instrument of ambition and tyranny – the weapon by which the strong Powers of the earth have destroyed the independence of the weak.” During the era of the original French Revolution, “republicanism tried its hand at intervention ... through the nations, over the Alps, through Italy, up the Danube, down the Rhine, over the burning sands of Egypt, and the cold snows of Russia, never stopping in her mad career until both the horse and rider perished upon the field of Waterloo.” The despotic powers then resumed their aggressive course “and again the weaker nations of Europe felt its keen

edge in the dismemberment of their territories.”

According to Miller, intervention brought neither peace nor justice nor free government but a cycle of never-ending violence and the oppression of the weak. It was only through the wisdom of Washington that the United States resisted the siren call of intervention “and promulgated the new law of non-intervention, for the regulation of our intercourse with foreign nations, and theirs with us.... Then it was he, who by just war had achieved liberty for his country, gave a new law of peace to the world.”

That nation which can standstill on its own soil, resting on its own independence, and relying upon its own resources, while other nations are in commotion, fighting and interfering with each other, is *the* nation of the earth, *the* government of commanding power and influence. That policy which caused us to stand still and look with national indifference upon the exciting conflicts of interest and ambition, of tyranny and liberty, which grew out of the first French Revolution, has accomplished more during the last ten years for the real progress of free institutions that will ever be obtained by *filibustering interveners* and locomotive politicians to the world’s end; and if, in the coming storm which now threatens Europe, the statesmen of this country can muster moral courage enough to stand unmoved by its fury, we shall prove to mankind that our house is founded upon a rock.

Miller compared the United States with the sun, “fixed in its own position upon this new continent,” which “attracts the gaze and admiration of the world. From it, as

from a central light, there goes from it a daily influence of power and reformation.

To deprive it of its isolation, to disturb its fixed position, in order to carry its power and influence to distant countries, would be as wise an act as to put the sun upon wheels for the benefit of a benighted planet; or, to make the figure more applicable, to cut up our glorious luminary of liberty into farthing candles, and go about the world to enlighten some spot – a Hungary or a Cuba – overshadowed by throne, or darkened by a despotism. Let us, rather, stand still and await coming events. Day will success to night; and when the Old World shall emerge from the darkness of despotism, and her people be prepared for self-government, our light, steady and fixed, will lead the regenerated nations to liberty and independence.... All Europe at this moment feels our power at work at the foundation of her despotisms, not by intervention, armed or unarmed, but by the wisdom and justice of our national policy, teaching the world what a nation may accomplish for freedom and humanity, which, while it refuses to quite its own to stand upon foreign ground, offers home and liberty to the oppressed of every land.

The New Democratic interventionists, Miller charged, were “deaf to the call of American labor for protection. They cannot see our broken-down forges and our ruined manufactures. While the masses in Europe are the object of their most ardent sympathies, the masses at home are abandoned with cold indifference, and left, unaided, to fight the battles of labor and national

independence against the combined capital of Europe.... Hitherto, the influence of our policy has been to *Americanize* Europe; now, it is to *Europeanize* America.”<sup>174</sup>

Tennessee Whig James C. Jones offered the most detailed rebuttal of the argument that there could be a middle or “progressive” ground between what he characterized as the strict non-interventionism of Washington and the Founders, on the one hand, and armed intervention on behalf of foreign revolutionary movements, on the other. Jones found Cass’s proposed expression of “deep concern” to be ambiguous, one capable of various interpretations, similar to Andrew Jackson’s expression during the 1828 presidential campaign that he favored a “judicious” tariff (a tweak at the Democrats, especially the southerners). Ambiguous expressions, however, must be clarified eventually in the form of a specific policy, and that in Jones’ opinion led inexorably down the slippery slope to armed intervention. One could already see this escalatory process taking place in rhetoric: Seward had gone beyond Cass’s formulation of “deep concern” by offering a “solemn protest” not only against Russian action but professing that the United States would not be “indifferent to similar acts ... *whenever or wherever* they may occur.”

...my fears are founded [Jones argued] on the fact that when we have taken one step, another becomes more important or imperious; and thus we may go on, step after step, until we find ourselves involved in all the turmoils of European conflicts and quarrels. The Senator from Michigan [Cass] moves a little; the Senator from New York [Seward] comes along and takes

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<sup>174</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32: 1, Appendix, pp. 212-4.

another step.... If the senator from New York is not satisfied with the two which have gone before him, another man coming behind him may take another step, and another, and another, and another, and one false step renders retreat impossible. If you have ever passed the Rubicon, retreat is impossible.

Cass might protest that none but a mad man would think of going to war to redress wrongs such as Russia imposed on Hungary; but Jones asked what would happen if the Czar – or a future despot – should respond to the American message with scorn and contempt?

How will you receive it? I can speak for you, Mr. President. You would not pocket the insult, you would not submit to the indignity. Now, if we take this step at all, I want to know from the learned Senators from Michigan and New York, whether they are ready to take the next step? If Russia treats us with scorn and contempt, and heap odium upon our Government and nation, are we ready to vindicate it? Are we ready to stand up to it, and to vote the men and money necessary to vindicate the honor of this country? Let us stop before we take another step. They have no right to involve the pride and honor of the country, unless they are also willing also to take the necessary steps to vindicate and maintain them.... But the gentlemen say they will not fight over this. Well, if you do not mean to fight about it, just leave it alone. [Laughter] I am opposed to fighting as much as you are; but if you mean to get us into a quarrel, in which our honor will be at stake, in which our

pride will be involved, I want you to stand up and fight it out, and have no *dodging*.

Jones scoffed at Cass's argument that American protests, appealing to international law and morality, would have moral influence over Russia and the rest of the world. Did Cass really believe that the Czar – whose actions in Hungary Cass had previously characterized as cruel, enormous and outrageous – possessed enough virtue to mend his ways merely by the force of American words? If so, would not a protest from any state, like the little republic of San Marino, have the same effect? "I would not draw a straw for all the moral influences of your declarations, unless there be a power behind the throne, greater than the throne" – that is, "the physical power and force possessed, to constrain obedience to it." Yet Cass proposed to send his protest to the Czar along with a footnote that "anyone who talks about enforcing this protest with armed intervention is a madman. How much virtue do you suppose would emanate from the protest? Just none at all, it seems to me." As for the moral effect that such protests might have in terms of mobilizing the rest of outraged humanity, Jones pointed to the recent refusal of the British Prime Minister, Lord Derby, to embrace a policy of intervention for non-intervention.

For Jones, there was the additional question of interest, rightly understood. "But when I come back to examining the records, and ask myself the question, what has been the course of that [Russian] Government towards us from our infancy down to the present moment, and why we should inveigh in such tirades of abuse and denunciation of her ... That she outraged humanity, justice, and propriety, in her course towards Hungary, I admit, but it ought not to be forgotten – gratitude forbids that we should forget – that Russia has been

one of the most constant, decided, and unchanging friends we have ever had.”

Jones ended with an appeal to “come home, gentlemen, come home.” Senators might weep for the fate of the poor Hungarians, but “better come home, and weep over widows and orphans, left homeless and fatherless by the neglect of the Government to give protection, and to improve her inland and her external commerce.... We have a sea coast almost boundless, with harbors to improve, interests to protect, thousand and tens of thousands of American citizens languishing for the want of paternal regard which the Government ought to extend to them, in giving protection to the honest labor of the country.”<sup>175</sup>

In the end, none of these resolutions or amendments ever came to a vote. The conservative Whigs, aligned with the Fillmore administration, and a strong majority of Southerners of both parties, constituted a substantial opposition to the New Democrats and progressive Whigs on this issue. By the time Kossuth returned to Washington in mid-April, Kossuth mania had largely passed. Only a few Senators, Seward among them, bothered to pay him courtesy calls before he departed for New England and eventually for Europe. Kossuth, meanwhile, had further muddied the waters by becoming involved in a proposed expedition to protect the white-ruled Dominicans against incorporation by the new self-proclaimed Emperor of Haiti, Faustin I. “If the Spaniards are beaten off the island by the negroes, we are in favor of encouraging an immediate descent of Americans and their setting up a republic for themselves ... and the introduction there of all the political institutions of this country, including domestic slavery,” George Sanders declared in the *Democratic Review*. The proposed expedition would establish a colony within the Dominican portion of the island,

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<sup>175</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32:1, Appendix, pp. 302-7.

consisting of 1500 American and foreign fighting men under the leadership of Colonel John T. Pickett of Kentucky, then proceed to subjugate Haiti. The expeditionary force would have then made be available to Kossuth for use in Europe. Kossuth claimed to oppose the Haitian Emperor because he was a despot under the sway of the Tsar of Russia, but reports of this scheme scarcely endeared him to the American anti-slavery movement.<sup>176</sup>

## V. Epilogue

The Presidential election of 1852 did not turn on the question of American attitudes towards Kossuth and future European revolutions. New Hampshire Democrat Franklin Pierce, the “dark horse” nominee who southern interests in the party regarded as reliable, easily defeated the candidate of a weakened Whig Party, Winfield Scott; and Free Soiler John Hale, whom both sides had regarded as something of a gadfly over the slavery question during the Senate debates discussed above.

The Democratic Party platform, formulated with the south in mind, ignored the issue of intervention entirely and cast the matter as one of defending American constitutional liberty, rightly understood:

Resolved, That, in view of the condition of popular institutions in the Old World, a high and sacred duty is devolved, with increased

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<sup>176</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, p. 155; Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America*, pp.122-6 (*Democratic Review*).

responsibility upon the democratic party of this country, as the party of the people, to uphold and maintain the rights of every State, and thereby the Union of the States, and to sustain and advance among us constitutional liberty, by continuing to resist all monopolies and exclusive legislation for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many, and by a vigilant and constant adherence to those principles and compromises of the constitution, which are broad enough and strong enough to embrace and uphold the Union as it was, the Union as it is, and the Union as it shall be, in the full expansion of the energies and capacity of this great and progressive people.<sup>177</sup>

The Whig Party platform articulated the default position of American foreign policy, that of strict non-intervention in the affairs of others and the exemplary role of the Republic:

That while struggling freedom everywhere enlists the warmest sympathy of the Whig party, we still adhere to the doctrines of the Father of his Country, as announced in his Farewell Address, of keeping ourselves free from all entangling alliances with foreign countries, and of never quitting our own to stand upon foreign ground; that our mission as a republic is not to propagate our opinions, or impose on other countries our form of government by artifice or force; but to teach, by example, and show by our success,

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<sup>177</sup> 1852 Democratic Party Platform, 1 June 1852, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29575>

moderation and justice, the blessings of self-government, and the advantages of free institutions.<sup>178</sup>

The Free Soil Party alone explicitly advocated American activism:

That every nation has a clear right to alter or change its own government and to administer its own concerns in such manner as may best secure the rights and promote the happiness of the people; and foreign interference with that right is a dangerous violation of the law of nations, against which all independent governments should protest, and endeavor by all proper means to prevent; and especially is it the duty of the American government, representing the chief republic of the world, to protest against, and by all proper means to prevent, the intervention of kings and emperors against nations seeking to establish for themselves republican or constitutional governments....

That the independence of Haiti ought to be recognized by our government, and our commercial relations with it placed on the footing of the most favored nations.<sup>179</sup>

The precise attitude of Pierce himself towards European affairs was unknown when he took office. Party conservatives thought him safe against the wilder inter-

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<sup>178</sup> 1852 Whig Party Platform, 17 June 1852, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25856>

<sup>179</sup> 1852 Free Soil Platform, 11 August 1852, in Thomas Hudson McKee, ed., *The National Conventions and Platforms of All Political Parties, 1789 to 1904*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Baltimore: The Friedenwald Company, 1904), p. 83.

ventionist notions of the New Democrats (by now generally known as “Young America”), while some observers believed that he secretly harbored Young American-type ambitions. His Inaugural Address was taken as a repudiation of Fillmore’s cautious approach, certainly with respect to official American assertiveness in the Western Hemisphere – although not to illegal filibustering. Pierce was less precise towards Europe:

With an experience thus suggestive and cheering, the policy of my Administration will not be controlled by any timid forebodings of evil from expansion. Indeed, it is not to be disguised that our attitude as a nation and our position on the globe render the acquisition of certain possessions not within our jurisdiction eminently important for our protection, if not in the future essential for the preservation of the rights of commerce and the peace of the world. Should they be obtained, it will be through no grasping spirit, but with a view to obvious national interest and security, and in a manner entirely consistent with the strictest observance of national faith. We have nothing in our history or position to invite aggression; we have everything to beckon us to the cultivation of relations of peace and amity with all nations.

Purposes, therefore, at once just and pacific will be significantly marked in the conduct of our foreign affairs. I intend that my Administration shall leave no blot upon our fair record, and trust I may safely give the assurance that no act within the legitimate scope of my constitutional control will be tolerated on the part

of any portion of our citizens which can not challenge a ready justification before the tribunal of the civilized world.... Of the complicated European systems of national polity we have heretofore been independent. From their wars, their tumults, and anxieties we have been, happily, almost entirely exempt. Whilst these are confined to the nations which gave them existence, and within their legitimate jurisdiction, they can not affect us except as they appeal to our sympathies in the cause of human freedom and universal advancement. But the vast interests of commerce are common to all mankind, and the advantages of trade and international intercourse must always present a noble field for the moral influence of a great people.<sup>180</sup>

Kossuth, for his part, had decided to abandon any pretensions of political neutrality and effectively endorsed Pierce before leaving the United States. Kossuth sent one of his associates to attend Pierce’s inauguration and ascertain his views on supporting actively a new Hungarian Revolution. If the new President was found willing, the envoy was to propose that the United State support Turkey diplomatically against Russia, strengthen the U.S. Navy in the Mediterranean, and establish a steamship line directly between New York and Constantinople. The United States would also provide military supplies and financial contributions and agree that in the case of an insurrection, it would transport volunteers from America at the U.S. government’s expense. Kossuth also sent private requests to Colonel Pickett, encouraging him to

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<sup>180</sup> Franklin Pierce, Inaugural Address, 4 March 1852, <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3553>

organize volunteers and make his men available for an expedition to Italy, Hungary or Turkey.<sup>181</sup>

Kossuth's emissary received no response or encouragement from Pierce or his high-level appointees. The new Secretary of State, William Marcy of New York, had largely ignored Kossuth during his visit to America. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, while a Senator from Mississippi, had been critical of Kossuth during the Senate debates. One of the key New Democrats remaining in Congress, Stephen Douglas (who had unsuccessfully sought the presidential nomination) emphasized the hemispheric rather than the transatlantic dimensions of an assertive foreign policy; one built around assisting revolutionary movements in Cuba, opposing British influence in Central America, and excluding other European powers entirely from the New World. When a European war broke out over the Crimea, Pierce ignored an inquiry from Kossuth whether the United States was prepared to recognize the independence of Hungary, Poland and Italy if they established *de facto* governments; and to accord them the benefits of commercial and neutral rights.<sup>182</sup>

There were still prospects of combining a hemispheric and transatlantic New Democrat agenda, however. Several of the Pierce administration's diplomatic appointments, which were made to accommodate factional interests within the Democratic Party, believed that by encouraging revolutions in Europe, the United States would enable the completion of its territorial and political ambitions in the New World. These appointees included Pierre Soulé as Minister to Spain, John L. O'Sullivan as

Minister to Portugal, James Buchanan as Minister to Great Britain, Daniel Sickles as the secretary of the American legation in London and George Saunders as the U.S. consul there. Sanders organized what became a famous, or notorious, dinner for the exiled European revolutionary leaders then in England, including Kossuth, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Herzen, and Ledru-Roland. Buchanan's appearance at the dinner gave it the appearance of a U.S.-sanctioned meeting in support of revolution. Soulé was the most active of the group. He conspired with Spanish rebels to overthrow the monarchy in hopes that a republican government there would cede Cuba to the United States. He was also accused of collaborating with potential assassins of Napoleon III; and of trying to bring about a war between Britain and Spain over Cuba, during which the resulting interruption of American cotton and corn supplies would destabilize the European social order and lead to the overthrow of its monarchies.<sup>183</sup>

Any such free-lancing by U.S. diplomats was effectively curtailed after the fiasco of the Ostend Manifesto, which publicized to domestic and international audiences the extent of American willingness to pressure Spain over Cuba. Pierce and later President Buchanan continued to enforce American neutrality laws against filibustering expeditions despite their private sympathies towards their aims. Such political circumstances in the United States created the possibility of filibustering that would result in the creation of independent (or client) regimes, rather than additions to American territory. The adventurer William Walker landed Nicaragua in June 1855 and eventually established a puppet government under his

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<sup>181</sup> Riepma, *Young America*, pp. 232-5; Komlos, *Louis Kosssuth in America*, pp. 130-2, 171.

<sup>182</sup> Riepma, *Young America*, pp. 232-5; Komlos, *Louis Kosssuth in America*, pp. 169-71.

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<sup>183</sup> Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, pp. 93, 110ff; Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations*, pp. 28-9.

control. Walker subsequently won the presidency through rigged elections, reinstated chattel slavery, and established English as a second language. He envisioned the creation of a white-ruled Central American Union based on slavery and closely tied to the southern states. The U.S. government recognized Walker's regime and New Democrats such as Stephen Douglas defended it.<sup>184</sup>

In time, Walker overextended himself and was executed but his legacy, and that of the other filibusters, deeply affected American politics, as well U.S. relations with Latin America. In 1861, president-elect Abraham Lincoln, who had once identified himself with the progressive Whigs, rejected a series of compromises proposed by Senator Crittenden aimed at heading off the Civil War. "Filibustering for all South of us, and making slave states would follow ... to put us again on the high road to a slave empire," Lincoln wrote. "A year will not pass, till we shall have to take Cuba as a condition upon which they will stay in the Union."<sup>185</sup> As the nation slid deeper into domestic crisis over slavery during the 1850s, the prospect of a new political coalition based on an assertive foreign policy and an aggressive approach to foreign regime change, disappeared.

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<sup>184</sup> Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, p. 220; Walter McDougall, *Throes of Democracy: The American Civil War Era, 1829-1877* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 346.

<sup>185</sup> James McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 118-9 (filibustering).