

you will please to communicate to M. Perrin, the French commissioner, upon the appearance of any disposition on his part or on the part of any French naval commander in the Pacific Ocean to proceed to hostilities against the Government of Hawaii for the purpose of enforcing the demands which have been made upon it on the part of France.

The Navy Department will receive instructions to place, and to keep, the naval armament of the United States in the Pacific Ocean in such a state of strength and preparation as shall be requisite for the preservation of the honor and dignity of the United States and the safety of the Government of the Hawaiian Islands.

I have, etc.,

DANIEL WEBSTER.

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[Unnumbered.]

*Mr. Webster to Mr. Severance.*

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,  
Washington, July 14, 1851.

SIR: I have written you a regular official dispatch, setting forth the principles of policy which will be pursued by the administration here in whatever respects the Government of the Hawaiian Islands.

I now write you a letter of private instructions, made necessary by suggestions contained in your communications by Lieut. Johnson.

In the first place, I have to say that the war-making power in this Government rests entirely with Congress, and that the President can authorize belligerent operations only in the cases expressly provided for by the Constitution and the laws. By these no power is given to the Executive to oppose an attack by one independent nation on the possessions of another. We are bound to regard both France and Hawaii as independent states, and equally independent; and though the general policy of the Government might lead it to take part with either in a controversy with the other, still, if this interference be an act of hostile force, it is not within the constitutional power of the President, and still less is it within the power of any subordinate agent of Government, civil or military. If the *Serieuse* had attacked Honolulu, and thereupon the *Vandalia* had fired upon the *Serieuse*, this last act would have been an act of violence against France not to be justified, and, in fact, if not disavowed at Washington it would have been an act of war. In these cases, where the power of Congress can not be exercised beforehand, all must be left to the redress which that body may subsequently authorize. This you will constantly bear in mind. But, at the same time, it is not necessary that you should enter into these explanations with the French commissioner or the French naval commander.

In my official letter of this date I have spoken of what the United States would do in certain contingencies. But in thus speaking of the Government of the United States I do not mean the executive power, but the Government in its general aggregate, and especially that branch of the Government which possesses the war-making power. This distinction you will carefully observe, and you will neither direct, request,