

Joint Crisis Committee: Opium Wars
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The First Opium War

While my military experience has mainly been related to Ireland, I believe that as Master-General of the Ordinance, I can use my expertise to weigh in on the current trade crisis with China. I fully recognize China's conscious efforts to deter our trade efforts with their nation; our relations have been built upon trade and their refusal to allow the expansion of it is unacceptable. However, coercion through the sole use of brute force will only further the deterioration of our already weak relationship with the Chinese. Going to war without an attempt at diplomatic relations would be an excessive and unnecessary use of our silver in an ironic attempt to salvage it.

When we first began trade with China, we were giving away exorbitant amounts of silver in exchange for tea, porcelain, and other goods that are unique to China. Estimates have shown that 3.6 million pounds of silver were drained out of our country to pay for solely tea. This loss of precious metal prompted us to find a "counterpart commodity" for silver; we found this in poppy fields in our colony in Bengal, India. Opium has proven itself to be an effective trade item. With its addictive properties along with the profit that can be made from it, Chinese traders have not only accepted the drug but have flocked to it.¹⁰ Opium use has become common among the Chinese public and there are rumors that it has even spread into the military; and as a result, there are concerns that Emperor Daoguang will act to further restrict trade with our nation in order to preserve his national defense.¹¹

The Qing government under Daoguang has prohibited the British from fair and equal trade through the Canton system. In 1757, the emperor decreed that all trade be restricted to the southern port city of Guangzhou. Our merchants are confined to a small riverbank outside of the city walls and are "subject to numerous demanding regulations, including the exclusion of foreign warships from the area, [and] the prohibition of foreign women or firearms." In addition, while on Chinese soil, foreign traders are subject to Chinese law where suspects are "guilty until proven innocent."² Emperor Daoguang cannot take legal responsibility for the actions of British merchants; and by doing so, he is implying that our judicial system is inferior to that of China's. These restrictions are suffocating our traders with no reason besides to prevent the distribution of opium, a plant that has been used as medicine by the Chinese for thousands of years.⁹ I intend to relieve British and other foreign traders of these harsh restrictions in this meeting.

Britain is currently in a time of transformation. Agriculture has long dominated the economies of the world, however in recent decades Britain has seen a movement towards mass production of goods through the utilization of new technology and work culture. Agriculture is still a dominant part of British society and the introduction of "new tools, fertilizers and harvesting techniques [have] result[ed] in increased productivity and agricultural prosperity."⁸ Now, only a fraction of the people are needed to produce the same amount of food; this has allowed for more people than ever before to enter other fields and allow for Britain's economy to

take root in many different areas. This branching of workers has also created a large and reliable working class in Britain.

The current government of England is divided, but unargumentative. Our Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, has expressed his disapproval of political controversy at a time when the cabinet is at its most polarized. The Whig party currently have control of the government and are promoting military action against China if they do not lift their trade restrictions. Robert Peel is the leader of the shadow opposition, the Conservatives, and is advocating against war.⁶

I have shown my support for her majesty's royal army in the past. When a new budget was proposed that lessened the amount of money given towards the military, I voted against it. I believe that military is essential to a stable society. That it is "the duty of the government to protect the well-affected." However, military is only a single component of a nation. When referring to protecting our citizens, we must take both national and international threats into account. An unstable economy has the potential to do as much, if not more, damage to British citizens as a war. On February 28, 1822, I stated that "army economies have been carried as far as they possibly could."⁵ I do not believe that war against China is the best course of action due to the dangers it poses to our economy. China is a major trade partner that has allowed us to utilize our colonies to their greatest economic extent while providing us with some of the most sought after items in the worlds. The expenses of war itself are something to be cautious of as well.

Despite the excessive trade and tension between our two nations, China and Britain have barely had true diplomatic discourse. The only times there have been an attempt made, it has failed. I believe that the first course of action would be to establish relations with China and ask that they rethink their uncouth behavior towards her Majesty's government. As the most powerful nation in the world, I believe that Britain has the authority to sway Emperor Daoguang. In these talks, I hope to accomplish three things: open trade along the coast of China, fair exchange of whatever goods merchants choose to accept, and British law to be enforced during trade negotiations. All of this will allow for Britain and China to achieve maximum trade potential.

If China does not choose to agree to these conditions, then I believe that war is the only option. The Emperor has expressed his distaste in foreign trade and I do not think that behavior can be tolerated in a modern era, one where nations thrive as Britain pushes them forwards. The use of force in order to instill fear into the Chinese will be in order if they do not comply to the conditions put forth.

Either path the Chinese government chooses to take, one of diplomacy or one of war, Britain shall come out triumphant and confident in our evident superiority over the Chinese.

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