Chapter 3 | Imperialism, Anti-Imperialism, and the Pan American Conferences

According to conventional views, seen in a global context, the US and Mexico have undergone fundamentally different historical and cultural trajectories. To most scholars, the US is an imperialist power par excellence while Mexico belongs to an anti-imperialist tradition as a legacy of losing half of its territory to US expansion in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War. Accordingly, as part of the core set of ideas that sustain myths of historical incompatibility, scholars have assumed that divergent historical experiences have caused Mexican and American diplomats to read international politics in fundamentally different terms: Mexicans have been staunch supporters of self-determination while Americans have imagined other nations as underdeveloped, legitimizing a long history of interventions. Put differently, by default, imperialism and anti-imperialism are meant to differentiate between American and Mexican historical actors.

But such contrasting engagement in international politics has not been inherent or always true. In fact, this chapter challenges these myths by revising the assumption of an anti-imperialist ethos natural to revolutionary nationalism. Both countries' foreign policies were deeply influenced by the aftermath of the Revolution. In the 1920s, in a conflict that influenced a larger transformation of inter-American politics, both countries' diplomats competed for leadership in Latin America, particularly in Central America. Shared conceptions that Latin America required moral and political guidance were essential to the rivalry. Diplomats in both countries believed that to some degree their country's respective language of development was exportable. By the late 1920s, the US and Mexico projected their regional rivalry onto hemispheric politics and collaborated to influence a shift towards non-intervention after three decades of incessant US

interventions in Latin America. As I will show, mutual restraint simultaneously secured Mexican sovereignty and US interests in the continent.

Although surprising from a contemporary perspective, during the 1920s competition over influence in Latin American politics was a serious matter to diplomats on both sides. Examining this competition requires moving past what likely seems a cognitive dissonance: Mexico as some kind of imperialist agent. Naturally, I do not mean that Mexico became an imperial power in the US way. Instead, I mean to use imperialism as a code to help decipher the contradictory Mexican position that opposed US intervention and yet actively sought to spread Mexican influence in Central America.[1] Indeed, decades ago, the renowned Mexican scholar Daniel Cosío Villegas used imperialism as a code in his volume on Mexican relations with Central America during the turn of the 20th century. He wrote that the cognitive difficulties and failed version of Mexican imperialism did not make the approach any less rewarding: "Because at this juncture it's obvious that Mexico cannot and will not be an imperialist power, it seems incredible that at one point it was or pretended to become one, and as a result is very difficult explaining why this was the case and why Mexico aspired to be so."[2]

Though Mexican aspirations to compete with the US seem an irrelevant adventure at best and unconvincing at worst, examining this moment reveals why the 1920s were particularly important to the making of the US-Mexico strategic convergence that followed over the next seven decades and that was characterized—for the most part—by Mexican independence in

[1] For work on Mexico-Central America relations, see Jurgen Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant*; Mónica Toussaint, "El triángulo fatal en la geopolítica regional: fronteras, unión y paz (1876-1910)," in *En busca de una nación soberana: relaciones internacionales de México, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. by Schiavon, Spenser, and Vázquez; "Memoria de un diferendo limítrofe: Matías Romero y el tratado de límites entre México y Guatemala (1881–1882)," in *Artífices y operadores de la política exterior mexicana*, ed. by Sánchez, et al; and Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México*, volume 4, part 1.

[2] Daniel Cosío Villegas writes: "Como a estas alturas resulta obvio que México no es ni puede llegar a ser, una potencia imperial, parece increíble que alguna vez lo fuera o que pretendiera serlo, y es muy difícil, en consecuencia, explicar por qué lo fue o pretendió serlo." In Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México*, vol. 4, part 1, XX.

international politics that somehow also managed to satisfy US interests. Furthermore, while on the surface the competition arose partly from realism, challenging the US was also made possible by a version of exceptionalism usually associated with turn of the century American imperialism that could sustain both imperialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric through the broad rubric of civilization as a concept.[3]

In fact, Mexican diplomats aspired to compete with the US; but this was not an anti-imperialist agenda as scholars insistent on narratives of US imperialism and epic Latin American resistance would argue. Instead, this was a moment when Mexican diplomats behaved as if they were representing a great power and even with limited means challenged the US for influence in Central America. In the process, US diplomats validated Mexico as a legitimate middle range power whose collaboration was critical to US foreign policy—to a degree, besides Brazil, exceptional in the context of Latin America—thus opening ground for the possibility of mutually beneficial strategic links.

In other words, Mexican anti-interventionism was not the natural outgrowth of the Revolution. Instead, Mexican competition with the US was coded through a cultural attitude towards Latin America traditionally studied as part of US imperialism. Mexican diplomats, particularly labor leaders, intellectuals, and career diplomats, felt that revolutionary social politics were a model for progressive governance in Latin America and an alternative to US influence. These notions were undergirded by convictions that Latin American was backwards vis-à-vis Mexico and enough confidence to launch a small but significant intervention in Nicaragua in 1926.

[3] Work on US progressive anti-imperialism includes Jonathan Hansen, *The Lost Promises of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920*; and Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution*. Dawley briefly discusses the place of the Revolution amongst progressives in light of Wilsonian foreign policy.

Meanwhile, difficulties with the Revolution encouraged the State Department to consider the benefits of strategic restraint after countless US interventions in Central America and Mexico. Indeed, the failure of the State Department to undermine the Revolution and the very real strategic competition from Mexico, a far weaker power, influenced the State Department to reconsider its foreign policy and to implicitly abandon the Monroe Doctrine, which since 1823 held that the US had the right to intervene in Latin America. During the 1930s, the turn against intervention would be complete in what became the Good Neighbor Policy of no-intervention.

To circumscribe my arguments, I focus on the Pan-American Conferences of 1923 and 1928 because these were places where three relevant factors intersected: inter-American discussions over post-World War I international politics, US-Mexican competing interests, and Latin Americans governments playing US-Mexico conflicts for their own ends. Fortunately, the archival documentation is rich: Mexico's government always had a rich participation in Pan American Conference of all kinds, from medical to financial, underlining a strong transnational component in Mexican social policy and history of cultural projections that have been understudied.[4]

[4] While politics was not the only important part of the conferences, debates over ideas of inter-American relations will be the focus of attention of this chapter. The first Pan American conference conferred on the initiative of James Blaine, US Secretary of State. The initial purpose was to secure and improve commercial relations between the US and Latin America. The bill introduced in February 1886 reads as follows: "For the encouragement of closer commercial relationships and in the interest of and the perpetuation of peace between the United States and the Republics of Mexico and Central and South America and the Empire of Brazil." On the subject of improving commercial relations, Matías Romero, then Mexican ambassador to the US, was every bit as insistent as Blaine. Furthermore, because the conferences were, on the one hand, opportunities to discuss common concerns on matters such as sanitation, communications, jurisprudence, children's welfare, women's suffrage, engineering, and so forth, and, on the other hand, venues of US soft power, US delegations were vulnerable to their Latin American counterparts voicing grievances. Efforts to negotiate US power were possible partly because US delegates arrived seeking to please its neighbors, while Latin American delegates tended to be of highest order. From Mexico alone, individuals such Matías Romero, José Yves Limantour, Fernando González Roa, and Daniel Cosío Villegas attended. For an overview of Mexican participation, see Carlos Marichal, *México y las conferencias panamericanas, 1889-1938: antecedentes de la globalización*; and Teresa Maya Sotomayor, "Estados Unidos y el panamericanismo: El caso de la I Conferencia Internacional Americana (1889-1890)," *Historia Mexicana* 45, no. 4 (1996): 759-781.

The first part discusses the 1923 Conference, where the Revolution posed a surprising challenge to US foreign policy. The second part, focused on the 1928 Conference, shows the resolution of the diplomatic battle and the outcome: the regimes aligned strategic interests, advanced mutual restraint, and helped transform inter-American politics.

The Revolution in Latin America

During the 1920s, diplomats from the State Department and the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs (hereafter SRE), respectively, sought to undermine the other abroad. Part of it reflected common struggles to define a new way to relate to Latin America. Mexican interactions with Britain, France, and the US had been much more important since Independence (1821), leaving Latin America distant. On the other side, Republican promises of post-Wilson foreign policy were not yet codified. The Republican victory promised a return to some kind of dollar diplomacy or conservative internationalism against idealist entanglements such as the League of Nations.[5] But the US was not ready to give up its right to intervene in Latin America. The inter-American conferences would prove to be instructive as they functioned as informal referendums on US foreign policy.

From the Mexican side, ambitions to dominate Central America were not new. Since the Porfiriato (1876-1910), Mexican diplomats had attempted to make Mexico a regional power, often at the expense of Guatemala in order to settle border disputes favorably. Twice these disputes almost led to war. For their part, Guatemalan diplomats tended to appeal to the US in order to balance Mexican ambitions.

But during the 1920s, Mexican efforts responded to more than strategic attempts to challenge the US. While the ideological components of the US vision of Latin America are well

[5] Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: US Foreign Policy since 1900*, 78-81.

known, Mexican conceptions of Latin America have not been as explored. Mexico's courtship of Latin America emerged from a particular vision that the Revolution offered an alternative to US influence premised on the idea that Mexico's development was more progressive than the rest of Latin America. While Mexico could not compete with US power, Mexican social politics supposedly presented an option between decadent Europe and the imperialist US, with Mexico at the symbolic helm.

While it is tempting to dismiss this optimism that Mexico suddenly mattered in the international stage (which would not be the case if this attitude was American or Russian), examining the source of these views reveals why Mexican officials could envision challenging the US abroad. The long-dreamed entrance into the civilized and modern world nourished the belief that through the Revolution, Mexico was reaching higher civilizational markers that also carried international obligations, perhaps a similar kind of cultural push that drove the US to imperialism in 1898. The relevance of this impulse is not the practical outcome, but what it reveals about the 1920s global context of the Revolution and the origins of the long-term compatibility between the Revolution and the American century.

In the late 1910s, Mexican diplomats (usually intellectuals turned career diplomats) had begun to try to establish a relationship with Latin America using a language of Latin American solidarity against the US. Intellectuals, writers, and poets were assigned to diplomatic posts, proving popular in labor, intellectual, and academic circles. The diplomats included Antonio Caso, Antonio Madero, Antonio Mediz Bolio, José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes, and Julio Torri, amongst others, in efforts that could be problematic. In Peru, the intellectual Antonio Caso led a student protest alongside the Peruvian radical Victor Haya de la Torre while José Vasconcelos organized an extravagant caravan that sparked a diplomatic controversy with Venezuela, which

broke relations with Mexico in 1923. Though not welcomed everywhere, the Revolution gained prestige and was interpreted according to the viewer's politics, particularly anti-imperialists such as Victor Haya de la Torre, Julio Antonio Mella (a Cuban revolutionary) and José Ingenerios, an Argentinean intellectual who claimed Mexico to be "a vast social laboratory."[6]

No one in Mexico anticipated that the Revolution could inspire a number of anti-imperialist intellectuals and labor. This was purely a conjuncture as the Revolution coincided with World War I and the radicalization of nationalist politics as evident in Korea, Russia, India, and other places. In this context, almost by necessity Mexican diplomats became a modest Mexican vanguard that once thrust into international politics welcomed the possibility of the Revolution gaining international meaning. For instance, Antonio Castro Leal, who spent the first half of the 1920s in Chile, wrote to the Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes that diplomats in South America were placing Mexico at the vanguard of the hemisphere: "a Mexico whose relevance is inexorably increasing during a moment when a new America can oppose Spengler's decadent Europe."[7]

In 1920, the diplomat Ramón de Negri wrote to President Álvaro Obregón to reflect on Mexico's place in international reconstruction and post-1919 global politics:

"…I firmly believe that in a near epoch, and if during the coming three years a global struggle develops between those who strive for freedom and conservative forces represented by Capital and religion, workers of the world will discover that their own problems, after the Great War, are the same ones that Mexico has battled for the past ten years….the world prepares itself to be ruled by the masses, that is to say by rural and urban workers, and I believe that these ideas will triumph. The movement is formidable, and with our country as part of the struggle it will not back down, for I believe that there is affinity between our efforts at economic freedom and

[6] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Fondo Obregón-Calles (hereafter F-OC), vol. 25, exp. 104-B-21, 182-184; Pablo Yankelevich has written extensively on Mexican cultural diplomacy. Yankelevich, "América Latina en la agenda diplomática de la revolución Mexicana," in *En busca de una nación soberana: relaciones internacionales de México, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. by Schiavon, Spenser, and Vázquez; and *La revolución mexicana en América Latina: intereses políticos e itinerarios intelectuales*.

[7] *Recados entre Alfonso Reyes y Antonio Castro Leal*, compiled by Serge I. Zaitzeff, Antonio Castro Leal to Alfonso Reyes, Santiago de Chile, Dic. 10, 1923, 65-71.

efforts against imperialism."[8]

The dawn of the new world order required a fresh Mexican version of Latin America. After US interventions in Mexico during the 1910s, Latin America had become paramount to Mexican security and thus a bit of realism was necessary:

"I have had the opportunity to speak at length with individuals from our current government, who say that we should ignore the Hispanic-American countries, arguing that they will never help us. I believe this is an inexcusable mistake, for while it is true that we cannot count on them materially, morally we can do so."[9]

Yet, diplomats also felt Latin America to be distant and backwards. In Argentina, ambassador Carlos Trejo was horrified by the South American arms race. In his view, South America lacked Mexico's "modern revolutionary legislation:" the construction of ports, highways, education, and urban sanitation.[10] For his part, Vicente Veloz González suggested a name change for the North American continent because it misrepresented Mexico. To his displeasure, he had discovered that in South America Mexico was not deemed North American as instead the country was assumed to be either South American or, much worse, part of a region that in Mexican diplomats' geographic imagination was dismissed as profoundly backwards, Central America.[11] Meanwhile, from Brazil, Amado Nervo wrote that Mexico ought to be

[8] "…Creo firmemente que en una época no muy lejana, y si en los próximos tres años se desarrolla en todos los países del mundo una lucha encarnizada de los elementos que pretenden ser libres en contra de las fuerzas conservadoras, integradas por el Capital y las diferentes religiones, los trabajadores del universo descubrirán que su propio problema, después de la gran Guerra mundial, es el mismo que ha ocupado a México en su lucha de diez años, y que tiene análogos, planteo y solución…El mundo se prepara para ser gobernado por las mayorías, es decir, por la gente trabajadora del campo y de las ciudades, y creo, por lo visto, que triunfarán esas ideas. El movimiento es formidable, y entrado nuestro país en la lucha, no se arredrará en ella, pues creo que hay afinidad general entre nuestros esfuerzos de libertad económica y los de aquellos que ahora están en abierta pugna con el imperialismo." In De Negri to Obregón, FAPECFT, Fondo Álvaro Obregón hereafter (FAO), series 30400, exp. D-8 D-03/200, inv. 2216, f. 8-12.

[9] "He tenido oportunidad de discutir con muchos hombres de nuestro régimen presente, que dicen debemos olvidar a los pueblos hispano-americanos, dando como razón que estos jamás nos proporcionarían ninguna ayuda. Creo que esto es un error imperdonable, pues si bien es cierto que en un caso dado, materialmente no contaremos con ellos, en el órden moral si, y esto sería lo mas efectivo que podríamos alcanzar." In De Negri to Obregón, FAPECFT, FAO, s. 30400, exp. D-8 D-03/200, inv. 2216, f. 8-12.

[10] Carlos Trejo to Sáenz, January 1926, AHGE, LE-196.

[11] Vicente Veloz González to Sáenz, January 26, 1926, AHGE, LE-196 (I).

entitled to set the example in social politics: "Mexico has won the right to precede every nation of the continent in the terrain of political and social reform."[12]

The incomparable José Vasconcelos held the most radical and politically far fatched ideas. Though sometimes read as anti-imperialist and irresistible to readers who would like to believe that Mexicans are perpetual victims and always resisting empire, Vasconcelos' *La raza cósmica* is more complicated than a case of anti-colonialism and spiritual exploration. Vasconcelos, in fact, seemed to be seduced by power and imperialism—he would, after all, launch a presidential candidacy and admire Nazi Germany. Cosmopolitan, deeply knowledgeable of the US, erudite, and engaged in global ideas, Vasconcelos imagined an extraordinarily eccentric alternative world order that was not necessarily underpinned by self-determination, but by a bizarre vision of pan mestizo imperialism that suggests parallels with Japanese pan Asianism. As he argued, with the decline of the white race and the potential threat of Japanese imperialism, mestizos' racial vigor would determine global politics. He writes:

"Throughout history, every great nation has thought of itself as the final and chosen one. When these childish presumptions are compared with each other, one can see that the mission each nation attributes to itself is, at the bottom, nothing else but its eagerness for booty and the desire to exterminate the rival power. The official science itself is, in each period, a reflection of the pride of the dominant race….Every imperialistic policy needs a philosophy to justify itself…the British preach natural selection, with the tacit conclusion that world domination belongs by natural and divine rights to the dolichocephalic man from the Isles and his descendants. But this science, which invaded us together with the artifacts of conquering commerce, is fought as all imperialism is fought, by confronting it with a superior science, and with a broader and more vigorous civilization."[13]

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[12] Nervo to Sáenz, November 16, 1925, AHGE, LE-196 (I).

[13] José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica*, English in 33-34; Spanish 73-74. Here is the original: "Cada uno de los grandes pueblos de la Historia se ha creído el final y el elegido cuando se comparan unas con otras estas infantiles soberbias, se ve que la misión que cada pueblo se atribuye no es en el fondo otra cosa que afán de botín y deseo de exterminar a la potencia rival. La misma ciencia oficial es en cada época un reflejo de esa soberbia de la raza dominante….todo imperialismo necesita una filosofía que lo justifique...los británicos predican selección natural, con la consecuencia tácita que el reino del mundo corresponde por derecho natural y divino al dolicocéfalo de las Islas y sus descendientes. Pero esta ciencia que llegó a invadirnos junto con los artefactos del comercio conquistador se combate como se combate todo imperialismo, poniéndole enfrente una ciencia superior, una civilización mas amplia y vigorosa."

As Vasconcelos writes above, to him only a stronger imperialism that in his case meant some kind of cultural dominance, defeats imperialism. Of course, for Vasconcelos this meant racial mixture a la Mexicana (the mestizo) as the philosophy to guide it, that fascinating and pragmatic response to a very real miscegenation. The argument is not that Vasconcelos and Mexico became imperialist similar to the US and US actors, but that such Mexican ideas can also be read as part of the imperial moment in global history. Notice how Vasconcelos racially dismisses the alternative imperialism then on the rise, Japanese pan-Asianism:

"A conquering race could not substitute us, because it would fatefully impose its own characteristics, even if only out of the need to exert violence in order to maintain its conquest. This mission cannot be fulfilled either by the peoples of Asia, who are exhausted, or at least, lacking in the necessary boldness for new enterprises. The people that Hispanic America is forming in a somewhat disorderly manner, yet free of spirit and with intense longing on account of the vast unexplored regions, can still repeat the feats of the Castilian and Portuguese conquerors…Only the Iberian part of the continent posses the spiritual factor, the race, and the territory necessary for the great enterprising of initiating a new universal era of humanity."[14]

On the practical side, Mexican efforts were understandably limited, examples soft power more than anything else that fully expressed themselves via rich participation in Pan American conferences. Labor, however, promised to play a central role. Thus, in 1925 the Mexican government assigned labor attachés to various embassies where they were instructed to establish relations with local labor. CROM organizer Carlos Gracidas—perhaps the only attaché who took the mission seriously—was sent to Argentina where he developed a relationship with the Partido Socialista, then led by the socialist Juan Justo. Gracidas discovered that in Argentinean labor,

[14] José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica*; English in 38-39; Spanish in 78-79. Here is the Spanish version: "No podría substituirnos una raza conquistadora, porque fatalmente impondría sus propios rasgos, aunque solo sea por la necesidad de ejercer la violencia para mantener su conquista. No pueden llenar a esta misión universal tampoco los pueblos del Asia, que están exhaustos, o, por lo menos, faltos del arrojo necesario a las empresas nuevas. La gente que esta formando América hispánica, un poco desbaratada, pero libre de espíritu y con el anhelo en tensión a acusas de las grandes regiones inexploradas, puede todavía repetir las proezas de los conquistadores castellanos y portugueses…solamente la parte ibérica del continente dispone de los factores espirituales, la raza y el territorio que son necesarios para la gran empresa de iniciar la era universal de la humanidad."

along with Sandino and the Russian Revolution, Mexico's Revolution was a symbol for local politics. Inspired, Gracidas established a Mexican office where he prepared press articles, conferences, film reels, and brochures on the advances of a Revolution that could, above all, wear various clothes. For example, in 1926 a labor conference organized in Mexico included delegates aligned with competing international syndicates such members of the AFL and the Confederación Obrera Argentina.[15] In another case, a labor attaché sent to Germany, Ezequiel Salcedo, became confident that the Revolution had energized Mexican labor and history. Asked by Calles to examine labor organizations, he concluded (with necessary flattery aimed at Calles) that there was little to be applied in Mexico as, in fact, it was Mexican labor that could teach new formulas to those old organizations.[16] This time, it was up to old, decaying Europe to match Mexican progress

Certainly, the language of Latin American solidarity was not uniquely Mexican. But since the Revolution had found itself as part of this international crux, then it made sense to look south. There was no real plan to unite Latin America, a task that would be unrealistic and it was a project few people would care for anyway. Rather, it was language with exchange value that was allowing Mexicans to find a language of communication with their otherwise distant colleagues and to undermine the US. Reading such language as anti-imperialist would be a simplistic assumption. Where the Revolution would fit in US-Latin American politics after 1919 was debated from the US to Argentina. The Revolution was useful because it was malleable. It could be used to rally against US injustices by a few individuals who often were not popular

[15] Pablo Yankelevich, "Imitémos a México: la experiencia de Carlos Gracidas en la diplomacia obrera mexicana (1925-1928)," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 7 no. 1 (Jul. 2001): 1-20.

[16] "Creo que para la labor de estudio que se me confió ha transcurrido el tiempo para darme cuenta que muy poco tenemos que aprender y casi me atrevo a decir a Ud. que mas podríamos enseñar que aprender de estas organizaciones viejas que conservan todas las fórmulas y métodos con que empezamos a trabajar nosotros en México." Salcedo to Calles, Sept. 6, 1925, FAPECFT, PEC gaveta 16, exp. 50, inv. 1066, leg. 2/6, f. 70-71.

domestically, had little influence, and certainly did not represent Latin America any more than those that supported US intervention did, which is what happened at the Fifth Pan American Conference of 1923. At the conference, Mexico became a convenient symbol for US-Latin American controversies that presented the SRE with an easy vehicle to undermine the US and gain influence in Latin America.

The Fifth Pan American Conference, Santiago, Chile 1923

The Fifth Pan American Conference originally was scheduled for 1914 but had been postponed due to World War I. The US delegation arrived expecting a respite from Europe's complicated Versailles Conference. The US delegation anticipated that pan Americanism—ideally a way for the US to dominate inter-American politics via a language of solidarity—would remain untouched. But a few Latin American delegates expected change and looked forward to something similar to a League of Nations as counterweight to the US or to local rivals. An example is the case of Uruguay's Baltasar Brum, who proposed an American League of Nations that borrowed from the Cuban nationalist José Martí's Latin Americanism and Woodrow Wilson's US-led Pan Americanism in order to suggest a hemispheric Monroe Doctrine.[17] For the host, Chile, the conference would be an important step towards a favorable resolution of the Tacna-Arica territorial dispute with Peru and Bolivia, which the US had just agreed to arbitrate. For the regional powers, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, an important question would also be armament control. In other words, though these conferences were about inter-American relations, they were often shaped by regional affairs.

For the State Department and the SRE, the central topic would be the unresolved US

[17] "Address of the President of the Republic of Uruguay Doctor Baltasar Brum at the University of Montevideo, April 21, 1920," National Records and Service Administration, College Park (hereafter NARA), Record Group (hereafter RG) 43, Fifth International Conference, General Records, March-May 1923, box 2, folder C (Item XVIII).

diplomatic recognition of the revolutionary regime. As of 1923, the US had not officially established diplomatic relations with Mexico, a critical question because US support would open international credit. However, only governments recognized by Washington were invited to the conferences as the entire Pan American organization was geared to serve US interests. In fact, the Pan American Union was directed by the American Samuel L. Rowe and chaired by Charles Evans Hughes, US Secretary of State. The Union required members to be accredited to Washington, leaving Mexico out of the preparatory meetings. This meant that because the US could not enter into agreements with non-recognized nations, Mexico's potential participation would invite controversies because the conferences usually resulted in various treaties.

Mexican delegations had participated in all previous conferences, hosting the second. But on this occasion, the SRE was aware that Mexico's participation would embarrass the US by having to deal with the problem of non-recognition in such pan American setting and yet failing to attend could also score a moral victory. The SRE investigated the strategy for the conference through the Brazilian embassy that as usual was close to the US. The Brazilian ambassador inquired Hughes about Mexican participation, to which Hughes responded that Mexico first needed to meet its international obligations (euphemism for paying for American losses incurred during the Revolution) and that the US could not enter into agreements with non-recognized states.[18]

Manuel Téllez, Mexico's unofficial ambassador to Washington, had experience undermining the US at conferences. At the US-Central American conference of 1922, Téllez had done his best to retard the proceedings covertly. For Santiago, Téllez felt that Mexico could gain international support and become the symbol of whatever other Latin Americans wanted by

[18] Torres Díaz, March 6, 1923, AHGE, LE-190, f. 190, 271; Hughes to Fletcher, March 5, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference General Records, March-May 1923, entry 133, box 2.

pulling out of a conference they were not invited to begin with, undermining the US in Latin America and at the same time possibly hastening negotiations for recognition. Téllez wrote that refusing to attend "would destroy the prestige of the Secretary of State [Hughes] and the Pan American politics of the United States. This could worsen negotiations for recognition…or could induce the Secretary of State to hasten recognition in order to avoid splitting the Pan American Union."[19]

With moral indignation on his side, the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto J. Pani announced Mexico's refusal to attend, blaming the US for disrespecting Mexican sovereignty and Pan Americanism. Delegations from Madrid to La Habana reported local support for Mexico's decision while in Costa Rica a congressmen and former guerrilla fighter, Jorge Volio Jiménez, caused a stir when he proposed that Costa Rica should declare solidarity with Mexico and decline the invitation.[20]

The State Department began investigating international sympathies for Mexico that were stronger in Central America and also prepared a special memorandum for its delegation on relations with Mexico. The document reveals the US to have been unprepared for any kind of challenge and a naïve refusal to believe that World War I and global challenges for self-determination had encouraged contestation in inter-American politics. The delegation was merely advised that topics deemed controversial ought to be avoided and told that the "present Conference has not been called to sit in judgment on the conduct of any nation, or to attempt to redress alleged wrongs."[21] Without a hint of irony, even in internal documents, the State

[19] Téllez to SRE, December 13, 1922, AHGE LE-190, f. 61-63.
[20] Téllez was tasked with making sure the US press wrote a story that underscored Mexico's refusal on the grounds of a legal issue. When he deemed that US press correspondents to be hostile, he threatened deportation from Mexico City. Téllez to SRE, AHGE, LE-189, f. 156-161; AHGE, LE-189, f. 218 ; February 27, 1923, AHGE, LE-191, f. 29.
[21] "Instructions from State Department and Memoranda Prepared for Use of Delegates," NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference General Records, entry 133, box 2.

Department did not acknowledge that US imperial history made it the most likely country to be asked to redress wrongs.

Chile's President Arturo Alessandri opened the conference in Santiago on March 25, 1923. The Mexican government instructed the minister in Chile, Carlos Trejo, to report on the daily events. He received funds to attend meetings, social gatherings, and finance anyone giving pro-Mexico conferences. Trejo penned a letter to Alessandri, offering a history of US imperialism in Mexico, and also began using the local press, intellectuals, and sympathetic delegates to undermine the US delegation.[22] US intelligence would describe Trejo's activities as a "persistent anti-American campaign."[23]

Henry Fletcher, former ambassador to Chile and Mexico, chaired the US delegation. He was joined by Kellogg, who as I mentioned before became Secretary of State in 1925. Other members included former senator Atlee Pomerene and George Vincent of the Rockefeller Foundation that was now fully integrated into Mexican public health.[24] The US delegation did not impress Trejo. He wrote that Rowe was dim witted and ignorant of the new demands of diplomacy, though Trejo recognized Fletcher's abilities.[25] In fact, within the American delegation, as anywhere in US politics, there were competing and contradicting views. Rowe was, undoubtedly, stubborn to concede on any subject unfavorable to the US, while Kellogg was

[22] Trejo's account is the main evidence of Mexico's unofficial yet important participation in the Conference. His observations are colored by US-Mexican controversies. With US sources, which of course are also tinted, I have been able to balance Trejo's analysis that at times overreached.
[23] "Memorandum for Chief of Delegation," undated, NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 133, box 2.
[24] Other members included William Saulsbury, who belonged to a prominent Delaware family with interests in Chilean nitrates. William Eric Fowler had banking interests and was a veteran of World War I and known to be on friendly terms with Latin American diplomats. Frank Patridge was a lawyer and businessmen and former Consul General in Venezuela and had been involved in the British-Venezuela Claims Commission. The secretary was Joshua Butler Wright, who would become Assistant Secretary of State and ambassador to Cuba in the late 1930s.
[25] Trejo, "Personal de la Conferencia," AHGE, LE-194, f. 44.

reluctant to accept compromise. The rest, however, were willing to make concessions, especially Fletcher, who perhaps was shrewder than Trejo realized.

The US-Mexico competition emerged in the political committee that joined to discuss the composition of the Pan American Union, a battle that should have been insignificant until US delegates awarded it disproportionate importance. Sympathetic to Mexico, the Costa Rican delegation led by the well-known anti-imperialist Alejandro Alvarado Quiros proposed modifications to the constitution of the Union that would allow members with no diplomatic representative in the US to assign a special member to the Board. In particular, Alvarado Quiros envisioned the Union as a kind of League of Nations that would also deal with arbitration. For his part, Colombia's Uribe proposed a resolution to make the chairmanship of the Union a rotated and elected position. The Union would then become a political organization with equal membership and arbitration faculties (a project that both the State Department and SRE opposed, as neither was interested in an international institution with arbitration capacities).

The Costa Rican delegation was not alone. Prior to the conference, Alvarado held meetings with Eduardo Ruiz, Mexican minister in Costa Rica and, in fact, the Costa Rican resolution was written in collaboration and conversations with the delegations from Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Panama, Guatemala, Colombia, and El Salvador.[26] Along with Alvarado, Trejo and the Cuban delegation led by the sympathetic Manuel Márquez Sterling were the main organizers of the anti-US campaign. Márquez had been ambassador to Mexico during Victoriano Huerta's 1913 coup, where he had witnessed the tacit support of US ambassador Henry Lane Wilson in unleashing the most violent period of the

[26] Richard Salisbury, *Anti-Imperialism and International Competition in Central America, 1920-1929*, 54.

Revolution.[27] All in all, in spite of their government's closeness to the US, the Cuban and Panamanian delegations were Trejo's best allies.

US delegates were deeply frustrated and wrote to the State Department that the controversy with Mexico undoubtedly inspired the resolution.[28] For the US to accept the resolution it would mean backtracking on its non-recognition policy and legitimizing Mexico's principled absence.[29] The US delegation was caught off-guard due to lack of preparation. On the one hand, Hughes had given instructions stating that the Union should not be granted any kind of political clout because, given the bland lines of US Pan Americanism, having a political Union could mean giving Latin Americans a venue through which to discuss US foreign policy.[30] But the US delegation did not prepare exactly what to argue against the sensible resolution being proposed.[31]

US delegates debated internally. Fletcher was aware that while the amendment was due to the Mexican problem, support was coming from countries with grievances against the US, especially Central American delegations.[32] Fletcher was willing to compromise on changes to the chairmanship of the Union. On the other hand, Rowe believed that the impetus was coming from interest in giving the Union power to settle long-running South American disputes, a ridiculous

[27] Márquez spent part of his youth in Mexico and was ambassador to Mexico during la *decena trágica* (the notorious 10 days in February 1913 that led to Francisco Madero's death with the tacit support of US ambassador Henry Lane Wilson) and wrote a valuable account. In 1923, he was part of a group of Cuban intellectuals and politicians pressuring Cuba's President Zayas to recognize Mexico despite US opposition (later, he would serve as ambassador to the US). Trejo, "Personal de las delegaciones," AHGE, LE-194, f. 53; "Primera comisión: política," AHGE, LE-194, f. 77-78.

[28] "Minutes of the Mtgs. of US Delegation," April 10, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 133, General Records, box 1.

[29] As Trejo wrote: "parece proposición encontrará obstáculos por parte Delegación Americana ya que aprobación envolvería justificación plena actitud de México." Trejo, April 11 and 12, 1923, AHGE, LE-194, f. 8, 9.

[30] "Minutes of the Mtgs. of US Delegation," March 27, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 133, General Records, box 1.

[31] "Minutes of the Mtgs. of US Delegation," April 10, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Entry 133, Fifth International Conference, General Records, box 1.

[32] Fletcher to Hughes, April 9, 1912. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 133, box 2, Telegrams to and from Department of State.

notion because the ABC countries were not interested in having Central American countries settle South America's frequent regional disputes. Finally, Kellogg preferred to maintain the status quo while Vincent, in the tradition of the well-liked American philanthropist, supported the proposal wholeheartedly.[33]

The delegation communicated to Washington that it would be "unwise to oppose the spirit of the Costa Rican proposal." Fletcher urgently asked for permission to propose a substitute that would authorize special delegates while stipulating that such motion should not be construed as diplomatic recognition of governments assigning such delegate.[34]

Nervous that the Costa Rican proposal would pass, Fletcher asked for instructions on how to respond in such contingency and thus the State Department began investigating a way to defeat the proposal from outside the conference.[35] Costa Rica's President Acosta informed the State Department that he would "warn" Alvarado but that he could not ask him to withdraw the proposition while the Cuban government confirmed to the State Department that the Cuban delegation was acting outside official instructions.[36]

Ultimately, on majority voting, a sub-committee agreed on a compromise. The comprise stated that 1) assistance to the conferences was a matter of right, not invitation 2) the Board would still be composed by diplomats in Washington, but a) countries lacking one could name a special delegate b) countries could name a special delegate if the accredited diplomat was not available 3) the presidency and vice-presidency of the Board would be elected, and special

[33] "Minutes of the Mtgs. of US Delegation," April 9, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 133, General Records, box 1.
[34] Fletcher to Hughes, April 9, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 133, box 2, Telegrams to and from Department of State.
[35] Fletcher to Hughes, April 18, 1923. NARA, RG 43, entry 133, Fifth International Conference, box 2, Telegrams to and from Department of State; Hughes to American Delegation, April 24, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 13, box 2, Telegrams to and from Department of State.
[36] Hughes to American Delegation, April 23, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, box 2, entry 133, Telegrams to and from Department of State.

delegates were eligible as well 4) there would be a resolution to study the full Costa Rican proposal at the next conference. In addition, the US reservation on recognition and assigning a special delegate was put on the record. Satisfied, Fletcher wrote to Hughes: "this is the best possible solution and that any further attempt at modification could be unwise and unsuccessful."[37]

All in all, details about the Union aside, the conference was indicative of a larger competition looming between US and Mexican foreign policies and a warning that inter-American politics needed a recalibration, especially North American politics. The conference announced Mexico as an important competitor. US intelligence would take careful notes of Mexican influence and propaganda in Latin America. Whether there was affinity for Mexico's case or other delegations simply symbolically pit the US and Mexico against each other for their own ends does not matter, ultimately the non-recognition of Mexico turned the conference into a battleground of inter-American politics with US-Mexico politics as the prism.

This was not about Latin American solidarity, but the product of regional politics where the ABC countries played no role, countries that had little interest in questions of US imperialism. Trejo did not mind as indeed activists from Haiti and the Dominican Republican, countries under US occupation, received only passing interest from Trejo.[38] It was Central America that mattered because it was a shared sphere of influence.

In fact, Chile was fundamental to defeating the Costa Rican proposal. While Trejo labeled the other side as conservative and subservient to the US, few desired an American

[37] Fletcher to Hughes, April 24, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 133, box 2, Telegrams to and from Department of State.

[38] Although Mexico was a symbol of resistance, it was Haiti that was under direct US occupation. In fact, Haitian and Dominican protestors interrupted the conference protesting US intervention. Trejo, AHGE, LE-194, f. 15, 23; Trejo, "Personal de las delegaciones," AHGE, LE-194, f. 53; Trejo, "Carácter general de la conferencia," AHGE, LE-194, F. 443.

League of Nations or to lose the US from Pan Americanism. The US required the receptive ears that it found because, in fact, the delegations were deeply split, which both sides used to their advantage.[39]

Similar to their American counterparts, Mexican diplomats tended to believe that Mexican concerns where universal. What emerged was a compromise that Mexican officials found satisfactory because transforming the Union was not truly the priority. The goal was to undermine the US and use international pressure to push for diplomatic recognition, which seems to have been accomplished because it appears that the conference hastened the need to compromise. Amidst the debates, both governments announced plans for what would become the Bucareli conferences of 1923 that resulted in the recognition of the Mexican government.[40]

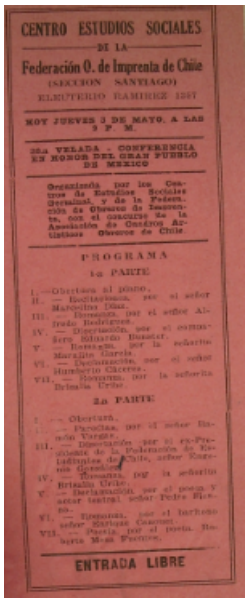
But larger lessons were drawn. In his version of Latin America, Trejo now imagined Mexico as a potential competitor to the US, rivaling the neighbor's influence despite power asymmetry. Excited and proud that the ghost of Mexico had followed Hughes and Fletcher and become the center of the conference, Trejo advised building a propaganda machine to build closer ties with Latin America.[41] The conference had shown that through a combination of international politics and shrewd maneuvering the US could be challenged abroad. Vis-à-vis Latin America, Mexico could be the l'enfant terrible to the US's often asphyxiating (but, on balance, not necessarily unwanted) paternalism.

For the US delegation, the conference was a useful revelation because the State Department had been unprepared to face something recalling Versailles where anti-colonial leaders had demanded change to international politics in favor of self-determination. And though

[39] Trejo, "Personal de las delegaciones," ASHRE, LE-194.
[40] Hughes to American Delegation, April 24, 1923. NARA, RG 43, Fifth International Conference, entry 133, box 2, Telegrams to and from Department of State.
[41] Trejo to Pani, May 27, 1923, AHGE, LE-195 (II), f. 197.

this was not truly anything like Versailles, the foundations of Pan Americanism were tested, but not challenged. More than anything, the US delegation listened to demands to live up to its Pan American rhetoric. This time Republicans could not hope to be helped by public opinion as in 1919, but rather the opposite was the case: documents stolen from the US embassy revealed to Mexico's government that, facing both public and business groups interested in improving Latin American relations, the State Department had to forge its report to the press because a true account of the conference would have "serious consequence for our Republican Party in the near presidential campaign, being this the cause that our Secretary of State has been forced to change his political views toward those countries."[42] In the coming years, US-Mexico competing foreign policies increased in importance as Mexican foreign policy began to truly test the State Department.

Labor and radicals used the conference to protest against US imperialism. The first image shows a protest over the Sacco and Vanzetti case, while the second is an invitation to a Chilean labor conference held in honor of the Mexican Revolution. Source: AHGE, LE-194, f. 479.



US-Mexico Intervention in Nicaragua and the Rio Juridical Commission

[42] FAPECFT, PEC, g. 23, exp. 138, inv. 1461, leg. 1, f. 1-4.

After the conference, the US recognized Obregón's government, but diplomatic difficulties began anew in 1926 when President Calles' foreign policy challenged the State Department in Central America. In 1925, as part of the reassessment of the costs of interventions and pressures from international and internal groups, the Marines left Nicaragua, temporarily ending an occupation that began in 1912. Amidst a political conflict between liberals and conservatives, Emilio Chamorro overthrew President Carlos Solórzano. But when Chamorro could not secure US recognition, Adolfo Díaz replaced him. From Mexico, Juan Sacasa, who had been vice-president under Solórzano, proclaimed himself president with the help of General Moncada. However, when Sacasa could not secure US aid, he turned to Calles, who agreed to supply arms to Moncada until the US blocked the Nicaraguan coasts and intercepted a Mexican boat carrying guns. Chamorro, Díaz, and the governments of El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica pleaded the US to take action against Mexico. By February 1927, the US returned to negotiate a settlement. The State Department's envoy Henry Stimson agreed to supervise the coming elections, overview disarmament—a liberal general named Augusto Sandino refused to surrender—and help organize a police force—where the future dictator Somoza would make his name.[43] All in all, the US-Mexico intervention helped produce a significant turning point in Nicaraguan history. [44]

The State Department recognized Mexican intervention in Nicaraguan politics as a genuine threat to regional leadership. In fact, while difficult to confirm and in all likelihood outrageous rumors—though it is telling that many in the State Department believed this—the

[43] Sandino was described by Stimson as a protégé of Pancho Villa who had lived in Mexico for 22 years and had returned for violence and spoils—the very worst of the Mexican Revolution. Stimson, "American Policy in Nicaragua;" Stimson, "Report of the US Mission to Nicaragua," October, 1927, NARA, RG 43 Sixth International Conference, Classified printed and processed reference material, entry 154, box 3.

[44] For a longer account of the events, see Jurgen Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant*; and Dana Munro, *The United States and the Caribbean Republics, 1921-1933*.

State Department suspected that Sacasa had secured help from Calles in exchange for promising to introduce agrarian reform and collaborate towards the formation of a Central American Union led by Mexico. Lawrence Dennis, the American envoy in Nicaragua, insisted that without US action Nicaragua would be "Mexicanized."[45] To the State Department, at no other point did Calles seem as anti-American and the Revolution as radical. Still, there was a hint of admiration in US intelligence reports because given the state of diplomatic relations it was oddly admirable that Calles took the opportunity to challenge the Monroe Doctrine—usually the terrain of European ghosts. However materially insignificant, the prospect of a Mexican Revolution spreading abroad was particularly bold and effective in obstructing US Pan Americanism and allowed Nicaraguan politicians to ask for their particular brand of US imperialism.

Sheffield and Kellogg made futile attempts to convince the US public and Congress that Mexico was intervening in Nicaragua. A desperate Kellogg testified in Congress on Mexico's aspirations to spread Bolshevism, which only produced incredulity in the liberal press and the Committee on Foreign Relations led by William Borah.

In fact, congressional opposition to the State Department afforded Calles room to operate. During the 1920s, the State Department wrestled over foreign policy with a group of leftist congressmen that Robert David Johnson has termed the "peace progressives," a group that included Borah, Robert La Follette, John Blaine, amongst others, and who in some cases seemed to have been highly influenced by Gruening, the journalist in Calles' payroll. This group did not reject US power, but focused instead on the possibilities of working with nationalist groups while securing US strategic interests through moral leadership by avoiding intervention. By the 1920s, the group had become anti-imperialist and adamant opponent of Kellogg's Mexican policy and oil companies. In 1927, Borah proposed a tour that would take the Foreign Relations

[45] Dana Munro, *The United States and the Caribbean Republics, 1921-1933*, 200-207.

Committee to Mexico and Central America. When this failed, he wrote directly to Calles requesting information about oil companies' activities.[46]

The Marines' return to Nicaragua proved to be a turning point for the State Department as the US faced intense criticism abroad and at home. Naturally, the topic dominated the next inter-American meeting, the Rio Juridical Commission of April 1927. These meetings were important because the US insistence on Pan American solidarity to a strong degree buffered power asymmetry. For decades, Latin American jurists had used these meetings to recalibrate inter-American politics, such as the case of the second pan American conference when the Calvo Doctrine was passed, which controversially held that disputes over foreign investment were to be settled through national courts rather than via foreign intervention. At Rio, the Mexican and Nicaraguan cases now offered specific cases for those opposing intervention or who found criticism of US intervention a useful tool in domestic politics.[47]

It is here that the new language of inter-American politics continued to be codified, and both American and Mexican jurists responded with similar pragmatism and astuteness. Although the US and Mexico had recently intervened in Nicaragua, both came to self-serving conclusions. Americans could not justify intervention on the Roosevelt Corollary alone, anymore. The work of John Bassett Moore, who differentiated between political intervention and non-political intervention ("interposition on behalf of citizens"), was instrumental in harmonizing intervention with the language of Pan Americanism, but in the process made "intervention" an unallowable

[46] Robert David Johnson, *The Peace Progressives and American Foreign Relations,* 125.

[47] Long before Versailles, Latin American and American jurists participated in debates over international law that would challenge tenets of Great Power diplomacy. Argentineans pursued juridical efforts against intervention during the turn of the century. The Calvo Doctrine argued that foreign claims were subject to national courts while the Drago Doctrine proposed that nations could not use force to collect debts. For histories of international law and Mexican jurists' contributions, see Toribio Esquivel Obregón, *México y los Estados Unidos ante del derecho internacional*; and Andrés Ordóñez's *Los avatares de la soberanía: tradición hispánica y pensamiento político en la vida internacional de México*, a work that interprets Mexican intellectual tradition as distinctly within a Hispanic tradition.

term.[48]

Meanwhile, Mexican diplomats and jurists dismissed intervention on accounts of settling foreign debts, humanitarianism, or the recent resolutions on the protections of minorities in the Versailles Treaty. Mexican diplomats argued that with the addition of the Roosevelt Corollary, which in 1904 held that the US had the right to intervene in other to settle European claims, Americans had become "sole executioners and judges and only they could administer intervened countries." But the SRE only explicitly opposed intervention insofar as it was US intervention and, unlike various other countries, Mexico did not prepare a resolution against intervention.[49]

At Rio, various resolutions against intervention were presented, chief amongst these was Argentina's: "A state may not intervene in the internal affairs or in the external affairs of another state." But US documents paid as much attention to the joint resolution presented by the Dominican and Mexican delegations (this was not planned, as this was solely a Dominican resolution that the Mexican delegation attached themselves to). The resolution stated the following: "no state may in the future directly or indirectly, nor by reason of any motive, occupy even temporarily any portion of the territory of another state."

Because the US delegation entered reservations on the various anti-intervention resolutions, the Rio Commission settled on sending the project to the coming Pan American Conference at La Habana. The crisis of legitimacy of US foreign policy in Latin America was clear, as summed up by Senator Borah: "the Government of the White House should not lose any opportunity which presents itself to restore, as far as possible, confidence in the good faith of the

[48] "Propositions presented to the Commission of Jurists at Rio de Janeiro by the Delegates to the Commission from Certain States," December 19, 1987, Appendix 8, NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference, entry 153, appendix to instructions to delegates, no. 3-35, box 1.
[49] "Memorandum 12, de ampliación al anterior relativo a la intervención." AHGE, LE-199.

Americans, which confidence has been lost through Kellogg's policy in Mexico and Nicaragua."[50]

While Mexico also intervened in Nicaragua, it was US intervention that captured the imagination of anti-imperialist activists. Senator William Borah took interest in the formation of such leagues and assemblies, such as the one pictured above, which was directed from Mexico City. Source: Box 254, William Edgar Borah Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The Sixth Pan American Conference at La Habana, Cuba 1928

By the time the US and Mexican delegations were preparing for the 1928 Pan American conference, Calles had more or less retreated from Nicaragua. Still, both governments expected a showdown. Fletcher wrote the now Secretary of State Kellogg—who was deeply marked by his experience at the 1923 conference—that "the next Pan American Conference will be far more important and in some ways more difficult that any of its predecessors." Delegates were warned against critics of US foreign policy: "the past year has seen the development of a vigorous anti-American propaganda throughout Latin America based on charges of 'imperialism' and

[50] Quoted in *El Universal*, October 6, 1927.

characterized by violent criticism of the relations existing between the United States and Mexico and the American policy in Nicaragua."[51]

This time, Hughes and Fletcher headed the delegation, but Kellogg kept in close contact with them throughout the conference. To quell domestic opposition, Fletcher wanted to assign congressmen so that they would: "not only learn something of the general Pan American view of American foreign policy but also appreciate some of the State Department's difficulties."[52] Furthermore, to prevent the events that made the Santiago conference a disaster, Kellogg attempted to secure allies in advance. Diplomats from Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, amongst others, promised support, while Nicaragua assigned delegates bitter of Mexican intervention. One potential adversary included El Salvador's Gustavo Guerrero, believed by the State Department to be anti-American (as I will show, this was accurate).[53]

Meanwhile, from a position of weakness, Mexicans were flexible. Well in advance, in 1925 the Calles administration began preparing for the conference and requested diplomats to make suggestions for the program. Of particular note—for its idealism and outlandishness—is a 595-page analysis sent by Salvador Martínez de Alva, Mexico's diplomat in Honduras. Convinced that the Revolution was anti-American and anti-imperialist, he proposed that Calles should lead a democratization of the conferences that would help free Latin America from US imperialism.[54]

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[51] "Special political memorandum," NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference, Instructions to Delegates, 1928, box 1.
[52] Fletcher to Kellogg, July 8, 1927, and Kellogg to Fletcher, July 26, 1927, Kellogg to Fletcher, October 8, 1927, Fletcher to Kellogg, August 16, 1927, all in NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference, General Records, entry 152, box 2, Fletcher and American delegations folder.
[53] "Information of delegations to conference," NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference; "Conference policy relations with the United States, relations with other countries, of the states, other than the United States, attending the Sixth International Conference of American States at Habana in January, 1928," NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference, entry 154, Statements on Conference Policy of Latin American Countries," box 1.
[54] Juan Manuel Salceda Olivares, "Salvador Martínez de Alva y el pragmatismo en la política exterior callista," in *Artífices y operadores de la diplomacia mexicana, siglox XIX y XX*, ed. by Agustín Andrés Sánchez, et al.

Instead, the SRE and the Mexican delegation developed a pragmatic middle ground that simultaneously reflected the impressive intelligence of the Calles regime in reading international politics and an acknowledgement that Mexico was distant from Latin America. The key force in the making of Mexican foreign policy and strategy likely was Fernando González Roa, a Mexican jurist with experience in US-Mexico negotiations. Like the State Department, Mexican embassies were asked to gather information about the other delegations.[55] The SRE found out that most delegations would be immediately tied to US positions, such as Chile, Perú, and Bolivia, all of which were too interested in territorial disputes to care for questions of US-Mexican intervention in Central America.[56]

Mexican delegates, led by González Roa, produced Mexico's immediate strategy and a foundation for a long-term approach to diplomacy that would be, much like that of the US, idealistic when it could be, but pragmatic when it had to be, flexible enough to side the US, yet malleable enough to be genuinely independent from the US. The Revolution thus produced complex, often contradictory ideas about international politics that escape easy analysis. Difference in power mandated pragmatism and thus Mexican officials shrewdly planned to use other delegations in order to advance their interests, which would allow the enmity of the US to be directed elsewhere:

"The necessity to not challenge the power of a country with such resources and negative outlook towards us such as the United States, guides us to follow a cautious, prudent foreign policy that does not irritate without motive our powerful neighbor, and that, on the contrary, shows all other American nations that Mexico, far from challenging the US or being a constant source of international scandal (as American propaganda portrays), is a fair, peaceful country that nonetheless is inflexible when defending its honor…the Mexican delegation believes that the intelligent conciliation of these two notions seemingly opposed will lead to our success, if we can exit the difficult situation at hand."[57]

[55] See letters exchanged on August, 1927. SRE, AHGE, LE-199 (IV).
[56] Rebolledo to Estrada, August 22, 1927, and September 1, 1927, AHGE, LE-199 (IV).
[57] "…la necesidad de no desafiar al poderío de una nación de tan grandes recursos y tan mal dispuesta hacia nosotros, como los Estados Unidos, aconsejan a nuestra patria a seguir una política de prudente cautela que no

US intelligence was uncertain about what to make of the Mexican delegation: would they challenge the US or would they compromise? The key members of the Mexican delegation had extensive experience on US-Mexico relations. The US believed that the chair, Julio García, was unlikely to go into controversial debates. González Roa was believed to side with critics of US imperialism but was known to be flexible and had already developed rapport with the recently arrived ambassador Dwight Morrow. The State Department believed that a former congressman, Aquiles Elorduy, would be a torn on the US delegation (and he would be). Salvador Urbina was an interesting assignment, as he was a justice in the Supreme Court during the key decision of December 1927 that declared the petroleum law unconstitutional.[58]

The Mexican Delegation is picture above. (Trejo, Genaro Estrada, González Roa, Urbina, Elorduy, and García). US intelligence genuinely felt that the SRE and its delegates would undermine the US at La Habana. Source: NARA, RG 165, box 2473, Military Intelligence Division Regional File, 1922-1944, Mexico 3800.

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cause irritación sin motivo a nuestro poderoso vecino y que, antes bien, de la impresión a todas las naciones americanas que México, lejos de desafiar a los Estados Unidos y de ser un constante promotor de escándalos internacionales, (como la propaganda Americana nos hace aparecer), es por el contrario un país justo, amigo de la paz, respetuoso del derecho ajeno, moderado en sus propósitos y que solo se manifiesta inflexible en la defensa de su independencia y de su honor, cuando es atacado injustamente. La delegación mexicana cree que en la sabia conciliación de estos dos móviles aparentemente opuestos estará el éxito de su gestión, si es que logra salir airosa de las dificultades de una situación tan complicada. In "Actitud mexicana en la sexta conferencia internacional americana," signed by García, González Roa, Elorduy, and Urbina, AHGE, LE-196, f. 168.

[58] Mexico sketches, NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference, entry 160, box 1, Biographical Sketches.

As it turns out, without each side knowing it but suspecting it, the American and Mexican delegations were ready to compromise even as they predicted that various Latin American delegations would insist on debating intervention. But the Mexican delegates were not willing to lead any stand against intervention as instead they were looking for a way to challenge the US on intervention without pushing enough that the US would retract itself entirely from the Rio voting, or force discussion on Mexican intervention in Nicaragua. Prior to the conference, Nicaragua's president Adolfo Díaz had sent a letter warning that if the intervention question were to be brought up, the Nicaraguan delegation would respond that Mexico had intervened in Nicaragua.[59]

Instead, the Mexican delegation planned a non-aggression pact that borrowed heavily from Wilson's Pan-American Pact of 1915.[60] The treaty Mexicans prepared was similar to Kellogg's project with France that would turn into the Kellogg-Briand Pact against war. The SRE felt that the resolution could be framed according to US doctrine and have it both ways: even if Mexico's non-aggression resolution failed, they would have sustained the principle of non-intervention in terms that were in vogue in the US and Europe.[61]

The projects of the Rio Commission indeed were the crucial topic of the conference. Peru's Victor Maúrtua was assigned to present the project, but he substituted the Rio text against intervention with the juridical justification of the American Institute of International Law based on the work of the American John Bassett Moore, the same study used by Americans to justify intervention as "interposition."[62] Fortunately for the Mexican delegation, its strategy worked.

[59] González Roa, "Memorandum secreto relativo a la conferencia de la Habana," AHGE, LE-209, f. 18-19.
[60] Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: US Foreign Policy since 1900*, 52.
[61] "Actitud mexicana en la sexta Conferencia Internacional Americana," signed by García, González Roa, Elorduy, and Urbina. AHGE, LE-196, f. 168; "Memorandum 10, preliminar sobre la actitud de la delegación nexicana en la conferencia," AHGE, LE-199.
[62] Telegrama f, García to SRE, February 2, 1928, AHGE, LE-203.

The Argentinean Honorario Pueyrredón and the Salvadorian Gustavo Guerrero—future president of the Permanent Court of International Justice of the League of Nations—emerged as vocal critics of intervention. Mexican delegates found Guerrero courageous to fault, unwilling to compromise, a sure anti-American.[63] When debates could not solve the impasse, a sub-commission was formed.[64]

Kellogg considered asking El Salvador to recall Guerrero, but Hughes wrote him that it would be "most unfortunate should any steps be taken to recall Guerrero; any action taken against him a this time would be apt to react unfavorably on our position here."[65] Argentina's government recalled its rogue delegate, only increasing tensions. The Mexican delegation participated in rallying delegations and they succeeded as only the Cuban and Peruvian delegations became openly supportive of intervention, while the ABC delegations remained benign spectators. Even Nicaragua's delegation abstained from supporting Maúrtua.[66]

But the efforts of the sub-commission failed because not everyone agreed on how to approach intervention without upsetting the US delegation because, after all, intervention was not truly opposed in every case as the Nicaraguan experience shows. Instead, the group agreed to take the topic to the next conference. Mexican delegates blamed Guerrero for his intransigence as they were instead seeking a conciliatory formula in order to avoid further controversy with the US or have Nicaragua bring their grievances against Mexico.[67]

On the last day, the resolution moved to the plenary session where Guerrero took the floor to push for the Rio project. But by now it was clear that not everyone opposed intervention

[63] Telegrama, f. 244/284, AHGE, LE-203; Olds, Acting Secretary to Delegation, February 6 and 7, 1928, NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference, entry 155, Telegrams, box 1.
[64] García to SRE, February 5, 1928, LE-203.
[65] Hughes to Kellogg, February 10, 1928, NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference, entry 155, Telegrams, box 1.
[66] Telegrama 11, González Roa (possibly authored by García) to Estrada, La Habana, February 6, 1928, AHGE, LE-203.
[67] González Roa, "Memorandum secreto relativo a la citada conferencia enviada por Fernando González Roa a don Genaro Estrada," AHGE, LE 209.

because at the conference intervention was largely a US-Mexico-Central America issue. Or at least, for now, for various delegations it was not worth it to fully engage the US delegation on such sensitive matter. For most South American countries, US intervention was not a concern. Brazil's delegation, for instance, if forced to decide would side with the US. But since the committee had agreed on principle against intervention but had not made a specific resolution, the matter could not be voted on.[68]

In response, Nicaragua's Cuadra Pasos and Hughes gave speeches. When Cuadra Pasos rose to speak, the Mexican delegation began preparing for the delegate to accuse Mexico of intervening in Nicaraguan politics. As González Roa put it: "the long awaited bomb was about to go off." Fortunately for González Roa and his colleagues, Cuadra Pasos made no reference to Mexico and insisted that the US would leave his country after the elections.[69]

Instead, the US and Mexican delegations agreed on the non-aggression pact. Mexico's pact was light, safe, and cosmopolitan; the Mexican delegation had judged correctly. The passing of the pact was seen as a victory by the US delegation because Kellogg believed that it would benefit his anti-war negotiations in France.[70]

But it was Hughes' speech that provided the defining moment. For the first time in the Pan American Conferences, the US openly defended its foreign policy. Hughes' speech was the start of a new language of US foreign policy that while not yet the Good Neighbor Policy, it was at once a reflection of a crisis in US inter-American policy and a foundation for a new formula

[68] González Roa, "Memorandum secreto relativo a la citada conferencia enviada por Fernando González Roa a don Genaro Estrada," AHGE, LE 209, f. 25; Telegram to SRE, February 18, 1928, AHGE, LE-203.
[69] González Roa, "Memorandum secreto relativo a la citada conferencia enviada por Fernando González Roa a don Genaro Estrada," AHGE, LE 209, f. 25.
[70] Kellogg to Hughes, February 17, 1928, NARA, RG 43, Sixth Conference, entry 155, Telegrams, Jan.-Feb. 1928, box 1.

borne out of conversations with Latin American jurists and confrontations with revolutionary Mexico:

"I joined readily in the resolution of the Delegation of Mexico against aggression. We want no aggression. We want no aggression against ourselves. We cherish no thought of aggression against anybody else. We desire to respect the right of every country and to have the rights of our country equally respected. We do not wish the territory of any American republic. We do not wish to govern any American Republic. We do not wish to intervene in the affairs of any American republic…

…From time to time there arises a situation most deplorable and regrettable in which sovereignty is not at work, in which for a time in certain areas there is no government at all,--in which for a time and within a limited sphere there is no possibility of performing the functions of sovereignty and independence.…Now it is a principle of international law that in such a case a government is fully justified in taking action—I would call it interposition of a temporary character—for the purposes of protecting the lives and property of the nationals. I could say that that is not intervention."[71]

While Hughes did not yet condemn intervention, his speech acquires greater significance when examined through González Roa. In his confidential report, González Roa observed the following. First, he was impressed that Hughes did not speak of intervention properly, but interposition, thus taking Hughes's speech as a real promise against intervention. Second, Hughes defended his vision of intervention according to international law, not on grounds of the Monroe Doctrine. Hughes and his audience were speaking the same language of post-1919 reconstruction of international politics that made intervention an illegitimate word in international diplomacy.[72]

At the end, while the US and Mexican delegations walked away satisfied having spoken against intervention in terms favorable to both, Guerrero and the Peruvian delegation were

[71] Remarks of the honorable Charles Hughes at the Plenary Session, February 18, 1928, RG NARA, 43, Sixth Conference, entry 160, State Department Press Releases, box 1.
[72] González Roa, "Memorandum secreto relativo a la citada conferencia enviada por Fernando González Roa a don Genaro Estrada," AHGE, LE-209 (XIII); Segunda comisión, derecho internacional privado, González Roa, AHGE, LE-205, f. 45-47.

engaging in a crude exchange, the kind that the self-styled civilized diplomats Hughes and González Roa would never engage in. They had reached a common ground.

The recalibration of US and Mexican foreign policies was partly the result of individual benefits to both, but it was also the product of mutually beneficial strategies. Agency does not necessarily mean opposition to the US. Mexico's strategy was not a concession to US imperialism and the US did not secede its power. Instead, the State Department was confirming that as much as intervention, restraint could sustain strategic interests, while the SRE had made the assessment that they could not compete with the US partly because Mexico had very little in common with Latin America. But perhaps more importantly, as much as power asymmetry, the fantasies of a moral alliance between Mexico and Latin America that De Negri, Vasconcelos, and Trejo once allowed themselves to imagine possible, had proven to be an illusion that the Revolution encouraged but history and common sense did not support.

Instead, at the conference the US and Mexican delegations aligned foreign policies via their particular version of anti-imperialism. Mexican diplomats interpreted imperialism as strictly economic, Marxist-light, resembling the version popularized by individuals such as Charles Beard and John Dewey in the US. This vision of progressive anti-imperialism retained a belief in cultural superiorities and stages of development.[73] In other words, US-Mexican anti-imperialism retained the mutually held attitudes that saw Central America as backwards, attitudes that Mexican delegates and diplomats freely ascribed to countries unwilling to negotiate with the US on Mexican terms.

In fact, in his final report, González Roa wrote that whereas Mexico confidently negotiated with the US from a position of independence, other governments seemed to be subservient pawns and unwilling to follow Mexico's lead. He wrote on US-Cuban relations as a

[73] Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism*, 222-225.

counter example of US-Mexico history and argued that in Cuba, due to a government happy to live off "crumbs of the Americans," progressive agrarian politics, restrictive immigration laws, and labor protection—all staples of 1920s Mexican revolutionary social policies—were not possible. To him, Cuba was everything that Mexico was not: black, subservient to the US, and ran by tyrannical landowners.[74] It would be easier to ignore backwards Latin Americans than to lead them.

In spite of the retreat, Central America remained the only viable Mexican sphere of influence, but Mexican diplomats did not want it. A few years later, González Roa, having served briefly as ambassador to the US in 1933-1934, would write that Central American nations were the only ones where Mexico held influence and relevance. He suggested sending Gonzalo Robles to Costa Rica (for Robles' story, see chapter 4), but this never materialized. In fact, Mexican diplomats took it as punishment to be sent to Central America, which remained backwards in the eyes of Mexican diplomats.[75] Ironically, while Mexican political influence would fade, over the coming decades Mexican cultural influence, especially via its entertainment industry, would acquire a remarkable strength that scholars have yet to examine or even acknowledge it as a cultural influence (perhaps a soft cultural imperialism) that has not required a single military expedition.

For the US, during the late 1930s this kind of anti-imperialist isolationism would be replaced by a crusading, Wilsonian anti-imperialism. Mexicans would join the US in the anti-imperialist crusade in the Pacific during World War II. US and Mexican diplomats shared ideas about international and compatible foreign policies that had space for both American interests and Mexican sovereignty—patterns that would hold for decades and contribute to the long Cold

[74] González Roa, "Memorandum secreto relativo a la citada conferencia enviada por Fernando González Roa a don Genaro Estrada," AHGE, LE-209 (XIII).
[75] González Roa to SRE, AHGE, March 8, 1935, 29-1-14.

War collaboration and to the remarkable compatibility between the post-revolutionary Mexican state and the American century.

Conclusions

I conclude with a series of points that I hope will invite new perspectives on US-Mexico relations in international history. My conclusions support the work of scholars who have argued against interpreting changes in US-Latin American relations as solely the product of Washington politics. The confrontations with Revolutionary Mexico, the consequences of the interventions in Nicaragua, and juridical arguments made by Latin American delegates show that the transformation of inter-American politics was not for the US to determine alone. For the coming conference at Montevideo in 1933, the American Cordell Hull—with Gruening as his advisor on Latin American affairs—would announce that "no government need fear any intervention on the part of the United States under the Roosevelt administration," finishing the conversation that began during the confrontation with revolutionary Mexico.[76]

This change in inter-American politics was not primarily product of conflict between US imperialists and anti-imperialist Latin Americans. Put differently, as categories meant to underpin some kind of essence or legitimize national meta histories, imperialism and anti-imperialism are truly inadequate. Intervention was opposed or supported by governments according to their interest, so that this is not a history of the US against Latin America, but rather a history of how regional North American politics gave a spark towards the consolidation of a new hemispheric language of foreign policy.

[76] Robert David Johnson, *The Peace Progressives and American Foreign Relations*, 284.

In particular, Central America was a sacrificial lamb offered by Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and other countries to the politics of US imperialism. So long as US imperialism was contained to the region, other Latin American countries were content with US power.

Furthermore, pan-Americanism should not be confused with evidence of the power of US imperialism, but evidence of its weakness. At these conferences it was not unified Latin American action but the politics of a few delegates and the fear of Mexican influence that pushed US delegates to make concessions. That the US would no longer need Pan Americanism as US power truly became preponderant after 1945 should alert scholars to not exaggerating US power in Latin America before that watershed year. Prior to 1945, the US needed Latin America to legitimize its foreign policy.

On the Mexican side, an imperialist imagination, however brief, was not an aberration. Mexican efforts abroad were due partly to both realism and to an outgrowth of a particular vision of Mexican social politics as both progressive and a potential model for Latin America. But there was no real plan to unite Latin America, a task that would be unrealistic. Rather, Mexican Latin Americanism was a common language that in a particular conjuncture allowed Mexican diplomats to speak with their otherwise distant colleagues in order to undermine the US by presenting Mexico as an anti-imperialist alternative. And yet, Mexican diplomats and delegates aspired to behave like a great power by potentially having influence in Latin American politics. This language may have proposed some kind of solidarity with countries south of Mexico, but it was held by a conviction central to Mexican diplomats and perhaps nationalism: Mexico could only aspire to one day be like the US, but at the least it was not as miserable as Central America.

In fact, for both American and Mexican officials here studied, imperialism, anti imperialism, and geopolitics were related elements within a common vision of post-1919

civilization that hinged on Latin American putative backwardness.[77] The Revolution had granted a generation of Mexican reformers confidence in the country's civilizational claims vis-à-vis Latin America and a certainty that the Revolution was a modern phenomenon that could compete with US models of development (to be more precise, language of development, as the US and Mexico were not proposing fundamentally different projects).

In sum, this chapter puts into different light the interpretative framework of US-Mexican history that departs from the assumption that by historical and cultural necessity Americans are imperialists and Mexicans are anti-imperialists. The US and Mexico had competing foreign policies, but they were competing not because they were different, but because similar notions underpinned their foreign policies. In competition but together, Mexican and American policymakers traveled the same course: from interventionist to anti-interventionist, reaching a pragmatic conclusion by the late 1920s. Lastly, while often the extent of US influence in the Revolution has been the focus of attention, this chapter suggests that the Revolution influenced a most hallowed terrain of US sovereignty—foreign policy.

[77] Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism*, 249.