



The
FORGOTTEN
PEACE



Mediation at Niagara Falls, 1914



MICHAEL SMALL

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PEACE

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Mediation at Niagara Falls, 1914

MICHAEL SMALL

University of Ottawa Press

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The University of Ottawa Press acknowledges with gratitude the support extended to its publishing list by Heritage Canada through its Book Publishing Industry Development Program, by the Canada Council for the Arts, by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences through its Aid to Scholarly Publications Program, by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and by the University of Ottawa.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING
IN PUBLICATION

Small, Michael, 1958–
The forgotten peace : mediation at Niagara Falls, 1914 /
Michael Small.

(Governance series, 14873052)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-7766-0712-2

1. Niagara Falls Peace Conference (1914).
 2. Mexico—History—Revolution, 1910–1920.
 3. United States—Foreign relations—Mexico.
 4. Mexico—Foreign relations—United States.
- I. Title. II. Series: Governance series (Ottawa, Ont.)

F1234 S62 2009 341.7'30971 C2009-902709-7

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA PRESS
542 King Edward Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5
www.uopress.uottawa.ca



uOttawa

For my parents

*“When It’s Mediation Time in Canada,
In Canada, in Canada
By the good old Falls, we’ll watch and wait,
And Mediate.
When it’s Mediation Time in Canada,
We’ll come here for a rest;
And we’ll pay ten cents to cross the Bridge
Whether going East or West.”*

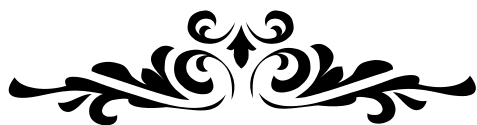
—Parody sung by reporters, May 1914.

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Preface

In the late summer of 1993, I was studying Spanish in Cuernavaca in preparation for a diplomatic assignment to the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City. While reading a general history of the Mexican Revolution by a British writer, Ronald Atkins, I came across a single paragraph that mentioned that after four years of upheaval there was an unsuccessful attempt in the summer of 1914 by three South American powers, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, to mediate an end to Woodrow Wilson's attempt to influence the course of the Revolution by military intervention. A peace conference was convened between the United States and Mexico by these three mediating powers and the location chosen was Niagara Falls, Ontario.



I had never heard of this event and I wondered what the contemporary citizens of Niagara Falls would have made of it. Indeed, over the next three years, while I was involved with Canada's rapidly expanding political relationship with Mexico in the post-NAFTA era, I never heard or read another reference to this unusual early chapter in Canada's relations with Mexico. Nevertheless, this intriguing fact remained stuck in my memory.

Ten years later I was granted the privilege of spending a year as a Fellow of Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. One of the obligations of being a Fellow is to produce a Fellow's paper on any subject of interest to the author. After discarding a few contemporary topics, I decided to try to discover what I could in the stacks of Harvard's magnificent Widener Library about the seemingly forgotten Niagara Falls Peace Conference of 1914. What I found was that, while the conference had been covered in passing in various works of scholarship written during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s dealing with American intervention in the Mexican Revolution, only one monograph had ever been devoted to the subject, written in Spanish by a scholar attached to the Chilean Academy of Diplomatic Relations in 1967. No full-length treatment of the conference had been written in English since 1914. As for Canadian secondary sources covering this event, there were none.

What follows is my attempt to retell the story of the Niagara Falls Peace Conference, using contemporary Canadian and American newspapers, American, British and Mexican diplomatic archives, and all the secondary



sources from North and South America that I could find in Widener Library. I also discovered a remarkable scrapbook of newspaper clippings and cartoons about the conference collected by the Argentine mediator which added a contemporary visual dimension to the record. I have tried to use my diplomatic training to piece together the story from the inside, keeping one eye on the envoys at the conference, who were committed to finding a just peace, while keeping another eye on the principals in the conflict, for whom the conference was but a proxy for securing victory by other means.

The story itself is a case study of the limits of third-party mediation, which should speak to aspiring modern mediators. More intriguingly, it casts some light from history on topics of intense current debate, such as the rights and wrongs of military intervention to restore democracy in a country under dictatorship, and the unexpected consequences that such interventions can generate.

Finally, for Canadian readers the story of this conference fills in a forgotten chapter in our relations with the United States and Mexico. It should spark some reflections on our current place in the world, since no peace effort quite like it has ever been attempted, before or since, on Canadian soil.

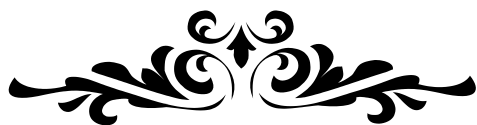
I would like to thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade for granting me the opportunity to do this research while serving as a Fellow at Harvard University from 2003 to 2004. I would also like to thank the Fellows Program of the Weatherhead



Center at Harvard, notably the Fellow's Program Director, Kathleen Molony, and the former Director of the Weatherhead Center, Professor Jorge Dominguez, for all the support they gave me while I was a Fellow at the Center, and for their helpful comments on the paper after I submitted it. I would also like to thank the research assistant provided by the Weatherhead Center, Jackie Shull, then a Harvard College senior, who gave me invaluable assistance in tracking down obscure key sources, in particular the archives of images on microfilm. The original draft has subsequently benefited from the encouragement and advice of Professor Robert Bothwell of the University of Toronto. This study would never have been published without the constant support for the project by the University of Ottawa Press. I would like to thank all those who have worked on it at the Press, in particular my editor, Alex Anderson. The judgments contained in this book represent entirely my own personal views and do not reflect the views or positions of the Government of Canada.

Michael Small

Ottawa



Chapter 1

Breaking news

Readers of the *Toronto Globe* opening their newspapers on the morning of Friday, April 24, 1914 would have been alarmed to read the following headline stretching across the page: "Declaration of War Against Mexico Expected." Different reports from the Canadian Press covered facets of the crisis that had been triggered by the unexpected occupation of the Mexican port of Veracruz by U.S. Marines two days before. The Mexican and American governments had expelled each other's *Chargés d'Affaires* and had severed all diplomatic channels between them. British and German naval vessels off the port of Tampico were asked by the U.S. Navy to help in rescuing 1,200 American oil workers there from enraged Mexican mobs. In Ottawa, Senator Poirier

asked if there were plans to send the Canadian ships *Niobe* and *Rainbow* to Mexico to protect the rights and property of Canadian citizens. Meanwhile, *The Globe* helpfully provided its readers with a map outlining the two possible routes available for a march by U.S. troops from Veracruz to Mexico City over the same terrain crossed by the troops of General Winfield Scott sixty-seven years earlier. *The Globe* noted ominously that “a few men with dynamite could destroy the bridges over deep gorges on both roads and thereby greatly embarrass the march of the invaders. The country along both lines offers many advantages for stubborn resistance.”¹

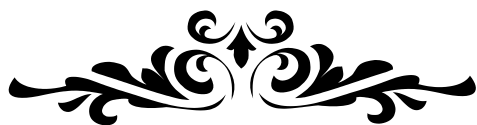
Contrary to expectations, the United States did not follow its occupation of Veracruz with a declaration of war. Instead, the next day there was a surprise announcement that three South American governments, the “A.B.C. powers” of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, had offered their good offices to mediate a resolution to the conflict between the United States and Mexico. The U.S. Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, accepted the offer at once and the Mexican dictator, General Victoriano Huerta, agreed a few days later. Envoys were named and a location was announced by the mediators. The parties had agreed that the next scene in the long-running drama of the Mexican Revolution would be staged in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

The Niagara Falls Peace Conference of 1914 represented an ephemeral high point in the nascent

¹ *The Globe* (Toronto), April 24, 1914.



Pan-American movement. For a few brief weeks it appeared as if the three most prominent countries in South America could find a peaceful resolution to the abortive American military intervention in the internal affairs of its disorderly southern neighbour. For Canadians, the conference provided an unexpected spectacle on their doorstep, combining high diplomacy and low intrigue around the gardens and cataracts of Canada's most famous natural attraction. If the results of the conference were fleeting and Canada's political contribution to the outcome was negligible, the fact that it took place at all merits mention in the history of Canada's relations with its two North American neighbours. This study reconstructs what did and did not happen at Niagara Falls in May and June 1914, and suggests why readers today might find points of interest in a failed peace conference that took place in Canada more than ninety years ago.



Chapter 2

Prelude to intervention

The Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920 was the cataclysmic event in that nation’s modern history. Successive waves of rebellion transformed a corrupt and backward dictatorship, heavily dependent on foreign capital, into a modern, centralized state committed to a nationalist, populist program of economic development. Given the extensive foreign investment from the United States, Britain, Canada, and various European countries in Mexico’s railways, mines, and oilfields, and the many foreign nationals who came to Mexico to manage these investments, there was a strong international interest from the outset in the outcome of the Revolution. Aided by the telegraph, regular shipping connections and a network of resident “special

correspondents,” newspapers across the United States and Canada provided constant coverage of the progress of the Revolution, focusing on political and military developments among the Mexican factions and dramatic stories about the fates of individual expatriates who became caught up in the conflict. Images of the major Mexican revolutionary figures became well-known to North American newspaper readers from frequent cartoons and caricatures. What seems a distant, foreign event to us today was daily news for the educated public of North America in 1914. For example, *The Globe* carried at least one story about Mexico and often several, most days of the week in the period between late April and early July 1914. The coverage of Mexico in leading American newspapers such as the *New York Times* was even more extensive.¹

This story is populated by more than its fair share of memorable characters, but five in particular stand out. On the American side, the two principal actors were the standard bearers of the Democratic Party which had successfully recaptured the White House in a three-way race in the presidential election of 1912. The first was Woodrow Wilson, the only professional academic to become President of the United States, whose meteoric political career began when he left Princeton University to become Governor of New Jersey in 1910. Within two years he won the Democratic Party’s nomination and

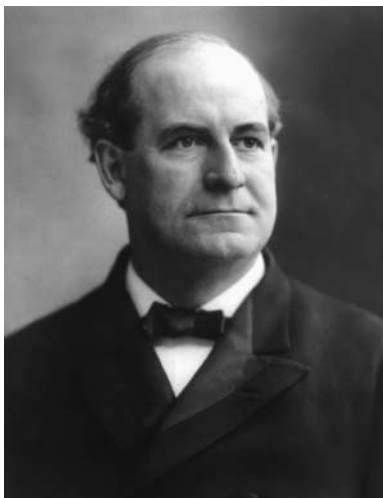
¹ See the collection compiled by the Argentine diplomat Rómulo S. Naón (1914), a selection of which is reproduced in Appendix I.



WOODROW WILSON (December 2, 1912). Library of Congress LC-USZ62-13028.

then the presidency, campaigning on a platform he called “The New Freedom.” Wilson the moralist, the idealist, the reformer, the strict Presbyterian, is a figure whose name has become synonymous with an entire approach to the conduct of American foreign policy.² At the time of this story, he was a newly elected President, whose greatest achievements and failures at the Paris Peace Conference lay five years in the future. He maintained a distant but vigilant presence at the Niagara Falls Peace Conference

² See, for example, the books written and edited by Wilson’s definitive modern biographer Arthur S. Link, and the account of the “Wilsonian” school of American foreign policy in Mead (2001).



WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN (c. 1908). Library of Congress LC-USZ6-831.

through the stream of detailed instructions, at times bordering on sermons, that he sent to the U.S. delegates. Wilson not only drafted these instructions but typed them himself, working late at night at the White House.³

Wilson's intermediary in these proceedings was his Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, the great populist orator from Nebraska who had led the Democratic Party to crushing defeat in three previous

³ Wilson often had to explain to recipients of his personal notes that he had typed them himself. For example, he began a short note to the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice: "My Dear Ambassador, I long ago wore out my pen hand by much writing, and am obliged, therefore, to ask my friends to regard notes which, like this, are written by



VENUSTIANO CARRANZA (1914). The original caption on this photograph read: "1914—Mexico City, Mexico—General Venustiano Carranza, who overthrew General Huerta, arriving in Mexico City." Bettman BE071336.

presidential elections. Bryan was more familiar to the American public than Wilson since he had been a national political figure for twenty years and his garrulous personality made him a cartoonist's dream.⁴

On the Mexican side, the two leading figures of the Constitutionalist forces whose cause Wilson and Bryan championed were Venustiano Carranza and Francisco

myself on my own typewriter as in fact autograph." Wilson to Spring-Rice, Washington, March 21, 1914, United Kingdom Foreign Office Papers (otherwise abbreviated F.O. in these notes) 115/1791.

⁴ For a brief sketch of Bryan as Wilson's Secretary of State, see Link (1954), pp. 26–27. See also the selection of cartoons from the Naón collection in Appendix I.



PANCHO VILLA (between 1908 and 1919). Library of Congress LC-DIG-npcc-19554.

“Pancho” Villa. Carranza was an aloof, taciturn, inflexible politician of urban middle-class origins and outlook. He had been Governor of his home state of Coahuila under the presidency of the apostle of the Revolution, Francisco Madero. After Madero’s death, Carranza rallied the disparate pro-Madero forces in northern Mexico around his Plan of Guadalupe, which designated him as the “First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army in charge of Executive Power.” Villa was the Constitutionalist’s most popular, reckless, and visible general. A passionate, cruel, mercurial figure from a humble peasant family, he was the quintessential rebel commander and Carranza’s opposite in every sense. Villa had assembled a fanatically loyal personal army in Chihuahua which became the



VICTORIANO HUERTA, flanked by José C. Delgado (l.) and Abraham F. Ratner (between 1906 and 1916). Library of Congress LC-USZ62-97991.

Constitutionalists' Division of the North. His early military victories in 1913 and the first half of 1914 had bolstered the Constitutionalists' morale and convinced the Wilson Administration that the Constitutionalist side would inevitably prevail.⁵

The target of Wilson's antipathy and the Constitutionalists' mortal enemy was "the usurper" in Mexico City, General Victoriano Huerta. A professional

⁵ For brief character sketches of Villa and Carranza see Atkin (1969), pp. 51–52 and p. 131, respectively. For a contrast between the two, see Quirk (1962), pp. 156–57. For a more sociological account of each of their factions, see Katz (1981), pp. 125–52.

soldier in the Federal Army, Huerta had been called out of retirement in February 1913 to help in defeating a mutiny against the government of President Madero. Instead of putting down the mutiny, Huerta cut a deal with one of its leaders, deposed Madero, and had himself appointed President. Madero was assassinated a few days later and, although Huerta denied responsibility for Madero's murder, he was depicted ever afterwards by his many enemies as a man with blood on his hands.⁶ Huerta was an alcoholic who reportedly consumed a bottle of cognac a day. His management methods as President were eccentric: he was rarely found in his office, preferring to hold cabinet meetings in taverns or bars in the small hours of the morning, and he liked to do his "office work" in a car while driving around Chapultepec Park.⁷ Huerta's methods for dealing with potential rivals and maintaining public order went well beyond exercising a "firm hand." As Paul von Hintze, the German Minister in Mexico City, commented to Berlin: "the methods of the government correspond roughly to those employed in Venice in the early Middle Ages, and we could look upon them with equanimity were they not occasionally extended to foreigners."⁸

⁶ For two detailed and somewhat differing accounts of this sequence of events, known in Mexican history as the "Ten Tragic Days," see Grieb (1969), pp. 12–29, and Meyer (1972), pp. 45–82.

⁷ See Atkin (1969), pp. 86–87 and 141; also Katz (1981), pp. 119–120.

⁸ Von Hintze quoted in Katz (1981), p. 120.



The unfolding chaos of the Mexican Revolution confronted Woodrow Wilson with the first sustained test of the application of his populist, democratic ideals to foreign policy. One of the many ironies of Wilson's presidency is that he entered office with virtually no experience of foreign affairs, nor even much interest in them.⁹ Yet within his first week in office he had issued a sweeping statement that the United States had "nothing to seek in Central and South America except the lasting interests of the peoples of the two continents." Wilson declared:

We hold... that just governments rest always on the consent of the governed, and there can be no freedom without order based on law and upon the public conscience and approval. We shall lend our influence of every kind to the realization of these principles in fact and in practice.¹⁰

The first question that required Wilson to put these noble sentiments into practice was whether to recognize the regime of General Victoriano Huerta as the *de facto* government of Mexico. Wilson was shocked by the brutal murder of Madero, the first democratically elected President of Mexico in forty years. He balked at the recommendation that landed on his desk from the State Department that the United States follow past

⁹ Link (1956), pp. 278–79.

¹⁰ Wilson Papers, Ser. 3, 2:20, March 12, 1913, quoted in Haley (1970), pp. 82–83.

American and European practice, and recognize Huerta as the *de facto* President.¹¹ In his mind, recognition constituted approval, which he was not prepared to grant to Huerta.¹² Accordingly, while most of the other countries with diplomatic missions in Mexico City proceeded to recognize Huerta, the United States did not, despite the fact that the United States was the only nation to have a full Ambassador in Mexico City. This reluctance on Wilson's part constituted a break with the United States' historic practice as a nation founded through revolution of extending *de facto* recognition to all governments in power, as the State Department carefully explained in a memorandum to Wilson.¹³

Over the first few months of his presidency, Wilson's discomfort turned to deep mistrust of the advice he was receiving from many of his officials. He learned that Henry Lane Wilson, then the U.S. Ambassador in Mexico, had not only advocated the overthrow of Madero but had even facilitated the power-sharing arrangement negotiated inside the U.S. Embassy between Huerta and his chief rival, General Felix Diaz. As Ambassador Wilson bombarded Washington with telegrams arguing the necessity of recognizing Huerta, President Wilson's reservations hardened into a determination that the United States could not countenance recognition of a regime established by the

¹¹ Link (1956), pp. 348–50.

¹² Grieb (1969), p. 43.

¹³ Grieb (1969), p. 72.



overthrow of a democratically elected leader.¹⁴ Huerta had to go.

The question then became how to remove Huerta. Withholding diplomatic recognition was the first step. This turned out to have significant economic repercussions for Huerta, as American and European bankers were reluctant to underwrite new loans to his regime in the absence of diplomatic recognition by its most powerful neighbour.¹⁵ Recall of Ambassador Wilson was the second step, even though this created the awkward situation that no replacement could be sent without extending *de facto* recognition to Huerta. Instead, the First Secretary, Nelson O'Shaughnessy, was appointed Chargé d'Affaires and tasked with confining his contacts to the Minister of Foreign Relations,¹⁶ although in fact he met Huerta frequently in the subsequent months. The third step was to send a trusted confidante, Wilson's campaign biographer William Bayard Hale, to Mexico City to report directly to the President on conditions in the country. Hale spent two months in this mission and met a limited circle of American expatriates in the capital. Not surprisingly, he reported back to Wilson that Huerta enjoyed little popular support. Hale

¹⁴ Grieb (1969), pp. 75–78.

¹⁵ Meyer (1972), p. 179. Meyer provides a very informative chapter, "Financing a Regime," which situates this factor in the larger context of the serious internal and external financial pressures on Huerta's government.

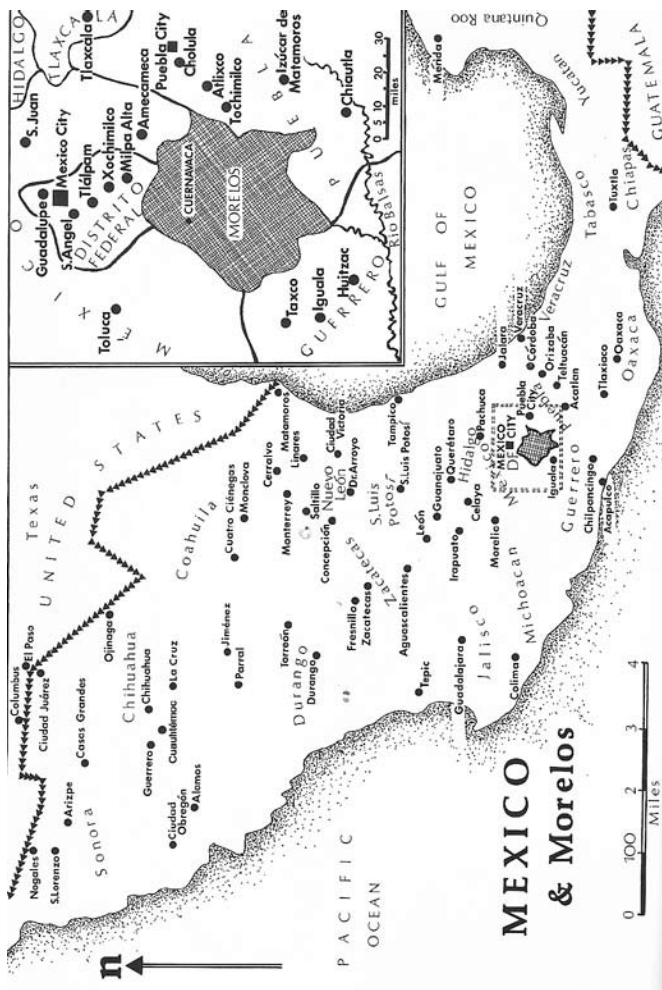
¹⁶ Grieb (1969), p. 88.

recommended that the United States take firm diplomatic action to force Huerta's resignation and the replacement of his regime by a democratically elected government.¹⁷

This paved the way for Wilson's next initiative: sending a personal representative to Mexico. For this task Woodrow Wilson selected a trusted friend, John Lind, a former Governor of Minnesota who had no knowledge of Mexico, Spanish or diplomacy. Lind was dispatched with a proposal to "mediate" the impasse between the two governments: the United States would offer recognition of a new Mexican government, if Huerta resigned and an interim government held free elections. Huerta's Foreign Minister dismissed this mediation proposal out of hand.¹⁸ Lind withdrew to Veracruz where he was kept on for months, much against his will, to "report on developments." Wilson briefed both Houses of Congress on the rebuff of Lind's mission and concluded that, since the United States could not force its good offices on Mexico, the best it could do would be to adopt a policy of strict neutrality, maintain the existing arms embargo against Mexico, and watch patiently for the internal conflict between Huerta and his enemies to resolve itself. This policy was immediately dubbed "watchful waiting" by the American press. Despite the subsequent evolution

¹⁷ Link (1956), pp. 354–55.

¹⁸ Link (1956), pp. 356–60. Huerta went through six different Foreign Ministers in his sixteen months as President. To minimize confusion, I have omitted their names at most points.



MAP OF MEXICO AND THE MEXICAN STATE OF MORELOS (around 1910).

of Wilson's approach away from this passive stance towards a more proactive policy to undermine Huerta, the label stuck in the popular imagination (as evidenced in newspaper cartoons, and even a humorous song, produced during the Niagara Falls Peace Conference nine months later).¹⁹

Up until this point, Wilson and Bryan had paid little attention to the Constitutionalists' growing insurgency in northern Mexico. This loose coalition of former supporters of Madero, led by "First Chief" Venustiano Carranza, refused from the start to recognize Huerta's assumption of power. Wilson and Bryan started to pay more attention to their potential, encouraged by reporting from various U.S. consuls in northern Mexico, notably Thomas Carothers in Torreon who became an outright partisan of Pancho Villa. They were also lobbied by Lind, who argued that the United States had to find a domestic alternative to Huerta. By the autumn of 1913 Bryan and Wilson had come to the conclusion that the only force capable of realizing their goals for Mexico was the Constitutionalists.

However, their first contact with Carranza and his cabinet was not auspicious. Wilson sent Hale to meet them in Nogales, Mexico, in mid-November with a proposal that the United States would permit them to buy arms in the United States if they supported Wilson's plans to install a provisional government in Mexico City that would oversee new elections, and if they guaranteed

¹⁹ Link (1956), p. 361.



the lives and properties of foreigners living in areas under their control. If such guarantees could not be provided by any party in Mexico, Wilson instructed Hale to warn that military intervention could follow. Carranza categorically rejected both the offers and the threats. Hale reported that the Constitutionalists “would be satisfied by nothing less than the destruction of Huerta and the old regime, and their unencumbered triumph.” Further:

the Constitutionalists refused to admit the right of any nation on this continent acting alone or in conjunction with the European Powers to interfere with the affairs of the Mexican Republic... they held the idea of armed intervention as inconceivable and inadmissible on any grounds or upon any pretext.²⁰

Carranza broke off the negotiations with Hale, informing him that further communications should go through the Constitutionalists’ Minister of Foreign Affairs. Hale, bitter and rebuffed, returned to Washington.

After these setbacks with both belligerent parties in Mexico, Wilson decided to issue a ringing statement clarifying the disinterested position of the United States and offering a sweeping defence of democratic government in Latin America. This position statement was drafted by Wilson and sent out by Bryan on November 24, 1913, to all American envoys in Europe, as a formal *démarche* to

²⁰ Link (1956), pp. 382–84.



the other powers with an interest in Mexico. It is worth quoting in full:

Our purposes in Mexico

The purpose of the United States is solely and singly to secure peace and order in Central America by seeing to it that the processes of self-government there are not interrupted or set aside.

Usurpations like that of General Huerta menace the peace and development of America as nothing else could. They not only render the development of ordered self-government impossible; they also tend to set law entirely aside, to put the lives and fortunes of citizens and foreigners alike in constant jeopardy, to invalidate contracts and concessions in any way the usurper may devise for his own profit, and to impair both the national credit and all the foundations of business, domestic or foreign.

It is the purpose of the United States, therefore, to discredit and defeat such usurpations whenever they might occur. The present policy of the Government of the United States is to isolate General Huerta entirely; to cut him off from foreign sympathy and aid, and from domestic credit, whether moral or material; and to force him out.

It hopes and believes that isolation will accomplish this end, and shall await the results without irritation or impatience. If General Huerta does not retire by force of circumstances, it will become the duty of the United States to use less



peaceful means to put him out. It will give other Governments notice in advance of each affirmative or aggressive step it has in contemplation, should it unhappily become necessary to move actively against the usurper; but no such step seems immediately necessary.

Its fixed resolve is that no such interruptions of civil order shall be tolerated in so far as it is concerned. Each conspicuous instance in which usurpations of this kind are prevented will render their recurrence less, and in the end a state of affairs will be secured in Mexico and elsewhere upon this continent which will assure the peace of America and the untrammelled development of its economic and social relations with the rest of the world.

Beyond this fixed purpose the Government of the United States will not go. It will not permit itself to seek any special or exclusive advantages in Mexico or elsewhere for its own citizens, but will seek, here as elsewhere, to show itself the consistent champion of the open door. In the meantime, it is making every effort that the circumstances permit to safeguard foreign lives and property in Mexico, and is making the lives and fortunes of the subjects of other Governments as much its concern as the lives and fortunes of its own citizens.²¹

²¹ United States Department of State (1922), pp. 443–34, File No. 812.00/11443d. Link (1956), p. 386, attributes the drafting of the statement to Wilson himself.



The U.S. attempt to use such *démarches* to reduce international support for Huerta met with limited success. Despite U.S. opposition, by June 1913 all other countries with missions in Mexico City had decided to recognize Huerta's regime as the *de facto* government of Mexico, save for Cuba, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Only the latter three South American democracies agreed to follow the lead of the United States in their policies towards Huerta.²² The European powers maintained business as usual.

Meanwhile, American observers suspected that Japan was exploiting the rupture in relations between the United States and Mexico to its political advantage.²³ In 1913 Huerta made a purchase of arms from Japan, and in January 1914 a Japanese naval vessel on a good will visit to a Pacific port was received with great public enthusiasm and "unusual honours" by the Mexican government. The State Department watched this visit closely, suspecting that the Japanese were attempting to cultivate Mexico in order to put greater pressure on the United States to deal with the then vexing question of the discriminatory laws against Japanese immigrants recently passed in California. Reports circulated in the

²² Grieb (1969), p. 71.

²³ Tuchman (1958), Chapters 2 and 4, gives a fascinating account of American fears of Japanese strategic designs in Mexico. According to Tuchman, many of the American press reports of Japanese plans to obtain a naval base in Mexico were the product of deliberate disinformation by German agents.



American press that Huerta and the Japanese government had signed a secret treaty to open western Mexico to new colonies of Japanese migrants, to be financed by British commercial interests, which in turn would pave the way for a Japanese base at Magdalena Bay on the Pacific Coast of Baja California. The Japanese Prime Minister reportedly declared that both the “Mexican hope and American suspicion that Japan will assist Mexico” were “wholly unfounded,” and that Japan was far too involved in disturbances in China to worry about affairs in distant Mexico. But the facts of the arms sale and the naval visit remained.²⁴

British policy came under even closer scrutiny from Wilson, Bryan, and the U.S. Ambassador in London, Walter Page, as Britain was second only to

²⁴ Reports from Mexico City, Washington, London, and Tokyo between January 29 and February 3, 1914 document these perceptions of Japanese activity in Mexico: see F.O. 115/1789. Also note a report by T. B. Hohler of the British Legation in Mexico City, March 11, 1914, concerning the U.S. Chargé’s perceptions of Japanese activities, F.O. 115/1791; and telegram 34 from the British Legation in Tokyo reporting the Japanese Prime Minister’s statement on the issue, April 27, 1914, F.O. 115/1794. For the story about the secret treaty between Japan and Mexico, see the *Washington Herald*, March 12, 1914. The *Herald* noted that two years previously the Taft Administration had felt required to invoke the Monroe Doctrine against Japan to counter a plan by Japan to obtain basing rights in Baja California.



the United States in importance as a source of foreign investment in Mexico. One British industrialist, Lord Cowdray, was the largest single investor in Mexico's rapidly expanding oil industry, then based around the Gulf port of Tampico. The Royal Navy had a strong interest in the stability of Mexican oil production, having switched in 1912 to an all oil-powered fleet, and had deployed a powerful West Indies cruiser squadron to guard the approaches to Tampico. In a particularly ill-timed move which enraged Wilson, Sir Lionel Carden, the new British Minister to Mexico, arrived in the autumn of 1913 and presented his credentials to Huerta the day after the arrest of the Mexican Congress.²⁵ Carden became a lightning rod for American suspicions, as he had made his name over a thirty-year career through his efforts to assert British economic interests in Latin America in the face of steadily growing American power. Walter Page, the U.S. Ambassador to London, dismissed Carden, foolishly, as a "slow-minded, unimaginative, commercial Briton, with as much nimbleness as an elephant."²⁶

Throughout 1913 the United States put increasing diplomatic pressure on Britain to distance itself from Mexico. Presented with the choice between good relations with a precarious regime in Mexico and good relations with a determined Administration in Washington, Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, opted for the latter. He

²⁵ Grieb (1969), pp. 129–30.

²⁶ Link (1956), p. 366.



sent his private secretary as a special envoy to meet Wilson and iron out hard feelings after the credentials incident. The British Government also distanced itself from Lord Cowdray, reduced the profile of its naval presence in the Gulf of Mexico, and put Sir Lionel Carden on a short leash. Britain signalled clearly to the U.S. Government that it would take no measures to protect Huerta, provided that the United States alerted Britain about any measures it planned to take that could affect the security of British interests in Mexico. By the beginning of 1914 much of Britain's diplomacy towards Mexico was being channelled through its Ambassador in Washington, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice.²⁷

After two months of stalemate, Wilson and Bryan were ready to try a new, indirect approach to engaging the Constitutionlists. Their agent in Washington, Luis Cabrera, had provided fresh assurances to the State Department that the Constitutionlists would respect foreign property rights, including "just and equitable concessions."²⁸ More importantly, Wilson had come to

²⁷ Link (1956), pp. 369–77, gives a concise account of Anglo-American relations over Mexico, and Grieb (1969), pp. 125–41, provides more detail, including an explanation of the naval dimension. See also Calvert (1968). Reading the messages exchanged between Sir Edward Grey and his respective Ambassadors in Washington and Mexico City, contained in the British Foreign Office files for the first half of 1914 (S 830, F.O. 115), reveals how much of Spring-Rice's time was devoted to reporting on Mexico.

²⁸ Link (1954), p. 121.



the conclusion that a permanent solution to Mexico's instability would require more than just the departure of Huerta and fresh elections. It would also require a new regime committed to land reform. Of the parties available to replace Huerta, only the Constitutionalists were committed to such a program.

Wilson's chosen instrument for facilitating a Constitutionalist victory was to lift the U.S. arms embargo against Mexico, which had been in place since March 1912. Although lifting the embargo would enable both sides in Mexico to rearm with U.S. weapons and munitions, Wilson knew that this measure would be of greater benefit to the Constitutionalists, given the long stretch of the U.S.–Mexico border under their control. Bryan spelled out the implications of this policy shift, in stark terms, in a message sent to all U.S. diplomatic missions on January 31, 1914:

...the United States has received information which convinces it that there is a more hopeful prospect of peace, of the security of property, and of the early payment of foreign obligations if Mexico is left to the forces reckoning with one another than there would be if anything by way of a mere change of personnel were effected at Mexico [City]... Settlement by civil war carried to its bitter conclusion is a terrible thing, but it must come now, whether we wish it or not, unless some outside power is to sweep Mexico with its armed forces from end to end; which



would be the beginning of a still more difficult problem.²⁹

The logic behind this message was explained in fuller terms by Wilson himself at a meeting in early February with the British Ambassador in Washington. Spring-Rice described the President's thinking in a long telegram to Sir Edward Grey:

He [Wilson] said that, after long and serious consideration of the whole subject, and after consulting all sorts and conditions of men who had experience of the country, he had come to the conclusion that the real cause of the trouble in Mexico was not political but economic. The real cause was in fact the land question. So long as the present system under which whole provinces were owned by one man continued to exist, so long there would be perpetual trouble in the political world. Having arrived at the conclusion he [had] been obliged to alter the policy which at first he had pursued. He had at first hoped that it would be possible, although Huerta himself could not be recognised, for reasons of which I was fully aware, to find some person or persons who

²⁹ Secretary of State to all diplomatic missions of the United States, Washington DC, January 31, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 446-447, File No. 812.00/10735a.



could form a provisional government under which elections could be held and a new President legally chosen. But it soon appeared that there was no one in Mexico today who could give adequate representation to the crying wants of those classes of population who were not so fortunate as to own land. A Government formed in Mexico City must of necessity [be] a government representing the interests of landowners. It could not be a government which could safely be trusted to solve that great question [which] was the prime cause of all political difficulties. It could not possibly be a government which the people could trust. But if that were impossible there remained another alternative, namely, a government upheld by a foreign power as a consequence of successful intervention. But successful intervention would unite against the invading party all the patriotism and all the energies of which the Mexicans were capable. To put such a government in power would be to substitute for a government which people could not trust a government which they perforce must hate.

Under such circumstances his thoughts had turned to the so-called "Constitutionalists." They had many faults but they at least had one virtue. They did more or less adequately represent the crying needs of the agricultural population. This was especially true of Villa, who was a sort of Robin Hood and had spent a not



uneventful life in robbing the rich to give to the poor. He had even at one time kept a butcher's shop for the purpose of distributing to the poor the proceeds of his innumerable cattle raids. He had another great virtue. That was that he was quite aware of his deficiencies as a political organiser. He knew he could fight, but he knew also that he could not govern. Villa was the sword of the revolution and it was possible that someone would be found who would manage the political affairs of the revolution, when accomplished, under capable and disinterested advice.

Such were the reasons that had led the President to believe that Mexico had best be left to find her own salvation in a fight to the finish. He did not intend to interfere himself and he hoped that other Powers would not interfere. If no interference took place he believed that Huerta would fall sooner or later and a new government be formed which could better express the will of the people, and lead in the end to a peaceful and permanent settlement.³⁰

Wilson notified Congress that he was revoking the arms embargo against Mexico on February 3, 1914. Merchants along the border between Texas and Mexico

³⁰ Spring-Rice to Grey, Washington, February 7, 1914. F.O. 115/1789 (British spelling and punctuation preserved).



moved swiftly to supply the Constitutionalist forces with rifles and ammunition. Stockpiles of munitions previously impounded by the U.S. Government under the embargo were released for sale to the Constitutionalists, despite the widespread apprehension among U.S. military officers that, sooner or later, U.S. troops would find themselves in Mexico fighting various Mexican forces armed with these new weapons.³¹ By early April the Constitutionalist forces were gaining ground in their fight against the Federal Army. Villa won a major victory by recapturing the strategic railroad junction at Torreon, while other Constitutionalist forces to the east began besieging Tampico.

However, Villa was also running out of money. He had consistently financed his army through cattle raids and confiscation of property (hence the U.S. insistence, in previous exchanges with the Constitutionalists, on respect for foreign property rights). When Torreon fell, Villa seized large stocks of cotton held by Spanish, French, and British merchants, but the British owners thwarted his plans by obtaining an injunction that prevented him from selling the cotton in the United States.³²

³¹ See Grieb (1969), pp. 121–22, regarding arms sales to the Constitutionalists. The British Military Attaché in Washington, Lieutenant Colonel Gage, reported the widespread opposition in “U.S. military circles” to the lifting of the embargo in his quarterly military report to Spring-Rice, May 1, 1914, F.O. 115/1795.

³² Spring-Rice to Grey, Washington DC, April 25, 1914, F.O. 115/1793.



Meanwhile, the centre and south of the country and above all, the capital, remained firmly under the control of Huerta. He had finally succeeded in strengthening his own position by raising a major loan from the Catholic Church and the propertied classes in Mexico City, which was reportedly sufficient to fund his forces for another six months.³³ With the lifting of the embargo, Huerta was now able to import new weapons by sea from the United States and he could readily purchase more from Europe or Japan.

Lifting the embargo did not prove sufficient as an instrument to achieve U.S. aims: further measures would be required to topple Huerta. In late March, Lind sent a message recommending that the United States apply direct military pressure against ports in the Gulf of Mexico to cut off the Huerta regime's customs revenues and its lines of supply. Despite his public protestations to the contrary, Wilson in fact had been considering a military intervention along these lines for several months.³⁴

³³ Link (1956), p. 392. Spring-Rice, in his telegram of April 25, 1914, reports the estimate that the domestic loan had given Huerta funds to fight for another six months.

³⁴ Grieb (1969), p. 122. Link (1954), p. 120, quotes Colonel House's diary regarding a conversation with Wilson on October 30, 1913, in which Wilson envisaged a blockade of all Mexican ports as the first step in a direct U.S. military intervention in Mexico. Spring-Rice also recorded a private conversation with General Wood, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, in which Wood decried his inability to obtain any

On April 9, 1914, an incident occurred in Tampico that provided Wilson with the pretext for such a move. A troop of about twenty Marines from the U.S.S. *Dolphin*, the flagship of the U.S. fleet anchored at Tampico, came ashore in a whaleboat behind Mexican military lines to purchase gasoline and were arrested and detained for an hour by an overzealous troop of the Tamaulipas rural guard. As soon as General Ignacio Morelos Zaragoza, the Mexican Federal Army commander, learned of this incident, he immediately released the Marines and issued an apology to their captain and the U.S. Consul. However, Rear Admiral Mayo, the commander of the U.S. fleet at anchor off Tampico, was not satisfied with the apology and insisted that the Mexicans fire a twenty-one-gun salute to the U.S. flag as full restitution for this insult to the national honour. Zaragoza demurred, on the grounds that he did not have the authority to offer such a salute, and cabled Mexico City for instructions. Mayo, notifying Washington of what he had done, received the full backing of President Wilson.

What ensued were ten days of increasingly tortuous negotiations between the two capitals, which came down to whether the United States would reciprocate the

political direction or even access to political circles in the Wilson Administration. Foreseeing the need for such a plan, Wood had drawn one up anyway: it envisaged the complete occupation and pacification of Mexico. See Spring-Rice to Grey, Washington DC, January 23, 1914, F.O. 115/1789.



twenty-one-gun salute it was demanding from Mexico. The final U.S. ultimatum expired on April 19, after Wilson refused to have O'Shaughnessy sign a Mexican protocol committing the two sides to reciprocal salutes, on the grounds that this would amount to recognition of Huerta's government. This diplomatic impasse appears to have been a deliberate contrivance by Wilson to mobilize Congressional support for a limited use of force. It succeeded. On April 20, Wilson addressed a Joint Session of Congress and asked "for your approval that I should use the armed forces of the United States in such ways and to such an extent as may be necessary to obtain from General Huerta and his adherents the fullest recognition of the rights and dignity of the United States."³⁵ The House of Representatives approved a resolution to this effect that evening by a vote of 323 to 29. That night, Wilson asked his Secretaries of War and the Navy to draw up comprehensive plans for a military intervention in Mexico, including a full-scale blockade of both Mexican coasts, occupation of Tampico and Veracruz,

³⁵ Address of the President delivered at a Joint Session of the Houses of Congress, April 20, 1914, on "The Situation in Our Dealings with General Victoriano Huerta at Mexico City," 63rd Congress, 2nd Session, House Document No. 910, reprinted in United States Department of State (1922), pp. 474–76, File No. 812.00/11552. For the evolution of U.S. demands and Mexican counterdemands over the Tampico incident, see United States Department of State (1922), pp. 448–78.

and the possible dispatch of an expeditionary force to Mexico City.

In the early hours of the following morning, an urgent cable arrived in Washington from the U.S. Consul in Veracruz, reporting that two hundred machine guns and fifteen million rounds of ammunition destined for Huerta's troops were due to be unloaded later that day from a German ship, the *Ypiranga*. Wilson immediately ordered that the ship be detained and that the customs house in Veracruz be occupied. A detachment of U.S. Marines on station off Veracruz proceeded to do so in the face of increasing fire from the 800 Mexican troops guarding the city. In short order, it became evident that the Marines would have to occupy the entire port to prevent the rifles from being unloaded. Reinforced by the main body of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, some 3,000 U.S. troops proceeded to rout the Mexican defenders and seized the city on the morning of April 22. Meanwhile, following stiff German protests, the United States realized that it could not hold the ship of neutral Germany and released the *Ypiranga*, which then sailed to another Gulf port and unloaded its cargo. Bills of lading found on board by U.S. troops showed that the arms had been purchased for Huerta's army in New York and had been transhipped via Germany to disguise their origin.³⁶

Although Wilson had already ordered plans for an invasion, he was apparently unnerved by the reality of the eighty-eight American casualties incurred in the

³⁶ Grieb (1969), pp. 151–54, and Link (1956), pp. 399–400.



impromptu action at Veracruz.³⁷ He was also surprised by the political reaction to the occupation. General Huerta received a major boost in public support for his resistance to U.S. intervention. Throughout Latin America, public opinion and press reaction harshly condemned this latest U.S. military intervention in the affairs of a Latin American state. Anti-American riots broke out or were suppressed by police in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Uruguay.³⁸ American expatriates in Mexico feared for their security, and there was a rush of refugees across the U.S. border and to the ports of Tampico and Veracruz. The British Government was privately irritated, as this rash move contradicted Wilson's previous commitment that the United States would not take military action in Mexico without prior warning. British subjects, including Canadians, working in Mexico also felt at risk as they anticipated that an enraged Mexican citizenry would not make much distinction among the nationalities of different English-speaking expatriates.³⁹ The great

³⁷ See Link (1956), p. 402, regarding Wilson's reaction to the casualties.

³⁸ Link (1956), p. 405.

³⁹ See, for example, Carden's report to Grey: "Although the American Admiral had promised to [British] Admiral Craddock that no hostile step would be taken without sufficient notice to enable foreigners to embark, American Marines were landed at Vera Cruz this morning." Mexico telegram no. 88, April 22, 1914, F.O. 115/1793. Carden and Admiral Craddock then spent the following week arranging for the evacuation of



majority of American press and political opinion, apart from Wilson's most loyal supporters in the Hearst press, regarded the seizure of Veracruz as the start of an undeclared war and an excessive means of seeking redress for a specific indignity to American honour, which was how Wilson had presented the Mexican situation to Congress on April 20.⁴⁰

Most seriously for Wilson's political aims, Carranza equally rejected the assurances sent to him by Bryan that the President was not seeking to declare war on Mexico but merely seeking "redress of a specific indignity." Carranza replied to Wilson via U.S. Special Agent Carothers that the criminal action of Huerta would never be sufficient to involve Mexico in a war against the United States, "[b]ut the invasion of our territory and the stay of your forces in the port of Veracruz, violating

several thousand English-speaking expatriates, the majority of whom were Americans, via trains from Mexico City to Veracruz and ships from Tampico. These operations elicited personal expressions of gratitude for Carden's work from his previous critics, Page, Bryan, and Wilson.

⁴⁰ Link (1956), pp. 402–05. This claim was repeated by Bryan when reporting the text of the Senate resolution approved on April 22: "Please note the word 'justified' is used instead of 'authorized.' This was done to emphasize the fact that the resolution is not a declaration of war but contemplates only the specific redress of a specific indignity." Secretary of State to certain U.S. Diplomatic Missions, Washington, April 22, 1914, in United States Department of State (1922), pp. 483–84, File No. 812.00/11637a.



the rights that constitute our existence as a free and independent sovereign entity, may indeed drag us into an unequal war, with dignity, but which until today we have desired to avoid.”⁴¹ After receiving this communication, Wilson reimposed the arms embargo *de facto*, reportedly in direct response to the representations of his military commanders, who now had troops in the field in Mexico and anticipated hostilities from all quarters.⁴²

The Mexican Government took the next step of severing the remaining channel of direct communication between Washington and Mexico City. On April 22 Huerta’s Foreign Minister, Lopez Portillo y Rojas, sent Chargé Nelson O’Shaughnessy a formal note characterizing the seizure of Veracruz as an act of surprise, which violated Mexico’s goodwill in allowing U.S. forces friendly access to the harbour and which gave no time for non-combatants to seek safety. The note declared: “This act was contrary to international usages. If these usages do not demand, as held by many states, a previous declaration of war, they impose at least the duty of not violating humane considerations or good faith by the people whom the country which they are in has received as friends.” It concluded by

⁴¹ The full text of Carranza’s statement is contained in the telegram from Special Agent Carothers to Secretary of State, El Paso, Texas, April 22, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 483–84, File No. 812.00/11618.

⁴² Gage to Spring-Rice, Washington, DC, May 1, 1914, F.O. 115/1795.



stating that President Huerta had seen fit to terminate O'Shaughnessy's mission and returned his passports.⁴³ O'Shaughnessy and his family left the next day for Veracruz in a specially guarded train provided by the Mexican Government, accompanied by Huerta's son as a guaranty of their safety. The State Department reciprocated by instructing the Mexican Chargé, A. Algara Romero de Terreros, to leave Washington the same day. The departing O'Shaughnessy took the initiative to turn over U.S. interests to the British Embassy, much to the displeasure of Wilson, who cancelled this arrangement when he learned of it and instructed Bryan that U.S. interests be represented by another government that had refused to recognize Huerta.⁴⁴ Brazil agreed to take on the role, while Spain agreed to do the same for Mexico in Washington.

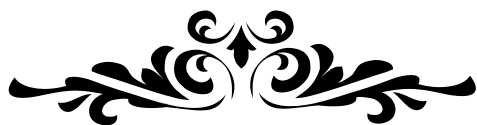
By April 24, both Wilson and Huerta found themselves in a precarious position. The occupation of Veracruz had failed to stop the shipment of arms to Huerta, mobilized Mexican public support around his regime, generated a refugee flow of U.S. citizens out of Mexico, dismayed international and domestic public opinion, and even earned the ire of the intended beneficiaries of the policy, the Constitutionalists. In the face of these political setbacks, Wilson was hesitant to

⁴³ O'Shaughnessy to Secretary of State, Vera Cruz, April 25, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 490, 123Os4/123.

⁴⁴ Grieb (1969), p. 155.



push the United States' military advantage. Huerta, on the other hand, had lost control of Mexico's principal port and major source of customs revenue. He knew that he could not dislodge the United States from Veracruz by force, or survive for long against renewed Constitutionalist attacks from the north, without an American withdrawal. Both sides were thus disposed to cease hostilities and save face for the moment, if an acceptable formula were proposed to them.



Chapter 3

A ray of light

In the words of one contemporary American observer, Frank H. Severance: “At this juncture, when the blockade of Mexican ports, the bombardment of Mexican cities, and the invasion of her territory by the United States troops seemed to be the next step, an offer of mediation came like a ray of light through the storm clouds.”¹

On April 25, three South American envoys in Washington—Domicio da Gama, the Ambassador of Brazil; Rómulo S. Naón, the Minister of Argentina; and Eduardo Suárez Mujica, the Minister of Chile—sent the following proposal to William Jennings Bryan:

¹ Severance, ed. (1914), editor’s essay, p. 6.



Mr. Secretary of State: With the purpose of serving the interests of peace and civilization in our continent, and with the earnest desire to prevent any further bloodshed, to the prejudice of the cordiality and union that have always surrounded the relations of the Governments and peoples of America, we, the plenipotentiaries of Brazil, Argentina and Chile, duly authorized thereto, have the honor to offer to your excellency's Government our good offices for the peaceful settlement of the conflict between the United States and Mexico.²

Thus was launched the formal mediation proposal from the "A.B.C. powers" (short for Argentina, Brazil, and Chile), as they were immediately christened by the press throughout the Americas. Throughout the process, cartoons made play of the first three letters of the alphabet, coupled with caricatures of the mediators and the three countries they represented. More augustly, photographs of the three mediators in full diplomatic uniform were widely reproduced by newspapers in North America, often under headlines such as "They Hope to Restore Peace."³

² Brazilian Ambassador and Argentine and Chilean Ministers as Mediators between the Governments of the United States and Mexico, to Secretary of State, Washington, April 25, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 488–89, File No. 812.00/16525 (U.S. spelling preserved).

³ This caption appears in *The Globe* (Toronto) May 13, 1914; for other photographs and cartoons see Naón (1914), a selection from which appears as Appendix 1.

The three mediators themselves were prominent in the Washington diplomatic community, but until this initiative they do not appear to have been public figures in the United States in their own right. The most active and ambitious of the three was the Argentine Minister, Dr. Rómulo S. Naón, who clearly relished the opportunity the mediation provided to enhance his profile in the American press.⁴ Best-known in his own country as an expert in international law and an educator, he had introduced major reforms in the Argentine education system when he was Superintendent of Public Instruction. In recognition of the latter achievement, he was awarded honorary doctorates by both Harvard and Yale in June 1914. In protocol terms, Domicio da Gama, the Brazilian representative, outranked Naón, as only Brazil at that point had appointed a full Ambassador to the United States. Consequently, Ambassador da Gama served as the spokesman for the three mediators. Da Gama was a career diplomat who had served in the United States in 1893 as secretary to the commission of arbitration between Brazil and Argentina conducted by President Cleveland, and subsequently served as Brazil's Chargé in Belgium and as Minister in Peru and Argentina. The Chilean Minister, Eduardo Suárez Mujica, sought the limelight least, but appears to have

⁴ Of the three mediators, Naón's picture appeared most often in the American press, and it is revealing that after the conference was over he carefully assembled the comprehensive archive of newspaper clippings already mentioned.



played a key role at various moments behind the scenes. He had been a legislator in Chile, Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and Secretary of Justice and Public Instruction. He also knew Mexico well, having served as Chilean Minister to Mexico for many years before being appointed Minister to the United States.⁵

In all contemporary accounts, the A.B.C. mediation proposal appears like a *deus ex machina* in the escalating conflict between Wilson and Huerta. Curiously, no one in the American press corps, which enthusiastically reported the proposal, chose to speculate as to whose idea it was or where it came from, nor did any of the parties, apart from Ambassador da Gama, offer their own public comments on the matter at the time. Da Gama mentioned in his speech to journalists at the conclusion of the conference, on July 2, that the initiative had been launched by his Argentine and Chilean colleagues on April 23, and that he had been unable to accompany them because he was giving an address at the time to the Congress of International Law. He may have stressed this point in an attempt to counter press reports that the successful outcome was due to Naón's handiwork. Da Gama's larger point was that mediation was a joint effort in which all three A.B.C. countries had acted in close coordination, and the record shows that this was indeed the case.⁶

⁵ Guerrero Yoacham (1966), pp. 89–90.

⁶ Severance, ed. (1914), editor's essay, p. 73. Strangely, this public statement by one of the mediators does not seem to have been picked up by any of the subsequent commentators on this question.

After the conference was over, Ambassador da Gama also explained the sequence of events in detail in a confidential report to the Brazilian Foreign Ministry. On the morning of April 23, the Chilean Minister Suárez Mujica took the initiative to contact his two colleagues, asking them to join him in an urgent visit to the State Department to discuss the Mexican crisis. The message did not reach da Gama, who was giving his speech at the time, but Suárez was confident from earlier discussions that he would support this initiative, so Suárez and Naón met Bryan in the name of all three A.B.C. missions. They discussed the impending climate of war and the situation created by the complete rupture of diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico. On the basis of this conversation with Bryan, both Suárez and Naón recommended to their Foreign Ministries that the three A.B.C. missions offer their good offices to the parties in order to avoid an irrevocable conflict. The next day, both the Chilean and the Argentine Foreign Ministers cabled their agreement that their representatives in Washington should make such an offer, in concert with Brazil.⁷

⁷ Rosario Solveira (1914), pp. 31–33. Rosario Solveira, an Argentine historian, appears to be the only author who has pieced together the sequence of events by reading the Argentine, Chilean, and Brazilian diplomatic reports contained in the Argentine Foreign Ministry files on the conference. Guerrero Yoacham, in his study of the conference published by the Chilean diplomatic academy, provides a survey of all the other versions of who was responsible for the original mediation proposal; see Guerrero Yoacham (1966), pp. 73–76.



One persistent version is that it was Bryan who actually put the idea to the A.B.C. representatives. While there is no documentary evidence to support this view, it should not be completely discounted. One Mexican historian, Berta Ulloa, also makes the apt observation that it would be out of character for Wilson to agree so readily to such a suggestion if it had not been arranged by him in the first place.⁸

The idea of concerted action by the A.B.C. missions in Washington regarding Mexico was not new. Since August 1913, the three missions had agreed to adopt a common front in responding to pressures from the State Department to get their governments to assist the United States in obtaining Huerta's resignation.⁹ Given that Argentina, Brazil, and Chile were the only other prominent states not to have recognized Huerta, they had good reason to expect that an offer from them would be acceptable to Bryan and Wilson. As Naón pointed out in his first cable back to Buenos Aires, there was also no prospect that any of the European powers could take such an initiative. Even if it failed, such an initiative would redound to the credit of the continent.¹⁰

The A.B.C. envoys' proposal reflected a growing trend in early 20th-century diplomacy toward the use of formal mediation and arbitration proceedings to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes. The two Hague

⁸ Ulloa (1971), p. 188.

⁹ Guerrero Yoacham (1966), p. 75.

¹⁰ Rosario Solveira (1994), p. 32.

Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 had provided the principal international impetus for this trend. The Hague Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes had been signed in 1907 by all the South American republics, as well as Mexico and the United States, and had entered into force in 1910. The Convention specified in Article 2 that: "In case of serious disagreement or dispute, before an appeal to arms, the Contracting Powers agree to have recourse, as far as circumstances allow, to the good offices or mediation of one or more friendly Powers"; and in Article 3: "Independently of this recourse, the Contracting Powers deem it expedient and desirable that one or more Powers, strangers to the dispute, should, on their own initiative and as far as circumstances may allow, offer their good offices or mediation to the States at variance."¹¹

The Pan-American movement, starting with the Second Pan-American Conference in Mexico City in 1901, had also been devoting increasing attention to the peaceful settlement of disputes. By the time of the founding of the Pan-American Union in 1910, the American republics had adopted seven general arbitration treaties among themselves, in addition to the Hague Convention.¹² John Barrett, an American who became the first Director General of the Pan-American Union, had specifically floated the idea in February 1913 during

¹¹ Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, signed at The Hague, October 18, 1907.

¹² Barrett (1911), p. 192.

the coup against Madero that the United States and several Latin American Republics form an international commission to mediate the political crisis in Mexico. This proposal had been rejected by the outgoing Taft Administration. Barrett had attempted again, without success, to float another mediation proposal in July 1913, to see if the Wilson Administration would be willing to engage other American republics to help in resolving the rising tensions between the United States and Mexico.¹³

Finally, William Jennings Bryan himself had long been active in the international peace movement. Upon becoming Secretary of State, in March 1913, he had embarked on a campaign to sign bilateral treaties with as many of the United States' partners as possible, committing the signatories to a "cooling off" period of six months to a year during which they would submit their disputes to permanent commissions of investigation.¹⁴

Thus, the A.B.C. mediators drew inspiration from a growing current in international public opinion and diplomatic practice when they offered their good offices to Bryan to resolve the dispute. The terms of their proposal fell squarely within the provisions of the Hague Convention.

¹³ Ulloa (1971), pp. 187–88.

¹⁴ Link (1956), pp. 280–83. In total, Bryan signed twenty-nine such treaties, starting with El Salvador in 1913. Had the United States recognized the Mexican Government during this period, he doubtless would have proposed a bilateral treaty with Mexico as well.



At least, that was how the mediators approached the task at hand. The United States appeared to agree when Secretary of State Bryan wrote back to them the same afternoon: "Conscious of the purpose with which the proffer is made, the Government does not feel at liberty to decline it... The generous offer of your Governments is, therefore, accepted."¹⁵ However, this less than wholehearted response was indicative of a deeper divergence in perspectives between the A.B.C. powers and the United States over the nature of the mediation. This was spelled out in an internal memorandum on the conference, written by the State Department's second-ranking official, Robert Lansing, on May 1, 1914:

... it must be borne constantly in mind that this is not a mediation between two established Governments nor between belligerent states. It is an attempt to restore peace between Mexican factions and to obtain guarantees from them which will insure the reestablishment of constitutional government in Mexico. The real quarrel of the United States is with the intolerable conditions which exist and not with the factions, except so far as they are the causes of these conditions. In reality, therefore, the mediation is between factions, and not between the United States and either one of

¹⁵ Secretary of State to Mediators, Washington, April 25, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 489, File No. 812.00/16525.



these factions. The situation of the United States in the present attempted mediation is, therefore, so novel as to take the cases out of any rule which may be deduced from precedents.¹⁶

Consistent with this logic, Bryan laid down an important marker in his initial response to the mediators about the nature of the Mexican representation:

This Government hopes most earnestly that you may find those who speak for the several elements of the Mexican people willing and ready to discuss the terms of satisfactory and, therefore, permanent settlement. If you should find them willing, this Government will be glad to take up with you for discussion, in the frankest and most conciliatory spirit, any proposal that may be authoritatively formulated, and will hope that they may prove feasible, and prophetic of a new day of mutual cooperation and confidence in America.¹⁷

The mediators readily understood that this meant that the United States expected Constitutionalist participation

¹⁶ "Memorandum on Place of Conference of Mediators and Representatives to Attend on Behalf of the United States," May 1, 1914, p. 1, signed by Robert Lansing with the handwritten notation "given to the Secretary," State Department File 812.00/11800-1/2.

¹⁷ Secretary of State to Mediators, Washington, April 25, 1914.

in the conference. Thus, they sent the same invitation to General Carranza as they did to General Huerta.

Despite their refusal to recognize Huerta's exclusive right to speak on behalf of Mexico, Wilson and Bryan were keen that Huerta accept the mediators' proposal. Bryan even went so far as to ask Sir Cecil Spring-Rice if the British Ambassador in Mexico City, Sir Lionel Carden, could help in persuading Huerta to accept it. Huerta's initial response was to ask if Britain, a power he trusted, would serve as the mediator. However, after the grief he had endured the year before, Sir Edward Grey had no desire to position Britain again between Wilson and Huerta. He firmly instructed Carden to advocate the South American proposal instead. Grey was able to inform U.S. Ambassador Page on April 28 that Carden had secured Huerta's acceptance of the offer.¹⁸ The mediators officially reported the good news to Bryan in a letter later the same day.

At this point, two intimately linked issues emerged that were to determine the course of the entire conference. The first was an end to hostilities between the parties as a precondition for mediation. In their message to Bryan on April 28, the mediators declared: "As a consequence of the acceptance of those good offices by your excellency's Government as well as by that of General Huerta, we

¹⁸ Grey to Mexico City, April 27, 1914, F.O. 115/1793; Grey to Spring-Rice, London, April 28, 1914, F.O. 115/1795; Spring-Rice to Grey, Washington, May 4, 1914, F.O. 115/1794.

understand that it is proper to suspend from this time, and during the mediatory action, the hostilities and military movements by the force of both parties.”¹⁹ In fact, the Hague Convention of 1907 required the suspension of hostilities and military movements during mediation only if there was specific agreement among the parties to do so.²⁰ However, as the mediators subsequently made clear, these were the only terms under which they were prepared to conduct the mediation. Huerta’s Foreign Minister of the moment, Jose Lopez Portillo y Rojas, readily agreed, and expressed the hope that the forces of Carranza and Villa would also agree to suspend hostilities against his government.²¹ Bryan replied more ambiguously: “We note what you say in regard to suspension of hostilities during mediation. We so understand it, provided of course that this Government would be at liberty to repel any aggression attempted.”²² This backhanded commitment appears to have been sufficient to satisfy the mediators. On a separate channel through the Spanish Embassy in Washington, Huerta’s Foreign Minister proposed a formal armistice between Mexico and the United States. Wilson’s reply was

¹⁹ Mediators to Secretary of State, April 28, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 492–93, File No. 812.00/23494.

²⁰ Hague Convention (1907), Article 7.

²¹ Letter from Minister of External Relations of Mexico to Mediators, Mexico City, April 30, 1914, Fabela, ed. (1962), p. 22.

²² Secretary of State to Mediators, April 25, 1914.

that since war had never been declared between the two countries, a formal armistice was unnecessary, but that Huerta himself could cease hostilities himself during the mediation.²³ As it turned out, both the United States and Huerta chose to cease hostilities against each other as soon as Veracruz had been taken.²⁴

The same, however, could not be said of the civil war between Huerta's government and the Constitutionalists. When the mediators sent Carranza a telegram on April 29, offering their good offices to find a peaceful solution to the conflict between the United States and Mexico, he promptly accepted.²⁵ They then sent him two more cables, the first requesting his commitment to suspend hostilities and the second asking him to appoint representatives to the conference.²⁶ Carranza's reply to the latter was to

²³ Secretary of State to Spanish Ambassador, April 28, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 493, File No. 812.00/23493a.

²⁴ Link (1956), p. 408, see note 94.

²⁵ Mediators to General Carranza, Washington, April 29, 1914, and General Carranza to Mediators, Chihuahua, April 29, 1914. Note that all the letters exchanged between the Mediators and General Carranza between April 29 and May 3, 1914, cited below, were given by the mediators to the U.S. delegation during the conference and are attached to their message: Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., United States Department of State (1922), May 31, 1914, pp. 517–19, File No. 812.00/12130.

²⁶ Mediators to General Carranza, Washington, April 30, 1914; Mediators to General Carranza, Washington, May 2, 1914.

request a definition of the points to be covered so that "I may appoint a representative with due authorization."²⁷ Before receiving an answer, he proceeded to give his own interpretation of the scope of the conflict in a second cable, explaining that while he had accepted the mediators' good offices to address the international conflict between the United States and Mexico, this was independent of "our internal struggle for liberty and right," and that he could not agree to a suspension of the Constitutionalists' military operations because it would only accrue to the benefit of Huerta.²⁸ Thus, Carranza differed with the mediators on two points of principle: the first regarding the proper scope of the conference and the second regarding the need for an armistice.

The mediators' response to Carranza on the first point was a clear statement that, in their view, "all difficulties which have contributed to bring about the present situation of Mexico directly or indirectly affect the solution of the conflict pending between the United States and Mexico," and consequently should be subject for settlement by negotiation. On the second point, they declared that if Carranza did not share their understanding of the necessity for an armistice as a precondition for the mediation, they would be compelled to withdraw their invitation to him to nominate representatives to the conference.²⁹

²⁷ General Carranza to Mediators, Chihuahua, May 3, 1914.

²⁸ General Carranza to Mediators, Chihuahua, May 3, 1914.

²⁹ Mediators to General Carranza, Washington, May 3, 1914.

There matters rested for the next four weeks, although the United States continued to hold out hope that the question of Constitutionalist participation would soon be resolved.³⁰

This initial exchange of letters between April 25 and May 3 among the possible parties to the conference revealed an important divergence of opinion about the terms under which the mediation should take place. The mediators were committed to an armistice and were convinced that the conference should take a broad scope, dealing with both internal and external issues that had contributed to the conflict between the United States and Mexico. Huerta's representatives were prepared to negotiate under both of these conditions, reflecting the fact that diplomatically they had the weakest hand and militarily they were on the defensive. The United States was keen to have a broad scope for the conference if it encouraged the Constitutionalists to participate, since its objective was to use the mediation to leverage an agreement among Mexico's armed factions. The United States was prepared to go along with an armistice as applied to its own troops, provided that it was reciprocated by Huerta's forces, but did not regard it as a point of principle. However, the Constitutionalists took the position that they wanted the conference to deal narrowly with Mexico's external conflict with the

³⁰ Secretary of State to all U.S. diplomatic missions, Washington, May 11, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 498, File No. 812.00/11902a.

United States, in order to accomplish one task they could not achieve militarily, namely, forcing a U.S. withdrawal from Veracruz. They had no interest in either an armistice or a broad negotiation that encompassed internal political issues, both of which could restrict their ability to impose their own political settlement following an outright military victory.

Thus, the Niagara Falls Peace Conference was launched without a clear consensus on the scope of the conference, who had to be present, or the preconditions for participation. Ambiguity over these fundamental points hindered the mediators' work from start to finish.

With the Constitutionalists sitting out for the time being, the mediators proceeded to formalize arrangements for the conference. The first order of business was the location. The *New York Times* reported that the mediators were inclined to propose Havana as a neutral site.³¹ Robert Lansing argued in his internal memorandum on the subject that the conference should be held in Washington, in order to facilitate communication between the Secretary of State and the mediators. In his view, the diplomatic missions of either Argentina, Brazil or Chile could provide neutral territory, as could the recently inaugurated headquarters of the Pan-American Union.³²

³¹ *New York Times*, May 3, 1914.

³² Lansing memo, May 1, 1914, pp. 3–4. Lansing actually made the case that since the mediation really was between Mexican factions, anywhere in the United States was “neutral territory,” but he suggested these diplomatic venues in Washington as preferable locations.

However, on May 4 Huerta's new Foreign Minister proposed to the mediators that Canada could serve as the location of the conference, due to "its rigorously neutral character."³³ Sir Cecil Spring-Rice reported his own views on this choice: "This I think a mistake."³⁴ Canada, however, was apparently acceptable as a venue to the United States. On May 5 the mediators officially informed the U.S. and Mexican governments that, "upon consulting all parties concerned," the conference would take place at the Clifton Hotel in Niagara Falls, Ontario, beginning on May 18.³⁵

The choice of Canada as the location for the conference generated no surprise at the time, even in the Canadian press, and it has been left virtually unexamined by subsequent commentators. Isidro Fabela, Carranza's Foreign Minister and later official historian of the Revolution, interpreted this choice as a gesture of gratitude from Huerta for the sympathy of the British government and the support he had received from the

³³ Secretary of External Relations to Mediators, through Ambassador of Spain, May 4, 1914, Fabela, ed. (1962) pp. 40–41.

³⁴ Spring-Rice to Grey, May 5, 1914, F.O. 115/1795. This terse comment is in Spring-Rice's own handwriting. He crossed out a couple of additional lines in the draft that indicate that he thought it would be better for Huerta to "consent to Washington" on the matter of the location.

³⁵ Mediators to Secretary of State, Washington, May 5, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 497, File 812.00/11849.



British oil tycoon Lord Cowdray.³⁶ This seems unlikely, given that, once he had accepted the A.B. C. mediators' offer, he never again sought to use British diplomatic channels through Sir Lionel Carden to influence the mediation. A more prosaic reason is that Canada was probably convenient to Huerta given that he had already dispatched a diplomatic agent there.

When Angel Algara Romero de Terreros, the former Mexican Chargé in Washington, was handed his passports, he travelled to Toronto and settled down to wait for instructions. Algara's arrival in Canada was seen as something of an enigma by the local press, an impression he did little to dispel. As the *Toronto Globe* reported on April 27:

Not a little curiosity has been aroused as to why A. Algara R. de Terreros, late Chargé d'Affaires of Mexico at Washington, who was given his passports by the United States government, came to Toronto. "I came to Toronto," he said, speaking to a *Globe* reporter at the King Edward Hotel last night, "because I thought I would be nearer the Mexican base than if I went to any other Canadian city. Moreover, I have many Canadian friends in Washington, who advised me to come to Toronto. The longer I am here, the more pleased I am with your beautiful city."³⁷

³⁶ Fabela, ed. (1962), p. 41.

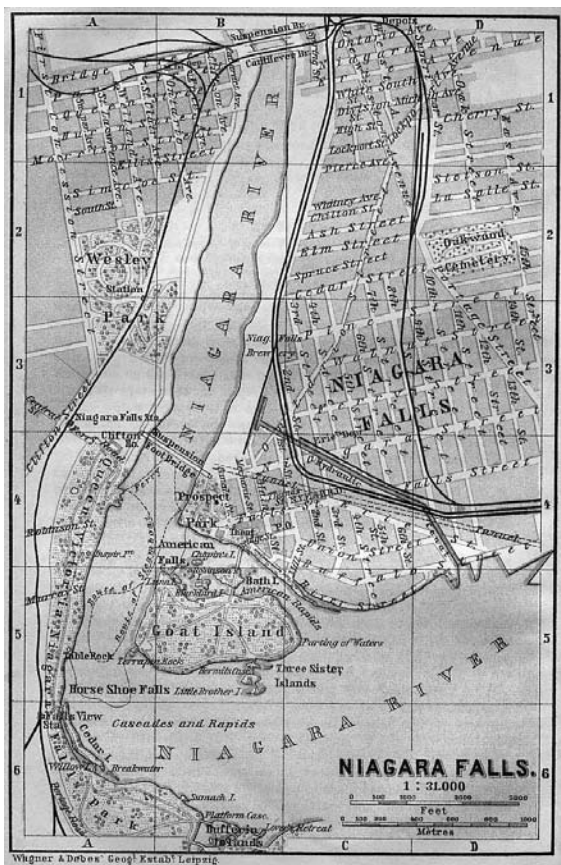
³⁷ *The Globe* (Toronto) April 28, 1914.

Algara discounted the likelihood of the A.B.C. mediation proposal being accepted by his government. Nevertheless, he remained in Toronto and, once Canada had been chosen as the location, he received a cable from Huerta's Foreign Minister instructing him to assist the Mexican delegates to the conference and to be prepared to cover their expenses.³⁸ Although his name never appeared in the formal list of conference delegates, he seems to have been present for much of the conference in Niagara Falls as an informal member of the Mexican contingent. (Curiously, having reported on Algara's arrival in Toronto, *The Globe* made no further connection between his presence on Canadian soil and the fact that the conference was then held in Canada.)

There appears to be no contemporary evidence explaining the choice of Niagara Falls as the Canadian site for the conference, but it may have been the result of a request from the United States in return for agreeing to meet in Canada. Given the popularity of the Niagara Falls as a tourist destination and its location exactly on the Canada–U.S. border, the U.S. delegates were able to lodge in a suitable hotel in their own country and commute over the Suspension Bridge to Canada for official meetings with the mediators and the Mexican delegates. This arrangement enabled the U.S. delegation to stay in daily touch with Washington via the dedicated

³⁸ Secretary of External Relations to Mexican Consul, Toronto, May 7, 1914, Fabela, ed. (1962), pp. 60–61.

telegraph line they had installed in their hotel and their nightly telephone calls with Secretary Bryan.³⁹



MAP OF NIAGARA FALLS (1894). This map of Niagara Falls from twenty years before the conference shows the location of the Clifton House Hotel on the Canadian side of the Suspension Foot Bridge. Reproduced from *The Dominion of Canada with Newfoundland and an Excursion to Alaska: Handbook for Travelers*. Leipzig: Karl Baedeker.

³⁹ Grieb (1969), p. 162, and Lamar (1926), pp. 256–57.



THE CLIFTON HOUSE HOTEL (date unknown). This photograph shows the hotel as it would have appeared in 1914. Niagara Falls (Ontario) Public Library D415214.

The one party that appears to have been left completely out of the loop by the selection of the location was the Canadian Government. In 1914, Canada's Department of External Affairs was only five years old and Canada had yet to establish any diplomatic missions abroad. Canadian diplomatic and consular interests were represented by Britain, as Canada was an integral part of the British Empire, and the Canadian Government communicated with British Embassies in third countries via the Governor General in Ottawa. On May 9 the Canadian Government sent a plaintive message through the Governor General to the British Ambassador in Washington observing that "press reports state that South American delegates appointed to mediate between the United States and Mexico propose to conduct their negotiations at Niagara Falls in Canadian territory, though we are without official information on



the matter.”⁴⁰ Spring-Rice replied by simply providing the information he had received from Ambassador da Gama regarding the mediators’ date of arrival and their accommodation plans, although he had known of Huerta’s choice of location for several days.⁴¹ It appears that neither the parties nor the mediators thought it necessary to secure official approval from Canada or from Britain before selecting Niagara Falls as the site and booking rooms in the Clifton Hotel.

The next item on the order of business was the selection of representatives. Huerta nominated three commissioners to represent Mexico, all of whom were lawyers and distinguished members of the upper class of Mexico City, but none of whom was close to Huerta.⁴² The lead commissioner was Emilio Rabasa, an eminent jurist and former senator who was considered the author of the best Mexican work on international law. Rabasa in fact had been Huerta’s choice to be Mexico’s Ambassador in Washington if the U.S. Government had extended diplomatic recognition. The second commissioner was Agustín Rodríguez, dean of the Mexican bar and director of the School of Law in Mexico City, who was a principal figure in Catholic political circles. The third was Senator Luis Elguero, a financier and former

⁴⁰ Governor General to Spring-Rice, Ottawa, May 9, 1914, Canada Department of External Affairs files RG25, Series A-3-a, Vol. 1142, File 1914-457.

⁴¹ Spring-Rice to Grey, May 5, 1914.

⁴² Grieb (1969), p. 161.

senator, who was a Director of the National Bank of Mexico and the National Railways. Elguero's son Rafael served as secretary to the delegation and they were accompanied by two protocol officers from the Mexican Foreign Ministry.⁴³ They were joined in Niagara Falls unofficially by Angel Algara from Toronto and Manuel Esteva, a Mexican consul from New York.⁴⁴ Finally, the Mexican delegation brought its own American legal counsel, William F. Buckley of Texas. His services were proposed by Rabasa, who was his consulting attorney in Mexico.⁴⁵

On the U.S. side, Wilson appointed a trusted boyhood friend, Associate Supreme Court Justice Joseph Rucker Lamar of Augusta, Georgia, as senior commissioner;⁴⁶ Frederick Lehmann from St. Louis, a

⁴³ The list of the Mexican delegates and their credentials was given by the U.S. Consul in Veracruz, whose surname was Canada. See Consul Canada to Secretary of State, Veracruz, May 12, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 499, File No. 812.00/11914. More details about their qualifications are contained in Guerrero Yoacham (1966), pp. 90–91.

⁴⁴ Secretary of State for External Relations to Algara, Mexican Consulate, Toronto, May 7, 1914, in Fabelo (1962), pp. 60–61.

⁴⁵ Grieb (1969), p. 161. Buckley, had an extensive legal practice in Mexico. He was the father of the well-known conservative political commentator William F. Buckley Jr.

⁴⁶ Colonel House recorded in his diary for May 11 that Wilson “told me Justice Lamar was an old boyhood friend, and they



former Solicitor of the Department of Justice, as second commissioner; and as secretary to the delegation, H. Percival Dodge, an experienced former diplomat who had served as head of the Latin American Department in the State Department under President Taft.⁴⁷ This trio was designated “The Special Commission of the President of the United States near the Mediators,” a term of art contrived by the State Department to avoid appointing delegates to meet representatives of a government the United States did not recognize.⁴⁸ Lansing was particularly concerned that neither the Secretary of State nor any senior officials of the Administration be appointed as delegates and thus be obliged to engage the Mexican delegates, even on an

used to play together and fight roosters”: Link, ed. (1979), Vol. 30, p. 21. More biographical detail about Lamar and his role in the conference can be found in the biography of him written by his wife: Lamar (1926).

⁴⁷ The Naón collection contains a clipping giving this information about Percival Dodge from an unidentified newspaper (it may be the *New York Tribune*) from May 15. According to this profile, Dodge was in his early forties when he had left the State Department the year before and had worked as a diplomat for twenty years since graduating from Harvard.

⁴⁸ Secretary of State to Mediators, Washington, May 18, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 500–01, File 812.00/12011a. Since there was a discrepancy in the titles that each side gave its envoys, I have used the generic term “delegates” when referring to the official participants at the conference.

informal basis.⁴⁹ As Huerta nominated his delegates first, and chose distinguished jurists rather than cabinet members or close political advisors, Wilson was able to follow suit and keep within the strictures of Lansing's advice by nominating experienced individuals appointed by the Taft Administration, none of whom currently occupied positions in the Executive Branch.

Although equally distinguished, the two delegations were dispatched to Niagara Falls with very different sets of credentials, a fact which readily became apparent when the conference started. While the Mexican delegates met Huerta for only ten minutes before their departure, the Mexican Senate in approving their appointment authorized them to "arrange, consult, negotiate and sign whatever agreement or treaty with the United States, extending them full powers and authority as broad as necessary to settle the emergent conflict between the two countries."⁵⁰ The Mexican delegates took this as full licence to develop their own proposals for resolving Mexico's internal political crisis and to reject instructions that they

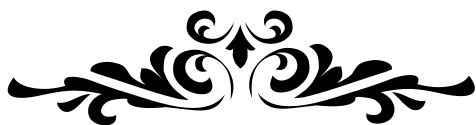
⁴⁹ Lansing memorandum, May 1, 1914. Lansing took the firm position that the United States could not designate representatives to meet with representatives of either the Huerta regime or the Constitutionalists, since the United States did not recognize either party as belligerents; and that it would be unwise for the Secretary of State or other senior official to attend the conference even in an unofficial capacity.

⁵⁰ Resolution of Mexican Senate to Mexican delegates, May 8, 1914, Fabela, ed. (1962), pp. 61–62.



regarded as unrealistic. They periodically cabled their recommendations back to Huerta through his Finance Minister, Adolfo de la Lama, usually bypassing the Foreign Ministry entirely. Given that the Foreign Minister was the designated successor to the President under the Mexican Constitution, it is not surprising that Huerta changed the occupant of this office three times during the course of the mediation and used a different Minister throughout as his channel of communications with the Mexican delegates in Niagara. The U.S. delegates, on the other hand, were deliberately given no negotiating mandate at all and were required to report back on all developments via coded cables through Bryan to Wilson.⁵¹ While they exercised some latitude in how precisely they conveyed the detailed instructions they received, the President essentially viewed them as his mouthpieces at the conference.

⁵¹ See Grieb (1969), p. 162.



Chapter 4

Diplomatic distractions

Upon arrival at Niagara, the Latin American and American delegates installed themselves in their respective hotels on either side of the Falls. Justice Lamar's wife, Clarinda, described the scene:

The three South American Ambassadors, with their suites, and the three Mexican Commissioners, with their families, were installed at the Clifton House on the Canadian side of the Niagara River. At the same hotel were the forty, or more, newspaper correspondents, each with a private wire to his special newspaper. The American Commissioners had their headquarters at Prospect House, on the American side of the



Falls, where they occupied one floor of the hotel with private wires, private telephones, secretaries, codifiers, secret-service men, and an obliging negro messenger from the State Department, named Macbeth... The Conference sat at the Clifton House, on the Canadian side of the Falls. The American Commissioners crossed the Niagara River on the suspension bridge for the meetings of the Conference and the South American Commissioners, and the newspaper correspondents crossed to the American side for interviews and consultations. The Mexican Commissioners kept pretty closely to the neutral territory.¹

The Americans' decision to set up headquarters on their side of the river generated its own protocol problems. The Niagara Falls *Daily Record* reported that:

The question of the mediators and the large army of attachés, etc., having to pay tolls when crossing the International Bridge has been worrying the authorities at Washington considerably of late, but they have announced that they have been unable to accomplish anything in this respect, as the bridge was constructed by the corporation and is owned by them, so the mediators must pay toll just the

¹ Lamar (1926), pp. 252–53.



same as the ordinary citizen, not excepting the United States Envoys, who will have to cross the bridge twice a day to attend the conferences.²

The *Daily Record* also noted that American “movie men” were finding it very difficult to get their recording equipment into Canada without being charged 25 percent duty by the Canadian customs authorities.³

The symbolism of holding a conference between the United States and Mexico on neutral ground just across the United States’ northern border was not lost on local observers. The Niagara frontier had been the principal battleground in the last war fought between North America’s two northern neighbours, the War of 1812, which had been settled one hundred years earlier with the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814. Commissioner Frederick Lehmann declared in one post-banquet speech that the frontier between Canada and the United States at Niagara Falls was “a demonstration of lasting peace” for all delegates to consider.⁴ When it was announced that the A.B.C. conference would be held at Niagara Falls, the *Daily Record* also recalled that

² *Daily Record* (Niagara Falls), May 18, 1914.

³ *Daily Record* (Niagara Falls), May 18, 1914.

⁴ Remarks after a banquet given by the Canada Club of Niagara Falls, reported in the *Daily Record*, June 3, 1914. Lehmann made the same point in his correspondence with the Mexican delegate Luis Elguero: see Lehmann to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 13, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p.532, File No. 812.00/12241.

the old Clifton House Hotel in the same location had been used fifty years earlier during the American Civil War by the New York publisher, Horace Greeley, for unofficial peace talks with Confederate representatives based in southern Ontario.⁵ To commemorate these anniversaries the Buffalo Historical Society made plans to publish a volume entitled *Peace Episodes on the Niagara*. (The volume was indeed published later that year, but, as its editor noted in his preface, the international celebrations planned to commemorate the centenary of the Treaty of Ghent were overshadowed by the outbreak of the Great War in Europe.)⁶

The meetings of the conference were held in the third-floor solarium of the Clifton Hotel, which faced southwest and had a commanding view of the Falls through large french doors that opened onto a wide balcony. The oak-panelled room was heavily carpeted and had an I-shaped table in the middle. During plenary sessions the mediators sat at one end of the table, their secretaries at the other, and the two delegations facing each other across the centre. The *Daily Record* commented that “the room resembles more nearly a very handsomely appointed smoking room more than anything else and is very cosy.”⁷

The Peace Conference at Niagara Falls opened with a plenary session at the Clifton Hotel on the afternoon of

⁵ *Daily Record* (Niagara Falls), May 13, 1914.

⁶ Severance, ed. (1914), editor’s preface, pp. vii–viii.

⁷ *Daily Record* (Niagara Falls), May 16, 1914.



May 20. Ambassador da Gama outlined the procedures that the mediators had confirmed with each side in advance: namely, that the mediators would normally hold informal meetings with each delegation separately, and bring the two sides together in plenary session only when results had been reached and could be officially recorded in the minutes.⁸ Over the course of the next five weeks the delegates met in plenary session on only three more occasions. Thus, virtually none of the conference actually took place face to face across the table, which suited all sides. Instead, it unfolded through lengthy, informal, off-the-record “conversations” between the mediators and one or other of the two delegations. These “conversations” often began between nine and ten at night, and could run till the small hours of the morning. Periods of intense activity were punctuated by lulls of several days, as the mediators retired to reflect on what step to take next, or to wait for a response from Mexico. Given the close watch that Washington kept on the proceedings, the U.S. delegates were rarely without reactions or instructions from Secretary Bryan and President Wilson.

The conference was a closed-door event, but it soon attracted a penumbra of uninvited observers. The first to arrive, the day before the conference began, was

⁸ The U.S. delegation filed its first report to Washington outlining these procedures: Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., May 20, 1914, United States Department of State, p. 501, File No. 812.00/12136.

Dr. Don Gonzalo S. Cordova, the Minister of Ecuador to the United States. Cordova had moved a resolution of support for the A.B.C. mediators that had been unanimously adopted at a meeting of the Pan-American Union. He made it known to the press that he had come “merely to give a moral force and effect to the deliberations of the mediators and other accredited representatives.” Señor Cordova declared in an interview with the *Buffalo Evening News*: “We see no reason why all the international differences between the nations of America should not be thus settled if these mediators are successful in bringing peace to Mexico.”⁹ Two other diplomatic representatives checked into the Prospect House shortly after the conference began in order to keep an eye on the proceedings—Baron Hertzberg of Germany and “Mr. T. Nymara” of Japan—but both kept out of the limelight.¹⁰

A more visible and sinister Mexican figure also appeared on the scene: General Felix Diaz, the defeated presidential candidate and chief mutineer with whom Huerta had cut his deal to depose Madero. Diaz had left Mexico after Huerta dissolved Congress the previous October. He had arrived in Toronto accompanied by a party of six and soon made his presence known. *The Globe* reported that “he is not here in connection

⁹ Severance, ed. (1914), editor’s essay, pp. 15–17.

¹⁰ *The Globe* (Toronto) May 23, 1914. “Nymara,” which is not a Japanese name, is presumably the reporter’s attempt to spell “Nomura.”



with the mediation proceedings at Niagara Falls, though he is greatly interested in what is transpiring there." When asked how long his party planned to stay in Toronto, Diaz replied: "up till now we have no idea of leaving it, since we have found it so interesting and worthy of study. It will be very acceptable to us to remain here for a considerable length of time."¹¹ Diaz remained in Toronto for at least a week, but he never received the signal that his presence was required in Niagara Falls.

For the accredited delegates Niagara Falls offered other attractions in the summer besides diplomacy behind closed doors. Almost all of them brought family members and servants. In the case of the three Mexican representatives, their suite consisted of twenty-three additional people, including nine children. The *New York Times* breathlessly reported their arrival in the city en route to the Falls: "Mexican Peace Party Happy in Seventeen-Room Suite in the Hotel Astor; All in Stylish Attire; Pretty Women and Picturesque Aztec Nurse Attract Much Attention at Pennsylvania Station."¹² In particular, the four unmarried daughters of Emilio Rabasa were featured frequently in articles about the social life of the conference.¹³

¹¹ *The Globe* (Toronto) May 23, 1914.

¹² *New York Times*, May 18, 1914. These are subheadings under the main headline "Huerta Delegates Arrive in New York."

¹³ Posed photographs of the four daughters appeared in many North American newspapers. The caption under one photograph on the Saturday illustrated page of *The Globe* (Toronto), June 6, 1914, was "Mexican Beauties at the Falls."

The Canadian Government, not wishing to give offence to such an eminent group of foreign dignitaries, ensured that the mediators received an official message of welcome from the Governor General upon their arrival at the Clifton Hotel. A representative of the Conservative Government of Prime Minister Borden, the Hon. Martin Burrell, Dominion Minister of Agriculture, was also on hand to extend an official welcome to Canada. Looking after protocol and security matters behind the scenes was the first Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Sir Joseph Pope. Responding to the concerns of the hotel manager, Pope called for four Dominion police to be dispatched in plain clothes to protect the participants, matching the presence of six U.S. secret service agents.¹⁴ On May 22 Minister Burrell offered a banquet in honour of the conference participants, to which he carefully offered only one toast, "To the King" (George V), to avoid the delicate question of recognition between the U.S. and Mexican delegates.¹⁵

Other celebrations in honour of the conference were held on both sides of the Niagara. On May 19 the

The newspaper introduced them as "The Misses Ruth, Isabel, Mercedes and Concepcion Rabasa, daughters of Senor Rabasa, the President of the Mexican delegation, who are attracting as much attention as the settlement of the trouble in Mexico itself."

¹⁴ Commercial telegram from Niagara Falls from Sir Joseph Pope to Hon. Martin Burrell, May 19, 1914, in Canada Department of External Affairs file 1914-457.

¹⁵ Severance, ed. (1914), editor's essay, p. 19.



commissioners of Victoria Park on the Canadian side offered a dinner for the mediators attended by numerous local civil and military officials. Not to be outdone, the New York State Park Commission hosted the diplomats and members of their families to a lunch on May 22, followed by a motor tour along the shore of the river and a ride on the *Maid of the Mist*.¹⁶ The Ontario Motor League also offered the mediators an automobile tour of the blossoms in season in the Niagara fruit belt “as perchance as a means of influencing them to an early and peaceful settlement.”¹⁷ On Sunday, May 24, a special Mass was held at a local Niagara landmark, the Church of Our Lady of Peace, which had been renamed and designated a site of pilgrimage by Pope Pius IX on the eve of the American Civil War. Mass was celebrated by the pastor, Father B. J. O’Neill, and was followed by a sermon for peace delivered by Rev. George J. Krim of Buffalo.¹⁸

The high point of the participants’ social schedule was an invitation to a formal garden party in Toronto on May 27 on the occasion of an official visit to the city by the Governor General of Canada, His Royal Highness

¹⁶ Severance, ed. (1914), editor’s essay, pp. 17–19.

¹⁷ *The Globe* (Toronto) May 13, 1914. It is not clear if the mediators ever took up this offer. The *Daily Record* (Niagara Falls) reported on May 19 that there was a diplomatic disagreement between the President of the League and the Mexican delegates over whether the accompanied press would be invited to participate in the tour as well.

¹⁸ Severance, ed. (1914), editor’s essay, p. 18.

Prince Arthur, the Duke of Connaught. For the trip to Toronto two special railroad cars were assigned, one for the mediators, the delegates, and their families, the other for a party of twenty-six American newspapermen covering the conference. Clarinda Lamar reported:

During the journey Justice Lamar and the other Americans in the party grew quite well acquainted with the South American members of the Conference. They admired the beautiful daughters of Señor Rabasa, the Señoritas Ruth, Isabel, Mercedes, and Concepcion, and they enjoyed the exquisite manner of the Spanish American gentlemen who composed the suites of the Diplomats and the Commissioners.¹⁹

However successful the invitation proved to be in breaking the ice among the conference participants, it occasioned much backbiting afterward among the Canadian organizers and the Canadian press. As *The Globe* observed:

Unhappily it cannot be said that Toronto outdid itself in any way whatsoever as far as the reception of the distinguished visitors was concerned. In the fact, the latter might have been the most common or garden tourists, for the city fathers, the Council, the Mayor or the Lieutenant Governor did not

¹⁹ Lamar (1926), p. 260.



take any more notice of their arrival than if they had not existed, while there was no one present from the Ducal entourage to greet the guests of the Duke at Union Station.

In response, the Acting Mayor protested to *The Globe* that no one had officially notified the city of the arrival of these special guests.²⁰

Once they arrived at Union Station in Toronto, the mediators and the delegates rounded up the few available taxis and even the hotel bus to take them to the King Edward Hotel, where they continued their informal “conversations.” In the lobby of the hotel the Mexican delegates encountered two members of the entourage of General Felix Diaz. As *The Globe* described the scene:

General Felix Diaz, the Mexican soldier-statesman, now visiting Toronto, was not at the [King Edward] hotel. He was in his room at the Westminster hotel, although (diplomatically) he had gone for a walk. But his avowed lieutenants were there, Colonel del Villar and Colonel del Rio were noticeably moving about the rotunda, and when Senor Rodriguez, the old Mexican mediator and jurist, came down the elevator, he and Colonel del Rio met like brothers, for the latter was at one time a pupil of the mediator's. They embraced in the Mexican fashion again and again, slapped each

²⁰ *The Globe* (Toronto) May 28, 1914.

other on the back, and Senor Rabasa despite his advanced years positively executed a war dance with the Colonel, who afterwards paid his respects to the handsome and beautifully gowned daughters of his old friend. General Diaz would much have liked to go to the hotel, but he felt that as he was here in a position not officially recognized he had best refrain from doing so.²¹

The mediators and delegates then departed the King Edward Hotel for Craighleigh, the home of Sir Edmund Osler, for an audience with the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and their daughter, Princess Patricia, before the start of the garden party. Unfortunately, the miscommunications continued when the party of American reporters covering the conference arrived at Craighleigh and found that their names had not been included on the invitation list. Instead, they simply took the opportunity to tour Toronto for the rest of the day. Clarinda Lamar found it remarkable that:

Not one line, not a syllable about this unfortunate occurrence appeared in any American newspaper. The Canadian papers were full of it. They explained and apologized. The Governor General, they said, lived in Ottawa. He gave the party in Toronto, for the convenience of his guests. His

²¹ *The Globe* (Toronto) May 28, 1914 (original spelling of "Señor" preserved).



aide-de-camp, who issued the invitations, insisted that the local details were in the hands of the Toronto Committee, and the Committee, of course, blamed the aide-de-camp. It was, evidently, one of those accidents for which no one was specially to blame.²²

The army of 150 newspapermen covering the conference generated a dynamic of their own. Their numbers included correspondents for four different New York newspapers and a number of veteran foreign correspondents, including Melville S. Stone, the General Manager of the Associated Press.²³ To accommodate them, the Clifton Hotel had to install a special office in the Buffet room with twenty telegraph operators and forty-four telegraph wires.²⁴ Since space was tight at the Clifton Hotel, many more had to find accommodation across the river in Niagara Falls, New York. The *Toronto Globe* advised that “Mayor Laughlin has called together the merchants and others on the American side and asked them to refrain from overcharging the press men who will descend and are descending on the city in shoals. It

²² Lamar (1926), p. 262.

²³ *The Globe* (Toronto) May 16, 1914, reported that the press would most likely number about 150. See a list of the more prominent correspondents covering the conference in an article on the those newspapermen who accompanied the group on their visit to Toronto in *The Globe*, May 28, 1914.

²⁴ *Daily Record* (Niagara Falls) May 13, 1914; *The Globe* (Toronto) May 16, 1914.



might be advantageous were Mayor Dores on this side to follow suit.”²⁵

In the early days of the conference the reporters were frustrated by the absence of hard news, since the mediators had decided to hold all sessions behind closed doors and all the participants were cryptic in their public pronouncements. For example, Justice Lamar tersely informed waiting newspapermen at the close of one day’s proceedings that “We have been discussing the first plank; there are no splinters in the plank either.”²⁶ Ambassador da Gama was more expansive but no more enlightening in his first interview upon arrival at Niagara, which he gave to the *Chicago Record-Herald* in French. The Chicago paper offered its readers the following translation of the Ambassador’s poetic prognosis for the conference:

There are three phases of mediation in general. Concerning the mediation now in progress especially a study should be made of diplomatic psychology:

(a) A wall of darkness with vague rays of hope, that hope which the wish creates, and in this case grows out of the most ardent desire that international American peace shall not be destroyed, but shall be maintained, if necessary, out of loyal consideration for the superior interests of civilization.

²⁵ *The Globe* (Toronto) May 18, 1914.

²⁶ Severance, ed. (1914), p. 91.



(b) Light, plans developing, resistance vanquished, difficulties surmounted, strong will helping and encouraging each other, the time which passes and brings prestige, the admission of possibilities, and finally co-operation to produce a finished work of art. I should call it a work of creative will.

(c) - - ?²⁷

Nevertheless, an *esprit de corps* prevailed throughout between the diplomats and the press covering the event. As time wore on, both delegations and the mediators started to give more background comment and even texts of letters to each other to the press. By midway through the conference the well-timed leak had become a standard feature of the proceedings. To entertain themselves and the delegates, the newspapermen edited their own bulletin, *The Mediation News*,²⁸ and produced their own light parodies of the conference. A local historian, Frank Severance, described the amateur theatrics at a lunch given at Prospect House by the Niagara Falls (N.Y.) Board of Trade for the newspaper correspondents:

The three South American mediators chancing to enter the hotel were captured by the reporters, as later were the American delegates, and for an hour shared in the fun, one feature of which was

²⁷ Severance, ed. (1914), editor's essay, p. 14.

²⁸ Lamar (1926), p. 257.



The Forgotten Peace

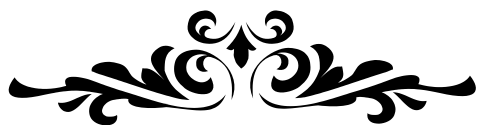
the singing of a song to the popular air *When It's Apple Blossom Time in Normandy*. It was written by a reporter in a trolley-car on his way to the luncheon, his inspiration running in the following fashion:

When It's Mediation Time in Canada,
 In Canada, in Canada
 By the good old Falls, we'll watch and wait,
 And Mediate.
 When it's Mediation Time in Canada,
 We'll come here for a rest;
 And we'll pay ten cents to cross the Bridge
 Whether going East or West.²⁹

According to the *Daily Record*, "this catchy little ditty seems to have caught on and is sung and whistled by bell boy and mediator alike."³⁰

²⁹ Severance, ed. (1914), editor's essay, p. 19, note 1. Clarinda Lamar also recorded the lyrics of the song and identified its author as a Mr. Fougner of the *New York Sun*: Lamar (1926), p. 257.

³⁰ *Daily Record* (Niagara Falls), May 26, 1914.



Chapter 5

The mediation

Woodrow Wilson made it clear from the outset that accepting the mediators' offer implied no change in his fundamental goal of ousting Huerta. He followed Bryan's formal reply to the mediators with his own confidential memo to them, which declared in typically sweeping terms that "no settlement could have any prospect of permanence," or be acceptable to American public opinion or the U.S. Government, unless it included three features. The first was "the entire elimination of General Huerta." The second was the immediate establishment of a single provisional government "acceptable to all parties and pledged to proceed at once to the establishment of a permanent government constituted in strict accordance with the Constitution of Mexico." The third was a

commitment by the provisional government to “the prosecution of such reforms as will reasonably assure the ultimate removal of the present causes of discontent.”¹ In short, nothing had altered Wilson’s relentless focus on forcing political change within Mexico. Nor did he make even oblique mention of the tensions between the United States and Mexico arising from the recent insults to the flag in Tampico and the intervention in Veracruz, which were the official reasons why the A.B.C. powers had offered their services as mediators in the first place.

The mediators themselves readily accepted that their work would have to focus on finding a replacement for Huerta’s regime that all parties could accept. They hoped that if they could obtain Huerta’s commitment to resign at the beginning of the conference, the United States would then be prepared to exert its influence on the Constitutionlists to accept an armistice and come to the mediation table prepared to negotiate the formation of a new provisional government.² Given that none of the A.B.C. powers recognized Huerta’s regime and only Brazil had a diplomatic presence in Mexico City (which at that point was also taking care of U.S. interests), they lacked the means to put this proposal directly to

¹ Confidential Memorandum to Diplomatic Representatives of Argentina, Brazil and Chile, April 25, 1914, in Link, ed. (1979), Vol. 29, p. 567.

² Views of mediators reported by Spring-Rice to Grey, Washington, DC, May 14, 1914, F.O. 115/1795.

Huerta.³ Instead, the mediators appealed to the good offices of Britain, once again through Sir Lionel Carden in Mexico City, to reinforce the message.⁴

By May 1914 the idea that Huerta might resign was no longer unrealistic. May was a militarily disastrous month for his cause. Before the end of the month he had lost the state capitals of Monterrey, Saltillo, and Tepic to the Constitutionalists. Most serious of all for the survival of his regime was the Constitutionalists' capture of the oil port of Tampico on May 13. Not only did this deprive his regime of access to the other major port on the Gulf of Mexico, but it gave the Constitutionalists a rich new concentration of foreign businesses that they could tax to finance their cause. On May 13 Carden reported to Sir Edward Grey:

I have strong reason for believing that whole Mexican Cabinet and most other supporters of the Government fully realize hopelessness of position and pin their faith on the Mediation Commission as affording only means of pacifying the country. They are willing to agree to almost any terms in so far as rebels are concerned but would probably resist any attempt of U.S.G. to profit by their

³ See report from Carden, Mexico, May 18, 1914, on his conversation with Brazilian Chargé in Mexico, F.O. 115/1796.

⁴ Spring-Rice to Grey, Washington, DC, May 16, 1914, telegrams 184 and 187, F.O. 115/1796.

internal dissensions...Huerta himself as yet shows no sign yielding but this is due in my opinion to his belief that to do so would be regarded by his enemies as a sign of weakness and would only encourage them to redouble their efforts against him. I think however that in reality he is prepared to retire and only awaits moment when he can publicly show that he does so at suggestion of mediators and not at dictation of the U.S.⁵

Acting on the mediators' request, Carden put this proposal directly to Huerta on May 20, skilfully making the pitch that staying in power should not become an obstacle to his original goal of pacifying the country. According to Carden, Huerta eventually agreed with this line of argument and left to telephone his representatives, who had just arrived in Niagara Falls.⁶ Huerta's Interior Minister, de la Lama, cabled Rabasa the same day confirming that he could announce Huerta's willingness to leave power if it would guarantee peace, not only with the United States but with the Constitutionals as well.⁷ As Carden predicted, Rabasa waited three days

⁵ Carden to Grey, Mexico City, May 13, 1914, telegram no. 138, F.O. 115/1795.

⁶ Carden to Grey, Mexico City, May 21, 1914, telegram no. 147, F.O. 115/1795.

⁷ Ulloa (1971), pp. 206–07. Rabasa tabled an official statement to this effect at the second plenary session on May 23: see Grieb (1969), p. 166, quoting the Minutes of the Second Plenary.

to let the conference get started and then tabled a brief official statement to this effect.

The conference thus began with Wilson's first objective already within reach: the departure of Huerta from power. Unfortunately, this did not make the President any more flexible when the mediators turned their attention to his second objective, the composition of a new provisional government. The mediators' opening proposal on May 20 was for Huerta to appoint a new Minister of Foreign Affairs, then resign and have that person replace him as Provisional President, following the terms of the existing Mexican Constitution. The name they suggested was Pedro Lascurian, Madero's Foreign Minister, an independent figure "of Constitutionalist principles." Wilson could not come up with any immediate objections to Lascurian, but he balked at the idea of having Huerta name his own successor.⁸ Instead, he suggested power should be transferred to

⁸ Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., May 20, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 501–02, File No. 812.00/12136. In fact, Huerta had used Lascurian for succession purposes once before. The day that Madero was forced to resign, Lascurian was sworn in as President and served for fifty-six minutes, during which time he appointed Huerta as Minister of Interior, the next office in the line of succession. Lascurian then resigned and Huerta took his place. This charade provided the tissue of legality for Huerta's appointment as Provisional President under the terms of the Mexican Constitution of 1857. See Meyer (1972), pp. 62–63, on this sequence of events.



three people, including a Constitutionalist, in order to “set up an authority free from former cabinet influences.”⁹ The mediators then tried to adapt this approach to the procedures established under the Mexican Constitution. They came back with a more fully developed proposal on May 26 for a Provisional President to be appointed, as before, who would then govern through a Board composed of four persons: one Huertista, one Constitutionalist and two neutrals. The Board’s principal task would be to convene new elections for President and Congress.

“We are seriously disappointed with the proposals outlined in your dispatch of the 26th,” Wilson informed his delegates. “We have reason to believe that the acceptance by Huerta of such a plan as that proposed could have been secured by this Government some months ago.”¹⁰ This assertion somehow overlooked the fact that none of Wilson’s strategies up to that point had yet secured Huerta’s resignation, let alone a method for holding new elections. However, Wilson had been encouraged by the progress of events on the ground since the mediation was first proposed. By that point he had become convinced that the Constitutionlists had

⁹ Wilson as quoted in Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, May 21, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 502–03, File No. 812.00/23435.

¹⁰ Bryan, quoting direct instructions from Wilson, in Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, May 27, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 509–10, File No. 812.00/23445.

to be put in control of any new provisional government. The Mexican delegates were merely trying to hold on to the privileges they enjoyed under the old regime. As for the neutrals whom the mediators proposed would have the balance of power in the provisional government, "There can be no such persons in Mexico among men of force and character. All men of real stuff must have taken sides in one way or another and those who call themselves neutrals are quite certainly partisans of the kind of order and supremacy which Huerta tried to establish, whether they adhere to Huerta or not."¹¹

Instead, the U.S. delegates were instructed to table an alternative plan. A single Provisional President would be appointed from the ranks of the Constitutionals, but would not be either Carranza or Villa. The Provisional President would exercise executive powers for a period of time in order to initiate various necessary reforms until the new elections, the timing of which he would specify. The elections would be organized by an independent Board of Elections comprised of three persons: two Constitutionals and one "representative of other political elements."¹²

¹¹ Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, June 3, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 523, File No. 812.00/23455a.

¹² For a line-by-line comparison of the two plans, see the memorandum in two columns prepared by the mediators, reported by Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 17, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 539–41, File No. 812.00/12313. The Mexican

Huerta cabled his approval of the mediators plan on June 9. By this point, the conference had become deadlocked between the two proposals.

The Americans' explicit bias in favour of the Constitutionlists caused the mediators discomfort and the Mexican delegates acute distress. By June 12 the Mexican delegates had abandoned their previous reservations about working through the mediators and started writing directly to their U.S. counterparts. These direct exchanges between the two delegations contain some of the most revealing passages in the entire record of the conference. In his memorandum to the U.S. delegation Emilio Rabasa argued:

By insisting now that Carranza and his followers shall form the Provisional Government, the Washington Government forces the elections in favor of the former. This is bad for Mexico, bad for the United States and even bad for Carranza. Bad for the two nations because of the natural and just feelings of hostility which the procedure of the United States will create in Mexico. Bad for the revolutionary chief and his partisans because public opinion in Mexico will accuse them of

delegates confirmed their agreement in all significant details with the mediators' plan on June 9, as reported in Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 9, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 525–26, File No. 812.00/12221-1/2.

having brought about the intervention of a foreign power in the country's affairs and of being subject to a foreign government... If the nation really wants Carranza for President his election is a foregone conclusion under a neutral government, and it is therefore unnecessary to impose him by means of a provisional government of his partisans.¹³

Justice Lamar's reply, sent on June 15, rejected the idea that the United States had any preference as to who would become President of Mexico or that it was trying to impose its own choice on the Mexican people. Lamar elucidated Wilson's view of the only real option in the mediation that would bring peace:

The President recognizes facts and he sees in the past success of the Constitutionalist Army indisputable evidence of the approval of the Mexican people. But he also sees that the full triumph of that army means an indefinite continuance of the war, with the suffering and bloodshed and death which every war involves. These consequences the President seeks to prevent through mediation. But we greatly fear that the

¹³ Mexican Delegation to U.S. Delegation, June 12, 1914, quoted in Special Commissioner Lamar to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, June 12, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 527–29, File No. 812.00/12263-1/2 (U.S. spelling preserved).



language of your note implies that his efforts may be thwarted because of your unwillingness to have a Constitutionalist as Provisional President, even though that promises the only practicable means by which the horrors of war can be prevented... if the plan you endorse should be adopted and a neutral chosen as Provisional President, we should have secured no practical results, but still be confronted with the insurmountable fact that the Constitutionlists, now almost completely triumphant, would reject any plan, repudiate the man, and press forward with renewed zeal to Mexico City with all of the loss of blood and life that may involve.¹⁴

In a parallel correspondence one of the other Mexican delegates, Luis Elguero, recorded a private conversation he had with the U.S. delegate Frederick Lehmann, as follows:

If a Constitutionalist President is put in power at present, it is certain that he will hold fraudulent elections, as has always been the case in Mexico after the triumph of a revolution, none of which put into the practice the electoral liberty they

¹⁴ U.S. Delegation to Mexican Delegation, June 14, 1914, in Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 16, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 535–37, File No. 812.00/12288.

preach, once they are in power... Elguero also drew attention to the fact that according to the Constitutionalist proclamations the chief of their party must occupy the [post of] President of the Republic, and they only intend to hold elections after triumph is complete and they have annihilated opposing political parties.¹⁵

To these pertinent observations Lehmann blandly replied: “we are of the opinion that in the present division of the Mexican people the great majority are with the Constitutionals in principle and in purpose, and that this party more than any other gives substantial hope of accomplishing the reforms believed to be necessary to an enduring peace.”¹⁶

What was at stake in these exchanges was not just a preference for a failing conservative order versus the victorious forces of revolution. The mediators and the Mexican delegates were arguing for using the mediation process to establish a temporary balance of power between the two sides in the Revolution, so that a new permanent government could be established through the ballot box. Woodrow Wilson took a much more limited view of

¹⁵ Señor Elguero to Commissioner Lehmann, June 12, 1914, attached to Commissioner Lehmann to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 13, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 530–32, File No. 812.00/12241.

¹⁶ Commissioner Lehmann to Señor Elguero, June 13, 1914, attached to the same document.



what the mediation could accomplish, determined by “the facts” (as he read them). The Constitutionalists were going to win the conflict and only their success offered the prospect of agrarian reform, which he regarded as essential to enduring peace in Mexico. The best that mediation could offer was a more peaceful and perhaps more rapid alternative to a Constitutionalist victory on the battlefield through the establishment of a provisional government that reflected their interests. However, for this option to hold any allure for the Constitutionalists, they had to be brought into the mediation process.

Thus, the second great issue of debate throughout the conference was whether a representative of the Constitutionalists would take a seat at the table. Wilson began pressing this issue again by the second day of the conference, instructing his delegates to ask if the mediators would reconsider admitting the Constitutionalists without requiring that they accept the scope of the mediation or agree to an armistice. The mediators replied that Carranza had already declined their invitation once. Furthermore, he only wanted to discuss the international issues between the United States and Mexico. After a week of intense negotiations at the conference, Carranza himself became concerned that a deal might be cut by the United States and Mexico without his involvement. He instructed his special representative in Washington to send a messenger up to Niagara Falls on May 28 to deliver a letter to the mediators, admonishing them that “said conflict should not be the subject of negotiations at the mediation conferences in the absence of representatives of the First Chief of the

Constitutionalist Army.”¹⁷ Bryan seized on this letter to conclude:

The mere fact that General Carranza has now sent an agent to Niagara Falls seeking admission to the conference, in spite of his previous refusal to do so, seems to show us very clearly that he did not at first realize the scope which was to be given to the discussion and to the plan to be proposed, and that it is just because that scope is so inclusive of everything he is interested in that he wishes admission. It is evidence of good faith, for if he participates he will be under stronger compulsion before all the world to accept the results.¹⁸

The mediators were not so sanguine about whether Carranza really wanted to participate, so they wrote back to him on June 2, asking if he was prepared to participate under the terms they had originally outlined, which entailed a commitment to an armistice, and, if so,

¹⁷ Señor R. Zubáran Capmany, representing General Carranza to Mediators, Washington, May 28, 1914, appended to Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., May 31, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 514–19, File No. 812.00/12130.

¹⁸ Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, May 31, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 519–20, File No. 812.00/23451. Although this message is signed “Bryan,” the language and arguments used read very much as if it was largely drafted by Wilson himself.



would he please nominate his representatives.¹⁹ Carranza then waited until June 11 to write back, ignoring the mediators' conditions and naming three representatives to the conference. The mediators wrote back again on June 15, pointing out that he had not responded to their conditions.²⁰ Meanwhile, the mediators' firm stand on an armistice exasperated Bryan and Wilson, who pointed out that cessation of hostilities was specifically not a requirement for mediation under the terms of the Hague Convention. The mediators' response was that they had made a commitment to an armistice a precondition for their offer of mediation in the first place and they were under instructions from their capitals to stick to this position.²¹ The U.S. delegates raised the question with Washington whether the mediators should be acting only as individuals, or representing the view of their capitals. Wilson replied that, in his view, the governments of the mediators should not try to dictate the terms of

¹⁹ Mediators to Señor Zubáran, June 2, 1914, attached to Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 13, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 529–30, File No. 812.00/12240.

²⁰ Señor Zubáran to Mediators, June 11, 1914, and Mediators to General Carranza, June 15, 1914, attached to two separate messages from Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 15, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 533–35, File Nos. 812.00/12270 and 812.00/12271.

²¹ Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., May 31, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 514–16, File No. 812.00/12130.

the process.²² However, the mediators remained adamant and, led by Naón, kept their own capitals in line on this point.²³

However, the Americans' real problem lay elsewhere, namely in their relationship with the Constitutionalists. The United States wanted the Constitutionalists at the table in Niagara Falls, as Bryan explained from Washington, because "it is extremely difficult for us to confer satisfactorily by indirect ways such as are open to us here."²⁴ Beyond this, there was a deeper problem of representation for the U.S. side, which Bryan acknowledged: "If the representative of the Constitutionalists is not admitted to the conference, we shall have to constitute ourselves judges of what would be just to them and reasonable to expect them to accept without any adequate means of forming the judgement."²⁵ In the absence of any representative of the Constitutionalists, the U.S. delegation proceeded to make these judgements for them.

²² Special Commissioner to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 4, 1914, and Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, June 4, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 524–25, File Nos. 812.00/23456, 23457.

²³ Rosario Solveira (1994), pp. 91–95.

²⁴ Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, May 21, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 504, File No. 812.00/23452c.

²⁵ Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, May 31, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 520, File No. 812.00/23451.

A third issue on the table was one that did interest the Constitutionalists: the continued presence of U.S. troops in Veracruz. Discussions of this topic did not get very far. The mediators proposed in their plan that the “American forces of occupation” would leave Mexican territory within fifteen days of the establishment of the Provisional Government.²⁶ Wilson flatly refused to agree to any fixed timetable for the evacuation of U.S. troops, on the grounds that it was a topic that should be discussed between the United States and the Provisional Government, “which might need our support and be conscious that it needed it.”²⁷ As Justice Lamar explained when writing back to Emilio Rabasa, “in the present disturbed condition of Mexico... the happenings of a day may make it desirable for the army to remain there longer than the date fixed in the Mediators’ plan.”²⁸ Given the Americans’ uncertain relationship with the Constitutionalists, it is hard not read this position as

²⁶ See Article VIII of the Mediators’ Plan as laid out in Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 17, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 541, File No. 812.00/12313.

²⁷ Bryan, quoting Wilson, in Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, May 29, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 513, File No. 812.00/23446, 23452g.

²⁸ U.S. Delegation to Mexican Delegation, June 15, 1914, attached to Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 16, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 537, File No. 812.00/12288.

a decision to hedge their bets. Hence the American counterproposal simply left the time and manner of withdrawal of their military forces in Mexico to be a matter of agreement between the United States and the Provisional Government.²⁹

The final issue that shaped the dynamics of the debate at Niagara Falls, even though it was never formally put on the table, was the inconsistent application of the U.S. arms embargo on Mexico. Wilson had lifted it as a matter of policy in February 1914 and then reimposed it as an administrative measure as soon as Carranza denounced the U.S. occupation of Veracruz on April 22. However, Wilson's own vacillations on the issue reflected a significant division of opinion within his Administration. In late May Sir Cecil Spring-Rice sketched the mood in Washington:

Each department has its own policy and its own information... The Minister of Navy, like Mr. Bryan, believes in "the germ theory of freedom" theory, that is, that the constitutionalists represent the principle of liberty and are worthy of the support of the sons of freedom. The Minister of War who is a business man thinks that the germ of freedom may prove very inconvenient to the American army, if it sprouts too freely among the Mexicans, and he would like to prevent all Mexicans, whether lovers

²⁹ See Article VIII in United States Plan in Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 17, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 541, File No. 812.00/12313.



of freedom or the reverse, from getting supplies of arms. The result of this is that the army has prevented Villa from getting arms over the land frontier; but now that he has got hold of Tampico he may be able to import arms under the eyes of United States Navy which will, I presume, obey the orders of its chief.³⁰

This is exactly what happened. On June 3 an American steamer, the *Antilla*, left New York for Tampico with two million rounds of ammunition and two airplanes. When this was reported in the New York papers, the Mexican delegation at Niagara Falls protested strenuously to the mediators. The U.S. delegation provided the lame reply that the order to the customs inspector to prevent the shipment had arrived one hour after the ship had sailed. When Huerta threatened to blockade Tampico with two gunboats, the U.S. Navy received instructions to use force to "prevent interference with commerce." After a cabinet discussion, all ports in the southern United States received instructions to detain shipments of arms to Mexico, but, somehow, during the course of the conference six ships carrying arms that left U.S. ports for other destinations were "forced" into Tampico due to "bad weather."³¹

³⁰ Spring-Rice to Grey, Washington, May 25, 1914, reprinted in Gwynn, ed. (1929), Vol. 2, pp. 207–08.

³¹ Grieb (1969), pp. 173–75. Grieb appears to have made the closest study of this under-reported aspect of U.S. policy towards Mexico in 1914.

Given this record, it is not surprising that the U.S. delegates were unconcerned about the Constitutionalists' refusal to accept an armistice as a condition for joining the conference. At the beginning of the conference the mediators expressed their profound concern to the U.S. delegates that, as Huerta's forces were being weakened by the day, there was a grave danger of anarchy in Mexico City and that the provisional government could enjoy any respect only if it took power in a context of public order. The mediators' conclusion, which they pressed on the Americans, was that "A cessation of hostilities is therefore imperative, and this may be obtained either by an armistice agreed to by the parties or by a general embargo against munitions of war, which would have the same practical effect."³² Wilson's reaction to this was to interpret it as a demand that the United States should "by some means intervene to prevent the complete success of the revolution now in progress," which he rejected as "impracticable" and likely to force a more active intervention by the United States in Mexico.³³ Instead, he put his faith in reaching "prompt agreement upon a clear program which the Constitutionalists

³² Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., May 23, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 504–05, File No. 812.00/23439, 23441.

³³ Wilson, as quoted by Bryan, in Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, May 24, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 505–06, File No. 812.00/23452d.

can accept." When the U.S. delegates explained to the mediators that "the President could not accede to their plan of securing an armistice or forcing an embargo," the mediators were evidently disappointed.³⁴

By Monday, June 15, the conference was at an impasse. There were two plans on the table, one proposed by the mediators, which Huerta had approved, and one that the U.S. delegates had drafted to reflect the absent Constitutionalists' interests. At the mediators' suggestion, both sets of delegates had tried to bridge the gap by coming up with a short list of names for the post of Provisional President, but no consensus had been reached.³⁵ The most that the mediators, the Mexicans, and the Americans had been able to agree on at the table was a *pro forma* protocol that provided for recognition, at an unspecified later date, of an undefined Provisional Government that would exercise power until the inauguration of an elected President.

The mediators proposed a suspension of the conference for the balance of the week to allow the Argentine Minister, Rómulo S. Naón, to return to the United States to receive his honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale.³⁶ As it turned out, three events occurred

³⁴ Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., May 25, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 506–07, File No. 812.00/23444.

³⁵ Grieb (1969), p. 172.

³⁶ Severance, ed. (1914), editor's essay, p. 52.

during this break that determined the final outcome of the conference.

The first was a showdown in northern Mexico on June 13 between Villa and Carranza, conducted over telegraph lines from their respective field headquarters in Torreon and Saltillo. Tensions had been building for months between the Constitutionalists' political leader and their most successful military commander. They came to a head when Carranza appointed another general, Natera, to lead the assault on the Constitutionalists' next objective, Zacatecas, and instructed Villa to send 5,000 of his troops to Natera for the battle. Villa refused and offered his resignation, which Carranza immediately accepted. Villa, however, had second thoughts when all his generals urged him to resume command of the Division of the North. On June 16 Villa took charge of the division and ordered it south to Zacatecas, in open defiance of Carranza.³⁷ The next day there were widely broadcast reports from American wire services that Villa's supporters had seized control of the Constitutionalist telegraph station at Juarez and were trying to take control of customs houses along Mexico's northern border.

Huerta's delegates at Niagara Falls did not miss the opportunity to point out that this split in the Constitutionalist ranks was exactly why they were

³⁷ These critical developments were first reported to the State Department by Collector Cobb to Secretary of State, El Paso, Texas, June 16, 1914, File No. 812.00/12226. For a detailed account see Quirk (1960).

arguing for a neutral candidate as Provisional President.³⁸ To put their case in the best light, they proceeded to release the text of their memorandum of June 11 to the U.S. delegation. This move outraged Lamar, who proceeded to release his response to the press. The result was an even greater sense of frustration between the two delegations, made worse by the growing doubts among the U.S. delegates over whether they were still backing the right side in the conflict.

These doubts were triggered by a four-hour meeting on June 16 in the Hotel Lafayette in Buffalo between two of the U.S. Commissioners, Lamar and Lehmann, and the two senior Constitutionalist representatives in Washington, Raphael Zubáran Capmany and Luis Cabrera. The meeting took place at the repeated urging of Bryan, who had met Zubáran several times in Washington to keep the Constitutionlists interested in the outcome of the mediation. The two Constitutionlists had already made one abortive visit to Buffalo ten days earlier, hoping to meet Minister Naón privately and argue their case for admission for the conference. Naón had cancelled the meeting at the last minute because he had failed to get the agreement for this meeting from his two fellow mediators, and the Mexican delegation was protesting that day the arrival of arms for the Constitutionlists on the *Antilla*.³⁹

³⁸ See articles in the *New York Evening Post*, June 17, 1914, and the *Washington Post*, June 17, 1914.

³⁹ Zubáran to Carranza, Washington, June 8, 1914, in Fabela, ed. (1962), pp. 114–16.

When Zubáran and Cabrera arrived in Buffalo again, Zubáran was upset to learn that the mediators had released to the press the texts of Carranza's latest telegram to the mediators, and their reply to Carranza reminding him that he had not responded to their demand for an armistice. Before heading for the meeting with Lamar and Lehmann, Zubáran reported this insult to Carranza and declared his intention to put to an end this debate with the mediators by delivering a formal protest at any further international discussion of issues that should be resolved among Mexicans.⁴⁰

Lamar and Lehmann arrived expecting to receive a short list of Constitutionalist candidates for Provisional President.⁴¹ Instead, they received an intensive education in Mexican national self-determination. Zubáran and Cabrera explained that the Plan of Guadalupe designated Carranza as the Provisional President, thus precluding consideration of any other candidates. Lamar and Lehmann explained in detail Wilson's plan, which they had defended at the conference, describing it as "in effect a present surrender to the Constitutionlists by Huerta." According to the two Commissioners, Zubáran replied that:

Mexican conditions raise no international questions and that they are entitled to fight out

⁴⁰ Zubáran to Carranza, Buffalo, June 16, 1914, in Fabela, ed. (1962), pp. 120–21.

⁴¹ Grieb (1969), p. 170.



their own fight in their own way, just as the United States in 1860 and 1864 was entitled to settle the question of slavery without the intervention of foreign powers... They insisted that they might be willing to take up the question of surrender with someone outside the mediation with which the United States had nothing to do; but that as far as the mediation was concerned they would absolutely decline to receive anything from the mediators or through the mediation—not in effect, but in words saying—that they would not accept as a gift anything which the mediators could give them, even though it was what they were otherwise seeking; that they would not take it “on a silver platter.” They declined to discuss names or to propose names for Provisional President, saying that no one would be satisfactory that was appointed by the mediators, even if it were Carranza himself, because anything that came from the mediators would not be accepted by their party or by the Mexican people.

Their manner was courteous, expressing regret that they should decline what was in mistaken kindness; but their statement was so explicit, their objection so positive, their spirit so defiant, that we asked them if we were to understand that they were expressing their own views or the views of Carranza. To this they emphatically replied that they were absolutely

instructed by Carranza to deliver this as their final answer.⁴²

It took Lamar and Lehmann two more days to absorb the full implications of the fact that “the representatives of the Constitutionals not only repudiated our good offices but distinctly stated that they would not accept anything from the mediators.” Trying to put the best face on an embarrassing situation, the Commissioners strongly recommended to Bryan that the United States delegation remain committed to the mediation process and to achieving reform in Mexico, but instead find a different party to back. They argued that the existing U.S. plan for the composition of a Provisional Government could be salvaged by a change in terminology: “As we are no longer dealing with the Constitutionals and they decline anything the mediation may do, we think it well not to assume to be acting for them and therefore should no longer use the term Constitutionalist, but the term liberal.”⁴³ Uncharacteristically, they did not receive a prompt reaction from Wilson or Bryan to this proposal.

⁴² Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 16, 1914, File No. 812.00/23477. Note that this critical message in its original form is eight pages long and only a heavily edited version appears in United States Department of State (1922), p. 538.

⁴³ Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 18, 1914, File 812.00/23478. This important message is not reprinted in United States Department of State (1922).

If Zubáran had any comprehension of the impact of his meeting in Buffalo on his interlocutors, he showed no signs of it in his next report to Carranza. Back in Washington, he met Bryan again on June 19, and found him “very aggressive.” Zubáran was deeply disturbed by Bryan’s suggestion that if Carranza was not willing to help the United States in pacifying Mexico through the mediation, they could find another Constitutionalist leader who might (Zubáran suspected Villa’s deputy, General Angeles). He discounted the explanation Bryan gave for the Administration’s frustration with Carranza’s refusal of help and suggested instead that their wavering support was due to the malevolent influence of U.S. Special Agent Carothers, who was assigned to accompany Villa. Zubáran concluded dramatically that Mexico was in peril of another foreign intervention, this time sanctioned by the South American powers, by being obliged to accept another candidate for Provisional President selected through the mediation process.⁴⁴

At this delicate moment Minister Naón arrived in Washington on June 20, at the request of his two fellow mediators, to propose a new approach to break the deadlock in the negotiation.⁴⁵ He met Zubáran first,

⁴⁴ Zubáran to Carranza, June 19, 1914, in Fabela, ed. (1962), pp. 127–28.

⁴⁵ Rosario Solveira (1994), pp. 99–100, describes the telephone conversations between Naón in Boston and the other two mediators, in which they agreed that he should proceed to Washington to try to “penetrate precisely the thinking of the [U.S.] government.”

then Bryan at length, and finally President Wilson. As Naón reported back to his Foreign Minister, he made two proposals, both of which were accepted by all his interlocutors. The first was that the mediators would simply invite the two contending factions to designate representatives to meet to work out the formation of a provisional government between them. The second was that the United States would agree to negotiate protocols dealing with all the international aspects of the conflict for subsequent implementation by the provisional government once it was established.⁴⁶

These deceptively simple proposals amounted to two major concessions by both the mediators and the United States. First, both external parties agreed that it would be best if the two Mexican factions met on their own terms to establish a provisional government. No mediators needed to be present. “A Mexican solution of the Mexican problem” was what Naón reminded Wilson he had recommended before the conference started.⁴⁷ Second, by agreeing to “protocolize” the international issues first, they decided to decouple the internal from the external dimensions of the conflict and thus dramatically reduce the scope of the mediation. Given the emerging divisions in the ranks of the Constitutionals and the apparent futility of having the U.S. delegates argue their

⁴⁶ Naón to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 21, 1914, quoted and translated in Link, ed. (1979), Vol. 30, pp. 197–99.

⁴⁷ Link, ed. (1979), Vol. 30, p. 198.

case for them at Niagara, this scaled-down solution to the mediation must have looked appealing to Bryan and Wilson.

On Monday, June 22, the mediators reconvened the conference in Niagara Falls and announced that they were putting Naón's plan into action. They had already sent a new letter to Carranza, inviting his representatives "to come to Niagara Falls or such other nearby point as might be desired for the purposes of conferring with the Mexican representatives on internal affairs."⁴⁸ They announced that the Mexican delegates at the conference had already agreed to this plan. They read a formal statement into the record that Mexicans were the persons who had the right and the authority to settle their internal differences. Then they tabled a new, simple, five-paragraph plan to be appended to the one-paragraph protocol on recognition of a provisional government, which had already been signed on June 12.

The mediators' new plan picked up all the international issues that had been included in the earlier U.S. draft: diplomatic recognition of the provisional government; a commitment by the United States not to claim "a war indemnity or other international satisfaction"; the establishment of international commissions to settle foreign claims for damages sustained during the civil war; and a commitment to withdraw U.S. forces from Mexican

⁴⁸ Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 22, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 544, File No. 812.00/23485.

territory under conditions agreed with the provisional government. It was understood that the reference to refusing to claim "other international satisfaction" closed the incident at Tampico.

The U.S. delegates proposed only two amendments to the mediators' text. One was to add a provision for an amnesty after the conflict, which had been included in both versions of the previous peace plan. Since this protocol dealt only with international questions, the U.S. delegates proposed that the amnesty apply only to foreigners, the issue of amnesty for Mexicans being left for a future provisional government. This was readily agreed. More delicate was the U.S. proposal to drop the mediators' reference to the "international conflict as definitely closed" after the United States had recognized the provisional government. As the U.S. delegates pointed out in cabling this text to Bryan, this language could imply a commitment to an immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Veracruz once the Administration had recognized the provisional government. The next day Bryan cabled Wilson's approval of the text as amended. His only stipulation was that if the Mexicans did not agree to an open-ended date for U.S. withdrawal from Veracruz, the subject should be dropped from the text altogether.

On June 24 the mediators met the U.S. delegation again to iron out the final wording. The mediators agreed in the end to substitute a reference to diplomatic relations being restored between the United States and a provisional government, in lieu of declaring the



“international conflict as definitely closed.” They also agreed to “postpone” any discussion of Veracruz and dropped the paragraph on the subject altogether from the final text.⁴⁹ At 9:45 that night they convened the final plenary of the conference and approved the text of the fourth protocol, as follows:

Article I. The Provisional Government referred to in Protocol no. 3 [the record of the June 12 plenary] shall be constituted by agreement of the delegates representing the parties between which the internal struggle in Mexico is taking place.

Article II. (a) Upon the constitution of the Provisional Government in the City of Mexico, the Government of the United States of America will recognize it immediately, and thereupon diplomatic relations between the two countries will be restored.

(b) The Government of the United States of America will not in any form whatsoever claim a war indemnity or other international satisfaction.

(c) The Provisional Government will proclaim an absolute amnesty to all foreigners for any and all political offenses committed during the period of the civil war in Mexico.

⁴⁹ Special Commissioners to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, June 24, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 546, File No. 812.00/23487, 23488.

(d) The Provisional Government will negotiate for the constitution of international commissions for the settlement of the claims of the foreigners on account of damages sustained during the period of civil war as a consequence of military acts or the acts of national authorities.

Article III. The three mediating Governments agree on their part to recognize the Provisional Government organized as provided by section [*sic*: Article] I of this protocol.⁵⁰

The mediators and the delegates remained in Niagara Falls for another week in the hope that General Carranza would reply to the fresh invitation from the mediators to meet General Huerta's delegates. A few days later Carranza cabled a very polite reply to the mediators informing them that, as their proposal implied a modification to the Plan of Guadalupe, he would need more time to consult all his generals and obtain their approval. With this message in hand, the mediators decided to take an indefinite recess. On July 1 they organized a signing ceremony for the last protocol, which Wilson agreed that the U.S. delegates could sign along with the Mexicans, subject to the proviso that "nothing contained herein is construed as a recognition of the

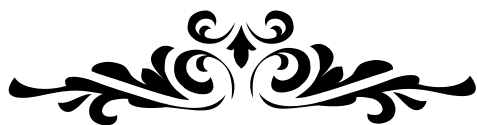
⁵⁰ Final text as appended to Secretary Dodge to the Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 25, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 548–49, File No. 812.00/12363 (U.S. spelling preserved).



government of General Huerta by the Government of the United States.”⁵¹ That done, the three mediators wrote to both delegations that “the protocol of June 24 having settled satisfactorily all the matters deriving from the incidents that originated our good offices... nothing more remains to be done but the organization and establishment of a Provisional Government of Mexico, a patriotic work reserved exclusively to the delegation of the two parties contending.”⁵² They assured all parties of their readiness to be called back to mediate, if needed, and they referred any further questions to the Brazilian Embassy in Washington. With that, the Niagara Falls Peace Conference was over.

⁵¹ Secretary of State to Special Commissioners, Washington, July 1, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 549–50, File No. 812.00/23490.

⁵² Mediators to U.S. Special Commissioners and Delegates of General Huerta, July 1, 1914, attached to Dodge to Secretary of State, Washington, July 3, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 554–55, File No. 812.00/12411.



Chapter 6

The aftermath

After the conference had ended there was the usual diplomatic round of congratulatory speeches and messages. At a farewell lunch to thank the reporters who had covered the conference “at this now historic spot,” Ambassador da Gama congratulated his fellow mediators “for appearing before you as probably the most united political body ever constituted in the world.” He declared that the mediation had established as a “principle of American policy” that international problems affecting the nations of the Western Hemisphere would always have “a fair examination and be settled without foreign interference.”¹ Huerta’s Foreign Minister sent a message to

¹ Severance, ed. (1914), editor’s essay, pp. 72–73.

his A.B.C. counterparts, expressing the profound thanks of the Mexican people for the results of the mediation, and rushed the signed protocols to the Mexican Senate for immediate approval. President Wilson sent a message to each of the A.B.C. Presidents conveying his government's "admiration for the ability, patience, and gratifying success with which [the mediators] conducted the conference at Niagara Falls; and its great satisfaction that so much has already been accomplished by the mediation in the interest of the peace of America."² This message of thanks was reciprocated by more effusive replies from the Governments of Argentina and Chile. On a less elevated plane, the meagre Canadian government files after the conference consist entirely of requests for payment from the manager of the Clifton Hotel and internal memos arguing over which agency would pay the bills for the four policemen who had been assigned to the hotel to provide security.³

The American press, not surprisingly, offered a wide range of reactions to the results of the conference, influenced by their varying editorial stances towards the Wilson Administration as a whole. Many papers highlighted their conclusion that the conference had defeated jingoist sentiments and averted a costly war between the United States and Mexico. The *San Francisco*

² Wilson, quoted by Bryan, in Secretary of State to U.S. Missions in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, July 7, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 559, File No. 812.00/12430.

³ Canada Department of External Affairs files, RG24, Series A-3-a, Volume 1142, File: 1914-457.

Chronicle, for example, concluded that “The mediation has been a most excellent thing for us, for Mexico and for the Americas.”⁴ The *New York Times* pronounced the result “such a triumph for President Wilson’s much misunderstood policy as to astonish even the staunchest supporters of the President.” By declining any indemnities “the disinterestedness of the United States is made clear to the world, and, what is more to the point, to the Mexicans themselves.”⁵ The *Boston Post* underscored “the great change in our relations with the South American republics and in their attitude towards us. Gone is suspicion, gone is the feeling that we are too haughty to recognize the nations to the south as co-partners in the continent’s destinies. Morally and materially the new friendship of the strong Latin American countries is of incalculable benefit to us.”⁶ The *Christian Science Monitor* judiciously noted the “peaks and valleys” during the mediation, but believed a constant ideal in favour of peace had dominated proceedings: “If the mediation between two North American republics is compassed by three South American republics’ tactful interposition and use of moral authority, a new era of Pan-Americanism will have dawned.”⁷ This sentiment was frequently repeated in uniformly enthusiastic editorials lauding the results of the mediation in the Latin American press.⁸

⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 3, 1914.

⁵ *New York Times*, June 26, 1914.

⁶ *Boston Post*, July 5, 1914.

⁷ *Christian Science Monitor*, June 29, 1914.

⁸ Guerrero Youcham (1966), pp. 160–64.

Other American newspapers were more sceptical in their assessments. The *New York Tribune* argued that only the mediators' decision to abandon their attempt to reach an internal political solution in Mexico had saved the conference from failure. The *Tribune* concluded that "the mediators ended right even if they started wrong."⁹ The *Journal of Commerce* cautioned that the protocols had not solved the internal problems of Mexico: "There is no assurance that a permanent result will be reached. All that is really settled now is the imbroglio between the United States and General Victoriano Huerta."¹⁰ Some papers were downright dismissive of the results. The *Washington Post* commented that "the A.B.C. mediators, having successfully marched up the hill, are about to march down it again and leave the Mexican situation where it was."¹¹ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reserved its scorn for the "fiasco" of the Administration's policy. In its view:

It makes no difference whether Huerta seeks terms and Villa is willing to grant them, or whether the Villa armies continue their victorious march upon the City of Mexico. In either event the future lies in the hands of Villa. The United States has no say in the matter whatever; it has no influence. It has expended many millions of dollars, and

⁹ *New York Tribune*, June 26, 1914.

¹⁰ *Journal of Commerce*, June 26, 1914.

¹¹ *Washington Post*, July 1, 1914.



for what? Not one dollar is asked by way of “war indemnity” and how could there be, considering that there was never the slightest justification for sending our army and navy to Veracruz? The administration has “butted in,” to use a rather forcible expression of the day, and has been butted out of Mexican affairs as a positive factor. The situation is precisely what it would have been had there been no Veracruz invasion and mediation had never been heard of... So far as the administration at Washington is concerned, it is all a most miserable piece of business—the outcome of the attempt of mere theorists to play at statesmanship.¹²

The three Mexican delegates to the conference provided their own ambivalent assessment of its outcome in a final letter to the mediators:

The basis of the agreements will insure external peace, the restoration of internal harmony; in a word, national rebirth and national honor lie in the organization of a provisional government in Mexico. If it is organized, all that will remain to be done will be the execution of the agreements that promise these boons; if it is not organized, the agreements, lacking their base, will be destroyed and Mexico’s situation will be the same

¹² *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 26, 1914.



as before—uncertainty for the future and evil for the present.¹³

Not surprisingly, Carranza never sent any representatives to Niagara Falls to negotiate with Huerta's delegates on the formation of a provisional government. As Carranza explained on July 6 to Wilson's special agent, Leon J. Canova, not only were all the Constitutionalist generals against it, but accepting such a plan would "promise only an unstable peace and insure another revolution."¹⁴ Furthermore, he cited the example of Juarez fifty years before, which, he said, showed that when a country was under revolutionary military rule certain reforms could be accomplished only by decree. According to Canova, Carranza declared that "if arms and ammunition can be obtained through Tampico so he can distribute them to the different divisions of the army, he will assuredly be at the capital in a short time and will guarantee establishment of peace on a firm basis and not on the quicksands of a transaction where no guarantees could be given."¹⁵ By July 9 Carranza had hammered out

¹³ Delegates of General Huerta to Mediators, attached to Dodge to Secretary of State, Washington, July 3, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 555–56, File No. 812.00/12411 (U.S. spelling preserved).

¹⁴ Special Agent Canova to Secretary of State, Saltillo, July 6, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 558–59, File No. 812.00/12429.

¹⁵ Canova to Secretary of State, Saltillo, July 6, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), pp. 558–59,

a written agreement that temporarily mended the rift between himself and Villa. On July 10 Carranza formally notified the mediators of the Constitutionalists' decision. He concluded by asking the mediators to advise Huerta's delegates that "the only form acceptable to me to finish our internal struggle is the unconditional surrender of General Victoriano Huerta with the army that sustains him."¹⁶

Huerta resigned on July 15 and went into exile. He turned power over to the last of the six foreign ministers appointed during his tenure, Chief Justice Francisco Carbajal, who acted as President for less than a month. Carbajal tried to negotiate the formation of a provisional government with Carranza, with no greater success. Pressured by Villa's army from the north, Obregon's forces from the northwest, and the ever-present militias of Zapata in the south, the resistance of the Federal Army collapsed in early August. On August 13 Carbajal's representatives signed an agreement with General Obregon dissolving the Federal Army.

File No. 812.00/12429. Canova was a member of a Spanish American family from St. Augustine, Florida, and had lived for a number of years in Cuba. He was dispatched by Wilson to northern Mexico as a Special Agent to assist George Carothers, and specifically to accompany Carranza's headquarters, while Carothers did the same with Villa.

¹⁶ Letter from Carranza to Zubáran, appended to Vice Consul Silliman to Secretary of State, Saltillo, July 10, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 562, File No. 812.00/12469.

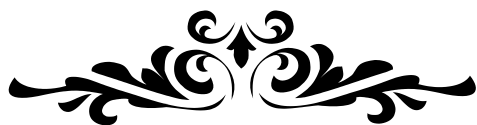
First Chief Venustiano Carranza entered Mexico City on horseback on August 20.

The triumph of the Constitutionalists was merely the end of one chapter in the tortuous history of U.S. involvement in the Mexican Revolution. It did not result in immediate recognition of Carranza's regime. Instead, the United States found itself trying to balance between two armed factions within the Constitutionalist camp. After their victory the long-standing rivalry between Carranza and Villa became irreparable. U.S. policy initially tilted towards Villa, who had always been more amenable to Wilson's advice and entreaties. Rivalry turned to civil war later in 1914, after Villa's supporters deposed Carranza at the Convention of Aguascalientes in November that year. Carranza was forced to retreat to Veracruz, which the United States finally evacuated just ahead of his arrival. Then Carranza rallied his supporters and fought back, defeating Villa in a series of battles during the course of 1915. Using a now familiar formula, Robert Lansing, on behalf of the State Department, convened a series of meetings in Washington with representatives of the A.B.C. powers and three other Latin American republics, all of whom urged the contending factions in Mexico to settle their differences under a Pan-American council. Carranza rejected this proposal, as his armies were set to recapture Villa's stronghold in Torreon. At this point Lansing was convinced that the United States had to recognize the winning faction in the Mexican civil war, or risk Germany using the political divisions in Mexico to distract the



United States from the growing conflict with Germany over unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic. In October 1915 the United States and the A.B.C. powers finally recognized Carranza's regime as the *de facto* government of Mexico. But it took another eighteen months, a second U.S. military intervention to punish Pancho Villa, and the release of the Zimmerman telegram to Carranza before the United States extended *de jure* recognition and returned an Ambassador to Mexico City. By that point, in March 1917, the United States was on the brink of war with Germany.¹⁷

¹⁷ This summary is drawn from Link (1954), pp. 127–48.



Chapter 7

Failures and accomplishments

Why did the Niagara Falls Peace Conference fail? Among the many reasons, the most fundamental was stated by Robert Lansing before the conference even began: it was never really a mediation between countries, but a mediation between two factions in a civil war, and one of those factions never came to the table. All the parties that did come to Niagara Falls recognized at the outset that they had to talk about internal political issues and the composition of a new provisional government to replace Huerta. As the mediators declared in their statement to the final plenary session: "The internal question of Mexico constitutes an essential difficulty in the way of a full solution of the conflict pending with the United States of America. We understood so when we

extended our good offices toward the peaceful settlement of this conflict.”¹ Carranza understood this perfectly well too, but, in the terminology of contemporary negotiation analysis, the Constitutionalists always had a better *BATNA*, a “best alternative to a negotiated agreement.”² As long as they retained good prospects of being able to defeat Huerta in combat and pacify Mexico on their own terms, they had no incentive to come to the table.

The three A.B.C. powers had no leverage with either side in the mediation. The United States, the one power that had considerable means to reduce the value of Carranza’s *BATNA*, never chose to exercise its leverage. As the mediators themselves pointed out to the United States, an even-handed, vigorous arms embargo would have seriously reduced the Constitutionalists’ ability to fight, and could well have forced them to accept an armistice and a negotiated solution. However, Wilson and Bryan in this instance preferred to give war a chance, on the theory that complete victory for the Constitutionalists was both inevitable and desirable for long-term stability. There is something chilling in the way these two prophets of peace were prepared to accept that (in Bryan’s words) “settlement by civil war carried to its

¹ Statement of Mediators included in Minutes of Fourth Plenary Conference, attached to Dodge to Secretary of State, Niagara Falls, N.Y., June 25, 1914, United States Department of State (1922), p. 547, File No. 812.00/12363.

² For an explanation of the term *BATNA* in negotiation analysis, see Fisher and Ury (1991), pp. 97–102.



bitter conclusion is a terrible thing, but it must come now whether we wish it or not." What they did not expect was that the civil war would continue in different forms for another five years after the defeat of Huerta.

At the same time, the mediators themselves got too caught up in the dignity of their role and their insistence on an armistice as the price of admission to the mediation. If they were truly interested in mediating a resolution of the conflict, rather than defending a foreign policy principle, they should have explored the option of dropping this requirement. We will never know what would have happened had they been prepared to let a representative of the Constitutionalists take a seat at the table without this precondition. Huerta's delegates might have walked out, but they probably would have stayed. Carranza's delegates would most likely have stalled for time, to see if they could continue to make gains on the battlefield. The most fascinating sidebar to the mediation, the one between the United States and the Constitutionalists, would have suddenly moved into full view of the other protagonists at the conference, instead of being conducted through sporadic, confidential conversations in Washington and Buffalo. With the Constitutionalists in the room, there would have been no need for the United States to speak on their behalf. The United States would have been obliged to shift ground and might have been forced to start defending its own contribution to the conflict in Mexico.

In the absence of the Constitutionalists, the U.S. delegation tried to play two roles at the same time:

as representatives of the United States and as advocates for the Constitutionalists. Their posture, as outsiders acting like insiders, disillusioned the increasingly independent Mexican delegates, who thought that the United States should support a balanced political settlement. It also frustrated the mediators, who wanted the United States to constrain the Constitutionalists and help in bringing them to the table. Ultimately, it confused the U.S. delegates themselves, who broke with instructions and recommended to Bryan that they dump Carranza and try to reach a political agreement with those Mexican delegates present in Niagara who were prepared to negotiate. Unfortunately, this recommendation missed the whole purpose of the mediation from Bryan and Wilson's perspective, which was to increase the United States' political engagement with, and ultimately its influence over, Carranza.

Once it became evident that Huerta's delegates were not going to agree at the table to an unconditional surrender, and that the Constitutionalists were not prepared to let the United States continue to represent them, the possibility of mediating the internal conflict at Niagara Falls disappeared. The mediators quickly narrowed the agenda to the international issues, the United States reverted to representing only its own interests, and the conference rapidly reached an inconsequential conclusion. Since Huerta and his regime were quickly going out of business, the United States had no interest in making any commitments at Niagara Falls on the only international issue in which it had any real stake: namely, the continued



occupation of Veracruz. Nor did the mediators oblige the U.S. delegates to do so. Hence, the final protocol signed at the conference had no relevance for the future course of the Mexican Revolution. Once it had been signed, no one on the ground seems to have referred to it ever again.

What then, if anything, did the A.B.C. offer of mediation accomplish? The view widely held and expressed in the American press at the time was that it at least prevented the United States from going to war against Mexico. If this was true, it would have been no small accomplishment. However, this view assumes that Wilson was willing to risk a full-scale war in Mexico. Wilson frequently denied that this was ever his intention, but he made the same declarations before he suddenly ordered the U.S. Navy to occupy Veracruz. Evidently, at this stage in his presidency, Wilson was prepared to use military force, but only in limited ways, to alter the internal balance of power within Mexico. When the occupation of Veracruz backfired politically, he immediately reversed course. The only circumstances that would have likely pushed him into ordering a full-scale invasion would have been much stiffer Mexican resistance in Veracruz and massacres of U.S. civilians in Mexico, leading to a domestic outcry for a full-scale intervention. This did not happen in 1914. It *did* happen in 1916, when Pancho Villa raided Columbus, New Mexico, and killed nineteen U.S. citizens. Wilson was forced by public opinion to order the Army into Mexico on a punitive expedition against Villa. U.S. troops found themselves fighting an enemy armed with weapons



that their government had tried to embargo two years earlier.

What the A.B.C. offer undoubtedly accomplished for Wilson was to calm the war fears at home after the occupation of Veracruz and save the reputation of the United States across Latin America. The protocol signed at the end of the conference helped both in securing this public relations dividend and in obscuring the fact that the United States was still in Veracruz. For those American observers who were inclined to be positive about the outcome, the protocol was significant for three reasons. First, the United States dropped its original insistence on a salute to the flag. Second, it declared no interest in any war indemnity. Third, although the United States made no commitments as to when its forces would leave Veracruz, neither did it try to use the protocol to justify their continued presence there. It was understood by all to be a temporary measure, not a permanent annexation. Thus, the protocol confirmed that a new approach was driving U.S. policy in Latin America, one less concerned with traditional matters of national honour, territorial annexation, or even defending the special privileges of U.S. property-owners. This was consistent with the vision for a new U.S. policy in the Americas that Wilson had outlined in a well-received speech in Mobile, Alabama, in the autumn of 1913. At Mobile, Wilson had declared that "it is a very perilous thing to determine the foreign policy of a nation in terms of material interests." Instead, U.S. foreign policy would be concerned with "human rights, national integrity, and



opportunity, as against material interests.”³ The moral contradictions of his policy towards Mexico would later be measured by its consistency with this higher standard. However, contemporary observers who were concerned with morality in international affairs were not inclined to look for contradictions in Wilson’s policies. They were sufficiently delighted that he had agreed to have the United States sign a peace protocol mediated by three other American republics.

In their own messages to each other after the conference, the Foreign Ministers of all three A.B.C. powers highlighted its importance as an example of what the three countries could accomplish by working together. All three believed that it had strengthened the bonds of solidarity and common action among the three most prominent South American republics.⁴ Given the past rivalries between Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, this was perceived as a significant accomplishment. There was even talk that they might form an “A.B.C. bloc” for future action.⁵ In May 1915, on the occasion of an official visit to Buenos Aires by the Brazilian and Chilean Foreign Ministers, the three countries signed an “A.B.C. Peace Treaty” in which they pledged that they would seek

³ Wilson, Address before Southern Commercial Congress, Mobile, Alabama, October 27, 1913, in Shaw, ed. (1924), Vol. 1, p. 35.

⁴ Guerrero Yoacham (1966), pp. 158–59.

⁵ Speculation to this effect appeared in *The Globe* (Toronto) July 9, 1914, under the headline “An American Triple Alliance.”

to preserve peace and would refrain from war until all controversies had first been referred to an impartial commission. This trilateral treaty was modelled on Bryan's bilateral peace treaties, which mandated a "cooling-off period" for international disputes. Two months later da Gama, Naón, and Suárez Mujica signed with Bryan bilateral peace treaties between each of their countries at a joint ceremony in Washington.⁶ In 1915 the U.S. Congress recognized their work as mediators by awarding the three envoys its highest honour, the Congressional Gold Medal, "for their generous services as mediators in the controversy between the Government of the United States of America and the leaders of the warring parties in the Republic of Mexico."⁷ (To put this distinction in perspective, the next time Congress awarded a Gold Medal it was to Charles Lindbergh in 1928.)

An additional legacy of the Niagara Falls Conference was to inspire hope that a new day had arrived in the conduct of inter-American affairs. "Pan-Americanism Now a Reality," trumpeted the *New York Times* at the conclusion of the conference.⁸ The symbolism of having three South American countries mediate a dispute between the two North American republics was a powerful inspiration to the advocates of a Pan-American approach to the

⁶ Manger (1940), p. 32.

⁷ Joint Resolution of Senate and House of Representatives, March 4, 1914, 38 Stat. 1228.

⁸ *New York Times*, June 26, 1914.



resolution of both internal and international conflicts. The clearest exposition of this view was given by James A. Slayden, a Democratic Congressman from Texas and a prominent Pan-Americanist, in "The A.B.C. Mediation," an article he published in 1915 in the *American Journal of International Law*. After first making the point that the mediation had at least made the belligerents in Mexico "realize that other countries were not indifferent to conditions in that republic," Slayden went on to argue that:

The second and by far the greatest value of the Niagara conference is the precedent it made. It points the way to the settlement of similar troubles in the future. It may, I think, be regarded as the beginning of a Pan-American policy for the quieting of internal troubles and international disputes between the republics on this continent.

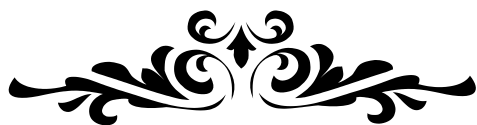
The proof it gave to the suspicious and doubtful citizens of the twenty Spanish and Portuguese-speaking republics that the people and Government of the United States contemplate no assault on their sovereignty and territory, sufficed in itself to lift the mediation out of the class of failures. It did not accomplish all that some believed it would, or all that some of us hoped it might; but, in spite of the jeers of unsympathetic newspaper wits and the scorn of militarists, it did enough to establish a policy. Hereafter when any American country gives itself over to anarchy, those governments that



prefer order to disorder, following the precedent of the “A.B.C.” mediation, can jointly intervene to command the peace.⁹

The promise of collective action that Slayden saw in the A.B.C. mediation was not realized in the following decades, but the vision he sketched out in 1915 prefigures the agreements reached since 1991 to strengthen the defence of democracy as a cornerstone of hemispheric security.

⁹ Slayden (1915), 151–52.



Chapter 8

Looking back from today

From the vantage point of today, what is there of interest in a failed peace conference that took place more than ninety years ago? It does not lie in its impact on the course of the Mexican Revolution. From that vantage point, it appears as an inconsequential Edwardian diversion from the course of a titanic struggle.

Primarily for this reason, almost all historians of the Revolution have dealt with the conference in a few lines, or at most a few pages, if they have covered it all. The only monograph I have been able to find that is completely devoted to the topic is the study done for the Chilean diplomatic academy by Guerrero Yoacham (1966), who was able to draw on some diplomatic papers left by the Chilean mediator, Suárez Mujica. The

studies by Rosario Solveira (1994) and Ulloa (1971) also substantially cover the conference, drawing on Argentine and Mexican sources respectively, as well as the published U.S. diplomatic documents. In English, Link (1956) does a superb job narrating the events that led up the conference and very efficiently dispatches the event in seven pages. Grieb (1969) has reviewed all the Mexican, British and American sources, and covers the conference in a more detailed chapter in his monograph dealing with the United States' relations with Huerta. The only contemporary accounts we have are the valuable essay by Severance (1914), which was based on newspaper reporting, and the remarkable scrapbook of clippings collected by Rómulo Naón. There have been no Canadian studies that I can find that cover the conference. The first serious history of Canadian–Latin American relations, Oglesby (1976), contains a chapter headed “Canadians and the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1928,” but dismisses the conference in three paragraphs.

Even Niagara Falls, which is a well-documented place, contains no landmarks to commemorate this unusual chapter in inter-American diplomacy. The Clifton House Hotel, where all the meetings took place, burned down in 1932 and in its place there stands today a quiet park, the Oakes Garden Theatre.

Nevertheless, some interest lies in the exceptional fact that the Niagara Falls Peace Conference occurred in the first place and in the symbolism of what was at stake there, when viewed through the lens of modern concerns.



First, the conference must have been one of the few occasions in the history of the United States when its government has allowed third countries to mediate a conflict between itself and another state. The United States has long been accustomed to playing this kind of role, formally or informally, in other countries' disputes. Even before 1914, the United States under Theodore Roosevelt was asked to mediate an end to the Russo-Japanese War. Rarely has the United States found it convenient to agree to mediation by other, weaker states to resolve a conflict in which the United States itself is a major party. This fact alone makes the Niagara Falls Conference an exceptional event.

Second, the conference took place in an era when international instruments for the peaceful resolution of conflicts were in their infancy. Much of the enthusiasm at the time around the conference derived from its perceived potential to give impetus to those instruments. Today we live in a world that is rich—indeed, some would argue, overburdened—with international norms, agreements, and institutions that attempt to promote collective security and resolve conflicts peacefully. Their effectiveness in constraining the actions of great powers may be questioned, but in the absence of such norms and institutions, all attempts at peaceful conflict resolution become one-off exercises. The difficulty the A.B.C. powers had in securing consensus on the minimum conditions to launch their mediation demonstrates the value of having multilateral mechanisms already in place, with established ground rules for these kinds of initiatives.



Third, the conference participants were far ahead of their time in recognizing the inextricable linkage between resolving “internal” political issues and addressing “international” ones when dealing with foreign interventions in a civil war. Given the impossibility, for most of the 20th century, of discussing anything in the formal institutions of inter-American diplomacy that smacked of “international interference in the internal affairs of other states,” it is fascinating to see how unencumbered the A. B. C. mediators were by such ideological constraints. It is not that the defence of sovereignty was unimportant to the A.B.C. powers. Great power interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states had been a preoccupation of Latin American diplomats for decades. The Argentine statesmen Calvo and Drago had led the way in the early days of the Pan-American movement in arguing for limits to foreign powers’ claims to override the domestic jurisdiction of states, for example in dealing with claims to enforce the payment of international debts. However, a fear that peaceful third-party mediation of internal conflicts could be exploited by great powers to undermine sovereignty was not a preoccupation for the A.B.C. governments. Reading this brief slice of the record of U.S. intervention in the Mexican Revolution makes it understandable why post-revolutionary Mexican foreign policy has been stamped by this suspicion. It has taken more than eighty years of internal political and economic evolution in Mexico and a more recent transformation of its relationship with its all-powerful neighbour to make Mexicans comfortable with discussing international norms and instruments



for defending human rights and promoting democracy. The same transformation in thinking about the limits of sovereignty has yet to be consolidated in the Western Hemisphere, for much the same reasons. In other regions of the world it has hardly begun.

We currently live in an era of contested “humanitarian interventions” intended to change the regimes of other states for the good of their peoples. The arguments Wilson advanced for intervening in the course of the Mexican Revolution look remarkably modern: the refusal to countenance the overthrow of democratically elected governments; the need for broad-based economic and political reforms to consolidate democracy; the inherent instability of narrowly based, tyrannical regimes and the negative spillover effects they can have on their neighbours. Some of the methods he used to implement his vision for Mexico, such as sending in gunboats and seizing a port, today look old-fashioned. Others remain very much a part of a great power’s foreign policy arsenal, notably cutting off rogue states’ access to credit and (selectively) applying arms embargos. Some of the most serious mistakes Wilson made in Mexico look depressingly familiar from other chapters of U.S. foreign policy, including trying to back one side in a civil conflict in order to influence its objectives, overestimating the international appeal of stated American ideals, and underestimating the power of other peoples’ sense of nationalism. Against this panoply of methods for intervention, the one option that Wilson pursued for a time, and that still looks attractive to middle-power practitioners of peaceful conflict



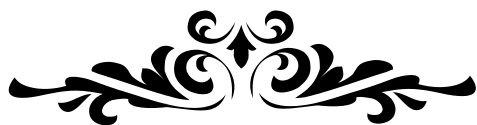
resolution, is mediation. Hence the potential interest of the Niagara Falls Conference for the A.B.C. mediators' modern counterparts. Failure can teach as much if not more than success can. The ultimate failure of the mediators' well-intentioned initiative was not to engage the President of the United States directly within the moral framework that he used to justify his policies.

Finally, and more modestly, there are some observations for Canada to be drawn from this completely forgotten chapter in our diplomatic history. Canada played no role of substance in the conference, but it did provide the venue, and the Canadian press and public followed events closely. Canada was deliberately chosen as a safe, neutral location for this highly experimental venture by the five other countries involved. The conference was the first occasion when an event of major political importance to both the United States and Latin America took place in Canada. For this reason alone, it is worth recalling in an era when Canada has made its relations with the rest of the Western Hemisphere a priority for its foreign policy.

The conference was also one of the very rare occasions when Canada has ever provided the venue for any kind of international peace talks. For all the activism that Canadians have displayed in international peacekeeping and peacemaking, very little of that activity has been conducted in Canada itself. Distance from modern zones of conflict may be part of the reason, but in 1914 our geography was the reason why Canada was selected as the location for the conference. The curious



fact remains that since 1914 there have been very few other occasions when it has ever been “Mediation Time in Canada.”



Appendix 1

Images of the conference

One of the most remarkable sources of information about the Niagara Falls Peace Conference is the archive of newspaper clippings and cartoons assembled by the Argentine mediator, Rómulo S. Naón. This archive contains several hundred pages of clippings from newspapers all over North America, starting in late April and running until mid-July, 1914. (Unfortunately, it does not contain any Mexican or South American clippings). The archive has been pasted into pages in a scrapbook. The name of the newspaper in which the photograph or cartoon appeared and its date are usually listed beside each image. The scrapbook was microfilmed in Buenos Aires and a copy of the microfilm was borrowed for this study from the Yale University Library. The

following pages of cartoons from the archive provide an impression of how the conference was depicted visually and metaphorically by the newspapers of the era.

Figure 1 is an image from the beginning of the conference in which the conflict between the United States and Mexico is symbolized as a fight between Uncle Sam and Huerta, who is recognizable by his bullet head and the bloody dagger he holds in his hand, suggesting his role in the murder of Madero. On Uncle Sam's shoulder is the dove of peace—a recurring image used by many different cartoonists throughout the conference.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 display a trend in many American cartoons of the period of “infantilizing” Mexico or the main Mexican actors in the conflict, either by depicting them as schoolboys or even infants to be scolded or nursed, either by Wilson, Bryan or Uncle Sam.

Figure 5 offers another recurring theme: the “feminization” of peace, depicting as a woman labeled “South America” appealing to the unbending figure of Huerta. Figures 6 and 7 focus on the mediation and the novel fact of three South American countries offering to settle a North American conflict.

Figures 8 to 12 are a series of cartoons using moving water as a metaphor for the turbulent context of the conference. Water imagery was an obvious choice for cartoonists given the backdrop of the Niagara River and Niagara Falls. It is also intriguing to see how more than one cartoonist linked water with the dove of peace, by drawing directly on the biblical story of Noah's Ark.



Finally, Figures 13 to 21 are a series of more explicitly political cartoons which comment on different issues or phases in the mediation, such as Huerta's resignation, Carranza's refusal to participate, the search for a provisional President, the impasse reached in the middle of the conference, the hypocritical American approach to the arms embargo, Villa's rebellion against Carranza and the final "indefinite suspension" of the mediation while hostilities continued in Mexico.

In contrast to the reams of rather breathless written coverage given to the conference by contemporary newspapers, these cartoons offer more incisive visual impressions of what was actually going on, demonstrating the old adage that a picture can be worth a thousand words.

MEDIATION! DO YOU THINK THE A. B. C.
POWERS CAN HANDLE HIM?



FIGURE 1. *New York Times* (April 26, 1914).

THE GRINGO SCHOOLMASTER



FIGURE 2. *Washington Times* (April 27, 1914).



WILL THEY EVER LEARN?

FIGURE 3. *New York Herald* (May 1, 1914).



FIGURE 4. *New York Sun* (June 4, 1914).

HOW FAR WILL HE GO?



FIGURE 5. *New York Tribune* (April 27, 1914).



FIGURE 6. *Minneapolis Journal* (May 8, 1914).

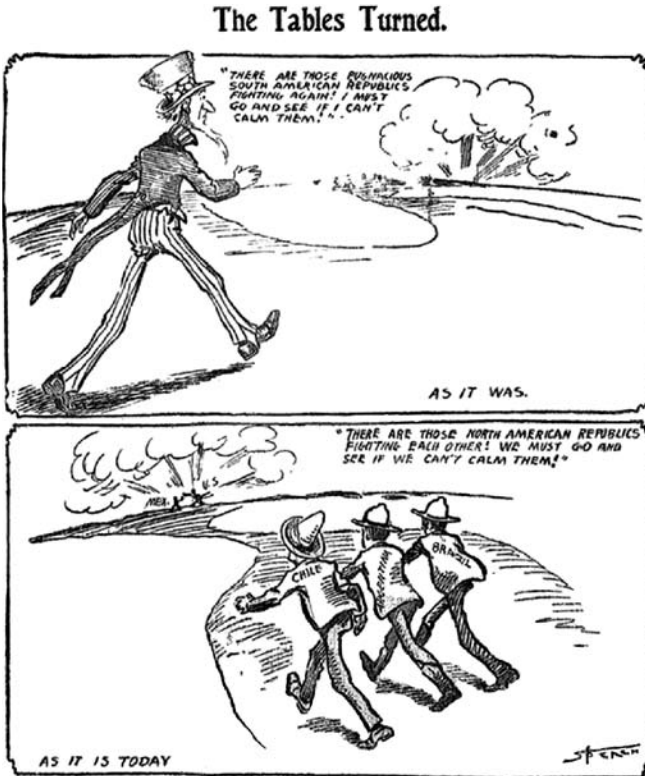


FIGURE 7. *World Herald* (Omaha, Nebraska).
(May 2, 1914).



FIGURE 8. *Philadelphia Record* (June 22, 1914).

GOAT ISLAND



FIGURE 9. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (June 19, 1914).



FIGURE 10. *Evening Sun* (New York City) (July 2, 1914).



FIGURE 11. *Washington Star* (April 28, 1914).

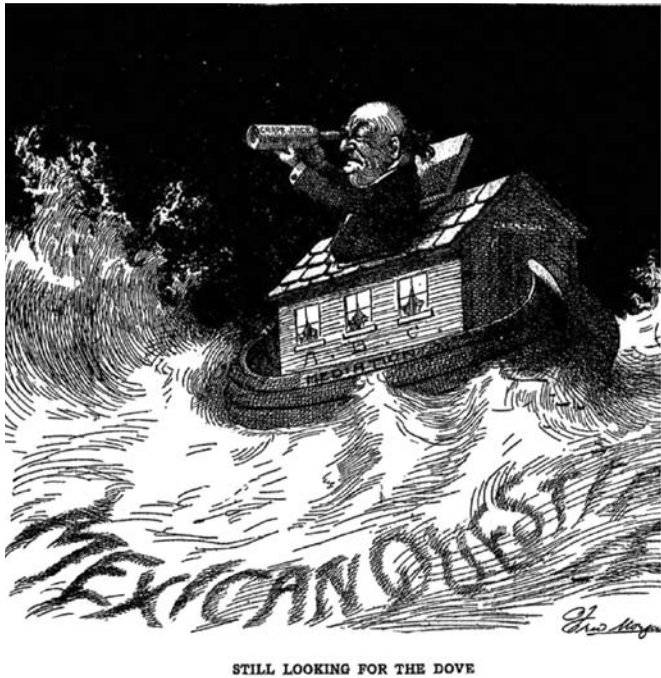


FIGURE 12. *Philadelphia Inquirer* (June 24, 1914).



FIGURE 13. *Winnipeg Tribune* (June 1, 1914).



FIGURE 14. *New York Tribune* (June 6, 1914).



FIGURE 15. *Philadelphia Inquirer* (June 6, 1914).



FIGURE 16. *Pittsburgh Dispatch* (June 11, 1914).



FIGURE 17. *Philadelphia Record* (June 14, 1914).



FIGURE 18. *Pittsburgh Dispatch* (June 18, 1914).

SETTLED



VILLA—Now you stay here and be good, and I'll let you be First Chief.

FIGURE 19. *New York Tribune* (June 20, 1914).

IT IS TO LAUGH



FIGURE 20. *San Francisco Chronicle* (June 26, 1914).



Figure 21. *New York Tribune* (July 1, 1914).



Appendix 2

“Mediation” *(from Punch)*

PUNCH'S VIEW OF THE “A, B, C’



New York Herald (May 18, 1914).



This short satiric play, published in the now-defunct British humour magazine *Punch*, is one of the few items in the Naón archive from Europe rather than North America. The following is the play in its entirety.

SCENE—*A room at Niagara Falls. The Argentine, the Brazilian and the Chilian mediators are mediating; that is to say, they are sitting on rocking chairs not very close to a large table covered with papers, pens, ink, etc. A deep noise of falling water pervades the air. Out of compliment to Canada, the conversation is carried on in English.*

Argentine Mediator—Cold, isn't it?

Brazilian Mediator—Yes, there's a great deal of cold in the atmosphere.

Chilian Mediator—We often get it colder than this in Chili.

(A pause.)

A.M.—There's a lot of water coming down.

B. M.—Yes, and it keeps coming, too, doesn't it?

C.M.—It isn't as noisy as I thought it would be, though.

A.M.—Oh, I don't know. It's quite noisy enough.

B.M.—Yet it's very difficult to concentrate one's mind. We've got a waterfall in Brazil which has the same effect. You can't do any work near it. People go there for a rest cure.



C.M.—There are a good many waterfalls in Chili, too, and they make more noise than this one.

(A pause.)

A.M.—How long do you think we shall be here?

B.M.—A week, or a month, or a year—I don't know.

C.M.—It's a dull place, isn't it?

B.M.—Dull as a ditchwaterfall. Ha ha!

C.M. and A.M. (together)—Ha ha! That's capital!

B.M.—You fellows must remind me to telegraph that home to Brazil.

A.M.—By the way, I see Roosevelt has been in Brazil.

B.M.—Yes; isn't it awful?

C.M.—Discovered a river, hasn't he?

B.M.—Something of that sort. He'll discover the world next.

A.M.—Anyhow, I'm glad he's not here.

B.M.—By Jove, yes. Wouldn't it be dreadful if he were?

C.M.—Don't. You make my flesh creep.

B.M.—After all, I'm not sure he's worse than Wilson. They are all alike, these Yankees. I've no use for them and their Monroe doctrine, have you?

A.M.—Not the slightest. If they think we're children they'll soon find out their mistake.

C.M.—Hear, hear!



(A pause.)

A.M.—Anything new from Mexico?

B.M.—No. Same old game.

C.M.—What's Huerta up to?

B.M.—Sitting tight.

A.M.—And what's Villa doing?

B.M.—Oh, he's been capturing Tampico a good deal lately.

C.M.—Isn't a fellow named Zapata chipping in somewhere?

B.M.—Yes, he's having a go, too.

(A pause.)

A.M.—I say, you men, I've got an idea.

B.M.—Out with it, then.

C.M.—Yes, let's have it then.

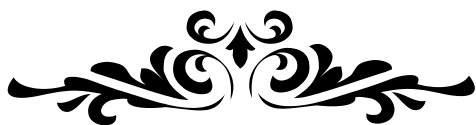
A. M.—Well, then, suppose we start by saying that Huerta and Wilson must both be eliminated. That'll please both sides. Huerta will be tickled to death if Wilson has to go, and Wilson will be delighted at our backing up his policy. What do you think?

B.M.—I can't think in all this noise.

C.M.—Nor can I, but I daresay it's all right.

A.M.—I'm glad you like the idea. It's fair to both sides, you see. That's what mediation's for.

(Left mediating.)



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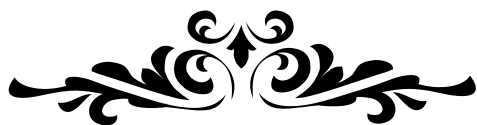
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