MATAMOROS: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CIVIL WAR AND NORTH AMERICAN BORDERLANDS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the geopolitical events along the lower Rio Grande from 1852-1867, with a coda in 1876, when combinations of filibusters, merchants, Federals, Confederates, Mexican Liberals and Mexican Imperialists all vied for geopolitical power and influence in the region during the various crises the United States (Civil War, Reconstruction) and Mexico (War of the Reform, French intervention) endured. By doing this I seek to decentralise and deinstitutionalise approaches to Civil War foreign policy on the Rio Grande, focusing instead on how non-state and what I term renegade state actors (that is, actors who belonged to a state institution but nonetheless followed their own policy) could impact, shape and influence geopolitical reality on the ground.[1]

This dissertation makes three arguments, each of them interlinked: firstly, the simultaneous crises in the United States and Mexico were perceived by some – such as Ulysses S. Grant – to be related to one another, where the outcome of one was meaningful to the outcome of the other. Secondly, in part as a consequence of this perceived relatedness, non-state and renegade state actors sought and occasionally succeeded in imposing their geopolitical visions on both the US and Mexican territory within the lower Rio Grande (and sometimes used the lower Rio Grande as a conduit through which to impose those visions on the nations as a whole). Thirdly, this dissertation argues that within the lower Rio Grande itself, non-state and renegade state actors were as successful as state actors in imposing their geopolitical visions, and sometimes more so. Therefore, a study that attempts to make sense

[1] By 'Liberals' I mean those who supported Benito Jaurez and the constitutional government; by 'Imperialists' I mean those who supported the French invasion and the crowning of Maximilian as Emperor of Mexico (in a military sense, this can include Europeans who fought for the Empire such as Ernst Pitner and his Austrian regiment). Due to French military support of the Imperial Mexican regime, the term 'Franco-Imperialist' is occasionally used in a military sense to denote an army comprised of both French and Imperialist forces. Imperial armies without French soldiers attached (or after the French withdrawal) are simply referred to as Imperialist.

of the geopolitical tangle along the lower Rio Grande in the 1850s and 60s that only focuses on state relations cannot accurately conceptualise the genesis, course and resolution of these events.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The only way I would ever dare compare myself to Cormac McCarthy is to note that he was also someone who was fascinated by the Texas-Mexico border, and by how sheer bloody *complicated* it all is. In his masterpiece *No Country for Old Men*, Vietnam veteran Llewellyn Moss, out hunting antelope near the Rio Grande, stumbles across the chaotic aftermath of a drug deal gone wrong, with cars, drugs, bodies and bullets strewn everywhere. Slowly, methodically, Moss pieces together what must have happened, although the exact details – why the deal went wrong, who shot first and so on – are never revealed either to him or to the reader. In writing this dissertation I have often felt myself somewhat akin to Moss, confronted with a chaotic picture and trying to make sense of it all without ever being able to observe what actually happened or hear the thought processes of the protagonists. Moss works it all out and finds the money, but it does not work out for him in the end; hopefully I avoid a similar fate.

Fortunately, I have not been alone in my endeavour, and multiple thanks are due. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professors Adam Smith and Pekka Hämäläinen, for their constant help and sage advice, especially, of course, when I didn't want to hear it. If I have improved in any way as a historian and critical thinker over the past three years, most of it is down to them constantly challenging me and interrogating my ideas.

Thanks are also due to historians Pablo Mijangos y Gonzalez, Jonathan Beall and Edward Shawcross for kindly answering my queries and helping direct my secondary reading and understanding of the mid-nineteenth century. Similarly, I must thank the members, both student and faculty, of the RAI who provided perceptive and extremely helpful criticism whenever I submitted papers to the American Graduate History Seminar.

Turning closer to home I must also thank my friends, particularly Taylor, John, Harry and Emma; my housemates, Jess, Miriam and Charlie, who are all terrible people; my girlfriend Susie; and my mother and grandfather. Above all I must thank my late nan, who when I was little, would patiently sit on her living room sofa watching daytime TV wearing a cowboy hat and holding a plastic six-shooter whilst I ran around pretending to be John Wayne. So you see, it's all her fault, really.

Naturally, I do not dare presume that my dissertation is either the final or the finest word to be said on this subject. If I could choose any epitaph for my thesis, it would be one that also comes from *No Country*, when Sheriff Ed Tom Bell and his deputy arrive at the drug-deal-gone-wrong site a few days after Moss and also take a look around.

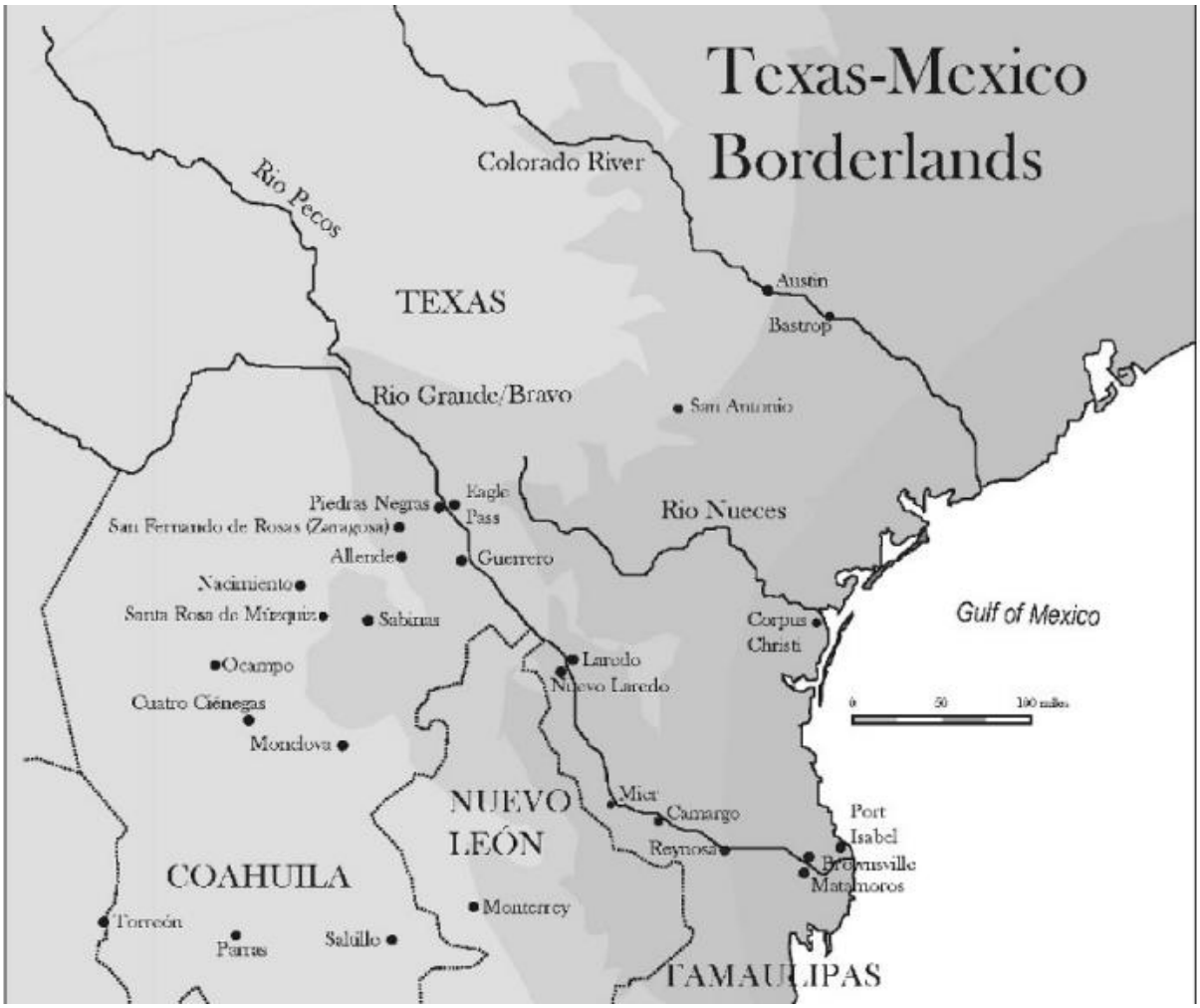
'Well Sheriff, this is a mess, ain't it?' says his deputy. 'If it ain't, it'll do till the mess gets here,' Bell replies.

In a similar way, I hope that this will do.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In the interests of an easier reading experience, I have standardised spellings of names and places. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century Matamoros was often written as *Matamoras*: I have updated all references to the modern spelling. Similarly, Jose Maria de Carvajal's name is sometimes written as *Carbajal* in primary sources. I have again standardised this to the modern spelling. Finally, in all sources I studied that were written documents such as the Stillman Papers and the Herron Collection, which I transcribed myself, I of course take full responsibility for any and all transliteration errors.

MAP


Texas-Mexico Borderlands
Rio Pecos
Colorado River
TEXAS
Austin
Bastrop
Rio Grande/Bravo
San Antonio
Piedras Negras
Eagle Pass
San Fernando de Rosas (Zaragosa)
Allende
Guerrero
Nacimiento
Santa Rosa de Múzquiz
Sabinas
Rio Nueces
Corpus Christi
Gulf of Mexico
Ocampo
Laredo
Nuevo Laredo
Cuatro Ciénegas
Monclova
Mier
Camargo
Port Isabel
Reynosa
Brownsville
Matamoros
NUEVO LEÓN
COAHUILA
Monterrey
Torreón
Parras
Saltillo
TAMAULIPAS

INTRODUCTION

In 1864, a Union courier slipped across the Rio Grande into Mexico. He presumably took the ferry that plied the river between the Texan town of Brownsville, occupied by Union forces since November 1863, and the Mexican town of Matamoros that faced it directly. The courier carried a letter from his commanding officer in Brownsville, Major-General Frank Herron, to his opposite number in Matamoros, a local *caudillo* who claimed to be acting in the name of President Benito Juarez named Juan Cortina. The letter contained a newspaper clipping from the *Houston Telegraph* in which the author advocated for a Confederate alliance with France, which had invaded Mexico in 1862 and had captured Mexico City in 1863 and installed the Austrian Archduke Maximilian as Emperor. 'You will readily perceive by reading it,' Herron wrote to Cortina, 'that the writer is quite as much an enemy to your Liberal Government as to that of the United States.' [2]

Herron's letter to Cortina raises a number of interesting questions. Firstly, were the American Civil War and French intervention in Mexico really related conflicts, as Herron apparently suggested, and if so how did they interact and intersect with one another? Secondly, why was Herron anxious to make Cortina aware of this? Thirdly, what effect did this relatedness, or perceived relatedness, have on both conflicts, especially in the area Herron and Cortina operated in, the lower Rio Grande? Fourthly, to what extent did these conflicts interact and intersect with one another as a result of central government policies, and to what extent was that interaction and intersection driven by non-state and what I term renegade state actors?

[2] Herron to Cortina, 14/6/64, Francis Jay Herron Collection, New York Historical Society [hereafter Herron Collection], 110

This dissertation seeks to address these questions. The lower Rio Grande was certainly a place of conflict interaction in the 1860s: by 1864, Union, Confederate, Mexican Liberal, Franco-Imperial and non-state forces were all operating in the area. This dissertation argues three things. Firstly, connections did exist, or were perceived to exist, between the Civil War and the French intervention, and more broadly between the sectional crises (North-South in the United States; conservative-liberal in Mexico) that existed in both countries. These connections were given practical expression along the lower Rio Grande during the 1850s and 60s, using diplomacy, warfare and trade and were often given expression by non-state or what I term renegade state actors.

By renegade state actors, I mean actors who belonged to a central state institution who nonetheless pursued their own policy, whether in opposition to central state policy or, in a sense, alongside it. This can, therefore, either mean actors who enacted the opposite of official state policy (for example, invasion of a neutral country) or pursued a policy somewhat in sympathy with official state policy (for example, supplying arms to a polity that the central state was in sympathy with). This is not to suggest that state actors not following official policy was (or indeed is) something unique to either the mid-nineteenth century or the lower Rio Grande, but rather that conceptualising and categorising the various actors in this way enables me to neatly assess whose actions were in service of official state policy and whose were not, whether they belonged to an institution of the state or otherwise.

Secondly, this dissertation argues that as a consequence of this geopolitical entanglement, state, non-state and renegade state actors sought to impose their geopolitical vision on either side of the Rio Grande simultaneously. In some cases, this was restricted to the lower Rio Grande region itself, and in others the lower Rio Grande was, in essence, the conduit through which this imposition was to be achieved. That these were not necessarily successful does not detract from the ability of non-state and renegade state actors to attempt

them. An example, addressed in more detail in Chapter 2, should hopefully illustrate what I mean: in 1860 the Knights of the Golden Circle planned to invade north-eastern Mexico and annex it to a Southern slave empire. In doing so, if successful, they would have transformed the political nature of the region (from part of the Mexican into part of the US polity) and its socioeconomic nature as well (from a free labour economy into a slave labour one). Equally, by doing so, this would have transformed the political nature not just of the region, but of the United States and Mexico as geopolitical and political entities as well.

Thirdly, this dissertation argues that non-state and renegade state actors were as capable of imposing their geopolitical visions than state actors were in the lower Rio Grande. For example, Southern and Mexican merchants were able to secure a free trade zone, the Zona Libre, along the lower Rio Grande as a concession from weak Mexican politicians. Equally, Union generals, acting against official US policy, were able in 1865 and 1866 to transport enough arms and ammunition to the Mexican Liberal government to enable them to drive back the Imperialists from the Rio Grande and begin the destruction of Maximilian's Empire. They were not always successful – the filibusters of the 1850s, for example, were complete failures. Non-state and renegade state actors could fail or succeed equally as well as state actors could in their policies. This shows how the lower Rio Grande was a place of 'polylateral' geopolitics, where the nation-state was only one of multiple actors (and, indeed, the nation-state itself was not a monolith).

North America in the mid-nineteenth century was a deeply politically unstable space, with the collapse of the United States into civil war, Mexico's own civil war followed by foreign invasion, the confederation of British North America into Canada, efforts of European empires to re-establish themselves in former colonies and continuing violence between Euro-American settlers and Native American tribes – and indeed, between the tribes themselves. Perhaps no one area of North America was more geopolitically unstable and fluid in this time

than the lower Rio Grande borderland, an area that may be said to stretch from San Antonio to San Luis Potosi latitudinally, and from Matamoros to Eagle Pass longitudinally. In the forty-five years from 1822 to 1867, a resident of this area may have come under the umbrella of Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the United States, the Confederacy and the Mexican Empire, and have fought against Spanish, Mexican, Texan, American, Union, Confederate, French, Imperialist and Native American forces, depending on their allegiance – all without moving house. This is without mentioning the polities that nearly came into being, such as the Republic of the Rio Grande, the Republic of the Sierra Madre and a Texan protectorate over north-eastern Mexico. No area witnessed a greater geopolitical churn – and consequently, witnessed a greater proliferation of geopolitical visions, state or otherwise.[3]

This dissertation examines the geopolitical dislocations in lower Rio Grande borderland from 1851 to 1867, when filibusters, merchants, revolutionaries, regional warlords, Union, Confederate, French and Imperial officials, and veterans of the Union and Confederate armies, all impacted the geopolitics of this region. From 1851 until 1860 merchants and filibusters attempted to invade north-eastern Mexico, either to carve out new polities of their own or to add it to the United States. During the Civil War, the ruler of north-eastern Mexico, Santiago Vidaurri, collaborated with the Confederacy in a great trade through the port of Matamoros, shipping cotton to Europe in return for arms and ammunition, whilst US Consuls rallied refugee Unionists, disaffected Mexicans and Tejanos and outlaws to attack and obstruct it. During the French intervention in Mexico, particularly after the end of the Civil War, Union officials and generals (particularly Ulysses Grant, Philip Sheridan and Lew Wallace) expedited the transfer of guns and men across the border to reinforce the Mexican Liberal forces, all against the official policy of the US administration. It is such

[3] For excellent overviews of the geopolitical turbulence in nineteenth-century North America, see Meinig, D.W., *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History Volume 2: Continental America, 1800-1867* (New Haven, 1993); Hahn, Steven, *A Nation without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830-1910* (New York, 2016)

official foreign policies of central governments – whether based in Washington, Mexico City or Richmond – that I define as *state policy*. Consequently, *state actors* are those who belong to a state institution (the Department of State, the executive branch, the Armed Forces) and who try to implement state policy. *Renegade state actors*, on the other hand, are those who belong to such a state institution and are tasked with carrying out state policy, but who subvert or even utilise the power of that state institution in order to pursue their own policy. This dissertation does not argue that actors such as the filibusters, Vidaurri or Grant were always more important than central state governments and their representatives, but rather that the course of sectional and geopolitical upheaval within and between Mexico and the United States on the lower Rio Grande cannot be understood without acknowledging the interplay of power, impact and influence between these various actors and state polities.[4]

Methodologically, in exploring the interplay between the various geopolitical visions, state, non-state and renegade state, that affected Mexico and the United States along the lower Rio Grande, this dissertation is faced with a bewildering array of possible approaches: global, local, glocal, transnational, borderland. The differences between such approaches can appear inordinately minute and obtuse, and one is reminded of those theological councils that met to discuss parts of church doctrine in the medieval and early modern periods. In the end, I have opted for a methodological framework that is not precisely any of these.

Perhaps it is easier to start a methodological overview by outlining what this dissertation is definitely not – which is, a nation-centric, border-bound approach. Indeed, taking a more traditional, state-centred approach – studying Southern filibustering and the Civil War within the boundaries of the United States, and the French intervention within the

[4] For my use of 'foreign policy' as a term that can include state interactions with non-state actors or agencies, I refer to definitions given by Hedley Bull and R.P. Barston. (See Bull, Hedley, *The Anarchical Society* (London, 1977), 162 and Barston, R.P., *Modern Diplomacy* (London, 1997), 1.) At this point I should make clear that I use Mexican and Tejano to denote national rather than cultural/ethnic allegiances. Thus 'Mexicans' are citizens of Mexico, whilst 'Tejanos' are Hispanic citizens of Texas (who were overall culturally and ethnically closer to Mexico than the USA).

boundaries of Mexico – makes no sense in the context of the events that took place along the lower Rio Grande. It was, as Karl Jacoby has suggested, the 'most liminal space between the United States and Mexico.' Southern and Mexican filibusters sought to carve out new polities in northern Mexico. A major blockade-running operation that sustained the Transmississippi's war effort took place through Mexico and was participated in and enabled by Mexicans, up to and including President Benito Juarez himself (not to mention Europeans and even some Northerners). Mexicans and Unionist refugees raided across the Rio Grande into Texas, whilst Confederate cavalry counter-raided into Mexico. French troops crossed the Rio Grande to participate in the Battle of Palmito Ranch in May 1865, whilst thousands of former Union troops (and Union guns) moved southwards after June 1865 to reinforce Liberal armies. A national framework, by its very nature, cannot consider these conflicts and connections together. The very nature of these historical events, therefore, dictate a different kind of framework.[5]

A global approach might seem the obvious one. Global history has been defined by Dominic Sachsenmaier as 'the search for alternative conceptions of space.' Similarly, as Sebastian Conrad notes, global history is simply a way 'of exploring historical issues without confining themselves a priori to the boundaries of nation-states, empires, or other political entities.' The events at Matamoros and the lower Rio Grande took place on and across multiple borders – the Union, the Confederacy, the Republic and the Empire in a state sense, but also the maritime border between European empires (and merchants) and North America. As this dissertation focuses on the lower Rio Grande as a place of connection and intersection, a place through which multiple geopolitical agencies were pursued, a global approach would seem to work best as the framework for all these events. As A.G. Hopkins

[5] For an excellent outline of the value of this approach, see Bender, Thomas, *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York, 2006); Jacoby, Karl, *The Strange Career of William Ellis* (New York, 2016), 68

has noted in reference to islands, though it works equally well for the boomtowns of the lower Rio Grande, they 'were not merely backwaters serving as minor recipients of much larger influences, but cosmopolitan centres that connected entire continents with flows of goods, people and ideas.' Again, it is clear that the lower Rio Grande fulfilled this function in the 1850s and '60s.[6]

However, the problem with taking a global approach is that, paradoxically, it can imply a worldview that focuses on local reaction to national or imperial action. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for example, has examined how Calcutta and Bengal reacted to the interloping and imposition of British rule. Such an approach implies a Hegelian dialectic of actor and reactor, thesis and antithesis. This dissertation, in contrast, argues that national and subnational entities were simultaneously acting upon and reacting to one another, both within and between nation-states. It is this interplay that, in part, the dissertation seeks to capture. Global history can reorient our focus from the metropole to the periphery, from the centre to the region, from the powerful to the powerless; and whilst this is important and useful, the end result can be simply to reverse the existing nation-state framework, rather than develop a new one.[7]

If global history is too diffuse a term, perhaps borderlands history is more specific. Borderlands history can be traced back to the work of Herbert Bolton in the 1930s but really began to develop as an approach over the last thirty years. 'Borderlands' history, however, can be methodologically ambiguous and cover a range of approaches, as Pekka Hämäläinen and Benjamin H. Johnson have noted: borderlands can be defined as 'permeable boundaries that both divide and connect . . . [or] borderless spaces . . . [or] specific regions with distinct

[6] Sachsenmaier, Dominic, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge, 2011), 2; Conrad, Sebastian, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, 2017), 38; Hopkins, A.G., *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton, 2018), 18

[7] Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000). For a delineation of the positives and negatives of Chakrabarty's approach, see Argyrou, Vassos, 'Provincialising Europe: Questions of Method and Strategy,' *Social Anthropology*, Vol. 9. No. 2 (2001), 217-22

social forms . . . [or] non-physical cultural frontiers.' Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, for example, in a widely read and influential codification of borderlands, have defined a borderland as a place of 'contested boundaries between colonial domains,' a definition that is somewhat problematic, as Native American polities could also be imperialist in outlook. It also suggests that a settler-settler border between nation-states obeys a different set of dynamics and does not count as a borderland.[8]

Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, on the other hand, have defined borderlands as places 'of economic exchange, cultural mixing, and political contestation at the edges of empires, nations, and world systems.' Hämäläinen and Truett have emphasised how in the borderlands 'history pivoted not only on a succession of state-centred polities but also on other turning points anchored in vast stretches of America where the visions of empires and nations often foundered and the future was far from certain.' Both borderlands and global history have an ambiguity about their precise definition, and consequently their precise application.[9]

Rather than any of these approaches, I have chosen to adopt what Mexican historian Carlos Rico Ferrat describes as an 'intermestic' framework. A historian of Mexican-US relations in the twentieth century, Ferrat describes their experiences in the twentieth century as 'intermestic': that is, in his own words, 'there are issues that are at the same time domestic and international. Most of the agenda in United States-Mexican relations is intermestic.' I have chosen this framework because Ferrat specifically developed it to deal with the contiguous histories of Mexico and the United States, and a framework that treats developments in Mexico and the United States as both international and domestic in cause

[8] Bolton, Herbert E., *Wider Horizons of American History* (New York, 1939); *Major Problems in the History of North American Borderlands* (Boston, 2012), ed. Hämäläinen, Pekka and Johnson, Benjamin H., xviii; Adelman, Jeremy and Aron, Stephen, 'From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,' *American Historical Review* Vol. 104, No. 3 (1999), 816

[9] Hämäläinen, Pekka and Truett, Samuel, 'On Borderlands,' *Journal of American History*, Vol. 98 No. 2 (2011), quotes 338, 340

and effect perfectly fits an examination of the intersections between the sectional crises in Mexico and the United States as they bordered one another on the lower Rio Grande.[10]

In order to fully conceptualise the role of non-state and renegade state actors in foreign policies, I have drawn on ideas from the field of International Relations. Geoffrey Wiseman, for example, has argued that 'traditional, state-centred "bilateral" and "multilateral" diplomatic concepts and practices need to be complemented with explicit awareness of a further layer of diplomatic interaction and relationships . . . the "polylateral" level.' Wiseman defines this 'polylateral diplomacy' as 'relations between states and other entities.' In a similar vein, Ning An, Min Wang and Hong Zhu have recently drawn attention to what they term 'non-state geopolitical agency' in modern diplomacy. In this way the interaction between non-state, renegade state and nonelite actors and states' foreign policy making (and the geopolitical visions of the former) can be conceptualised.[11]

What does geopolitical agency mean? For An, Wang and Zhu, it is 'the role of non-state actors in the (co)production of geopolitical meaning' – that is, how actors outside the state can help shape geopolitical reality. 'Agency' as a concept can be as limiting as it is enlightening if, as Walter Johnson for example argues, it forms the conclusion to an historical investigation: for instance, 'slaves had agency.' Rather, borrowing from Johnson, Joan Scott and others, this dissertation takes the existence of agency as a starting point. What situations

[10] Thelen, David, 'Mexico, the Latin North American Nation: A Conversation with Carlos Rico Ferrat,' *The Journal of American History,* Vol 86 No. 2, Rethinking History and the Nation-State: Mexico and the United States as a Case Study: A Special Issue (1999), 473

[11] Wiseman, Geoffrey, '"Polylateralism" and New Modes of Global Dialogue,' *Diplomatic Studies Programme Discussion Papers*, No. 59 (1999), 3; An, Ning, Wang, Min and Zhu, Hong, 'The geopolitics of a female Chinese migrant charity network in Zimbabwe: Insights from *Love in Africa*,' *Social and Cultural Geography*, Vol. 24 No. 7 (2023), 1264

conferred geopolitical agency on people? How did they utilise this agency? What impact did it have?[12]

Applying these concepts of polylateral diplomacy and geopolitical agency opens up new perspectives on the lower Rio Grande borderland in the mid-nineteenth century. Previous studies of the borderland have conceptualised it as drawing to a close by this time. Adelman and Aron, for example, note that by 1860 the lower Rio Grande had effectively changed from a borderland into a 'bordered land.' Similarly, David Weber brings his study of the Mexican frontier to an end in 1846, whilst Andres Resendez declares the Mexican-American War to be 'the end of an era' and that 'the consolidation of nation-states . . . marked a new plateau in the frontier experience.' In this reading, the 1848 definition of the US-Mexico border embodied in the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo is seen as the defining geopolitical event, a caesura that separates a borderlands world from a world of bordering nation-states. The actions of non-state actors then become defined by their reaction to domestic policies and dynamics in either the United States or Mexico; as Samuel Truett phrases it, borderlanders are reduced to 'how they chose to adapt to this world, what they dreamed about when they looked north and south, and what their strategies were for dealing with modernity.' The role of non-state and nonelite actors in the lower Rio Grande borderland therefore becomes *reactive* rather than *active*, and defined by domestic nation-state policies and prejudices rather than geopolitical interplay.[13]

In part, this is reflective of the particular focus of individual historical works. Brian DeLay, for example, has examined the raids of Native Americans into Mexico and their influence on the outcome of the Mexican-American War. Consequently, there is little point in

[12] Ibid, 1265; Johnson, Walter, 'On Agency,' *Journal of Social History,* Vol. 37 (2003), 113-24; Scott, Joan W., 'The Evidence of Experience,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17 (1991), 773-97

[13] Adelman and Aron, 'From Borderlands to Borders,' 837; Weber, David, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque, 1982); Resendez, Andres, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge, 2005) 14, 269; Truett, Samuel, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the US-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven, 2006), 8

pushing his analysis far beyond 1848 when the war ended. Similarly, a recent wave of scholarship has examined how the new geopolitical reality of the border post-1848 affected borderlanders. This is normally framed in terms of the tensions between the Tejano and Anglo communities. As Pekka Hämäläinen and Benjamin H. Johnson note, such studies 'focused their attention on the marginalisation and racialisation of Mexican-descent people in the US Southwest after 1848.' What is absent, in many of these examinations of the lower Rio Grande borderland, is the role of geopolitics, which is seemingly assumed to end with the 1848 creation of the border and, by extension, the role borderlanders could play within geopolitical relations between the US and Mexico. In this reading, the transformation from 'borderland to bordered land' forces the borderland into the straitjackets of US or Mexican nationality and, by implication, a US or Mexican state-directed geopolitics. This suggests a loss of geopolitical agency. In contrast, this dissertation argues that the creation of the border actually created the environment for geopolitical visions that could be state, non-state, renegade state, elite and nonelite in character, or a combination thereof and could shape, impact and influence the policies pursued in Washington, Mexico City and Richmond.[14]

It also reflects the methodological ambiguity that a borderlands approach can fall prey to, and that Hämäläinen and Johnson have differentiated: is it a settler-indigenous borderland or a settler-settler border? In addition, is borderlands history a new approach to the imperial conquest of North America (by European empires and/or and settler republics) or is it an examination of communities living along the border? If a work is based upon the former approach, then naturally in the US Southwest 'borderland' studies of the area end around the time this study begins. However, simply because the US-Mexican border has not moved since

[14] DeLay, Brian, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the US-Mexican War* (New Haven, 2008); *Major Problems*, ed. Hämäläinen and Johnson, xvi; Villanueva Jr., Nicholas, *The Lynching of Mexicans in the Texas Borderlands* (Albuquerque, 2017); Mora, Anthony, *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848-1912* (Durham, NC, 2011); Menchaca, Martha, *Naturalising Mexican Immigrants: A Texas History* (Austin, 2011)

1848 on the lower Rio Grande (and since 1854 along its entire length) does not mean there have not been geopolitical dislocations, whether attempted or actual, which affected both nation-states, or attempts to impose a vision of how either nation-state should be, either in their entirety or just along the lower Rio Grande.

Rachel St. John has noted that 'borderlands historians . . . have often treated the borer itself as an irrelevant or incidental part of the borderlands.' However, a more recent wave of scholarship has begun to push back against this earlier view, challenging the distinction between borderland and 'bordered land' and the implicit loss of geopolitical agency and relevance in the lower Rio Grande area after 1848. James David Nichols focuses on the issue of mobility in the lower Rio Grande borderland, and observes that 'instead of closure, I found continuity.' Nichols has uncovered 'a praxis of mobility toward political ends that predated the arrival of dividing lines and remained in place long after governments drew their boundaries.' Indeed, Nichols notes that this drawing of boundaries has in fact 'only encouraged greater mobility' since 'everyone [now] knew where the dividing line was.' In his examination of the late-nineteenth century Mexican revolutionary Catarino Garza, Elliott Young has pushed this analysis beyond the Civil War era, noting how his revolt 'questioned the notion of the inviolability and integrity of national borders.' Similarly, Omar Valerio-Jimenez has examined how 'the redrawing of borders . . . neither began nor ended the region's long history of power relations.' As Young notes, the US-Mexican border cut through the lower Rio Grande, but 'the nation-state project of severing these communities, however, remains even today only partially completed.' In other words, 'the very act of establishing the border created similar structural conditions on either side of the boundary in relation to the central state' – or, as this dissertation argues, to both central states and their foreign policies.[15]

[15] Rachel, St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western US-Mexico Border* (Princeton, 2011), 5; Nichols, James David, *The Limits of Liberty: Mobility and the Making of the Eastern US-Mexico Border* (Lincoln, 2018),

In his examination of Garza's revolt, Young is focussing on how a non-state actor could attempt geopolitical dislocation in the lower Rio Grande borderland in the late nineteenth century. Other recent studies have examined the impact of non-state actors in the borderland on state foreign policies. Alice Baumgartner, for example, has examined how the desire to stop slaves running away to Mexico via the borderland drove the US annexation of Texas and the war with Mexico. In turn, this externally-faced policy rebounded internally, helping to set the stage for the American Civil War. As she notes, 'enslaved people who escaped to Mexico and the antislavery laws that entitled them to freedom contributed to the outbreak of a major sectional controversy over the future of human bondage in the United States.' Similarly, remaining in the lower Rio Grande borderland, Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga has examined how cooperation across racial, class and national lines could both create and terminate violence, from the 1830s to the 1880s, and the effect this had on the geopolitics of the region.[16]

Rather than focussing on state actors and state organisations, this dissertation instead focusses on two other types of actors and their impact on geopolitics: non-state and renegade state (and, where such terms overlap, nonelite actors as well). As Gonzalez-Quiroga notes in reference to the lower Rio Grande borderland: 'some historians have assigned such people minor roles, but they made up the substance of historical processes and movements and shaped the decisions of those in power.' Methodologically, this can be difficult as many of these actors did not leave behind records of their actions or of the motivations for what they did. This dissertation therefore often has to rely on official sources, but reads them against the grain to investigate not the power of state actors pursuing official state policies, but rather

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quotes 226-27; Young, Elliott, *Catarino Garza's Revolution on the Texas-Mexico Border* (Durham, NC, 2004), 4, 6; Valerio-Jimenez, Omar, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham, NC, 2012), 1. For a work that straddles both approaches, see Montejano, David, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin, 1987)

[16] Baumgartner, Alice, *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to Civil War* (New York, 2020), quote 7; Gonzalez-Quiroga, Miguel Angel, *War and Peace on Rio Grande, 1830-1880* (Norman, 2020)

where this may be infringed or impeded by non-state, renegade state and nonelite actors, and how official central policy may have been impacted or influenced, positively or negatively, by these actors in the lower Rio Grande.[17]

Recently, antebellum and Civil War era historiography has begun to address this decentralised and deinstitutionalised approach. Evan Rothera, for example, has examined the connections between the Civil War, the French intervention in Mexico and civil wars in Argentina, and has devoted part of his focus to what he terms 'transnational warriors': men who travelled to these various countries to fight in their conflicts for ideological reasons. He has warned how 'studies of foreign policy sometimes focus on top policymakers, particularly the secretary of state, to the exclusion of everyone else.' Similarly, Beau Cleland, in an examination of the role merchants played in blockade-running in the West Indies during the Civil War, has called for a 'deinstitutionalisation of diplomatic history,' and for historians to 'reconsider how and why individuals and subnational groups shaped the course of the war and international relations in the nineteenth century.' In reference to the Civil War era, Cleland calls for an 'embrace [of] the trend in histories of empire and sovereignty that deemphasizes the role of the state by decentring the diplomatic history of the war from the State Department or Foreign Office and placing focus on the people who personally shaped the transformation of state policy into action and, perhaps more frequently, vice versa.'[18]

Andrew Isenberg and Thomas Richards have also argued that histories of the antebellum and Civil War era place too much emphasis on government policy, noting that 'we must differentiate between the policies and actions of the federal government, and the actions and goals of American settlers in a plethora of western regions.' Similarly, Thomas Richards,

[17] Ibid, 3

[18] Rothera, Evan C., *Civil Wars and Reconstructions in the Americas: The United States, Mexico and Argentina, 1860-1880* (Baton Rouge, 2022), 66; Cleland, Beau, 'Sustaining the Confederacy: Informal Diplomacy, Anglo-Confederate Relations and Blockade-Running in the Bahamas,' *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 89 No. 1 (2023), 62. Cleland cites two particular examples of this approach in Belich, James, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (New York, 2009); Hopkins, *American Empire*

Jr, has argued that American antebellum expansionism should be understood more in terms of individual settlers' conception of the North American continent than of US government policy, drawing a distinction between the American nation and the US state. As Richards notes of these settlers, 'they possessed political, social, economic and ideological goals of their own . . . their destinies were fundamentally pragmatic.' Sarah Rodriguez, meanwhile, has emphasises how Anglo-American migration to Texas helped (indirectly) to drive US expansion, and argues that the US rise to continental dominance had paradoxically more to do with its own weakness than its strength – in other words, US sovereignty was dragged along behind the agency of American settlers, both in Texas and elsewhere. Maria Angela Diaz has explored how Gulf of Mexico communities helped facilitate, resisted and participated in Southern expansionism before and during the Civil War.[19]

Nathan Citino, Rachel St. John and William S. Kiser have noted the failure of histories to address the importance of local actors along the US-Mexico border (and elsewhere) until very recently. As Citino notes, 'by focusing on official diplomacy, historians of American foreign relations tend to neglect behaviours on the ground and the complexity of inter-group relations carried on beneath the radar of state policy.' Similarly, St. John has argued that 'the border lay at the centre of a borderlands region in which private individuals and government agents continued to contest the limits of state authority and national identity long after the establishment of fixed national boundaries.' Focussing directly on the US-Mexico border during the Civil War, Kiser argues that an 'overlooked component of this story

[19] Isenberg, Andrew and Richards, Thomas, 'Alternative Wests: Rethinking Manifest Destiny,' *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 86 No. 1 (2017), 17; Richards, Jr. Thomas, *Breakaway Americas* (Baltimore, 2020), 7; Rodriguez, Sarah, 'Children of the Great Mexican Family: Anglo-American Immigration to Texas and the Making of the American Empire, 1820-1861,' PhD dissertation (2015), 4; Diaz, Maria Angela, *A Continuous State of War: Empire Building and Race Making in the Civil War-Era Gulf South* (Athens, Ga., 2024)

involves the foundational role of irregular diplomacy and nation building in the US-Mexico borderlands.'[20]

Taking this one step further, Matthew Christopher Hurlbut and Karl Jacoby have recently examined the agency, geopolitical and otherwise, of distinct individuals in relation to the US-Mexican border in the Civil War and postbellum eras. Hurlbut follows the career of John Newman Edwards, perhaps most famous as the journalistic champion of Jesse James, who fought in the Civil War and then travelled to Mexico to throw in his lot with the Emperor Maximilian. As Hurlbut notes, following Edwards invites us to reconfigure the special and temporal dimensions of the Civil War, as a conflict that extended much further south, much further west and went on for much longer than was previously thought. Jacoby, meanwhile, follows the 'strange career' of one William Ellis, a former Texan slave who became a millionaire in Mexico. Jacoby notes that the border divides 'not only two nations but also two historiographical traditions': US, north of the border, and Latin American to the south. Jacoby argues that 'those who move between the United States and Mexico . . . tend to elude historians, their experiences falling through the artificial partitions we impose on the past.' By focussing on these border-crossing individuals such as John Newman Edwards and William Ellis (or, in this dissertation's case, filibusters, merchants, generals, soldiers and *caudillos*), why they did so and what effect it had, we can, in Jacoby's phrase, 'craft a truly American history – that is, a history not of the United States or Mexico, or even of their shared border region, but rather a history that encompasses the North American continent in its entirety.'[21]

[20] Citino, Nathan J., 'The Global Frontier: Comparative History and the Frontier-Borderlands Approach in American Foreign Relations,' *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 25 No. 4 (2001), 688; St. John, Rachel, *A Line in the Sand* (Princeton, 2011), 9; Kiser, William S., *Illusions of Empire* (Philadelphia, 2022), 7

[21] Hurlbut, Matthew Christopher, *Oracle of Lost Causes: John Newman Edwards and His Never-Ending Civil War* (Lincoln, Na.., 2023), xxix; Jacoby, Karl, *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire* (New York, 2016), xix, xxv

What forms did this geopolitical agency take? To categorise this, I have drawn from the work of Bridget Coggins, who has examined 'rebel diplomacy' in the modern era. For Coggins, modern rebels are defined by their non-state and non-institutional nature – in other words, they are decentralised and deinstitutionalised. According to Coggins, this form of diplomacy 'pursue[s] what we might call the externally oriented face of governance, procuring legitimacy and goods through foreign engagement and the strategic use of talk . . . in addition to achieving a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.' Borrowing from Coggins, therefore, non-state, renegade state and nonelite geopolitical agency may be divided into the categories of force, trade and talk. This dissertation will use these categories throughout to examine the geopolitical impact and agency of non-state, renegade state and nonelite actors in the lower Rio Grande borderland.[22]

These forms of geopolitical agency can be seen throughout the time period this dissertation focuses on. In the decade prior to the Civil War, Southern and Mexican filibusters used force, trade and talk (primarily force) in an attempt to carve out new polities along the lower Rio Grande. In 1851, Southern merchants sponsored Mexican filibusters on the lower Rio Grande who sought to create their own republic, in order to change the borderland into a free trade zone – the so-called 'Merchants' War.' Filibuster incursions along the Rio Grande continued throughout the 1850s. The 'Cortina War' of 1859-60 threatened to provide a major opportunity for filibusters, as Juan Cortina led Mexicans and Tejano settlers in what was effectively an uprising against the US state and Governor Sam Houston advocated invasion of northern Mexico in retaliation and the establishment of a protectorate, but eventually Cortina was defeated and the crisis soon superseded by that of secession and civil war.

[22] Coggins, Bridget, 'Rebel Diplomacy: Theorising Violent Non-State Actors' Use of Talk,' in *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge, 2015), ed. Arjona, Ana, Kasfir, Nelson and Mampilly, Zachariah, 98-99, 102. As Coggins notes, 'diplomacy' is the preserve of recognised states; hence she uses the term 'talk' in her examination of rebel foreign relations instead. (Ibid, 101.)

The same forces can be seen at work during the Civil War. The trade through Matamoros was begun by non-state merchants and the Confederacy's attempts to procure arms through it was often impeded by them. Mexicans such as Vidaurri, Cortina and even Benito Juarez himself attempted to control the flow of the trade. Meanwhile, non-state and nonelite actors, drawn by the economic boom the wartime cotton trade engendered, arrived in the borderland to economically profit from it, which of course only pushed the trade on.

Equally, from 1863 onwards the Union utilised the lower Rio Grande to oppose the French intervention in Mexico, an opposition that steadily increased in hostility and aggression as the intervention went on. In November 1863, Lincoln sent a Union army to the lower Rio Grande as a warning to Napoleon III. Arms and ammunition were surreptitiously sent across the Rio Grande to the *Juaristas* from at least 1864 onwards, in contravention of official Union policy. In January 1865, General Lew Wallace arrived on the lower Rio Grande with orders from Lincoln to propose the surrender of the Confederate Transmississippi based on a joint invasion of Mexico to defeat the French. Finally, from the summer of 1865 onwards Generals Ulysses Grant and Philip Sheridan utilised the lower Rio Grande to send large numbers of arms and volunteers to Benito Juarez to help turn the tide against the French intervention in Mexico, again contravening the official policy of the United States government.

In all of these foreign policies, state or otherwise, the most important factors were force, trade and talk. In this way, the foreign policies of non-state or renegade state actors acted as proxies for state diplomacy and state geopolitical action: they were statelike without being states themselves. Force was used by the Union and the Confederacy to try and secure the lower Rio Grande militarily and as an implicit threat behind diplomatic negotiations beyond their borders, and by the South to transform the geopolitical relations of the region. Trade was utilised by the Confederacy to bring arms and ammunition into Texas in return for

cotton going out, helping to maintain the struggle against the Union and being used to suggest a *de facto* legitimacy. The Union attempted to block this trade, and from 1864 traded guns southwards to support the Mexican Republicans in their struggle against the Empire. Finally, the Confederacy, the South – not technically states themselves –and the Union used talk with both state and non-state actors to advance their own particular foreign policies.

Theorised in this way – non-state and renegade state actors utilising force, trade and talk to pursue their own and influence state foreign policies – we can also see many other examples in borderlands both American and otherwise. For example, in 1836 during the Texas Revolution General Edmund Gaines marched his troops into Texas without President Jackson's permission. In 1846, John C. Fremont encouraged the breakaway Bear Flag Republic in California during the Mexican-American War and only reluctantly acceded to its takeover by US Navy and Army officials. Beyond North America, in 1879 Sir Henry Bartle Frere invaded Zululand in South Africa against the orders of the British government, whilst in 1885 Charles Gordon decided to stay in Khartoum, again against British government orders, starting and prolonging a geopolitical conflict respectively. Other contemporaneous examples include Yakub Beg, who carved out his own empire in the Central Asian borderlands, and even Garibaldi's Thousand who helped effect the Unification of Italy. Non-state, renegade state and nonelite geopolitical agency as a function of borders was not a phenomenon unique to the lower Rio Grande: it was a recognisable geopolitical dynamic of the nineteenth-century world.[23]

[23] Remini, Robert V., *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845: Volume III* (New York, 1984), 357; Chaffin, Tom, *Pathfinder: John Charles Fremont and the Course of American Empire* (New York, 2002), 321-44; Knight, Ian, *Brave Men's Blood: The Epic of the Zulu War, 1879* (London, 1990); Thompson, Brian, *Imperial Vanities: The Adventures of the Baker Brothers and Gordon of Khartoum* (London, 2002); Yuan, Tsing, 'Yakub Beg (1820-1877) and the Moslem Rebellion in Chinese Turkestan,' *Central Asiatic Journal*, Vol. 6 No. 2 (1961), 134-67; Scirocco, Alfonso, *Garibaldi: Citizen of the World: A Biography* (Princeton, 2021)

What connected all of these was the existence of state political struggle, internal, external or both, usually violently expressed, and the desire for economic expansion. The creation of or desire for a 'boom' (usually by non-state actors) could prompt geopolitical agency, and both helped engender and was reflective of non-state foreign policies. Viewed in this way, the lower Rio Grande borderland today is home to many of the same dynamics that characterised the 1850s and 60s, with the rise of the drug cartels. The economic boom of cotton has been replaced by the economic boom of cocaine, and instead of goods flowing southwards goods now flow northwards instead. Thus, whilst the 1850s and 60s might have seen the end of the borderland world historians such as Adelman and Aron have defined, the very creation of that borderline enabled state, non-state and renegade state actors to attempt and impose their geopolitical and geoeconomic visions on both the United States and Mexico.[24]

There have been several works on Southern filibustering in recent years, both before and during the Civil War. Robert May, Matthew Karp, Charles H. Brown, Matthew Guterl and Kevin Waite have all emphasised the importance of expansion to the South and by extension to the Confederacy. Several of these have touched on filibustering into Mexico; as Robert May noted 'Mexico was simply too visible and accessible a target to be overlooked' by Southerners. Maria Angela Diaz has likewise examined the praxis of antebellum Southern expansionism in the Gulf of Mexico. The best studies of the antebellum filibustering expeditions along the lower Rio Grande are regional studies such as those by Miguel

[24] My thinking on the importance of 'booms' has been much influenced by Belich, *Replenishing the Earth;* Resendez, *Changing National Identities*; Andreas, Peter, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade made America* (New York, 2013); Smith, Joshua S., *Borderland Smuggling: Patriots, Loyalists, and Illicit Trade in the Northeast, 1783-1820* (Gainesville, 2006). For the influence of economic booms, licit or otherwise, in the Southwest US see Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*; Diaz, George T., *Border Contraband: A History of Smuggling across the Rio Grande* (Austin, 2015); Kearney, Milo and Knopp, Anthony, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin, 1991). The comparison between the events of the 1850s and 1860s and the operation of the drug cartels will be addressed in the Conclusion.

Gonzalez-Quiroga and Jerry Thompson. By their nature these focus on non-state and renegade state actors.[25]

Despite Southern antebellum expansionism, Confederate diplomacy was in many ways supplicatory, even hesitant, both to state actors such as Napoleon III and renegade state actors such as Santiago Vidaurri. The dominant work on Confederate diplomacy remains *King Cotton Diplomacy* by Frank Owsley. For Owsley, Confederate diplomacy 'centred around the well-known dependence of Europe, especially England and France, upon an uninterrupted supply of cotton from the southern states' and therefore focuses upon Confederate relations to Europe, with Mexico a secondary consideration. Most diplomatic and global histories of the Civil War have followed Owsley's lead and pay only glancing attention to the lower Rio Grande (indeed, many of them even less than he did), even though, in Don Doyle's words, it 'would provide a vital lifeline to overseas shipments of essential supplies' and as Owsley noted 'Mexico was in many respects the most vital foreign problem with which the Confederacy had to deal.' [26]

Overall, the historiographical focus on Southern geopolitical agency has been on the Caribbean and on non-state actors (filibusters), whilst studies of Confederate geopolitical agency have focused on Europe and on state actors (or what approximate to state actors for the Confederacy); as William S. Kiser has noted, little has been done to examine the praxis of Confederate geopolitical agency in the same area where its Southern antebellum counterpart was attempted, nor has there been much attempt to examine what Kiser calls 'the

[25] May, Robert E., *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1973), quote 137; Karp, Matthew, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Ma., 2016); Brown, Charles H., *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters* (Chapel Hill, 1980); Guterl, Matthew, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, Ma., 2008); Waite, Kevin, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire* (Chapel Hill, 2021); Diaz, *A Continuous State of War;* Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*; Thompson, Jerry, *Cortina: Defending the Mexican Name in Texas* (College Station, 2007)

[26] Owsley, Frank Lawrence, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (Chicago, 1931), 1, 87; Doyle, Don H., *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York, 2015), 118

interconnectedness of antebellum foreign policy, wartime diplomacy, and postwar Reconstruction across the entire US-Mexico borderlands.' Only two major works, by James Daddysman and James Irby, focus directly on the Civil War trade through Matamoros and neither engages with the filibustering that occurred in the previous decade or with Union support for the Mexican Republic during the French intervention. Both are essentially narrative histories of the rise and fall of the trade. They do not examine either continuities or change from what occurred geopolitically in the borderland either before or after the trade itself. This dissertation differs from most other approaches to the lower Rio Grande at this time by in effect decentring the Matamoros trade from its examination and in fact argues that the boom along the lower Rio Grande actually began with the creation of the Zona Libre in 1858 rather than the Civil War trade in 1861. By framing the Matamoros trade not just as a product of the Civil War but also as a product of a mercantile geopolitical and geoeconomic vision, this dissertation foregrounds the role of merchants in the trade – something which is in many ways historically just, as they began the trade, developed it and enjoyed the lion's share of its profits.[27]

In the glancing attention they pay to the lower Rio Grande, many historians acknowledge the non-state and renegade state nature of the region. Frank Owsley noted that 'several of these [Mexican border] states had exercised almost complete independence for a number of years,' whilst Emory Thomas similarly described the 'more or less independent northern Mexican states that shared a border with the South.' Don Doyle, meanwhile, notes the ambiguous nature of the lower Rio Grande borderland: it 'promised Confederates a back door around the blockade, but northern Mexico might also provide a back door for the Union army to invade their vulnerable western borders.' In other words, historians of the Civil War

[27] Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 6-7 (quote 7); Daddysman, James W., *The Matamoros Trade: Confederate Commerce, Diplomacy and Intrigue* (Newark, 1984); Irby, James A., *Backdoor at Bagdad: The Civil War on the Rio Grande* (El Paso, 1977); Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 176-210

have acknowledged the existence of both national and subnational foreign policies along the lower Rio Grande during the Civil War itself without examining them in any great detail.[28]

Doyle at least invites us to also consider the Union presence in this area. In traditional histories of the Civil War, written within a nation-state framework, the lower Rio Grande barely features. It is not mentioned at all by J.G. Randall or James Ford Rhodes, for example, and James McPherson refers to it only briefly, noting that 'Matamoros had become the entrepot for trade with the South exchanging cotton for contraband.' Similarly, none make any reference to the role of the Union on the lower Rio Grande regarding the French intervention in Mexico, beyond Randall's comment that 'border "incidents" were making it increasingly difficult to restrain the [Union] soldiers on the Rio Grande.' As this dissertation will show, officers did little to 'restrain' their men: instead, they were encouraged to cross the Rio Grande to fight, and often actually provoked the 'border incidents' that Randall mentions themselves.[29]

Historians who have paid more attention to the lower Rio Grande, and on the connection of the Civil War to the French intervention, have placed more emphasis on the quasi-independent nature of Union foreign policy there. William Hardy has argued that in the summer of 1865, Grant was effectively pursuing his own foreign policy on the lower Rio Grande. In addition, Robert Ryal Miller and Thomas Schoonover have demonstrated the extent of Union support for the Mexican Republic in its war against the Empire. More recently, Patrick Kelly has argued for the importance of the lower Rio Grande to Lincoln's foreign policy, whilst Don Doyle and Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga have likewise drawn attention to the supply of Union guns and volunteers to the Liberals. Again, however, the

[28] Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 113; Thomas, Emory M., *The Confederate Nation, 1861-1865* (New York, 1979), 185; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 119

[29] Randall, J.G., *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1937), 809; Rhodes, James Ford, *History of the Civil War 1861-1865* (New York, 1961); McPherson, James, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, 1848-1865* (Oxford, 1987), 387

attention paid to what happened on the ground is often cursory, with state actors prioritised in the historical narrative (with the notable exception of Miller and Gonzalez-Quiroga). This dissertation will therefore build on the work of Miller and Gonzalez-Quiroga by focusing on the roles of non-state and renegade state actors in this foreign policy.[30]

There is a historiographical debate on the best way to describe Union support for Juarez. Dean Mahin, for example, describes Union policy towards Mexico as 'Lincoln's cautious responses,' whilst Howard Jones draws attention to how 'the Lincoln administration repeated its threat to wage war against the intruder.' Despite their differences both, of course, focus only on the state and official state policy. Using the lens of geopolitical agency, I argue that instead Union support as practiced by non-state and renegade state actors was aggressive and fell only a little short of direct intervention, especially after 1865. Union officers and men, either demobilised or still in uniform, raised loans for the Mexican Republic, supplied it with arms and ammunition and marched south to fight in its armies against the French and their Imperial allies. Such acts were far more diplomatically provocative, in and of themselves, than the *casus belli* for Bismarck's wars in 1864, 1866 and 1870, for example, and arguably exceeded the similar support the US gave to Texas during the Texas Revolution of 1835-36. As an aggressive, militarised form of diplomacy, performed by non-state actors and renegade state actors contrary to official state policy, Union foreign policy in Mexico can perhaps best be compared to US support for the Contra rebels in Nicaragua in the 1980s. I therefore argue that Union policy along the lower Rio Grande was not cautious, in the sense

[30] Hardy, William E., 'South of the Border: Ulysses S. Grant and the French Intervention,' *Civil War History*, Vol. 54 No. 1 (2008); Miller, Robert Ryal, *Arms Across the Border: United States Aid to Juarez during the French Intervention in Mexico* (Philadelphia, 1973); Schoonover, Thomas, *Dollars over Dominion: The Triumph of Liberalism in Mexican-United States Relations, 1861-1867* (Baton Rouge, 1978), esp. 178-211; Kelly, Patrick, 'The Lost Continent of Abraham Lincoln,' *Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 9 No. 2 (2019); Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 302; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 233-49

of being timid, but rather aggressive, hostile and warlike, even if it did not become a war itself.[31]

In the foreword to his history of the Warsaw Uprising, Norman Davies notes that 'most people think of a good history book, as they think of a good novel, in linear terms.' However, as Davies points out, 'different types of subject matter demand different types of treatment.' Whilst this dissertation attempts nothing as ambitious as some of Davies' work – such as utilising a reverse chronological order structure – it does nonetheless attempt to combine both a thematic and chronological approach. Chapter 1 provides what might be termed a bird's-eye spatial and temporal overview of the intersection between the US and Mexican sectional crises, and a more tightly framed overview of events along the lower Rio Grande in the 1850s and 60s, in order to orient the reader. Each chapter after this until Chapter 6 focusses on a certain type of actor and also corresponds roughly with a certain timeframe, although of course, like men, no chapter is an island, and these categories are by no means hermetically sealed within their chapters. Finally, Chapter 6 reverses the dominant viewpoint of the dissertation, asking how Mexicans and the French south of the Rio Grande helped create and reacted to the intersecting geopolitical visions and crises on the lower Rio Grande.[32]

If the lower Rio Grande saw a loss of independence from state power in the mid-nineteenth century, it paradoxically also saw an increase in the practice and the salience of geopolitical agency. This was connected to state conflicts (both internal and external) and the desire for and existence of economic booms. This geopolitical agency was not restricted to

[31] Mahin, Dean B., *One War at a Time: The International Dimensions of the American Civil War* (Washington, DC, 1999), 106; Jones, Howard, *Blue and Grey Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 323; Carr, William, *The Origins of the Wars of German Unification* (London, 1991); Belohlavek, John M., '"Let the Eagle Soar!": Democratic Constraints on the Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson,' *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 10 No. 1 (1980); Hoekstra, Quint, 'Helping the Contras: The Effectiveness of US Support for Foreign Rebels during the Nicaraguan Contra War (1979-90),' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 44 No. 6 (2021)

[32] Davies, Norman, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (London, 2004), xii

states and state actors, however. Non-state, renegade state and nonelite actors also attempted to impose their own geopolitical visions along the lower Rio Grande on both the United States and Mexico, influencing and impacting state foreign policies and helping to determine their success or failure. As the conclusion will show, these dynamics did not end in the mid-nineteenth century, but can be observed again and again – in the seizure of power by Porfirio Diaz in Mexico, in the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, and in the rise of the drug cartels; so that, if the mid-nineteenth century does constitute the end of the lower Rio Grande borderland's geopolitical autonomy, it marks the beginning of the borderland's geopolitical influence as well.

The people who practiced, influenced and impacted these foreign policies were, on the whole, not individuals of great state power, or if they were they often subverted this power to their own ends. By decentralising and deinstitutionalising the geopolitical visions of Southern filibusters, the Union, the Confederacy, the Mexican Republic and the Mexican Empire (and, indeed, individuals and groups who did not see themselves as acting *for* a state polity at all) this dissertation raises these people to prominence and questions exactly what power the governments of the United States and Mexico had in determining the outcomes of the many geopolitical and economic dislocations along the lower Rio Grande in the 1850s and 60s – and, indeed, what power they continue to have.

CHAPTER ONE: CRISES

Stephen Austin travelled to San Antonio in early 1822 exhausted, worried and annoyed. This American – born in Virginia a decade after the United States' independence – had inherited from his father, Moses, a commission from the Spanish government to settle Anglo families in the region of Texas, on the far northern frontier of Spain's North American empire. Austin had sent his first group of settlers by sea from New Orleans to the mouth of the Colorado River, whilst he travelled overland via Natchitoches; however, when he arrived, his settlers were not there. Other Anglo settlers unattached to his scheme now were, settled on land that according to Spanish law belonged to him. So Austin saddled up once more and rode to the regional capital of San Antonio. The governor, however, could not help him, and so Austin had to ride all the way to Mexico City. On the way a party of Comanches waylaid and began to rob him until they realised he was an Anglo. Austin arrived in Mexico City understandably tired and fed up, but his mood was transformed upon hearing that Mexico had just been officially recognised by the United States. Austin exulted to find himself at 'the fountain head of a new born nation.' A mere fourteen years later, however, he would be one of the instigators of the rebellion that separated Texas from Mexico into its own nation-state.[33]

Although by birth a US citizen, Austin died a Texan, having also been a Spaniard and a Mexican in the course of his life. What had inspired Austin's peregrinations across North America and his (sometimes violent) change in citizenship was economic opportunity. His father had left debts accrued running a Virginia mine to go to Spanish Louisiana to run a smelting works there. After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the Austins became US citizens again, only to lose all their money in the Panic of 1819. Once again Spanish North America

[33] Brands, H.W., *Lone Star Nation: How a Ragged Army of Volunteers won the Battle for Texas Independence and Changed America* (New York, 2004), 72-75

beckoned, and they moved to Texas. Moses died soon after reaching Texas, but Stephen fulfilled his father's dying wish to bring Anglo families into the state. They also brought slaves, and the increased Anglo (or Anglo-supervised) cultivation of Texan resources – cotton, cows and corn – was one of the main factors behind the Texas Revolution of 1836.

Austin's life tells us much about the world of mid-nineteenth century North America. It was a world where identity and loyalty could easily be changed, as easily as riding on down the road. In part this was because the space of North America was in a constant state of contestation – one might be riding down a Mexican highway which only the year before had been the Spanish 'Royal Road,' only to be suddenly set upon by a group of Comanches. It was also a world of rapidly shifting economic fortunes, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. As William Kiser and Thomas Richards Jr have noted, nationality and allegiance was fundamentally fluid at this time: Richards highlights how many polities were dreamt of, planned for or attempted, whilst Kiser notes that 'nationality remained moderately fluid, and many foreigners changed citizenship multiple times as opportunity and caprice dictated.'[34]

Austin represents something else as well: the geopolitical agency of the non-state actor – specifically, one might say, the impact a merchant could have on Mexican political space. Continuing what his father had begun, Austin transformed Texas into an Anglo state within the Mexican federation and then became one of the leading figures in declaring that state's independence. After many twists and turns, the Republic of Texas was annexed by the US in 1845, precipitating the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. The effect of this was to turn the lower Rio Grande into the place where the crises that befell Mexico and the United States in the 1850s and 60s met (in some cases quite literally) and intersected.

[34] For an overview of Austin's life, see Cantrell, Gregg, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (New Haven, 1999). Richards, *Breakaway Americas*, 7; Kiser, William S., *Coast-to-Coast Empire: Manifest Destiny and the New Mexico Borderlands* (Norman, 2018), 23

What were those crises, and how did they intersect? The purpose of this chapter is to answer both questions, firstly with a broad overview and secondly by relating events on the lower Rio Grande itself (which should also hopefully serve to orient the reader, as each subsequent chapter focuses on a particular group involved in these events). Almost everyone is familiar with the key points of the US sectional crisis in the 1850s and 60s: the Missouri Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, Bleeding Kansas, John Brown and Harper's Ferry, the election of Lincoln, the secession crisis and the bloody conflagration of the Civil War. Fewer people, outside Mexico, are familiar with the key events in Mexico's crisis: the Plan of Ayutla, the War of Reform and the French intervention.

Fewer still are aware of the connections between these crises; or perhaps more accurately, the ways in which these crises were perceived to be connected. Occasionally, historians have attempted to draw connections between the crises in Mexico and the United States. These can vary from the bafflingly specific to the unhelpfully vague. In the first case, Thomas Schoonover has argued that the Mexican Liberals and US Republicans were united by a commitment to '*laissez faire* capitalism.' Quite how this squares with Republican commitment to protectionism, embodied in the 1862 Morrill Tariff, is unclear. In the second instance, Frank Towers has argued that the 1860s saw the 'Crisis of North America' which was driven by conflict over sovereignty.[35]

Perhaps more convincingly, Patrick Kelly has argued that, whether these crises were connected or not, many in the US and Mexico perceived them to be connected, in both a geopolitical and ideological sense. The two were interconnected. Both Mexican Liberals and US Republicans were fighting for democracy and republicanism ('that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth,' as Lincoln phrased it).

[35] Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion*, xix; *Remaking North American Sovereignty: State Transformation in the 1860s* (New York, 2020), ed. Towers, Frank and Spangler, Jewel L.

The defeat of either would have placed an avowed opponent on the other's border. Settlement of one crisis, in other words, was essential to the security of the settlement of the other crisis.[36]

The US and Mexican Crises, 1848-1867

North America in 1848 was a patchwork of political sovereignties. North of the forty-ninth parallel, British North America was split into five distinct provinces, and had just formally reached the Pacific coast due to a gold rush in the Fraser River area. Below this, the United States stretched, officially at least, from coast to coast, demarcated by the Mason-Dixon line into two separate socioeconomic systems: the free labour North, and the slave South. Below the Rio Grande lay Mexico, recovering from internal rebellion, US invasion and Native American raids. Mexico in 1848 was still dominated by the peonage labour system, with most land held either by the Church, the upper *hacienda* class or in the communal pueblo system and was riven with political instability. This was suspended from time to time either by the concentration of power in the hands of a *caudillo* (usually General Santa Anna) or the uniting of various groups to drive that *caudillo* from power. All three Euro-American polities were interdicted in their access to the Pacific by powerful Native American polities: the Assinboine Confederacy in British North America, the Sioux and Comanche in the US, and the Yaqui in Mexico. Since 1836, North America had witnessed revolutions, wars, raids, coups d'etat, annexations and riots. Differing conceptions of politics and economics coexisted uneasily alongside each other, sometimes within the same polity. Geopolitical sovereignty was, in other words, essentially fluid.[37]

[36] Kelly, 'Lost Continent,' passim

[37] An explicitly transnational history of nineteenth century North America (beyond the recent turn to this in Civil War historiography) remains to be written; as mentioned in the Introduction, perhaps the best

It is important to understand this geopolitical background in order to understand the crises that defined the 1850s and 60s, as the ideologies that crystallised in that year were not born out of thin air. In the 1830s Mexico was wracked by a series of revolts, in states such as Yucatan, Zacatecas and Texas. The successful Texan revolt is by far and away the most famous of these (north of the Rio Grande, at least). These revolts mark the beginning of a mid-century crisis over North American geopolitical sovereignty. Although Texas' winning of its independence has enjoyed the lion's share of attention, in reality General Santa Anna successfully crushed most of the revolts and asserted centralist power. Only on the extremities of the Mexican nation-state – in Texas to the north, and Yucatan to the south-east – was the revolt successful and independence achieved. In both provinces revolt was led by an ethnic elite that controlled the region's economy: Anglos in Texas, and *mestizo* whites in Yucatan.[38] Equally, the elites of both states relied on extractive capitalism for their power – cotton in Texas and henequin in Yucatan – both of which were harvested by unfree labour – African-American slaves in Texas, and Mayan peons in Yucatan. Both new republics supported each other in their struggles for independence: Yucatan and Texas formed an official alliance against Mexico, and a joint Texan-Yucatan fleet defeated the Mexican navy at the Battle of Campeche in 1843. Texas also received clandestine support from the Democrat, pro-South US administration of Andrew Jackson. In their secession from a nation-state polity driven by elites eager to maintain and expand their extractive capitalist connection to Europe, Texas and Yucatan prefigure the secession of the South in the crisis of 1860-61.[39]

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approximations of this are Hahn, *A Nation without Borders*; Meinig, *The Shaping of America Volume 2: Continental America*; Taylor, Alan, *American Republics: A Continental History of the United States, 1783-1850* (New York, 2021). All of these, however, tell a US national story in which North America figures, rather than vice versa.

[38] 'Mestizo' is a term for mixed-race people in the former Spanish Empire. (Bartolome, Miguel Alberto, 'Pluralismo Cultural y Redefinicion del Estado en Mexico,' *Serie Antropologia*, Vol. 210 (1996), 2 [FIND DIFFERENT REFERENCE??]

[39] Torget, Andrew J., *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill, 2015)*;* Jordan, Jonathan W., *Lone Star Navy: Texas, the Fight for the Gulf of Mexico, and the Shaping of the American West* (Washington, 2006), 252-71

Shortly after Texas had secured its independence, rebellion broke out in British North America against the authorities. What is now 'Canada' was in the 1830s a collection of five separate colonies, including Upper Canada, Lower Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Rebellions in the Canadas began in 1837 and were eventually defeated by British troops. A few rebel holdouts, led by William Lyon Mackenzie, fled first to an island in the Niagara River and then into New York State, from where they mounted sporadic guerrilla attacks until 1839. Canadian rebellion, and the subsequent Durham Report of 1840, persuaded the British to advance Canadian self-government, which has variously been described as 'creole sovereignty' or an 'imperial nation-state.'[40]

Texas was eventually annexed by the United States in 1845. One key factor that drove the United States to annex Texas was the fear that, in return for repudiating its debt, Britain would force Texas to abolish slavery, or even annex the nation for itself.[41] Mexico, meanwhile, had never officially given up its claims to Texas, and further believed the boundary between Texas and the state to its south, Tamaulipas, to lie on the Neuces River, whilst Texans insisted it lay 50 miles further south on the Rio Grande. The United States inherited this claim, and when a troop of US cavalry was ambushed in the disputed region in 1846, Mexico and the US suddenly found themselves at war. A US army under Zachary Taylor marched south across the Rio Grande and occupied Monterrey, whilst other columns conquered California and New Mexico. Finally, an army under Winfield Scott landed at Vera Cruz and fought its way to Mexico City, which was captured in September 1847. A peace treaty, the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo, was signed in February 1848.[42]

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[40] See Martin, Ged, *Britain and the Origins of Canadian Confederation, 1837-1867* (Basingstoke, 1995); Kilbourn, William, *The Firebrand: William Lyon Mackenzie and the Rebellion in Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1967)
[41] Silbey, Joel H., *Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (New York, 2005), 36-38
[42] For an overview of the Mexican-American War, see Clary, David A., *Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle for a Continent* (New York, 2009)

By this treaty almost half of what had been Mexico – California, New Mexico, Arizona, and parts of present-day Utah and Nevada – became US territory. Although there was a smattering of *polkos*, or pro-Americans (named after the US President, James Polk) – the majority, including liberal politicians such as Melchor Ocampo and Benito Juarez, rallied to Santa Anna and the central government. This would complicate Mexican Liberals' relationship to the United States, particularly prior to the Civil War. In the United States, on the other hand, the war was bitterly divisive, derided as 'Mr Polk's War' in the North and opposed by politicians including an obscure congressman from Illinois by the name of Abraham Lincoln. The South, however, supported the war completely: the majority of volunteers were Southern, and most of the heroes the war produced, such as Jefferson Davis, were also from the South. The South was quick to perceive American triumph in Mexico as a vindication of its own martial capability, whilst the immense seizure of territory had others dreaming of even more, into the Caribbean or southwards all the way to Central America.[43]

One thing that had enabled the American takeover of such a vast tranche of territory was the devastation caused by Native Americans. By 1836 the great 'empire' of *Comancheria* was arguably past its height, but across what is now the American Southwest Native American tribes took advantage of Mexican military weakness to increase their own power. Powerful Native American raiding parties pushed into Mexico as far south as Zacatecas. Northern Mexico was turned into a wasteland. By 1837 the editors of *El Mercurio de Matamoros* insisted that the Comanches had 'wrecked the fortunes of the ranchers and the people. Those who yesterday had ten to fifteen thousand pesos, today count but a quarter of that.' Initial attempts by the governor of Coahuila to create a Mexican-Comanche alliance against Texas rebounded on him, and growing trade between Comanches and Texas

[43] Cunliffe, Marcus, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America 1775-1865* (London, 1969), 335-45; for Southern expansionism, see Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*; May, *Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire*; and Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*

redirected Comanche raiding parties into northern Mexico. Beginning in 1840, huge raiding parties pushed southwards into Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi and Jalisco.[44] One party, said to number over five hundred, swept down the Rio Parral and Rio del Oro valleys, killing men, abducting children and taking horses. The Comanches penetrated so far south that they entered an entirely new geography, leaving the Great Plains behind altogether and entering a world of jungles and sierras. As much as the focus of this work will be on settler nation-states and European empires, as Pekka Hämäläinen emphasises up to and including this point North America was still a space to a great extent dominated by Native American polities.[45]

Just as Hämäläinen and DeLay have emphasised the role of Native Americans in US expansion and Mexican contraction, somewhat similarly several historians have positioned US expansion as a consequence of US state weakness rather than strength. Andrew Isenberg and Thomas Richards argue that 'weakness and division defined American expansion': according to Richards, for example, Polk's great grabs of territory were in response to fears of geopolitical encirclement. In addition, the US presence in these newly acquired areas was weak enough to encourage, as Isenberg and Richards phrase it, 'experimentation and improvisation.'[46]

The transfer of all this territory from Mexican to American control had the effect of destabilising both polities, or perhaps more accurately in Mexico's case, destabilising it still further. Santa Anna, forced into exile after his failed defence of Mexico, came back and again allied with conservatives to establish a centralist government in 1853. He then persuaded to surrender a further portion of Mexican territory to the US, selling what is now the southern strip of Arizona and New Mexico to the Pierce administration in 1854. This antagonised the

[44] DeLay, Brian, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven, 2008), 174; Hämäläinen, Pekka, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, 2008), 230-31
[45] Smith, Ralph A., 'The Comanche Bridge, 1843-44', *Plains Anthropologist*, Vol. 6 No. 14 (1961), 264; Hämäläinen, Pekka, *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America* (New York, 2022), ix-xi
[46] Isenberg and Richards, 'Alternative Wests,' passim, esp. 8-10 and 14-16; Richards Jr, *Breakaway Americas*, 255; Rodriguez, 'Children of the Great Mexican Family,' 4-5

regions where several liberal figures in the decentralised chaotic aftermath of the Mexican-American War, such as Juan Alvarez, Ignacio Comonfort, Benito Juarez and Santiago Vidaurri, had begun to carve out power bases for themselves. Santa Anna moved against Alvarez in the province of Guerrero but was defeated and again fled the country. A Liberal government took power and began 'La Reforma,' or the age of reform. Key legislation passed included the Ley Juarez, which reduced the power of the military and the Catholic Church, and the Ley Lerdo, which forced institutions to sell land to individual families. In addition, the 1857 Constitution reaffirmed the abolition of slavery and declared any slave who set foot on Mexican soil to be thenceforward free. La Reforma was an attempt to change Mexico, to bring it into line with the liberal-democratic norms that seemed to hold sway north of the Rio Grande (and even to surpass them), and from which the United States had, to the anticlerical liberal eye, benefited so much.[47]

Just as the United States expanded under Polk, so did the British north of the 49th parallel. Indeed, it was during the Polk administration that the 49th parallel was set as the border across the continent (having been set as the border as far as the Rocky Mountains in 1818) when the boundaries of the Oregon Territory were decided in 1846. In 1843 the British established a settlement on Vancouver Island and in 1849 incorporated it as a colony. Further colonies were established in the far west, including the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1853 and British Columbia in 1858. In British North America, the central government was expanding its power to fill the sovereignty claimed, just as the United States and Mexico were; and just

[47] For La Reforma, see Olliff, Donathon C., *Reforma Mexico and the United States: A Search for Alternatives to Annexation, 1854-1861* (Tuscaloosa, 1981); Sinkin, Richard N., *The Mexican Reform, 1855-1876: A Study in Liberal Nation-Building* (Austin, 1979); Mijangos y Gonzalez, Pablo *La Reforma (1848-1861)* (Mexico City, 2018); Hamnett, Brian, *Juarez* (New York, 1994), esp. 56-116; 1857 Mexican Constitution accessed at *Constitución Federal de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos.1857*. Library of Congress Law Library Reading Room. (https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/mexico/constitucion1857.html.)

as in the United States and Mexico, this central expansion would have the effect of transforming the nature of this sovereignty that was being enforced.[48]

The year 1854 opened with the final transfer of North American continental territory (between nation-state polities at least) with the Gadsden Purchase. As we have seen, this energised both Mexican Liberals and what would become the US Republicans. The acquisition of so much territory from Mexico, first with the Mexican-American War and then with the Gadsden Purchase, raised the issue of whether it would be admitted to the Union as free or slave territory. First into the battle was Pennsylvania Representative David Wilmot, who attempted to secure Congress' agreement that the regions would only be admitted as free territory. This set off a brutal political argument between North and South that was finally ended with the Compromise of 1850, although a diehard group of Southerners including Jefferson Davis continued to oppose it. Such political calm as remained ended in 1854 when Senator Stephen A. Douglas secured the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The result was that partisans on both sides rushed into the regions coming up for statehood in order to form a majority of the population. Political opposition soon turned to violent opposition and Kansas began to bleed, with one abolitionist called John Brown emerging foremost among the bloodletters.

Mexico likewise found itself on the path to civil war, as the liberal reforms antagonised the conservative elite. With the accession to the presidency of Benito Juarez in 1858, the War of the Reform began. The conservatives under Miguel Miramon were initially successful and occupied Mexico City, with Juarez fleeing to Vera Cruz; but the tide began to turn, and on December 22nd, 1860, at the Battle of Calpulalpan, the conservatives were decisively defeated. Miramon fled the country, first to Cuba and then to a more receptive audience in France, whilst Juarez reassumed power in Mexico City.

[48] Morton, W.L., *The Critical Years: The Union of British North America 1857-1873* (London, 1964)

Two days prior to the Battle of Calpulalpan, South Carolina seceded from the Union. The antagonism between North and South had only grown, with the collapse of the Whig Party and the rise of the Republicans to replace it in the north. Violence continued in Kansas and spilled over onto the floor of the Capitol, where proslavery Representative Preston Brooks beat in abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner's head with a cane. (Famously, Southerners sent Brooks more canes as a sign of support.) In October 1859, John Brown had mounted a raid on the military arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, planning to use the arms there to equip the slaves he was about to incite into a general uprising. Although Brown was swiftly defeated by US marines under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee, Southern fire-eaters continued to agitate for secession to protect their 'peculiar institution.' The final straw came when Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, despite not receiving a single Southern electoral vote.[49]

As state after Southern state followed South Carolina in seceding from the Union – the lower South over the winter of 1860-61, and the upper South after the Battle of Fort Sumter in April 1861 – Juarez in Mexico City likewise found himself beset by problems. Unsurprisingly, the chaos of the War of the Reform had weakened central government control, and several strongmen had set themselves up as regional warlords or *caudillos*. One example of this is Santiago Vidaurri, who united the states of Nuevo Leon and Coahuila under his personal rule and was narrowly prevented from taking control of Tamaulipas. The Mexican treasury was, as usual, bankrupt, and European powers such as Britain, Spain and France were clamouring for their debt to be repaid; and with the United States now embroiled in civil war, there was no one to enforce the Monroe Doctrine.

[49] The classic overview of the build-up to the Civil War remains Potter, David M., *The Impending Crisis: America before the Civil War, 1848-1861* (New York, 1976); for a more recent account, see Freehling, William W., *The Road to Disunion Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant 1854-1861* (New York, 2007)

North America seemed to be reopened as an imperial battleground: the French, Spanish and British occupied Vera Cruz in late 1861 demanding debt repayment, whilst Spain also occupied its former colony of Santo Domingo in the Caribbean. In the following year the French upgraded this occupation into an invasion (Spain and Britain left) and by 1864 had placed an Austrian archduke, Maximilian, on the appropriately-named 'Cactus Throne' as Emperor of Mexico.[50]

The true moment of crisis for the Liberal-Republican cause came in the summer of 1864. At this point, French armies had chased Juarez all the way to the Rio Grande. Lincoln was convinced due to high casualty lists he was about to lose the forthcoming presidential election to a pro-peace Democrat. Maximilian arrived in Mexico City and was recognised as sovereign of Mexico by all European nations, and the Confederacy. In the autumn of 1864 the tide, in the United States, at least, began to turn. This was crucial to the resolution of the conflict not just in the United States, but also in Mexico: for, as will be addressed below, the Union (or rather, a select group of pro-Liberal politicians and generals) used this to send men and munitions to Juarez, providing him with the necessary means to take the offensive against the Franco-Imperialists.

By 1865, the Confederacy was at last defeated. Union troops were rushed to the Mexican border – more than when the US had actually invaded in 1846 – not to invade, but rather to mount diplomatic pressure on the French to leave. (One other purpose was also in order to send men and munitions across the border to support the Liberal cause.) This was successful, and Napoleon III announced in November 1865 that French troops would be

[50] In recent years, several histories and biographies have explored the wider impact of the Civil War on the Atlantic world. See Doyle, *Cause of all Nations*; Downs, Gregory P., *The Second American Revolution: The Civil War Era Struggle over Cuba and the Rebirth of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2019); *The Union, the Confederacy and the Atlantic Rim* (West Lafayette, 1995), ed. Robert E. May; *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s* (Chapel Hill, 2017), ed. Doyle, Don H. For an excellent recent study of Maximilian, see Shawcross, Edward, *The Last Emperor of Mexico: A Disaster in the New World* (London, 2022)

withdrawn from Mexico. With their withdrawal, the Imperialist cause in Mexico swiftly collapsed, and Maximilian was executed in the city of Queretaro in 1867.

By 1867, the Confederacy and Imperial Mexico had been defeated. This defeat was not just military but socioeconomic as well, in that the capitalist system they had fought for was also dismantled. In the US, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments destroyed the slave labour system, whilst in Mexico peonage was abolished and land privatised (or rather, these achievements of La Reforma were successfully defended). This victory was to have a ripple effect beyond continental North America: a slave uprising began on Cuba in 1868 directly inspired by the Civil War, whilst Spain and Brazil both passed 'free womb laws,' effectively putting a generational limit on slavery, in 1870 and 1872 respectively. Gregory Downs, for one, has argued that this spread eastwards across the Atlantic as well, and that the Glorious Revolution in Spain in 1868 was inspired by the conflict in North America.[51]

However, this did not last. In the US, Reconstruction was betrayed with the Compromise of 1877, allowing ex-Confederates to re-establish segregation in the South. The rise of Wall Street and the great 'robber barons,' supported by the US government and army, also led to and exacerbated rising inequality in the United States. In Mexico, the seizure of power by Porfirio Diaz after Juarez's death ensured whatever benefits accrued from Mexico's economic transformation went mainly to those in power and not the great mass of people. Beyond the continental landmass, the slave rebellion on Cuba was defeated in 1878 and Spain soon collapsed back into monarchy. As Gregory Downs argues, 1867 was a 'plastic

[51] Downs, *Second American Revolution*, 104-12; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 301

moment' of historical change and because it did not last it can be easy to forget that it happened.[52]

These connections between Liberal and Republican (and liberal/republican) ideologies in both Mexico and the United States did not, of course, begin in 1848, but rather, as Caitlyn Fitz has argued, had a long if often underemphasised heritage. Mexico began to rebel a generation after the United States, and the example of the US was clearly an inspiration to the rebels. The Viceroyalty of Mexico, after all, took virtually the same name at its independence (or rather, after the short-lived empire of Iturbide) becoming the United States of Mexico. The Mexican Constitution of 1824 was also based closely on that of its northern republican counterpart. More broadly, revolution tied the north-south Atlantic world together: as Fitz shows, US politicians gave Independence Day toasts to South American revolutionaries, and US citizens fought as volunteers in the armies of Bolivar, San Martin and O'Higgins.

This sense of the importance of the United States (as example and as ally) to the Latin American revolutionary movements was acknowledged by both the movements and the US. Revolutionaries in Pernambuco, Brazil, for example, vowed that they would 'choose . . . the United States for their model.' In Virginia, meanwhile, Independence Day revellers hoped that 'may our example inspire them to imitation.' The full bloom of this sense of hemispheric liberal-republican solidarity came with the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, opposing Old World, imperial interference in New World republics.[53] It also percolated north of the US border, as well as south: the Upper Canadian rebellion of 1837, Beverley Boissery

[52] See for example Beatty, Jack, *Age of Betrayal: The Triumph of Money in America, 1865-1900* (New York, 2007); *Mexico: From Independence to Revolution, 1810-1910* (Lincoln, 1982), ed. W. Dirk Raat; Downs, *Second American Revolution*, 136-41 (quote 141)

[53] Fitz, Caitlyn, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York, 2016), 56, 119. Of course, this was as long as it was not a black republic: as Thomas Bender has shown, Haiti was effectively frozen out of US discourse around the transatlantic revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. (Bender, *Nation amongst Nations*)

argues, was 'inspired by Jacksonian/Jeffersonian democracy' and led by William Lyon Mackenzie, 'a newly converted republican.'[54]

However, this moment did not last. As Fitz suggests, one reason for this was US expansion. Other factors, as Reginald Horsman has argued, included the conception of race as a determinant for successfully forming and maintaining a democratic republic. This growing conceptual distance even found a cartographic expression, as Thomas Bender argues: in the early nineteenth century, US mapmakers referred to the 'western hemisphere,' but by its middle they began to differentiate between 'North' and 'South America.' The delineation was effectively drawn along racial boundaries, between the 'successful' white polities of the north and the 'weak' mestizo polities of the south. As one Democrat politician declared, opposing the annexation of Yucatan, they simply needed 'better samples of the white man' to function as republican governments.[55]

Nonetheless, a sense of solidarity with other republics (albeit from a position of avuncular superiority) continued to permeate certain sections of US politics, particularly in the Whig Party. Led and in many ways personified by Henry Clay, the Whig Party believed, as Michael Holt argues, 'that government at all levels should be used positively . . . through the internal development of the nation's civic institutions and economic infrastructure, rather than through foreign expansionism and adventurism.' Given the geography of the western hemisphere, this necessitated a support, however muted and however symbolic, of Latin American republics. It also, as will be addressed below, necessitated a different economic system than that advocated by the slave South. However, it should be noted that all Whigs

[54] Boissery, Beverley, *A Deep Sense of Wrong: The Treason, Trials, and Transportation to New South Wales of Lower Canadian Rebels after the 1838 Rebellion* (Toronto, 1995), 169-70

[55] Fitz, *Our Sister Republics*, 244; Horsman, Reginald, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Ma., 1981); Bender, *A Nation among Nations*; *Congressional Globe* Vol. 18, 30th Cong. 1st Sess., Speech of Root, 29/4/48, 712

thought the same way: William Seward, for example, advocated expansion into Latin America and the Caribbean (as long as doing so did not benefit the South).[56]

The relationship of Mexican liberalism to its US counterpart, on the other hand, was much more complex. After all, despite the Mexican constitutional aping of the US, they were very different republics and products of very different revolutions. Alan Taylor, for example, finds symbolic significance in the US creation of a new capital from scratch – Washington DC – whereas the Mexicans simply converted Mexico City from a colonial to a national capital, suggesting a degree of continuity with the colonial past. Charles Hale has argued that, although 'American society and institutions were idealised in much of the Mexican political writing of the nineteenth century,' Mexican liberals mainly saw themselves in a continuum from the French and Spanish American Revolutions. Nonetheless, the United States had a great exemplary influence on Mexicans and they 'talked openly of imitating the United States in reforming Mexico.' Donathon Olliff emphasises this, noting that 'Liberals tended to see the United States as a model, particularly for their political institutions . . . Despite recent national humiliation at the hands of the United States, Mexico's mid-nineteenth-century liberals continued to draw much of their inspiration from the success of their northern neighbour.' The liberal Tadeo Ortiz, for example, described the United States as 'the classic land of liberty and order and the refuge of all the social virtues.' In 1859, at a low point for the Liberals in the War of the Reform, Sebastian Lerdo (author of the Ley Lerdo, and future president) hoped for US armed intervention to establish a US protectorate as the only way to defeat the Conservatives. Although the more thoughtful liberals tended to prefer the Franco-Spanish revolutionary tradition, they certainly desired an American revolutionary outcome.[57]

[56] Holt, Michael F., *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York, 1999), 951-52; Stahr, Walter, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man* (New York, 2012), 60
[57] Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 11; Hale, Charles A., *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853* (New Haven, 1968), 214, 199; Olliff, *Reforma Mexico and the United States*, 10; Hamnett, *Juarez*, 122. For a general discussion of the influence of the US on Mexican liberalism, see Hale, *Mexican Liberalism*, 188-214

By its very existence the US also facilitated a syncretic sense not just of republicanism and liberalism, but of a distinctly New World republicanism and liberalism. For example, in 1853 Benito Juarez and fellow liberals such as Melchor Ocampo were forced into exile and went to New Orleans. Of course, there was a practical reason for this in that it was close to Mexico, but equally so were several Caribbean islands, on some of which Spanish was also the main language. Clearly something about the freedoms of the US, both practical and intellectual, drew these Mexican liberals to it. In New Orleans, Juarez met a Cuban independence fighter called Pedro Santacilia, whose conception of liberalism and republicanism had a major effect upon Juarez himself. In Brian Hamnett's view, 'the Cuban connection of Juarez . . . is often overlooked,' but also, as Gregory Downs argues, this was a liberal-republican viewpoint born of separate Cuban and Mexican experiences and influences that combined in the US, whose very existence and rampant success also strongly influenced what might be termed north-south Atlantic political thought.[58]

This worldview grew stronger with the American Civil War and the invasion of Mexico by France in 1862, although it was always constrained by the course the former conflict took. Benito Juarez had also dispatched an ambassador, Matias Romero, who met Abraham Lincoln in December 1860. Acting on Juarez' behalf, Romero pledged his friendship to Lincoln, who reciprocated the gesture. It should not be inferred that this friendship translated into practical support, or was shared amongst all politicians. Lincoln's fear of getting involved in any extraneous conflicts prevented any overt support for Mexico (certainly of a military kind), whilst a proposed loan to the Juarez government negotiated by Ambassador Thomas Corwin was killed by the Senate in 1862.[59]

[58] Hamnett, *Juarez*, 51-52; Downs, *Second American Revolution*, 7
[59] Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion*, 1-2; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 127

The sense of this connection blossomed in 1865 with Confederate defeat, particularly amongst Radical Republicans. Henry Winter Davis in early 1865 claimed that the western hemisphere must be free from 'here to Cape Horn,' calling on the Franco-Imperialists to leave Mexico. John Kasson likewise saw the French intervention as an attempt 'to discredit the republican system.' Congressman John Conness of California, who had previously voiced strong opposition to any action against France, now declared his intention of helping Mexico. Even Andrew Johnson himself, who was no Radical, was apparently eager to aid Mexico. In his acceptance speech for the vice-presidential nomination in June 1864, he had declared 'France takes advantage of our internal difficulties and sends Maximilian off to Mexico to set up a monarchy on our borders. The day of reckoning is approaching. The time is not far distant when the rebellion will be put down, and then we will attend to this Mexican affair . . . An expedition into Mexico would be a sort of recreation to the brave soldiers who are now fighting the battle of the Union, and the French concern would quickly be wiped out.' After meeting with Ulysses S. Grant, a fervid supporter of the Liberals in Mexico, Johnson lifted the embargo on arms sales to Mexico in May 1865.[60]

It is important to emphasise that what is being considered here is the *perception* of connection that some US and Mexican politicians had. Equally, many perceived no such connections at all, and saw their polities as entirely separate to one another. For example, Lucas Alaman, a leading Mexican conservative theorist (similar, in his position and influence, to Calhoun in the US) articulated a deep hostility to the US as a geopolitical and ideological entity, characterising it as 'a people of merchants and adventurers, scum and refuse of all

[60] Davis, Henry Winter, *Speeches and Addresses Delivered in the Congress of the United States and on Several Public Occasions* (New York, 1867), 573; Kasson, John, *Evolution of the Constitution of the United States of America and History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Boston, 1904), 258-59; Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion*, 170-71, 179; 'Speech on Vice-Presidential Nomination,' 9/6/64, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson Volume 6: 1862-1864* (Knoxville, 1983), ed. Graf, Leroy P. and Haskins, Ralph W., quote 727. Chernow notes that in 1866 Grant 'drift[ed] toward Radical Republicanism.' Overlaps on foreign policy may have helped this. (Chernow, Ron, *Grant* (London, 2017), 581.) Similarly, William Hardy notes that the main supporters of Grant's policy in the cabinet were 'Radical-leaning' Attorney General James Speed, Postmaster General William Dennison and War Secretary Stanton. (Hardy, 'South of the Border,' 78.)

countries.' As Alaman pointed out, the war that led to Mexico losing half of its territory was inflicted on Mexico not by 'an absolute monarchy, but of a republic which claimed to be in the vanguard of nineteenth-century civilisation.' For Alaman and others of his mindset, this led not only to a rejection of the US itself but also of republicanism and liberalism as political institutions. They turned instead to the monarchical systems of Europe for salvation, a direct result of which was the French intervention of 1862 and the coronation of Emperor Maximilian in 1864.[61]

Similarly, Caitlyn Fitz, Gregory Downs and Kevin Waite among others have shown how Southern expansionism overrode any sense of liberal and republican solidarity, turning the South into an expansionist polity and an ally of monarchs and emperors. Kevin Waite has shown how Confederate secession was underpinned, at least in parts, by dreams of creating an 'empire' not only to the south but also to the west, an empire that had to come at the expense of the Confederacy's sister North American republics, the US and Mexico. Jefferson Davis acknowledged the transformation of Southern foreign relations upon secession, declaring in Atlanta in 1861 that 'for the future, we are to be embraced in the same moral category as Cuba and Brazil' – both, of course, slave societies, but also imperial polities (Cuba as a colony of the Spanish Empire, Brazil as an independent empire). By rejecting the idea of liberal-republican solidarity, the Confederacy moved towards an alliance with monarchies and empires seemingly utterly at odds with its Democratic Jeffersonian and Jacksonian heritage. It was also underwritten by the strength of economic connection to Europe; as Joseph Fry writes in his study of Southern foreign relations, the South had

[61] Alaman quoted in Hale, *Mexican Liberalism*, 213; for a general discussion of Mexican conservative thought re the United States, see ibid, 212-14

'supreme confidence that King Cotton provided the basis for an independent and triumphant foreign policy.'[62]

Matamoros

Before Matamoros, there was San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos: Saint John of the beautiful estuaries. This was the first town, established by Spanish settlers there on the lower Rio Grande in 1774 as part of the colony of Nuevo Santander, as a response to and reflection of geopolitical instability, to stop the British seizing a stretch of unpopulated Gulf coast.[63] Later on, the name was changed to Refugio, as the town was indeed a refuge for local *rancheros* sheltering from Native American raids. North of the Rio Grande as far as the Neuces River stretched the flat, featureless prairie, which soon became known as 'El Desierto Muerto' on account of it either being very muddy or very dry, depending on the rains (Abraham Lincoln described it in the plural as 'stupendous deserts'). Around San Juan itself was the thorny scrubland known as chaparral, full of trees and plants whose very names suggested hostility and violence: catclaw, horse killer, crucifixion thorn. From October to April the north winds blew down into Refugio, sometimes blowing so cold that the water in the beautiful estuaries froze over; in the summer, on the other hand, the winds blowing in from the Gulf could make everything hot and arid.[64]

Refugio's name was changed to Matamoros in 1826, in honour of Father Mariano Matamoros, a martyred priest killed in the War of Independence who hailed from Refugio. The town first entered the narrative of North American history in 1835. The town was the

[62] Davis quoted in Fitz, *Our Sister Republics*, 247-48; Downs, *Second American Revolution*, 58; Waite, *West of Slavery*, 13-40; Fry, Joseph A., *Dixie Looks Abroad: The South and US Foreign Relations 1789-1973* (Baton Rouge, 2002), 74; see also Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 1-50

[63] Weber, David J., *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, 1992), 194

[64] Roell, Craig H., *Matamoros and the Texas Revolution* (Denton, 2013), 9, 18-19, 25; 'To Horace Greeley,' 27/6/48, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln Volume I: 1824-1848* (New Brunswick, 1953), ed. Basler, Roy P., 494

focus of an expedition of about one hundred Texians led by James Grant and Francis Johnson during the Texas Revolution, but the attack was easily repelled.[65] The dislocations caused along the Rio Grande by the Texas Revolution brought further troubles in the form of Native Americans. As Mexican troops were withdrawn from the frontier to form Santa Anna's army of reconquest, Apaches and Comanches descended the Rio Grande to raid the town's environments. The first Comanches reached Matamoros on 14th April 1836, one week before Santa Anna came to grief at San Jacinto, and raided the ranches along the coast. By March 1837 two hundred Comanches came to Matamoros; by July over one thousand raided around the town, killing settlers and capturing horses and cattle. At least one newspaper report suggested that this Comanche attack was launched in conjunction with Texas revolutionaries.[66] Eventually Mexican campaigns pushed the Comanches back upriver, but the violence had not ended.[67]

The independence of Texas suddenly transformed the Rio Grande into a borderland between two states. Within the Mexican federation, the border between Texas and its southern neighbour, Tamaulipas, had been set at the Neuces River. Texas now claimed its border extended southwards a further fifty miles to the Rio Grande (as well as westwards to modern New Mexico and northwards to modern Wyoming). The result was to perpetuate violence within this disputed area. Raids and counter-raids crossed the Rio Grande from 1837 onwards. As part of the Pastry War between France and Mexico in 1838-39 – so-called because the apparent *casus belli* was the looting of the shop of a French pastry chef by Mexican soldiers (another, perhaps more plausible reason, that foreshadows European intervention in 1861, was that Mexico had not kept up its debt repayments to France) – a

[65] Roell, *Matamoros and the Texas Revolution* passim, esp. 7-8, 12-13, 38-68
[66] Anderson, Gary Clayton, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875* (Norman, 2005), 138-39
[67] Vigness, David M., 'Indian Raids on the Lower Rio Grande 1836-1837,' *Southwestern Historical Quarterly,* Vol. 59 No. 1 (1955), 16-21; for a wider geographic scope on Indian raids in the Southwest, see DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, passim

French ship blockaded Matamoros in 1838, whilst the town was besieged in the winter of 1839-40 by federalist forces in one of Mexico's interminable civil conflicts. In 1842 Mexican forces twice crossed the Rio Grande and occupied San Antonio, whilst the Texans in turn invaded Mexico and captured the towns of Laredo and Guerrero. A plan to attack Matamoros was scrapped, however, as the Texan government felt it had to control the upper Rio Grande first before it could attack the lower.[68]

The annexation of Texas brought a US army under Zachary Taylor to the disputed region, where they built Fort Brown across the Rio Grande from Matamoros. The first two major battles of the Mexican-American War, Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, were fought barely twenty miles from the city.[69] Part of Taylor's army at these engagements was a young lieutenant called Ulysses S. Grant. Years later, Grant would recall a countryside at once devastated of settlers by Native Americans yet teeming with wildlife: 'there was not at that time,' he later noted, 'a single habitation from Corpus Christi until the Rio Grande was reached'; the only thing he encountered on the march was a 'herd of wild horses.' The countryside they left behind them gave a picture of equal devastation: Grant recorded passing a village where the inhabitants 'lived underground for protection against the Indians' and remembered 'the remains of a town called San Patricio', slightly north of Corpus Christi, where the townsfolk 'had all been massacred by the Indians, or driven away.'[70] Undoubtedly as a consequence of this Native American devastation, driving settlers to the protection of a walled town, Matamoros was by this time however highly populated, with some sixteen thousand inhabitants, and Taylor's army suffered a steady trickle of desertions to the Mexican

[68] Nance, Joseph Milton, *After San Jacinto: The Texas-Mexican Frontier, 1836-1841* (Austin, 1963), 53, 231-33; *Attack and Counter-Attack: The Texas-Mexican Frontier, 1842* (Austin, 1964), 47-48, 109-13, 297-335 (Pastry War note: Will Fowler?)
[69] Clary, *Eagles and Empire*, 105-15
[70] Grant, Ulysses S., *The Personal Memoirs of US Grant* (New York, 1885-86; Penguin Edition, London, 1999), 35, 43, 46

town (mainly, it seems, caused by the site of Mexican women going down to the river to bathe).[71]

There was, as Omar Valerio-Jimenez has demonstrated, a good reason for Matamoros' prosperity, beyond Native American raids into the surrounding countryside: in 1821 whilst still a Spanish possession it had been declared an open port by King Ferdinand VII, and this was confirmed by the Mexican government of Augustin Iturbide in 1823. William Kiser has noted how the 1820-40s witnessed a 'growing continental trading network,' which Matamoros formed a key part of. Matamoros swiftly became the third most important port on the nation's Gulf coast after Veracruz and Tampico, providing a trade route to New Orleans and across the Atlantic to Europe. By 1835, two thirds of all goods imported into the regions north of Guadalajara came through Matamoros, and it was known as 'La Gran Puerta de Mexico', or the Great Gateway of Mexico.[72] Matamoros itself stood some thirty-one miles inland from the Gulf, and was serviced by two ports: Point Isabel, twenty miles north (and therefore in Texas after 1836) served as a deep-water port, whilst Bagdad, a mere half-mile from the river mouth on the Mexican side, served as an unloading station. A sandbar at the entrance to the harbour meant only smaller vessels could enter: the larger ships would wait off the bar as the smaller vessels either loaded and unloaded at Bagdad itself, or ascended the Rio Grande, whose bends and loops doubled the thirty-one mile distance, to anchor off Matamoros. Years later, a Civil War blockade runner would remember the scene: 'there was nothing to indicate the existence of any port or city – a bare and barren coast, as far as the eye could reach there seemed to exist nothing but sand plains and some scrub brushwood.'[73]

Matamoros was the site of illegal trade as well: smugglers would run goods into the town from New Orleans and Europe (usually silver bullion), and take Mexican goods (usually

[71] Clary, *Eagles and Empire*, 81, 96
[72] Kiser, *Coast-to-Coast Empire*, 38; Roell, *Matamoros*, 7-10
[73] Ibid, 18; Watson, William, *The Adventures of a Blockade Runner: or, Trade in Time of War* (London, 1893), 18

tobacco and cotton) back to their home harbours.[74] Matamoros was the place of exchange in a trade route that extended into the North American continent, up the Rio Grande valley to Santa Fe, and outwards to the markets of the Atlantic economies. By 1835, it was estimated that this illegal trade exceeded 600,000 pesos a year.[75] Here (as in many other places) the (re)drawing of geopolitical boundaries was being utilised not by polities but by independent and individual merchants to secure their own independence, in this case from a nation-state in the form of taxation. During the 1838-39 Pastry War, Matamoros was blockaded by the French navy, and Mexico rerouted its trade through Texan Corpus Christi instead, despite the best efforts of the Texas Navy to stop them (a fascinating counterpoint to what would happen again in the 1860s when the transatlantic trade route was interrupted).[76] In 1851, the 'Merchants' War' began when local traders led by Jose Carvajal proclaimed the 'Republic of the Sierra Madre' in a bid to rid themselves of national tariffs. Carvajal was financed in his campaign by local merchants such as Mifflin Kenedy and Richard King and supported in the field by American volunteers.[77] A direct parallel can be drawn between the Merchants' War and the US Civil War: both were begun by a successful socioeconomic elite seceding (or attempting to) from its parent nation-state polity in order to protect or extend its own conceptions of sociopolitical and socioeconomic space.[78]

After the Mexican-American War, Fort Brown, across the Rio Grande from Matamoros, became the centre for a new US town, rather unimaginatively named

[74] Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope*, 113

[75] How much this would have been in dollars in unclear. For the difficulty of compiling and interpreting 19th century Mexican statistics, see Salvucci, Richard J., 'The Origins and Progress of US-Mexican Trade, 1825-1884: "Hoc Opus, Hic Labor Est,"' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 71 No. 4 (1991), 697-98. Omar Valerio-Jimenez gives an idea of the scale of profits available to smugglers in the 1850s: tobacco purchased in New Orleans for $1-1.50 per cwt could be sold in Mexico for $50-75 per cwt. (Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope*, 113)

[76] Roell, *Matamoros*, 32-36; also, Valerio-Jimenez, Omar, 'Neglected Citizens and Willing Traders: The Villas del Norte (Tamaulipas) in Mexico's Northern Borderlands, 1749-1846,' *Mexican Studies*, Vol. 18 No. 2 (2002), 281-85; Kiser, *Coast-to-Coast Empire*, 26

[77] Diaz, *Border Contraband*, 18-30

[78] For a penetrating analysis of how illegal trade created the modern United States, see Andreas, *Smuggler Nation*

Brownsville. Despite this, the area between the Rio Grande remained predominately Hispanic in ethnicity and culture. Karl Jacoby notes that Spanish remained the dominant language and cattle ranching the dominant economic activity. Nonetheless, changes began to occur. Due to its possession of the deep-water harbour of Point Isabel, Brownsville swiftly replaced Matamoros as the region's commercial centre: by the 1850s the annual trade was estimated at $10-14 million. Matamoros' population declined from twenty-five to just five thousand and Bagdad 'languished as a miserable fishing village.' Smuggling nonetheless continued, now mainly directed through Brownsville and the island of Brazos Santiago, with the goods now carried across the Rio Grande into Mexico. This led to a boom in the towns of the area, even as far north as Corpus Christi: the regional economy, in many ways, was already underpinned by illegal trade, the extractive capitalist economy at the expense of the nation-state tax collector. (Indeed, one could argue it always had been: further up the coast Galveston had first been founded by the pirate Jean Lafitte.)[79]

Some historians have noted the rather unique position of the lower Rio Grande, especially in relation to the two nation-states whose borders ran through it. Sarah Rodriguez has noted how the southern United States and northern Mexico formed a 'semi-autonomous region . . . that presented the possibility of a very different geopolitical arrangement to that which ultimately emerged.' According to Rodriguez, what 'unified' the southern US and northern Mexico was a 'shared commitment to regional sovereignty, martial citizenship, forced labour, and free trade.' This echoes Gonzalez-Quiroga's focus on the lower Rio Grande as a place of cooperation as much as of conflict. Karl Jacoby neatly summarises this dichotomy: although US and Mexican actors pursued 'economic integration,' the nation-states were anxious 'to police the flow of peoples, goods and ideas from the other side.' This

[79] Jacoby, *Strange Career of William Ellis*, 26; Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope,* 144-46; *The Civil War on the Rio Grande, 1846-1876*, ed. Roseann Bacha-Garza, Christopher L. Miller and Russell K. Skowronek (College Station, 2019), 59; for Lafitte, see Rubin, Susan Goldman, *Jean Lafitte: The Pirate who Saved America* (New York, 2012)

connection between economic integration and concern about 'the other side' would be aptly and amply demonstrated in the Cortina War.[80]

In 1859, a Tejano landowner named Juan Nepomuceno Cortina led a local rebellion against the authorities known as the 'Cortina War.' Cortina was eventually defeated in the winter of 1859-60, but the turmoil his rebellion engendered led to two plans for invasion of north-eastern Mexico. Newly-elected Governor of Texas Sam Houston proposed an expedition into north-eastern Mexico to secure Texas property from the 'bandits' who operated from there, whilst George Bickley and the expansionist Knights of the Golden Circle advertised an invasion of north-eastern Mexico in the national papers.

With the coming of the American Civil War, the lower Rio Grande became the centre of a contraband trade run through Matamoros. Confederate merchants and officials took advantage of Mexico's neutral status to reorient Southern trade west of the Mississippi in that direction. Cotton from across the Transmississippi region would be transported to Brownsville, where it was ferried across the Rio Grande to Matamoros. From there it was taken to the little port of Bagdad, loaded on waiting ships and taken to the West Indies and Europe. In return, European merchants shipped both munitions and consumer goods to Matamoros and from there into Texas.

Concerned both with the trade and the French invasion of Mexico and push northwards towards to the Rio Grande, Lincoln dispatched a small army to the lower Rio Grande in November 1863 which occupied Brownsville. The trade was rerouted upriver through Eagle Pass and Laredo. A Confederate counteroffensive retook Brownsville in August 1864 and the Union forces withdrew offshore to the nearby island of Brazos Santiago.

[80] Rodriguez, 'Children of the Great Mexican Family,' vii; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 3; Jacoby, *Strange Career of William Ellis*, xxi

The Union occupation of Brownsville seemed to inspire similar turmoil south of the river, and after several battles and political machinations Juan Cortina established himself as ruler of Matamoros. Shortly afterwards in February 1864, President Juarez and his army, fleeing the advancing Franco-Imperialists arrived on the lower Rio Grande, defeated Santiago Vidaurri and established himself in Monterrey. Both of them corresponded with the Union general across the river, but also cooperated with the Confederates in continuing the contraband trade. This lasted until August 1864 when a Franco-Imperial army under Tomas Mejia arrived. Juarez fled to El Paso del Norte (now Ciudad Juarez) whilst Cortina's men split into three camps: some crossed the Rio Grande into Union lines on Brazos Santiago, others withdrew into the chaparral to wage guerrilla warfare against the Franco-Imperialists, whilst Cortina himself, quite astonishingly, joined the Imperial army.

In January 1865 Union General Lew Wallace arrived on Brazos Santiago. He had been sent by Lincoln to try and negotiate the surrender of the Transmississippi. Although the local Confederate commanders, General Slaughter and Colonel Ford, were keen to do so, their superiors, John G. Walker and Edmund Kirby Smith, opposed it. At the same time, Kirby Smith was trying to persuade the French in Mexico to push their armies across the Rio Grande and annex Texas to Maximilian's Empire.

With the end of the Civil War, Union forces were rushed to the Rio Grande under General Philip Sheridan's command. Throughout the summer of 1865, Grant pressured President Johnson to push Union troops into Mexico. Johnson resisted this, and Grant began to support Juarez' struggle clandestinely, ordering Sheridan to send arms and ammunition across the Rio Grande to the Liberal forces. Troops stationed around Brownsville, many of them United States Coloured Troops, were also encouraged to cross into Mexico when their enlistments had expired, or even 'desert.'

Thousands of Union and Confederate veterans headed into Mexico throughout 1865, as did thousands of Union munitions. Around this time Cortina also abandoned the Imperialists and returned to the lower Rio Grande and the Liberal cause. A Liberal army besieged Matamoros over the winter of 1865-66 but was thrown back by the Imperialist garrison. A stalemate settled in along the lower Rio Grande.

In June 1866 an Imperial column departed Matamoros heading for Monterrey escorting a wagon train. At the Battle of Santa Gertrudis, the Liberal army fell upon the Imperialists and destroyed them. Although details are scarce, as will be addressed in Chapter 5 the Liberals appear to have used weapons supplied by Sheridan and their ranks probably included a number of Union veterans. With the defeat at Santa Gertrudis, the Imperialists were forced to abandon Matamoros and the lower Rio Grande. This opened the Valley of Mexico to Liberal attack, and only one year later Maximilian was executed at Queretaro and the Liberal government restored in Mexico City. Texas historian Jerry Thompson has described Santa Gertrudis as 'the Waterloo of the Imperial army on the Rio Grande.'[81]

After 1867, violence continued along the lower Rio Grande – Manuel Gonzalez-Quiroga estimates that the 1870s was actually a more violent decade than the one that preceded it. In an instance of how the US and Mexico could interact and impact on each other's domestic crises, in 1876 Porfirio Diaz launched a coup from Brownsville into Mexico to try and gain the Mexican Presidency. Diaz was backed by a number of American generals and businessmen, including some who had been involved in machinations along the lower Rio Grande dating back to the Merchants' War, and at least half of his army was composed of American volunteers. Diaz' coup was successful: he became President, opened Mexico up to US investment and ruled the country until 1910.[82]

[81] Thompson, *Cortina*, 180
[82] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 250

Matamoros and the lower Rio Grande was, therefore, the place where the perception and sometimes the reality of the connection between the US and Mexican crises occurred. Actors and events on one side of the border affected those on the other, with ripples sometimes all the way to their respective nation's capital cities. In order to secure their desired domestic outcomes, both tried to influence the political and socioeconomic settlement on the other side of the Rio Grande. As the Anglo-American Union and Confederacy were more powerful, this was often an asymmetric process: Union and Confederate actors often had more practical means at their disposal (more money, more guns, more men) to try and achieve this than their Mexican counterparts did. On the lower Rio Grande, as the above suggests, this was more often the purview of non-state and renegade state actors than it was that of official state policies. The following chapters will address the role played in these geopolitical dislocations by the following groups of actors: filibusters, merchants, generals, soldiers and *caudillos*.

CHAPTER TWO: FILIBUSTERS

In Cormac McCarthy's Western novel *Blood Meridian*, set some time after the Mexican-American War, the main character 'the kid' joins a group of filibusters planning to invade the Mexican state of Sonora. The leader explains their rationale: 'There is no government in Mexico. Hell, there's no God in Mexico. Never will be. We are dealing with a people manifestly incapable of governing themselves. And do you know what happens with people who cannot govern themselves? That's right. Others come in to govern for them . . . And we will be the ones who will divide the spoils. There will be a section of land for every man in my company. Fine grassland. Some of the finest in the world. A land rich in minerals, in gold and silver I would say beyond the wildest speculation.' The filibusters advance into Sonora, a state in north-western Mexico, only to be quickly wiped out by a band of Comanches.[83]

Despite their fate, McCarthy's fictional filibusters demonstrate the pull of Mexico on the American (particularly Southern) imagination after 1848. Expeditions crossed into Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua and Tamaulipas in an attempt to annex them to the United States or form new, pro-Southern polities. In spite of this, most literature on the filibusters of the 1850s has focused on Narciso Lopez in Cuba and William Walker in Nicaragua. Filibustering expeditions to Mexico take a distinctive third place. Even then, the only book devoted solely to filibustering into Mexico does not address events along the lower Rio Grande at all. The activities of filibusters in this borderland therefore merit closer inspection, not only for the expeditions in and of themselves but also what they say about this

[83] McCarthy, Cormac, *Blood Meridian: or, The Evening Redness in the West* (New York, 1985), 36, 37

decentralised, non-state foreign policy, that violently, if without formal war, sought to increase the power of the United States.[84]

For some Americans, mainly Southerners, US victory in the Mexican-American War had opened up the continent, even the hemisphere, to American expansion. Southerners dreamt of adding Cuba and Mexico to the United States (a United States, of course, that protected and indeed promoted slavery) and even extended their ambitions to Central and South America as well. 'We claim the right of expansion as essential to our future security and prosperity,' Representative John Quitman claimed in 1856. Mexico, due to its geographical proximity, political instability and recently demonstrated military weakness, was a prime target of these filibustering aspirations. As Albert Gallatin Brown – Jefferson Davis's partner in the Senate from Mississippi – declared in 1859: 'I want Tamaulipas, Potosi, and one or two other Mexican states; and I want them all for the same reason – for the planting and spreading of slavery.' American expansionism, and what sociopolitical institutions would grace new American territory, was a major factor in the sectional crisis of the 1850s – in other words, the desire for (not exclusively) Mexican territory helped to fuel the sectionalism of that decade. Filibustering expeditions not only unsettled the US state, fuelling debates about the spread of slavery and its effect on free labour, but also threatened to unsettle and destabilise the Mexican state (among others) for the simple fact that this new American territory was to be acquired from it.[85]

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[84] Most histories of the Civil War era or antebellum politics, when they discuss the filibusters, focus on Cuba and Nicaragua: see for example McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 105-16; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion Volume II*, 145-67; Johnson, Walter, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Ma., 2013), 303-94. Even works focusing purely on the filibusters concentrate on Cuba and Nicaragua: see for example May, *Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire*; *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*; Guterl, Matthew, *American Mediterranean*. The only work devoted solely to filibustering into Mexico (albeit excepting the lower Rio Grande) is Stout Jr., Joseph Allen, *The Liberators: Filibustering Expeditions into Mexico 1848-1862 and the Last Thrust of Manifest Destiny* (Los Angeles, 1973).

[85] 'Speech of John A. Quitman of Mississippi, on the Powers of the Federal Government with Regard to the Territories: Delivered during the Debate on the President's Annual Message, in the House of Representatives,

What were filibusters? The word itself is derived from the French *flibustier* and Spanish *filibustero*, which mean freebooter and pirate, and according to Robert May, in the 1850s 'referred to American adventurers who raised or participated in private military forces that either invaded or planned to invade foreign countries with which the United States was formally at peace.' May further notes that filibustering 'crossed American ethnic, regional and class lines,' although this seems somewhat sweeping: the vast majority were Southern and white. Charles Brown lists the various occupations involved in either financing, promoting or practising filibustering: 'financial magnates,' politicians, secessionists, even missionaries all took part in these expeditions. As Steven Hahn notes, filibustering had a 'complex relation[ship] with official power and territorial ambition.' Rachel St John has contextualised this in terms of the US national 'boundary line,' noting that beyond it filibusters indulged 'hopes of creating new national divisions of space in the borderlands,' but that filibusters did not operate inside the United States; thus, 'even as they violated Mexican territorial sovereignty, filibusters implicitly recognised the authority of the United States.' Thomas Richards Jr argues that filibusters were in fact 'breakaway Americans,' albeit 'the most violent and ambitious [ones],' who distinguished between loyalty to the American nation and to the US state. Filibustering was technically illegal, outlawed by the 1818 Neutrality Act. Walter Johnson notes how the Neutrality Act was intended to remove geopolitical agency from non-state, renegade state and nonelite actors, centralising and institutionalising US foreign policy: 'diplomacy was [to be] the arena where *nations*, rather

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18/12/56,' *Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman Volume 2* (New York, 1860), ed. Clairborne, J.F.H., 333; 'Speech at Hazelhurst, Mississippi, 11/9/58,' *Speeches, Messages and Other Writings of the Hon. Albert G. Brown* (Philadelphia, 1859), ed. Cluskey, M.W., 610. Many historians have noted that the pressure for filibustering into Mexico came from South-westerners, whilst South-easterners and politicians from the Upper South opposed it. See for example Fuller, John D.P., *The Movement for the Acquisition of All-Mexico, 1846-1848* (Baltimore, 1936), 114-15; May, *Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire*, 16; Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*, 183. Walter Johnson suggests this was because railroad development had reoriented commerce in the South geographically from the south to the east. (Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 320.)

than ethnic groups or religions or classes, confronted one another . . . the US government hoped to make it possible for *the* nation to have *a* foreign policy.'[86]

Officially unendorsed by the US government, filibusters were non-state or renegade state actors who sought, in Hahn's words, to 'influence American policy by doing what the government was unable or unwilling to do itself.' Implicit within the analysis of Hahn and May is perhaps the key factor in filibustering: it was an attempt to transform the sociopolitical and geopolitical ordering of North America and the Caribbean (and, for some, beyond) to either integrate into or mirror the sociopolitical and geopolitical ordering of the United States – particularly, though not always, the Southern United States. This chapter examines the attempts to achieve this in the borderland region of the lower Rio Grande – to impose (Southern) US sociopolitical and geopolitical norms and ambitions in north-eastern Mexico, either in the form of annexation, protectorate or as a *quid pro quo* for military support in the Mexican War of Reform.[87]

Robert May has noted that 'the number of American filibuster raids into Mexico in the 1850s is staggering.' This chapter will examine three in the lower Rio Grande region: the Merchants' War of 1851-52, the proposed protectorate of Sam Houston, first in 1857 and again in 1859, and the proposed expedition of the Knights of the Golden Circle in 1860. Filibustering was only brought to an end along the lower Rio Grande by the advent of the American Civil War and set up many of the relationships and dynamics that would influence the conflict's course in that region.[88]

[86] May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, xi; for the apparently only incidence of filibustering in which African-Americans took part, see ibid, 197; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 17; Hahn, *Nation without Borders*, 162; St John, *Line in the Sand*, 44, 45; Richards Jr, *Breakaway Americas*, 260; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 323
[87] Hahn, *Nation without Borders*, 162
[88] May, *Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire*, 147

The Merchants' War, 1851-52

The lower Rio Grande had born witness to military expeditions somewhat analogous to filibustering before the 1850s – before there was a border between the US and Mexico in the area. Filibustering in some sense had already come to the lower Rio Grande in the 1830s with the breakaway of Texas from the Mexican Republic. As noted earlier, Matamoros had been the focus of an expedition led by James Grant and Francis Johnson during the Texas Revolution, but the attack was easily repelled. Unauthorised by Texan commander Sam Houston, this was a case of state actors – commanders of official Texan forces – utilising the borderland to pursue their own policies in a renegade fashion, and using state forces to do so. The Texas Revolution had not proved the end of these borderland dislocations. In 1838, *ranchero* Antonio Canales attempted to create his own polity, the Republic of the Rio Grande and garnered support from both Mexicans and Texans. He established his capital in the town of Guerrero but was rebuffed in attacks on Matamoros, Monterrey and Saltillo. His military commander, Antonio Zapata, was captured and executed by Mexican troops in March 1840 and Canales eventually surrendered that November.

The Republic of the Rio Grande's brief life illustrates many of the characteristics of the lower Rio Grande borderland during this time. Canales often withdrew after defeat into 'El Desierto Muerto' between the Rio Grande and the Neuces: despite being claimed by Texas, this could not be enforced, and it served in essence as a stateless space where non-state or renegade state actors, intent on their own geopolitical agency, could gather or regroup. In a forerunner to the American Civil War and the French intervention, Texan President Mirabeau Lamar 'turned a blind eye' to Canales' recruitment of volunteers in Texas. Positioned on the border, the success of the Republic of the Rio Grande was dependent on 'intermestic' factors: a struggle against Mexican sovereignty waged with (discreet) Texan support. Lamar's actions also show how high within state institutions renegade action could go, with even the

president of his country sanctioning actions contravening his official policy – just as Lincoln and Andrew Johnson were arguably to do in the following decade. Borderlands were not just utilised by the non-state and renegade state actors who were there – such as Canales or Johnson and Grant – but also by renegade state actors ensconced within president's and governor's mansions, government departments and legislative assemblies, hundreds if not thousands of miles away, to pursue their own unofficial policies.[89]

During the Mexican-American War, Zachary Taylor had built Fort Brown north of the river opposite Matamoros. One man quick to take advantage of this was a merchant originally from Connecticut called Charles Stillman. Stillman had arrived on the lower Rio Grande with his father Francis when he was just fifteen in 1825 and immediately became involved in mercantile affairs. After the end of the war, Stillman founded the town of Brownsville around Fort Brown which quickly expanded, helped initially by the California Gold Rush, with many prospectors passing through northern Mexico on their way to the Pacific goldfields. In 1850 he joined with fellow merchants Mifflin Kenedy and Richard King to form a steamship company that would come to dominate trade along the lower Rio Grande. The three merchants would prove to be highly important to the fortunes of Southern and Confederate foreign policy in the region in the forthcoming years. The Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War also gave hopes of a commercial boom on the lower Rio Grande: the nineteenth article stipulated that goods brought to the lower Rio Grande during

[89] De la Garza, Beatriz, *From the Republic of the Rio Grande: A Personal History of the Place and the People* (Austin, 2021), 11-20; Luck, Paul D., *Searching for the Republic of the Rio Grande: Northern Mexico and Texas, 1838-40* (Lubbock, 2022); Nance, Joseph Milton, *After San Jacinto: The Texas-Mexican Frontier, 1836-1841* (Austin, 1963), 201-315; Vigness, David M., 'Relations of the Republic of Texas and the Republic of the Rio Grande,' *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 57 No. 3 (1954). For a *longue duree* view of the lower Rio Grande's sense of political separation from first Spain and then Mexico see Valerio-Jimenez, Omar, 'Neglected Citizens and Willing Traders: The Villas del Norte (Tamaulipas) in Mexico's Northern Borderlands, 1749-1846,' *Mexican Studies*, Vol. 18 No. 2 (2002).

the war that had not yet been sold would not be subject to import taxes, sales duties or confiscation.[90]

This was simply ignored by Mexican authorities, who continued to levy duties or seize goods outright. (Although in fairness, many American merchants apparently used the nineteenth article as a cover to import further goods avoiding any incomes or sales tax.) Perhaps in compensation, in November 1849 all duties were lowered by 40%, but according to James Fred Rippy 'they were still high.' Such a situation encouraged mercantile support for an alternative to Mexican government, particularly an alternative that promised to reduce or abolish import and sale taxes: and a figure promoting such an alternative shortly emerged in the form of Jose Carvajal.[91]

Carvajal was born in 1809 in San Antonio and had served as secretary to Antonio Canales during the Republic of the Rio Grande. Despite participating in this separatist movement, Carvajal had fought for Mexico during the Mexican-American War, but returned to separatist politics at the war's end: according to Charles H. Brown, Carvajal began planning another independent polity as early as 1848. Eventually, in September 1851, he proclaimed the Republic of the Sierra Madre and issued El Plan de la Loba.[92]

Among other things, El Plan de la Loba called for the withdrawal of central government troops, reduced tariffs and certain goods to be allowed into the new country for free for five years. A Mexican attack on Carvajal persuaded him to flee across the river to Brownsville, where he began to rally mercantile support and recruiting Texans to his cause, including former Texas Ranger John 'Rip' Ford. (He was known as 'Rip Ford' for his habit of

[90] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 7, 94; *Civil War on the Rio Grande,* ed. Bacha-Garza, Miller and Skowronek, 182-85; Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 79-80

[91] Rippy, James Fred, 'Border Troubles along the Rio Grande, 1848-60,' *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 23 No. 2 (1919), 94. More recently, Kearney and Knopp have also concluded the tariffs were 'unrealistically high.' (Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 92)

[92] Nance, *After San Jacinto*, 252-53; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 150-51

writing R.I.P. after the name of every Ranger killed in action.) Ford described Carvajal as 'among the advocates of American principles in Mexico.' Ford more properly meant Southern as the following demonstrates: living between the Rio Grande and the Sierra Madre were, in Ford's estimation, 'three thousand coloured men . . . who were owned by men living in Texas.' Upon his arrival in Brownsville, Carvajal, no doubt as a condition of support, 'acceded to a proposition' to have these returned to their masters and even to pass a law to make it illegal for a runaway slave to seek shelter in his new polity's territory. 'The liberal views expressed in the plan of la Loba – and the hope of strengthening the institution of slavery in Texas and in the South, as stated by Carvajal – caused Texians to sympathise with a people struggling for liberty,' according to Ford. Ford clearly saw no contradiction between the two claims.[93]

In other words, Texans agreed to support Carvajal for two reasons: firstly, to secure advantageous trading rights in north-eastern Mexico; secondly, to secure the return of runaway slaves and the abolition of north-eastern Mexico as a haven for them. Clearly these are the 'American principles' Ford mentions in his memoirs, combined with a belief in individual freedom and the right to property. Support for Carvajal was, in effect, an attempt to extend the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act south of the Rio Grande. All these aims – free trade, return of runaways and an extension of slavery's reach – were the desires of many prominent Southern politicians such as Jefferson Davis and William Yancey, were advocated in Congress and would be embedded within the Confederate constitution. The cost of Texan support for Carvajal would be to turn his Republic of the Sierra Madre into a facsimile of the

[93] Ibid, 151; May, *Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire*, 147; Chance, Joseph E., *Jose Maria de Jesus Carvajal: The Life and Times of a Mexican Revolutionary* (San Antonio, 2006), 104-05; Ford, John Salmon, *Rip Ford's Texas* (Austin, 1963), ed. Oates, Stephen B., 195, 196. Alice Baumgartner estimates 3-5000 slaves escaped into Mexico in total (Baumgartner, *South to Freedom*, 4). Slave escape into northern Mexico has been neglected for a long time and is just beginning to receive the attention it deserves: see ibid, passim; Nichols, James David, 'The Line of Liberty: Runaway Slaves and Fugitive Peons in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands,' *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 44 No. 4 (2013)

US South – to accept the sociopolitical and geopolitical configuration of the new polity that those north of the river demanded. In short, the price of support for the independence of north-eastern Mexico was to turn it into the Southern dream: a slavery-supporting, free-trade republic.

Carvajal captured Camargo on September 19th with around 170 men, 100 Mexicans and 70 Americans and the following month, reinforced to 400 men (including Ford and more Americans) he moved to attack Matamoros. The attack was somewhat hampered due to having only one piece of artillery as Matamoros, like any town on the old Spanish frontier, had encircling city walls. Nonetheless, Carvajal's men forced their way to the city plaza where they engaged the Mexican troops entrenched behind barricades. 'There was a great uproar,' Ford remembered; 'cannon boomed, musketry rattled, men shouted, and no great amount of damage done.' Ford was wounded and crossed back over the Rio Grande, where he was treated by the US Army surgeon in Brownsville. Whilst Ford was absent Carvajal withdrew his men. A strike at Cerralvo in a bid to secure the garrison's artillery was similarly unsuccessful.[94]

Carvajal was arrested by US authorities in March 1852 and bailed shortly thereafter for $5,000. His speech at a summer fair in Corpus Christi in June failed to attract either money, supplies or men. A raid by men formerly under Carvajal's command, now led by one Alfred Norton (who had lost an arm in the attack on Matamoros) was launched against the Mexican town of Reynosa in March 1853. It was successful, although Norton was arrested shortly afterwards in Brownsville. Whilst Carvajal was not directly involved, he was thought to have planned it and his bond was revoked. The Reynosa raid confirmed the lessening Southern support for Carvajal: 'you may consider the Reynosa affair as a death blow for

[94] Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 152-53; Chance, *Carvajal*, 101-45; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 197-204 (quote 200)

filibusterism on the Rio Grande, at least for the present,' the *Galveston Journal* informed its readers. Carvajal was finally brought to trial in January 1854 but was almost immediately acquitted: his lawyers alleged that five members of the original grand jury did not meet the requirements to serve as a juror and therefore the indictment was invalid. Judge John Watrous upheld the complaint and the charges were dismissed.[95]

The attitude of the US government to the Merchants' War showcases not only the limits of official state power in the borderlands but also a pronounced ambiguity over exercising what power it had. President Millard Filmore ordered the US commander in Texas General David Twiggs to stop the expedition on September 24th, only a week after Carvajal had issued El Plan de la Loba, but did not warn US citizens against taking part for another month. General William Harney, commander on the frontier, was unsure whether the 1818 Neutrality Act allowed him to use violence to stop Carvajal's military expedition. When, in January 1852, Harney issued orders for the seizure of Carvajal's arms and ammunition and a list made of his followers so they could be brought to trial, two of his subordinate officers, Gabriel Paul and Richard Garnett, refused. Both men were arrested, tried before a court martial and acquitted.[96]

In response to a formal protest from the Mexican government, Secretary of State Daniel Webster noted the connection of trade to the borderland disturbances: Although Webster stressed the US government opposed their actions and that 'persons accused [were] to be arrested for trial and punishment' he further stated that 'there is no existing law which authorises the President to prevent them [the merchants].' In other words, even if distance of time and space had not been an issue, the scope of the central state government's powers

[95] Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 155-57; Chance, *Carvajal*, 146-48, 154-57, 163
[96] Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 152; Chance, *Carvajal*, 139. Garnett would subsequently earn the dubious distinction of becoming the first general to be killed in the Civil War, at the Battle of Corrick's Ford in July 1861.

would not allow it, according to Webster, to enact preventative measures to guard against such filibustering, underlining the weakness of the state in protecting territorial borders. This weakness in enforcing central government authority and in some cases a disinclination to even attempt to do so, helped create the space for a plurality of foreign policies such as filibustering. Subsequently, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis did issue orders authorising the commanding officer in Texas to stop any invasion of Mexico.[97]

How much were merchants involved in the Merchants' War, and indeed which ones? Historians such as Robert May, Charles H. Brown and Joseph Chance all seem to believe that Carvajal approached the merchants, rather than vice versa. May mentions that Carvajal 'procured arms and other supplies from merchants who stood to gain trading advantages with Mexico if his tariff policies were adopted.' Brown notes that Carvajal 'began negotiations with merchants at Brownsville . . . to support a revolution that he would lead.' Carvajal's biographer Joseph Chance notes that 'the plan drew support from border merchants.' On the other hand, Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga and Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp posit the merchants as the originators of the conflict on both sides of the border. For Gonzalez-Quiroga 'merchants of the Rio Grande – Anglo-Americans, Mexicans and Europeans – did more than write angry letters,' he writes. 'They jointly financed a revolt against the government.' For Kearney and Knopp 'the few firms still surviving in Matamoros were desperate for a solution, perhaps even a revolutionary one, and the interconnections . . . facilitated coordination of the plot on both sides of the river.'

Writing to the Mexican Ambassador, Daniel Webster appeared convinced of that the desire for a trading relationship based on American mercantile terms underpinned the

[97] Daniel Webster to Luis de la Rosa, 4/11/51, *The Papers of Daniel Webster: Diplomatic Papers Volume 2, 1850-1852* (Hanover, NH, 1987), ed. Shewmaker, Kenneth E., Stevens, Kenneth R., and Berolzheimer, Alan R., 589-91 (quote 591); Davis to Marcy, 24/8/54, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis Volume 5: 1853-1855* (Baton Rouge, 1985), ed. Crist, Lynda Lasswell and Dix, Mary Seaton, 326

conflict. 'The insurrection adverted to has been more or less instigated and fomented by those who have been thwarted in attempting to carry on illicit trade with the Mexican Republic,' he wrote. 'It is not unlikely that these persons may have had power to aid in some degree the insurgents in the north of Mexico, and that they considered the provocations they had received sufficient to justify such a course.' Charles Stillman himself denied any direct involvement, writing to his friend James Jewett: 'I am sorry to see Jim that you thought me so green to be engaged in the Revolution, any further than talking goes' although he admitted 'that I would like to see Carvajal succeed is true.' However, he was certainly aware of the preparation of Carvajal's invasion as he also wrote to his business associates in New Orleans in July 1851 that 'we are encouraged to anticipate a revolt on this frontier, which will open the country [to trade] to Monterrey at least.' He hoped that as a result the lower Rio Grande customs houses 'will be filled by others more suitable to our interest, [as] a Mexican force is also gathering on this side of the river near Camargo, under the name of volunteers for Cuba.' Kearney and Knopp similarly posit Kenedy and King as the main backers of the Merchants' War. Either way, the likeliest scenario is that the scheme actually originated with Carvajal – especially given his prior involvement in the Republic of the Rio Grande – and the Southern merchants such as Stillman, Kenedy and King saw this as the convenient answer to their prayers.[98]

If Carvajal's separatist dream predated mercantile discontent with the Mexican authorities and was rooted instead in the failed Republic of the Rio Grande in the 1830s, then the Merchants' War was in essence a co-option of political discontent by the local economic

[98] Webster to Luis de la Rosa, 4/11/51, *Papers of Webster 2*, 590; May, Robert, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 36; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 151; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 98; Chance, *Carvajal*, 102. Chance further states that 'more important [than mercantile support] however, an independent northern Mexico was sanctioned by Mexican Liberals.' Unfortunately, he provides no examples. (Ibid.); Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 91-92 (quote 92); Stillman quoted in Stillman, Chauncey Devereux, *Charles Stillman, 1810-1875* (New York, 1956), 16; Stillman to Granger & Co, 15/7/51, Stillman Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Stillman to Granger & Co, 9/9/51, ibid

elite, mainly foreign, to further their own ends. That Carvajal's army was mainly composed of Americans suggests that this vision had more sway north of the Rio Grande than south of it (or that there were more armed Americans with time on their hands milling around the area). However, as Gonzalez-Quiroga and Kearney and Knopp reveal, Mexican, American and European merchants were all involved in this scheme. Nonetheless, the desire to use the Republic of the Sierra Madre to abolish the safe haven for runaway slaves clearly originated on the American side of the Rio Grande, and that Carvajal accepted the policy (it having not been in the original Plan de la Loba) shows how important he perceived American support to be to his success. Whilst support for Carvajal crossed ethnic lines, it would nevertheless seem to be a situation where the American voice predominated.

At the same time, it suggests a different dynamic of power, where non-state actors held as much military and political power within the region (*de facto* if not *de jure*) as state actors did, if not more. Rachel St John has noted that in the borderlands state power was often in dialogue with other actors on the ground, rather than imposing its policy. Indeed, north of the Rio Grande state actors were either unsure if they could stop them (Harney and Webster) or simply refused to (Paul and Garnett). Similarly, Carvajal, Paul, Garnett and others involved in the Merchants' War were all acquitted of breaking the law, which suggests a sympathy with their actions in state institutions, even if they contravened official US policy. In contrast, St John suggests this does not reflect state weakness, but rather the ability of state officials on the ground to prioritise objectives and maintain sovereignty without resorting to force. Even if the US Army had been committed to stopping Carvajal's filibustering, they simply could not; as his biographer notes, Carvajal's men 'had been over this country many times . . . and knew it and the people living there too well to ever be caught.' This must be

balanced against the fact that, south of the river, Carvajal and his men were defeated by regular Mexican troops.[99]

The Merchants' War (in many ways a misnomer, as it was neither a war nor, most probably, originated by the merchants) shows how filibustering was essentially a stateless imperialism and how at the same time it also sought to extend American, particularly Southern, sociopolitical structures beyond the borders of the United States. This can clearly be seen in the American influence on the Plan de la Loba, in terms of its free trade economic policy, its commitment to returning runaways and to reversing the Mexican policy that slaves gained their freedom the moment they set foot on Mexican territory. In return for their material support, Carvajal had to accept the desired Southern sociopolitical configuration of his polity.

In one sense, the Merchants' War was the continuation of a north-eastern Mexican struggle for independence that had its genesis in the Republic of the Rio Grande. The blurring of ethnic differences can be pushed too far – Carvajal, who had been educated in the US, was derided as 'muy americana' and most Mexicans opposed him. Nonetheless, the Merchants' War not only reveals a heterodox dynamic of power relations – non-state actors dominating regional geopolitics rather than the state, which could only lamely chase them or apologise for their misdeeds – but also an attempt to create a state that was essentially stateless: born not of ideological conviction (at least as far as the merchants were concerned) but a desire for benign economic conditions that cut across ethnic lines and prompted geopolitical intrigue. Force – and talk, in the shape of 'El Plan de la Lobo' – were used to secure trade and if necessary a state was to be invented, or its invention co-opted, to achieve this. Non-state policy in the Merchants' War was not only warlike whilst not actually a war; it was also statelike whilst not actually a state.

[99] St John, *Line in the Sand*, 7; Chance, *Carvajal*, 139

Runaway Slaves before the Civil War: The Callahan Raid

Robert May has asserted that 'there is little evidence that filibustering in Mexico was sectionally oriented,' but for the lower Rio Grande at least this seems inaccurate. As mentioned, one condition of Southern support for Carvajal was his promise to return runaway slaves to their Texan owners. The next case of geopolitical agency, this time by a renegade state actor, along the lower Rio Grande similarly turned on the issue of runaways, whilst the future proposed invasion of the Knights of the Golden Circle aimed to spread slavery southwards into the runaways' hideaway and beyond. In other words, despite the failure of the Merchants' War some Southerners still desired, and occasionally acted upon this desire, to transform north-eastern Mexico into a sociopolitical and geopolitical space that at least resembled the South, if not became a part of it.[100]

In the years since the Merchants' War John Ford had rejoined the Rangers and involved himself in further filibustering activities: he became the chief organiser of John Quitman's expedition to Cuba in Texas, for example. In both his public (Ranger) and private (filibuster) capacities, the issue of runaways in northern Mexico continued to vex him. 'Something must be done for the protection of slave property in this state,' he wrote to Quitman in July 1855: 'negroes are running off daily.' 'Let men,' he wrote in a newspaper editorial, 'goaded by frequent losses, once shoulder their arms and make a forward movement to the Rio Grande, and nothing short of success will satisfy them.' Ford remained unrepentant in his memoirs, and connected the continuing runaway trouble to the failure of previous filibustering. 'The possession of slaves in western Texas in 1854 was rendered insecure, owing to the contiguity of Mexico and to the efforts of Mexicans to induce them to run away

[100] May, *Southern Dreams of Caribbean Empire*, 148

. . . The writer [Ford] called attention . . . to the continuous exodus of slaves into Mexico and to the remedy once within reach during the Carbajal revolution.' Ford's worries were not without foundation. Indeed, Benjamin Johnson has noted that slaves were more likely to escape to freedom from Texas than any other part of the South. On his journey through Texas, Frederick Olmsted noted that runaways were '*constantly* arriving' in border towns such as Piedras Negras. Texan slaveholders called a meeting at the town of Bastrop to discuss the practicality of crossing into Mexico to capture runaways. There, there gathered 'men of means, influence and character,' according to the *Bastrop Advertiser*, 'who will give material aid to any amount, to men who will pledge themselves to pursue and capture our runaways even in the heart of Mexico.'[101]

It was in this atmosphere that Captain James Callahan set off on an expedition with 111 Rangers, ostensibly to hunt down a raiding party of Lipan Apaches. He may also have been persuaded by the slaveowners assembled in Bastrop to go hunting for runaways. Crossing the Rio Grande just downstream of Eagle Pass, Callahan encountered a joint force of Mexicans and Native Americans near Rio Escondido. Almost surrounded, Callahan cut his way out and fell back to Piedras Negras, the Mexican village opposite Eagle Pass. After the Mexican commander had sent an insulting note to his American counterpart, Major Burbank, at San Antonio, Burbank offered Callahan's men protection for them to withdraw, but not before they set fire to the town and 'in addition to a large quantity of produce, they secured gold necklaces and chains, earrings, watches, rings, and other valuable articles.' Again, the state was belatedly providing cover to a renegade state actor.[102]

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[101] Ibid, 49-50; Ford to Quitman, 2/7/55, quoted ibid, 137; *The Texas State Times*, 2/6/55; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 214, 215; Johnson, Benjamin, *Bordertown: The Odyssey of an American Place* (New Haven, 2008), 69; Olmsted, *Journey through Texas*, 325; *Texas State Gazette*, 23/6/55

[102] Tyler, Ronnie C., 'The Callahan Expedition of 1855: Indians or Negroes?', *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 70 No. 4 (1967), 579-81 (quote 581); Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 215-16

The Callahan expedition – if indeed it was to capture runaways, as will be discussed below – was a violent outcome of a failure of non-state actors to successfully advance diplomatic talk. 1855 was a year of turmoil in Mexico. The previous year, General Santa Anna's sale of Mexican territory to the US in the Gadsden Purchase had galvanised Liberal opposition to him, and leading Liberal politicians had issued the Plan of Ayutla in 1854. Santa Anna had been driven from power and into exile, and now an uneasy truce between Liberals and Conservatives prevailed. One of the Plan of Ayutla's signatories, Santiago Vidaurri, had been elected Liberal governor of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon, and it was to him that the Southern slaveowners gathered at Bastrop had first appealed. Vidaurri refused them permission to cross into his territory to recover runaways, and wrote to his military commander, Colonel Emilio Langberg, that he should 'repel force with force' if a Southern expedition was mounted. Vidaurri further asserted that should matters should be reserved for governments and not private parties to discuss. As later events would prove, this was a principle Vidaurri deployed only when it was politically convenient to do so.[103]

Was Callahan's expedition really to recover runaways? For Ronnie Tyler and Robert May, the answer seems to be definitely yes. Sean Kelley has suggested that the recapture of runaways was a 'second goal' of the expedition after punishing the Lipan Apaches. Similarly, Kevin Mulroy notes that 'interested slaveholders apparently secured Callahan's support for their mission by promising him a percentage of the blacks captured.' More recently, Curtis Chubb has suggested that the raid's only purpose was what it declared, to attack a party of Lipan Apaches. Even Vidaurri himself, Chubb points out, put the expedition purely down to the activities of the Apaches: 'It was owing to those Indians that the Americans have lately invaded our National Territory, thus giving rise to a serious conflict, causing to us heavy expenses, the burning of Piedras Negras, and the consequences of the battle of Rio

[103] For the Gadsden Purchase and the Plan of Ayutla, see Sinkin, *The Mexican Reform*; Tyler, 'The Callahan Expedition,' 577-78 (Vidaurri quoted 578)

Escondido.' Far more convincing a culprit, to Chubb, is an expedition mounted by four Texan landowners into northern Mexico at their own expense, two weeks before Callahan's expedition rode off. Local official Ramon Musquiz wrote to Vidaurri that Langberg met with 'a small force raised at the expense of four landowners to whom he had offered to deliver the Negroes they say we have here.' If Callahan's raid was not to recapture runaways, there was clearly a contemporaneous expedition that was, mounted by non-state actors. Even if Callahan was not aiming to recapture runaways, he almost certainly fought them: some of the 'Indians' recorded as fighting alongside the Mexicans at Rio Escondido were Seminoles, resettled on the Rio Grande from Florida in 1850. A sizeable number of these were runaway slaves from Georgia and Florida plantations who had fled to the Floridian everglades only to be resettled after the Second Seminole War, the famous 'Black Seminoles.'[104]

The Callahan raid was another instant of non-state and renegade state actors combining to try and enact their own foreign policy, or perhaps more simply to force into being the sociopolitical and geopolitical construction (anti-runaway, pro-Southern) that they wanted north-eastern Mexico to be. In recognition of this, James David Nichols has described the raid as 'aggressive – even imperialistic.' Callahan and his men were Texas Rangers, employed by the State of Texas, but according to Tyler, May and Mulroy they were acting at the behest of non-state actors in the form of the slaveowners. If May and Mulroy are correct, at the behest of individuals outside any government institution Callahan had changed the objective of his mission and, by extension, changed and challenged the foreign policy of the US government on the lower Rio Grande: now, *de facto* if hardly *de jure*, Rangers were

[104] Ibid, 583-85; May, *Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire*, 138; Kelley, Sean, '"Mexico in His Head": Slavery and the Texas-Mexico Border, 1810-1860,' *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37 No. 3 (2004), 718; Chubb, Curtis, 'Revisiting the Purpose of the 1855 Callahan Expedition,' *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 121 No. 4 (2018), passim, for Musquiz and Vidaurri quotes 423, 428-29; for 'Black Seminoles' on the lower Rio Grande, see Mulroy, Kevin, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock, 1993), 61-109, Callahan raid 78-81 (quote 79); Porter, Kenneth W., *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville, 1996), 137-74, Callahan raid 151-53. Porter notes that 'years later, elderly Black Seminoles' claimed to have defeated 'three attacks by Texan slavers in Mexico.' (Ibid, 151.)

crossing into Mexico to capture runaway slaves. When talk with Vidaurri had failed, the slaveowners had resorted to violence in order to secure their goal – either by co-opting Callahan's expedition, or, per Chubb, sending their own, or both. Both cases had been a violation of the 1818 Neutrality Act – in other words, actors in the borderland had essentially taken foreign policy into their own hands. In both cases, military force had been used by Vidaurri to expel them from his territory.[105]

The Callahan raid – and the general atmosphere of Texan slaveholders' desire to push into Mexico to recover runaway slaves – decisively shaped the response of the Mexican central government. The Mexican Secretary of War wrote to Emilio Langberg that if Texans 'resolve[d] to invade our frontier with the aim of recovering their runaway slaves and their stolen horses, in this case you will with regret be compelled to repel force with force.' In other words, violent non-state/renegade action by Callahan and Texan slaveholders compelled a violent official response. Equally, Callahan, by appealing to Burbank for military aid in recovering his retreat from Rio Escondido, had drawn the US military – and by extension, the US government – into a situation where they would have been compelled to fire on Mexican state forces. Wars have been started over far less. Thus, the violent actions of non-state/renegade state actors impelled state actors, in the form of military forces, to the brink of firing upon one another, which would of course have constituted a major change in the praxis of the foreign policies of two countries nominally at peace.[106]

Whilst Callahan's raid was sanctioned by state officials (if not for the reason of capturing runaways), the incursions of Texan slaveholders into Mexico highlights what US foreign policy was not prepared to do and how, in the borderland, its limits could easily be transgressed. This was a virtue in many ways of the raiding parties' mobility: moving light

[105] Nichols, 'Line of Liberty,' 430
[106] Secretary of War to Langberg, 11/9/55, quoted Baumgartner, *South to Freedom*, 212

and fast, they could literally outpace the bounds and the reach of US foreign policy. Similarly, Callahan's incorporation of the slaveholders' aims into his raid (per Tyler, May, Kelley and Mulroy) show how US foreign policy could be adapted or subverted in the borderland to non-state, renegade state or nonelite aims. This shows there was a profound disconnect between the foreign policy that could be *proclaimed* in Washington and the foreign policy that could be *enacted* in the borderland.

The borderland was still a place of geopolitical agency, despite the imposition of the border – not just for Callahan and the slaveholders but also, crucially, for the runaway slaves themselves. Indeed, it was the very imposition of the border – and its demarcation between a slaveholding polity and a non-slaveholding one – that enabled both forms of geopolitical agency in the first place: for the runaway slaves to, essentially, migrate, and for the slaveholders to exceed US foreign policy and chase after them into another country. The border had not removed geopolitical agency – rather, as the escape of runaway slaves and Callahan's raid show, it had created it. This would continue into the Civil War, with slaves using the Confederate trade into Matamoros to escape into Mexico, whilst after the Civil War runaways would have quite a different effect on the geopolitics of the lower Rio Grande, turning from taking advantage of it to helping determine it – in 1865 and 1866 many former runaways who had joined the USCT, and were by then based on the lower Rio Grande, were encouraged to head south of the border after their enlistments expired, join the Mexican Liberal armies and fight against the Imperialists.

Sam Houston and the Knights of the Golden Circle: The Proposed Expeditions of 1860

After serving thirteen years in the US Senate, in addition to a lifetime of military and political adventures – near-death in the Creek War, Governor of Tennessee, the victorious general in

the Texan War of Independence and then President of Texas (twice) – Sam Houston might have been forgiven for retiring altogether from the political scene. However, he was persuaded to run for governor and easily won the gubernatorial election in 1859.

Houston took office on December 21st, a week before Cortina's defeat at the Battle of Rio Grande City, and his depredations were clearly uppermost in Houston's mind. Whilst in the US Senate in 1858, Houston had proposed a scheme to establish a US protectorate over Mexico; and in light of the disturbances along the lower Rio Grande, he returned to this idea in his Inaugural Address. He was also doubtless aware of the state of Texas public opinion, suggested by an editorial in the *Ledger and Texan* from a few months later: 'Events have carried us forward, until what commenced in a foray of banditti, is now become a war of races, and is becoming a war of nations.'[107]

In this context Houston delivered his inaugural gubernatorial address. 'Aware of the State of Mexican affairs,' he declaimed to the assembled Texan congressmen, 'I believed the Mexican people utterly incapable of framing a government and maintaining a nationality.' Houston drew attention to the borderland nature of Texas, again disproving Adelman and Aron's thesis that the Rio Grande borderland drew to a close in 1848: 'our entire boundary upon the Rio Grande, from the anarchy which prevails in that country, is in an exposed and excited condition.' If Mexicans could not end this 'anarchy' themselves, Houston heavily hinted that Texas would have to do it for them. 'As a neighbouring people to us, it is important for the maintenance of good neighbourhood, that law and order should exist in that country . . . As a border state, our own security must to a great extent, depend upon the condition of things in Mexico, and the restoration of order, and the establishment of good government in that country.' What Houston wanted, in other words, was the invasion of

[107] De Bruhl, Marshall, *Sword of San Jacinto: A Life of Sam Houston* (New York, 1993), 374; *Ledger and Texan* (San Antonio), 3/3/60

north-eastern Mexico and the establishment of Texas suzerainty there – to impose American, especially Southern, sociopolitical norms on Mexico, in this case to protect those norms in Texas, rather than expand the US state per se.[108]

His first action was to issue a proclamation 'to the Citizens of the Rio Grande Country to Stay the Hand of Violence,' by returning 'to their homes and to the exercise of their lawful Occupations.' It is clear that Houston construed some of Cortina's followers as filibusters themselves, for the proclamation also warned 'all persons holding allegiance to a foreign government, if any there be, who may be connected with such disturbances, are hereby notified that if arrested with arms in their hands, they will be treated as bandits and invaders.' Houston requested John Ford forward a copy of the proclamation on to Cortina. Houston then called for the organisation of the Texas militia, 'in view of the continued depredations upon our frontier and the insecurity arising from the anarchical condition of Mexico.'[109]

Despite promising in his inaugural that 'this is a subject for the consideration of the federal authorities,' by February 1860 Houston had either decided to take matters into his own hands, or was attempting to bluff the US government into supporting him on the frontier either offensively or defensively, as two letters to Secretary of War John B. Floyd indicate. 'The Territory of Texas has been invaded,' Houston informed him on February 13th. A threat of independent action followed at the end of the letter: 'Texas cannot be invaded with impunity. If thrown upon her own resources she may not only resist but adopt means to prevent a recurrence of the outrage.' Another letter two days later elaborated on this: Houston 'may feel that his duty is to meet the emergency in carrying his action so far as not only to

[108] 'Inaugural Address, 21/12/59,' *The Writings of Sam Houston 1813-1863 Volume VII: November 1842-March 1860* (Austin, 1942), ed. Williams, Amelia W. and Barker, Eugene C., 382-83; Thompson, *Cortina*, 86-87. General David Twiggs, commander of the US Army in Texas, had also called for US occupation of parts of Mexico in order to calm border violence in the late 1850s. (Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 107.)
[109] *Writings of Sam Houston VII*, 'Proclamation ordering Armed Bands within the State to Disperse, 28/12/59,' 389-90; ibid, 'To John Salmond [sic] Ford, 30/12/59,' 391; ibid, 'Message to the Texas Legislature, 13/1/60,' 412; De Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 382

repel the aggressions of Mexico, but to adopt such measures as will prevent the occurrence of similar inroads upon our frontier.' It is in an obvious inference that the 'means' and 'measures' Houston hinted at to 'prevent a recurrence' was some sort of deployment of Texan and/or US troops into north-eastern Mexico.[110]

Houston was essentially hinting at an invasion, hopefully with US governmental approval ('can we hope for aid from the Federal Government?' he asked in his February 15th letter to Floyd). In other words, he was threatening to act as a renegade state actor – a State governor, no less, hinting at launching what was essentially a filibustering expedition to establish a protectorate over north-eastern Mexico, in contravention of official state policy, in order to stop attacks across the Rio Grande such as those by Cortina. (Quite how invasion was to stop, rather than encourage, Mexican and Tejano attacks is unclear, although Houston was convinced that 'the Mexicans are a mild, pastoral and gentle people . . . they would hail with pleasure any measure which might be adopted by any foreign government that would give them peace and security.') That Houston's proposed expedition enjoyed a great degree of support is clear from the letters of support he received: 'A little filibustering would help Mexico,' wrote one. 'We are now anxious for you to call us a round [sic] you and march into Mexico and take charge of that unhappy country,' wrote another.[111]

The US commanding officer on the lower Rio Grande now was Colonel Robert E. Lee, sent there in February 1860 after his defeat of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry the previous October. According to Robert May and Marshal De Bruhl, Houston asked Lee to take command of the expedition into Mexico, but Lee declined. By March the enterprise was all over: Houston was beset by both lack of firearms and lack of money, despite his promise

[110] Ibid, 'Inaugural Address,' 383; ibid, 'To John B. Floyd, 13/2/60,' 475-76; ibid, 'To John B. Floyd, 15/2/60,' 478-79 (quote 479)
[111] Ibid, 'Inaugural Address,' 383; F.G. Nicholson to Houston, 20/3/60 and Columbus B. Smith to Houston, 6/5/60, quoted in May, *Southern Dreams of Caribbean Empire*, 146

to Floyd that 'Texas can . . . muster into the field ten thousand men, who are anxious, embarrassed as her finances are, to make reclamation upon Mexico.' According to William Prescott Webb, the 'embarrassed' finances of Texas led Houston to some interesting sources for backing: he planned to persuade British bondholders of Mexican debt to finance the expedition and use Texas Rangers, Native American guides and Native American war parties in the invasion. In mid-March Houston wrote to Floyd 'to vindicate myself from misapprehension' over the Mexico expedition. Houston averred that 'since 1857 I have been written to from various parts of the United States urging me to invade Mexico with a view to the establishment of a protectorate,' but 'to these overtures I made no favourable response' – an astonishing claim, given his advocacy of just such a protectorate in the Senate in 1858. Nonetheless, Houston now assured Floyd that 'I will continue or countenance no action with a view to complicate or embarrass the affairs of this administration.' To one John S. Bedwell, 'tendering a Company of men for the Rio Grande service,' Houston could only write that 'the Government of the United States have taken this matter in hand, I have now no need of men for the service.'[112]

With his advocacy of a US protectorate in north-eastern Mexico in 1858 and his comments in his Inaugural Address and letters to Floyd, Houston was either prepared (politically, if not practically) to invade Mexico in early 1860 or, in the latter case, was bluffing Floyd to receive more government support. If the former possibility was the case, that Houston could even contemplate doing so, effectively without explicit support from the US government, speaks to the borderland nature of the lower Rio Grande and the key role renegade state actors such as himself played in the praxis of foreign policy in this region. In

[112] Ibid, 145; Webb, Walter Prescott, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defence* (Austin, 1965), 205-15; *Writings of Sam Houston VII*, 'To John B. Floyd, 15/2/60,' 479; ibid, 'To John B. Floyd, 12/3/60,' 519-22 (quotes 519, 520, 521); ibid, 'To John S. Bedwell, 31/3/60,' 566; De Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 384. In contrast to Webb, De Bruhl suggests that British bondholders approached Houston requesting invasion: 'Reportedly the British were prepared to pay Houston a huge amount of money to lead an expedition across the border and they would settle an annuity on Margaret [Houston's wife].' (Ibid, 388.)

one sense, in calling for military action to defend American citizens, Houston belongs to a tradition stretching back to Thomas Jefferson and the Barbary Pirates and forwards to peacekeeping missions such as those in Somalia in the 1990s and indeed even the War on Terror. The difference, of course, is that all these are examples of the policy of the US government. In proposing an invasion, but not a war, indeed stressing his quarrel was not with the Mexican people but rather with those who had led them astray, Houston was advocating a forceful foreign policy to secure peace in the region at odds with the official policy of the Buchanan administration.[113]

Not only was Houston acting in an independent or semi-independent manner (or threatening to if he did not receive more central government support on the frontier) but his plans for establishing a protectorate in north-eastern Mexico was an attempt to dictate the political and security structure of that region. Having failed to restrain bandits and more politicised guerrillas such as Cortina and his men, in Houston's eyes the Mexican government and its local representatives had clearly lost their legitimacy to rule over this region. Of course, such an argument might equally have been made by a Mexican looking northwards, considering all the filibustering expeditions launched into Mexico that the US government, as Webster had admitted over the Merchants' War, could not prevent. That none did – nor did they propose an invasion and establishment of a protectorate – underlines the clear geopolitical power imbalance between Mexico and the United States, not just on the lower Rio Grande but more generally. Mexican officials having failed to prevent attacks launched from their country on US citizens and property, Houston sought – certainly in his Senate speech in 1858, and possibly as Governor in 1860 – to extend US political and military power to north-eastern Mexico to secure the border, and by doing so to secure not just lives and property, but the sociopolitical institutions of Texas (most obviously slavery) as well. Once

[113] See for example Parker, Richard B., *Uncle Sam in Barbary: A Diplomatic History* (Gainesville, 2004); Miles, Alex, *US Foreign Policy and the Rogue State Doctrine* (New York, 2013)

again, the same logic that had dictated the Merchants' War and the Callahan Raid also prevailed here: the Texan way of life could only be secured if the Mexican way of life was altered (forcibly, if necessary) to reflect and suit it.

On the other hand, Houston may have been bluffing in his talk of invasion, using it to wring concessions from the government, and if so he succeeded: Floyd increased US military strength along the lower Rio Grande. If this was the case, however, its shows how renegade state actors, and more localised actors, could use the *threat* of geopolitical dislocation to influence and change the official policy of the US government. The non-state, renegade state or nonelite potential of geopolitical agency could impact and influence state foreign policies as much as their kinetic realities could in the borderland. Instances like this show how, in certain situations, US foreign policy could be *reactive* to what occurred in the borderland, rather than *active* in imposing a central government policy on the region.

One further reason Houston called off his proposed expedition was that he discovered his was not the only filibustering expedition in the area. The tumult along the lower Rio Grande caused by the Cortina War had drawn the attention of George Bickley and the Knights of the Golden Circle. Bickley had formed the Knights in 1854; their purpose was to establish a Southern slave empire radiating out from Havana in the eponymous 'golden circle,' encompassing the Southern United States, Mexico, Central America, northern South America and the West Indies. Charles Brown and Robert May have argued that the national appeal of the Knights was limited, but it enjoyed its greatest popularity in Texas: the Knights had at least 32 'castles' in 27 Texan counties, and 'newspapers such as the *Dallas Herald* and the *Houston Telegraph* applauded Bickley's activities.'[114]

[114] Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 446; May, *Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire*, 151. For an in-depth examination, see Keehn, David C., *Knights of the Golden Circle: Secret Empire, Southern Secession, Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2013)

In January 1860 Elkanah Greer, the Knights' commander in Texas, issued a 'circular' calling on Knights throughout the country to support an invasion of Mexico. Greer and his Texans were ready to 'move immediately,' he wrote, 'and take possession of the States of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila and Chihuahua, and of them organise a Government.' That this government would operate as an extension of Southern sociopolitical and geopolitical norms and ambitions is obvious. Hundreds if not thousands of filibusters moved to the lower Rio Grande; in May, the *New York Herald* reported that 'this section of the country is filled up with members of this mysterious organisation . . .their fires are increased every night by new parties arriving during the day . . . there is a continuous caravan of them, coming in small parties, in large parties and on wagons, armed and unarmed, with money and without it.' The Knights' annual convention, held in Raleigh, North Caroline, in May, resolved to move the organisation's headquarters to Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, in November.[115]

The preparations of the Knights to invade Mexico were not exactly clandestine; their expedition was even debated on the floor of Congress. Representative Samuel Sullivan Cox of Ohio declared in March 1860 that 'such movements are as irrepressible as fate . . . The very stars in their courses are "Knights of the Golden Circle" and illustrate the record of human advancement. They are the type of that territorial expansion from which this American continent cannot be exempted without annihilation. The finger of Providence points to our nation as the guiding star of this progress.' On the other hand, Senator James Rood Doolittle of Wisconsin described the Knights as an example of 'southern fanaticism' with their plans for 'the acquisition of Cuba, Mexico, Central America, all tropical America.'[116] Both Cox and Doolittle illustrate the essential point of the Knights' plan: it was to extend a Southern vision

[115] Greer, Elkanah, 'An Appeal,' 26/1/60, in *Leaves from a Family Album* (Waco, 1975), ed. Greer, Jane Judge, 34; *New York Herald*, 3/5/60; Keehn, *Knights of Golden Circle*, 53

[116] 'Address to the House of Representatives,' 19/3/60, Cox, Samuel Sullivan, *Eight Years in Congress, from 1857 to 1865: Memoirs and Speeches* (New York, 1865), 140, 151; *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., pt. 2 (10/4/61), 1632

of US government, its sociopolitical norms and its ideological inheritance, southwards into Mexico. For Cox this was 'progress,' for Doolittle 'fanaticism'; nevertheless, intrinsically both recognised the Knights' proposed expedition for what it was.

Richard Taylor and Jose Navarro, sent by Houston to investigate the damage caused by the Cortina War on the lower Rio Grande, found 'hundreds of filibusters,' according to Jerry Thompson, around Brownsville. Some of these filibusters boasted that they would soon have 2000 men ready to invade Mexico – considerably larger than Carvajal or Cortina's armies (indeed, half the size of Zachary Taylor's army that had invaded north-eastern Mexico during the Mexican-American War). According to Samuel Heintzelman, some of the Knights crossed into Mexico on their own initiative; they had, Heintzelman noted in April, 'straggled into Matamoros' and were 'behaving badly.' Robert E. Lee wrote in a letter home in February that he had many 'filibustering reports and Mexican aggressions to scrutinise and discuss.' In response, Houston issued a proclamation on March 21st declaring that the Knights' expedition 'is not authorised by the Executive; but is discountenanced and proclaimed as illegal.' Houston may have wanted to invade Mexico, but he did not share the secessionist desires of the Knights. As Sarah Rodriguez has noted, 'Houston struggled to assert his authority over increasingly frustrated and rogue citizens whose regard for the federal government was conditional.' He also did not want to antagonise the US government, which had after all just agreed to deploy more regular troops to the area.[117]

Despite Houston's proclamation Bickley persisted. In July 1860 he published a letter in the *Richmond Daily Whig* trying to drum up further support for his filibuster into northern Mexico. 'I hereby order every member of the order belonging or desiring to belong to our

[117] Thompson, *Cortina*, 89; Heintzelman, Samuel Peter, *Fifty-four Miles and a Fight: Major Samuel Peter Heintzelman's Journal of Texas and the Cortina War* (Austin, 1998), ed. Thompson, Jerry, 231, 268; Robert E. Lee to Anne Carter Lee, 22/2/160, quoted May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 131; *Writings of Sam Houston VII*, 'Proclamation Declaring an Expedition to Mexico Unauthorised, 21/3/60,' 534-35 (quote 534); Rodriguez, 'Children of the Great Mexican Family,' 412

military department, and I respectfully invite all who may wish to join us, to repair to our camp at or near Fort Ewen on the south bank of the Rio Neuces . . . by the fifteenth day of September, 1860,' he wrote. The exact number of Knights is unclear; one Baltimore reporter claimed that 4000 men from the city had joined the Knights and were preparing for the invasion of Mexico, and David Keehn quotes a Knights spokesman who claimed they had 5000 men ready to cross the Rio Grande, but according to Robert May Bickley 'was unable to put together anything resembling a formidable expedition.'[118]

Bickley himself did not arrive in San Antonio until October 1860 and soon involved himself in the ongoing presidential election instead. With the election of Abraham Lincoln, the filibuster threat to Mexico petered out. In his memoirs, John Ford would suggest that it was actually the failure to extend Southern power into Mexico that caused the Civil War: 'Had a war between Mexico and the United States ensued, it is possible that the sectional quarrel then splitting the Union may have been stilled, for a season at least, wise counsel might have prevailed, and the fratricidal contest might have been averted.' Such a worldview envisioned Mexico as in effect an extension of US internal politics, which carried with it, implicitly, the right of Americans to interfere in Mexico. Such ideas would return again on the lower Rio Grande in 1865 as the Civil War approached its end rather than its beginning – and again Ford would be closely involved with them.[119]

Once again, the existence and the aims of the Knights point to both the (perceived) limits of US foreign policy and the (perceived) ease with which this could be transgressed. Whatever their exact number, hundreds if not thousands of men had gathered along the lower Rio Grande intending to invade Mexico. Bickley had a technical excuse for his invasion so that it did not contravene the 1818 Neutrality Act: he claimed that he and his Knights had

[118] *Richmond Daily Whig*, 18/7/60; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 45; Keehn, *Knights of Golden Circle*, 41; May, *Southern Dreams of Caribbean Empire*, 154
[119] Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 305

been invited by President Benito Juarez into Mexico to fight alongside the Liberals in the War of the Reform. This was not the case. Bickley was attempting to subvert both US and Mexican official policies in the course of his invasion, whilst using both as a cover *for* his invasion.

The fact that representatives of the US government such as Heintzelman could observe the growing number of Knights along the lower Rio Grande knowing their intention was invasion and yet do nothing to stop them could speak to Heintzelman's sympathy with the scheme, but either way it shows a failure to enforce the limits of US foreign policy on the nation's own citizens. The Knights were not arrested, or compelled to leave, or had their movements restricted. The impression one gets of US officials such as Lee and Heintzelman in regard to the Knights is impotence. The US government did not prevent the Knights' invasion. What stopped the invasion of the Knights was not the strength of the US state, but rather its weakness: the looming potential disintegration of the country in the 1860 presidential election changed Bickley's and the Knights' focus from one of *external* expansion to one of *internal* control of the central government. If the foreign policy of invasion was abandoned, it was not because the Knights were afraid of the reaction of the central government, but rather that the seriousness of the political crisis and the schedule of the electoral calendar diverted their attention elsewhere.

Equally, the Knights' motive should not be forgotten. Their intention was to construct a Southern empire in the Americas and the Caribbean. The purpose of this proposed empire was to extend the geographic range of Southern sociopolitical institutions, thereby increasing the South's economic and political power, whether within or without the nation-state framework of the United States. The proposed expedition across the lower Rio Grande into north-eastern Mexico was one part of this plan, one colony of the longed-for empire. Proposed and attempted expansion into north-eastern Mexico reveals the intermestic nature

of the origins of the Civil War as much as filibustering expeditions to Cuba and Nicaragua do. By invading north-eastern Mexico, the Knights were attempting to dictate the sociopolitical configuration of that region and align it to the South, an attempt that both reflected and deepened the sectional divide.

Conclusion

The various filibustering expeditions along the lower Rio Grande during the decade of the 1850s clearly show the non-state and renegade state, decentralised and deinstitutionalised nature of this foreign policy, and indeed the failure (or disinclination) of the central state to control it. They also show how many Americans considered it their duty and their opportunity to advance into north-eastern Mexico, either to extend Southern sociopolitical norms and geopolitical power, or to protect them where they were. In other words, by their very existence they show how geopolitics on the lower Rio Grande interacted with the sectional crisis of the United States, and that this interaction was mainly given concrete, practical expression by non-state and renegade state actors.

As Walter Johnson phrases it, filibusters were 'nonstate invaders, members of private armies that operated outside the government-structured realm of international law and diplomacy.' Similarly, Rachel St John argues that 'some of these men imagined themselves as illicit agents of US expansion.' This invites us to reconsider where power in foreign policy lay and, related to this, what foreign policy (or diplomacy) even was and exactly who practiced it in the mid-nineteenth century. George Herring has noted that 'US foreign policy has normally remained the province of elites,' but in an institutional sense the lower Rio Grande disproves this. Filibusters were on the whole 'privately organised,' or non-state in conception, such as the merchants who backed Carvajal or the Knights of the Golden Circle.

On the other hand, some were state actors following their own policy, such as Callahan or (possibly) Houston. Both suggest the locus of power did not rest solely with the central state institutional elite – executive or legislative politicians in Washington, or even generals 'on the ground' such as Harney – but rather with regional leaders instead. Construing Herring's comment in a Marxist sense, this non-state, renegade state praxis of foreign policy still did involve elites, but of the socioeconomic variety: the merchants behind Carvajal, the slaveowners who may have influenced Callahan, for example.[120]

In all of these expeditions along the lower Rio Grande, non-state and renegade state actors held the initiative; indeed, a defining nature of these expeditions is the inability of US state actors to enforce official state policy in such borderland areas. These non-state and renegade state actors – men such as Jose Carvajal, Charles Stillman, Juan Cortina, Sam Houston and George Bickley – utilised force and talk as they sought to influence policies or carve out new polities. Often the *raison d'etre* for these expeditions was trade – whether gaining control of Mexican minerals, circumventing Mexican tariffs or protecting the Texan cotton fields and denying the African-American slaves that tilled them a harbour to run to. All of this added up to a non-state and renegade state foreign policy (or constructions of foreign policy), that violently, if without official war, sought to transform geopolitical power relations along the lower Rio Grande.

The Merchants' War does not meet the technical definition of such a conflict, although its name points to its extremely violent and antagonistic nature, and of the lower Rio Grande borderland during that time more generally, as can also be seen with the Callahan Raid and Houston's and the Knights' invasion schemes. Invasion and annexation by non-state actors were seen as practicable, if not always legitimate forms of policy; and, in the spirit of one

[120] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 305; St John, *Line in the Sand*, 43; Herring, George C., *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York, 2008), 7, 214; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, xi-xii

man's terrorist being another man's freedom fighter, the only thing filibusters needed to convey legitimacy was success. The Confederacy would face the same problem as well.

Primarily focused on force as they were, though happy to utilise talk where possible, by their actions filibusters sought to provide US foreign policy with a power and an aggression that they felt it lacked, and to make up for areas where they felt US diplomacy had failed: most notably, on the lower Rio Grande, in recovering runaway slaves and preventing the escape of others. In this way, they extra-territorialised not only the sectional crisis of the United States, but also the compromise that seemed to have averted it, namely the Compromise of 1850. Part of the Compromise of 1850 was the Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed Southerners to take runaway slaves living in the North back into slavery in the South. The filibustering expeditions mentioned above, even those that did not aim at annexation, effectively sought to transform north-eastern Mexico into an extension of the US sociopolitical space – at the expense of Mexican political control, whether *de jure* or *de facto*.

The non-state and renegade state nature of these filibustering expeditions also raises the issue of motivation. Why were these men tempted to contravene the 1818 Neutrality Act and abrogate the creation and execution of foreign policy to themselves? Robert May has noted the many reasons men (and aside from William Walker's expedition to Nicaragua, it was always men) signed up to be filibusters: for money, for adventure, to avoid prison, to avoid peace, even out of Masonic fraternity. It is difficult to establish exactly who was involved in these expeditions along the lower Rio Grande, but some clues can be gleaned.[121]

Most of Carvajal's men, for example, were Americans, and many of these were former Texas Rangers who had served in the Mexican-American War. Ford mentions only of his men in the war that they were 'men of good character.' A more caustic portrait is painted

[121] Ibid, 81-116, 197-99

by Mexican Ambassador Luis de la Rosa in his letter to Daniel Webster. Rosa refers to them multiple times as 'adventurers.' His description of them not only notes some of their numbers and names but also their mobility and flexibility, both in terms of physical movement and adherence to a cause: 'seventy more adventurers from Lampazos and Pasa del Aguila, who belonged to a body of United States troops which had been discharged, and who were commanded by one Captain Tod; and that eighty more adventurers that had assembled at Corpus Christi for the purpose of joining the Cuban expedition, had likewise gone over to Mexico, under the leadership of an individual called Captain Howell.' Similarly, their former commander General Persifor Smith referred to them as 'men of unsettled habits . . . [who] were ready for anything that offered to supply their necessities.' Some of these filibusters were notable figures: one was Roberdeau Wheat, later famous as leader of the Lousiana Tigers during the Civil War, who took part in multiple filibustering expeditions; another was William Henry, grandson of the famous Patrick Henry of Virginia. Despite the often denigratory language used to describe them, filibusters came from across class lines and all sectors of society.[122]

As Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga has noted, however, ethnic differences do not map neatly onto who supported who. Mexicans and Americans fought together under Carvajal, whilst Mexican militia crossed the Rio Grande to help defend Brownsville from Cortina. Similarly, Robert May notes that two filibusters who had fought with William Walker in Nicaragua were serving in Santiago Vidaurri's army in 1858. Allegiances were not fixed, either to a particular state or even necessarily to the concept of a state at all. Whilst the filibustering expeditions are clearly examples of non-state geopolitical agency, and whilst they attempted to enforce a certain vision of sociopolitics and political allegiance on north-

[122] 'Luis de la Rosa to John J. Crittenden,' 23/10/51, *Diplomatic Papers of Webster 2*, ed. Shewmaker, Stevens and Berolzheimer, 586-89 (quotes 588); Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 152; Senate Executive Documents, 32nd Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 1, quoted in Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 151; Thompson, *Cortina*, 86

eastern Mexico, it would be wrong to assume that all filibusters were motivated by ideological considerations – or, conversely, that all who supported the extension of the Southern political dream (free trade, pro-slavery) to north-eastern Mexico were Anglo-Americans.[123]

The filibustering foreign policies of the 1850s, therefore, suggest a world where policy could be initiated independently at the frontier, where socioeconomic elites desirous of economic expansion could create (or felt the power to create) their own geopolitical realities, ignoring official policies decided in Washington or Mexico City. These geopolitical actors sought to use their agency to influence state politics from the ground up, whether it was in terms of foreign policy (Callahan, Houston, the Knights) or indeed to create a state of their own (Carvajal and his merchants). Non-state actors' agency and power was derived from their socioeconomic power, renegade states' agency and power from their membership of the very institutions their policies threatened to subvert. Both translated this agency into the power of violence, either threatened, funded or realised, or a combination thereof. Having no official state backing, these deinstitutionalised belligerents could nonetheless recruit and deploy their own armies and artillery and fight for months on end. Beyond the lower Rio Grande, they could even fight wars against one another, non-state foreign policies coming to violent blows with each other using armies and artillery within and across the theoretical sovereignties of nation-states: for example, Cornelius Vanderbilt recruited an army, which he supplied to Costa Rica, to defeat William Walker in Nicaragua, after Walker had nationalised Vanderbilt's assets in that country.[124]

The case of Vanderbilt's and Walker's armies fighting one another in Nicaragua highlights the other key point about the filibustering expeditions into north-eastern Mexico,

[123] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 98-99; May, *Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire*, 135
[124] For Vanderbilt and Walker, see Dando-Collins, Stephen, *Tycoon's War: How Cornelius Vanderbilt Invaded a Country to Overthrow America's Most Famous Military Adventurer* (New York, 2009)

actual or proposed, in the 1850s: they used foreign climes as an external setting for the development of an internal conflict. What this translated into on the ground along the lower Rio Grande were attempts to try and extend the sociopolitical makeup of the South into north-eastern Mexico. In this way Mexico's political reality was directly affected by the ongoing sectional crisis of the United States. It became an externalised expression of internal ideological conflict, somewhat analogous to how English Royalists and Parliamentarians in the 1650s expressed their own ideological differences by fighting on opposing sides in various continental European conflicts. At the same time, these non-state attempts to create new polities could reinforce allegiance to existing ones: Rachel St John, for example, notes how repelling filibustering expeditions 'helped foster a burgeoning sense of Mexican identity.'[125]

In the end, the majority of these non-state or renegade state foreign policies along the lower Rio Grande ended in failure: Carvajal did not create the Republic of the Sierra Madre; Callahan did not catch any runaways; and neither Houston nor the Knights invaded Mexico. For Carvajal, Callahan and Cortina the reason was military defeat by state forces; for Houston it was lack of finances; and for the Knights it was the looming presidential election. This suggests then that nation-states in the borderland were powerful enough to limit the effects of subnational disruptions of their sovereignty, but not powerful enough to stop such incursions crossing the border in the first place.

Nonetheless, the simple fact that such foreign policies could be practiced along the lower Rio Grande shows both their perceived viability, the power many had to attempt them, and the corresponding lack of power the central government had to prevent or even stop them once they had begun. Filibustering expeditions by non-state, renegade state and nonelite actors show the limits to the effective enforcement of official state policy, firstly by their very

[125] St John, *Line in the Sand*, 39, 50 (quote 50)

existence, and secondly their continued ability to escape punishment for transgressing that policy, as Carvajal, Paul, Garnett and the Texan slaveholders who crossed into Mexico all show. They could also force state actors to adapt official foreign policy in the heat of action. Callahan, for instance, was possibly persuaded by non-state actors to try and catch runaways on his raid into Mexico, whilst he in turn was able to place US troops in a position where they could have fired on Mexican forces, who were still in Mexican territory. The buildup of the Knights' strength in the borderland, the widespread knowledge what they were there for and their occasional actual incursions into Mexico, combined with the absolute failure of US officials such as Lee and Heintzelman to do anything about it show the limits to which the observance of US official foreign policy could be imposed on the nation's citizens. In other words, they were practical, kinetic expressions of non-state and renegade state geopolitical agency.

Filibustering expeditions along the lower Rio Grande also reveal how the sectional crisis of the 1850s was externalised, projected and imposed onto the neighbouring territory of Mexico. As the Civil War approached, many would take these attitudes and practices into the coming conflict along the lower Rio Grande, with powerful results.

CHAPTER THREE: MERCHANTS

As the Merchants' War shows, the decisions of merchants in the lower Rio Grande borderland could cause, or help to develop, geopolitical dislocations. During the American Civil War merchants were quick to take advantage of Confederate legislation that allowed cotton to be exported to Mexico in order to set up a trade through Matamoros. In this way, cotton was ferried across the Rio Grande to Matamoros, then taken to Bagdad on the coast and shipped to Europe, in return for commercial goods. It was the spontaneous development of this trade that brought the possibility of importing arms through Matamoros to the Confederacy's attention. Non-state actions, in other words, anticipated and therefore helped to create state policy.

Once the official Confederate trade had begun through Matamoros, merchants continually defined the limits of this policy's success. They would constantly undercut the Confederate state when it sought, firstly, to buy cotton from plantation owners and, secondly, then sell it in Matamoros. Furthermore, mercantile importation of commercial goods on blockade-runners by necessity limited the arms that could be transported to Matamoros. The Confederacy would struggle with this until almost the end of the Civil War, as well as its own incompetence and corruption – although the corruption, at least, was also in part a result of mercantile pressures.

These merchants also impacted the geopolitics of the lower Rio Grande, and indeed the diplomacy of the Civil War more broadly. European merchants engaged with the trade either by selling munitions to the Confederacy, commercial goods to Confederate citizens, or transporting those goods to and from Matamoros on blockade runners. Even merchants in the United States traded to Matamoros, including some with elite political connections; showing

how, for some at least, profit trumped patriotism. Union merchants were therefore actively helping to undermine their own nation's policy of defeating the Confederacy.

Merchants who were based and/or traded along the lower Rio Grande therefore intersected with the sectional crises in Mexico and the United States in two different ways: firstly, by trying to exploit them to make as much profit as possible; secondly, by utilising the trade to try and support their favoured side in the ongoing crises, particularly in the American Civil War.

Often trade during the Civil War is discussed in state terms, and its course is portrayed as being the prevue of central governments. Thus, Confederate trade is framed in terms of the government's cotton embargo, whilst the Union is understood in terms of its blockade policy. Such a focus can, however, obscure the ways in which these state policies (and others) were either evaded or driven by non-state actors. On the lower Rio Grande, the trade was begun by merchants acting in a private capacity rather than Confederate state officials. However, this brought a Union blockade to diplomatically dangerous waters and extended the scope of the Civil War to the Rio Grande. Equally some merchants, both American and European, not only utilised the trade for their own profit but also attempted to utilise that trade to achieve their desired foreign policy goals – or more accurately, to influence their nation's foreign policy in a direction that they desired.

The Zona Libre

Despite their defeat in the Merchants' War, Charles Stillman and his associates had continued to prosper along the lower Rio Grande, helped rather than hindered by Mexican instability. The tense truce between Liberals and Conservatives in Mexico after Santa Anna's overthrow collapsed in 1858 into the civil war known as the War of the Reform. Vidaurri fought for the

Liberal cause and the new President Benito Juarez, and his main source of military supply was Texas. In May 1858, for example, he contracted with Stillman for the delivery of more than 10,000 rifles along with pieces of artillery; when the arms arrived, they required fifteen wagons to transport them to the front line around San Luis Potosi. Vidaurri paid for this by 'offering discounts to merchants who traded across the border through the customhouses under his control.' Instead of securing economic prosperity by ending political instability in the area, as they had hoped to do with the Merchants' War, merchants had instead secured this by exploiting political instability instead.[126]

Another factor in increasing mercantile prosperity was the creation of the Zona Libre, or free trade zone, by Tamaulipas governor Ramon Guerra in March 1858. Guerra sought to prevent the increasing emigration of Mexicans across the border into Texas for work. The extent of the Zona Libre was not specified in Guerra's proclamation but according to Samuel Bell and James Smallwood it 'encompassed a narrow strip of territory six to eight miles wide along Tamaulipas's northern border' where the flow of goods was exempt from import or export duties. As Quinn Slobodian has noted, in such a zone 'investors effectively dictate their own rules. The zones are quasi-extraterritorial, both of the host state and distinct from it.' The Zona Libre had an immediate socioeconomic effect: the population of Matamoros rose from 12,000 in 1844 to 40,000 prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. In addition, the registered annual imports jumped from 1,400,000 pesos in 1857 to 3,500,000 in 1858 and 4,500,000 in 1859.[127]

It is worth for a moment considering just what the Zona Libre represented. Both the United States and Mexico were protectionist countries using tariffs to favour their domestic

[126] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 167, quotation 405
[127] Ibid, 165; Bell, Samuel E. and Smallwood, James M., 'Zona Libre: Trade and Diplomacy on the Mexican Border, 1858-1905,' *Arizona and the West* Vol. 24 No. 2 (1982), 124; Slobodian, Quinn, *Crack-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World Without Democracy* (London, 2023), 3; Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 105

production. The Zona Libre was therefore the only place of international free trade on the North American mainland between British North America and British Honduras. Merchants on the lower Rio Grande lacked the power and influence to change US protectionist laws as made in the capital, but had the ability to influence the change in Mexican protectionist laws, at least on a regional scale. Although this was in a tiny sliver of north-eastern Mexico, the evidence quoted above suggests it made a big difference, not just to the merchants in terms of their profits but also to people living in north-eastern Mexico.

Guerra's creation was really the act of a renegade state actor, deciding policy on the ground without recourse to the central government. (Guerra was not even the elected governor, serving only in an interim capacity.) As Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga notes, 'this was an extraordinary example of state [i.e., federal state] sovereignty.' Similarly, William Kiser characterises it as a 'blatant display of regionalism.' By creating the Zona Libre, Guerra demonstrated the legislative independence of the lower Rio Grande borderland, and the central government (soon embroiled in civil war and then foreign invasion) could only acquiesce and agree. Together with Vidaurri's domination of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon, this shows the weakness of state power in the borderland south of the river and, consequently, the ability of regional actors to determine and develop their own foreign policies.[128]

The effect of all this on Brownsville is somewhat contested. According to John Ford, 'the quantity of goods entering by way of Brazos de Santiago and the mouth of the Rio Grande was enormous. They represented $10,000,000 a year and sometimes $14,000,000 a year.' Gilbert Kingsbury, postmaster of Brownsville, wrote that the town had more millionaires in proportion to its size than any other in North America. On the other hand, Kearney and Knopp argue that 'the impact of the Matamoros free trade zone on Brownsville was devastating' and that 'one commercial house after another went out of business.' Equally,

[128] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 165; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 67

historians who address the Matamoros trade tend to preface this with an account of how 'sleepy' Matamoros was. Chauncey Stillman, for example, notes that Matamoros was 'moribund' before the outbreak of the Civil War and houses could be rented for as little as $10 per month. Such language tends to draw on an article written by Robert Delaney in the 1950s, which points out how, before the Civil War (including the Zona Libre years) only one ship cleared from New York to Matamoros per year.[129]

Can the two perspectives be reconciled? Neither necessarily disproves the other. Delaney, after all, tells us only how weak the Matamoros-New York trade was, rather than, as he extrapolates, trade from Matamoros as a whole. Exports from Matamoros were far more likely to head for New Orleans or the West Indian harbours such as Havana or Kingston, being both geographically closer and large mercantile entrepots themselves, than they were to New York. Within the US, Richard Salvucci has noted that Philadelphia was the main trading port with Mexico in the antebellum era. At the same time, as Brazos Santiago was the better harbour than Bagdad, it would be natural for most trade to be routed through there – through the United States rather than Mexico. Similarly, Kearney and Knopp's argument that the Zona Libre led to 'one commercial house after another' going out of business, may be related to how free trade zones tend to concentrate wealth in a few companies rather than diffuse it among many, as Jarius Banaji has recently argued.[130]

Considered in this way, the economic prosperity the region enjoyed in the 1860s that is usually linked solely to the trade through Matamoros during the Civil War can be argued to

[129] Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 460; Kingsbury to Warren, 3/6/60, quoted Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 168 (calculation ibid); Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 106; Stillman, *Charles Stillman*, 25; Delaney, Robert W., 'Matamoros: Port for Texas during the Civil War,' *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* Vol. 58 No. 2 (1955), 473. Kearney and Knopp suggest that this was part of a grand plan to secure an invasion of Mexico: 'According to one theory, certain Southern interests were again trying, by reducing the military protection afforded to Brownsville, to stir border troubles with Mexico that could be used to justify a new war and incorporate still more Mexican territory into the United States.' (Ibid, 106-07)

[130] Salvucci, 'Progress of US-Mexican Trade,' 699; Banaji, Jarius, *A Brief History of Commercial Capitalism* (Chicago, 2008), 99-102

have actually begun in 1858 with the creation of the Zona Libre. The war turbocharged a boom that was already in progress. Uncoupling the boom along the lower Rio Grande from the Civil War focuses our attention less on the course of the Civil War and more on one of its causal factors: namely, the Southern desire for free trade. Confederate policy along the lower Rio Grande during the 1860s can therefore be understood not just as an attempt to procure desperately needed military supplies, but also to impose Southern economic (and socioeconomic) desires on north-eastern Mexico. This would also be a key factor behind Jefferson Davis's refusal of Santiago Vidaurri's offer of annexation, examined below.

Rachel St John has argued that capitalism was only secured on the western US-Mexican border after military victories had secured national sovereignty. In contrast, the Zona Libre shows capitalism flourishing not merely in spite, but actually because of a lack of national sovereignty: left to their own devices, and supported by renegade state actors such as Garza, merchants along the lower Rio Grande swiftly built a prosperous economy that actually boomed the more those national sovereignties weakened, fracturing under the weight of civil war and foreign invasion.[131]

Having secured the Zona Libre, the concern of Southerners throughout most of the Civil War was limited to who controlled Matamoros and whether they would perpetuate the Zona Libre's free trade policy. Until the arrival of the Franco-Imperialists on the lower Rio Grande in late 1864, Confederate attempts to influence and shape Mexican sociopolitical and geopolitical policies in the area were confined to three things: 1) initial Confederate ambitions for expansion into north-eastern Mexico, which the Civil War rendered moot; 2) treaties with local Mexican officials to expedite the trade and protect it; 3) counter-raids into north-eastern Mexico to locate and attack the *renegados*, Mexicans, Tejanos and Anglo

[131] St John, *Line in the Sand*, 129

Unionist refugees from Texas who combined together to raid into Texas to try and disrupt the trade.

The Creation of the Trade

On April 19th, Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation placing Southern ports in a state of blockade. To advocates of the King Cotton doctrine, this was playing into their hands: it helped to withhold cotton from the European market, underlining European reliance on the South and so increasing the chances of the Confederacy's recognition. They themselves had already passed an act banning the export of cotton, unless it was to Mexico. The nascent Confederate ambassadors to Europe, William Yancey and Dudley Mann, believed 'the blockade question . . . to be the great lever which will eventually decide the relations between Europe and the South.' However, this did not obviate the fact that the South, a severely limited industrial country, had to import the majority of its war materials. The Confederacy therefore found itself on the horns of a foreign policy dilemma: the quickest way to secure foreign recognition was seen as withholding cotton from Europe, yet the nation's armies needed arms and ammunition, and those could really only be purchased in Europe and really only purchased with cotton. Exporting cotton and importing munitions via Mexico appeared to be the easiest way of resolving this quandary, allowing the Confederacy to import the arms and ammunition it required and paying for them in cotton, whilst at the same time (if only on a technicality) withholding Southern cotton from the European market. In addition, the Union blockade of the Southern coast also made importing munitions and exporting cotton via

Mexico easier. The imposition of a Union blockade along the Southern coast caused eyes to swiftly turn towards Mexico in general and to Matamoros in particular.[132]

As always on the lower Rio Grande, however, state actors followed where non-state actors had already led: the first ship that cleared from Matamoros carrying cotton for Europe (no fewer than 3000 bales) did so in the summer of 1861 from the Texan firm of 'Colonel Middleton Johnson and the Rhyne brothers.' Teenager John Warren Hunter reported seeing 'a never-ending stream of cotton pouring into Brownsville' in late 1861, before the trade mandated by the Confederate government (hereafter referred to as the official trade) had started. This private trade was dominated by Stillman, Kenedy and King in two respects: firstly, they sold cotton themselves in Matamoros; secondly, their steamboat company was the main mode of transport to take cotton from Texas across the Rio Grande into Mexico. Stillman had relocated all his goods to Matamoros and registered his steamboats under a Mexican registry by July 1861, doubtless to help with this new trade that had suddenly sprung up. The following month, according to James Daddysman, Stillman was 'anticipating the shipment of the entire Texas cotton crop through Matamoros.'

At the same time, representatives of private companies began arriving at Brownsville and Matamoros from across the Atlantic, eager to avail themselves of the profits that could be made. Droege, Oetling and Co, Brown, Fleming and Co, Harding, Pullin and Co and Lloyds all came from Britain. According to Bell and Smallwood, European merchants had already established contacts and bases along the lower Rio Grande in the late 1850s and with the outbreak of the Civil War 'were fully prepared to fill the Confederacy's enormous orders for guns, gunpowder, uniforms and other goods.' That European companies were already present

[132] *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* [hereafter *ONR*] Series 1 Volume 4 (Washington, 1896), Abraham Lincoln, Proclamation, 19/4/61, 156-57; Yancey and Mann to Toombs, 15/7/61, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy including the Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865 Volume Two*, ed. Richardson, James D. (Nashville, 1906), 45; Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 31

along the lower Rio Grande further strengthens the argument that the creation of the Zona Libre in 1858 was the starting point of the wartime boom, not solely the war itself. The Matamoros trade therefore began with non-state actors. As James Daddysman notes, this was a trade begun by 'independent-minded Texas farmers and enterprising businessmen.'[133]

As merchants were inventing, or rather adapting the trade from Matamoros to increase their profits, other non-state actors were quick to bring the possibilities of Matamoros to the Confederacy's attention, highlighting another way in which central government foreign policy in the borderland could be influenced by non-state actors. In quick succession, WF Robertson, CK Marshall and HG Humphries all wrote to LeRoy Walker to suggest the utilisation of Matamoros as a conduit for military supplies. 'An agent in England,' Robertson suggested, 'might purchase all the articles required by us and consign them to a similar agent in Matamoras, whence they could be readily sent across the Rio Grande into Texas and then distributed by land conveyance to any part of the Confederate States.' Marshall suggested a method of payment: 'Said goods [are] to be paid for either in cash or Confederate bonds, redeemable within sixty days after the blockade is raised, the parties to take cotton then at fair rates if they choose.' Humphries, meanwhile, worked out a mode of transportation: 'what is to prevent an English or French ship from clearing for Matamoras, in Mexico, and landing their cargo without any interference whatever from the U. S. vessels? And if they can be landed in Matamoras, certainly we can get them into this country. They could be shipped in the name of a Mexican merchant who could be induced to engage in the transaction, or they might be shipped as English property to a merchant in Matamoras.' Combined with the

[133] Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 30-31 (Hunter quote 30); Diaz, *Border Contraband*, 33; Stillman, *Charles Stillman*, 26; Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 120-21; Bell and Smallwood, 'Zona Libre,' 127. C.L. Webster suggests that the first military contract for importation from Europe to the Confederacy via Matamoros was signed in July 1861 with a Belgian company, Gautherin and Co. (Webster III, C.L., *Entrepot: Government Imports into the Confederate States* (Roseville, 2010), 199-204)

messages of government representatives such as Bee, this served to spark the official trade into life.[134]

Walker was quick to see the advantages inherent in these suggestions. He wrote at once to his purchasing agents in London outlining these proposals for trade through Matamoros, noting that 'these simultaneous suggestions will suffice to show you with what great interest our whole country is looking for the result of your important mission.' However, in the same letter he noted that 'the above suggestions are communicated for your consideration, not as instructions,' even though 'thousands of brave volunteers have been refused by this Department for want of arms, and other thousands are already in camp unable to move for want of them.' In other words, it was left to the discretion of the purchasing agents in London as to where exactly the supplies were imported.[135]

The trade soon proved to be immensely profitable for its participants. George Giddings, ordered to Matamoros by Judah Benjamin, reported to the Chief of Ordnance Josiah Gorgas in January 1862 that he had met with a 'Messrs. R. and D. G. Mills,' who had already 'on the way to Mexico over 2,000 bales of cotton, the proceeds of which I shall use in payment for arms, etc., at Matamoros.' Giddings had also secured two vessels 'dispatched from Matamoros by myself and Mr. Stillman, with powder and other articles in the British provinces, and am looking daily for their arrival.' At the same time the Governor of Texas, Francis Lubbock, was noting that Giddings expected 'valuable arrivals' at Matamoros. By February 1862, Stillman was writing to Richard King that '[Mifflin] Kenedy saw a hundred thousand in his vaults, twelve vessel[s] reported having arrived in the offing, with a prospect of shipping 20,000 bales of cotton at $5 per bale.' The nascent trade was not confined purely

[134] *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* [hereafter *OR*] Series 1 Volume 4 (Washington, 1882), Robertson to Walker, 21/5/61, 346-47; ibid, Marshall to Walker, 18/8/61, 558; ibid, Humphries to Walker, 15/8/61, 560
[135] Ibid, Walker to Huse, Anderson and Commissioners, 20/8/61, 578

to Matamoros itself, either. Shortly after the New Year, an American called John Coe came across a German-born American called Schenck who had begun trading in Tampico, the next Mexican port to the south. Schenck was buying up a multitude of goods in Tampico and transporting them north to Matamoros, among them arms, ammunition, quicksilver, saltpetre, sulphur and percussion caps. Similarly, from Monterrey, US consul M.M. Kimmey reported that 'millions of dollars' worth of cotton is sold here monthly, all of which is sent back to the rebels, by their agents here, in the shape of powder, lead, coffee, blankets, shoes, rope, sugar [and] cotton goods of all kinds.'[136]

Hamilton Bee, who had succeeded John Ford as commander along the lower Rio Grande in autumn 1861, also pointed out the utility of Matamoros. Matamoros' advantage lay in its geography: positioned between Texas and the Atlantic Ocean, it was the natural conduit between both. Bee wrote to Judah Benjamin, who had replaced LeRoy Walker as Secretary of War in September, and delineated the exchange opportunity that Matamoros provided: trade through Matamoros and Brownsville had, he calculated, been worth $12,000,000 per annum before secession (again, strengthening the argument for the boom to have begun in 1858). Moreover, the English and German merchants already living in Matamoros were sympathetic to the Confederacy. This served as a prelude to Bee's main point: 'Shut up and encompassed around as we are,' he wrote, 'it is the only port through which we can communicate with the nations of Europe.' Bee was suggesting a new form of official trade, one of cotton for munitions: 'By proper encouragement every necessary supply, either for our Government or people, can be brought to Matamoros from abroad,' he said. It is highly likely that Bee made this suggestion because he had observed the private, non-state trade begun by Stillman,

[136] Ibid, Coe to F Chase, 2/1/62, 642-43; OR Series 4 Volume 1 (Washington, 1900), Giddings to Gorgas, 5/1/62, 832-33; ibid, Lubbock, Johns and Randolph to Benjamin, 13/1/62, 840-41; Stillman to King, 25/2/62, quoted in Stillman, *Charles Stillman*, 28; 'New York Times,' 8/2/63

Kenedy and King and others, and theorised it could be adapted to the Confederate state's advantage.[137]

Matamoros was ideal for this because, as Bee noted, 'we have no other outlet so long as the supremacy of the seas is against us.' As Matamoros and its port Bagdad lay within Mexican territory, they could not be blockaded by the Union navy. Due to the exception made for Mexico in the Confederate ban on cotton exportation, and aided by Geurran's creation of the Zona Libre, Matamoros was in a unique economic position. Ships were safe to bring supplies into Matamoros, from where they could be ferried across the Rio Grande to Brownsville and thence distributed throughout the South. Once in Mexican waters, the ships could take as long as they needed to load and unload, free from the fear of Union involvement.[138]

Benjamin was, it seems, quick to take up Bee's suggestion – hardly surprising, as it accorded with his own views on the subject as outlined by Doyle. A mere week later Brigadier-General Paul Hebert wrote to Benjamin, possibly in reply to an earlier instruction, that he had begun to trade cotton into Mexico in exchange for arms and ammunition. On December 2nd, Benjamin wrote to Christopher Memminger, the Secretary of the Treasury, informing him that he had ordered one George Giddings to Matamoros to purchase arms and ammunition for the Confederate army. To pay for this, Benjamin requested Memminger to 'remit cotton to that place to be sold by Mr. Giddings.' The Secretary of War explained the purchasing scheme he was now instigating: 'If, therefore, you can authorize Mr. Giddings to purchase for account of the Treasury 10,000 bales of cotton under the recent authority vested in you by Congress, for remittance to Matamoros, the proceeds of the cotton there sold would

[137] *OR* 1.4, Bee to Walker, 12/10/61, 118-19. For Bee, see Eicher, John H., and Eicher, David J., *Civil War High Commands* (Stanford, 2001), 125. Bee's brother, Barnard Bee, gave Stonewall Jackson his nickname before being shot dead at First Bull Run.
[138] *OR* 1.4, Bee to Walker, 12/10/61, 118-19; Daddysman, *The Matamoros Trade*, 16; Webster, *Entrepot*, 196

furnish the money required for paying for the arms.' Southern cotton transported to Matamoros would be sold or exchanged for arms and ammunition for the Confederate cause. This was the beginning, on the lower Rio Grande, of a commercial foreign policy with Europe, whereby engaging in trade would hopefully lead to a procuring of legitimacy.[139]

Confederate foreign policy was influenced and shaped by the actions of non-state actors. The sight of Stillman, Kenedy and King's (and others') swift establishment of the cotton trade through Matamoros had inspired Bee to propose the same thing to Benjamin. This had already been proposed by (presumably) non-state actors Robertson, Marshall and Humphries to Benjamin's predecessor Walker, who had acted on it to advise purchasing agents in Europe to ship arms to Matamoros. This policy – although quickly given substance and depth by Benjamin – did not originate in the central state government, but was rather suggested and inspired by the actions and recommendations of non-state actors. In this way, official Confederate foreign policy was influenced and shaped from outside the institutions of government itself.

Defending the Trade: Fighting the Renegados

On the lower Rio Grande itself, a refugee crisis had developed by early 1862, formed of Unionists fleeing south from Texas and settlers fleeing east from the frontier, where the Civil War had encouraged Native American raids. From Matamoros, Leonard Pierce reported to Seward a flood of Unionist refugees and deserters coming to the consulate, asking for a passage to the North or money to buy one with. Similarly, Confederate Colonel Henry McCulloch reported a steady stream of Union sympathisers and deserters crossing the Rio

[139] *OR* 1.4, Hebert to Benjamin, 24/10/61, 127; *OR* 4.1, Benjamin to Memminger, 2/12/61, 774. Further suggesting this was a change in policy, Hebert's fellow commander Henry McCulloch reported the new trade into Mexico and asked whether he should stop it or not. (*OR* 1.4, McCulloch to Cooper, 17/10/61, 122-23)

Grande into Mexico. 'Many Germans and some American are leaving here to avoid a participation in our struggle,' he reported. By May, Pierce was reporting that 'the crowds of refugees from Texas do not diminish in the least, although it is very difficult, owing to the strict watch kept upon their movements, for them to get out.' The consequences for being caught were severe: 'Many are arrested; some are hung; others are taken and pressed into service.' As far as Unionist refugees were concerned, Pierce noted 'throughout the counties bordering on the Rio Grande there exists a perfect reign of terror.'[140]

The refugee situation was exacerbated by the Confederate adoption of conscription in December 1861 and martial law that was declared on the lower Rio Grande in April and throughout Texas generally in May 1862. This led hundreds of Unionists who had perhaps hoped to keep their heads down, like Edmund Davis for example, to head south for the Rio Grande. Davis was lucky to be picked up by a Union steamer just off Brownsville – he would return to play a role in the Union occupation of the town a year later. Similarly, Confederate requirements for a 'citizenship oath' led many merchants to leave Brownsville and move into Matamoros.[141]

Again, mobility of the individual combined with the immobility of the borderline was crucial on the lower Rio Grande in enabling non-state and nonelite actors to utilise their geopolitical agency and escape from polities that oppressed them, or threatened to. Once more, the dynamics of the borderland showed more continuity during the first year of the Civil War than change: in utilising their personal mobility to cross the immovable border and thereby remove themselves from state power that sought to oppress them, and perhaps worse, these Unionist refugees were obeying the same dynamic that runaway slaves had enacted in

[140] *OR* Series 1 Volume 9 (Washington, 1883), Pierce to Seward, 1/3/62, 674; ibid, Pierce to Seward, 21/3/62, 661; ibid, McCulloch to Davis, 25/3/62, 704-05; ibid, McCulloch to Davis, 31/3/62, 705; ibid, Pierce to Seward, 5/5/62, 684-85

[141] Moneyhon, Carl H., *Edmund J. Davis of Texas: Civil War General, Republican Leader, Reconstruction Governor* (Fort Worth, 2010), 42-43

the 1850s to escape from bondage in Texas to freedom in Mexico – and they would provoke a similar response.[142]

Unionists transformed the border towns south of the Rio Grande. According to one observer Matamoros looked like 'an American town.' In Monterrey, Vice-Consul Kimmey complained that he was 'overrun by them [and] still without instructions.' He had housed no fewer than 32 of them in his own rooms, and he estimated this was only three per cent of the refugee total. In Piedras Negras over 200 Unionists could not get a job because they did not know Spanish. Living together cheek by jowl, whatever the barriers of communication, local residents would have seen the poverty of these refugees, and perhaps witnessed Confederate raiding parties that struck along the Rio Grande to cut the refugees off from Mexico. Most importantly, the two groups, residents and refugees, now had a common enemy: residents had a history of fighting Anglos since the 1830s, whilst Unionists were fleeing a violent persecution against them from these same Southerners (even, as in Edmund Davis's case, where they were not overtly opposing the Confederacy). Such a situation can only have inspired sympathy between the two groups, centred around the hatred of the Confederates across the river. Indeed, this seemed to have an almost immediate effect, as Confederate border patrols began to report that some 'Mexicans' (whether Mexicans or Tejanos is unclear) and Unionist Texans who had fled southwards had begun to raid Confederate supply trains together. US consul at Matamoros Leonard Pierce estimated a total of 1300 *renegados* raided the Matamoros trade.[143]

However, whilst there was collaboration between Unionists and Mexicans it should not be thought that all Unionists and Mexicans sympathised and worked with one another.

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[142] Baumgartner, *South to Freedom*, 2-3

[143] Pierce and Kimmey quoted Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 85; *New York Times*, 8/2/63. Not all refugees in Mexico, however, were Unionists: Tucson was a hotbed of secessionist support, and as the Union California Column bore down on it in May 1862, hundreds of rebel sympathisers crossed the Rio Grande to take refuge in Sonora. (*OR* 1.9, Carleton to Drum, 25/5/62, 553)

For example, Pierce noted, although the Mexican commander in Matamoros and the 'better class of people' supported the Union, the town was on the whole sympathetic to the Confederate cause (unsurprisingly, considering the wealth and employment such a trade brought). Manuel Gonzalez-Quiroga emphasises 'the importance of collaboration between Texas and Northeast Mexico during the 1860s,' as conflicts 'generated an immense transborder labour market.' Just as Mexicans developed a sense of affinity with Unionist refugees, so other Mexicans developed affinity for the Confederate or pro-Confederate merchants and officers who gave them work. This could also lead to violence against Unionist supporters in Matamoros itself: poor Pierce was harassed in the streets by Confederate supporters, and ten men even searched his room in the consulate when he was out on business. There was, in other words, a stronger sense of Union-Mexican solidarity amongst those who did not benefit from the trade than amongst those who did – indeed, the one was arguably the precondition for the other.[144]

In their opposition to the Confederacy, Unionist refugees and Mexicans were non-state actors pursuing a statelike, warlike policy of raiding. In leaving the Confederacy and then attacking into it, Unionist refugees were demonstrating their geopolitical agency. They utilised both their own mobility within the borderland and the barrier (both physical and geopolitical) of the Rio Grande to escape Confederate persecution and then strike back against it. It was a war and a foreign policy that was both deinstitutionalised and decentralised: these cross-border raids do not seem, for example, to have been the brainchild of the US consuls, whilst naturally these raiders did not wear uniforms or receive pay from the US state (at least, not according to the official records). At the same time, defending the border was crucial to Confederate foreign and indeed domestic policy, as the raids endangered its claim to territorial sovereignty. Cross-border raids also damaged the trade

[144] *OR* 1.9, Pierce to Seward, 24/3/63, 656; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 176-77

through Matamoros that would become so important to the Confederacy, and therefore hindered its success. William Kiser notes how fear of the *renegados* replaced fear of Native American raiding parties in the region's economy and that by utilising their geopolitical agency, the *renegados* 'in so doing influenced the course of Civil War diplomacy.' In the coming years, the raids would hinder the praxis of Confederate foreign policy through Matamoros just as the siege of Matamoros by Carvajal had.[145]

However successful talk was in keeping the trade going, the Confederacy had to use force to maintain it as well. In the winter of 1862 those Tejanos that had suffered during the Zapata Rebellion of April 1861 hit back, assassinating Judge Vela amongst other raids. Mexicans also attacked the trade directly: a raider called Zapata and his gang ambushed and plundered Confederate supply trains at Roma and Rancho Soledad, on the road to Fort Brown. In response to Confederate complaints, Governor Lopez of Tamaulipas did not deny that there were 'robbers and marauders' operating out of the village of Mier, but declared he was unable to do anything about it due to the need to keep troops in the south of the state to defend Tampico against the French. Confederate officers construed Lopez's reluctance to remove Unionist refugees from the Rio Grande area as an act of bad faith. In January 1863 the Mexican Minister for Foreign Relations wrote to the governor asking him to stop these raids, or provide evidence that would refute the reports if they were false.[146]

After negotiations, an agreement was signed between Lopez and Bee in February 1863, regulating when Confederates could cross the border in pursuit of raiders. What this treaty did in effect was to frame the *renegados* as the same sort of threat to trade, settlement and civilisation, allowing military transgression across the national border, as Native

[145] Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 76
[146] *OR* Series 1 Volume 15 (Washington, 1886), Bee to Anderson, 30/11/62, 881-83; ibid, Buchel to Lopez, 27/12/62, 924; ibid, Luckett to Dickinson, 26/1/63, 960-61; Thompson, *Cortina*, 109; *OR* Series 1 Volume 26 Part 2 (Washington, Washington, 1889), Fuente to Lopez, 30/1/63, 52-53

American raiding parties were. Whilst clearly a sign of cooperation and reflecting in part a mutual desire for a peaceful border, the treaty had also been pushed for by Confederate officials. It was, in other words, another case of Southerners trying to dictate or influence Mexican political affairs in the borderland.

The Bee-Lopez treaty, signed to protect the trade that passed through Matamoros, soon had a practical, violent effect along the lower Rio Grande. Mexican authorities cooperated with Confederates in hunting down *renegado* Antonio Zapata and his guerrillas. In February 1863 Bee complained to Lopez that Zapata was raiding the frontier under the Union flag, he and his men having been recruited by the US consul at Matamoros on the promise of loot from Texan ranches. Bee requested Lopez' help in hunting down Zapata. Although Lopez was not prepared to act against the US consul, fearing he would anger the United States, he nonetheless agreed to cooperate in finding Zapata and issued a proclamation to his troops ordering them to find him. In March, Bee received information that Zapata, who was presumed to have been in the North or in New Orleans, was arriving at Matamoros onboard a ship with a cargo of arms and ammunition from New York destined for his men in the field. Bee asked Lopez to impound the arms and arrest Zapata. Lopez did the former, but Zapata was not there when his troops arrived. Zapata remained at large along the frontier until September 1863, when a cross-border raid by Benavides finally located and killed him.[147]

Despite this agreement, the treaty was threatened by the actions of Confederate renegade state actors pursuing their own aims without reference to official policy as adumbrated by the recent treaty. In April 1863, Lopez, for example, was upset by a transgression of Santos Benavides' troops, based in Laredo, into Tamaulipas. Benavides and

[147] Ibid, Bee to Lopez, 3/2/63, 966-67; ibid, Proclamation of Lopez, 28/2/63, 1126-27; ibid, Bee to Lopez, 19/3/63, 1133; ibid, Lopez to Bee, 20/3/63, 1133; *OR* 1.26.2, Bee and Slaughter to Turner, 22/9/63, 248-49

his men raided the town of Guerrero which Benavides believed was sheltering cattle thieves and being used as a base by Zapata. Bee, on the other hand, defended Benavides' actions. In Mexico City, the Foreign Minister instructed Lopez that if Bee failed to make amends for the Benavides raid amongst others, he was to arrest Confederate soldiers along the border – but not to mount an invasion of Texas. Practical cooperation between Unionist and Mexican *renegados* in raiding into Texas was forcing a wider confrontation between Mexico and the Confederacy, and a concomitant sense of solidarity with the Union.[148]

A similar problem occurred with the raid of Colonel Chilton. Before sunrise on 15th March 1863, a Confederate force of over 100 men under Chilton crossed the Rio Grande to attack Unionist Edmund Davis and his *renegados*. A firefight ensued resulting in the death of about twelve Unionists before Davis and his second-in-command Captain Montgomery surrendered. To further complicate matters, a band of Mexican soldiers tried to stop the Confederates returning to Texas with their captives (whether on their own initiative or on orders is unclear) and a further firefight followed before Chilton could leave with his prisoners. After the raid, Lopez immediately protested it as a contravention of his and Bee's agreement. Bee himself was outraged, having not authorised the expedition, and insisted it was mounted by civilians and off-duty soldiers. He also blamed US consul Leonard Pierce for the raid due to his policy of sheltering and aiding Unionist refugees, who included *renegados*. Davis was eventually found and returned to the Mexican side of the river. Lopez asked for Captain Montgomery to be returned as well but his fate had already been sealed.

The British officer Lieutenant Arthur Fremantle had arrived at Bagdad around the same time, and on the road from Bagdad to Matamoros met some Confederate cavalrymen who told him they had '*left*' a man called Montgomery on the road to Brownsville. 'By the

[148] *OR* 1.15, Bee to Dickinson, 25/2/63, 991-92; ibid, Benavides to Gray, 13/4/63, 1040-41; ibid, Lopez to Bee, 17/4/63, 1044-45; ibid, Bee to Lopez, 22/4/63, 1051-53; *OR* 1.26.2, Fuente to Lopez, 1/4/63, 51-52

smiles of the other officers,' Fremantle noted, 'I could easily guess that something very disagreeable must have happened to Montgomery.' When Fremantle and his companion crossed the Rio Grande into Texas they soon found him. 'He had been slightly buried,' Fremantle wrote, 'but his head and arms were above the ground, his arms tried together, the rope still around his neck, but part of it still dangling from quite a small mesquite tree. Dogs or wolves had probably scraped the earth from the body, and there was no flesh on the bones.' As Fremantle noted, 'I obtained this [thus?] my first experience of lynch law within three hours of landing in America.' The man Fremantle saw lynched was not a runaway slave, but rather a Unionist *renegado*.[149]

Montgomery's fate tells us a lot about the operations of Confederate power in the lower Rio Grande region, or what could be done in its name. Firstly, renegade state actors clearly felt no qualms in utilising their mobility and firepower to cross the border to pursue their enemies, similar to the Callahan Raid in 1855, thus – in one respect – rendering the demarcation of the border meaningless. Personal, officially unsanctioned desire for vengeance overrode geopolitical boundaries. However, as Fremantle noted, the raiders had waited until they crossed back into Texas to lynch Montgomery. There may have been more abstract reasons for this – to act as a warning to others in Texas, perhaps to lynch him on the sight of his own raid – but at the same time it shows the importance of the border: Southerners did not lynch their victims in Mexico. Finally, the reason Chilton and his men

[149] *OR* 1.15, Bee to Dickinson, 12/3/63, 1016-17; ibid, Bee to Lopez, 18/3/63, 1132; ibid, Lopez to Bee, 18/3/63, 1132-33; *The Fremantle Diary: Being the Journal of Lieutenant James Arthur Lyon Fremantle, Coldstream Guards, on his Three Months in the Southern States* (Boston, 1954), ed. Lord, Walter, 7-8; Bee to Quintero, March 16, 1863, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Confederate States of America Records, Department of State, 1859–1868, MSS16550, Reel 8, quoted in Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 85. Davis's captor actually promised he would protect him from being lynched and did so (Moneyhon, *Edmund J. Davis*, 55)

had attacked Davis and Montgomery was in Mexico was because Davis and Montgomery themselves were attacking the Confederate trade.[150]

Merchants during the War

As noted, merchants had pioneered the trade through Matamoros to Europe and they benefited from it enormously. American, Mexican and European merchants made large profits from trading privately through the Mexican port, in part from Confederate desperation to purchase supplies, in part from the Southern community's desire to maintain a high standard of living during wartime.

Those who profited most from the trade were the private speculators and merchants, in particular Stillman, Kenedy and King in Texas and Patricio Milmo and Jose San Roman in Mexico. Most of the records available relate to Stillman but they are not extensive. As Marilyn Sibley notes, 'records are lacking which consider his costs at the Rio Grande and his division of the profits with his various associates. Thus, his true profit for the war years cannot be determined with accuracy.' However, some are available which give an indication of the profits merchants along the lower Rio Grande could enjoy. In late 1862, for example, Stillman, Kenedy and King made a profit of 131% on two lots of cotton totalling 636 bales. In early 1863, the trio signed an agreement with Bee whereby they undertook to provide military supplies for the Confederate army in return for 500 bales of cotton per month – netting them a profit, James Daddysman estimates, of $60,000 each in specie. More

[150] Masich, Andrew E., *Civil War in the Southwest Borderlands, 1861-1867* (Norman, 2017), 4; Faragher, John Mack, *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles* (New York, 2016), 33-34

concretely, a sale of 130 bales to British merchants in September 1862 made Stillman a profit of £5,087, whilst a sale of 356 bales a year later made him a profit of £13,167.[151]

Arthur Fremantle noted the scale of the profits that could be made. In Matamoros he met a captain who had just run his ship from Galveston down to Matamoros. In Galveston his cotton had been worth 6 cents per pound; in Matamoros it was suddenly worth 36. Other mercantile profits reveal the economic boom that was taking place along the lower Rio Grande. One example of this, a Mr Lambert writing to his business partner Mr Marks, suffices. Firstly, Lambert purchased military supplies in New York and Europe that cost him $36,000, which he then shipped to Matamoros. There, the supplies were bought from him for a total of $139,000, paid in cotton, which Lambert could then ship back to New York or Europe to sell on at an even greater profit. Unsurprisingly, he wrote excitedly to his partner Marks 'if we carry out what I have undertaken there is a fortune.'[152]

Another key source of profit for Stillman, Kenedy and King was their steamboat company, which dominated the market in transporting cotton across the Rio Grande, from Brownsville as far north as Roma. Steamboats overrode constraints of both time, space and nature, transporting cotton quicker than wagons, and were far less reliant on the whims of nature – current, tide and wind – than a sailing boat. So quickly could these steamboats transport cotton to Bagdad that William Watson noticed hundreds, if not thousands of cotton bales piled up in the sand dunes around the little village, awaiting transportation. As John Ford later noted, 'the boats reaped an unusually rich financial harvest.'[153]

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[151] Daddysman, *The Matamoros Trade*, 118-19; Sibley, Marilyn McAdams, 'Charles Stillman: A Case Study of Entrepreneurship on the Rio Grande, 1861-1865,' *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 77 No. 2 (1973), 239; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 178

[152] Fremantle, *Diary,* 6; *OR* 1.15, Bee to Dickinson, 30/1/63, 964-65; ibid, Lambert to Marks, 22/1/63, 660-61 (quote 661); Watson, *Adventures of a Blockade-Runner,* 16

[153] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 178-79; Ford, Karen and Ford, Tom, 'Los Algodones: The Cotton Times on the Rio Grande,' in *Civil War on the Rio Grande*, ed. Bacha-Garza, Miller and Skowronek, 184-85; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 464; Watson, *Adventures of Blockade Runner*, 26

Although Charles Stillman has been described by Daddysman as the most powerful merchant in the trade, according to Gonzalez-Quiroga that accolade should belong to Jose San Roman, a Spaniard who had arrived on the lower Rio Grande during the Mexican-American War. Indeed, Gonzalez-Quiroga goes so far as to say that, possessing a network that spanned Mexico, Cuba, New Orleans, New England and Europe, 'it is highly probable that no other merchant in America during the Civil War handled a greater volume of cotton and silver shipments overseas than San Roman did.' San Roman also diversified – in February 1863, for example, he sold over eighteen thousands pounds of rope to the Confederacy which was needed to tie cotton together into bales. Other Mexican merchants, such as Jose Oliver and Francisco Yturria, also participated in the trade and reaped large profits. Equally, Vidaurri monopolised trade south of the Rio Grande by legislation in favour of his son-in-law Patricio Milmo, which might seem to contradict Gonzalez-Quiroga's claim about San Roman; however Milmo was not by birth a Mexican, or even a Spaniard. He had been born in Ireland as Patrick Mullins and had Hispanicised his name on coming to Mexico.[154]

Despite the profits to be made, private trade was initially slow to recover from Carvajal's siege of Matamoros and Vidaurri's temporary closing of the border in early 1862. In April 1862 the editor of the *Fort Brown Flag* noted that 'no transactions are taking place.' However, Commander French of the US Navy found the trade in rude health when he arrived off the Rio Grande in August 1862. There were no fewer than 20 ships sitting off the Rio Grande when he arrived, all flying different neutral flags – 8 British, 6 Spanish, 2 Danish, 1 Bremen and 1 Prussian. There was even one ship flying the US flag. One British steamer from Liverpool he boarded had no less than £60,000 in specie on board, presumably to purchase cotton with. According to Bee by January 1863 60 vessels were sat off the mouth of

[154] Daddysman; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 160, 179-180; Tyler, Ronnie C., *Santiago Vidaurri and the Confederacy* (Austin, 1973), 111; FO 5/1184, 'Matamoros Seizures Vol. 3 – 11/3/64-12/8/64'

the Rio Grande. Blockade runner William Watson, who arrived in Matamoros in the summer of 1863, remembered 'in the open sea lay at anchor a fleet of nearly one hundred steamers and sailing-vessels, of various sizes and descriptions, in different stages of discharging and loading.'[155]

Merchants also benefited beyond the lower Rio Grande itself, firstly in the wider Caribbean world and also across the Atlantic in Europe. For example, Watson often based himself out of British Honduras (Belize). Not only could goods such as rifles be purchased and loaded here to sell to the Confederacy, but ships could also be registered as British to (in theory) avoid US seizure. From here, Watson sailed first to Havana. According to Watson, Havana – of course still controlled by Spain at this time – was somewhat akin to Rick Blaine's Casablanca, only with an emphasis on exploiting mercantile profit rather than refugees' desperation: 'although Havana was a Spanish city, this was not a Spanish crowd, but mostly of the Anglo-Saxon race, consisting of runners and speculators from America, Britain and other places, who had flocked to Havana to reap a harvest off the thoughtless blockade runners, who, when they had made a successful run, would find themselves suddenly possessed of money which they did not, just at the moment, know what to do with.' Havana, as much on the Civil War periphery as Matamoros, was likewise turned into a mixture of trading post and pleasure-centre for the overwhelmingly European traders drawn there by the opportunities that blockade running offered. As Gregory Downs has noted, Havana was transformed from 'an exporter of sugar and coffee [in]to a way station for European goods heading to the Confederacy.'

Watson's delineation of this transformation has more than a whiff of self-pity about it: 'a crowd of speculators soon found their way to the place, who bought up the goods in the

[155] *Fort Brown Flag*, 17/4/62; *ONR* 1.19, French to Farragut, 8/9/62, 180-81; *OR* 1.15, Bee to Dickinson, 30/1/63, 964-65; Watson, *Adventures of Blockade Runner*, 16

limited market, and run them up to a high figure to sell to blockade runners . . . And while trumpeting their zeal for the Confederate cause, they took special care to pocket large profits without running any risk. While to those who actually run the blockade and incurred the risk and danger, but little accrued.' That Watson was doing the same thing in Matamoros in running the blockade did not seem to occur to him. There were even separate cafes for Unionists and Confederates, 'where out of each other's hearing they waged a desperate war of words against each other.' Guns were then run the short distance across the Gulf of Mexico into Matamoros, where the delivery of the cotton, toiling its way southwards from Alleyton, was patiently awaited.[156]

It was not just private speculators who sold to Confederate agents in Matamoros that profited, but also those that sold to Confederate commercial agents in Britain. One example of this is Isaac, Campbell and Co, which enjoyed a virtually exclusive contract with the Confederate Army for the first two years of the war. In one particular contract that Confederate agent Colin McRae detailed to Treasury Secretary Christopher Memminger there were, for example, 30,000 rapiers at $2.50 each, 30,000 jackets at $8 each, 30,000 greatcoats at $20 each and 30,000 shoes at $4 each. By contrast, according to McRae, the same items could be purchased on the open market at $0.84, $3.30, $7 and $2.14 each respectively. Therefore, as McRae suggested in his letter, it was imperative to have one overarching system for purchasing military supplies in order to get value for money – or rather, for cotton. As far as McRae was concerned, these contracts and contractors were motivated by purely capitalistic reasons: 'There are many other contracts of various shades and hues floating about the London markets, all, however, having but one object, namely, to enrich contractors

[156] Watson, *Adventures of a Blockade Runner*, 139, 146, 152; Downs, *Second American Revolution*, 92. Guns were also run into the Confederacy directly from Cuba (Thompson, Samuel, *Confederate Purchasing Operations Abroad* (Chapel Hill, 1935), 17). For more detail on Cuba's involvement in blockade running, see Wise, Stephen, *Lifeline of Confederacy: Blockade Running during the Civil War* (Columbia, 1988), 167-180 and Horne, Gerald, *Race to Revolution: The United States and Cuba during Slavery and Jim Crow* (New York, 2014), 100-105.

at the expense of the Government.' McRae was clear that this ability to maintain a viable transatlantic economic relationship was key to the survival of the Confederacy: 'Such exhibitions are very damaging to our credit, as they create the impression among capitalists and all prudent men that a government which is so reckless of its means is not likely to achieve its independence against such fearful odds.' Furthermore, the inability of the Confederacy to engage effectively with this capitalistic exploitation of its requirements, in McRae's eyes at least, invalidated its claim to sovereign nation-state status.[157]

At the same time as they helped to prolong the Confederate war effort, some private contractors also counteracted the Confederacy's attempt to pay for supplies with cotton, by travelling into the Texan interior and buying cotton directly from the plantations themselves. As agent Simeon Hart complained, 'the result is that at commercial points and in most of the urban districts of the State the holders of cotton refuse in toto to sell for currency, and demand specie, which is being paid to them by speculators among ourselves and foreigners who have brought in specie for this purpose.' Such practices drove up the cost for the government to purchase cotton. Hart explained: 'In remote districts my agents are still buying lots at 15 and 16 cents per pound, but so soon as the mania reaches these districts, which it is certain to do, cotton will go to 40 and 50 cents in currency, and in a short time holders will refuse to sell for paper.' (Indeed, so successful was this trade that in San Antonio as late as 1864, almost exclusively in the Confederacy, transactions were made with specie rather than paper currency.)

Hart recommended the Confederacy nationalise the cotton trade, but this was slapped down by the obdurately free trade Memminger, who argued that 'when the cotton is to be turned into money, and that money applied to purchase supplies, the transaction itself exhibits the absence of necessity and the want of those characteristics which distinguish such a

[157] *OR* Series 4 Volume 2 (Washington, 1900), McRae to Memminger, 7/10/63, 982-86

military necessity as justifies impressment.' Memminger further argued that the problem was not that the planters were unwilling to sell their cotton, but that Hart was not willing to pay the price that they demanded. That Memminger was responsible for the money Hart had with which to purchase, and that they were engaged in a war for survival of the nation, appears to have passed him by.[158]

Although most merchants involved in the Matamoros trade during the Civil War were motivated simply from a desire for profit, this was not the case for all of them. One of the most powerful European merchants involved in the Matamoros trade was British businessman William Schaw Lindsay. Lindsay owned the mercantile company WS Lindsay & Co. and had also served as Liberal MP for Sunderland since 1854. At least one blockade runner that ran into Matamoros was chartered by Lindsey & Co. Edgar Stringer, a partner in Lindsay & Co since 1848 introduced Nelson Clements, mentioned earlier, to the munitions firm Sinclair, Hamilton & Co in March 1863, for which he promptly claimed £1,000 in fees. The *Caroline Goodyear*, one of the ships on which Clements' supplies made the (attempted) run to Matamoros, was chartered by Lindsay & Co in May.[159]

After the Civil War, Lindsay always maintained that, although his company had been involved in the Matamoros trade, he had delegated decision-making to Peabody and had had no say in Lindsay & Co's involvement. Lindsey later wrote that 'when the firm of which I was the head engaged as brokers for one or two vessels, the object of which, I believe, was to run the blockade, I warned my partners that I could have nothing to do with it, and I retired from the head of that firm in 1863.' If this was true, he was nonetheless one of the leaders of

[158] Ibid, Hart to Seddon, 19/6/63, 867-68; ibid, Indorsement, Memminger to Davis, 30/6/63, 869. Seddon politely pointed out Memminger's ignorance in this particular regard: 'The Secretary has probably not examined the law regulating impressments. The power is there given to impress any property when deemed necessary for the good of the service.' (Ibid, Indorsement, Seddon to Davis, 15/7/63, 869-70)
[159] Clark, Michael, 'William Schaw Lindsay: Righting the Wrongs of a Radical Shipowner,' *Northern Mariner* Vol. 20 No. 3 (2010), 303; *ONR* 2.3, Slidell to Benjamin, 9/10/63, 933; Thompson, *Confederate Purchasing Operations*, 80

the pro-Confederate cause in Britain. When William Yancey arrived in London in July 1861 as Confederate ambassador, he carried with him a letter of introduction from Lindsay to other pro-Confederate MPs. In early 1862 George Sanders, a Virginia contractor, suggested to Confederate agent James North that he 'see Lindsay MP and talk freely to him as he will appreciate our scheme more fully than any other man in England.' To Henry Adams, son of US Ambassador Charles Francis, who served as his father's secretary during the Civil War, Lindsay was the one 'about whom the whole web of rebel interests clung — rams, cruisers, munitions and Confederate loan — social introductions and parliamentary tactics.' The connection between Lindsay & Co's involvement in the Matamoros trade, and Lindsay's advocacy for the Confederacy, is suggestive to say the least.[160]

In summer 1862, Lindsay travelled to visit Napoleon III as he took the waters at Vichy. Edwin de Leon, a Confederate agent, ran into Lindsay in Paris and noted that his 'relations with the Emperor were of a peculiar and intimate kind' as they had met before due to Lindsay's extensive commercial interests. Upon returning to London, Lindsay presented a motion in the Commons for recognising the Confederacy, but it never came to a vote. He also asked for interviews with Palmerston and Russell, perhaps to tell them Napoleon's private views on the Confederacy he had learnt at Vichy, but both ministers refused to see him. The following summer, as Lee invaded Pennsylvania, Lindsay's friend and parliamentary colleague John Roebuck presented a motion in the House of Commons proposing to recognise the Confederacy, and Lindsay and Roebuck together travelled to Fontainebleau outside Paris for another audience with Napoleon III to try and persuade him to recognise the Confederacy.[161]

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[160] Clark, 'William Schaw Lindsay,' 306; Lindsay, Bill, *William Schaw Lindsay: Victorian Entrepreneur* (Stroud, 2023), 228-29; *ONR* Series 2 Volume 3 (Washington, 1922), Mason to Benjamin, 4/11/62, 593; Adams, Henry, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston, 1918), 186

[161] De Leon, Edwin, *Secret History of Confederate Diplomacy Abroad* (Lawrence, 2005), ed. William C. Davis, 122; Bennett, J.D., *The London Confederates: The Officials, Clergy, Businessmen and Journalists who backed the*

Lindsay was of course unsuccessful, but the connection between economic profit and Confederate recognition that he embodied is telling. Indeed, in a speech in August 1864 Lindsay declared his support for the Confederacy was motivated by commercial reasons and his concern for the rise in unemployment the Civil War had created in Britain. Lindsay both sought to prolong the Confederacy's existence and help it win recognition and to try and make a profit for himself in the process – or at least, his company did. Lindsay's advocacy for the Confederacy to Palmerston and Napoleon shows the reach mercantile interests bound up with Matamoros had, and how some merchants could influence, or seek to influence, the course of the war. Unfortunately for the Confederate cause, Lindsay remained very much the exception among the British political and mercantile classes rather than the rule throughout the Civil War.[162]

These merchants were inspired purely by the profits available, rather than any sense of ideological affinity to the Southern cause (with the possible exception of William Lindsay, addressed below). John Ford noted that 'goods were sold to anyone having money or cotton. There was little thought of politics in the trading circles.' In London, Confederate agent Edward Anderson wrote in his diary that 'Friend Isaac [Samuel Isaac, head of Isaac, Campbell and Co] is a most useful man to us, but he never loses sight of his profits.' As Adam Mendelsohn has noted, whilst 'it is possible that Samuel Isaac may have been sympathetic to the Confederate cause,' in the grand scheme of things 'undoubtedly profits provided the largest enticement.' Gonzalez-Quiroga neatly sums up the mercantile attitude: far from being pro-Confederate, or pro-slavery, their 'only ideological devotion was to get rich.' Similarly for the Mexican teamster and labourers hauling the cotton to Matamoros who

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American South during the Civil War (Jefferson, 2007), 141; Duberman, Martin B., *Charles Francis Adams 1807-1886* (Boston, 1961), 288-89

[162] LND/1, 382-94, Speech to Sunderland Shipowners Association, August 1864, quoted in Clark, 'William Schaw Lindsay,' 306

benefited from the trade, David Montejano writes that 'they took those roles not from sympathy with the Confederacy or slavery but in pursuit of profit and good wages.'[163]

Henry Bell, commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, sailed down to Matamoros in May 1863 and counted 68 sailing ships and 'and a forest of smaller craft inside the river,' loading and unloading cargo. Bell could capture only two ships, the *Kate* and the *Star.* The *Kate* had only 18 bales of cotton onboard. The following month, however, the *Miriam* was captured with some 170 bales of cotton onboard, as well as three flags – American, British and Mexican. In August Bell confessed that the blockade of the Texas coast was successful, 'except at the Rio Grande, where everything is in favour of the contraband traders.'[164]

Several factors combined to make the blockade of Matamoros and the Rio Grande so difficult for the Union. Firstly, it was hundreds of miles from any viable base and the navy was already stretched having to blockade Mobile and Galveston and provide support for Banks' campaign against Port Hudson on the Mississippi. Bagdad lay within Mexican national waters and as Spencer Tucker points out, the Rio Grande was too shallow for them to sail up it to Matamoros. As CL Webster notes, many blockade runners would simply land their military cargo under cover of darkness, occluding US observation and consequently capture. Other tactics blockade runners employed included various national flags, such as were found on the *Miriam*, the concealment of items about the ship and the registry of ships under neutral nationalities, particularly British. One naval commander confessed he simply

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[163] Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 369; Anderson, Edward C., *Confederate Foreign Agent: The European Diary of Major Edward C. Anderson* (Tuscaloosa, 1976), ed. Hoole, Stanley W., 62; Mendelsohn, Adam, 'Samuel and Saul Isaac: International Jewish Arms Dealers, Blockade Runners, and Civil War Profiteers,' *Southern Jewish History*, Vol. 15 (2012), 67-68; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 181; Montejano, David, 'Mexican Merchants and Teamsters on the Texas Cotton Road, 1862-1865,' in *Mexico and Mexicans in the Making of the United States* (Austin, 2012), ed. Tutino, John, 142

[164] *ONR* Series 1 Volume 20 (Washington, 1905), Bell to Farragut, 27/3/63, 103; ibid, Bell to Farragut, 30/3/63, 113-14; ibid, Bell to Farragut, 2/6/63, 286-87; ibid, Lewis to Welles, 18/6/63, 303; ibid, Bell to Welles, 19/8/63, 468-69 (quote 469)

did not have enough legal understanding to prosecute the blockade. Notably, Confederate complaints about their inability to secure supplies in Matamoros, discussed above, are focussed exclusively on the chaos of their own system, rather than the Union blockade.

Frank Owsley notes that the Union blockade in the Gulf of Mexico 'was very ineffective the first year and a half and never very effective during the entire war.' Michael Bonner and Peter McCord and Stephen Wise argue that the overall Union blockade was highly ineffective, with four out of five steamers successfully penetrating the blockade (and their chances of doing so, according to Bonner and McCord, actually increasing as the war dragged on). Richard Salvucci notes that American (including the Confederacy) imports from Mexico during the Civil War increased from $1 million in 1861 to $5 million in 1865. Salvucci attributes the majority of this to the 'entrepot' at Matamoros. Of course, the blockade was, in individual cases, successful; but as the despairing lists of ships in Bagdad harbour made by Union commanders indicates, it was the proverbial tick on an elephant's hide.[165]

As the war went on the trade only grew, paradoxically waxing as the war itself waned. In the winter of 1865-66. one eyewitness counted 2-300 merchantmen trading with Matamoros. The glut of cotton moving through Matamoros at this time can be gauged by the price cotton was selling at in the town. In November 1863 when Banks occupied Brownsville and Bee burnt all the cotton in the warehouses, the prices soared to 90 cents per pound; by early 1865, they had fallen to just 28 cents per pound, a decline of almost seventy-five per

[165] Martin, Christopher, *Damn the Torpedoes! The Story of America's First Admiral: David Glasgow Farragut* (New York, 1970), 220-21; *ONR* 1.19, French to Farragut, 8/9/62, 180-81; Tucker, Spencer C., *Blue and Gray Navies: The Civil War Afloat* (Annapolis, 2006), 108; Webster, *Entrepot*, 198; Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 237. Interestingly, Owsley argues that Matamoros cannot give any insight as to the overall effectiveness of the Union blockade because of its neutral status (ibid, 258-59); Bonner, Michael Brem and McCord, Peter, *The Union Blockade in the American Civil War: A Reaasessment* (Knoxville, 2021), 161; Wise, *Lifeline of Confederacy*, 226; Salvucci, 'Progress of US-Mexican Trade,' 728-29

cent.[166] Judging by prices alone, more cotton was now going through Matamoros than at any previous time in the trade. Douglas Ball has computed that from 1863-65 some $3 million worth of 'merchandise' was sold to Europe from Texas (the main outlet for which was Matamoros). 'Most sales were of cotton,' Ball notes, 'with only a few cargoes of tobacco or naval stores thrown in to meet contracts.' According to Ball's statistics, this is the equivalent of 36% of all 'merchandise' (primarily cotton) sold by the Confederacy in 1864-65. In other words, by the end of the war, according to Ball's statistics, it is possible that over one third of the exported Southern cotton crop was passing through Matamoros. Richard Salvucci has examined US exports (including the Confederacy) to Mexico during the Civil War. From 1862-64 they hold level at roughly $7.5 million, but in 1864-65 almost double to $13.8 million. As Salvucci notes, this included both Confederate cotton and Union supplies shipped to Matamoros, ostensibly to supply the Liberals. Some will have done, whilst others will have been sold on to the Confederacy. Whilst it is difficult to determine to determine how much of this went via Matamoros, once has to assume the majority did given Imperial control of Mexico by late 1864.[167]

Although it is difficult to tell from a lack of precise information in the available records, it would at appear that despite the eventual collapse in early 1865, during 1864 at least the Confederacy did appear to benefit from the trade with the provisions of the New Plan and the impressment of cotton. In August 1864 Leonard Pierce wrote from Matamoros that 'large quantities of merchandise now cross the river daily for the interior of Texas.' Robert Kerby has estimated that during October and November 1864 the Confederacy imported more than 600,000 pounds of ordnance stores through Matamoros. Frank Owsley has noted that 'Kirby Smith's army as well as the Texan militia was supplied from abroad to a

[166] Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 121, 154
[167] Ball, Douglas B., *Financial Failure and Confederate Defeat* (Chicago, 1991), 99; Salvucci, 'Progress of US-Mexican Trade,' 705, 728-29

large extent.' In addition, with the capture of Savannah in December 1864 and Wilmington in January 1865, many blockade-runners began rerouting their operations towards the Texas coast and presumably also Matamoros. By the end of the war, then, the Confederacy would appear to have finally been able to use the trade to its great advantage.[168]

Up to the last possible moment, indeed even after Federal troops reoccupied Brownsville in June 1865, records indicate that the trade was continuing. A report in late May indicated that cotton was still coming into Brownsville, and Confederate property was now being sent to Matamoros. General Philip Sheridan, whom Grant appointed as commander along the lower Rio Grande in June, noted that as his troops approached cotton was still being ferried across the river. Merchants emptied the Brownsville warehouses as much as they could, but Federal troops still captured 500 bales. Cotton was still crossing the Rio Grande above Brownsville (where, of course, Federal troops had not yet arrived): Sheridan reported 826 bales crossed the river at Rio Grande City, 'and this is only one item.' An indication of the trade's continuance, and the general lawlessness the Confederacy collapsed into, is that Confederate General Slaughter reportedly formed 'a marauding party' that levied taxes in cotton in the Texan interior. Slaughter's new career as an outlaw preying on the cotton trade, on the capitalist connection to Europe, did not go as well as he hoped: just a day later, Sheridan reported that he had been arrested by his own men and only freed after he paid them $20,000. As they rode south to the Rio Grande in the summer of 1865, intending to take service with Maximilian's army in Mexico, Confederate General Jo Shelby's cavalry brigade encountered a wagon train bound from Brownsville to Shreveport abandoned with a multitude of provisions – 'salt pork, lard, bacon, rice, dried fruit, molasses, wines, whiskeys, pickles, preserves, jellies, cakes, and tins of sweet English biscuits.' John Newman Edwards,

[168] *ONR* Series 1 Volume 21 (Washington, 1906), Pierce to (Seward?), 31/8/64, 652-53 (quote 652); Kerby, Robert L., *Kirby Smith's Confederacy: The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863-1865* (New York, 1972), 377; Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 267. For the rerouting of blockade runners to Texas in early 1865, see ibid, 255-57; Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy*, 378-79; Wise, *Lifeline of Confederacy*, 219-20

who rode with Shelby, noted that 'apathetic teamsters' supplied them with Sharps carbines, Enfield rifles, Colt Navy revolvers, sabres and Bowie knives. These supplies had almost certainly been purchased in Matamoros, even as the Confederacy was collapsing.[169]

Many travellers to the lower Rio Grande noted its growing prosperity. According to Lew Wallace in January 1865, watching offshore, he could 'stand on my boat and count at least 100 vessels of all kinds lying off Bagdad. Neither the port of New Orleans nor that of Baltimore can present today such a promise of commercial activity.' It was in 1864 that an English-language newspaper, the *Matamoros Morning Call*, was published in the town, indicating that a large proportion of the town's population had not only moved there recently but had done so from Anglo countries – the obvious inference being that the trade had brought them there. The town was filled with speculators, smugglers and swindlers, saloons, hotels and brothels. By 1864 ten stagecoaches ran between Matamoros and Bagdad every day, another indicator of the level of commerce the town and its port now enjoyed. A steamboat service was established between Bagdad and Havana in February 1865 and Cortina's attack on Matamoros that April cut a telegraph line between the town and Bagdad, further indications of prosperity.[170]

A good description of Matamoros in the latter stages of the Civil War is contained in the memoirs of Eliza Ripley. Ripley's husband was a cotton trader who secured a government contract and, unwilling to face separation, his wife accompanied him on his trips to the Rio Grande. (Eventually, loath to live under the Union, the couple would flee first across the river to Mexico, and then across the Gulf to Cuba.) Although Ripley provides no dates for her arrival in Matamoros, she mentions watching a review of French and Imperial troops in the

[169] *OR* 1.48.2, Brown to Crosby, 23/5/65, 564-65; ibid, Sheridan to Grant, 8/6/65, 813-14; ibid, Sheridan to Grant, 9/6/65, 827-28; O'Flaherty, Daniel, *General Jo Shelby: Undefeated Rebel* (Chapel Hill, 1954), 235-36; Hurlbut, *Oracle of Lost Causes*, 102
[170] Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 22

town, meaning it was some time after Mejia's occupation in September 1864. Yet another indication of Matamoros' wealth at this time is that Ripley felt almost more impressed by the 'delicious French confections and wines' served to her as she watched, than the review itself.[171] Similarly, in the winter of 1865-66 an Austrian officer, Ernst Pitner, serving in the Imperial garrison noted that 'I do not believe in my whole life altogether I have enjoyed so much champagne, Rhenish wine, claret and all sorts of delicacies.' At one party he attended 'every man [had a] bottle of claret, masses of English beer and champagne . . . stewed fruit and roasts and pieces of ham.' Raymond Jonas notes that by 1866, a chicken in Matamoros cost $2 and a turkey cost $4.[172]

Ripley's description of Matamoros, in either late 1864 or early 1865, is worth quoting at some length:

'Business was booming in Matamoros; large warehouses were opened and filled, vessels of every size and nationality unloaded at the Boca – several miles below the city at the mouth of the Rio Grande – and goods were hauled to Matamoros in an endless stream of wagons. A regular fast stage-line was in full operation also for businessmen to travel to the Boca and back again. The whole sleepy little city woke up and rubbed its eyes one fine morning to find it was inspired by new life, and was fast becoming a busier and noisier place than it had ever dreamed of.'[173]

The Confederate naval captain Raphael Semmes passed through Matamoros in late 1864. He noticed something else on his arrival, that emphasises the economic agency of non-

[171] Ripley, Eliza McHatton, *From Flag to Flag: A Woman's Adventures and Experiences in the South during the War, in Mexico and in Cuba* (New York, 1889), 116
[172] Pitner, Ernst, *Maximilian's Lieutenant: A Personal History of the Mexican Campaign, 1864-1867* (Albuquerque, 1993), 102; Jonas, Raymond, *Habsburgs on the Rio Grande: The Rise and Fall of the Second Mexican Empire* (Cambridge, Ma., 2024), 181
[173] Ripley, *From Flag to Flag*, 121

state actors, if not their political fidelity. 'Whites, blacks, mulattos and Indians were all mixed,' he noted. 'But prominent above all was the Yankee. The shanties were his and the goods were his. He kept the hotels, marked the billiards and sold the grog.' The stagecoach that took him from Bagdad to Matamoros was driven by a Northerner. According to Semmes, the stagecoach itself was from 'Troy, New York' and the horses that pulled it were 'all Northern horses – tall, strong and gaunt, none of your Mexican mustangs.' Semmes had even taken passage in a 'Yankee schooner' from the island of St Thomas to Bagdad. The majority of Northerners who moved to the lower Rio Grande to take part in the trade seem to have been from New York. Eliza Ripley noted that a steamer service established between Matamoros and Havana in February 1865 was the work of 'enterprising New Yorkers,' whilst Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp note two Jewish New York merchants, AJ Bloomberg and GM Raphael, who opened 'commercial houses' in both Matamoros and Brownsville.[174]

CL Webster has noted that 'Northern financial houses vied for the rich profits to be made at Matamoros.' According to Robert Delaney, before 1861 the New York City Customs House registered only one vessel per year leaving New York for Matamoros; between 1861 and 1864 no fewer than 152 left New York bound there. Despite the knowledge of customs officials that their cargoes were probably destined for the Confederacy, they could not stop the ships from leaving as Matamoros was of course technically the port of a neutral country. By the final year of the war, Delaney estimated that the trade was worth over $1 million per week.[175]

One merchant closely involved in the trade with New York was Charles Stillman. Stillman had dispatched merchant ships to New York since before the Civil War, and he saw the conflict as a means of increasing this traffic rather than as a barrier to it. It is not possible

[174] Semmes, Raphael, *Memoirs of Service Afloat, during the War between the States* (Baltimore, 1869), 791-92; Ripley, *From Flag to Flag,* 122; Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 137
[175] Webster, *Entrepot*, 206; Delaney, 'Matamoras: Port for Texas,' 473-87

to compute Stillman's entire trade with New York, but his last shipment to that city, in February 1865, gives some idea of the scale. On February 3rd, Stillman sold a cargo containing 105 bales of cotton, among other things, to a 'Brigadier John Butler,' to be delivered in New York City, for a gross profit of $39,881.47.[176]

General Canby, now in command of the Department of the Gulf after Banks' failure along the Red River, drew Halleck's attention to traffic from New Orleans to Matamoros in early December 1864. 'Casks of crates and crockery, freighted with rifle and musket barrels' Canby reported, 'bales of codfish, with the small parts of the arms; kegs of powder in barrels of provisions; pistols and percussion caps in boxes of soap and barrels of fruit; clothing, shoes, and other army supplies, with scarcely any attempt at concealment, are constantly being received at Matamoros, and are constantly transferred to the insurgents in Texas.' The volume of this trade, Canby declared, had increased recently, and he was doing his best to restrict it. The Collector of Customs in New Orleans had indeed already prohibited anymore vessels leaving that port for Matamoros.[177]

This trade from Northern ports involved some figures in astonishingly high echelons of power. One such person involved was no less a figure than governor and then senator from Rhode Island, William Sprague, who in 1863 became the son-in-law of Lincoln's Treasury Secretary, Salmon Chase. Sprague's family fortune was based on textile mills that with the Civil War and the Union blockade had fallen dormant. In March 1863, Sprague formed a company with Harris Hoyt, a Texan Unionist, and purchased three vessels, which Hoyt sailed down to Havana. From there, Hoyt piloted a cargo of military supplies across to Matamoros

[176] Sibley, 'Charles Stillman,' 239; Account Sales, Sequence 229, Charles Stillman Papers, Houghton Library, Harbard University (accessed at https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:50062892$229i).
[177] *OR* Series 1 Volume 41 Part 4 (Washington, 1893), Canby to Halleck, 9/12/64, 805; ibid, Canby to Courtenay, 3/12/64, 805-07

having re-registered as a British ship. In Texas, Hoyt signed an agreement to supply $400,000 worth of similar supplies to the Confederacy in exchange for cotton.

In November 1864 Hoyt's skipper, Charles Prescott, was arrested by the Union army, and he gave a full confession. Hoyt implicated Sprague, and a military enquiry was set up under Major-General John Dix. Fortunately for Sprague, Dix himself was implicated in inter-belligerent trade in Virginia, and was forced to resign. Lincoln's assassination led to the investigation falling into abeyance, and Edward Stanton held it as a threat over Sprague's head for the remainder of his political career. Indeed, Stanton used it to force Sprague to vote against his own removal from office, and for the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson in 1868. The Matamoros trade therefore ended up having an immense if indirect impact on the course of post-war politics of the United States.[178]

The trade through Matamoros also impacted the outcome of the French intervention in the lower Rio Grande theatre. By the summer of 1866, with Liberal interdiction of the roads around Matamoros, trade had dried up and Imperial General Mejia could no longer levy customs duties. He was finally driven to raise a forced loan, only to find the Matamoros merchants, in Joseph Chance's words, were 'cash poor, their assets tied up in merchandise that could not reach its intended markets.' Mejia was accordingly forced to send his troops escorting a convoy to Monterrey, so merchants could sell their wares and raise the money he desperately needed. The *Matamoros Daily Ranchero* reported the merchandise at a value of $3 million. It was this Imperial army that was destroyed at the Battle of Santa Gertrudis, precipitating Imperial collapse in northern Mexico. One participant after the battle recalled the plain strewn with 'boots, shoes, woollens, silks, and satins,' and that Liberal troops 'were refreshing themselves with wondrous wines and brandies; preserved meats and other

[178] Leigh, Philip, *Trading with the Enemy: The Covert Economy during the American Civil War* (Yardley, 2014), 52-54; Lamphier, Peg, *Kate Chase and William Sprague: Politics and Gender in a Civil War Marriage* (Lincoln, 2005), 46-47

delicacies; and smoking the finest cigars.' The prosperity of Matamoros, brought about by the cotton trade to Europe, had ironically led to Imperial defeat.[179]

The dramatic prosperity of Matamoros and the surrounding region in 1864-65 reflects the agency of non-state actors and how this could take advantage of the great geopolitical conflicts waged by states. Business clearly boomed in Matamoros and drew many merchants and workers to the region. These came from various places: the Confederacy, Mexico, Europe, as addressed before, but also from the Union itself. These figures presumably felt no or only slight compunction in participating in the boom despite their polity's war with the Confederacy. Nor was this attitude restricted to lower class people looking for higher wages, as the example of Sprague makes clear.

Conclusion

Examining the economics in the lower Rio Grande from 1858-65 reveals three things: firstly, that the growing prosperity of merchants in the region dated from 1858 rather than 1861, albeit this was turbocharged by the Civil War; secondly, mercantile actions helped to both prolong and undermine the Confederate war effort and lay at the heart of the Confederacy's diplomatic engagement with the various political authorities in north-eastern Mexico; and thirdly, non-state and renegade state actors were vital to the operation of geopolitics and geoeconomics in this place and time.

Southern merchants, exemplified by Stillman, Kenedy and King exploited the Zona Libre from its creation in 1858 onwards. In contrast to the position taken historically, beginning with Delaney and repeated by Daddysman and Gonzalez-Quiroga, it seems clear that the trade during the Civil War accelerated a process that had already begun, rather than

[179] Chance, *Carvajal*, 190-91; *Brownsville Daily Ranchero*, 14/6/66

the Civil War marking the beginning of that process itself. The creation of the Zona Libre was a reflection not just of a localised mercantile geopolitical influence, but also of Southern pressure on north-eastern Mexico to embody Southern economic and sociopolitical desires. This was not exclusive to north-eastern Mexico, of course, but it was one of the few places if not the only place where, economically at least, that Southern pressure succeeded. As Rachel St John has noted, 'transnational capitalism seemed to threaten to blur the boundary between the United States [or in this case the Confederacy] and Mexico to the point of obliterating it.'[180]

Once concessions had been achieved, by the merchants in 1858 and then reaffirmed and extended by Vidaurri in 1861, Confederate policy had focussed on maintaining these concessions and trying to make sure the Confederate state benefited from it as much as possible. The first concern can be accounted for in the many talks with Vidaurri, exemplified by the negotiations surrounding his closing of the border in early 1862, and the agreements to continue the trade negotiated with Juarez and Cortina. The second can be accounted for in the extradition treaty Bee signed with Lopez, the attempts to defend the trade against the *renegados* and the multiple different strategies employed to try and get as many arms and as much ammunition into the Transmississippi via Matamoros as possible.

In pursuit of this, whilst in many ways the Confederacy was its worst enemy, with a multitude of bureaucracies which were all to some degree inefficient, incompetent and corrupt, merchants themselves also undoubtedly played a key role. Merchants regularly undercut Confederate purchasing agents and cotton bureau officers in Matamoros and even travelled to the source of the product in east Texas, buying cotton directly from plantation-owners and leaving the Confederacy with no benefit from it. As CL Webster has commented, this meant that the Confederacy imported nowhere near the amount of arms and ammunition

[180] St John, *Line in the Sand*, 89

via Matamoros that it could have done. Only when the Confederate New Plan had been implemented and purchasing operations standardised in 1864 did the Confederacy begin to import a large number of munitions. It is notable that most descriptions of the trade's benefit to the Confederacy – the most famous perhaps being SS Brown's, who described it as 'the New York of the Confederacy west of the Mississippi,' again a quote that is often used by historians to portray the Matamoros trade throughout the Civil War years – were written in 1864 and 1865 (Brown's own description dates from January 1865). In other words, the Matamoros trade only became a trade that primarily benefited the Confederate state in the final year of the Civil War. The primary beneficiaries prior to this were the Confederate, Union, European and Mexican merchants.[181]

These mercantile activities helped prolong the Civil War, for some merchants at least did transport arms and ammunition to the Confederacy via Matamoros. Their efforts could be felt far beyond the lower Rio Grande. Ulysses S Grant, for example, dispersed his troops after the fall of Vicksburg to secure the Mississippi River Valley. At Natchez, they captured a 'large amount of munitions of war which had probably come through Texas from the Rio Grande and which were on their way to Lee's and other armies in the East.' At the same time, merchants could also undermine the Confederate war effort, most notably by travelling to East Texas plantations and buying cotton at source rather than from Confederate agents. Northern merchants also undermined the Union war effort by trading with the Confederacy via Matamoros.[182]

The explanation for this is of course a prioritisation of profit over patriotism. It is easy to assume all merchants operated according to a Scrooge-like, amoral economic calculation.

[181] In contrast, William Kiser argues that the main obstacles to the Confederacy fully exploiting the trade was the distance of Matamoros from the plantations, and the raids of the *renegados*. The latter, at least, still points to the importance of non-state geopolitical agency in the course of the trade. (Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 69-70)
[182] Grant, *Memoirs*, 320

However, this was not the case. William Schaw Lindsay was deeply involved with the Matamoros trade (or at least his company was) and he was one of the main advocates for the Confederate cause in Britain. Similarly, Charles Stillman, although desirous of making a profit, considered himself a true Southerner despite his Connecticut birth, according to his son and biographer. Therefore, whilst all merchants engaged with the trade for economic reasons, some also did so for ideological reasons as well. In both ways despite being non-state actors (or acting in a non-state capacity as private merchants) they affected, or sought to affect, the geopolitics of the lower Rio Grande and indeed beyond.

The ending of the Civil War, with the deployment of thousands of Union troops along the lower Rio Grande commanded by generals antagonistic towards the Imperialists garrisoned in Matamoros (discussed in the next chapter), brought a prosperous economic environment to a close. Established in response to mercantile pressure (violently expressed in the Merchants' War) the Zona Libre had economically altered a vital strip of Mexican territory to suit the interests of overwhelmingly Southern merchants. Economic and military pressures had compelled the Confederacy to try and defend and extend this concession along the lower Rio Grande. That they could not enforce this, or were reliant on Vidaurri, Cortina and Juarez to do so, was a symptom of their own weakness. Indeed, William Kiser has argued that the Bee-Lopez treaty, designed to protect the trade, actually 'caused more problems than it solved, creating false expectations and leading to provocative military actions that nearly erupted in open warfare.'[183]

In November 1863, a Union expedition under the command of Major-General Nathaniel Banks arrived on the lower Rio Grande and captured Brownsville. From their arrival, Union generals, identifying the Liberal struggle in Mexico against the Franco-Imperialists as parallel to their own struggle against the Confederacy, attempted to influence

[183] Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 87

the situation in Mexico and the attitude of Liberal Mexicans towards the Union. A similar dynamic would occur with the Confederacy and the Mexican Empire once Franco-Imperialist forces arrived on the Rio Grande in late 1864. The following chapter examines the attempts of Union and Confederate generals to shape their respective foreign policies, and the Mexican Republic's and Mexican Empire's, in the lower Rio Grande from 1863 to 1866.

CHAPTER FOUR: GENERALS

Introduction

Union material support for Juarez in Mexico is both present and absent in Civil War and Reconstruction historiography, often mentioned but very rarely examined in detail. The only monograph devoted to the subject was written by Robert Ryal Miller in 1973. As Miller observed, 'there is no book focussing on military support that the *Juaristas* received from the United States.' There has been none since Miller's, either. There have, however, been numerous references to it since Miller's examination: Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga mentions that 'prominent military men worked actively in support of Mexico', whilst Gregory Downs acknowledges that 'US officers dropped weapons on the border . . . [which] helped undermine French confidence and create[d] space for Juarez's Liberal forces to regroup.' Thomas Schoonover notes that 'during the winter of 1865-66 and throughout 1866, Grant attempted to give or sell arms and munitions to the Mexican republic.' Evan Rothera notes that 'Sheridan . . . facilitated arms drops across the border.' None, however, devote any great deal of attention to this subject, despite all acknowledging that this was essentially a renegade policy which had a major impact on the course of the war in Mexico.[184]

Union and Confederate generals along the lower Rio Grande could ignore or exceed their orders in order to either pursue their own policies or, more accurately perhaps, interpreted and adapted their nations' foreign policies to their own preferences. This chapter will examine three separate instances of generals' geopolitical agency: firstly, the actions of Union generals during the Federal occupation of Brownsville from 1863-64; secondly, the

[184] Miller, *Arms across the Border*, 3; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 235; Downs, *Second American Revolution*, 101; Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion*, 223; Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 67

actions of Confederate generals during the collapse of the Confederacy in the first six months of 1865; and thirdly, the actions of US generals supporting the Liberal army in Mexico from 1865-66.

Union Generals at Brownsville

Following the Union occupation of Brownsville in November 1863, Major-General Banks received a letter of congratulation from Seward. Nonetheless, Seward ordered Banks to act with circumspection: he was not to stop the trade *in* Mexico, but rather stop it from crossing the border. Nor was he to protect US citizens or property in Mexico, but rather observe events from the Rio Grande.[185] Banks himself, however, soon left for New Orleans, where he began to lay plans for an invasion of east Texas via the Red River.[186] Initially Napoleon Dana was left in charge, but on December 23rd Banks appointed Major-General Francis Herron in command instead, with Dana being moved up the coast to Pass Cavallo.[187]

Whilst Banks was still in Brownsville, the chaos in Matamoros caused by Cortina and Ruiz' struggle for power prompted a military response, albeit one that did not exceed Seward's instructions. 'Another revolution occurred today in Matamoros,' Banks informed Halleck as he watched the fighting in Matamoros. By nightfall, Banks was training his artillery on the town at the request of the American consulate – Union cannon deployed to fire into Mexican territory – as he feared that 'another revolution might occur tonight which might place the French party in power.'[188]

Banks' invocation of the French threat – not 'the Confederate party,' but the French – underlines the Union fear of European imperial encroachment into North America during the

[185] *OR* 1.26.1, Seward to Banks, 23/11/63, 815
[186] Harrington, Fred Harvey, *Fighting Politician: Major-General N.P. Banks* (Philadelphia, 1948), 143-44
[187] *OR* 1.26.1, Special Orders No. 322, 24/12/63, 879
[188] *OR* 1.26.1, Banks to Halleck, 6/11/63, 399-405

Civil War. Union artillery was trained on Matamoros not just to protect the consulate, but also to act as a warning as to what would happen if the lower Rio Grande became a site of imperial conquest. Equally, this was a transgression of Seward's instructions not to protect US citizens or property in Mexico. On the one hand, Banks may have intended the deployment of US artillery purely as a deterrent to the perceived pro-French parties in Matamoros. On the other, if Banks had felt compelled to use his artillery, only projectiles would have exceeded Seward's instructions, not troops deployed for battle. In this way, although he did not deploy any troops south of the river, Banks was enacting, or preparing to enact, a transgression of Seward's instructions if he judged that the occasion called for it – and, perhaps more pertinently, he judged that he could do so in the first place.

There is a possibility that Banks may have gone even further. In his memoirs, Chester Barney, a captain with the 20th Iowa Infantry, part of the Brownsville garrison, noted that Banks 'threw part of the 20th Wisconsin across, under [the] command of Colonel Bertram, to restore order.' Thomas Cutrer repeats this claim in his history of the Civil War in the Transmississippi. However, given that there is no mention of this in the *Official Records* and that the exact same regiment (which was actually the 26th Wisconsin, not the 20th as Barney states) was used by Frank Herron to interfere in Matamoros at the request of the consul (discussed below), it is likely that Barney got the two incidents mixed up.[189]

Once Juarez and Cortina were established along the lower Rio Grande, Herron in Brownsville began to practice diplomacy with them and despite their cooperation with the Confederacy, Juarez and Cortina were happy to participate. On one occasion, Juarez sent his Finance Minister, Jose Maria Iglesias, to Matamoros to confer with Cortina. Learning of his

[189] Barney, Chester, *Recollections of Field Service with the 20th Iowa Infantry Volunteers; or, What I Saw in the Army* (Davenport, 1865), 246-47; Cutrer, Thomas W., *Theatre of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill, 2017), 308; see for example *OR* 1.34.1, Herron to Stone, 15/1/64, 81-84

presence, Herron invited him over to Brownsville for dinner, sent his coach to the ferry to meet him, and flew the Mexican flag over Fort Brown in his honour during the meal.[190] Herron was eager to emphasise the similarities between the two sides: on 14th June, he sent Cortina an article by one Nestor Maxen that had been published in the *Houston Telegraph*. 'You will readily perceive by reading it,' Herron wrote to Cortina, 'that the writer is quite as much an enemy to your Liberal Government as to that of the United States,' thus framing the threats the two nations faced as similar, hoping to engender a sense of Union-Mexican solidarity, as noted in the Introduction. When Vidaurri's secretary of state fled to Brownsville hoping to secure passage for Havana, Herron promptly arrested him and delivered him across the river to Cortina.[191] After a Confederate raid into Mexico around the village of Guerrero, Cortina wrote to Herron requesting he deploy troops to stop such 'oppressions,' which Herron agreed to. The failure of a Federal raid on Laredo in March, however, soon put an end to this.[192]

None of this had been covered in Seward's instructions to Banks, and no new set or revision of instructions has been uncovered. Herron was certainly following the *spirit* of Union diplomacy with Mexico – as early as December 1860, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Lincoln had assured Matias Romero that his administration would look on Juarez as a friend – but he does not seem to have been following the *letter* of it. In other words, as far as it is possible to judge, Herron was most likely pursuing his own policy of cooperation with Mexican Liberals – or giving his own definition and detail to an overall Union diplomatic atmosphere.

[190] Thompson, *Cortina*, 134
[191] Herron to Cortina, 14/6/64, Herron Collection, 110; Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 96; *OR* Series 1 Volume 34 Part 3 (Washington, 1891), Ford to Turner, 5/5/64, 808
[192] Thompson, *Cortina*, 135

All this diplomacy appeared to bear fruit in April 1864, after Herron had been temporarily replaced with General John McClernand. McClernand was much more forceful in his diplomacy than Herron had been. He asked Cortina to persuade Juarez to seize all cotton and other property belonging to Confederates in Mexico, and expel anyone supplying and helping the rebellion. It is again unclear whether this was McClernand's initiative or whether he was obeying orders in requesting this, but there are no orders to this effect in the *Official Records*. McClernand even crossed the river to speak with Cortina directly in Matamoros. Showing how the US and Mexican crises were perceived as connected to one another, or perhaps playing on McClernand's conviction of this, Cortina informed McClernand that the success of the Union 'was necessary to the security of Mexico, not only against trans-marine nations [i.e., the French] but against the ambitious aims and aggressive spirit of the so-called Confederate government.' Cortina went on to issue a *pronunciamento* against the Confederacy that according to McClernand was 'little less than a declaration of war against the rebels.' This apparent Union-Cortina alliance was affirmed when McClernand made Cortina a present of 'ten artillery pieces in a formal ceremony on Plaza Hidalgo in Matamoros.' Cortina himself received an engraved sword. From Houston, Magruder complained that Andrew Hamilton – proclaimed Union governor of Texas after the occupation of Brownsville – and Cortina had 'walked arm in arm through the streets of Matamoros.'[193]

The sincerity of Cortina can be called into question: according to his biographer, McClernand 'read far more into that [*pronunciamento*] . . . than was warranted.' Indeed, at the same time as his *pronunciamento*, Cortina was also writing to John Ford offering to help smooth the flow of cotton over the Rio Grande at Reynosa and Camargo. Nonetheless, however earnest or dissembling Cortina had been, this was an aggressive foreign policy most

[193] *OR* 1.34.3, McClernand to Cortina, 7/4/64, 73; ibid, McClernand to Cortina, 8/4/64, 87; ibid, Magruder to Slidell, 27/4/64, 796; Thompson, *Cortina*, 135-36

probably developed and implemented by McClernand himself. With the ceremony that supplied Cortina with a artillery and a sword, McClernand as a representative of the US government was in effect conferring political legitimacy on him. Available sources give no indication that this was the desire of Lincoln or Seward.

Which position was sincere, which was cynical – or was Cortina exploiting both Union and Confederacy in order to maintain his own power base? John Ford believed that Cortina 'hated Americans, particularly Texans.' If he could 'get within the Yankee lines, it would be a finale he [Cortina] would delight in.' In other words, Cortina's opposition to the expansionist Southerners who had taken away his birth-right made him pro-Union. The questionable motives, and negligible outcome, of Cortina's *pronunciamiento* calls into question how successful Union belligerent diplomacy was at this time of the war. At the same time, it highlights Cortina's geopolitical agency as a non-state actor within the borderland that Union officials would treat with Cortina and in effect recognise his sovereignty over Matamoros. Given that it is unclear if McClernand was acting on instructions, this is a case of a renegade state actor using talk with a non-state actor to try and create a state of affairs in a neighbouring country beneficial to the Union. By sending him artillery pieces, McClernand was also giving Cortina the means to resist Franco-Imperial advance and attack the Confederacy.[194]

Union diplomacy, however – or more accurately the diplomacy of the Union generals along the border – had been put at risk by the actions of General Herron during the fighting between Ruiz and Cortina in Matamoros in January 1864. The fighting was so fierce that Consul Pierce, fearing for his and his family's life, not to mention the nearly $1,000,000 in specie that the Consulate held, wrote to Herron immediately requesting him 'to send a

[194] Kiper, Richard L., *Major-General John Alexander McClernand: Politician in Uniform* (Kent, 1999), 286; Thompson, *Cortina*, 136; *OR* 1.41.3, Ford to Dwyer, 3/9/64, 909; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 375

sufficient force to protect myself and property.' Even Governor Ruiz sent a letter to Herron suggesting he send troops over to protect the consulate. Given that Ruiz' letter also mentioned how Matamoros had sent troops to protect Brownsville from Cortina's attack in 1859 he was probably hoping something of a *quid pro quo* might be arranged. In the borderland, one episode of violent transnational cooperation begat another.[195]

It was barely six weeks since Seward had explicitly ordered Banks not to send troops into Mexico to protect US citizens or property, and it seems inconceivable that Banks would have left Herron in charge without relaying these instructions; and yet this was precisely what Herron proceeded to do. Orders went out at once to Colonel Bertram of the 26th Wisconsin to take four companies of his regiment into Matamoros, 'to make proper dispositions of his force to protect the US Consul and his property and to remove them at the earliest possible time to this side of the river.'[196] Bertram was cautioned that 'should a stray shot come near, or even strike one of your men, that, will not be considered a sufficient reason for your firing.' Messengers were also sent across the river to inform Ruiz and Cortina of Bertram's movements.

Bertram's four companies marched through the battle zone without firing. A brief cessation in combat occurred when the Union troops arrived, but 'learning there was to be no interference, both parties went at it again' – suggesting both sides initially thought the Union troops might be about to join in against the other. However, now Bertram's men had arrived, both Mexican forces took good care to 'keep some distance away from the US Consulate.' Bertram stayed in position until seven the following morning, when at last he was able to withdraw with Consul Pierce, his family and the specie to Brownsville.[197]

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[195] Herron to Banks, January 1864, Herron Collection, 7-9; ibid, L Pierce Jr to Herron, 12/1/64, 11; ibid, Ruiz to Herron, 12/1/64, 12
[196] Ibid, Herron, 12; ibid, Herron to Bertram, 12/1/64, 15
[197] Ibid, Herron to Stone, 14/1/64, 16

Unsurprisingly, uproar followed on Herron's action, but notably this uproar came more from Juarez, hundreds of miles away, than it did from Cortina, who had been fighting for control of Matamoros. Having sent commissioners to check what Bertram's troops were doing in the city, Cortina happily left them alone and concentrated on fighting Ruiz. Ruiz, on the other hand, was even happier to see the Union troops, having explicitly invited them over. However, Ruiz' hopes of a violent Federal intervention did not, of course, come to pass.

The Juarez government, however, was furious. The ambassador in Washington, Matias Romero, characterised Bertram's troops as an 'invasion of Mexican territory' and a 'flagrant violation of our sovereignty.' It was also, as Romero pointed out, in direct contravention of the orders Seward had given Banks to refrain from deploying troops in Mexico.[198] Even the French consul complained of Herron's actions, in words eerily similar to Romero's.[199] Seward promised an investigation would be mounted into Herron's actions. From his immediate superior, however, Herron received nothing but support: 'The movement of troops into Matamoros,' Banks wrote to Halleck, 'seems to have been necessary to enable the consul to leave the city.'[200]

In acting contrary to his official instructions, Herron was behaving as a renegade state actor. Herron's actions underline how maintaining or enforcing a border ultimately relied on force: Mexico could not stop Herron from sending troops into Matamoros due to its own political anarchy. Juarez' anger, and in contrast Cortina's calm, also points to how differently state and non-state actors perceived sovereignty and power in the borderland: for the state actor, it had to be absolute – anything else was a violation of sovereignty. For the non-state actor (particularly, in this case, the borderland geopolitical non-state actor), power was, as

[198] Romero to Ciudadano Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 4/2/64, *Correspondencia de la Legacion Mexicana en Washington durante La Intervencion Extranjera, 1860-1868, Volume V 1864* (Mexico City, 1871), 23
[199] *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs,* [hereafter *PRFA*] *Accompanying the Annual Message of the President to the Second Session Thirty-eighth Congress, Part III: France,* De Geofroy to Seward, 11/3/64, , 201
[200] Ibid, Seward to de Geofroy, 12/3/64, 201-02; ibid, Banks to Halleck, 25/1/64, 203

James F. Brooks has suggested, 'in perpetual turmoil, negotiation and regeneration.' In a region which had seen multiple invasions and geopolitical transference of power since the 1820s, Herron's actions were in many ways the norm rather than the exception.[201]

The diplomatic efforts of Union generals along the lower Rio Grande did not have much time to have an effect in the few months that the Union held Brownsville. Talk was used to encourage a sense of Union-Liberal solidarity, with Herron hosting Juarez' minister to dinner and sending the newspaper article to Cortina, and McClernand persuading Cortina to issue the *pronunciamento*. The limits of this diplomacy's effectiveness are only too apparent, however; out of necessity, both Juarez and Cortina continued to trade with the Confederates, and although Cortina requested Union protection from and retribution against the Confederate raiders that struck the village of Guererro (see Chapter 6), he did not attack the Confederacy himself as McClernand might have hoped. Equally, Herron's renegade dispatch of Bertram to Matamoros caused a diplomatic incident with Juarez. However, despite its limited success, the content of such Union diplomacy shows how it operated within the borderland: talk was pursued both with and by state, renegade state and non-state actors equally, a strategic pluralism or polylateralism that reflected the dynamics of the borderland itself rather than the bilateral interactions of central governments. Indeed, despite instructions from Washington, it is clear that a great degree of power to change policy resided (as Herron's and possibly McClernand's actions show) at the borderland itself. This was in part a function of the central state's inability to maintain a close grip on policy along the border.

The diplomacy of Union generals in 1863-64 also showcases how they actively sought to link together the conflicts north and south of the Rio Grande, from Herron entertaining members of Juarez' cabinet to McClernand attempting to secure a *de facto*

[201] Brooks, James F., *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, 2002), 366

alliance with Cortina. The rationale was to link together the Union with the Liberals, and the Confederacy with the Franco-Imperialists – despite Juarez and Cortina collaborating with the Confederacy during this time. If these connections were based, as Thomas Schoonover, Don Doyle and Patrick Kelly have suggested, on the Union-Liberal position being rationalised as one or a mixture of a defence of liberalism, democracy, republicanism, free labour and even capitalism, then by their actions Union generals were attempting to influence what the sociopolitical shape of Mexico should be. In this they were enacting their government's sympathies rather than its policies. Union generals on the lower Rio Grande sought to connect the crises together so that the resolution of the Mexican crisis could reflect that of the United States.

Union Generals: Wallace on Brazos Santiago

In January 1865 Lew Wallace was sent to Brazos Santiago. Wallace's mission was partly to do with the trade (or at least the trade had drawn his attention to this area) and partly a reflection of a growing Union belligerent diplomacy as the Civil War waned. On January 13th Wallace had received a letter from one SS Brown, an old schoolfriend from Indiana and presumably a Texan Unionist, who had found himself, like so many others, a refugee in Monterrey. Brown managed to find passage from there to Baltimore (presumably via Matamoros) and from there he wrote to Wallace to draw the Mexican town to his attention. It was he who made the famous comparison of Matamoros to New York. Matamoros was, wrote Brown, 'feeding and clothing the rebellion, arming and equipping, furnishing it materials of war and a specie basis of circulation in Texas that has almost entirely displaced Confederate paper.'

Brown advocated suppressing the trade by a military occupation of Matamoros itself and further suggested this could be used as a springboard for external conflict and internal reunion. Such an attack, he was sure, would rally the local population 'against foreign intervention,' and Confederate troops would unite with Federals to attack the Imperialists in Mexico under the auspices of the Juarez government.[202]

Wallace immediately wrote to Lincoln to suggest he go out to Brazos Santiago and attack Matamoros. Lincoln did not refuse Wallace permission but nor did he grant it; rather, he told Wallace to 'go to Grant.' Grant was a noted sympathiser to the Juarez cause – already in October 1864, Grant had expressed his desire to Matias Romero to lead an American army into Mexico to Juarez' assistance. In his letter to Grant, Wallace, taking up Brown's suggestion, proposed nothing less than an alliance of the Confederate and Union commands along the Rio Grande and an invasion of Tamaulipas 'under the Juarez flag.' 'The adoption of the Juarez flag on the banks of the Rio Grande as the basis of a compromise,' he declared, 'would stagger the rebellion next to the giving in of the State of Georgia.' If it did not, Wallace finished, he would be in a position to move on the Matamoros trade and crush it. In other words, Yankee and rebel would combine to invade a foreign country under the flag of that country's disputed government that had been driven back to its own border. It was an astonishing suggestion, that quite explicitly advocated war with France as a consequence of its adoption – and that resolving the crisis in Mexico would, *ipso facto,* resolve the crisis in the United States. It was, Wallace suggested (in perhaps something of a Freudian slip), 'worth a trial.' Behind it lay a belief that external belligerence could presage internal reunion – not

[202] *OR* Series 1 Volume 48 Part 1 (Washington, 1896), Brown to Wallace, 13/1/65, 512-13; McKee, Irving, *'Ben-Hur' Wallace: The Life of General Lew Wallace* (Berkeley, 1947), 91

too dissimilar, in its way, to the famous proposal Seward had made to Lincoln in April 1861.[203]

Apart from Grant and Wallace, only Lincoln and Stanton knew of this proposal. Lincoln, however, was hesitant about the move, describing sending Wallace as 'the argument of the thief – alright if you don't get caught.' Nonetheless, he relented, and Wallace obtained a letter of introduction from Romero to one Jose Carvajal, who re-enters the picture, who had been appointed commander along the Rio Grande by Juarez. According to his own memoirs, Wallace also carried secret instructions from Lincoln to help the flow of men and munitions across the border to Juarez. Although he acted with the approval (however hesitant) of Lincoln himself, Wallace was in many ways behaving as a renegade state actor. The policy was his own, adapted from SS Brown's letter and although Lincoln agreed to the mission, it was in secrecy, kept hidden even from his own cabinet aside from Stanton. (According to Wallace's biographer Lincoln advised him to go see Seward, but Wallace refused.) Wallace's mission was covert, hidden not just from the French or the general Union public but even from key Union policymakers themselves. It was a clandestine foreign policy to protect Mexico and reunite the antebellum United States that in essence saw Lincoln, Stanton, Grant and Wallace behaving as renegade state actors.[204]

Wallace's peace proposal is eerily similar to that of Francis P. Blair, who had proposed it to Jefferson Davis in Richmond in December 1864. Both Blair's and Wallace's peace proposals (although not Lincoln's own at the Hampton Roads conference in February 1865) envisaged peace and reunion as a prelude to armed intervention in Mexico. Mexico, in other words, was to be used as a space, both literally and metaphysically, in which internal US

[203] *OR* 1.48.1, Wallace to Grant, 14/1/65, 512' McKee, *'Ben-Hur' Wallace*, 91; Wallace, Lew, *Lew Wallace: An Autobiography Volume II* (New York, 1906), 812-13; James Fred Rippy notes the similarity between Wallace's proposal and Seward's. (Rippy, *United States and Mexico*, 266.)
[204] McKee, *'Ben-Hur' Wallace*, 92

conflict would be resolved with external geopolitical conflict. This was a foreign policy designed firstly to secure peace within the borders of the US, and with this drive monarchical government from Mexico. In being used to resolve the US sectional conflict, Mexico would also presumably have been used to reflect and indeed embody the compromises the putative Union-Confederate alliance would have agreed upon.[205]

It took over a month for Wallace to reach Brazos Santiago. Letters must presumably already have been despatched across enemy lines, as Wallace could now report that Edmund Kirby Smith, Confederate commander in the Transmississippi, had agreed to meet for a conference. Wallace even disingenuously told his Confederate counterparts that his mission was not authorised by the 'proper authorities of my Government.'[206]

Once Wallace finally arrived at Brazos Santiago in early March, however, (having ordered the mailboat to be delayed by a week to try and disguise his arrival) no interview with Kirby Smith materialised. Wallace instead wrote to the local Confederate commander, the piquantly named General Slaughter, to ask for a meeting, to which Slaughter happily agreed. Their meeting was delayed by a howling norther that made all travel from Brazos Santiago impossible,[207]but finally occurred at Point Isabel on the 11th, between Wallace on the one hand and General Slaughter and Colonel John Ford on the other.

Their discussion went well, with Wallace playing the gracious host ('I "treated" them to the refreshments,' he informed his wife) and the following day a document detailing Wallace's propositions for the surrender of Texas was drawn up and sent to Brownsville. The terms were more than generous: in return for submitting to the Union, all soldiers and citizens could remain in Texas, providing they took the oath of allegiance, or were otherwise free to

[205] Jonas, *Habsburgs on the Rio Grande*, 182
[206] *OR* 48.1.1, Wallace to Grant, 22/2/65, 937-38; *OR* 48.1.2, Wallace to Slaughter and Ford, 12/3/65, 1280
[207] *OR* 48.1.1, Wallace to Christensen, 25/2/65, 973; Slaughter to Worthington, 6/3/65, 1279-80; Wallace to Slaughter, 10/3/65, 1280; Wallace to Grant, 14/3/65, 1279

leave, and all property rights were to be respected. 'The right of property in slaves,' Wallace wrote, 'shall be referred to the discretion of the Congress of the United States' – an artful fudging, if not outright avoidance, of that particular issue. Wallace was convinced the agreement of Slaughter and Ford would win the whole of Texas to the Union cause: he described Ford as 'politically the most influential Confederate soldier in Texas.' His hopes were presumably high, therefore, when he returned to his bivouac on Brazos Santiago.[208]

Slaughter passed on Wallace's terms to his superior, General Walker, and met with an immediate rebuff. Slaughter was reprimanded for agreeing to meet Wallace in the first place and ordered never to do so again. Walker found the whole affair highly dubious. 'The fact that an officer of his high rank in the enemy's army is found at so remote a corner of the Confederacy has in itself something sinister and suspicious,' he wrote to Slaughter. 'If the terms he was prepared to propose had been such as one could honourably entertain, it would not have been necessary for him to come to the Rio Grande to open negotiations.' Wallace, meanwhile, had written directly to Walker of his meeting with Slaughter and Ford, asking if he could have a meeting with Walker as well. Walker refused. Wallace then requested that Walker still pass on his letter to Kirby Smith with a view to opening negotiations. 'It is impossible for me to believe,' he wrote tartly, 'that accident or policy has located all the sane men of your Confederacy in its obscure corners.' Walker again refused. Wallace wrote bitterly to Grant that Walker 'belongs to the Radicals.'[209]

Undaunted, Wallace now arranged another meeting with Slaughter and Ford, asking them if they would be prepared to act independently of the Transmississippi high command. How could Walker oppose this, he asked the two commanders cheekily, when he believed in

[208] Ibid, Wallace to Slaughter and Ford, 12/3/65, 1280-82 (quote 1282); ibid, Wallace to Grant, 14/3/65, 1276-79 (quote 1279); McKee, *'Ben-Hur' Wallace*, 93
[209] *OR* 48.1.2, Walker to Slaughter, 27/3/65, 1448; *OR* 48.2, Wallace to Walker, 30/3/65, 460-61; ibid, Walker to Wallace, 25/3/65, 461-62; ibid, Wallace to Walker, 2/4/65, 462; ibid, Wallace to Grant, 18/4/65, 457-58

the doctrine of state's rights? In turn, Slaughter and Ford confided their fears that Kirby Smith was negotiating with the Emperor Maximilian for an Imperial annexation of the Transmississippi. If Imperial annexation happened, Ford assured him, he would be prepared to launch a counter-revolution. Slaughter enthusiastically agreed. 'The best way for officers in his position to get back into the Union,' Wallace reported him saying to Grant, 'was to cross the river, conquer two or three States from the French, and ultimately annex them, with all their inhabitants, to the United States.' Both officers, Wallace reported, 'entered heartily' into the 'Mexican project.'[210]

It is difficult to discern why Lincoln agreed to Wallace's mission, particularly as Blair's mission, which Lincoln had derided, had already returned from Richmond by the time Wallace departed for Matamoros. The likeliest explanation is that Lincoln hoped this would be a way to secure an early and bloodless surrender of the Confederate Transmississippi. What Wallace's suggestion entailed was a violent restructuring of Mexican politics and geopolitics not only in the US interest but also to resolve the US sectional crisis.

Confederate Generals: Kirby Smith, Magruder and France

As the discussion of Slaughter and Ford with Wallace suggests, Confederate generals also implemented their own geopolitical policies in the borderland, or attempted to enact their own interpretations of central government policy, especially after the arrival of the French in northern Mexico in 1863 and the Union conquest of the Mississippi River Valley. As James Fred Rippy has noted, 'since Louis Napoleon was their avowed friend, it was natural to expect that he might extend aid to them through Mexico, especially if he could promote his

[210] *OR* 48.1.2, Wallace to Grant, 16/5/65, 1166-67; *OR* 48.2, Wallace to Slaughter and Ford, 6/4/65, 462-63; ibid, Wallace to Grant, 16/5/65, 457

Mexican undertaking thereby.' Confederate generals sought to encourage this generosity in the French emperor.[211]

For instance, John Magruder wrote to the French in August 1863 requesting they prevent a Union attack on Brownsville from the direction of Lavaca, around Matagorda Bay to the north of Brownsville and Corpus Christi.[212] As rumours of a Union attack on Texas grew in late 1863, Magruder stepped up the pressure on the French, writing directly to the Confederate ambassador in Paris, John Slidell. 'It will be impossible for France to hold her possessions in Mexico if the United States troops overrun Louisiana and Texas,' Magruder argued. 'I have been endeavouring to induce General Forey to order the occupation of Matamoros, offering to throw the cotton of Texas into the hands of French merchants in return.'[213] In other words, just as Jefferson Davis on a macro level hoped to use cotton to secure European recognition, so Magruder hoped to use cotton to secure French military support on the lower Rio Grande. Crucially, however, Magruder had no permission from Davis or his cabinet to do this, or no permission that has survived in the available records.

Similarly, in April 1863 one A. Superviele had arrived in Puebla with a message for the French diplomat Dubois De Saligny from Hamilton Bee. De Saligny assured Superviele 'that he himself was a secessionist, and that his best friends were all engaged in the Southern cause.' Superviele then outlined the mutual benefit of French occupation south of the Rio Grande: 'our government and people would give the preference to the French for the acquisition of our cotton,' the French could cross any mules and cattle they purchased in Coahuila and Nuevo Leon onto the Texan side of the Rio Grande and 'they could be driven in safety down to the mouth [of the Rio Grande] with the protection of our authorities,' and that

[211] Rippy, *United States and Mexico*, 240
[212] *OR* 1.26.2, Bee to Turner, 14/8/63, 166-67; ibid, Bee to Ruiz, 14/8/63, 167-68; ibid, Bryan to Magruder, 4/9/63, 202
[213] *OR* 1.26.2, Magruder to Slidell, 14/10/63, 312-15 (quote 312)

'we could manage things in such a way that, without compromising either France or the Confederacy officially, we could . . . in secrecy furnish them with three lighters flying Mexican colours but, in fact, belonging to us.'[214]

Superviele was shortly afterwards sent on another mission, and in December 1863 he arrived in Paris with a message for John Slidell from Edmund Kirby Smith. In it, Kirby Smith warned Napoleon III that a Union attack on the lower Rio Grande would give the Mexican Empire 'on its border a grasping, haughty and imperious neighbour.' Kirby Smith urged Napoleon to occupy the right bank of the Rio Grande to ensure the safety of the Confederate trade, and thus the Confederate ability to resist the Union on the left bank.[215]

Cooperation of this sort along the lower Rio Grande reflected what Kirby Smith, hoped to achieve on a larger scale with the French army on his southern border. In January 1864 Kirby Smith dispatched one WG Hale to Mexico City to represent the Confederacy at Maximilian's court. Hale was ordered to ask for 'greater facilities than now exist for the entrance of Confederate vessels into Mexican ports contiguous to the Rio Grande.' This is an obvious reference to Matamoros. Later in his instructions, Hale was ordered to gather information on the Imperial attitude towards the Confederacy. Kirby Smith believed that increased trade would deepen the friendship between the two nations, as the following letter shows – or even, indeed, lead to an alliance.[216]

Another example of Confederate support for the Empire was a scheme proposed in 1864 and attempted in 1865 to conquer the north-western Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora, Juarez' power base in the north. This plan was developed by William Gwin, a former US senator. Gwin had travelled to Napoleon III's court in 1864, proposing a plan that would turn Chihuahua and Sonora into a French dukedom, and received Napoleon's approval.

[214] *OR* 1.26.2, Superviele to Bee, 31/7/63, 140-151 (quote 144-45)
[215] *OR* 1.22.2, Kirby Smith to Slidell, 2/9/63, 993-94
[216] *OR* 48.1.2, Kirby Smith to Hale, 25/1/64, 1343

Although this was not a Confederate plan, the Confederacy both knew and approved of Gwin's scheme: Gwin noted he was 'highly valued because I am with the South in this contest' and John Slidell wrote to Judah Benjamin from Paris that 'if carried out its consequences will be most beneficial.' Frederick Steele reported from Brownsville in June 1865 that Confederate General Walker, who had scuppered Ford and Slaughter's peace plans, was marching his division westwards to Sonora to join Gwin. Gwin himself had returned to California and began recruiting men for his expedition. Grant certainly took the situation seriously, proposing an invasion of Sonora in January 1865 in order to secure the area from Imperialist clutches. Gwin's scheme failed, however, and in July 1865 he left Mexico City; by October he was in a Union prison in Louisiana. Although Gwin's scheme proved to be a damp squib, it shows how non-state actors could influence and help form state foreign policies in the borderland, almost provoking both a Confederate and Union invasion of sovereign Mexican territory.[217]

By February 1865 Kirby Smith was writing directly to Florentino Lopez, the commander in chief of the Imperial army. He informed Lopez that President Davis reciprocated the friendship of Maximilian and that Smith likewise reciprocated the friendship of Lopez. He went on to assure Lopez (and through him, no doubt, Maximilian) that President Davis wanted 'to cultivate the most friendly and agreeable relations with the Imperial Government of Mexico.' At the least, Kirby Smith hoped that protracted warfare along the Rio Grande would lead to 'political complications which it is the interest of the United States to avoid.' In other words, Kirby Smith hoped to use the proximity of the Franco-Imperialists to dissuade a Union attack. Similarly, Brigadier-General William Preston,

[217] Waite, *West of Slavery*, 203-07 (Gwin and Slidell quotes 206, Waite quote 205); St John, Rachel, 'The Unpredictable America of William Gwin: Expansion, Secession and the Unstable Borders of Nineteenth-Century North America,' *Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 6 No. 1 (2016), 56-84; *OR* 48.2, Steele to Sheridan, 10/6/65, 841-42

sent in 1864 as Confederate representative to Mexico City, tried to convince Maximilian that Lincoln was actively aiding Juarez in his struggle against the Empire.

In January 1865, as mentioned above, Ford and Slaughter communicated to Lew Wallace their fear that Kirby Smith was planning on facilitating the annexation of Texas to the Mexican Empire. Several newspaper articles by members of his staff had apparently suggested this.[218] These fears were not unfounded: that same month, Kirby Smith had dispatched a letter to Slidell in Paris in the care of Charles de Polignac, a French noble who had served as a general in the Confederate army. 'Our cause has reached a crisis, which calls for foreign intervention,' Kirby Smith wrote. 'It cannot be too strongly emphasised upon the Emperor of the French that the security of his Empire in Mexico, and the interests of his own government, all demand interference to restore peace and establish firmly the nationality of the Confederate States.' Kirby Smith even offered to promote a scheme of gradual slave emancipation if Napoleon would militarily intervene.[219]

Kirby Smith's calls for intervention grew more desperate in April 1865, with the fall of Richmond and surrender of Lee at Appomattox. On April 11th, he forwarded the correspondence between Wallace and Slaughter and Ford to Slidell in Paris, asking him to bring it to Napoleon's attention. It proved, Kirby Smith said, that 'the policy of the United States Government [is] to enforce the Monroe Doctrine and re-establish the Juarez Government in Mexico.' On Brazos Santiago, Wallace was convinced that 'there is a secret agreement existing between the Mexican Imperialists and the Texan Confederates, contemplating ultimate annexation of Texas and mutual support, or the support without the annexation.' Meanwhile, an agent of General Canby's in Matamoros reported news of

[218] Ibid, Kirby Smith to Lopez, 10/2/65, 1379-80; ibid, Wallace to Grant, 16/5/65, 1166-67; ibid, Slaughter to May, 30/1/65, 1353-55; *OR* 48.1.1, Kirby Smith to Sprague (undated), 192-93
[219] Kirby Smith to Slidell, 9/1/65, quoted in Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy*, 373; Kiser, *illusions of Empire*, 135-36

couriers carrying despatches between Maximilian and Kirby Smith, and that 'the feeling and spirit evinced by the Confederates generally and Texans in particular is most decidedly in favour of an uprising in Texas, at least assisting the Imperial against its enemies, particularly the United States.' Conversely Wallace, at any rate, was convinced that if Kirby Smith did pursue an Imperialist alliance, he would be opposed by his own men.[220]

As news of Richmond's fall, the surrender of Lee and Joseph Johnstone and, most importantly, the capture of President Davis began to filter through to the Transmississippi, Kirby Smith found himself a general without an army. Desertion reached epidemic levels: in mid-May 450 of the Louisiana division's 1200 men left the colours. The Texas division was disbanded on 21st May and its commander General Walker was robbed by army deserters of his personal wagons and ambulance. The general breakdown of military discipline was confirmed when Generals Buckner and Price sailed to New Orleans to negotiate a surrender of the Transmississippi on their own initiative. Any attempt to secure Franco-Imperial assistance was rendered moot in the face of this. Confronted with this *fait accompli*, Kirby Smith at last signed documents of surrender on June 1st, ending the Civil War in the Transmississippi.[221]

Kirby Smith's attempts to secure French intervention were, of course, a sign of military and geopolitical desperation; but perhaps more interestingly, such schemes seem to have originated with Kirby Smith himself. Such renegade state action on distant fronts of collapsing polities is not unknown in times of war: the German commander in Italy, General von Vietinghoff, for example, surrendered to the Allies at the end of World War Two against the instructions of the central Nazi government. If the dynamic is not unique to the lower Rio

[220] *OR* 48.2, Herron to Banks, 9/5/65, 365; ibid, Kirby Smith to Slidell, 11/4/65, 1277; ibid, Wallace to Grant, 16/5/65, 457; ibid, Wallace to Grant, 18/4/65, 457-58; ibid, Canedo to Canby, 4/5/65, 307-08; ibid, Canedo to Osterhaus, 4/6/65, 771

[221] Trudeau, Noah Andre, *Out of the Storm: The End of the Civil War, April-June 1865* (London, 1994), 335, 338-41; Cutrer, *Theatre of a Separate War*, 433-37

Grande at the end of the Civil War, it is nonetheless notable: Kirby Smith was attempting to secure active armed intervention by the French in Texas, particularly in 1865. It is another example of the agency, or perceived agency, of an actor acting independently of state institutions, or using them for his own purpose. That Kirby Smith was not successful does not alter this.[222]

Union Generals' Support for Juarez, 1865-66

Events in Mexico were always a concern for the Lincoln administration. Patrick Kelly, for example, has argued that the 'continent' referred to in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address shows a conception of the Civil War as part of a continental struggle, alongside the French intervention, against the forces of monarchy and aristocracy. At the same time, however, Lincoln had placed an embargo on American arms trading in 1861. As a consequence, the Lincoln administration did little to support Juarez during the Civil War – although Banks was sent to the Rio Grande in order to implicitly warn the French of where their Mexican adventure might lead.

More practical support for the Liberal cause in Mexico, in the form of guns and volunteers, is generally described as beginning in the summer of 1865. Palpable support for Juarez along the Rio Grande may, however, have begun in late 1864. According to Union soldier Justus Brooks, Lew Wallace was engaged in smuggling arms across the border to Juarez. Brooks' recollection, published in 1914 (with an affidavit from Wallace's son) recounts an episode of gun-running across the border near the town of Mesilla in New Mexico. In October 1864, Brooks and his comrades were a month away from the expiry of their enlistments, when eighty of them were ordered down to the Rio Grande, ostensibly to

[222] For von Vietinghoff's surrender in Italy, see Beevor, Antony, *The Second World War* (London, 2012), 757

chase some Apache raiders. There, they were joined first by a Mexican who claimed he was lost, and then by thirty Union cavalry, among whom, Brooks declared, was General Wallace. The troops crossed into Mexico during the night. 'The officers seemed to know its location, though it was far away from the Rio Grande at that point,' Brooks remembered.[223]

The 'lost Mexican' now turned out to be a guide who took them to a nearby town. (Brooks' interlocutor, AW Barber, deduced this was either El Paso del Norte or Chihuahua.) They travelled by night and rested by day, 'in miserable rest among brush or rocks or ravines.' French troops had been sighted by an earlier patrol towards the Rio Grande, and the troops could not take the risk of being seen. At the town, they were joined by a train of wagons. 'Strange to say, the painted letters "US" had been carefully erased from every wagon and harness,' Brooks recalled. 'But they were laden with a familiar sort of long, heavy boxes.' Brooks and a friend deduced they were 'rifles and cartridges.' Having been unloaded, the wagons returned to the Rio Grande, Wallace and the 'lost Mexican' (who may have been General Jose Carvajal) rode on to another town and Brooks and his comrades retraced their steps to New Mexico. They were ordered not to tell anyone about their expedition over the border.[224]

Whilst Brooks never saw the contents of those boxes, it is hard to imagine what else these army wagons with their US initials removed could have been transporting across the border in those 'long, heavy boxes.' If Brooks' recollection is to be believed the Union was smuggling guns across the border to help Juarez from October 1864 at the very least. Of course, this may have been done without Lincoln's knowledge – that part is impossible to tell. (AW Barber claims it was 'ordered by that silent man of deeds, General US Grant' who kept 'his purpose from the Secretary of State.') As Barber noted, 'the country knew afterward the

[223] Barber, A.W., *The Benevolent Raid of General Lew Wallace: How Mexico was Saved in 1864: The Monroe Doctrine in Action; Testimony of a Survivor, Private Justus Brooks* (Washington, 1914), 7-8
[224] Ibid, 8-10

fatal ending of Maximilian and his brief empire . . . but there were irregular ways and means adopted in that crisis.'[225]

How accurate is Brooks' memoir? It seems doubtful the officer in question was Lew Wallace. Wallace himself makes no mention of the episode in his memoirs, although he happily discusses his mission to Brazos Santiago and post-Civil War service with the *Juarista* army (and Philip Sheridan, in his memoirs published before Wallace's, openly discusses arming the *Juaristas*, which was contrary to official government policy). In October 1864 Wallace was commander of the Department of Maryland. He did visit Grant at his headquarters outside Richmond in September and the two discussed securing Wallace a more active command. Intriguingly, there is a gap in Wallace's memoirs between his visit to Grant and his mission to Brazos Santiago in January 1865. It is theoretically possible that Wallace travelled from the eastern seaboard to New Mexico, supervised several arms shipments across the border, and returned to his headquarters in Baltimore within the space of around a month; but on balance it is unlikely.[226]

This leaves two alternatives. Firstly, the officer may not have been Wallace. But then why the affidavit from Wallace's son? The other alternative is that Brooks or Barber got the date wrong, and it was not October 1864 but rather October 1865 that this episode occurred. Wallace resigned from the Union army in November (which would account for him still wearing his Union uniform) but at this time was travelling between Washington, New York and his home in Crawfordville, Indiana, as he served on the court that convicted Andersonville commandant George Wirz of war crimes and then became involved in securing a loan for the Juarez government. Either the officer was not Wallace; or he was, and the operation was deemed so secret it was never mentioned afterwards; or Brooks was lying.

[225] Ibid, 3, 10
[226] Wallace, *Lew Wallace II*, 811-12; McKee, *'Ben-Hur' Wallace*, 75

Giving an old man, reminiscing at the distance of half a century, the benefit of the doubt, perhaps the officer was not Wallace, and his son in 1914 was just trying to garner a little more glory to his father's name. If Brooks is to be believed, the Union was practicing a belligerent diplomacy along the Rio Grande in 1864, supplying Juarez with arms and ammunition to continue his war against the French.[227]

In the aftermath of Lincoln's assassination and Seward's incapacitation, and the end of the Civil War itself, Grant took up the cause of Mexico and ran with it. Grant had always sympathised with the plight of Mexico. He described the Mexican-American War as 'one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation.' Of the French intervention itself, he wrote in his memoirs that 'I, myself, regarded this as a direct act of war against the United States by the powers engaged, and supposed as a matter of course that the United States would treat it as such when their hands were free to strike.' Biographers of Grant have also noted his determination to support Juarez. According to Jean Edward Smith, 'the general in chief was determined to topple Maximilian in Mexico.' William McFeely notes that 'in Mexico there was another liberal cause to be fought for, another nationalist struggle under way,' whilst Ron Chernow notes that 'for Grant,' Mexico was 'an unfinished piece of business from the Civil War.' McFeely and Chernow in particular demonstrate how the sectional crises in the US and Mexico were perceived to be connected. Similarly, using the framework of Elliot West's 'Greater Reconstruction,' William Kiser argues that Grant sought to use military means to 'preserve and expand' democracy in both Mexico and the 'New South.' Grant would firstly advocate for an interventionist policy in Mexico, and when the Johnson administration disavowed this would pursue his own renegade state policy, warlike if

[227] Ibid, 95-102; Wallace, *Lew Wallace II*, 862-76

not a war itself, supplying arms to Juarez through the lower Rio Grande and encouraging former Union soldiers to volunteer to serve in the Liberal armies.[228]

However, Grant clearly wanted a far more aggressive foreign policy than just lifting the ban on exporting arms. After Lee's surrender at Appomattox in April, Grant turned to a nearby staff officer and declared 'Now for Mexico.' Almost immediately, he ordered the veteran XXV Corps to be deployed to the lower Rio Grande borderland. Grant himself initially considered taking command of the troops deployed to the lower Rio Grande. Eventually he decided instead to send Phil Sheridan, one of his most trusted subordinates, to command in Brownsville. There was even a meeting in June 1865 in Washington involving Johnson, Grant, Seward, Stanton and General John Schofield discussing whether or not to send Schofield to Mexico to take command of a Liberal army corps.[229]

In June 1865, after the Grand Review of the Armies through Washington, Grant wrote a letter to Johnson detailing the reasons for his opposition to Maximilian and support of Juarez. The 'act of attempting to establish a Monarchical Government on this continent, in Mexico, by foreign bayonets [w]as an act of hostility against the Government of the United States,' Grant wrote, and if allowed to triumph in Mexico 'I see nothing before us but a long, expensive and bloody war; one in which enemies of this country will be joined by tens of thousands of disciplined soldiers embittered against their government by the experience of the last four years.' Clearly, Grant saw the resolution of conflict in Mexico as crucial to the resolution of conflict in the United States, or certainly at least to US geopolitical security. Grant's language suggests that both possibilities were in many ways two sides of the same coin.

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[228] Grant, *Memoirs*, 25, 635; Smith, Jean Edward, *Grant* (New York, 2001), 421; McFeely, William S., *Grant: A Biography* (New York, 1981), 221; Chernow, *Grant*, 554; West, Elliott, 'The Future of Reconstruction Studies,' *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (2017), 14; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 151

[229] Schofield, John M., *Forty-six Years in the Army* (New York, 1897), 379-80. As a sign of his turn against this policy, Seward subsequently diverted Schofield to a mission to France instead.

In a subsequent letter to Johnson in September, Grant outlined his strategy: 'I would openly sell, on credit, to the Government of Mexico all the arms, munitions and clothing they want, and aid them with officers to command troops.' Grant both used the 'continental' dialectic employed by opponents of monarchy and slavery that Patrick Kelly has addressed, and explicitly linked together the Franco-Imperialists and Confederates (or now ex-Confederates) as soldiers in a common cause, against the Union and Liberal Mexico.[230] At the same time, by advocating the selling of arms for the express purpose of fighting the Franco-Imperialists, Grant was advocating a dramatic change to official US foreign policy, suggesting the use or enabling of force without resorting to, or joining in, open state warfare in order to achieve a foreign policy objective.

Grant also explicitly tied his opposition to Maximilian to the Franco-Imperial facilitation of the Confederate trade to Europe through Matamoros. That city, he wrote, 'and the whole Rio Grande, under his control, has been an open port to those in rebellion against this Government.' Other outrages along the lower Rio Grande demanded a Union response: 'Rebels in arms have been allowed to take refuge on Mexican soil protected by French bayonets. French soldiers have fired on our men from the South side of the river, in aid of the rebellion.' In other words, Grant saw this Franco-Imperial support and facilitation as a *de facto* alliance, facilitated by and acting within the borderland, and for the forces this alliance represented (European expansion and slavery) to be completely defeated the Union should at the least actively support Juarez with arms. Just as Matthew Karp has theorised Confederate foreign policy as 'an ideological and strategic calculus whose fundamental postulate was the protection of slave property,' so might Grant's foreign policy be construed as one predicated

[230] Grant quoted in Chernow, *Grant*, 555; *The Papers of Ulysses Grant* [hereafter *PUG*] *Volume 15: May 1st-December 31st, 1865* (Carbondale, 1988), ed. Simon, John Y., Grant to Johnson, 19/6/65, 157-58; ibid, Grant to Johnson, 8/9/65, 316-17; Kelly, 'Lost Continent,' 266

on the defence of American (in Kelly's continental sense) free labour republicanism from European intervention and invasion.[231]

Grant certainly did not seem to be too concerned with the prospect of Union support leading to war. 'How all this could be done without bringing on an armed conflict others who have studied such matters could tell better than I,' Grant blithely concluded in his letter to Johnson. Just a month later, however, Grant wrote to Sheridan that 'a war on the part of the United States is to be avoided, if possible, but it will be better to go to war now when but little aid given to the Mexicans will settle the question than to have in prospect a greater war, sure to come, if delayed until the Empire is established.' Matias Romero noted the risks inherent in Grant's policy: 'the president has two policies before him . . . Should he decide for Grant's policy, there will be war between the United States and France, if Napoleon has not ordered his troops out of Mexico before the end of the year.'[232]

As already noted, gun-running to the Liberals may have begun before the end of the Civil War in New Mexico. A more concrete instance, this time definitely involving Lew Wallace, had occurred in January 1865. When Wallace was sent to Brazos Santiago at that time, he had secret orders not only to try and negotiate the surrender of Texas, but also to contact and arrange to supply the Mexican Liberals. In a postwar letter to Mexican President Porfirio Diaz, Wallace noted that 'only Mr Lincoln and Mr Stanton' knew of his mission to make contact with the Liberals. 'If they only required arms and war material, I was to help provide them,' Wallace wrote. Whilst on the lower Rio Grande, Wallace made contact with General Carvajal, and in April 1865 smuggled Carvajal into New York under the name of 'Joseph Smith.' 'No one except General Grant, Secretary Stanton and President Lincoln knew

[231] *PUG 15*, Grant to Johnson, 19/6/65, 157-58; Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*, 247-48
[232] *PUG 15,* Grant to Sheridan, 25/7/65, 286; Schoonover, Thomas, *Mexican Lobby: Matias Romero in Washington, 1861-1867* (Lexington, Ky., 1986), 67

of his arrival,' Wallace later wrote, forgetting Matias Romero, who met with Carvajal shortly after his arrival.[233]

The supply of guns on the borderland also proved crucial to Mexican finances in the United States, and by extension to an external recognition of Mexican legitimacy. In a complicated series of transactions, Carvajal and Wallace managed to float a $30,000,000 loan to Mexico on the New York bond market. Initially the uptake was very weak, as the US refused to back the bonds; but eventually Herman Sturm – another Union general who had volunteered for the Mexican cause – was able to market them to munitions manufacturers. Sturm convinced them that Juarez would be victorious (perhaps he told them or hinted at Union involvement) and they bought $2,000,000 worth of munitions with the bonds, which were then shipped to Mexico from New York and Boston. Thus, the violence engendered by the French invasion was used to Mexico's own advantage as security with which to buy arms and ammunition to fight them. Eventually, they would ship enough supplies to the Liberal army to equip 7000 soldiers via Matamoros.[234]

Wallace was in contact with Grant throughout these operations, as he attempted to assemble a private army under himself, Carvajal and one H. Clay Crawford (discussed below) around Brownsville. In November 1865 he wrote to Grant requesting more arms and ammunition along the lower Rio Grande. By this time Wallace had resigned from the Union Army and accepted a generalcy from Juarez. 'It would be of immense service to us,' Wallace wrote, 'if we could have the shipment of the arms and two or three millions of cartridges by the government to Brownsville. I do not mean the whole store, but five or ten thousand muskets, the latter number if possible.' Despite requesting that these be sent 'by the

[233] Wallace to Diaz, 15/8/89, quoted in Wallace, *Lew Wallace II*, 843-46 (quote 844); McKee, *'Ben-Hur' Wallace*, 92, 95; Schoonover, *Mexican Lobby*, 58

[234] Miller, *Arms across the Border*, 49-51; Miller, Robert Ryal, 'The American Legion of Honour in Mexico,' *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 30 No. 3 (1961), 236; Wallace, *Lew Wallace II*, 871-73

government,' Wallace's next sentences underline the essentially renegade state nature of this proposed shipment. 'If you conclude to send a party to overhaul the arms, wouldn't it be better that the person authorised be one in our confidence? There would then, it seems to me, be no need of explanation on your part.' Now technically a Mexican state actor, Wallace was utilising his Union contacts to encourage a US renegade state policy that would achieve practical effects in the borderland, at least initially. It is another example of how North American actors could straddle the definition of state or non-state actor, or indeed even states themselves, and have a powerful impact on the geopolitics of their time.[235]

Wallace's efforts in New York were matched by those of Philip Sheridan on the lower Rio Grande. Sheridan fully agreed with Grant's conception of the war. 'I have always believed Maximilian's advent into Mexico was part of the rebellion,' he wrote to John Rawlins, Grant's chief of staff. He never deviated from this view – a similar phrase crops up in his memoirs. Sheridan was also perfectly prepared to march into Mexico, a point he reiterated in his memoirs: 'a golden opportunity was lost, for we had ample excuse for crossing the boundary, but Mr Seward being . . . unalterably opposed to any act likely to involve us in war, insisted on his course of negotiation with Napoleon.' Like his general-in-chief, Sheridan clearly saw that the reconfiguration of American political and social institutions would not be complete until those in Mexico had been similarly reconfigured – or rather, reconfirmed in the defeat of foreign invasion.

Colonel John Sobieski gives some further insight into Sheridan's thinking at this time. Sobieski and his fellow volunteers (discussed in Chapter 5) had originally planned to sail for Mexico from New Orleans, but his plans were discovered and he and his men were arrested in August 1865. In jail, they were visited by Sheridan. 'He told us . . .' wrote Sobieski 'if the French did not go, that he, Sheridan, would be sent over with an army to drive them out.'

[235] Wallace to Grant, 16/11/65, quoted in Wallace, *Lew Wallace II*, 865-66 (quote 866)

Both Grant and Sheridan were of one mind when it came to conceptualising the Civil War and the French intervention as parts of the same conflict, and both were prepared to use military violence to end the Mexican part of the conflict as they had the part in the United States.[236]

On 13th July, Grant ordered Sheridan to go to Brownsville in person, and shortly thereafter further instructions came. 'We must have a large amount of surrendered ordnance and ordnance stores, or such articles accumulating from discharging men who leave those stores behind,' Grant mused. 'Without special orders to do so send none of these articles back but rather place them convenient to be permitted to go into Mexico if they can be got into the hands of the defenders of the only Government we recognise in that country.' In his memoirs Sheridan detailed how the Liberals were 'supplied with arms and ammunition, which we left at convenient places on our side of the river to fall into their hands.' As this went against official government policy, Grant and Sheridan were practicing their own foreign policy as renegade state actors in favour of Mexico against the French. South of the river, Imperialists feared that Sheridan was about to occupy north-eastern Mexico as a prelude to war.[237]

The next development, however, demonstrated the continued difficulties facing such an aggressively pro-Mexican renegade state policy in the borderland. Many of these difficulties were inherent in the very thing that made such a policy possible: namely, the agency of non-state and renegade state actors. The lower Rio Grande swarmed with 'generals' in 1865-66. One of these was H. Clay Crawford, whose passage to the Rio Grande was eased by Grant and Sheridan. Crawford claimed to be a Union major-general (he was not) and was commissioned into the Liberal army alongside another adventurer, Arthur Reed.

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[236] *OR* Series 1 Volume 48 Part 2 (Washington, 1896), Sheridan to Rawlins, 4/6/65, 767; Sheridan, Philip Henry, *Personal Memoirs of Philip Henry Sheridan, General United States Army* (New York, 1902), 210, quote 214-15; Sobieski, John, *The Life-Story and Reminiscences of Colonel John Sobieski* (Los Angeles, 1900), 120

[237] *PUG 15*, Grant to Sheridan, 13/7/65, 259; ibid, Grant to Sheridan, 25/7/65, 285-86; Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs,* 216; Kiser, *illusions of Empire*, 152; 'La Sociedad,' (Mexico City), 29/7/65

With Federals turning a blind eye, Crawford opened a recruiting office in Brownsville offering $50 a day in gold to serve in Mexico. On 5th January 1866, in conjunction with Cortina, Crawford's men crossed the Rio Grande and seized control of Bagdad from the Imperialists. Many of these men were black, clearly veterans of the XXV Corps: Jerry Thompson describes them as 'black soldiers in blue uniforms,' whilst Sheridan telegraphed Grant that 'it is reported that some of the coloured troops crossed over the Rio Grande to assist in the capture of Bagdad.' Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga argues this was the product of a plan that was the result of 'talks . . . initiated with General Godfrey Weitzel.' Weitzel himself, in a letter to Mejia, declared he had attacked Bagdad 'at the request of [Liberal] General Escobedo.' The raid on Bagdad, in other words, appears to have been a deliberate result of Union-Mexican co-operation to defeat the Imperialists along the lower Rio Grande.[238]

A few days later on the 15th, as if in confirmation of this, Weitzel ordered his men to cross the Rio Grande and occupy Bagdad 'to prevent pillage and keep the peace.' Despite this support of the Liberal cause, Crawford and Weitzel's actions brought condemnation from Grant and Sheridan. 'I do not sustain this action,' Sheridan wrote of Weitzel's deployment across the river (very similar, of course, to Herron's actions in 1864). 'If General Weitzel has not already arrested Crawford on the order already given, I will arrest him.' Grant issued a peremptory order for the troops to be withdrawn back across the Rio Grande immediately. One reason for this was simply that it was done contrary to their orders by people they did not approve of (Sheridan described Crawford as giving 'annoyance with his blustering and swaggering manner'). By the winter of 1865 as well, Johnson had swung into Seward's camp where Mexican policy was concerned. Incidents such as the capture of Bagdad (and Weitzel's deployment of troops there) arguably brought too much attention to renegade state policies.

[238] Thompson, *Cortina*, 167-68; *PUG Volume 16: 1866* (Carbondale, 1988), ed. Simon, John Y., Sheridan to Grant, 16/1/66, 29; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 239; Weitzel to Mejia, 18/1/66, quoted in Jonas, *Habsburgs on the Rio Grande*, 184

Interestingly, Sheridan promised to 'break up the filibustering parties there.' As with the Southern filibusters, Crawford's men may well have been motivated primarily by financial gain – Jerry Thompson mentions 'as many as fifty lighters' crossing from Bagdad to Brownsville after the attack, all of them laden with goods.[239]

Whether Crawford was supported by Weitzel or not, his raid on Bagdad demonstrates the impact such actors could have on military and diplomatic affairs and how power hierarchies could so easily be subverted: not only were Crawford (and possibly Weitzel) acting contrary to official US state policy, they were even acting contrary to the renegade state policy enacted by Grant and Sheridan (as we have seen, Grant repeatedly warned Sheridan not to move troops in US service into Mexico). Again, this is a case of a foreign policy in the borderland being decided from the ground up, and directly affecting state relations.

Despite Crawford and Weitzel's faux pas, Grant continued to expedite the passage of arms and ammunition across the border. For example, in New Mexico General Irvin McDowell prohibited the supply of arms across the border to the Mexicans: Grant promptly countermanded the order. By late 1865, however, key elements of the administration were moving against his policy: Johnson was beginning to row back from his commitment to Mexico, and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was impeding the supply of arms to Mexico. As 1866 dawned Grant wrote to Stanton requesting the Ordnance Department deliver 5,000 rifles and 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition to Mexican general Pedro Baranda to be shipped to Mexico. By March, Grant was writing to Schofield in Paris (having 'never written to you since your departure . . . because I could not say anything which would be agreeable to Mr Seward') that 'Mr S keeps the whole question between the United States and Mexico so

[239] *PUG 16*, Sheridan to Grant, 17/1/66, 29; ibid, Kip to Sheridan, 21/1/66, 32; ibid, Grant to Sheridan, 25/1/66, 28; Thompson, *Cortina*, 168

befogged . . . If he has a partiality in the matter, I think it leans to Imperial success.' As autumn came Grant was ordering Sheridan to encourage the passage of men and munitions into Mexico: 'No policy has been adopted by our Government which authorises us to interfere directly on Mexican soil with that country,' he wrote, 'but there is nothing I know of to prevent the free passage of people or material going through our territory to the aid of the recognised government.' Robert Benaway Brown notes that Grant arranged for 15,000 rifles to be made available to the Liberals at Brownsville, and 'while they were not free, they were made available to Escobedo [the Liberal commander] at an extremely low figure.' During 1866 Sheridan supplied more than 30,000 rifles from the Baton Rouge Arsenal across the Rio Grande to Juarez, with what Joseph Chance describes as 'compassionate disregard' for the Neutrality Act of 1818.[240]

Through 1865 and 1866, Grant grew more and more disenchanted, among many other things, with Johnson's attitude towards Mexico. Schoonover highlights the 'intermestic' nature of this split: 'the often-noted drifting apart of the Grant-Johnson relationship . . . was the result of more than differing domestic politics.' As the split between the two men widened, Johnson tried to get Grant out of the picture in October 1866 by offering him membership of a diplomatic mission to Mexico, escorting the new American ambassador there and meeting with Benito Juarez. In theory, Grant should have jumped at this opportunity to provide support to Juarez; however, he declined to go. Grant recognised Johnson's suggestion as an attempt to remove him from the centre of power and possibly discredit Grant if his mission proved a failure. (The ambassador Johnson had chosen whom

[240] Schoonover, *Mexican Lobby*, 104, 124-25; *PUG 16*, Grant to Stanton, 9/1/66, 5-6; ibid, Grant to Schofield, 24/3/66, 128-29; ibid, Grant to Sheridan, 9/10/66, 322; Brown, Robert Benaway, 'Guns over the Border: American Aid to the Juarez Government during the French Intervention,' PhD diss., University of Michigan (1951), 230-31; Chance, *Carvajal*, 191. At the same time as he was sending guns to Mexico, Grant was withdrawing or refusing to send them to arsenals in Southern states to arm white militias, showing firstly how not only the supply of guns, but also the withholding of them, could help determine the success of policies on the ground; and secondly how defeat of the Franco-Imperialists and (continued) defeat of ex-Confederates were related factors in Grant's political conceptions. (Chernow, *Grant*, 580-81)

Grant, who had a notorious drinking problem, was to accompany was also an alcoholic.) Grant stayed in Washington and General William Sherman was sent instead.[241]

The dispatch of arms and ammunition across the lower Rio Grande in 1865 and 1866 was an extremely belligerent act, even if it fell short of the outright war that Grant and Sheridan wanted. It was certainly in contravention of official US policy. Evan Rothera has noted that Grant's suggestion of sending volunteers and 'selling weapons to the Liberals were striking and bellicose. They violated US neutrality.' William Hardy argues that Grant's actions show 'a willingness to actively test the boundaries of policy in pursuit of his objectives' and describes the episode as 'the general's belligerent entrée into US foreign policy.' Grant continued this policy even after Johnson reimposed the ban on exporting arms in November 1865. In a violation of a neutral status enshrined in law, acting aggressively and hostilely against the Franco-Imperialist presence in Mexico, Grant was enacting in practice his own foreign policy as a renegade state actor in and through the lower Rio Grande borderland.[242]

Two questions remain. Firstly, to what extent was this policy Grant's alone, and not the President's? Most historians agree that Johnson was initially sympathetic to Grant, as outlined above, but Seward managed to change his mind. Johnson biographer Hans Trefousse notes that 'although Johnson himself had long favoured some sort of action to drive the French out,' he was 'willing to yield to Seward's pleas for a patient course.' Schoonover posits that 'in mid-1865, Grant, Johnson and Matias Romero had jointly and secretly worked up a plan to send an army of volunteers to fight under President Juarez against the French.' However, after Johnson informed Seward of the plan, Seward managed to persuade him against it and eventually to adopt an anti-intervention foreign policy. Hardy argues that

[241] Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion*, quote 227, for Grant's projected mission to Mexico 228-30; Chernow, *Grant*, 582-83
[242] Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 57; Hardy, 'South of the Border,' 86

Johnson was so absorbed in Reconstruction he effectively gave Seward a free hand in determining foreign policy. As for Grant, Ron Chernow notes that 'during the war, he had been exemplary in bowing to civilian leadership, whereas he now tried to circumvent the secretary of state.' Hardy has likewise argued that Grant 'took matters into his own hands.' William Kiser has noted that Johnson was 'hesitant to pursue the hawkish sort of action that his generals recommended,' and equally, not only was Grant therefore operating independently of Johnson, he was also operating independently of Juarez, who he had not consulted. It would seem clear, then, that Grant was acting as a renegade state actor.[243]

Evan Rothera suggests a slightly more nuanced interpretation. He notes that although officially against intervention, Johnson 'did little to curtail the flow of US arm, munitions and soldiers into Mexico.' For Rothera, this made him 'complicit in widespread violations of US neutrality favoured by men like Grant, Sheridan, and Romero.' Similarly, Robert Benaway Brown notes that Lew Wallace's plan to recruit an army of Union veterans for Mexico 'received the whole-hearted but unofficial approval of Andrew Johnson.' Along similar lines, although he does not believe Johnson fully supported Grant's policy, Kiser notes that Johnson had developed secret plans to encourage Union veterans to volunteer for active service with Juarez. In other words, although Johnson was officially against providing support for Mexico, he did not do anything to stop this support from taking place, suggesting a tacit acceptance or even agreement with Grant's foreign policy – although this was not, in fairness, how Grant himself saw it. Grant's independent foreign policy in the borderlands might, then, have been

[243] Trefousse, Hans L., *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York, 1989), 270, 261; Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion*, 221-22 (quote 221); Hardy, 'South of the Border,' 72, 74; Chernow, *Grant*, 555; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 153

conducted with the tacit approval of the President – not wholly unlike that of Andrew Jackson's in Florida, during and after the War of 1812.[244]

The second question is, to what extent was Grant's policy successful? Most historians argue that the withdrawal of the French from Mexico was due to Seward's diplomatic pressure. James Fred Rippy notes that with the French withdrawal Seward 'had completed his greatest achievement in diplomacy.' Hanna and Hanna have noted that 'the drumming of Seward's fingers in Washington had increasingly reverberated through the salons of the Tuileries and inexorably indicated to Napoleon III that time, which has no allies, had run out for his Grand Design for the Americas.' Other factors outside North America have also been given the credit: Rippy highlights the growing power of Prussia in Europe, Steve Sainlaude emphasises the role of French officials in persuading Napoleon to withdraw, and George Herring emphasises the vicious guerrilla war in Mexico and overall lack of support for Maximilian.

However, as Ron Chernow notes, 'Grant's decision to send a military force to the Rio Grande had helped the liberal opposition there [Mexico] to survive.' William Hardy argues that 'Grant's use of the army further pressured Napoleon, who saw no point in waging war against a superior army that outnumbered his forces two to one . . . Grant's threats were necessary to show the foreign invaders that the United States meant business.' In terms of military supplies themselves, Lew Wallace later wrote to Porfirio Diaz that 'the arms were good. With them every time your troops met the enemy they were victorious.' As the final section will show, these arms were indeed vital in the eventual Liberal victory in the north-

[244] Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 54; Brown, 'Guns over the Border,' 137 (referencing Wallace to Tifft, 18/9/65, Wallace Papers); Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 153; *OR* 1.48.2, Grant to Sheridan, 22/10/65, 1242-43; Remini, Robert V., *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (New York, 1977), 241

east. Grant's foreign policy therefore played an important role in the victory of Juarez in Mexico.[245]

Conclusion

During the Civil War and its aftermath, it is clear that both Union and Confederate generals pursued their own foreign policies, or gave personal detail to the broad strokes of central government policy on the lower Rio Grande. This is perhaps most obvious in Grant and Sheridan's supply of arms to Juarez and encouragement to volunteers to travel south of the Rio Grande, but it can also be seen in Herron's and McClernand's interactions with Juarez and Cortina and Kirby Smith's and Magruder's attempts to forge a Franco-Confederate alliance and even encourage a French expedition into Texas. What impact did generals' geopolitical policies have? What determined if they could or could not successfully pursue their own policies?

The obvious answer to the second question would appear to be a lack of communication. Thousands of miles from Washington DC or Richmond (and in the Confederate case, still hundreds of miles from Kirby Smith's headquarters at Shreveport, Louisiana), Herron, McClernand and Magruder were not linked by telegraph to military or civilian headquarters. There was, therefore, a temporal gap between the dispatch and receipt of orders that gave them latitude in which to pursue their own policies.

Whilst this may well have been the case, it does not explain the generals' independent actions overall. Sheridan, for instance, was connected by telegraph to Washington and yet

[245] Rippy, *United States and Mexico*, 273-74; Hanna, Alfred Jackson and Hanna, Kathryn Abbey, *Napoleon III and Mexico: American Triumph over Monarchy* (Chapel Hill, 1971), 302; Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 253; Sainlaude, Steve, *France and the American Civil War: A Diplomatic History* (Chapel Hill, 2020), 186-88; Chernow, *Grant*, 582; Hardy, 'South of the Border,' 84, 85; Wallace to Diaz, 15/8/89, quoted in Wallace, *Lew Wallace II*, 864

pursued a policy in contradiction to official US policy. Of course, that telegraph linked him to Grant, the instigator of the arms supply policy, who never left Washington for the lower Rio Grande and was, in other words, in constant contact with members of the Johnson administration. One cannot therefore state that communication difficulties were *carte blanche* the reason for generals pursuing independent policies, or independent variations on policy, in the borderland.

Another reason may lay in the personality of the generals themselves: Herron, McClernand, Magruder, Kirby Smith, Sheridan and Grant had all disobeyed orders in the course of the Civil War, or acted on their own initiative when orders did not address situations that arose. Their actions in the lower Rio Grande borderland can therefore be seen as a result of their willingness to contravene orders or decide their actions on the hoof that they displayed in other theatres of the war.

What these perhaps both amount to is not difficulty of *communication* per se, but difficulty of *oversight*. For example, Sheridan was in relatively easy communication with Washington – but this was with Grant, who fully supported him, rather than with Johnson or Seward; and, as Rothera has suggested, Johnson may not have wanted to actually stop the shipments of arms to Juarez anyway. In other words, in Sheridan's case, apparently independent action in the borderlands may have provided the ideal cover for a policy the president wanted to pursue but could not do so publicly for dangerous diplomatic reasons. Johnson could convincingly, if embarrassingly, claim plausible deniability if a diplomatic crisis suddenly arose. As for Kirby Smith and Magruder, they were separated from Richmond not just by distance but by the Union army as well, whilst Herron and McClernand, despite their sensitive geostrategic location, were never the top priority for the Lincoln government.

This consideration leads into the first question: what impact did the generals' policies have? During the Civil War itself, one could argue that the effects were not entirely notable: McClernand did not transform Cortina into an active ally of the Union, even with the *pronunciamento*; Kirby Smith and Magruder did not persuade the French to form an alliance with the Confederacy or dispatch troops across the Rio Grande into Texas. On the other hand, Herron was able to secure the objective he sent troops into Matamoros for – the consul, his family and the treasury – albeit at the cost of a diplomatic incident.

That McClernand, Kirby Smith and Magruder did not have the geopolitical impact they desired is in many ways not their fault. All required the cooperation of another party – Cortina or the French – to achieve their aims, a cooperation which neither party provided, either at all or to the extent the generals hoped for. More importantly, the generals were able to *attempt* their own policies in the borderland, due, not necessarily to a lack of communication with their superiors in and of itself, but rather due to a lack of oversight from those superiors.

The geopolitical impact generals could have can really be seen after the end of the Civil War, when Grant and Sheridan directed arms and volunteers, but particularly arms, to the Liberals in Mexico. William Kiser has noted how this proceeded from a sense that the crises in the US and Mexico were connected, arguing that the time high-ranking figures such as Grant and Sheridan devoted to this, whist simultaneously pursuing Southern Reconstruction, 'shows the ongoing importance of Mexico in the overall context of Civil War era events.' The effect of this can be seen at the decisive Battle of Santa Gertrudis, fought outside Matamoros in June 1866. The memoirs of Ernst Pitner, an Austrian officer who fought on the Imperial side at the battle, emphasise what he described as a 'violent exchange of fire.' The battle was 'a moment of the most frightful small arms fire and the men in their ranks fell down dead in droves . . . Already half the company lay dead or wounded on the

ground.' The Liberal army was, according to him, 'very well armed.' Robert Benaway Brown emphasises the vicious effectiveness of the fire of repeating rifles in the battle, almost certainly supplied from the US. Jack Dabbs has even argued that the Liberal army utilised Gatling guns supplied by the Union which, if true, marks Santa Gertrudis out as the first battle to ever be fought with automatic weapons. It is more likely, however, that the 'frightful small arms fire' Pitner endured was produced by the Sharps repeating rifles, rifles which Sheridan had supplied to the Liberals.[246]

Santa Gertrudis, then, is a case of a general's independent policy (in this case Grant's) having a major effect on the geopolitics of the lower Rio Grande: the small arms he ordered to be supplied to the Liberals played a major part in the Liberal recovery of north-eastern Mexico. As noted above, if Herron, McClernand, Kirby Smith and Magruder did not achieve the same geopolitical effect, it was not for want of trying: Herron and McClernand tried to engineer an alliance with Cortina, whilst Kirby Smith and Magruder tried to engineer an alliance with the French. Their failure is not the same as their lack of capacity to act, and they failed for reasons outside their own control – the intransigence of Cortina and the French. In contrast, Grant succeeded for reasons within his own control – as general-in-chief he had the small arms he wanted to send to Mexico, and had a close ideological ally in Sheridan that he could put in charge on the lower Rio Grande.

Equally, what all these generals were attempting was twofold: if, firstly, they were pursuing their own policies or putting their own spin on central policies, they were also, simply by doing this, attempting to dictate the geopolitics south of the Rio Grande. Herron and McClernand wanted to formulate an implicit, unspoken Liberal-Union alliance, or at least

[246] Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 154; Pitner, *Maximilian's Lieutenant*, 133-34; Dabbs, Jack Autrey, *The French Army in Mexico 1861-1867: A Study in Military Government* (The Hague, 1963), 172; Brown, 'Guns over the Border,' 171. Although Dabbs' Gatling guns claim is hard to believe, Robert Benaway Brown notes that Lew Wallace had secured Gatling guns for Carvajal's army in September 1865. (WH Talbott to Wallace, 11/9/65, referenced in Brown, 'Guns over the Border,' 136.)

cooperation, which naturally rested on opposition to the Confederacy (see, for example, Herron's parallel between the Confederacy and the Mexican Empire using the newspaper article); Magruder and Kirby Smith, in a mirror image, sought the same with the Mexican Empire, which for them would draw the French and Imperialists northwards over the Rio Grande, into Texas and into the Civil War. This is most obvious in Kirby Smith's desperate attempt to encourage a French invasion in the summer of 1865. Finally, Grant and Sheridan used the supply of arms and ammunition, and the encouragement of volunteers, to secure the geopolitical (and sociopolitical) triumph of the Mexican Republic, something which all members of the Johnson administration agreed was in the USA's interest, however much they differed on the means to achieve this. The policies of Union and Confederate generals were designed to impact and influence the geopolitics of Mexico and, through this, the course, scope and meaning of the Civil War itself, not just on the lower Rio Grande but also (if, for example, Kirby Smith had succeeded in his hopes of a Franco-Confederate alliance) far beyond as well.

From 1863-67 Union and Confederate generals attempted, and sometimes succeeded, in pursuing their own geopolitical policies on the lower Rio Grande. What dictated their success was not the blessing or condemnation of their parent governments but rather whether enough other geopolitical actors, mainly located south of the Rio Grande, were willing and able to cooperate with them. This suggests a horizontal, diffused structure of geopolitical power and influence in the borderland, where theoretically decisive Union or Confederate military power – see for example Zachary Taylor's successful invasion of north-eastern Mexico in the Mexican-American War with an army of 5000 men, which both the Union and Confederacy would have been capable of fielding – was constrained by the military developments of the Civil War and wider diplomatic concerns. In this case, generals were reliant on actors south of the Rio Grande for their policies to succeed. Nonetheless, they

enjoyed the independence (*de facto* if not *de jure*) to attempt these policies, and when allied to willing actors south of the border (as Grant and Sheridan were) they were able to succeed.

Grant and Sheridan's successful independent policy (or at least, per Rothera, quasi-independent) shows that for generals to succeed in formulating their own policies on the lower Rio Grande two things were required: the ignorance or at least inaction of their own central government, and the support of key geopolitical actors south of the Rio Grande. If these were in place generals could, as Grant and Sheridan show, have a major effect on the geopolitics of the lower Rio Grande – and, as the outcome of the Battle of Santa Gertrudis shows, *through* the lower Rio Grande have a much wider impact as well.

CHAPTER FIVE: SOLDIERS

Introduction

John Sobieski was at pains to point out his royal heritage: on the front cover of his memoirs he was described as a 'lineal descendant of the king of Poland.' Despite his clear pride in his monarchical ancestors, Sobieski found himself drawn to republics. Having taken part in the failed nationalist Polish uprising of 1848, he went into exile in the United States, and joined the Union army on the outbreak of the Civil War, eventually becoming a colonel. After the Civil War he travelled south, crossing the Rio Grande to join the Liberal armies in Mexico, and commanded the reserve firing squad that executed Maximilian in Queretaro in 1867.

Sobieski's adventures invite us to consider not only the ideological links between the Mexican and American conflicts of the 1860s (and indeed, in Sobieski's case, the European ones as well) but also how these links were both perceived and acted upon by those who chose to fight in these conflicts as well. In a recent study, Evan Rothera defines these soldiers as 'transnational warriors' – 'soldiers of freedom (not fortune).' Believing in a hemispheric, if not global, struggle between the forces of republicanism, democracy and liberty on the one hand and the forces of monarchy, aristocracy and repression on the other, these soldiers travelled from country to country fighting in successive conflicts for their chosen side.[247]

A recent wave of scholarship has emphasised the interlinked nature of the Civil War with other mid-nineteenth century conflicts. Gregory Downs, for example, has examined how the Civil War inspired the Ten Years War in Cuba and revolution in Spain. Patrick Kelly and Andre Fleche have examined the connections between the Civil War and the revolutions of 1848. Don Doyle has examined how the Civil War interacted with European geopolitics.

[247] Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 25. Sobieski's experiences will be discussed in more detail below.

Although these studies focus on what may be termed high politics, as opposed to the actions of individuals outside the traditional loci of power, the connections between the Civil War and its contemporaneous conflicts have nevertheless become more and more a focus of Civil War historiography.[248]

Alfred and Kathryn Hanna have argued that 'the assumption that the new Mexican Empire would become an auxiliary battleground for the US Civil War collapsed' when Napoleon and Maximilian sought US recognition in 1864. On the state level, this is certainly true: the Union did not invade Mexico, nor was there any alliance between a combination of the Empire, France and the Confederacy. However, moving away from the corridors of power and elite actors shows that this 'auxiliary battleground' did, in a sense, very much occur after Confederate surrender. This chapter argues that men exercised geopolitical agency by joining armed forces along the lower Rio Grande, and in doing so helped to determine the course of the Mexican crisis through their service and sacrifice. This chapter will examine five separate instances of this: firstly, it will examine the choices of lower Rio Grande residents to volunteer for the Union and Confederate armies, and Union and Confederate veterans volunteering for service in Mexico; secondly, it will examine two instances where such volunteers had a direct impact on the battlefield: the Battle of Palmito Ranch in 1865, where French volunteers may have aided the Confederate army, and the Battle of Santa Gertrudis in 1866, the decisive battle which secured north-eastern Mexico for the Liberal cause in which both Union and Confederate veterans participated.[249]

Volunteers for the Civil War Armies

[248] Downs, *Second American Revolution*; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*; Fleche, Andre, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill, 2012); Kelly, Patrick, 'The European Revolutions of 1848 and the Transnational Turn in Civil War History,' *Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 4 No. 3 (2014)

[249] Hanna and Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, 141

As with other borderland areas during the Civil War, such as Kentucky or Missouri, men volunteered for the armies of both sides during the conflict. On the lower Rio Grande, this could cut across racial lines: Hispanics joined both Union and Confederate armies, as did whites. What inspired these men to join either army – or even, in some cases, to change allegiance between them?

For example, when Ford received instructions for his counteroffensive to retake Brownsville in early 1864, he had only the few hundred men of Bee and Benavides' commands available to him. Ford set about raising more men, from the lower Rio Grande itself and elsewhere within Texas. He was convinced that 1000 men could be raised if their terms of service were limited only to the lower Rio Grande, and even suggested redeploying the Frontier Regiment from West Texas, where it guarded against the Comanches, to attack Brownsville instead.[250] Bee, meanwhile, called for reinforcements from as far away as Louisiana. The Confederate recruitment drive also extended to Tejanos; Santos Benavides was offered a generalcy if he could recruit an entire regiment.[251] Confederate high command even contacted William Quantrill, who had fled to Texas after the massacre in Lawrence, Kansas, hoping he would operate against Brownsville from Corpus Christi.[252] Confederate recruitment therefore involved not only the men already in the borderland (such as Benavides' Tejanos) but also brought men from elsewhere in the Transmississippi to the lower Rio Grande.

The Union also recruited men in the borderland. The majority of the Union troops attacked at the Battle of Las Rucias, for example, were German-American Unionists who had refugeed to Matamoros and were recruited by Edmund Davis. Due to the lack of cavalry (particularly important in an environment such as the lower Rio Grande), plans were quickly

[250] *OR* 1.26.2, Ford to Turner, 25/12/63, 534-35
[251] Ibid, Turner to Bee, 5/12/63, 483
[252] *OR* 1.34.2, McCulloch to Bee, 9/2/64, 957-58

laid to recruit Mexicans and Tejanos with their horses into the Brownsville garrison. Edmund Davis and John Haynes, another Texas Unionist, also began recruiting Mexicans: by February 1864, 443 of the 943 men in Davis's First Texas Cavalry were Mexican, whilst Haynes had raised a Second Texas Cavalry of about 300 men, all of whom were Mexican. As Jerry Thompson notes, only 25% of these men were actually from Texas – some 60% were actually from Coahuila, Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon. Adrian Vidal (discussed further below) was commissioned a captain in the Union Army on November 26th, with his 'Independent Partisan Rangers' were made up of Mexicans lured north of the border by a $100 bounty. Confederate agent Charles Russell noted that 'they [the Union] are recruiting among the Mexicans, and have succeeded in raising about 400 under the traitor Vidal.' This Union recruitment is another sign of non-state agency: despite Vidaurri, the great power in the region, having favoured the Confederacy since its inception, these Mexicans were prepared to sign on with the Union. Financial inducements were undoubtedly a factor; it is also possible some were also *Cortinistas*, in spirit if not in fact. The Zapata County rebels, for example, were nicknamed the 'First Regiment of the Union.'[253]

Borderland historians emphasise the lower-class stature of many of these recruits, arguing that their enlistment was prompted mainly by the bounty, and when that failed to appear many deserted – as many as 30% in Haynes's regiment. Edmund Davis found that, although Mexicans were willing to enlist under Vidal and in other units, they often deserted because the promised bounty was not paid to them. Jerry Thompson dwells on the irony that 'the United States government was now recruiting men which the army had fought four years earlier.' Whilst this is of course correct, both the US government and lower-class Mexicans now faced the same enemy: secessionist, expansionist Southerners, eager to spread the cotton economy across the continent. This was surely a factor in Mexican recruitment. Mexicans did

[253] Thompson, Jerry, *Mexican Texans in the Union Army* (El Paso, 1986), 14-15; *OR* 1.53, Russell to Bloomfield, 28/11/63, 916-17; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 82

also join the Confederate army, but were both far fewer in number and deserted more often, for as Gonzalez-Quiroga says 'many Anglos . . . continued to commit atrocities against peaceful Mexicans.' Taken in the aggregate, then, there was a preference among Mexican recruits for the Union over the Confederate army. Given the bounty, financial reward was probably a major factor in their choice, but anti-Southern sentiment, a legacy of the Texas Revolution, Mexican-American War and filibustering of the 1850s, may also have been a factor. The first points to a disconnect between geopolitical agency and geopolitical concern, whilst the latter reinforces it. It was doubtless a matter that differed from person to person – further reinforcing the choice and agency of these recruits, whatever prompted it.[254]

Borderland recruits could fulfil other roles besides orthodox military ones. In December 1863 Herron despatched one 'McManus' to Eagle Pass to try and interdict the traffic.[255] TP McManus is a shadowy figure in the contemporary sources, and first comes to light that December when he offered to recruit 30 men who had deserted the Confederate army to attack Eagle Pass and Laredo.[256] His origins are unknown, although the maiden name of the wife of the founder of Eagle Pass was McManus. By the spring of 1864 his own side was referring to him as 'desperate man' and his men as 'thieves and renegades.'[257] Nonetheless, he would prove to have his uses.

McManus' first plan was to recruit Confederate deserters and persuade them to re-join the rebel army to incite mutiny amongst their comrades; however, they were betrayed by 'Jews and merchants' and ended up in San Antonio prison. (A thick seam of anti-Semitism runs throughout McManus' correspondence.) Less than a month into his role, however,

[254] Thompson, *Mexican Texans in the Union Army*, 15; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 220, 223-25; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 94
[255] Herron to MM Kimmey, 10/1/64, Herron Collection, 16
[256] *OR* 1.26.1, Dana to Stone, 11/12/63, 842-44
[257] *OR* 1.34.3, Ware to CO Piedras Negras, 23/4/64, 790-91; *OR* 1.34.2, Herron to Stone, 15/1/64, 84-87. For the McManus family at Eagle Pass, see Hudson, Linda S., *Mistress of Manifest Destiny: A Biography of Jane McManus Storm Cazneau, 1807-1878* (Austin, 2001). There is, however, no mention of a TP McManus in the book.

Consul Kimmey at Monterey advised Herron that orders had been issued suspending movements of cotton from San Antonio to Eagle Pass. Herron noted that Kimmey was of the 'opinion that the operations of Mr McManus had caused it. If he can collect 150 men about him, there is no doubt but that he will effectually close up that road.'[258] Indeed, with the concentration of troops under Benavides further down the Rio Grande, only 30 soldiers were left to guard the trade route through Eagle Pass.[259] McManus therefore utilised Mexico, and quite possibly Mexicans (the ethnic composition of his command is not given) to attack the trade route. However, as always any instance of ethnic cooperation is not an indication of a uniform sentiment: a messenger McManus sent to General Carleton in New Mexico was ambushed and murdered by four Mexicans, who McManus believed 'were hired for this purpose by Jew cotton speculators.'[260] His impact was not, however, quite what Kimmey imagined it to be: cotton moving through Eagle Pass was suspended because Vidaurri and Kirby Smith had fallen out over debt repayment, rather than McManus' actions.[261]

Once given borderland support was not, however, fixed, and could fluctuate depending on personal relations and the power of geopolitical actors. A key example is Captain Adrian Vidal, nephew of the influential and pro-Confederate merchant Mifflin Kenedy. In late 1863 Vidal commanded a company of cavalry in the Confederate army deployed along the Rio Grande. Barely a week before Banks arrived, Bee had sent two privates, Litteral and Dashiell, with a message to Vidal, stationed sixty miles upriver, to move his company into Brownsville. All that arrived in Brownsville, however, was Litteral, 'shot through both jaws.' Vidal and his men, all Tejanos, had killed Dashiell, tried to kill Litteral and deserted *en masse*. Bee soon became convinced that Vidal was operating with Cortina, a view doubtless only strengthened when Vidal crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico to escape

[258] Herron to Stone, 15/1/64, Herron Collection, 19-20
[259] *OR* 1.26.2, Turner to Ford, 22/12/63, 525-26
[260] Ibid, McManus to Dana, 13/2/64, 316-20
[261] Tyler, *Vidaurri*, 122-24; *OR* 1.34.2, Kimmey to Seward, 12/2/64, 627-28

pursuing Confederate forces, 'acting in concert with the hundreds of renegades and deserters harboured on the other side of the Rio Grande'. Indeed, a pursuant column of Confederate cavalry soon found 'a large body of cavalry' drawn up on the Mexican bank of the river, 'composed . . . of renegades and deserters from Bexar and other counties of Texas.'[262]

With the desertion of Vidal and his men, Bee believed that 'peril was around me on all sides.'[263] He had only 19 regular soldiers, plus a volunteer company under Captain Cummings, to face Vidal, who had over 60. Bee was determined to 'follow Vidal and crush this movement before it becomes an organisation.' (He also sent a message over the river to ask Governor Ruiz in Matamoros for help. In his letter, Bee hinted that Vidal, apparently reinforced by Unionist refugees based at the consulate, would attack Matamoros as well. Ruiz promptly complied, capturing 22 of Vidal's men, or as Ruiz termed them, 'insurrectionists.'[264]) It soon became clear that Vidal had indeed been influenced by Cortina.[265]

As mentioned above, Vidal and his men would go on to join the Union forces. This, at least, would appear to be a clear example of political beliefs trumping personal relations in determining geopolitical support. As Mifflin Kenedy's nephew, Vidal was probably induced to support the Confederacy and enlist in its armed forces by a web of familial and economic interests. These were however clearly against his own private political convictions, or became so. In late 1863, Vidal took advantage of the permeable nature of the borderland to violently remove himself from the Confederate army and eventually join the Union instead. In going against his own family's interests, it speaks to Vidal's own agency, and indeed his

[262] *OR*, 1.26.1, Bee to Turner, 8/11/63, 434-35; ibid, Duff to Tarver, 11/8/63, 439-40
[263] Ibid, Bee to Turner, 8/11/63, 435
[264] Ibid, Bee to Ruiz, 28/10/63, 450; ibid, Ruiz to Bee, 28/10/63, 450
[265] Thompson, *Cortina*, 112-13

impetuosity: he was a young man of twenty-one. The factors that determined who one supported were not always sober, considered and rational.

Borderland support, even violent support, of a particular geopolitical actor, did not necessarily extend to joining their regular forces. The *renegados* in northern Mexico have already been mentioned in previous chapters. Related to these, the day after Vidal and his company absconded, Bee received information that an invasion attempt was about to be launched, not from the east, from soldiers transported across the Gulf, but rather from the south, from 'all the Yankee sympathisers in and about Matamoros.' Swiftly the residents of Brownsville were armed and prepared to meet the invasion threat. However, 'the authorities of Matamoros . . . prevented the crossing of the horde quartered in their city.' By November 2nd, the threat from the south had dissipated; but by then Banks had appeared off Brazos with his expeditionary force.[266] Indeed, it could have been intelligence of his approach that persuaded the 'authorities of Matamoros' to hold 'the horde' back. As Bee and his cavalry pulled out to the north after Banks' arrival, they did so 'under the groans and hisses of certainly no less than 400 renegades on the other side of the river' – imagery which suggests that Cortina's men and the many refugees cared for by Consul Pierce, had arrived to watch the transition of power from Confederate to Federal.[267] Whatever happened exactly in Matamoros at this time, the possibility raised in Chapter 3 of a nonelite (overwhelmingly Mexican) populace generally pro-Union, and an elite (overwhelmingly Anglo) generally pro-Confederate, is reinforced.

Cooperating Soldiers: Palmito Ranch

[266] *OR* 1.26.1, Duff to Tarver, 11/8/63, 440-41
[267] Ibid, 441-42

The geopolitical impact of soldiers in the lower Rio Grande during the Civil War consisted not just of them joining armies but also cooperating with them. For example, French and Imperial troops may have actively supported, or at least agreed to support, Confederate forces in the lower Rio Grande. Cooperation between French and Confederate troops may also have occurred during the Battle of Palmito Ranch itself, fought one month after Lee's surrender at Appomattox. There had been little fighting between Union and Confederate forces on the lower Rio Grande in the winter of 1864-65. In December 1864 Brigadier-General Pile, on Brazos Santiago, reported skirmishes along the Boca Chica with the Confederates; however, within a month, he was requesting reassignment to 'a more active command.'[268] Overall, despite these skirmishes, operations along the lower Rio Grande appeared to be at an end. (Not least as the eternal problem of warfare in this borderland region remained: the Confederates did not have enough men, and the Federals did not have enough horses.[269])

The quiet was shattered in May 1865 by a Union advance from Brazos Santiago. On May 11th, Colonel Theodore Barrett ordered troops from the 62nd United States Coloured Troops (USCT) and 1st Texas Cavalry to advance from Brazos Santiago and occupy Brownsville. Barrett may have been motivated by the eternal desire for more horses, or to try and secure the cotton in Brownsville. Since Wallace's visit, Slaughter and Ford had dispersed their troops to make the best use of the meagre forage available. As Barrett's troops advanced however, Ford rallied his men around him, and the last battle of the Civil War, fully one month after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, began.[270]

Skirmishers halted Barrett's advance around Palmito (or Palmetto) Ranch, a couple of miles to the east of Brownsville, and the Federals took position atop a low hill. Although reinforced by Santiago Benavides and his regiment, Ford was outnumbered. Nonetheless, he

[268] *OR* 41.4, Pile to Drake, 5/12/64, 767-68; ibid, Pile to Hurlbut, 2/12/64, 746-47
[269] Ibid, Christensen to Pile, 14/12/64, 768; *OR* 48.1.1, Pile to Drake, 12/1/65, 494-95
[270] Dobak, William A., *Freedom by the Sword: The US Coloured Troops, 1862-1867* (New York, 2013), 430-31

decided to attack. Ford's attack was slightly unorthodox but undeniably effective: having pinned back both of Barrett's flanks, a mounted charge by Benavides smashed through the Federal centre. The Federal troops retreated in some disorder, pursued by Ford's cavalry, until they could reform themselves behind the Boca Chica under the guns of Brazos Santiago, from where reinforcements had been hurried. 'Boys,' Ford announced, 'we have done finely. We will let enough alone, and retire.' Federal casualties numbered around 150, whereas the Confederates lost only a few dozen.[271]

The battle at Palmito Ranch has perhaps most been noted by historians firstly for its chronological importance as the last battle of the Civil War, and secondly for the ethnic composition of the armies involved: the Confederate army included a large number of Tejanos under Benavides' command, whilst the Union army included both USCT, most of them former slaves, and (white) Texas Unionists. However, there may also have been soldiers of a different nationality involved in the battle. In his official battle report, Union Colonel Theodore Barrett reported observing 'a body of Imperial cavalry [that] crossed the Rio Grande at Matamoros, doubtless with a view of aiding the rebels.' This manoeuvre may have had its origin in a secret agreement between Quintero and Imperial General Mejia, the detail of which is hidden away in Ford's memoirs. At this time, Confederate and Imperial authorities were concerned about a Union attack on Brownsville coupled with an attack by Cortina on Matamoros, the one being used to support the other. In Ford's memoirs he quotes a letter from one Captain Aldrich of his superior General Slaughter's staff, who noted that Slaughter 'secured through the friendly aid of Senor Quintero an agreement with General Mejia that in case of an advance by Cortina he (Mejia's) cavalry would cross, in citizen's dress, and come to our assistance.' Ford also related in his memoirs that some French troops

[271] *OR* 48.1.1, Barrett to Thomas, 10/8/65, 265-67; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 391; Cutrer, *Theatre of a Separate War*, 429-30; Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword*, 431-32

crossed the Rio Grande and helped the Confederates by working the Confederate artillery during the battle.[272]

Such cooperation goes far beyond what was officially mandated by either Napoleon III in Paris or Maximilian in Mexico City. In this respect, the actions of Mejia and the nameless French and Imperial troops positions them as renegade state actors. If Aldrich, Ford and Barrett are to be believed, firstly Quintero and Mejia signed a secret agreement whereby Imperial cavalry, disguised in civilian clothes, would militarily come to the aid of the Confederacy, and French soldiers volunteered to serve Confederate cannons during the Battle of Palmito Ranch. Mejia was offering warlike (in other words, violent) support across the border without declaring war himself. In this respect, he was enacting a belligerent diplomacy – warlike without itself being war.

At the same time, many historians point to Napoleon and Maximilian's ambivalence towards the Confederate cause by this point, as it was clearly in abeyance. Maximilian sent letters of condolence to Washington upon Lincoln's assassination, clearly hoping for some sort of *rapprochement*. (As Edward Shawcross notes Maximilian had never been in favour of the Confederacy, whilst despite Napoleon's support, he was dissuaded from recognition and support by his ministers.) Mejia's actions therefore again show the imbalance of power structures in the borderland, or the inability of the central government to enforce them (particularly in Mexico, with communication hampered by guerrillas). Mejia was enabled to enact his own variation on Imperial foreign policy contrary to official instruction that could well have embroiled his country in external war (hence, no doubt, the provision that Imperial

[272] *OR* 48.1.1, Barrett to Thomas, 10/8/65, 265-67 (quote 267); Aldrich to Ford, 21/10/90, quoted in Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 394-95 (quote 395)

cavalry were to cross the Rio Grande disguised in civilian clothes). Mejia's actions are therefore a perfect example of renegade state action and geopolitical agency.[273]

Union Volunteers in Mexico during the Civil War

The greater volume of what may be termed the practical, tangible support of the Union for Liberal Mexico – the supply of arms and the participation of volunteers – occurred from the summer of 1865 onwards, after the end of the Civil War. However, Union soldiers and citizens, renegade and non-state actors, began to supply this practical support to Mexico even whilst the Civil War was ongoing, albeit in small numbers. For example, in April 1864 de Geofroy, the French Ambassador to Washington, complained to Seward about a club in New Orleans that styled itself the 'Defenders of the Monroe Doctrine.' Clearly well informed about the group, de Geofroy reported that 'some number of federal officers' were involved in the 'DMD,' and that 'transmissions of arms and munitions have been directed toward the frontier of the Rio Grande, and I am assured, although I do not like to believe it, with the connivance of some of the authorities of the United States.' Since the Union capture of Brownsville, de Geofroy noted, 'it seems that Brownsville, on the Rio Grande, is the very active centre of a traffic in articles contraband of war, a traffic which is carried on for account of the agents of Mr. Juarez, and that the federal authorities, who are accused of deriving large profits from it, favour, in place of hindering it.' Waiting near Boston harbour to be shipped to Matamoros was a ship filled with 'one or two batteries of artillery, carbines, swords, and bayonets.'[274]

[273] Sainlaude, *France and the American Civil War*, 177-82; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 301-02; Shawcross; Hanna and Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, 141; Sainlaude, Steve, 'France's Grand Design and the Confederacy,' in *American Civil Wars*, ed. Doyle, 119

[274] *PRFA, 38th Cong,, Part III: France,* De Geofroy to Seward, 26/4/64, 216-17; ibid, Seward to de Geofroy, 30/4/64, 218; ibid, de Geofroy to Seward, 27/5/64, 219; Miller 'The American Legion,' 231

The leaders of the DMD were certainly a disparate group – they included the 'Mexican General' Francisco DeBourdon (who was actually a Vermonter called Smith), a captain of the 14th Illinois Infantry Regiment, and the inventor of the 'acoustic telegraph' – but it is difficult to discern any motive arising from desire for profit, particularly as the Juarez government was bankrupt and effectively displaced. Their very eccentric nature, as opposed to the nexus of successful businessmen and politicians who ran arms to the Confederacy from Europe and New York, argues against this. As Fred Harrington has noted, their purpose was 'to raise men, money, and sympathy for the constitutional or Juarist cause.' Seward declared to de Geofroy that 'there has been neither any enrolment of men, nor any subscriptions of money, by the club, or by any other association, for the purposes of war in Mexico. Nor have any arms, ammunition, or men, been sent there, through any association of persons in the State of Louisiana, so far as the governor knows, or has even heard.' Whether he believed this to be true, wanted it to be true, or knew it to be false is unclear ('so far as the governor knows,' is doing a lot of work in that particular protestation). On Seward's orders, Nathaniel Banks mounted a raid on the DMD in June that secured 'three vessels, gunpowder, medicine, camp equipment, gold, and fifteen thousand dollars in greenbacks.' 'Arrests have been made, and . . . goods have been seized upon the supposition that they were destined for a contraband trade with Mexico,' Seward reported to de Geofroy. Most of the American citizens arrested had accepted commissions to serve under Juan Cortina, showing not only how far Cortina's fame had spread but also how non-state, renegade state and even state actors could work together across political boundaries in the pursuit of shared objectives.[275]

Despite this crack down, pro-Juarez societies continued to proliferate across the Union: in addition to the DMD, there was the Monroe Doctrine Committee in New York, the Monroe League in San Francisco and the Mexican Aid Society in Cincinnati. The latter was

[275] Ibid; *PRFA 38.3,* Seward to de Geofroy, 28/5/64, 219-20; ibid, Seward to de Geofroy, 21/6/64, 221; Harrington, *Fighting Politician*, 132-33

chaired by General Lew Wallace, who hoped these societies would 'control public sentiment, govern the politicians, raise funds, recruit soldiers, and beget cooperation and united intelligent management.' It is notable, firstly, how many of these referenced the Monroe Doctrine in their names – suggesting a worldview where the north-south axis of the Atlantic world was opposed to the east-west one, New World republicanism opposed to Old World aristocracy – but also notable that they actually existed in the first place: that even in the midst of the Civil War, American citizens were motivated by a sense of defending New World republics against European intervention and conquest, and at least some of them put this into practice by sending arms and ammunition to help Juarez via the lower Rio Grande and others tried to sail there and join him, thus exercising a nonelite, non-state geopolitical agency.[276]

Union Volunteers in Mexico, 1865-66

After the Civil War, veterans from the Union and Confederate armies ventured south of the Rio Grande to continue their military careers. Broadly speaking, Union veterans travelled south to fight for the Liberals, whilst Confederates went to Mexico to fight for the Imperialists (although, as will be addressed below, there were exceptions to this). Civil War veterans did not, of course, make up the majority of either the Liberal or Imperial armies, but – somewhat akin to the Napoleonic veterans who crossed the Atlantic to fight for Simon Bolivar – they played a small but crucial role in the defeat of the Mexican Empire. Evan Rothera emphasises the diverse nature of these men, how they were non-state or renegade state actors, and how despite their lack of formal power they still enjoyed and employed geopolitical agency in their choices, mobility and service: they were 'from the centre and the

[276] Wallace quoted in Miller, 'American Legion in Mexico,' 231

periphery, from elite and non-elite actors, from men as eminent as Ulysses S. Grant to nameless veterans who crossed the US-Mexico border.'[277]

As we have seen, Grant himself was prepared to march into Mexico to achieve his aims. In a meeting with Matias Romero in May 1865, Romero told him that 'it would not displease us to receive some of the more renowned soldiers from this country . . . to serve as a sort of nucleus for our army.' Grant and Romero then settled down to draw up a scheme to get this veteran army into Mexico. Grant wanted Sherman to command this force, an indication of how seriously he took the subject. Although this of course was never officially organised (Grant's attempt to under Schofield was artfully subverted by Seward), Grant and Sheridan continued to encourage men to 'volunteer' across the river during 1865 and 1866 in the lower Rio Grande borderland. Emphasising the renegade state nature of this enterprise, Jonathan Beall has argued that 'Grant worked with American and Mexican leaders to create a private but legal army of recently discharged veterans to cross the Rio Grande and fight for the Liberals.'[278]

The occupation of the lower Rio Grande enabled these men to easily slip southwards to join the Liberals, and also enabled Liberal leaders, especially Cortina, to openly recruit men in Brownsville and its environs. Many of the troops who crossed the Rio Grande were black, and according to Matias Romero it was not chance that so many black troops were deployed to the Mexican border. The reason for sending the USCT XXV Corps to Brownsville, Romero noted, 'was to offer them the opportunity to cross over to us.' Romero believed many would because of the benefits prevalent in a liberalised Mexico compared to

[277] For the role of British veterans in the Latin American Revolutions, see for example Hughes, Ben, *Conquer or Die!: Wellington's Veterans and the Liberation of the New World* (Oxford, 2010); Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 54. Foreign volunteering for Liberal armies may have started before the Civil War's end: William Kiser notes that Juarez began recruiting foreigners when in Monterrey in mid-1864, almost a year before the Civil War's end. (Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 139, referencing Proclamation of Benito Juarez, August 11, 1864, NA, RG59, Despatches from United States Consuls in Monterrey, Mexico, 1849–1906, M165, Roll 1.)
[278] Schoonover, *Mexican Lobby*, 59-60; Beall, Jonathan A., 'The Military Occupation of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1865-1866,' *Journal of South Texas,* Vol. 16 No. 2 (2003), 209

the United States: there would be 'advantages they will enjoy in Mexico, where the Negro race is not the victim of prejudice.' In October 1865 the French ambassador, the Marquis de Montholon, wrote to Seward complaining that Cortina was recruiting 'coloured persons' in Brownsville; in November, Sheridan noted there was a great desire among black troops to go to Mexico once their enlistments had expired. In the winter of 1865-66, three USCT soldiers were captured south of the Rio Grande: the French general Douay referred to them as 'irregulars.' William Richter records rumours that black soldiers were granted temporary leaves-of-absence to join Cortina outside Matamoros, and that men could enlist as 'bodyguards' for 'parties' in Mexico at $50 a month. By July 1866, one French officer in Monterrey was complaining of 'Americans and niggers who often join the rebel bands, to the number of two or three thousand and sometimes more.'[279]

Edelmiro Mayer was a determined 'transnational warrior' who fought in the lower Rio Grande after the end of the Civil War. An Argentine by birth, Mayer fought in no fewer than three civil wars during the 1860s: the Argentine Wars of Unification, the American Civil War and the French intervention in Mexico. Manuel Gonzalez-Quiroga cites Mayer as one of the 'American' officers present at the decisive Battle of Santa Gertrudis in 1866. According to Argentine politician Aristobulo del Valle, what motivated Mayer to fight consecutively in Argentina, the United States and Mexico was a 'limitless love towards all things republican, toward all that is free among the Americans, from Patagonia to the Mississippi.' As Rothera states, Mayer saw these conflicts as 'individual parts of a much larger struggle that the forces of reaction waged against republicanism and democracy' – and he chose to exercise his

[279] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 234; Thompson, *Cortina*, 154; Schoonover, *Mexican Lobby*, 69; *OR* 48.2, Sheridan to Grant, 20/11/65, 1257; ibid, Montholon to Seward, 19/10/65, 1241; Jonas, *Habsburgs on the Rio Grande*, 183; Richter, William L., *The Army in Texas during Reconstruction, 1865-1870* (College Station, 1987), 24; Colne to Bernard, 10/7/66, quoted in Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 244. In contrast, Richard White argues that the XXV Corps was deployed to the lower Rio Grande simply because the USCT had longest to serve until their enlistments expired. (White, Richard, *The Republic for Which it Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (New York, 2017), 34)

geopolitical agency in violent, military defence of this transnational republican and democratic cause in the lower Rio Grande borderland.[280]

The memoirs of John Sobieski provide some insight into the nature of Union volunteers in Mexico. In June 1865, after a meeting with Matias Romero, Sobieski placed an advert in the newspaper advertising 'an excursion to Mexico . . . no one, except those who have served in the Union army for three years, need apply.' Sobieski wrote that 'in less than one hundred days I had one hundred men and over; good, true men, sober, thoughtful, patriotic, who were willing to do and dare.'

Having been arrested in New Orleans, Sobieski and his men were all released without charge after the interview with Sheridan mentioned in Chapter 4, but following this only ten agreed to press on to Mexico. This number was further reduced to seven during the journey from New Orleans to Sonora. Again, this offers an insight into why men chose to go or not go; for those that left the expedition, according to Sobieski, 'their object in going to Mexico had not been one of adventure or romance, but purely to aid the Mexican Republic in the fight for existence.' Having learnt that Sheridan and his troops would be sent into Mexico if the US government thought it necessary, 'they felt it was their duty to return home.' Volunteering for service in Mexico, for these men, was then an extension of their patriotic duty. (This is, of course, not dissimilar to the argument Grant was making at the same time for direct military intervention.) As for Sobieski and his ten disciples, they 'considered it our duty to go to Mexico.'[281] Once at the 'patriots' camp' in Sonora, Sobieski noted its polyglot nature: 'the little army was composed of Americans, English, Germans, French, Canadians, Russians, Scotch, Irish, Grecians and pure Mexicans.'[282]

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[280] Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 25-27 (quote 27); *Congreso Nacional: Diario de Sesiones de la Camara de Diputados, Ano 1874,* 238, quoted ibid, 26
[281] Sobieski, *Life-Story*, 122
[282] Ibid, 119-20 (quote 120), quote 124

In California, Liberal general Placido Vega recruited men for an army to march to *Juarista* aid. Many of his recruits were Hispanics, some of whom had served in the Union army. Some of them were Anglos. One such was assistant surgeon F.M. Cassill, who wrote that 'I have always had a lively interest in the fate of our sister republic ever since the Frenchman's foot first polluted her soil.' The warm phrase 'our sister republic' indicates the strength of Union-Mexican sentiment that existed in 1865. Vega eventually recruited 400 men, but his attempt to ship them south from San Francisco was thwarted by Union officials, apparently acting on the request of the French charge d'affaires. Grant apparently rescinded this order, but Vega's men could still not leave. Vega's men were arrested, though acquitted after a retrial, but it was not until November 1866 that he was able to lead his volunteers into Mexico. As the *San Francisco Daily Call* noted, 'the object of the prime movers in the scheme, the French agents, has succeeded.'[283]

Another Union volunteer unit that fought for the Liberals was the American Legion. The Legion was also organised by Vega in San Francisco and whilst substantial financial remuneration was offered to volunteers, as Robert Miller points out 'propaganda stressing French violation of the Monroe Doctrine was also effective in gaining recruits.' The Legion joined Juarez at El Paso del Norte in late 1866 and by January 1867 was in the thick of the fighting. It formed the Liberal spearhead in the final battle of the war, the assault on Queretaro. Including the Legion, Romero calculated that in 1867 over 3,000 Union veterans were serving in the Liberal army. Of these, he estimated that 500 fought under Escobedo in north-eastern Mexico and that a further 200 were in Matamoros under H. Clay Crawford. Compared to armies in the American Civil War this was very small, but in terms of the Liberal strength in the north of Mexico this may have accounted for as many as one-quarter

[283] Miller, *Arms across the Border*, 23-30, Cassill quoted 24; *San Francisco Daily Call*, 16/7/65; for the significance of the phrase 'sister republics' at this time see Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 61-65 and Kelly, 'Lost Continent,' 225-26

or one-third of the troops. Sobieski himself, as mentioned, even commanded the reserve of the firing squad that executed Maximilian in Queretaro, bringing the long conflict to a close. Union veterans who utilised the borderland to pursue their own geopolitical agency therefore played a small but crucial role in the victory of the Mexican Republic.[284]

Altogether somewhere between 3000 and 5000 Union and Confederate veterans fought in Mexico after the Civil War. There was, of course, no one reason why all of them did so. Historians have often emphasised the financial incentives promised to both officers and men. Robert Miller points out that volunteers in the American Legion were offered a basic rate of pay comparable to the Union army, bonuses for bravery and a land grant in Mexico, whilst Lew Wallace, for example, was offered $100,000 to accept a generalcy in the Liberal army. Nonetheless, Miller also acknowledges the influence of anti-Imperial sentiment and propaganda on these volunteers, whilst Wallace only took up the Liberal offer after consulting with Grant, who was violently pro-Liberal on principle. Grant and Sheridan advocated and discreetly encouraged the passage of Union veterans southwards to fight the Imperialists. That so many of these were black may reinforce how the French intervention was conceptualised as part of the Civil War, struggles for individual liberty against repressive sociopolitical systems. The end of Maximilian in Queretaro, executed on the orders of a US citizen in Liberal service, brought this conflict to an end.[285]

The men who moved into and through the borderlands to fight for the Liberal cause emphasise what Evan Rothera has described as 'the sheer variety of actors who influenced foreign policy.' Most of their names and individual experiences are lost to history, but we know they ranged across class, geographic and ethnic lines, from the Union general Lew Wallace to Polish exile Jan Sobieski to the African-American former slaves who had enlisted

[284] Miller, *Arms across the Border*, 37-41 (quote 37); Romero quoted in Miller, 'American Legion of Honour,' 229; Brown, 'Guns over the Border,' 85-86; Sobieski, *Life-Story*, 136-37
[285] Miller, *Arms across the Border*, 37, 43

in the XXV Corps. They fought for money or idealism or possibly both. Their ideological and geographic mobility combined with their geopolitical agency contributed to the outcome of the French intervention and restoration of the Mexican Republic. These volunteers demonstrate another case of foreign policy, in and through borderlands, being enacted and implemented by a combination of non-state and/or renegade state actors that transformed, or helped to transform, the geopolitical realities of North America.[286]

Confederate Volunteers in Mexico

Union citizens and officials were not the only ones whose eyes turned south of the border in the summer of 1865. Confederates both sent guns to help the Imperialists in the lower Rio Grande and crossed the river to serve in the army of Maximilian. At the same time, however, some also crossed the Rio Grande in order to serve under Juarez, emphasising again the geopolitical agency of actors in the borderland. Their impact was overall less than that of their Union counterparts, but once again their very existence points to the importance of deinstitutionalised agency and mobility interacting with and helping to determine the course of the foreign and indeed domestic military policies of state polities.

Faced with overall defeat in 1865, Confederates around Brownsville supplied guns south of the river to their sympathetic neighbours. In June 1865 Confederate artillery was sold across the Rio Grande to Matamoros where it was incorporated into the garrison. Grant and Sheridan were incensed by this. Grant ordered Sheridan to 'demand' the return of the artillery from Matamoros, but if it was refused 'not to commence hostilities.' Mejia, unsurprisingly, refused to give the cannons back. Confederate cannons were therefore used to blast back Liberal attacks on the city during the siege later that year. There was undoubtedly a

[286] Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 66

measure of economic pragmatism to this Confederate sale: Matamoros was nearby and needed artillery, whilst Slaughter, who would shortly lead a band of 'a marauding party' raiding through the Texan interior, was desirous of money. Nonetheless, it is a case of the Confederacy supplying arms to Imperial Mexico to aid it in its own conflict against the pro-Union Liberals.[287]

The movement of Union veterans southwards to fight for the Liberals had its mirror image in Confederate veterans crossing the Rio Grande, most of whom went to fight for the Empire. On 4th July 1865, General Jo Shelby and his 'Iron Brigade' arrived at the ford at Eagle Pass on the lower Rio Grande. Veterans of that other Civil War borderland conflict, the truly fratricidal war in Missouri, Shelby had assembled his men on the prairie near Corsicana, Texas after learning of the peace negotiations that surrendered the Transmississippi to the Union. 'Boys,' he said, 'the war is over and you can go home. I for one will not go home. Across the Rio Grande lies Mexico. Who will follow me there?' At least two hundred agreed to, and as the column made its way via Waco, Austin and San Antonio to Eagle Pass, it picked up recruits and hangers-on along the way, including Generals Magruder and Price, governors Allen of Louisiana and Murrah of Texas, and eventually even Kirby Smith himself. Now at Eagle Pass, before he passed into Mexico, Shelby paused to sink the brigade's battle flag in the Rio Grande, weighing it down with stones. He then led his men southwards to offer their services to Maximilian.[288]

By June it was estimated at least 2000 former Confederate soldiers had passed into Mexico, some of whom went to Matamoros. US secret agent A.H. Canedo, based in the town, reported that in the summer of 1865 Quintero and other former Confederate officials were in Matamoros trying to recruit a regiment of Texans to serve in Maximilian's army. As will be

[287] *OR* 48.2, Sheridan to Grant, 8/6/65, 813-14; ibid, Sheridan to Grant, 9/6/65, 827-28; ibid, Grant to Sheridan, 15/6/65, 889
[288] O'Flaherty, *General Jo Shelby,* quote 234, 237-45

outlined below, some may have been part of the Imperial army at the Battle of Santa Gertrudis. The desire to fight for the Empire, although not universal, was clearly prompted by a conception of it being analogous to the Confederacy, a space where the same political and economic values could flourish. (As a Mexican newspaper complained in 1867, 'not content with having conspired against the liberty of their own country, [former Confederates have engaged in] a new conspiracy to destroy the liberty of Mexico.') In Mexico peonage was still legal – and whilst this was not the same of slavery, it functioned in a very similar way.[289] This was played on and up to by Maximilian's government, which in September 1865 published a law that sought to encourage immigration to Mexico. Part of this law permitted immigrants to bring with them 'workmen in considerable numbers, of whatever race they might be' and that on the immigrant's death, his heir would inherit the 'workmen.' Matias Romero argued that this was designed to appeal to 'disaffected citizens of the United States . . . by admitting them with their prejudices and their peculiar system of labour, already well tried in the southern part of the United States.' In other words, it permitted slavery as long as the slaves were brought from outside the country. Often overshadowed by Maximilian's 'Black Decree' the following month that promised no quarter to his Liberal opponents, this law highlights Maximilian's attempt to encourage Confederate military migration to and in service of his empire.[290]

The movement of so many Confederate veterans into Mexico was of concern to Grant, and he used it to argue for Union involvement in the conflict. Grant's letters about Mexico in 1865 commented again and again on his fear of ex-Confederate involvement in the Imperialist cause. 'Rebels in arms have been allowed to take refuge on Mexican soil

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[289] *OR* 1.48.2, Canedo to Osterhaus, 4/6/65, 771; 'Monitor Republicano,' (Mexico City), 30/7/67; Resendez, Andres, 'North American Peonage,' *Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 7 No. 4 (2017), passim, esp. 606-08
[290] *OR* 48.2, Sheridan to Grant, 28/6/65, 1015; Thompson, *Cortina*, 150-51; Hamnett, *Juarez*, 158-59; *PRFA, Accompanying the Annual Message of the President to the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress*, Romero to Seward, 5/10/65, 480

protected by French bayonets,' he informed Johnson. In June 1865, he wrote to Stanton that, as a consequence of recalcitrant Confederates crossing into Mexico, he considered it 'a duty we owe to a friendly but downtrodden Nation, to send an armed force to capture these recreants.' Sheridan held similar views: 'I think we ought to go after Shelby and his command,' he wrote to Grant in August (one month after Shelby had crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico). 'I feel certain that with 6,000 or 8,000 cavalry I can stir up the whole of Northern Mexico.' At the end of 1865 he reported a 'Rebel Emigration scheme' causing 'a great deal of excitement throughout the South on the subject.' Sheridan saw this as inherently dangerous to an 'intermestic' cause that was clearly shared between Mexico and the United States. 'Unless the government is firm on this question,' he wrote to Grant, 'there will be a large party to back Maximilian in Mexico.'

The mobility of non-state actors in the form of Confederate veterans migrating to Mexico to fight for the Empire therefore galvanised Grant's renegade state policy in turn. Despite their impact on state policy (and despite the encouragement of Maximilian with his September 1865 decree) neither of these were state-generated or official state policy, yet they had an important effect on the geopolitics of the region and the course of war in Mexico. Sheridan's desire to cross the border in pursuit of Confederate veterans similarly shows his determination to secure the borderland against enemies of the United States – not wholly dissimilar, in its way, to Sam Houston's proposed expedition in 1860.[291]

The Federals wanted as many of these Confederate refugees captured as possible. According to his memoirs, John Ford visited Matamoros and tried to persuade them to return to the US. Along the lower Rio Grande Federals first asked Mejia, who refused to cooperate against them, and then Cortina, who agreed to. In July 1865 Confederate general Mosby

[291] *PUG 15*, Grant to Johnson, 19/6/65, 157; ibid, Grant to Stanton, 20/6/65, 205; ibid, Sheridan to Grant, 7/2/66, 426; *OR* 48.2, Sheridan to Grant, 1/8/65, 1148

Parsons, who had received a passport from Mejia in Matamoros, was robbed and murdered by a band of Cortina's cavalry just outside China, Nuevo Leon. By doing this, Cortina signalled his sympathy and affinity to the Union cause and continued to violently enact his lifelong enmity towards Southern Anglos.[292]

However, it should be acknowledged that the choice of allegiance among Confederate veterans was not always so clear cut. Interrogating the emphasis placed by such historians as Don Doyle and Patrick Kelly on reading the Civil War-French invasion conflicts as a struggle between monarchy (France and the Confederacy) and republicanism (Mexico and the Union), some Confederates chose to support the Liberals precisely because they were fighting for republicanism against monarchy. For example, leading his men across the Rio Grande, Jo Shelby himself preferred to fight for Juarez rather than Maximilian: in a real display of republicanism, he put it to a vote. Similarly, along the lower Rio Grande, John Ford crossed the river to fight alongside his old friend Jose Carvajal after the Battle of Santa Gertrudis. Ford was commissioned a general and recruited 'former Confederate soldiers,' according to Joseph Chance, for service against the Imperialists. In his memoirs, Ford declared he had only been 'friendly with the Imperialists, with the hope of benefiting our [Confederate] cause.' With the end of the Civil War, however, Ford decided 'in favour of a government for the people and by the people' – an interesting and revealing echo of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Equally, despite their ideological and geopolitical differences, Liberals were not averse to recruiting former Confederates: for example, the Liberal governor of Coahuila, Andres Viesca, offered Shelby 'land rewards and political titles' if he recruited a division of American mercenaries.

Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga sees this as an example of 'the pragmatism that was the hallmark of the borderlanders,' but equally it shows a commitment to republicanism and

[292] Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas,* 403; Thompson, *Cortina*, 150-51

democratic politics – nor was it uniquely Confederate veterans from the lower Rio Grande who made this choice. Of course, Ford and Carvajal were old friends from the Merchants' War and many Confederate veterans may, as with some of their Union counterparts, have just been looking for a way to earn money in the aftermath of the Civil War: nonetheless, they are important instances of personal agency, reminders that the dividing lines between polities and ideas were clearer in the president's palace or the ambassador's dining room than they necessarily were to the man on the ground; or that those dividing lines did not always appear to be the same to everyone.[293]

The movement of former Confederates southwards into Mexico in 1865 demonstrates how the nature of borderlands depended on the agency of those who operated within them. For example, Confederates might display a continuing allegiance to ideals of republicanism by enlisting with Juarez; on the other, they might display a continuing allegiance to unfree labour and anti-Unionism by joining the Empire. The borderland, in other words, did not so much enable ideological transformation as it enabled ideological continuity, whichever form that continuity took or focused on. Equally, it reveals the impact of nonelite and non-state actors on foreign policies of central governments, especially with the publication of Maximilian's September 1865 decree, which Romero was surely right was designed to attract former Confederates. Grant's desire to invade Mexico and supply Juarez with arms is also reflective of this. Whilst Confederate veterans may not have had the overall impact that Union veterans did, they nonetheless contributed to the defence of the Imperialist cause from 1865-67 in Mexico.

[293] For the Civil War and French intervention as conflicts that pitted republicanism against monarchism, see Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 99-105; Rothera, *Civil Wars and Reconstructions*, 10; Fleche, Andre M., *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill, 2012), 6-8; Hurlbut, *Oracle of Lost Causes*, 106; O'Flaherty, *General Jo Shelby*, 245-47; Chance, *Carvajal*, 195; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 405; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 235

Transnational battle: The Battle of Santa Gertrudis

Maximilian's end may have come at Queretaro, but the beginning of his end occurred along the lower Rio Grande. Yet again, Matamoros was fated to play an important role. Many Union troops deployed to the US-Mexico border were deployed to Brownsville and Brazos Santiago. Their intervention, both indirect in the supply of arms and men and direct in militarily crossing the river, would prove crucial in turning the tide of the war in Mexico. The Mexican Gettysburg, the Battle of Santa Gertrudis, would be fought near Matamoros using Union-supplied weaponry with a decent number of Union veterans in the Liberal ranks.

In total some 52,000 Federal troops were deployed to the Rio Grande under Sheridan's command, with the XXV Corps, some 16,000 men, deployed around Brownsville itself. By way of comparison, the XXV Corps alone was four times greater than the armies deployed there under Zachary Taylor and Nathaniel Banks in 1846 and 1863 respectively. This shows the growth in power of the US state during the Civil War that even a renegade state policy could command. The effect on the lower Rio Grande was immediate. The French troops at Matamoros were immediately withdrawn, for fear of 'complications.' This allowed the Liberals to block the roads to and from Matamoros, placing the town in an effective state of siege.[294]

This deployment aided the Liberals in other ways as well. With the Federal occupation, Cortina was able to set up a recruitment office in Brownsville. He declared he had captured property that he wanted to sell in Texas to buy military supplies with. In a sign of Union-Mexican solidarity, he was invited to a Federal Fourth of July party and, despite an argument that resulted in one Federal officer drawing his pistol and cracking one of Cortina's men over the head with it, he extended an invitation to a party of his own at Rancho del

[294] Hutton, Paul Andrew, *Phil Sheridan and his Army* (Lincoln, 1985), 21; Brown, 'Guns over the Border,' 232

Carmen in Mexico. By this point Frederick Steele, the commander of the XXV Corps, observed that apart from Matamoros itself Cortina 'appears to have full sway everywhere else on the Rio Grande.' He even captured three Imperial steamers that piloted the river. In an echo of what had occurred during the Civil War, the French ambassador complained that at least one steamer had been captured in Texan waters, declaring that 'it would be difficult for neutrality to be more openly violated.' Grant riposted, in a letter to Stanton, that 'he would not have to go off the Rio Grande . . . to find instances of more flagrant violations of neutrality, and where material aid has been given to the rebellion and against the United States.' The nature of the various policies practiced within the Rio Grande, hostile to other polities without being directly confrontational, warlike without being war, could not be clearer.[295]

Cortina cut the road between Matamoros and Bagdad and completely controlled the surrounding countryside. His men 'circle[d] about the city, killing or capturing every living thing which moves,' according to the *New York Herald*. Mejia responded by arming the citizens in the town – which, as another indication of Matamoros' prosperity even at the end of the Civil War, included French, German, Spanish and English citizens – and finally launched a counteroffensive that pushed Cortina back upriver. One of the fallen in these engagements was Adrian Vidal, whom we last met deserting the Confederate army for the Union. Despite his uncle Mifflin Kenedy's attempts to bribe Mejia and obtain his nephew's release, he was shot anyway. As Jerry Thompson neatly puts it, he 'had served both the blue and the grey, deserted from both, joined a third army, and was shot by a fourth.' Vidal's complicated borderland career and tragic end – he was just twenty-one when he was killed – illustrates how fluid the North American borderlands were as a geopolitical space, how

[295] Steele to Newhall, 1/7/65, quoted in Thompson, *Cortina*, 153; ibid, 152-53; *PUG* 15, Grant to Stanton, 6/11/65, 395-96

complex it could be for people to navigate them and the importance of their personal agency in doing so.[296]

With the retreat of Cortina, some sort of calm briefly returned to Matamoros: in a sign of the complex nature of support and opposition amongst geopolitical actors, Federal officers, despite their help for Cortina, crossed the river at Mejia's request as guests at his functions. Mejia even began construction of an opera house in anticipation of a visit from Maximilian and his wife the Empress Carlota. By October, however, Juarez had sent General Mariano Escobedo to command the 'Army of the North.' Carvajal had also returned by then from New York to supervise the delivery of arms and ammunition shipped from there. Escobedo was able to rally the various Liberal factions together and march on Matamoros. The final siege of the town had begun.[297]

Mejia retreated behind his entrenchments, laid out by the Prussian Confederate Major Blucher. He had three thousand men, including some former Confederates and the international citizens of the town. Watching from Brownsville, Sheridan reported severe fighting: one fort was taken by the Liberals, only to be recaptured by the Imperialists later. Close-quarter fighting continued for sixteen days in the rain and mud, until at last, exhausted, Escobedo withdrew his men to the chaparral, but kept them in the immediate area. A French naval officer stationed off the mouth of the Rio Grande complained of Union support for the Liberals during the siege: 'the mess stores and munitions of war,' he wrote to Godfrey Weitzel, by then Union commander in Brownsville, 'are furnished by persons under your command. Escobedo's [artillery] pieces are worked by gunners from your army . . . The wounded are received in the Brownsville hospital . . . In a word, Brownsville seems to be the headquarters of the Juarists [sic].' These complaints highlight how Union soldiers and

[296] Thompson, *Cortina*, 155-57; *New York Herald*, 17/7/65
[297] Thompson, *Cortina*, 157-62; Chance, *Carvajal*, 189

officers were working along the lower Rio Grande to aid the Liberals – to settle the shape of Mexican sociopolitics – and the real-terms impact this had on the battlefields in north-eastern Mexico. Union gunners working Liberal artillery pieces is, of course, a direct echo of the French gunners working Confederate artillery pieces at Palmito Ranch earlier that year.[298]

One key problem the Liberals faced along the lower Rio Grande, that highlights their own geopolitical and political agency (and, concomitantly, the limits of state policy), was their internal division. Cortina, Carvajal, Escobedo and Cortina's one-time lieutenant, Canales, all commanded their own armies along the river, and each one mistrusted the other. Carvajal wrote to Lew Wallace that 'Cortina . . . can't be trusted in *any capacity*.' Mejia took advantage of these divisions to retake Bagdad bloodlessly on January 25th and sprung a surprise attack on Cortina in April, killing or capturing more than a quarter of his men. Cortina himself barely escaped. At the time of Crawford's raid on Bagdad, Union Lieutenant-Colonel Lawrence Kip estimated that Matamoros was garrisoned by 4000 men – '2700 are reliable and 200 . . . are rebels from the United States.' According to Kip 'these last go by the name of the centra-guerrillas and are the worst men in the country.' Liberal strength was estimated at only around 2500, further hampering any concerted push on Matamoros.[299]

The turning point eventually came in June 1866, with the Battle of Santa Gertrudis. Little regarded outside Mexico, Santa Gertrudis is never mentioned in histories of the Civil War or Reconstruction, and even Thomas Schoonover, perhaps the most dedicated scholar of US-Mexican relations in the Civil War era, does not mention the battle at all. However, in its way Santa Gertrudis was as decisive in North American history as Yorktown or Gettysburg.

[298] Thompson, *Cortina*, 162-65; *OR* 48.2, Sheridan to Grant, 30/10/65, 1249; Cloue to Weitzel, 6/11/65, quoted in Gaulot, Paul, *Fin d'Empire* (Paris, 1890), 56

[299] Carvajal quoted in Chance, *Carvajal*, 189 (original emphasis); Thompson, *Cortina*, 176-77; *PUG 16,* Kip to Sheridan, 21/1/66, 32. Kip presumably meant *contra*-guerrillas.

On 6th June 1866 Mejia sent a huge column of over two hundred wagons and 2000 mules toiling westwards from Matamoros to Monterrey, carrying several million dollars' worth of merchandise, guarded by two regiments of European troops and 1500 Imperialist cavalry. The Liberals had by this time been united, however unwillingly, under Escobedo's command, and he ordered them to harass the column, throwing up obstacles and poisoning wells and watering-holes with animal carcasses. Servando Canales, once Cortina's deputy, secretly met with the Imperialist cavalry and persuaded them to change sides. As the weary column approached Camargo, Escobedo attacked on the plain of Santa Gertrudis.[300]

One of the European troops guarding the column was Ernst Pitner, who we last met enjoying the delights of Matamoros in the final months of the Civil War. He later recalled the 'fierce fighting' of the battle: opposed by Liberal infantry, the Austrian troops marched forwards and had a 'violent exchange of fire.' Pitner recalled a scene of intense bloodshed: 'it was a moment of the most frightful small arms fire and the men in their ranks fell down dead in droves . . . Already half the company lay dead or wounded on the ground.' The Austrians tried to charge, were surrounded by Liberal cavalry and then turned to try and cut their way out back to the wagons. Pitner succeeded, being wounded in the throat in the attempt, but most did not: the Austrian contingent, only around 300 strong, lost 130 men killed or wounded and 126 taken prisoner. '340 men fought without cavalry,' Pitner recalled, 'in what was almost exclusively cavalry terrain against an enemy of 2,000, among whom there were at least 600 horsemen, very well armed and led.' 'Most of the Mexican troops,' Pitner's editor notes, 'went over to the other side.' 350 Imperial infantry stuck their rifles in the ground with the point of their bayonets, held up their hands and shouted '*Viva la Libertad!'* Pitner himself, trying to hide from the Liberals, crawled into a wagon and found himself with two Imperialist

[300] Chance, *Carvajal*, 190-91; Thompson, *Cortina*, 178; Pitner, *Maximilian's Lieutenant*, 128-29

soldiers for company, 'who were unwounded but said they were ill. But I think that the fellows were only hiding there.' All three were later taken prisoner.[301]

Raymond Jonas has noted that victory at Santa Gertrudis 'meant that the army of the Mexican Republic had recovered as a fighting force.' The was, however, also to a certain extent a North American fight. Pitner noted that the Imperialist column's rearguard was made up of 'contra-guerrillas,' whom Lawrence Kip in January had described as 'rebels from the United States.' It is equally possible that they were French, as Pitner lists 120 'contra-guerrillas' accompanying the column under a 'Gesard': they at least had a French officer. On the Liberal side, Jack Dabbs estimates that Escobedo's army consisted of 4-5000 men, 'including some 1200 North Americans.' It is unclear exactly what Dabbs means by 'North Americans' – it is the only use of the term in his book and is rather an odd phrase to use. A fair assumption would be that Dabbs probably means Union and possibly Confederate veterans. 1200 seems a high number, but Weitzel's XXV Corps had mustered out in January 1866, many of whom were encouraged to go south of the border and join the Liberals. (Weitzel noted at that time that 'about ninety-eight out of every hundred officers and men are strongly in favour of the Liberals.') Similarly, Raymond Jonas notes rumours that Escobedo's army contained 12-1500 Union veterans. Jonas argues that there were probably closer to 150 Union veterans present, but the source he bases this on concerns a unit that was not present in north-eastern Mexico at this time. From Matamoros, US Vice-Commercial Agent Lucius Avery reported that amongst Escobedo's forces were 'said to be several companies of negroes, made up of deserters and discharged soldiers from the US army.' It seems clear, therefore, that whatever the exact number a certain proportion of Liberal troops were from the XXV Corps.

[301] Ibid, 133-34; Thompson, *Cortina*, 179

Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga highlights a number of Union veterans – Edelmiro Mayer, Francisco Meier and Juan Encking – who served on Escobedo's staff during the battle. Barry Cohen, meanwhile, cites a source who 'personally knew more than fifty Americans who handled the Liberal artillery at Santa Gertrudis.' In his account of the battle, Pitner gives no clue as to the ethnic makeup of the Liberal army in his account, although he does mention 'the frequent visits of the American officers' when he was in hospital in Camargo. Whether Pitner means former Union or Confederate officers now fighting for the Liberals or current US officers is unclear. Similarly, the rate at which the Austrian troops were cut down at Santa Gertrudis by volley fire suggests a disciplined, battle-hardened force which the XXV Corps certainly was, having fought in the Siege of Petersburg. Robert Benaway Brown emphasises the vicious effectiveness of the fire of repeating rifles in the battle, almost certainly supplied from the US. Jack Dabbs has even argued that the Liberal army utilised Gatling guns supplied by the Union which, if true, marks Santa Gertrudis out as the first battle to ever be fought with automatic weapons. To whatever degree, it seems clear that definitely Union and possibly Confederate veterans fought on the Liberal and Imperialist sides respectively at Santa Gertrudis.[302]

The effect of the Liberal victory was electric: at Santa Gertrudis, Escobedo captured not only the merchandise meant for Monterrey, but over 1000 muskets as well, along with eight pieces of artillery, ammunition and other military equipment. The Imperialists lost an estimated 400 dead and 1000 captured, at a cost of only 150 Liberal casualties. The situation along the lower Rio Grande was transformed. Just three days after the battle, Mejia gave up Bagdad and pulled his remaining troops (estimated at only 600 men) back into Matamoros;

[302] Jonas, *Habsburgs on the Rio Grande*, 186, 188; Pitner, *Maximilian's Lieutenant*, 129, 132, 137; *PUG 16*, Kip to Sheridan, 8/1/66, 32; Dabbs, *French Army in Mexico*, 172; Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword*, 448 (Weitzel quote); Cohen, Barry M., 'The Texas-Mexico Border, 1858-1867,' *Texana*, Vol. 6 No. 2 (1968), 164; Busch, Samuel, *Recollections of Mexico: The Last Ten Months of Maximilian's Empire* (Wilmington, De., 2001), ed. Ullman, Fred D., 143; Avery to Seward, 26/10/65, quoted in Rothera, *Wars and Reconstructions,* 69; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 243; Brown, 'Guns over the Border,' 171

within a week he had surrendered the town to the Liberals as well. By August, a general counteroffensive had secured northern Mexico for the Liberals, as Sheridan reported: they had 'recaptured Matamoros, Gamargo, Presidio de Rio Grande, Lampazos, Monterrey, Saltillo, Monclova, Durango, Chihuahua, and in fact hold nearly all of the country, putting the invaders on the defensive, and confining them to the Valley of Mexico, with a fair prospect of their speedy extermination.' All of this was as a result of Escobedo's victory at Santa Gertrudis, which Jerry Thompson describes as 'the Waterloo of the Imperial army on the Rio Grande.' Brian Hamnett has likewise described this as the decisive victory in turning the tide of the Mexican war against the Imperialists, whilst recently Raymond Jonas has noted that after the battle the end of the Empire 'seemed inevitable.'[303]

The Liberal victory at Santa Gertrudis was also decisive in changing official US policy towards the Mexican war effort. Nine days after the battle, Romero went to meet Grant in his office, who read him Sheridan's account of the battle. 'In Sheridan's opinion this victory was equivalent to ending the war in the Rio Grande,' Romero noted. In July, Sheridan telegraphed that 'every encouragement should now be given to the Liberals; and if I could get authority to sell them some of the surplus ordnance at Brownsville it would be a great help.' A week later, Sheridan pressed: 'I hope the Government will let me give the Liberals 5000 stand of arms; it would be a valuable contribution to a good cause.' Grant wrote to Stanton, urging 'a revocation of the order prohibiting the Ordnance Dept. from selling surplus Ordnance and Ordnance Stores.' Grant's appeal was successful, and the embargo on arms was removed. 'I am in hopes of being able to get authority to dispose of all of our surplus arms and munitions within your command, to the Liberals at Mexico,' he wrote to Sheridan. Thus

[303] Ibid, 179-80 (quote 180); Dabbs, *French Army in Mexico*, 172; *OR* 48.1, Report of Sheridan, 14/11/66, 300; Hamnett, Brian, 'Mexican Conservatives, Clericals and Soldiers: the "Traitor" Tomas Mejia through Reform and Empire, 1855-1867,' *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 20 No. 2 (2001), 204; Brown, 'Guns over the Border,' 171; Jonas, *Habsburgs on the Rio Grande*, 186, 188

the achievements, in part, of former Union soldiers exercising their geopolitical agency had helped to transform official US policy in supplying arms to the Liberals.[304]

Although Jerry Thompson has compared Santa Gertrudis with Waterloo, in terms of the role Union and possibly Confederate veterans played in it the closest historical comparison is the Battle of the Dunes fought in 1658. In this battle the French army under Turenne defeated the Spanish army led by John of Austria on the beaches outside Dunkirk. However, English contingents also fought in this battle on both sides. Turenne's army included a contingent of Cromwell's New Model Army, which was allied to France at the time, whilst the Spanish army included around 2000 Royalist exiles, including the future King James II. The Battle of the Dunes, whilst a Franco-Spanish conflict, was thus also a continuation in a foreign country, and in a foreign conflict, of the English Civil War. The comparison is, of course, not exact, but the reasons for Union and possibly Confederate veterans fighting at Santa Gertrudis were somewhat similar – the externalisation of an internal struggle, the projection of civil strife onto neighbouring geopolitics, and the conviction that a bloodily-won political settlement in one's polity could only be secured by a reordering of neighbouring geopolitics that would ensure that polity's safety.

The Battle of Santa Gertrudis demonstrates the agency of Union and possibly Confederate veterans and their practical impact in the borderland and indeed beyond. Whatever their exact number, Union veterans played a part in this decisive Liberal victory, and the Liberal army fought equipped with repeating rifles almost certainly from US arsenals (the best candidate is the Sharps repeating rifle) and possibly even Gatling guns, although the latter is highly unlikely. Liberal victory, utilising these formerly Union guns and men, secured the north-east and opened the way for an offensive into the Valley of Mexico and fall of the

[304] Schoonover, *Mexican Lobby*, 133; *PUG 16*, Sheridan to Grant, 16/7/66, 245; ibid, Sheridan to Rawlins, 21/7/66; ibid, Grant to Stanton, 28/7/66; ibid, Grant to Sheridan, 30/7/66, 267

Mexican Empire. The actions and decisions of these non-state, renegade state and/or nonelite actors in the lower Rio Grande borderland therefore had major repercussions beyond the borderland itself – they helped to end the military and civil crisis in Mexico, just as they had in the United States.

Conclusion

As the men who fought and bled on the battlefield, soldiers had a direct and dramatic impact on the outcome of geopolitical policies on the lower Rio Grande. The vast majority of them in this region were volunteers, either for armies directly or cooperating with others as in the case of the French cannoneers at Palmito Ranch or the Union cannoneers outside Matamoros in winter 1865.

Confederate veterans clearly fought for the Franco-Imperialists in the lower Rio Grande and elsewhere because, at least in part, they identified the Franco-Imperialist cause with that of the Confederacy. Although Maximilian was in fact hostile to the Confederacy, his decree of September 1865 suggests that they were not necessarily wrong in making this identification (and after all, the Mexican Empire was underpinned financially and militarily by Napoleon III, whose sympathy for the Confederacy was well-known). It is perhaps unsurprising that recalcitrant, unrepentant Confederates should join the Imperial army after the Confederacy's demise, in a similar way to how other veterans, Jesse James being the most obvious example, turned to outlawry as a way of continuing their struggle against the Union and the forces it represented.

At the same time, as we have seen not all Confederates who volunteered for service in Mexico fought for the Franco-Imperialists. In terms of the lower Rio Grande John Ford is the most obvious example. Ford may have been motivated by his friendship with Carvajal, but it

is also possible, as incongruous as it may seem, that some ex-Confederates were motivated more by notions of hemispheric republican solidarity than they were a sense of Confederate-Imperial (and concomitantly, Union-Liberal) affinity. Nonetheless, it appears that the majority of Confederates who travelled to Mexico fought on the Imperial side.

Why did these soldiers fight, after their own civil war had ended? Unfortunately, almost no evidence remains at what one might term the level of the other ranks, and so any reasons given has to be a matter of interpretation and guesswork. Nonetheless, possible reasons can be advanced, from the application of logic, comparison to international volunteers in other conflicts, and the memoirs and reports of these soldiers' officers. Undoubtedly many officers (that is to say, not generals), such as Jan Sobieski and Edelmiro Mayer fought because of a grand ideological conception about what both the American Civil War and the French intervention in Mexico were fought for. This also appears to have been true, per Sobieski's memoirs and Sheridan's reports, of at least some of their mean, as it also was of the Defenders of the Monroe Doctrine who sailed intrepidly, if in vain, from New Orleans to join in the Mexican struggle. Equally, they were fighting for a certain vision of Mexico, as a liberal, republican, democratic nation-state, and from the conviction that the settlement so bloodily won in the United States would not be secure until the concurrent conflict in Mexico was settled along similar lines as well.

Of course, there is no denying that financial renumeration also played a role, as the extremely generous bounties offered by the Juarez government suggest. Other factors in persuading American troops to fight in Mexico possibly included familial and communal relationships (such as the relationship between Ford and Carvajal, for example) and a desire for adventure. Some may have been afraid to return to civilian life after service in the army. Concerning European volunteers for Maximilian's army, Raymond Jonas argues that

'although some volunteers were inspired by the possibility of adventure, the sheer number of volunteers in skilled occupations suggests economic interest and despair.'[305]

For many of these soldiers, we can unfortunately only speculate as to their reasons for fighting for other causes along the lower Rio Grande. Why, for example, did the French cannoneers volunteer to fight at Palmito Ranch? Was it from a sense of adventure? Did they identify with the Confederate cause? Had they made friends with the Confederate soldiers and wanted to help them? Were they pressured to do so by their officers? Of course, each man would have his own reasons for fighting; but for the lower Rio Grande these have faded from the historical record. Adventure, ideological conviction, incompatibility with civilian life, economic despair: the reasons are probably always the same for military volunteers, and the question is more one of order of precedence.

Clearly, 'transnational warriors,' per Rothera's term, whilst they chose to fight in foreign conflicts, did not do so solely from the belief that they were defending a hemispheric conception of republicanism and democracy. However, it is impossible to be cynical and suggest this sort of motivation was unimportant. Soldiers who fought for these reasons certainly did exist, as examples such as Edelmiro Mayer, Jan Sobieski and the Defenders of the Monroe Doctrine prove. Similarly, moving across the battlelines, Confederate veterans fought in the Imperial army because of a similar sense that the war in Mexico was ideologically connected with the Civil War. This makes sense if we compare their service with that of foreign volunteers in other conflicts. In some ways, the service of Union and Confederate veterans in the French intervention is somewhat analogous to volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, as volunteers in both saw these conflicts as part of a much wider ideological and geopolitical struggle. As Giles Tremlett notes of the International Brigaders in Spain, 'only one political and moral category fits almost all the Brigaders. They were anti-

[305] Jonas, *Habsburgs on the Rio Grande*, 154

fascists.' One might draw a direct comparison between the Union volunteers in Mexico and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade of Americans that fought in Spain. Peter Carroll emphasises that whilst many in America 'felt as they did about fascism, similarly deploring its racism, militarisation and brutality . . . those who responded to the crisis acted primarily from political motives. Most were Communists.' The comparison is not exact – nor is the Spanish Civil War the only conflict that could be compared – but this would seem to suggest the role ideological motives play in persuading someone to volunteer for a foreign war.[306]

Motivations for decisions are one thing, the consequences of those decisions are another. The movement of these troops south of the Rio Grande – in particular the movement of Union veterans to join the Liberal Mexican army – by their actions helped to victory a certain vision of the Mexican state that many in the United States supported, including, as outlined in the previous chapter, Grant and Sheridan. By helping to secure a certain vision of the Mexican state, they (in some eyes at least) helped to secure the vision of the US state won on the battlefields of the Civil War – although that vision was of course still internally contested after 1865, and indeed arguably still is today.

Union veterans south of the Rio Grande played an important part in the defeat of the Franco-Imperialists and the restoration of Juarez to Mexico City. How decisive they were to this process overall is difficult to determine, as no reliable figures exist for the overall number of veterans who decided to fight with Juarez, or detailed accounts of their involvement in every military engagement. Nonetheless, the Battle of Santa Gertrudis hints at a decisive role played by Union veterans, from the disciplined volley fire Ernst Pitner's troops were struck by to the officers Gonzalez-Quiroga adumbrates on Escobedo's staff, deciding and implementing tactics and strategy. Sobieski's presence, commanding the reserve firing squad,

[306] Tremlett, Giles, *The International Brigades: Fascism, Freedom and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 2020), 7; Carroll, Peter N., *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Palo Alto, 1994), 2-3

at Maximilian's execution in Queretaro suggests a metaphor for the Union veteran impact overall: whilst, for obvious nationalistic reasons, Juarez could not place Union veterans front and centre, they were nonetheless an important if discreet part of the Liberal Mexican victory. In helping to secure Liberal victory and the end of the Mexican Empire, Union veterans were helping establish a vision of Mexico that was conducive to the settlement of the United States' sectional crisis, as secured by Confederate surrender and the legislative achievements of the Civil War-era US Congress, with the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments as their crowning achievement.

Most importantly, these troops were *volunteers*, particularly in the case of Union and Confederate veterans fighting in Mexico. Whatever their reasons for joining up, they chose to join. For Union volunteers, it was not the official policy of their government to send them there, although, as the various Monroe Doctrine societies, and the political speeches quoted in Chapter 4 suggest, there was a general pro-Liberal sentiment in the country that the government clearly shared – indeed, per Sobieski's memoirs, some went because they thought their government wished them to, and then withdrew when told Union soldiers might march south anyway. In volunteering, these men exercised a geopolitical agency as non-state or renegade state actors, taking a conscious choice to insert themselves into the geopolitical conflicts of the time. A sense of connection between events in Mexico and the United States was surely one factor for their enlistment. By ending the conflict in Mexico, Union volunteers believed they would help secure the settlement of the conflict in the United States. In contrast, Confederate volunteers who joined the Imperialists believed they could continue to fight against the sort of political settlement Confederate surrender had imposed on them, somewhat analogous to how English Royalists with the Spanish fought against the English Parliamentarians with the French in the Battle of the Dunes. The exact role of these veterans south of the Rio Grande, although most of the particulars are unclear, was nevertheless

important to the course of eventual Liberal victory and triumph of a Union-esque, and pro-Union, political settlement in Mexico.

CHAPTER SIX: CAUDILLOS

Introduction

Caudillo is a word for which there is no direct translation in the English language, although the synonym used most often for it is perhaps 'warlord.' As a consequence it is often considered in the Anglosphere as a pejorative, yet in the Hispanic world this was not necessarily the case: both Francisco Franco in Spain and independence fighter Emiliano Aguinaldo in the Philippines, for example, cloaked themselves in the title of '*el caudillo*' as a positive label. *Caudillos* were not necessarily dictators or oppressors, or perceived as such, as the support they enjoyed along the lower Rio Grande testifies. However, the English approximation of 'warlord' highlights a key feature of *caudillos* – although some, such as Franco, could be state actors, other *caudillos* could be non-state or renegade state actors in their sourcing and usage of power, operating either separate to or in subversion of central state institutions.[307]

As Will Fowler notes, the wars of independence enabled the emergence of *caudillos* throughout Latin America. 'The end of the colonial tie to traditional monarchical authority,' he writes, 'opened up a vacuum that was occupied by the military or regional strongmen or chieftains of the newly formed republics.' Fowler suggests a few pan-Latin American traits of *caudillos*: they had regional power bases; usually came from a military background; employed personality cults and 'populist performances'; and their despotism was perceived as a guard against 'social dissolution.'[308]

[307] Knight, Alan, *Bandits and Liberals, Rebels and Saints: Latin American since Independence* (Lincoln, 2022), 210; Preston, Paul, *Franco: A Biography* (London, 1993), 248-49; Linn, Brian McAllister, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence, 2000), 18-19

[308] Fowler, Will, *Santa Anna of Mexico* (Lincoln, Na, 2007), 347-48

Admittedly, the terminology or power of *caudillos* is not universally accepted amongst historians of this period. For example, Brian Hamnett emphasises the importance not of the *caudillo* but rather the *cacique* (literally, chieftain) whose power came from 'the localisation and regionalisation of politics [that] led to the predominance of personality.' Hamnett notes that 'some commentators' – he does not say which – 'have described Mexican federalism [in the period 1810-67] as the institutionalisation of *caciquismo*.' One is therefore faced with a choice: *caudillos* or *caciques*? I have decided to use the term *caudillo* because I feel it foregrounds the military nature of these leaders and their role in the geopolitics of the lower Rio Grande, and indeed beyond.[309]

This chapter focuses on two such *caudillos* who operated along the lower Rio Grande in this time period, with a short coda dedicated to a third who used the lower Rio Grande as a springboard for power over the nation as a whole: Santiago Vidaurri, Juan Cortina and Porfirio Diaz. This chapter argues that *caudillos* sought to influence US and Confederate policy and use alliances (whether *de facto* or *de jure*) with them or some of their citizens in order to seize, maintain or extend their own power along the lower Rio Grande. Just as Anglo generals such as Grant, Sheridan and Kirby Smith believed the US crisis could not be resolved, or that resolution secured, until the Mexican crisis was resolved along similar lines, so *caudillos* along the lower Rio Grande believed their power would not be secure (or could not be regained or even extended) until they had transformed Union or Confederate regional policy in their favour. *Caudillos* along the lower Rio Grande therefore always faced two ways, both south and north, in seeking to secure their personal control.

There is a sharp contrast between Vidaurri and Cortina and Mexican President Benito Juarez, who would arrive on the lower Rio Grande in early 1864, in retreat from Franco-Imperialist forces. Juarez' power was derived from his institutional position of president,

[309] Hamnett, *Juarez*, 6-7

which he had gained neither through populist personal nor military power (nor, in fairness, through election either). Juarez owed the presidency solely to the Mexican Constitution, which decreed that the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court should succeed the President if he died in office, as had happened in 1857.

Mexican liberalism as personified by Juarez and legislated for by the governments after 1855 was self-consciously modern, seeking to break with a past in which political power was dependent on the charisma and military power of individuals. Although Charles Hale, for example, has emphasised Mexican liberalism's debt to Spanish political thought, the United States was also a key factor in Mexican liberal ideology, if only because it provided a powerful and nearby example of such institutionalised liberalism working. Indeed, according to Mexican conservative Lucas Alaman, it worked only too well: according to him, it was precisely because of its liberal, republican nature that the United States had defeated Mexico and taken so much of its territory in 1848.[310]

Whether *caudillo*, *cacique*, or liberal institutionalist, Mexicans had to cope with the United States north of their border. As Porfirio Diaz is rumoured to have said: 'Poor Mexico! So far from God, and so close to the United States.' This also meant that the practice of Mexican power, especially in the borderland, was in some ways conditioned by their conception of American power and what it could achieve (positively or negatively) south of the border. Mexican *caudillos* wanted independence (*de facto* if not necessarily *de jure*) but they also wanted protection; they wanted trade, but they wanted to dictate the terms of that trade. These desires came up against the inevitable asymmetry of US-Mexican relations: the polity north of the Rio Grande was always more powerful than that south of it (in the

[310] Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in Age of Mora*, 213. Rachel St John has emphasised how the rise of regional *caudillos* due to lack of a strong central government; in contrast, Sarah Rodriguez sees it resulting from a commitment to federalism. (St John, *Line in the Sand*, 42; Rodriguez, 'Children of the Great Mexican Family,' 425)

aggregate, at least). Only during the Civil War, when the Confederacy relied upon the Matamoros trade (to whatever extent) and was consequently vulnerable, was this asymmetry in some ways reversed; but to preserve, regain or extend their non-state or renegade state power, *caudillos* along the lower Rio Grande were as reliant on their interactions with the US and the Confederacy as they were on their interactions with the Mexican central government.[311]

Santiago Vidaurri

The most powerful *caudillo* along the lower Rio Grande at this time was Santiago Vidaurri. One of the supporters of the Plan of Ayutla that toppled Santa Anna from power in 1855, Vidaurri ruled Nuevo Leon and Coahuila for almost a decade, from 1855 to 1864, with occasional periods in charge of Tamaulipas as well. Although he was elected as governor, Vidaurri maintained his position through intimidation, economic monopoly and a private army, often ignoring instructions from the central government, and was therefore to all extents and purposes a renegade state actor, who collaborated with central state policy when it suited his own ends.

The beginning of Vidaurri's rule postdates the Merchants' War, but he was in charge by the time of the Callahan Raid in 1855. His reaction to the Raid, and to runaway slaves in general, reveals a lot about both the extent of and the limits to his power. As noted in Chapter 1, his reaction to the Callahan Raid was to order Emilio Langberg to violently oppose it. Vidaurri was protective of runaway slaves in his domains, but the reasons were not altruistic: male runaways were guaranteed their freedom if they joined Vidaurri's army and served in the garrisons of his north-western frontier guarding against Native American raids. Indeed, as

[311] Eisenhower, John S.D., *So Far from God: The US War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (Norman, 1989), x

James David Nichols has noted, by 1858 (notably enough also when the Zona Libre was created) Vidaurri had reversed his position, and offered to return runaway slaves. For Nichols this change in policy came about because 'Santa Anna and the conservatives [were] out of power' in Mexico City. To maintain his regional independence, for Nichols at least, Vidaurri was forced to look for another benefactor, which became the US South rather than the Mexican nation-state. To put it somewhat glibly, one had to be a member of a state in order to be a renegade state actor.[312]

Clearly, with the proposed expeditions of Houston and the Knights in 1860, Vidaurri's domians were seen north of the Rio Grande as essentially lawless, certainly dangerous to Southern life and property in southern Texas, and by extension to sociopolitical institutions. The Confederacy, on the other hand, was much more unclear and uncertain in how it related to Vidaurri's quasi-independent power. Following its proclamation in Montgomery, Alabama, in February 1861, the Confederate attitude to Mexico quickly revealed itself to be a study in ambivalence: on the one hand, as the previous chapter has shown, many Southerners (who were also leading secessionists) yearned for the conquest of Mexico and its opening to slavery. On the other, Mexico was the only land border with a neutral power that the Confederacy possessed, and was therefore vital for the procuring of supplies. To this end the Confederate Congress passed an act prohibiting the export of cotton in 1861 with the exception of one place: Mexico.

As Robert May has noted, this reflected a division about how the Confederacy should present itself abroad. The Confederacy had been founded in part to help facilitate the spread of Southern slavery throughout the tropical New World. Article IV, Section 3 of the Confederate Constitution explicitly allowed for expansion and the legality of slavery in any additional territory. Davis even looked forward to the annexation of the lower Rio Grande in

[312] Baumgartner, *South to Freedom*, 170-74, 212; Nichols, 'The Line of Liberty,' 432

a speech he made on his way to his inauguration in Montgomery, Alabama. In Atlanta, Davis apparently 'spoke of the future of the Confederate States . . . with the northern portions of Mexico forming portions of its broad domain.' In other words, the long-term purpose of Confederate foreign policy (indeed, the long-term purpose of the Confederate state itself) was expansion, with north-eastern Mexico an explicit target of that expansion. At the same time, however, the Confederacy had to appeal as much as possible to a Europe that also had its sights set on expansion in the New World (Spain conquered Santo Domingo in April 1861 as the guns fired on Fort Sumter) and to avoid an additional war on its southern border. Confederate foreign policy was therefore constrained between what it wanted to be and the limits that geopolitical circumstances dictated. As Emory Thomas has noted, 'Southerners could not be all things to all people; yet they tried to be so, and as a result the Confederate diplomatic image was often unfocused.' Such an attitude in the corridors of power made a successful Confederate government foreign policy difficult, but not impossible.[313]

Confederate Secretary of State Robert Toombs sent two diplomats to Mexico, one to operate on a regional, subnational level and the other on a national level, in a clear case of polylateral diplomacy. The regional diplomat was Jose Augustin Quintero, who was sent as an ambassador to Vidaurri in his capital at Monterrey. The act of sending such an ambassador to Vidaurri reflects both his borderland strength vis a vis both Mexico and the Confederacy and the Confederacy's geopolitical weakness: Vidaurri was powerful enough to command his own diplomatic mission, independent of the mission to Mexico City, highlighting his geopolitical agency and autonomy. Equally, such an ambassadorial mission underlines how

[313] May, Robert, 'The Irony of Confederate Diplomacy: Visions of Empire, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Quest for Nationhood,' *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 83 No. 1 (2017), 78-83, 92-93; Confederate Constitution, 11/3/61, accessed at The Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School (Avalon Project - Constitution of the Confederate States; March 11, 1861 (yale.edu)) ; *Charleston Mercury,* 21/2/61; Thomas, *Confederate Nation*, 83; Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*, 247. For the Spanish invasion of Santo Domingo in 1861, see Eller, Anne, 'Dominican Civil War, Slavery, and Spanish Annexation, 1844-1865,' *American Civil Wars*, ed. Doyle, 147-66.

the Confederacy *had* to negotiate with Vidaurri if they were to be geopolitically successful in the borderland. Diplomatic relations with the central government in Mexico City would not be enough.

A case study of every rule having its exceptions, Quintero was a brilliant choice as a Confederate diplomat: firstly, he spoke Spanish, and secondly he knew Vidaurri personally, having met him in 1859. Born in Cuba and a (self-proclaimed) graduate of Harvard, Quintero was the editor of a prominent New Orleans newspaper and a noted poet and champion of both Cuban and Southern independence. Quintero apparently saw little conflict of interest in giving his support to a movement that had advocated annexing Cuba to the United States and in the summer made an 'expedition' to northern Mexico to meet with Vidaurri and his officials there on the Confederacy's behalf.[314]

One of the key reasons for Quintero's mission to Vidaurri was to stop the warlike depredations by men such as Juan Cortina in the lower Rio Grande borderland. Toombs informed Vidaurri that Quintero had been sent directly to him in 'the absence of speedy and constant communication with the [Mexican] Central Government,' and his main concern appeared to be 'evil-disposed Mexican citizens who reside within the limits of your jurisdiction' who had 'planned predatory expeditions against the citizens of the State of Texas' – a continuation of the concerns that had so vexed Houston earlier in the year. Quintero and Vidaurri met to discuss this in Vidaurri's capital of Monterrey, and in the course of their discussions, Vidaurri raised with Quintero the possibility of trade with and through north-eastern Mexico. Quintero soon learned that lead, saltpetre, gunpowder and copper could all be obtained in Nuevo Leon and Coahuila at reasonable prices. Vidaurri and Quintero also discussed building a transcontinental railroad connecting Texas to Mazatlan. Such a

[314] Lavelle, Gerardo Gurzo, *Una vecindad efímera. Los Estados Confederados de América y su política exterior hacia México, 1861-1865* (Mexico City, 2001), 110; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire,* 97-98; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 183; Rodriguez, 'Children of the Great Mexican Family,' 426

railroad, as Thomas Schoonover phrases it, 'would bind northern Mexico to the Confederacy and be the shortest route to the Pacific.'[315]

Vidaurri then went one step further: he offered to ally his states with the Confederacy, and even to have them annexed into the nascent Southern republic. Why did Vidaurri suggest this? The reasons for doing so reflected the borderland nature of Vidaurri's domain, as they faced both south and north. For Gonzalez-Quiroga, Vidaurri's suggestion was 'hedging his bets,' preparing a defence of his power base if it was threatened by Mexico City. Similarly, Patrick Kelly notes that it 'arose from the long-standing tensions between the federalist Vidaurri and the nationalist Juarez.' Similarly, Ronnie Tyler notes that Vidaurri had developed a 'disillusionment with Juarez and the liberals' and hoped that the Confederacy would help with both security and economic development. Additionally, he was attracted by the Southern doctrine of states' rights as a way to maintain his own regional power. William Kiser suggests that Vidaurri saw 'geopolitical absorption' into the Confederacy as a financial benefit, and also considered it the best way of protecting his autonomy from 'the impending threat of French imperialism' (although Kiser arrived at this conclusion given the French had not yet even landed at Vera Cruz is unclear).[316]

Vidaurri's reaction to the foreign policy of this new state was clearly positive. It is difficult to believe – especially after the events recounted in the previous chapter – that Vidaurri was unaware of the Confederacy's desire for expansion. In suggesting Confederate annexation, Vidaurri was effectively attempting to dictate the terms of that Confederate expansion. He was also demonstrating his geopolitical agency and autonomy from the central Mexican state. Such a transference of sovereignty would have amounted to a massive

[315] Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 113-15; Quintero to Toombs, 19/8/61 and 22/8/61, referenced ibid, 115; *ONR* Series 2 Volume 3 (Washington, 1922), Toombs to Vidaurri, 22/5/61, 101; Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion*, 274

[316] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 184; Kelly, 'The Cat's-Paw,' in *American Civil Wars*, ed. Doyle, 71; Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri*, 52; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 71

geopolitical dislocation in North America and it was not proposed by Quintero or any other Confederate diplomat. Vidaurri, the Mexican renegade state actor, had effectively dared Confederate foreign policy to fulfil its original purpose and offered subnational support for it to do so.

In September Quintero was ordered to return as 'confidential agent of this Government in north-eastern Mexico, to reside at Monterrey [Vidaurri's capital].' Quintero was to 'assure His Excellency that the President cordially reciprocates his expressions of friendship and good will towards the Confederate States,' and to enquire whether Vidaurri 'could be induced to sell to this Government a half or any considerable portion of the arms in his possession.' Were he to do so, this 'would be regarded as the most signal and valuable proof of his friendship for the Confederate Government and people.' Davis, however, felt it would be 'imprudent and impolitic . . . to take any steps at present in regard to the proposition [of annexation] made by Governor Vidaurri.' The opportunity to absorb Nuevo Leon and Coahuila into the Confederacy was therefore passed up by Richmond.[317]

Why did Davis refuse Vidaurri's offer? According to Frank Owsley, Davis refused Vidaurri's suggestion due to a desire, once independence was won, to expand southwards in order to spread slavery and so as not to upset European powers which were known to be planning an intervention in Mexico. In other words, an increase in Confederate territory to include a north-eastern Mexico where Vidaurri, who, as James David Nichols has noted, was an opponent of slavery, was in charge was the wrong sort of expansion for the Confederacy. Robert May notes that Davis's decision 'made strategic sense,' not only for the reasons Owsley outlined, but also because adding north-eastern Mexico to the Confederacy would allow the Union to blockade it and therefore diminish, rather than increase, the amount of supplies the Confederacy could obtain through that territory. Davis may also have been

[317] *ONR* 2.3, Browne to Quintero, 3/9/61, 253-55

concerned that agreement to annexation would jeopardise John Pickett's mission to Mexico City and even embroil the Confederacy in a war with Mexico. The limits imposed on Confederate foreign policy by wider geopolitical concerns therefore prevented an annexation of north-eastern Mexico, despite this, as Davis's speech in February suggests, being an objective of the Confederacy.[318]

As Patrick Kelly points out, this shows 'the limits of the Confederate strategic position in Mexico.' Wider geopolitical concerns prevented the Confederacy from enacting the expansion it craved and that the renegade state actor Vidaurri had offered to enable. Vidaurri's proposal, however, also shows the limits of Mexican central state power in the lower Rio Grande borderland. Despite the growing antagonism between Juarez and Vidaurri, Vidaurri was able to ignore official government policy in order to pursue his own goals – in other words, to act as a renegade state actor. This extended to suggesting detaching his states from one polity and absorbing them into another. This demonstrates the potential of Vidaurri's geopolitical agency and that he was prepared to exercise this in order to preserve his own power. Perhaps most importantly, as Sarah Rodriguez notes, 'it nonetheless demonstrates . . . the variety of geopolitical arrangements still available well into the nineteenth century.'[319]

Vidaurri's interaction with Quintero also suggests a power imbalance between the renegade state and the state actor in terms of who proposed and initiated foreign policies. After all, the topics of annexation and cross-border trade were first mentioned by Vidaurri

[318] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 184;; Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri*, 52-53, 57-58 (quotes 52 and 58); Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 116-17; May, 'Irony of Confederate Diplomacy,' 91. Matthew Karp suggests that the Confederacy abandoned expansion in general not because of the Civil War itself and the fear of additional conflicts but rather 'with an ideological and strategic calculus whose fundamental postulate was the protection of slave property.' (Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*, 247-48.) Many histories of Civil War diplomacy or global histories of the Civil War do not even mention Vidaurri's proposal: see for example Jones, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy* and Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*.

[319] Kelly, Patrick, 'The Cat's-Paw: Confederate Ambitions in Latin America,' in *American Civil Wars*, ed. Doyle, 70; Rodriguez, 'Children of the Great American Family,' 429

rather than Quintero. Of course, Quintero may have led the conversation in one or both directions, but he claims no credit for it in his correspondence. In other words, these proposals of geopolitical dislocation and commercial connection came from the renegade state actor Vidaurri, rather than the central state diplomat Quintero. Vidaurri was attempting to take advantage of and even dictate the course and shape of Confederate foreign policy.

Equally, the mere fact that the Confederacy sent an ambassador not just to Juarez in Mexico City, but also to Vidaurri in Monterrey, shows the lack of Mexican central control along its north-eastern border, where the local held more power than the national. Vidaurri's annexation proposal was of course completely against Mexican official policy, as was his engagement in trade with the Confederacy. Again, this was a reflection of the lack of central government control along the border, and was in many ways a continuation of a pattern that had already begun: in 1860, for example, the governor of Guanajato state allegedly drew up a treaty with the Knights of the Golden Circle, providing for them to, in effect, take over the province. In another sense, Vidaurri's suggestion of annexation was also a way of *de jure* securing his *de facto* independence from the central Mexican state and preserving his regional autonomy. That Vidaurri failed in this attempt had nothing to with the strength of the Mexican state, and everything to do with the weakness and disinclination of the Confederate state instead.[320]

Despite this Confederate rebuff, Vidaurri continued to cooperate closely with the new polity on his northern border. After Thomas Corwin, the US Ambassador in Mexico City, had negotiated for US troops to cross Mexican territory around Guaymas as they marched from California to New Mexico, Vidaurri declared that he would oppose the transit of any Federal troops through Nuevo Leon and Coahuila and would write to the governors of the other frontier states to encourage them to do the same. Again, this was Vidaurri acting against the

[320] Keehn, *Knights of Golden Circle*, 38

official policy of the Mexican central government and initiating, or threatening to, his own foreign policy. The Confederate State Department praised his determination to 'preserve . . . the Sovereignty of his State.' What this meant in practice was Vidaurri's preservation of his localised, pro-Confederate power from the imposition of central, anti-Confederate control, both by opposing Union incursion and encouraging cross-border trade. Monopolised by his son-in-law Patricio Milmo, the receipts of this trade greatly enhanced Vidaurri's political and military might. In one key respect, however, Vidaurri refused to cooperate with the Confederacy: he refused to sell them military supplies. This was so he could use them himself in order to defend himself from the central state authority. In being able to dictate these terms of trade, Vidaurri showed himself to be the key player when it came to deciding commercial policy in the borderland, not the Confederacy. The balance of power therefore lay with the Mexican renegade state actor and not the Confederate state.[321]

An important impediment to the trade was the customs charge levied on cotton as it crossed the border from Texas to Mexico. At the Rio Grande, any merchant looking to trade cotton in Matamoros had to pay the Confederacy one-eighth of a cent per pound of cotton in excise, plus the ferry fee. Once across the river, the merchant had to pay another duty to Vidaurri's customs officers of two cents per pound, or $10 per bale. This naturally made exporting cotton from Matamoros less appealing to European investors than it would be otherwise. After lobbying from Quintero, Vidaurri reduced his rate to one cent per pound in March 1862. A mere two weeks later, however, Vidaurri suddenly rescinded the reduction and in response to Quintero's questioning announced that the Confederacy was at fault, blaming John Ford for refusing his request to attack Jose Carvajal's army, camped outside Brownsville. Vidaurri argued that he needed additional revenue to support the increased military presence in Matamoros required to protect the town against Carvajal. Once Carvajal

[321] *ONR* 2.3, Browne to Quintero, 14/1/62, 151-52; Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri*, 53-54

disappeared into the Mexican interior, Vidaurri lowered the duty back to one cent per pound. He further made border towns Reynosa, Camargo and Mier free ports of entry, and declared Monterrey a 'free depot' for cotton, meaning cotton could be stored there for free with duty only payable upon shipment to Matamoros. As James Daddysman has noted, 'this satisfactory arrangement continued with but slight interruption for the remainder of the war.' Even actions by Confederate renegade state actors could not affect Vidaurri's helpfulness. After the Chilton raid discussed in Chapter 4, of Confederate troopers into Mexico without permission, Quintero rushed to see Vidaurri – based on past experiences such as the Texan protection of Carvajal, a tariff rise was quite possible. Vidaurri himself, however, was not unduly concerned. For him, this made Texas and Tamaulipas equal after the raids from Vidaurri's territory into Texas by Mexicans and Unionists.[322]

The occupation of Brownsville by Union troops in November 1863 posed another danger to Confederate-Vidaurri relations. That December, Confederate quartermaster Charles Russell travelled to Monterrey and was introduced to Vidaurri by Quintero. Russell found Vidaurri to be 'a gentleman of liberal and extended views' and the two soon came to an agreement that cotton would pass through Eagle Pass with a customs charge of 25%, well below the normal import duties. Russell also returned to Texas with a loan of $100,000 from Vidaurri, secured against cotton exports to and through Nuevo Leon. As far as Russell could see, the only barrier to Confederate trade along the upper Rio Grande would be lack of cotton. Despite Union success along the lower Rio Grande, Vidaurri was prepared to not only help the continuation of the Confederate trade through Matamoros but even to loan the Confederacy money. Why? One can only presume that Vidaurri had calculated that

19. *OR* 1.26.2, Quintero to Benjamin, 21/3/63, 67-69; Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 121-22 (quote 122); Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri*, 74, 110

supporting the Confederacy was still offered the best advantage in helping him to maintain his own power base in Coahuila and Nuevo Leon.[323]

At the same time, this is not to say that Vidaurri always conformed to the Confederacy's wishes – in other words, that he surrendered his geopolitical agency. Indeed, it was precisely to retain this that he supported the Confederacy, even, paradoxically, suggesting the annexation of his provinces to the incipient nation. He demonstrated his independence and initiative in his dealings with the Confederacy in an incident involving the Treasury agent Cornelius Thayer. Thayer had been despatched from Richmond by Treasury Secretary Memminger with $15,000,000 in Confederate money to the Transmississippi for use in military purchasing. Due to Union control of the Mississippi River Valley, Thayer had departed by ship from Wilmington, sailing first to the West Indies and then from there to Bagdad. On the road from Bagdad to Eagle Pass, Thayer was waylaid by troops acting under Vidaurri's orders who promptly confiscated the $15,000,000 that Thayer had brought with him. At the same time, Vidaurri remained suspect to his allies south of the Rio Grande: in 1864, Alphonse Aymard wrote to French commander Achille Bazaine that 'Vidaurri's behaviour . . . is very ambiguous, and I would not be surprised at all if he conceived the crazy thought of forming in the North a small independent state.'[324]

In his actions during his decade of power from 1855-64 Vidaurri demonstrated both his geopolitical agency and his commitment to a certain vision of regionalised, decentralised Mexican politics – indeed, the one was inseparable from the other. By acting independently, or quasi-independently, as a renegade state actor, up to suggesting annexation to the Confederacy, he was putting into action his vision of political power in Mexico as federalised

[323] *OR* 1.26.2, Russell to Johnson, 1/1/64, 566-70

[324] *Correspondence with the Treasury Department of the Confederate States of America, 1861-1865* (Washington, 1880), ed. Thian, Raphael, Thayer to Memminger, 22/12/63, 267-69; *Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de México*, Vo. 18 (Mexico City, 1908), ed. Garcia, Genaro, Aymard to Bazaine, 17/3/64, 10-13

and decentralised, located at the periphery rather than at the centre. Equally, it was this very conception of Mexican politics as something federalised and decentralised that enabled Vidaurri to act in this way. The suggestion of annexation – if it had been made in good faith – suggests that Vidaurri was more committed to a regionalised, decentralised vision of politics than he was to decentralisation within the bounds of a particular nation-state.

Considered on a more practical level, interaction with the political and economic elites north of the Rio Grande was crucial to Vidaurri in maintaining, and attempting to extend, his hold on power. As noted in Chapter 2, he purchased arms and ammunition for his armed forces from Southern merchants during the War of the Reform (and doubtless afterwards as well), whilst runaway slaves served to provide manpower for those armed forces. Vidaurri maintained a close and usually cooperative relationship with the Confederacy in order to maximise the revenue he received from the Matamoros trade, thus helping him to maintain and increase his power. The Matamoros trade provided also provided him with a *casus belli* to try and take control of Tamaulipas. It is notable that the only two times Vidaurri broke off or threatened his relationship with the Confederacy was due to money: when he suspended cotton shipments in early 1862 during Carvajal's siege of Matamoros, and when he seized Thayer's funds in 1863. In all of Vidaurri's actions, therefore, one can see the American sectional crisis directly affecting the shape of Mexican politics on the lower Rio Grande. Interaction with the Confederacy helped determine to what extent Vidaurri could maintain and extend his renegade state power.

Vidaurri vs Juarez

In February 1864 Vidaurri suddenly fell from power. After the French had broken through at Puebla and took Mexico City in June 1863, Juarez and his army had retreated northwards

through the Valley of Mexico towards Coahuila and Nuevo Leon. In the initial phases of Juarez' withdrawal he and Vidaurri had cooperated: Juarez sent some 28 pieces of artillery ahead to Monterrey for safekeeping, for example, whilst Vidaurri advised Cortina to cooperate with Juarez against the French – although Ronnie Tyler suggests this may have been a Machiavellian political move to ensure Cortina's defeat by the French, thus delivering Matamoros back into Vidaurri's hands without having to deploy his own troops. The cotton trade, however, drove them apart, or at least provided a *casus belli*: Vidaurri lobbied Juarez for an extension of the Zona Libre along the Rio Grande from Matamoros to Monterrey, allowing him access to Tamaulipas' customs receipts. Juarez refused and issued a decree that henceforth all the revenue from the customs house at Piedras Negras would go to the federal government. Not only did this constitute the main source of Vidaurri's income, and was therefore vital to him, but in the Mexico of early 1864 it probably constituted the main source of income in the entire country. Access to it was therefore equally vital for Juarez.[325] Finally, all pretence was abandoned, and Juarez issued a proclamation deposing Vidaurri and marched on Monterrey, where he arrived on February 12th.[326]

He arrived with 3000 men, albeit without artillery. Vidaurri had withdrawn into Monterrey's citadel and had enough food to withstand a siege of several days. He also had those 28 guns Juarez had earlier sent ahead for safekeeping, which the Mexican President now found trained by Vidaurri's men on his own troops.[327] After two days, however, Vidaurri came out to negotiate, feigning loyalty as he knew Juarez' troops had no artillery and problems of supply meant they would be withdrawing shortly. By the end of the discussions, although the exact course and cause of events is unclear, Vidaurri's son had drawn a pistol and threatened Juarez, who fled through the streets in a stagecoach with an angry mob of

[325] Tyler, *Vidaurri*, 125, 136-37
[326] *PRFA 38.3,* Kimmey to Seward, 4/3/64, 60-61
[327] *OR* 1.34.2, Kimmey to Seward, 12/2/64, 627-28

Vidaurri loyalists in pursuit. (Juarez himself, however, insisted that it was 'at a trot . . . The President of the Republic cannot run.')[328]

Both sides sent to Cortina in Matamoros for aid and eventually he declared for Juarez, fearing that Vidaurri meant to annex Tamaulipas to his own private empire, and promised to send 800 men to help attack Monterrey.[329] This would, in theory at least, sever the cotton trade at its outlet from Confederate-sympathetic control. Although Vidaurri had not, contrary to impression given by most accounts, definitely agreed to support the French, even if he had their armies would not have arrived to help him in time. Juarez now returned to Monterrey, this time with 7000 men and with artillery, and Vidaurri fled for the border with his army, guns and state treasury – in other words, Vidaurri was hoping for sanctuary in the Confederacy not only for himself, but also for the objects that allowed him to exercise power – his army, artillery and money. Near the village of Villa Aldama, however, only halfway to the Rio Grande, a flying column of 1600 *Juaristas* caught up with Vidaurri's army and destroyed it. Having spiked his artillery, Vidaurri fled across the Rio Grande to Laredo to find refuge with his pre-war friend, Santos Benavides, before continuing on to Houston, where Magruder put him up in one of the city's finest hotels.[330]

The confrontation between Juarez and Vidaurri has been described by one Mexican historian as 'a dramatic duel, that helped set the course of the country.'[331] Had Juarez been defeated, it could well have spelled the end of his government, for he would have been caught between Vidaurri's forces and the French. However, it was Vidaurri's power in the Mexican north-east that was broken – although John Ford, initially at least, believed he would continue

[328] Tyler, *Vidaurri*, 138-39; Smart, Charles Allen, *Viva Juarez!: A Biography* (London, 1963), 302
[329] *OR* 1.34.2, Herron to Stone, 9/3/64, 535-36; Thompson, *Cortina*, 132
[330] Herron to Stone, 20/3/64, Herron Collection, 84; ibid, Hyde Clark to Stone, 30/3/64, 90; Thompson, *Cortina*, 133; Tyler, *Vidaurri*, 141-42
[331] *Juarez: Historia y Mito*, ed. Vazquez, Josefina Zoraida (Mexico City, 2010), 459

to be an important player in regional politics.[332] Vidaurri would, however, never return to Nuevo Leon. From Houston he travelled to French-controlled Mexico and formally threw in his lot with the Franco-Imperial cause. By September 1864 he was in Mexico and would briefly serve as the Emperor Maximilian's prime minister before being executed alongside him in Queretaro for treason three years later, on the orders of Juarez. Juarez himself, meanwhile, established his capital at Monterrey by the second week of April. Not only had he dealt with the threat from Vidaurri, he had also secured a direct conduit between himself and the Union army across the Rio Grande – and control of the customs houses through which the Matamoros trade flowed.

Santiago Vidaurri's career is indicative of the power renegade state actors could wield amid the borderlands and weak central governments of mid-nineteenth century North America. Vidaurri had sustained himself in power in north-eastern Mexico for almost a decade, ruling almost completely without reference to the government of the polity he was nominally a part of. Vidaurri's renegade state geopolitical agency had enabled the trade that helped sustain the Transmississippi Confederacy and in September 1861 his offer of annexation (to maintain his own independent regional power) would have expanded the Confederacy almost as far south as the Valley of Mexico itself. Historians who have studied Vidaurri all note his *de facto* independent power. Ronnie Tyler notes that Vidaurri was 'the leading caudillo in the northern states. He had argued for states' rights.' Vidaurri 'defended his autonomy' against Juarez, who 'would severely limit his independent manner of governing.' James Fred Rippy notes that Vidaurri was only 'nominally a support of Juarez' and that 'the weakness of the Mexican central government, together with his wide popularity, enabled him to wield great influence in his own and neighbouring states.' DP Crook has noted he was a 'quasi-independent chieftain.' Vidaurri was not the last of his kind in Mexico, a

[332] *OR* 1.34.3, Ford to Turner, 17/4/64, 775-76

reflection of how weak central government in that country would continue to be, certainly when compared to the United States. He is, however, a perfect example of how renegade state actors could wield independent geopolitical agency and help shape the destinies of polities across the North American continent.[333]

Vidaurri's fall in March 1864 was on paper calamitous for the Confederacy and their trade via Matamoros as now Juarez at Monterrey and Cortina at Matamoros controlled the trade's outlets, and neither of them were known to be particularly friendly to the Confederacy. The Confederates were convinced that Juarez, so close to Lincoln and opposed to the Confederacy, would cut the cotton trade off altogether.[334] Soon after Juarez had established himself in Monterrey, Ford came to believe he had given permission for the Federals to deploy on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande into Tamaulipas to march on Laredo. If this happened, Ford requested permission to send his own troops across the river to fight the Yankees in Mexico. 'It would almost be tantamount to a declaration of war on the part of the Juarez government against the Confederate States,' he wrote to Magruder, who promptly endorsed Ford's intentions to fight Federals in Mexico if he found them there, 'as it would be a declaration of war.' Nonetheless, until such evidence was obtained, he advised Ford to cultivate friendly relations with Juarez. The Confederacy therefore feared a Mexican policy that enabled Federal aggression against it by allowing the Union to strategically utilise Mexican space to outflank Confederate positions.[335]

Confederate fears about Juarez turned about to be misplaced. The trade was too valuable, and Juarez' finances were too dire for him to ignore it. Not only did the trade continue via Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass, Juarez also cooperated with the Confederacy in

[333] Tyler, *Vidaurri*, 13; Rippy, *United States and Mexico*, 234-35; Crook, DP, *The North, the South and the Powers 1861-1865* (New York, 1974), 333
[334] *OR* 1.34.3, Redmond to Dickinson, 21/3/64, 724-25
[335] Ibid, Ford to Turner, 17/4/64, 775-76; ibid, Ford to Turner, 5/5/64, 807-08. A comparison here may be drawn with the Allies' use of neutral Greece to open a new front and outflank the Central Powers during World War 1.

its operation. Jose Quintero stuck around in Monterrey after Vidaurri fled, and soon secured an interview with the Mexican President. Juarez invited him to dinner, and assured Quintero that he intended to keep the trade open – now that he was in control of the customs house at Piedras Negras, with its income of $40,000 a month, he could hardly afford not to. 'The commerce between Texas and Mexico is quite brisk,' Quintero reported to Judah Benjamin in May, about a month after Juarez had taken control.[336] For the same reason, Cortina cooperated with the Confederacy in Matamoros. Shortly after Quintero's interview with Juarez, Magruder wrote in person to Cortina, thanking him for arranging to protect the cotton trade through Laredo.[337] When a former subordinate of Vidaurri, Julian Quiroga (who may also have been his son), cut the road from Piedras Negras to Monterrey with 200 men, Juarez moved his troops out to attack them. Not only was he a political opponent, the trade was also too valuable and necessary to be interrupted. Thus Juarez, the opponent of slavery, found himself in cooperation with the Confederacy.[338]

Of course, Juarez had not suddenly become pro-Confederate or pro-slavery, nor had he become anti-Union: there was simply no other way for his government to survive in early 1864. Ronnie Tyler notes that Juarez' policy was 'no doubt . . . [influenced by] the revenue that he was already receiving from the Confederate trade,' whilst according to James Daddysman, Juarez and Quintero 'cooperated for the mutual benefits of the trade.' As Miguel Gonzalez-Quiroga phrases it, 'commerce continued because it was in the interest of all the participants.' Indeed, one could reasonably argue that the Confederacy's trade with Europe did as much (unwittingly enough) to keep Juarez in power, or in contention for power, as Union sympathy and support did. The purity of ideological beliefs always had to be subordinated to the harsh realities of the geopolitical situation, and in early 1864 as much as

[336] Quoted in Tyler, *Vidaurri*, 145
[337] Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 96; *OR* 1.34.3, Magruder to Cortina, 22/5/64, 835
[338] Tyler, *Vidaurri*, 36, 145-46

Juarez needed Union support (which he continued to court) he also needed money, for which the Matamoros trade was really his only source. In other words, Juarez lacked the power to influence or impose the political construction he wanted to see north of the Rio Grande and was forced to cooperate with the political and sociopolitical construction that he opposed, even though that wanted to see his own power ended south of the river.[339]

Whilst Juarez was not a *caudillo* (although political opponents would accuse him of acting as one, especially after the Imperial defeat in 1867), the Confederate-Liberal collaboration on the lower Rio Grande during 1864 might be seen as a clear example of the 'intermestic' nature of Mexican-American affairs. Despite his opposition to slavery and to American expansion, Juarez was forced by political reality to cooperate with the pro-slavery, pro-expansionist Confederacy in order to maintain his political viability (and, indeed, vice versa) in Mexico and continue his struggle against the French, whom many of the Confederacy's leading commanders in the Transmississippi were attempting to draw into open alliance with the Confederacy. Misery does indeed make strange bedfellows.

Juan Cortina: The Cortina War, 1859-60

Perhaps the most famous of the violent episodes along the lower Rio Grande between the Mexican-American War and the American Civil War is the First Cortina War. The outlines of the conflict are simple enough: its instigator was one Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, scion of an ancient landholding family along the lower Rio Grande that had once owned vast stretches of territory north of the river, including the land on which Brownsville had been built. Cortina was an avowed opponent of Anglo Southerners – he had fought in or alongside the Mexican army during the Mexican-American War, and against Carvajal's army in the Merchants' War.

[339] Smart, *Viva Juarez!*, 308-09; Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri*, 144; Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 97; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 209

In the late 1850s Charles Stillman began steadily manoeuvring Cortina's mother out of most of her remaining landholdings. According to Cortina's biographer, these 'extended legal complications over land also edged Cortina to the edge of open rebellion.'[340]

Whatever the exact effect of the Zona Libre in the late 1850s, for men such as Cortina north of the Rio Grande, there was no prosperity to be enjoyed, or if there was it came at a price. Riding through Texas in the early 1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted noted that Mexicans were being expelled from their homes on charges of stealing horses or fomenting slave insurrection. David Montejano has noted a 'series of punitive expulsions [that] occurred in Central and Southeast Texas . . . Mexicans were driven from Austin in 1853 and again in 1855, from Seguin in 1854, from the counties of Matagorda and Colorado in 1856, and from Uvalde in 1857.' One especially violent manifestation of this discrimination was the so-called Cart War in 1857, which took place near San Antonio. Mexican freighters undercut Anglo teamsters in haulage charges, and between July and November 1857 Anglo bands attacked and murdered the freighters in Goliad and Karnes Counties. Although the official response was encouraging – Governor Elisha Pease commissioned Rangers to track down the murderers and US Army troops were detached to protect freighter convoys, whilst prominent firms in San Antonio such as Howard and Ogden supported the freighters – many Tejanos fled to the Rio Grande. As Jerry Thompson notes 'Cortina was certain to have heard of the Cart War and ethnic violence elsewhere in the state' and as a consequence 'he became more and more restless.'[341]

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[340] Thompson, *Cortina*, 22-23, 31-32

[341] Olmsted, Frederick Law, *A Journey through Texas: or, A Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (New York, 1857), 502-03; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 28; Cox, Mike*, The Texas Rangers Volume I: Wearing the Cinco Peso, 1821-1900* (New York, 2008), 141-43; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 125-26; Thompson, *Cortina*, 35. Although Thompson refers to the Cart War as 'ethnic violence,' Gonzalez-Quiroga notes that 'it is not clear if the attacks were motivated by competitions for jobs or racial hatred, or both.' (Ibid; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 125.) Montejano mentions 75 murders, but this is the only precise figure I have found and Montejano does not cite where he found this figure. (Montejano, *Anglos and*

Matters came to a head for Cortina one night in Brownsville in July 1859 when he witnessed Marshal Robert Shears arrest a former servant of his for abusing local businessman Gabriel Catsel. The Mexican was apparently drunk and according to some reports armed, and in the course of the arrest Shears began to pistol-whip him. Cortina strode forward to intervene; heated words were exchanged; and Cortina shot Shears in the shoulder. Cortina rode out of Brownsville with his former servant and went to Matamoros, beyond US jurisdiction. In his absence, he was indicted for murder.[342]

Cortina bided his time, and then in the early hours of September 28th, 1859, launched a raid on Brownsville with around 70 men, undoubtedly taking advantage of the lack of a US garrison at Fort Brown. He divided his men into groups of four or five and ordered them to find and kill members of the Anglo elite that Cortina had on his 'death list.' In total, five people were killed. The Cortina War had started. Rumours soon spread that Brownsville had been sacked and Cortina was marching on Corpus Christi with more than a thousand men. Texas Governor Hardin Runnels immediately despatched Rangers to the lower Rio Grande, among them John Ford. Ford did not arrive before the Rangers had suffered a series of small defeats at Cortina's hands and Brownsville had to be reinforced by US Army regulars under Major Samuel Heintzelman. 'In truth we lost in all the fights with that desperado until Major Samuel P. Heinzelman's regular troops appeared,' Ford later wrote.[343]

Ford and Heintzelman moved out to attack Cortina, and battle was eventually joined outside Rio Grande City on December 27th. Ford's Rangers were in the vanguard and became engaged before Heintzelman's regulars and artillery could arrive. Ford remembered the battlefield as 'very foggy' which possibly helped disguise his lack of support from Cortina.

Mexicans, 29.). Karl Jacoby suggests Mexican expulsion was undertaken in order to remove their ambiguous position from Anglo conceptions of racial hierarchy. (Jacoby, *Strange Career of William Ellis*, 23)

[342] Thompson, *Cortina*, 37-39

[343] Ibid, 40-45, 62-66; Cox, *The Texas Rangers*, 154-55; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 265

Although 'the fire of the enemy was terrific,' including two pieces of artillery, Ford later wrote that 'the number of Texians actually engaged at any time was not much higher than ninety.' A flanking detachment managed to silence the *Cortinista* artillery, and Ford was about to order a charge when he heard Mexican bugles. A *Cortinista* cavalry charge thundered towards his battle line, but the Rangers took cover in the chaparral and opened fire: 'many a charger galloped off, carrying an empty saddle; Cortina's bold riders were left on the ground.'[344]

Nonetheless, according to Jerry Thompson the Rangers were 'pressed on three sides' and 'preparing to fall back' when Heintzelman's regulars suddenly appeared. Cortina ordered a retreat and Captain George Stoneman's 2nd US Cavalry charged forwards to turn the retreat into a rout. Ford's Rangers also saddled up and joined in. Cortina conducted a fighting retreat for ten miles with the main body of his force, in the process abandoning both of his artillery pieces, running out of ammunition and being reduced to throwing his walking stick at the Rangers in a fit of exhausted rage.[345]

Fifteen Rangers were wounded in the Battle of Rio Grande City. Cortina's losses were far more excessive. Officially, Heintzelman listed 60 Mexicans killed out of a total force of 590, but Ranger accounts suggest a far higher number. Ford recalled saying to Stoneman: '"There are three companies of infantry under the riverbank. Had you not better compliment them with a notice?" Stoneman did so, and out of all congregated there only ten or twelve were ever heard of again . . . None of the Mexicans proposed to surrender.' Another Ranger recalled the bloody aftermath of the battle: 'We had no use for prisoners,' he wrote in the *Corpus Christi Ranchero*, 'therefore only three were permitted to be taken.'[346]

[344] Ibid, 272-73; Thompson, *Cortina*, 78-79
[345] Ibid, 79-80; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 273-74
[346] Ibid, 274; Thompson, *Cortina*, 80; *Corpus Christi Ranchero*, 7/1/60

Heintzelman noted in his diary 'I hope now that the matter is ended,' but despite this crushing defeat Cortina, like a Tejano William Wallace, now took to guerrilla warfare instead. By January 1860, Cortina was reported to have at least 150 men under arms personally, whilst other bands also operated under his name. Ford crossed the Rio Grande to attack Cortina and his men three times the following month, at Rancho La Bolsa, Rancho La Mesa and Reynosa. On each occasion Cortina was able to escape. Although bands of men operating under his name continued to raid across the Rio Grande in the spring and summer of 1860, Cortina moved south and joined the Liberal army in the War of the Reform. As early as March 1860 he was part of the Liberal forces around San Luis Potosi and took part in the decisive Battle of Calpulalpan in December which resulted in a Liberal victory.[347]

The Cortina War is another case of decentralised, deinstitutionalised foreign policy along the lower Rio Grande, both in its course and in its effects. A local *ranchero* who had seen his family's landholdings taken over by the new Anglo economic elite that had financed the Merchants' War, Cortina had launched what was in effect a rebellion against the United States and rallied disaffected Tejanos and sympathetic Mexicans to his cause. Adapting May's definition of a filibuster quoted in Chapter 1, Cortina was a Mexican who raised his own private army, not to create a new state, but rather to change the policy of the existing one. To illustrate this, Cortina had issued a proclamation outlining his position in September 1859. After calling for a society devoted to improving the lot of Tejanos, including 'extermination [of] their tyrants, to which end those which compose it are ready to shed their blood and suffer the death of martyrs,' Cortina also admonished his followers to 'repose their lot under the good sentiments of the governor elect of the State.' In other words, Cortina sought not to change the geopolitics of the lower Rio Grande, as Carvajal for example did, but rather to force a change in policy towards his race within the existing State of Texas. By using

[347] Heintzelman, *Fifty Miles and a Fight*, 155; Thompson, *Cortina*, 80-95; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 275-305

organised violence to achieve this – warlike if not war – and operating out of Mexico to achieve it, Cortina was, in essence, forming a policy that was both foreign and domestic.[348]

Cortina's ability, both before and after his defeat at Rio Grande City, to escape from the forces of Texas and the US into the chaparral, as Carvajal had into *el desierto muerto* in the closing stages of the Merchants' War, highlights how the borderland essentially operated as a stateless space. Beyond the towns and forts of the region, official state geopolitical policy could only be enforced with force, and then only haphazardly due to logistical and manpower constraints. In this sense the borderland still operated along the same dynamic that Pekka Hämäläinen outlines for Texas during the time of the Comanche Empire; equally, the same could be said for today, when drug cartels and illegal migrants regularly use the vastness of the borderland to evade the policies of the United States and Mexican governments.[349]

One major effect of the Cortina War was, of course, the devastation that it caused on the lower Rio Grande. Jerry Thompson notes the human cost of the war: '151 of Cortina's men were killed and perhaps twice as many wounded. Fifteen Americans and 80 Mexicans not affiliated with Cortina also lay dead.' According to David Montejano, business as far as Laredo had been 'interrupted for five months.' All the American ranches had been burnt by Cortina's men, and in retaliation all the Mexican ranches had been burnt by the Texans. Another effect, as detailed in Chapter 1, was to inspire yet another case of decentralised foreign policy from north of the border, as Sam Houston on the one hand, and Southern

[348] Cortina, Juan Nepomuceno, 'Proclamation to the Mexicans of Texas,' 23/11/59, accessed at Proclamation to the Mexicans of Texas - The Heritage Post
[349] Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 350

expansionists on the other, both saw in Cortina's actions a reason to attack into Mexico and extend the territory of the United States southwards.[350]

The Zapata Rebellion: The Second Cortina War?

After secession, the frontier at Brownsville and along the Rio Grande was made the responsibility of John Ford. He was ordered by the Texan Committee of Public Safety to 'protect the Rio Grande frontier against hostile invasions.' With this in mind, he sat down in March 1861 to ponder the strategic defence of the Rio Grande. 'As a strategic point Brazos Island possesses importance,' he wrote to the Committee of Public Safety on March 6th. 'In the event Mr. Lincoln should adopt a coercive policy, Brazos Santiago and the mouth of the river would be points of attack. They are [the] keys to the valley of the Rio Grande, and they should be permanently fortified.' One month before Fort Sumter, plans were already being laid to protect the lower Rio Grande from invasion from Mexico. 'One false move on the part of the Confederate officers on the Rio Grande,' Ford wrote in his memoirs, 'would have changed the face of affairs, and might have precipitated the hosts of Mexico on the soil of Texas.'[351]

Another Confederate officer concerned about frontier defence along the lower Rio Grande was Edmund Kirby Smith, future commander of the Transmississippi. A month after Ford's letter, he wrote to LeRoy Walker that Brownsville, commanding as it did the line of communications with Mexico, was 'the first line of defence.' Initially, Kirby Smith seemed more concerned about its vulnerability to Native Americans and reliance on imports: 'The line of the Rio Grande is alone exposed to Indian depredations from its upper or northern

[350] Thompson, *Cortina*, 86; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 171; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 33
[351] *OR* 1.53, CPS to Ford, undated, 650-51; ibid, Ford to Robertson, 6/3/61, 652; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 322-23

extremity. The absence of grass renders the subsistence of cavalry on this line extremely difficult, and should the supply of corn from Mexico be intercepted, almost impossible.' Then, however, he articulated the fear of a military threat from south of the border: 'Monterrey and Victoria . . . would be the base of operations for an enemy operating from Mexico.' Whilst to some extent this is a soldier performing due diligence and considering every possible threat to this position, Kirby Smith's fear of an 'enemy operating from Mexico,' perhaps Juarez or Cortina but also maybe Union troops, shows that Mexico was a source of strategic concern for the Confederacy. Confederate sovereignty had to be secured not just against the Union, but against other potential geopolitical rivals as well.[352]

Reinforcing this, Confederates were clearly worried about the threat to the frontier from enemies operating within Mexico, whether that was Mexicans themselves pursuing borderland grievances, allies of the Union, or a combination of the two. In his letter to Davis, for example, Clark warned about 'the possible invasion of Mexican guerrillas,' whilst the Texan Committee of Public Safety likewise wrote to Davis, reporting that 'Black Republicans' had been seen in Texas, where 'they design to encourage the Mexicans to commence a predatory war upon our frontier.' In other words, Confederate officials feared Union agents agitating the Tejano population into fighting a shared enemy and creating a sense of ideological connection between the Confederacy's two nation-state neighbours.

Similarly, one of the first subjects Quintero raised with Vidaurri was his help in preventing Cortina from ever invading Texas again. Mexicans certainly appeared to be unsettled on both sides of the border. 'Considerable alarm exists among the Mexican population on this side of the Rio Grande,' Ford warned. General Bee meanwhile brought the two issues of trade and frontier defence together, suggesting that transatlantic trade through Matamoros would help obviate the possible alliance between Unionists and Mexicans that he

[352] *OR* 1.1, Kirby Smith to Walker, 20/4/61, 627-28

saw threatening the lower Rio Grande: 'It will keep neutral and quiet a large and in some respects an efficient force of a race embittered against us by real or imaginary wrongs dating back twenty years.'[353]

Ford decided the best thing he could do was to issue a proclamation 'stating the object of our mission, and hope to quiet their apprehensions.' Wasting no time, Ford issued this edict, 'To the People of the Valley of the Rio Grande,' on the very day he wrote to the Committee of Public Safety suggesting that such a thing should be done. 'All good citizens,' he told them, 'are requested to remain at home in pursuit of their peaceful vocations.' There would be no discrimination against the local population: 'Their rights, civil and religious, will be respected; their persons and property secured against molestation and danger.' Most importantly, violence, or the possibility thereof, would be removed from the borderland, thus legitimising the new polity in the eyes of the people (or so Ford, the former Texas Ranger, hoped): 'Order will be preserved, and everything possible will be done to restore tranquillity and confidence to this frontier.' Any confidence Ford might have felt in his proclamation's effect was not shared by his onetime subordinate in the Rangers, Philip Luckett. 'I assure you,' he wrote to Major-General Earl Van Dorn, commander of the Department of Texas, 'that from my long experience on the Rio Grande I believe we have every reason to fear that serious raids, similar to the Cortinas [sic] raid, will take place.' Luckett was very shortly to be proved right in his pessimism.[354]

On April 12th, one day before the guns thundered at Fort Sumter, an uprising occurred upriver from Brownsville in Zapata County. Forty Tejanos seized control of the third precinct of the county under the leadership of Antonio Ochoa. The Tejanos were rebelling against the

[353] *OR* 1.1, Clark to Davis, 4/4/61, 621; ibid, Neal to Davis, 28/4/61, 630; Quintero to Vidaurri, 19/6/61, quoted in Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri*, 48; *OR* 1.53, Ford to Robertson, 6/3/61, 652
[354] Ibid; ibid, Ford, 'To the People of the Valley of the Rio Grande,' 6/3/61, 654; *OR* 1.1, Luckett to Van Dorn, 2/5/61, 631

overwhelming political and economic control that was held over them by local landlords. For example, during the recent referendum on secession, the County Judge Isidro Vela had threatened that anyone who did not vote for secession would be fined fifty cents, a huge sum for the poor Tejano farmers. Zapata County had duly voted 212 to 0 in favour of secession. Moreover, Ochoa himself was a *Cortinista*, and several of his men had also ridden with Cortina in the recent troubles. Even the very name of Zapata County revealed the power of these landlords, and their dedication to separatism: it was named in honour of Jose Zapata, who had commanded the cavalry of the Republic of the Rio Grande in the late 1830s. The name had been chosen by the county's chief landlord, Henry Redmond, to honour a previous attempt to create a new polity along the lower Rio Grande. Zapata County was, in this sense, a memorial to the contingency of North American polities.[355]

Although Judge Vela persuaded the men to stand down, on April 15th a detachment of Confederate cavalry under Captain Matthew Nolan surrounded Ochoa's men in the village of Rancho Clareno, and called on them to surrender. This appears to have been merely for appearance's sake, as Nolan's men soon opened fire without giving the rebels a chance to comply; by the time the firing stopped, at least nine Tejanos lay dead and dozens more were wounded.

Nolan's massacre did not, however, have the desired effect. Hearing of this and anxious to avenge his defeat at Rio Grande City, Cortina crossed the Rio Grande into Texas and was joined by dozens of men looking for vengeance (including Ochoa, who had not been present at Rancho Clareno). Cortina moved to attack the ranch of Henry Redmond himself, only to find it protected by Confederate troops from Laredo under Santos Benavides, a Tejano and fellow prominent landowner. Cortina settled down to a sort of quasi-siege until a

[355] Thompson, *Cortina,* 97; Coppock, Mike, 'The Republic of the Rio Grande,' *Wild West*, Vol. 18 No. 4 (2005), 46-52

Confederate relief column arrived from Laredo. Cortina tried to attack it at the village of Carrizo on May 22nd but was caught between the two fires of the relief column and Benavides, who sallied out from Redmond's ranch in pursuit. Cortina escaped with ten of his men back into Mexico. The 'Second Cortina War' was over as quickly as it had begun.[356]

Regional historians of the Zapata County rebellion, such as Jerry Thompson and Manuel Gonzalez-Quiroga, have tended to portray this as, in essence, a utilisation of central government conflict by borderland grievances. For Thompson, 'with ethnic, social and economic undercurrents' the rebellion was 'a reaction to the repressive political oligarchy and boss rule in the country,' whilst for Gonzalez-Quiroga it was 'an extension of the first [Cortina War] revolt.' Nonetheless, Thompson admits that 'some in Texas saw the insurrection in Zapata County as Unionist-inspired.' Ochoa was reportedly heard declaring himself in favour of 'Old Abe' and demanding communication with Federal authorities to the north.[357]

To what extent were Ochoa and his men fighting out of solidarity with the Union, and to what extent were they fighting against local oppressors? The balance may well fall with the latter, but the point is that with the Civil War these issues had become intertwined. Opposing the local landlords meant, *ipso facto*, supporting the Union. As Gonzalez-Quiroga summarises it, 'since the Zapata County oligarchs favoured the Confederacy, it was logical that Cortina would cast his lot with the Union.' At the same time, as referenced earlier, Omar Valerio-Jimenez has noted the suppression of Tejano votes in the presidential election and secession referendum out of fear of their anti-slavery beliefs, suggesting Tejanos might have been pro-Republican in their sentiments.[358]

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[356] Thompson, *Cortina*, 97-101; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 324-25
[357] Thompson, *Cortina*, 98; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 212; Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope*, 249
[358] Ibid

The Zapata rebels, and Cortina, were also of course non-state actors, utilising an official war to try and violently redress their own regional grievances. The overall end-goal of the rebellion is unclear, but presumably it was similar to Cortina's in 1859. Once again, then, one can see a continuity from the attempted political and geopolitical dislocations from before the Civil War began. Indeed, the alternative name for the Zapata Rebellion – the Second Cortina War – more than hints at this continuity. Tejanos oppressed by the local political regime had attempted to redress this oppression through violent action. Government control had been weak enough to allow this to happen but strong enough to defeat it once it occurred.

Zapata County, however, remained a Confederate worry for the rest of the war. In November 1861, another raid by Mexicans based across the Rio Grande hit Carrizo before Confederate troops could stop it. In a long-delayed act of revenge, Judge Vela was assassinated on December 26th, 1862. Ford bemoaned that Unionists in Zapata County were now supported from within Mexico, 'who avow the intention to take service with the North, should Mr Lincoln send an invasion force to the Rio Grande.' As Ford's comment shows, the borderland nature of the lower Rio Grande was coming to be exploited by the Union in its war against the South and non-state actors, identifying with the Union as the Zapata rebels possibly did, could use their mobility and capacity for violence to aid and enable an aggressive Union foreign policy in the borderland against the Confederacy.[359]

Cortina in and out of Power, 1863-65

[359] *OR* 1.1, Brewin to Ford, 7/11/61, 131-32; *OR* 1.15, Bee to Lopez, 3/2/63, 966-67; *OR* 1.1, Ford to Stith, 11/11/61, 137. Ford claims in his memoirs that Judge Vela was hanged by Ochoa's men in the initial rebellion (Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 324).

The arrival of Union troops in Brownsville in November 1863 prompted further political dislocations south of the Rio Grande. These would raise Cortina truly up to the rank of *caudillo*, in the sense of possessing both military and geopolitical power, and bring him into diplomatic interaction with both the Union and the Confederacy.

Living in Brownsville at the time of the Federal invasion was one Jose Maria Cobos, a conservative Mexican general living there in exile. As Banks' troops approached and Bee's men pulled out to the north, Cobos received permission to organise local residents into a militia, ostensibly to protect the town. Rather than marching out to resist Banks, however, Cobos then took his men south across the Rio Grande into Matamoros, where, in cooperation with Juan Cortina, he imprisoned Governor Ruiz, and declared that it was his intention to save Mexico from 'the rude blows of a tyrannical demagogue' – the Liberal President, Juarez. 'My impression . . .' Banks informed Halleck, 'is that the tendency of Cobos' movement is to the benefit of France.'

For one day Cobos was ruler of Matamoros, but on the morning of 7th November he made the mistake of ordering Ruiz' execution. Combined with his anti-Juarez *pronunciamento*, this was enough to turn Cortina against the new governor. By ten a.m., Cobos had been put on trial for treason and summarily executed in the town square.[360] The freed governor issued a proclamation to the soldiers of Cortina, declaring that they had 're-established the authority of the highest government of the nation, which is the authority of the Mexican people.' He was not, however, allowed to resume his office; Cortina now declared himself in support of a rival, former governor, Jesus de la Serna, and Ruiz, who barely a fortnight earlier had been capturing renegade Union-supporting Confederate deserters on General Bee's behalf, fled across the Rio Grande into what were now Union lines. This indicated Cortina's strength and viability as a localised, independent *caudillo*, for Ruiz had

[360] Thompson, *Cortina*, 116-17

not only been appointed by Juarez, he had been his classmate at law school in Oaxaca and was a very close ally.[361]

Ruiz returned to Mexico and prepared to violently take back his governorship. In December, he marched on Matamoros with a small army he had gathered further south and paused for 48 hours outside the city walls to allow for civilian evacuation. In an inversion of what had happened one month earlier with the Union advance on Brownsville, refugees from Matamoros now crowded the ferry to cross over to Brownsville. Before an assault could be made, the two sides came to an agreement on 1st January, whereby Ruiz would resume governorship, de la Serna retired to his ranch, and Cortina became second-in-command of Ruiz' army. All now being well between the two, they would then combine their armies and march on the French positions at Tampico.[362]

On 12th January, an officer of Cortina's named Cardenas, presumably drunk, rode over to Ruiz' house and insulted him, for which he was arrested, taken into the back yard and shot. 'This settled the matter,' as Herron put it, and once again Matamoros became a battleground between the contending parties. Cortina with 600 men and six cannon held the western part of the city, whilst Ruiz with 800 men and four cannon held the eastern, centred around the Plaza Hidalgo.[363] The fighting lasted throughout the night and until noon the next day, and Herron counted over 250 separate discharges of artillery. 'The roar of artillery,' noted a Union soldier, 'and the almost constant volleys of musquetry [sic] indicated a most bloody fight.'[364]

[361] Ibid, 110; Smart, *Viva Juarez*, 106
[362] Thompson, *Cortina*, 122; *OR* 1.24.2, Herron to Stone, 16/1/64, 92-93
[363] Ibid; *OR* 1.34.1, Herron to Stone, 15/1/64, 81-84; Herron to Banks [?], January 1864, Herron Collection, 7-10 (quote 7); Thompson, *Cortina*, 124
[364] *Federals on the Frontier: The Diary of Benjamin F. McIntyre, 1862-1864*, ed. Tilley, Nannie M. (Austin, 1963), 291

It was this battle that prompted Pierce to send a message to Herron requesting military protection.[365]

The result of the battle placed Matamoros in Cortina's hands. The capture of Ruiz' artillery was the signal for his army to collapse, and Cortina unleashed his cavalry through the streets, cutting down whatever refugees they could find. After eighteen hours of carnage, over 300 men lay dead in the town. Ruiz and the survivors fled to Brownsville, where General Herron promptly disarmed them. 'We have lost everything except our honour,' Ruiz told Juarez. Cortina was now in total control of Matamoros, which Juarez would eventually officially acknowledge, transforming Cortina suddenly from a non-state into a state actor.[366]

After the French occupation of Bagdad in August 1864 Cortina still controlled Matamoros, and John Ford in Brownsville feared a joint Cortina-Union attack from Matamoros and Brazos Santiago respectively on his position along the Rio Grande. At this time, violence sometimes quite literally crossed borders: some of Cortina's men sniped at Confederate troops from across the river near the village of Freeport, upriver from Brownsville. In response to Ford's requests that these 'outrages' be stopped, Cortina deployed 600 men into position outside Matamoros and ordered eight artillery pieces placed on a bluff overlooking Brownsville. Ford protested that 'troops under your command are patrolling the banks of the Rio Grande, your artillery is bearing upon the City of Brownsville . . . I would respectfully inquire, if by these acts you intend to indicate that war exists between your government and that of the United States?' Hoping for support, Ford wrote to the French commander at Bagdad, Commander Veron, to establish whether he intended to attack Matamoros or not. Veron's reply is unfortunately not recorded.[367]

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[365] Herron to Banks, January 1864, Herron Collection, 7-9; L Pierce Jr to Herron, 12/1/64, ibid, 11; Ruiz to Herron, 12/1/64, ibid, 12
[366] Thompson, *Cortina*, 132
[367] Quoted in Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 370; Thompson, *Cortina*, 139-40

If Cortina really was intending to attack Brownsville, Ford believed the best thing to do would be to strike Matamoros first: in other words, if only slightly and temporarily, to invade Mexico. (He was presumably unaware that a Franco-Imperial army under General Mejia was very close.) Ford was aware that, as Jerry Thompson phrases it, doing this 'might provoke an international incident that would result in President Lincoln sending a large army to the Rio Grande to again cut the flow of badly needed supplies into Texas.' His resolve to do so if he felt it necessary, however, reinforces not only Ford's geopolitical agency but also how the two sectional crises of the United States and Mexico, here at the border on the lower Rio Grande, could impact and intersect with one another.[368]

Just as Ford feared an attack from the Federals to the east and Cortina to the south, so Cortina himself also feared an attack from Ford to the north, Mejia to the south and the French garrison at Bagdad to the east. A key reason behind Cortina's military demonstrations against Brownsville were signs of cooperation between the Confederacy and the French along the Rio Grande. Cortina complained that every time his men sallied out against the French at Bagdad, they were fired at from the Texan side of the river. In addition, the French capture of La Burrita, a village upriver from Bagdad, was achieved to the accompaniment of 'a hardy cheer' from Confederate troops gathered along the riverbank. Cortina had also received information that the French at Bagdad had passed on a shipment of arms to the Confederates, which was reciprocated with a herd of cattle.[369] Cortina wrote to Herron, now on Brazos Santiago, that he feared a Franco-Imperial attack, from both the east at Bagdad and from the south at Victoria. 'I am counting for help from you with your forces . . . in case it is needed,' he wrote to Herron. In other words, Ford was hoping for a French attack on Cortina and

[368] Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 370-73; Thompson, *Cortina*, 140
[369] Ibid, 139

Cortina was hoping for a Union attack on the French – a clear sign of how the two crises had come to intersect on the lower Rio Grande.[370]

The arrival of the French in Tamaulipas broke Cortina's power. A Franco-Imperial army under General Tomas Mejia advanced on Matamoros from Monterrey, recently vacated by Juarez, and from San Fernando. An attempt by Cortina to defend the line of the San Fernando River ended in defeat, and he fell back on Matamoros. With Juarez now in El Paso del Norte almost one thousand miles upriver, Cortina 'could not communicate with his government, neither could he hope for aid.' His response was to turn on the only source of income he had access to: the trade. Cortina raised the import tax on cotton and levied $200,000 through a forced loan on the city's merchants. Those that resisted were jailed. Whilst this shows the prosperity of the trade in that Cortina could raise so much money immediately, it did swiftly erode his support amongst the mercantile classes. There is also a parallel with Vidaurri's confiscation of Thayer's Treasury funds as the Liberal army under Juarez approached.[371]

Cortina's next move was to cross over the Rio Grande into Union lines around Brazos Santiago. Whilst Cortina may have come to this decision on his own, he was at least encouraged to do so by US Consul Leonard Pierce, who promised him a warm reception from Colonel Day, the commander on Brazos Santiago. Day did agree to take in Cortina's men, but only if they were disarmed by Union troops first.[372] It is a measure of the desperation of Cortina's situation that he agreed. This set into motion another round of deadly geopolitical farce. Colonel Day sent a column of the Union 1st Texas Cavalry down to the Rio Grande to disarm Cortina's men and escort them to Brazos Santiago, when they were attacked by

[370] *OR* 41.2, Ford to Veron, 24/8/64, 1089; Cortina to Herron, 18/6/64, Herron Collection, 114; Thompson, *Cortina*, 137; *OR* 41.1, Report of Col Day, 8/9/64, 742
[371] Ibid, Ford to Dwyer, 29/8/64, 1088-89; Thompson, *Cortina*, 139
[372] *OR* 41.3, Day to Cortina, 8/9/64, 99-100

Confederates from Brownsville. Day's men repulsed the Confederates and themselves fell back with their new allies to Brazos Santiago. In the process Union troops had swiftly rearmed the *Cortinistas* as the Confederates approached, and repelled the Confederate advance by using one cannon taken from the Mexicans. All in all, 13 officers, 290 men, 22 horses and 3 cannon made their way from Matamoros to Brazos Santiago.[373]

Such numbers show that barely one third of Cortina's men decided to cross the river into Union lines, dashing his hopes of creating a Union 'Cortina Brigade.' Cortina himself was not one of them. One of his chief subordinates, Colonel Servando Canales, declared the decision to join the Union to be 'not only insane but criminal . . . it was a treacherous deed to set aside his own flag in order to array himself against a people fighting for its independence.' He led the bulk of the 'Cortina Brigade' away from its commander to contest the Franco-Imperial advance.[374] When this happened, Cortina became convinced he would lose control of Matamoros to Canales and elected to stay in the city, leaving his few hundred loyal men to cross the river into Union lines without their commander. From Bagdad, Veron wrote a threatening letter declaring the United States was now responsible for Cortina's actions, the implication clearly being that any *Cortinista* attack on French troops would be interpreted as an attack by the United States on France. Day, unsurprisingly, refuted this. He would not, he claimed, 'countenance the occupation of US soil by any armed force except our own, and especially by a force hostile to the French government.' (Day was in fairness as good as his word, and did indeed disarm Cortina's followers, at least before the Confederate attack.)[375] Cortina certainly believed that the Federals would support him in attacking the Confederates, and even in attacking the French. Pierce, on the other hand – the one who had set the ball

[373] *OR* 41.3, Day to Drake, 14/9/64, 184-85; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 375. Both Ford and Day performed the usual military trick of claiming to have lost few men whilst inflicting massive casualties on their opponent
[374] Quoted in Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 373; Thompson, *Cortina*, 143
[375] *OR* 41.3, Veron to Day, 7/9/64, 100; ibid, Day to Veron, 8/9/64, 100-01 (quote 101)

rolling in the first place – had the rather quaint notion (in his official correspondence, at least) that Cortina's men could be hired 'as beef hunters or mustered in as rangers.'[376]

The Union reaction to this most recent Cortina complication was swift. Enquiries came from Seward on down, as the French charge d'affaires in New Orleans wrote to the State Department protesting the sheltering of Cortina. Seward asked General Halleck for clarification, who asked Banks who asked Canby. General Canby assured Banks that Cortina's men would be recruited only in a general enlistment, and immediately sent to New Orleans rather than serving on the Rio Grande. Shortly thereafter Seward wrote directly to Canby requesting more information and emphasising, as he always did, that US neutrality in Franco-Mexican affairs was not to be compromised in any way.[377] Of the *Cortinistas* on Brazos Santiago, unarmed and without their commander, some did join the US army (where they were deployed, and in what capacity, is sadly not recorded) whilst the majority returned to Mexico, mainly to serve again in Cortina's command.[378]

Cortina had now lost part of his men to the Union and part to Canales. As Mejia's men finally neared Matamoros in late September and the town braced itself for yet another siege (the fourth in two years, if the sieges of Carvajal, Cortina and Ruiz are all counted) Cortina surrendered the town without a fight. More surprisingly, not only did he surrender but he also joined the Imperial army. Rumours abounded for years afterwards that a large sum of gold had persuaded him to turncoat. Canales, who earlier had opposed Cortina's attempt to flee into Union lines, now fled himself with his regiment into Confederate lines around Brownsville.[379]

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[376] Ibid, Pierce to Herron, 8/9/64, 101; Thompson, *Cortina*, 140-41
[377] *OR* 41.2, Fred Seward to Stanton, 29/8/64, 916; *OR* 41.3, Canby to Banks, 15/9/64, 197-98; ibid, Seward to Canby, 30/9/64, 497-98
[378] *OR* 41.3, Day to Drake, 9/10/64, 721; Thompson, *Cortina*, 144
[379] Ibid, 145-47; *Brownsville Daily Ranchero*, 24/9/1870

Cortina's various manoeuvres over this period reflect both his agency and, paradoxically perhaps, his lack of control. In his multiple changes of allegiance, from Juarez to the Empire and then back to Juarez, whilst also flirting with the notion of joining the Union, Cortina was demonstrating his personal agency. (It may or may not be coincidence that Cortina always swore allegiance to a Hispanic polity rather than an Anglo one.) At the same time, however, these choices were reactive, reflecting his own loss of geopolitical control in the face of the Franco-Imperial advance. In this sense, Cortina's political mobility came at the expense of, and reflected the diminution of, his own political power. At the same time, Cortina's period in power during 1863 and 1864 also demonstrates how the different conflicts north and south of the Rio Grande intersected with one another and how non-state actors such as Cortina could be pivotal in that.

Coda: Porfirio Diaz and the American Path to Mexican Power

Despite the surrender of Lee at Appomattox in 1865 and execution of Maximilian at Queretaro in 1867, resistance towards the triumph of a certain vision of the US and Mexican state did not altogether cease. In the US, unrepentant ex-Confederates formed Red Shirts, White Leagues and the Ku Klux Klan to violently oppose the Republican settlement in the South, whilst Juarez continued to face opposition from regional *caudillos*. Both conflicts would in the end be finally settled, tragically short of their promise in the late 1860s, in 1876. Whilst these two settlements are not directly connected – the one was not connected to the other – it is interesting to once again note the asymmetry of power: the Mexican settlement reflected US desires for what Mexico should be; the US settlement had nothing to do with that Mexico wanted (although, as Gregory Downs points out, many US commentators compared Reconstruction politics in horrified terms to how Mexico was). That Mexican

settlement began on the lower Rio Grande and involved many of the same people who had been involved in the geopolitical dislocations of the 1850s and 60s.[380]

Benito Juarez died in office in 1872 in the middle of another rebellion led by a *caudillo*. This time the *caudillo* was Porfirio Diaz, a hero of the French intervention, who alleged that Juarez and his supporters had gerrymandered the 1871 presidential election which Juarez had won against Diaz. Juarez was succeeded by Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada, who offered an amnesty to the rebels. Diaz was one the last to submit and did so in late 1872, after which he was pardoned and his military honours restored. After a brief period of retirement to private life in Mexico Diaz decided to move, and1875 found him living in Brownsville.

Lerdo was deeply suspicious of the United States and of increasing its influence in Mexico, and consequently often vetoed attempts to construct railroads in the US-Mexico borderlands, including on the lower Rio Grande. Friedrich Katz quotes Lerdo as that there must be 'between strength [the US] and weakness [Mexico], the desert' as an explanation, meaning that the borderland was to be kept underdeveloped as a buffer zone between the two. After Lerdo cancelled US business concessions in northern Mexico, Diaz received support from a range of US non-state and renegade state actors, including US general Edward Ord, now military commander on the lower Rio Grande, former US general William Rosecrans, Ranger John Ford and the merchants Richard King and Stillman – not Charles Stillman, who was now dead, but his son, James Stillman. They supplied Diaz with guns and men, including 500 rifles, 250,000 rounds of ammunition and 2,000,000 cartridges for repeating rifles from merchants in Brownsville, in return for advancing US business interests and pacifying the borderland. Equally, Robert Wooster notes that many still harboured dreams of American

[380] Downs, Gregory, 'The Mexicanization of American Politics: The United States' Transnational Path from Civil War to Stabilization,' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 117 No. 2 (2012), 387

expansion, with pro-expansion Secretary of State Hamilton Fish setting the tone in the Grant administration.[381]

One particular borderland element these men wanted pacifying was Cortina, whose men had begun to raid across the Rio Grande again. US cavalry had raided into Mexico in pursuit of him in 1873, and in 1875 the commander of a US gunboat patrolling the Rio Grande had actually tried to manufacture a war crisis by persuading some Texas Rangers to cross to the Mexican side dressed as *Cortinistas* and open fire on his vessel. The commander's plan was betrayed to Washington and his plan stopped, although Texas Rangers did cross the Rio Grande and attack the Las Cuevas ranch, mistaking it for the *Cortinista* headquarters of Las Cucharas. As Michael Webster notes, these incursions into Mexico were planned and attempted by officers on the ground acting on their own initiative, effectively as renegade state actors. John Ford quoted himself replying to Diaz' appeal for support in his memoirs: '"If you will give your word that, successful in the revolution you are to inaugurate, you will order Cortina to be removed from the frontier, Americans will loan you money."' That money would be used not only to remove Cortina from the frontier, but to place Diaz in power in Mexico City over the whole country.[382]

Diaz advanced across the Rio Grande with 1600 men, 800 of whom were American and captured Matamoros in April 1876. One of his supporters, ironically enough, was Cortina. By November Diaz had successfully installed himself in power in Mexico City, and in May 1877 was formally elected President. Servando Canales, first Cortina's ally and then his enemy during the 1850s and '60s, was appointed the Mexican military commander along

[381] ; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 160; Mora-Torres, Juan, *The Making of the Mexican Border: The State, Capitalism, and Society in Nuevo León, 1848–1910* (Austin, 2001), 56–59; Wooster, Robert, 'The Army and the Politics of Expansion: Texas and the Southwestern Borderlands, 1870-1886,' *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 93 No. 2 (1989), 154, 165

[382] Webster, Michael G., 'Intrigue on the Rio Grande: The Rio Bravo Affair, 1875,' *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 74 No. 2 (1970), 151-60; Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 412. For the Las Cuevas raid, see Webb, *Texas Rangers*, 255-80

the lower Rio Grande. Cortina was summoned to Matamoros by Canales, arrested, and after a quick court martial sentenced to death. After an appeal from Ford (according to his own memoirs) to spare Cortina's life, Canales sent him to Mexico City, where Diaz kept him imprisoned for nearly twenty years. 'Can any gentleman dare say that President Diaz has not fully redeemed his pledge?' Ford asked.[383]

Diaz would remain in power (bar a brief interlude in the early 1880s) until 1910, during which time US investment in Mexico rose sharply. The root of this were the actions of non-state and renegade state actors, many of them from the US, exercising geopolitical agency in the lower Rio Grande borderland, just as they had done or attempted to do in the 1850s and 60s. The settlement of Mexican politics for a generation, then, had its genesis along the lower Rio Grande and in the support for Diaz amongst many of the same actors who had supported Carvajal in 1852, who had secured the Zona Libre in 1858 and had defended the Matamoros trade during the Civil War. In addition, it was supported by the same actors (or same sort of actors) who had fought against the Confederacy and supported a free labour conception of the United States. In other words, the US support for Diaz combined most of the various visions of political settlement Americans had tried to project onto Mexico along the lower Rio Grande since the creation of the border in 1848 (a pro-slavery Mexico was, of course, a nonstarter – although business profits in Mexico would be built on the backs of peon labour, just as in the South they would be secured with a segregated labour force). The accession of Diaz to power in Mexico was therefore an 'intermestic' issue, having its roots in American support along the lower Rio Grande. Diaz had used this American support

[383] Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, 413-14 (quote 414)

to seize power, not as a regional *caudillo* in the manner of Vidaurri or Cortina, but as a national *caudillo*.[384]

A further illustration of the non-state nature of this coup can be seen in the US government's response to it. The Grant administration was concerned Diaz would ally with Cortina, and rushed troops to the border after his victory, giving them permission to cross into Mexico to chase marauders. Diaz also deployed troops to the border, and there was a brief war scare in 1876-77 as the two national armies watched each other across the Rio Grande. Charles Hackett notes that the Grant and Hayes administrations withheld recognition of the Diaz government until he had secured peace along the frontier. That the government in Washington could have arrived at such a different understanding to what actually happened – Diaz' coup, after all, had been supported by Americans along the lower Rio Grande in order to *stop* Cortina, combined with the raid of 1873 and attempted invasion of 1875 show the limits of central government understanding of and influence in the lower Rio Grande, still a decade after the Civil War and the collapse of Maximilian's empire. [385]

Equally, the connection between expansion and border security, seen for example in Sam Houston's advocacy of a protectorate over north-eastern Mexico in the 1850s, was still apparent two decades later. Robert Wooster argues that by withholding recognition of Diaz, the Hayes administration 'implicitly promoted the cause of Southern expansionism.' Equally, Michael Webster suggests one reason for the attempted invasion of 1875 was 'probably . . . the unfulfilled desire of Texas to extend her boundaries to the Sierra Madre.' The support of Diaz, and the suppression of Cortina, were thus in many ways the capstone on the issues that

[384] Hart, John M., *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Los Angeles, 2002), 59-68; Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 343-46; Thompson, *Cortina*, 200-38

[385] Jacoby, *Strange Career of William Ellis*, 51-52; Hackett, Charles W., 'The Recognition of the Diaz Government by the United States,' *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 28 No. 1 (1924), 41-53; Wooster, 'Army and Politics of Expansion,' 165. Interestingly, neither Hackett nor Wooster make any mention of how Diaz came to power, beyond its extra-legal nature.

had plagued the lower Rio Grande since the formulation of the national border in the 1840s, and were only ended by changing the political makeup of Mexico as a nation, via the lower Rio Grande itself as the springboard for Diaz' coup.[386]

Conclusion

As Vidaurri, Cortina and Diaz show, Mexican *caudillos* used their interactions with the polities north of the Rio Grande – whether diplomatic, economic, military, or a combination thereof – to help them seize, maintain or extend their own power along the lower Rio Grande. Although opposed to antebellum Southern expansionism or attempts to extend their sociopolitical norms into his domains in the form of the Callahan Raid or the proposed protectorates over north-eastern Mexico, Vidaurri did nonetheless utilise economic connections with Texas to purchase arms and ammunition for the Liberals during the War of the Reform.

Once the Civil War began, and particularly the contraband trade through Matamoros, this pattern only increased. By facilitating the trade, Vidaurri could use the extensive customs house receipts to pay for his army and to haphazardly extend his power into Tamaulipas. This also provided Vidaurri with a political leverage. Twice – in early 1862 and late 1863 – he suspended the trade until it was restructured to his own advantage. As William Kiser has noted, 'the sly manipulation of customshouse rates speaks to the localised power structures that proliferated in Mexico in the 1860s.'[387]

At the same time, Vidaurri proposed that the Confederacy annex the provinces he controlled in September 1861. At first glance, this is a dramatic deviation from his behaviour

[386] Wooster, 'Army and Politics of Expansion,' 165; Webster, 'Intrigue on the Rio Grande,' 149
[387] Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 75

in the 1850s, when he opposed Southern raids into north-eastern Mexico for runaways, and indeed protected runaways from these Southern raiders (albeit at the cost of serving in his own armed forces). One can, however, see a form of continuity: Vidaurri was attempting to utilise actors north of the Rio Grande to secure his own power south of it, just as he did with runaways and merchants before the Civil War. Such an interpretation also makes sense of Jefferson Davis's refusal of this offer – the Confederacy wanted this territory, but not at the price of it remaining under Vidaurri's control (or war with Mexico, either). Nonetheless, it is a clear case of a Mexican *caudillo* attempting to utilise actors north of the Rio Grande to secure his own power south of it.

Juan Cortina presents an arguably more complex picture. Technically, Cortina was a US citizen although he ended up holding *de facto* political power in Mexico with his capture of Matamoros that was eventually recognised *de jure* by Juarez. Cortina's rise to regional political prominence began with his rebellion against US rule in Texas in 1859, specifically against how that manifested in the treatment of the local Tejano community. After that – particularly after his seizure of Matamoros in late 1863 – he cooperated with the Union and, to an extent, the Confederacy in maintaining his power, at one point trying to secure a Union attack on the French garrison of Bagdad. In other words, military and political support from north of the Rio Grande was to be utilised to maintain his own power south of it.

Perhaps the clearest example of how *caudillos* utilised American support for their own ends (albeit at the cost of reciprocation) is with the final case, that of Porfirio Diaz. Based in Brownsville in 1876, far from his power base in Oaxaca and not even in his own country, Diaz utilised American support in the form of money, arms, ammunition and volunteers to cross the border and mount a coup that would put him in power for the best part of the next 35 years. As part of the Faustian pact, Diaz had to open up Mexico to US commerce and business interests. The parallel between Diaz and Carvajal in the Merchants' War, how he

wrote and then altered the Plan de le Loba to American interests, is clear. Indeed, some of the same people, or their descendants, were involved in both. A parallel can also be drawn with Grant and Sheridan's support for Juarez after the Civil War. In all cases, American actors (often non-state or renegade state) supported Mexicans in their attempts to maintain, seize or extend their power in order to secure a certain American vision of how Mexican politics should be – not just a peaceful polity on their southern border, but a polity that was variously either pro-slavery, anti-slavery, free trade, preferential to American businesses or a combination thereof. With Diaz, these actors succeeded in securing this not just in the borderland, but across Mexico as a whole.[388]

The power and reach and influences on *caudillos* along the lower Rio Grande was therefore an 'intermestic' issue, at once international and domestic. Interaction with Texas, often defined on his own terms (especially after 1861) enabled Vidaurri to maintain and sometimes extend his own power in north-eastern Mexico. The Cortina War was explicitly 'intermestic' in that it ranged across both sides of the border, as did the Zapata Rebellion of April 1861. Diaz' coup was 'intermestic' in that it was only possible with American support and, arguably, benefited American interests more than it did that of the Mexican population. It also, William Kiser suggests, was the ultimate triumph of this 'secretive diplomacy' that also tolled its death knell: as Diaz owed his position in Mexico City to US businessmen and political allies in Washington, and rewarded them handsomely for their support, there was no

[388] As an aside, the coup that put Diaz in power was also the first time the US (or US actors) had intervened in a neighbouring country to reorder that country's politics in a way that suited American business interests. A line can thus be drawn from Diaz' coup to American involvement in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Cuba and others, often seen as a product of turn of the century American imperialism or even Cold War anti-communism. (Crandall, Britta H., and Crandall, Russell C., *'Our Hemisphere'?: The United States in Latin America, from 1776 to the Twenty-First Century* (New Haven, 2021), 2)

longer any need for a non-state borderland diplomacy designed to advance merchants' economic interests.[389]

Finally, these *caudillos* were clearly non-state or renegade state actors. Although the elected governor, and one of the leading Liberals, Vidaurri only conformed to the central government in Mexico City when it suited his own purpose. After the French invasion, he was more sympathetic to them than to Juarez, and fought Juarez in February 1864. It is frankly bewildering to try and make sense of the tangle of Cortina's relationship to the US, Confederate, Republic and Imperial state, but he can perhaps be said simply to have operated as a non-state actor during the Cortina War and early phases of the Civil War, transitioned into a renegade state actor with his seizure of power in Matamoros and its recognition by Juarez, briefly served as a state actor when he joined the Imperial forces, and then become a non-state actor again after the end of the French intervention in 1867. Diaz, previously one of Juarez' principal lieutenants, was in 1876 acting as a non-state actor in crossing from the US into Mexico to mount a coup for power.

American support and interaction, whether military, diplomatic, economic, or a combination thereof, was therefore vital in non-state and renegade state Mexican *caudillos* maintaining, extending or seizing power in the lower Rio Grande – which is not to say there was no conflict between the two. In supporting these *caudillos*, American actors were trying to influence Mexican politics along the lower Rio Grande (and, indeed, beyond) to conform to their own wishes and secure their own interests. Both the Americans who did this and the Mexicans who welcomed it were not pursuing the official policies of their respective states, but rather working as non-state or renegade state actors, exercising their own geopolitical

[389] Katz, Friedrich, 'The Liberal Republic and the Porfiriato, 1867-1910,' in *Mexico since Independence* (Cambridge, 1991), ed. Bethell, Leslie, 69-70; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 160

agency. The impact on the lower Rio Grande, and indeed Mexico as a whole, whether intended or not, was tremendous, long-lasting and profound.

CONCLUSION

From 1852-1877, in William Kiser's words, Americans and Mexican 'military officers, governors, secret agents and diplomats' – not to mention merchants and soldiers – 'tried to use the porous South Texas borderlands to their advantage in many different ways.' As the US was the more powerful nation than Mexico – and Texas, whether in the Union or the Confederacy, the more settled state than Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon or Coahuila – this process was necessarily asymmetric: Americans and Confederates had much more impact on Mexico than Mexicans did on the US or the Confederacy.[390]

I have written Americans, Confederates and Mexicans above rather than the United States, the Confederacy and Mexico because this was a question not only, or even largely, of states' interaction with one another (i.e., the interaction of, for example, Union foreign policy with Mexican foreign policy) but of individuals and groups either outside of state institutions or pursuing their own policies within those institutions. These dynamics fall broadly into three related categories: firstly, non-state and renegade state actors were able to practice and pursue their own foreign policies and geopolitical visions (that is, policies directed at a foreign polity); secondly, they could take advantage of state foreign policies to their own benefit; and thirdly, they could enable the success or failure of state foreign policies in the borderland.

The first dynamic – that non-state and renegade state actors could practice their own foreign policy and pursue their own geopolitical visions in the imperial borderland – occurs several times from 1851 to 1867. In 1851, American and Mexican merchants sponsored Carvajal to try and carve out a new polity in north-eastern Mexico to aid their economic

[390] Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 97

endeavours. In 1860, the Knights of the Golden Circle planned and advertised an expedition into north-eastern Mexico to annex it to the United States. In response to this arrogant Anglo treatment of Mexican people and property, Cortina launched his 'war' against Texas in 1859. During the French intervention, non-state US actors – whether former generals, former soldiers, or the inventor of the acoustic telegraph – made their way to the lower Rio Grande and elsewhere to help drive the Franco-Imperialists from Mexico. Their motives were political, financial or both.

As for renegade state actors, Callahan raided into Mexico with the possible, if not probable, intention of capturing runaway slaves, whilst Governor Sam Houston was so outraged by the Cortina War that he planned an invasion of north-eastern Mexico and the establishment of a protectorate that he had already advocated in 1857. Santiago Vidaurri took advantage of central government weakness to pursue his own foreign policy in the borderland, even suggesting annexation of the legally Mexican territory he effectively independently controlled by the United States. In 1865, Grant and Sheridan funnelled arms and men to the Liberal armies, in direct contravention of official state policy, in order to achieve the geopolitical outcome that they desired. This sort of non-state and renegade state foreign policy does not occur along the lower Rio Grande prior to 1836, but it can be seen after 1867, especially with Diaz' revolution against Lerdo, launched along the lower Rio Grande with US mercantile backing. That such episodes did not occur after 1876 can be attributed to Diaz' protection of US economic interests in Mexico and, during the Mexican Revolution, Woodrow Wilson's willingness to deploy the US Army to defend them. As matias Romero – by then Diaz' Treasury Minister – wrote to the Mexican President, 'the best means

of impeding annexation is to open the country to the United States . . . with the objection of making annexation unnecessary and even undesirable.'[391]

The second category concerns how non-state and renegade state actors could influence and take advantage of state policies in the borderland to their own benefit. This can be seen with the creation of the Zona Libre in 1858 – in many ways, a direct response to the Merchants' War of 1851-52 – and the exploitation by American (both Southern and Northern), Mexican and European merchants of the cotton trade through Matamoros during the Civil War. Below this elite level, non-state actors also benefited financially from these policies by the increased pay for jobs such as freighters on wagons or ships' crews on blockade runners, or by joining state armies for their pay, prestige and the sheer sense of adventure. This is not a simple, binary case of state failure and non-state and renegade state success; rather, both had the opportunity and possibility of failure or success. In and of itself, this interrogates the argument made by historians such as Adelman and Aron that the imposition of the nation-state border entailed a loss of geopolitical agency in the borderland (which will be returned to below).

The third category concerns how these non-state and renegade state actors could enable the success or failure of state foreign and indeed domestic policies within and through the borderland. In a broad sense, merchants, filibusters and renegade generals tested the US policy of non-intervention enshrined in the 1818 Neutrality Act. Merchants actively undermined the Confederacy's utilisation of the cotton trade (not that Confederate agents helped themselves), diminishing the number of arms that could be imported – as the relative success after 1864, once the New Plan was adopted, makes clear. The caprices of Vidaurri and Cortina determined the flow of cotton across the border when they controlled the

[391] Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 160; Romero quoted in Salvucci, Richard J., 'The Progress of US-Mexican Trade, 1825-1884,' 719

Mexican side of the Rio Grande. The actions of volunteer armies such as that of H. Clay Crawford in seizing Bagdad, possibly with Union collusion, demonstrated the weakness of Franco-Imperial rule in the borderland and encouraged both support for the Liberals and the Liberal decision to take the offensive. The support of Grant, Sheridan, Wallace and others proved crucial in the transportation of arms and volunteers from the United States to Mexico in aid of Juarez; whilst the journeys of nonelite actors such as John Sobieski, John Ford and the unrecorded veterans who the armies of Crawford, Carvajal and Escobedo to Mexico were vital, if not necessarily on their own decisive, in the defeat of the Imperialists and the restoration of the Mexican Republic.

Lurking behind all these actions lies one connective truth: what all these non-state and renegade state actors had in common was a desire to shape Mexican political space, either restricted to the lower Rio Grande or with the lower Rio Grande forming part of a national whole. As Sarah Rodriguez has noted, the US rise to continental power was 'as much about a small group of white property-owning US citizens who saw the profound limits of their nation's political capacity' as it was a simple tale of the expansion of state sovereignty driven by government policy. The filibusters examined in Chapter 2 wanted to absorb north-eastern Mexico into a US/Southern slave empire, which required not just a fundamental change to Mexico's geopolitical borders but also, ipso facto, a fundamental alteration of north-eastern Mexico's sociopolitical institutions. Merchants such as Stillman, Kenedy and King wanted to transform north-eastern Mexico into a free-trade paradise, whilst John Ford, Sam Houston and George Bickley all, to differing extents, wanted to transform it into a pro-slavery space, or at the very least anti-runaway. They envisioned different political settlements to bring this about, involving either independence, annexation or the establishment of a protectorate.[392]

[392] Rodriguez, 'Children of the Great Mexican Family,' 434

As examined in Chapter 3, the merchants in many ways achieved their objectives with the creation of the Zona Libre in 1858. It would appear to be this that began the economic boom along the lower Rio Grande, although the contraband trade during the Civil War certainly sent it into overdrive. Confederate efforts to protect the contraband trade during the Civil War are usually read straightforwardly as an attempt to maintain the flow of arms and ammunition into the Transmississippi, which indeed was the case; but for much of the Civil War this flow was far below its potential, and indeed was often hindered by the very merchants who had secured the establishment of the Zona Libre in 1858. More sinuously, then, Confederate attempts to protect the trade was also – unwittingly, perhaps – an attempt to defend the economic reconfiguration of the lower Rio Grande that the merchants had achieved in 1858.

As Chapter 4 shows, Union and Confederate generals also attempted to influence the configuration of Mexican politics in and beyond the lower Rio Grande. This was because both saw a sympathetic ally in control of Mexico as a vital component of either reunion or independence. Thus, Herron and McClernand attempted to win local Mexican actors to the Union side; Grant and Sheridan attempted to aid Liberal victory by the dispatch of weapons and the encouragement of volunteers, whilst both advocated a military invasion of Mexico to aid Juarez in his struggle against the Franco-Imperialists; and Kirby Smith and Magruder hoped for a Franco-Imperial victory as a prelude to an Imperial-Confederate alliance. They equally tried to impress on Franco-Imperialists, up to and including Napoleon III, that their victory in Mexico would not be secure if the Confederacy was allowed to fall.

These sentiments were not just confined to elite actors: as Chapter 5 has argued, soldiers were crucial in securing the reordering of Mexican political space as Grant and Sheridan wished it to be. In their sadly nameless thousands, they crossed the Rio Grande to fight for either the Liberal or the Imperial cause. Their motivations were diverse, but one of

them – as the proliferation of societies across the North dedicated to defending the Monroe Doctrine suggests – was that a resolution of the conflict in Mexico was seen as crucial to the security of the (reunified) United States; and that resolution, naturally, had to be along lines amenable to the US.

Finally, Chapter 6 has shown the other side to this story, how Mexican *caudillos* could encourage this involvement by American actors in order to maintain, extend or seize their own power. Thus, Vidaurri could encourage Confederate trade and cooperation against the *renegados*, Cortina could encourage Union support and try to persuade them to attack the French, and Diaz could utilise American financial and military support in his coup that began along the lower Rio Grande and took him all the way to Mexico City. This resulted in a reordering of Mexican politics and economics to make it more amenable to US investment, in sharp contrast to the preceding Lerdo government. Diaz' success was also the fulfilment of the desire of certain actors along the lower Rio Grande to reorder Mexican politics and economics to their own wishes, as the participation of many of the same people (or their descendants) in both the Merchants' War and Diaz' coup suggests.

These actions were also 'intermestic,' in that they were simultaneously both international and domestic in origin and effect. To a certain extent this is inevitable along an international border, but it also, as Carlos Rico Ferrat has pointed out, shows an essential truth about US-Mexico relations: the political spaces of both countries are, in many ways, deeply intertwined and sensitive to the actions (whether internal or external) of the other. In this sense, there was a connection between the parallel crises that befell the United States and Mexico, though it was not necessarily one of shared ideological perils that many at the time and historians who have addressed this since have assumed – or more accurately, it was not just because of these. Rather, it was because not only were the two nations threatened with disruption, and in Mexico's case by conquest; they were also next to one another. To secure

the political settlement in the United States, the political settlement in Mexico also had to be secured. Whilst this might in some ways be an obvious point, it does not denude its importance.

Indeed, although Diaz' coup settled the order of Mexican politics and economics for a generation, it did not end the attempts to affect Mexican political space through the lower Rio Grande. Other instances occurred along the lower Rio Grande in the following half-century. In 1891, Catarino Garza launched a revolution from around Rio Grande City, where Cortina had been defeated in 1859, into Mexico in an attempt to topple Porfirio Diaz from power. Fighting lasted two years in both north-eastern Mexico and Texas before Garza was defeated and fled to Panama. Elliott Young describes this as the biggest threat Diaz faced between his assumption of power and eventual downfall in the Mexican Revolution. As for the Mexican Revolution itself, Kelly Lytle Hernandez has recently addressed how it was started by Mexican exiles living in the US, known as *Magonistas*, who crossed the Rio Grande to overthrow Diaz. Friedrich Katz, meanwhile, has examined how foreign non-state actors such as merchants interfered with and influenced the course of the Mexican Revolution. The raids of Pancho Villa into the southwestern United States, meanwhile, are well-known, whilst Rachel St John has noted how arms smuggling boomed on the western border during the Revolution.[393]

Equally, remaining in the mid-nineteenth century for a moment, the events along the lower Rio Grande challenge our assumptions about the American Civil War as an internal conflict that was contested internally. Diplomatic histories of the Civil War are usually histories of what did not happen: Britain did not go to war with the Union over the Trent

[393] Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace on Rio Grande*, 250-74; Young, *Catarino Garza's Revolution*; Hernandez, Kelly Lytle, *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire and Revolution in the Borderlands* (New York, 2022); Katz, Friedrich, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago, 1981); for the US response to the Mexican Revolution see for example Eisenhower, John S.D., *Intervention!: The United States and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1917* (New York, 1993); St John, *Line in the Sand*, 122

Affair, for example, nor did France ally with the Confederacy. However, focussing upon the lower Rio Grande encourages to acknowledge the Civil War as not just an internal but also an extraterritorial conflict. Indeed, this can be widened both temporally and spatially to cover North America throughout the Civil War era. Two examples will hopefully suffice to illustrate this: the campaign waged between Cornelius Vanderbilt's and William Walker's private armies in Nicaragua in the late 1850s, and the likely presence of Union and Confederate veterans at the Battle of Santa Gertrudis in 1866. Both are examples, before and after the Civil War, of how the North-South conflict could be, to adapt Beau Cleland, deinstitutionalised and extraterritorialised.

This encourages us to consider the Civil War as not only an internal struggle for control of the United States as it existed in 1861. As noted in the Introduction, historians such as Andrew Isenberg and Thomas Richards, John Craig Hammond, Kevin Waite and Steven Hahn have recently begun to frame the Civil War as an imperial conflict. The lower Rio Grande shows this with the various activities of filibusters, merchants, generals and soldiers, albeit with the complication that these 'imperialisms' are perhaps not best understood by focussing on the official state metropole policy. This in turn influenced the policies of Mexican *caudillos*, who sought to both resist and co-opt these various American imperialisms in order to maintain their own power. This process reached its apotheosis on the lower Rio Grande in 1876 when Porfirio Diaz utilised the support of American volunteers and businessman to launch a coup that seized power over the whole country.

In the process, this dissertation has integrated the lower Rio Grande into diplomatic histories of the Civil War, but not simply as a facet of the military campaigns – this has been more than adequately covered by the likes of James Daddysman. Instead, this dissertation has demonstrated that the lower Rio Grande was a place of almost unique geopolitical turbulence in the North America of the mid-nineteenth century. As William Kiser notes, 'the Civil War

era represented a high-water mark of irregular diplomatic interaction between the United States and Mexico.' An in-depth examination of this space and time reveals the impact that the struggles of the Civil War era had outside the United States, a subject that still has not received the historical attention I believe it deserves. This dissertation is hopefully one of several steps recently taken in the right direction. Furthermore, by deinstitutionalising this history and focussing on non-state and renegade state actors, this dissertation has questioned how far state actors were responsible, or solely responsible, for the course and shape of events in these crucial years. This is hopefully a fruitful avenue of approach to Civil War era politics and geopolitics that can be explored further in the coming years.[394]

Ultimately, what this dissertation seeks to do is to emphasise how differently things may have turned out (along the lower Rio Grande in particular), how these distinctly possible alternatives helped to create what actually happened, and how renegade state and non-state actors were integral to this process. As Daniel Walker Howe has noted, 'we too readily assume the inevitability of everything that happened.' This sense of contingency, despite being articulated in respect to the Civil War by James MacPherson, has been notably lacking in histories of the Civil War era, especially where US-Mexico relations are concerned. Isenberg and Richards argue that this sense of inevitability was conditioned by Union victory in the Civil War – without that, the US looks strikingly similar to Mexico. Sarah Rodriguez notes that 'the long road to US continental domination was replete with contingencies, ironies and missed opportunities.' Thomas Richards, Jr, meanwhile, argues that 'separation and independence were part of the normal discourse for most of the Americans who left or contemplated leaving' and that 'for this era, scholars have lost the sense that history could have turned out differently. They have lost the notion that contingencies directed the

[394] Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 162

geopolitics of the period.' These contingencies can be clearly seen in the agency of actors along the lower Rio Grande during the Civil War era.[395]

Returning to the lower Rio Grande itself, this process of 'intermestic' power and influence cannot be said to have vanished in our own twenty-first century, although interestingly, despite the US' power, the asymmetry may be said to have flipped. On 14th March, 2003, Osiel Cardenas, the leader of the Mexican Gulf Cartel, was arrested in Matamoros after a shootout involving 'hundreds of bodyguards and Mexican soldiers.' Cardenas was extradited to the US and subsequently jailed. Seven years later, his brother, Antonio Cardenas, who had taken over the cartel after Osiel's arrest, was killed in another shootout in Matamoros that also claimed the lives of three gunmen, two marines, a soldier and a local reporter.[396]

Drug cartels now dominate northern Mexico and the lower Rio Grande. As non-state actors, they dictate the foreign policies of the US and Mexico in the borderland. They are enabled to do so in part by US citizens, both in terms of buying the drugs they traffic and, in turn, smuggling guns across the border into Mexico. It has been estimated that in 2010-12, for example, 2.2% of all arms sales in the US were trafficked across the border. This amounts to 212,887 firearms per year, far more than Grant and Sheridan sent southward but just as decisive in maintaining those that receive them in power. In 2008, for example, the Mexican

[395] For McPherson and contingency, see McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 857-58; Howe, Daniel Walker, *What Hath Gad Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York, 2007), 690; Isenberg and Richards, 'Alternative Wests,' 10-11 (see also Diaz, *Continuous State of War*; Downs, Gregory, 'Mexicanisation of American Politics'); Rodriguez, 'Children of the Great Mexican Family,' 431; Richards Jr, *Breakaway Americas*, 13

[396] 'Alleged Leader of Mexican drug cartel arrested,' CNN, 14/3/2003 (CNN.com - Alleged leader of Mexican drug cartel arrested - Mar. 14, 2003); 'High Profile Mexican drug lord killed in deadly shootout,' France24, 06/11/2010 (High profile Mexican drug lord killed in deadly shootout (france24.com))

Attorney General Eduardo Medina Mora acknowledged that the cartels were actually better armed than the Mexican armed forces.[397]

Stephanie Brophy has noted that what enables the cartels' power and geopolitical influence is 'relatively weak government institutions, rampant corruption, easy access to weapons, technological advances, broad transnational networks, and prohibition policies.' Aside from prohibition policies, exactly the same dynamics enabled the geopolitical agency of nonelite, non-state and renegade state actors along the lower Rio Grande, the same area that the Gulf Cartel now controls, in the 1850s and 60s. Merchants and filibusters utilised these dynamics to try and create or extend polities amenable to their own control and worldview. Whilst the cartels do not attempt to do this *de jure* as the merchants and filibusters ultimately did, they certainly do it *de facto*, operating what Brophy describes as 'a parallel power structure operating outside the rule of law.' Cartels traffic drugs across the Rio Grande for immense profits, often in collaboration with local officials, just as merchants and Confederate agents did with cotton during the Civil War. Guns flow across the border into Mexico perpetuating what is essentially a struggle for control of the state's territory and sovereignty, just as they flowed northwards into Texas during the Civil War and southwards into Mexico during the French intervention for the same purpose.[398]

The parallels are striking. At the same time, Donald Trump's infamous promise to 'build a wall' effectively quarantining Mexico from the United States suggests a break in (an admittedly often deinstitutionalised) foreign policy towards Mexico. Since 1848, Americans have attempted to influence the shape of Mexican politics, along the lower Rio Grande and elsewhere, in order to suit their interests. Trump's policies suggest a withdrawal from this.

[397] McDougal, Topher L., Shirk, David A., Muggah, Robert and Patterson, John H., 'The Way of the Gun: Estimating Firearms Trafficking across the US-Mexico Border,' *Journal of Economic Geography*, Vol. 15 (2015), 297; 'Deaths rise as Mexico drug gangs return fire,' *Financial Times*, 18/3/2008 (Deaths rise as Mexico drug gangs return fire | Financial Times (ft.com))

[398] Brophy, Stephanie, 'Mexico: Cartels, Corruption and Cocaine: A Profile of the Gulf Cartel,' *Global Crime*, Vol. 9 No. 3 (2008), 259, 257

After all, the Emperors of China did not build the Great Wall in order to influence Mongolian politics: they built the Great Wall in order to separate Chinese and Mongolian politics.

Contrary to some historians who argue that the calcification of borders necessarily restricted the geopolitical agency of actors in those borderlands, this dissertation shows that it in fact enabled them. It was precisely the existence of this geopolitical boundary that created the conditions for such geopolitical agency to thrive. As James David Nichols notes, 'borders, rather than reducing opportunities, created them.' It is also why, if in a mutated form adapted to the realities of the twenty-first century, they continue to exist, as the power of the cartels demonstrates. Indeed, Pekka Hämäläinen's description of the Comanche Empire's characteristics – 'staggering geographical range, core-periphery hierarchies, vast hinterlands of extraction, systematic incorporation of foreign ethnicities, dynamic multiculturalism, and penetrating cultural influence' – holds equally true for the cartels and the drug trade today.[399]

The lower Rio Grande, then, highlights a geopolitical agency that is deinstitutionalised and decentralised, expressed in terms of force, trade and talk, obeying dynamics that began in the 1850s and 60s that, despite alterations, hold true even today. Acting both with and against the state, non-state and renegade state actors can pursue their own foreign policies, enable the success or failure of state policies, and take advantage of state policies to their own benefit. This is dependent on and reflective of their own mobility and power imbalances between, in the language of world systems theory, the core and the periphery, and between the official and the renegade. In so doing they interrogate what their nation-states mean and test the limits of what they can geopolitically enforce and achieve.

Understood in this way, the Cardenas brothers, captured and gunned down in Matamoros earlier this century, are not too dissimilar to Stillman, Kenedy and King in the

[399] Adelman and Aron, 'From Borderlands to Borders'; Nichols, *Limits of Liberty*, 8; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 350; Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 165. William Kiser also notes the parallels between smuggling in the Civil War era and cartel activity today. (Ibid, 161-62.)

1850s and 60s, albeit looking north rather than south. This is not to say conditions are precisely the same. There are of course no more filibusters, careering around the Caribbean trying to expand the United States or create their own empires. Despite the violence of the cartels, no Texas Governor has called for an invasion of northern Mexico as Sam Houston did. No European empire has invaded Mexico since the French withdrew in 1867. Yet those underlying dynamics of non-state and renegade state geopolitical agency remain, albeit channelled and transformed. They continue to affect Mexico and the United States both internally and externally. What the infrequency of such geopolitical agency after 1867 suggests is that they only usually occur when economic booms or (violent) political struggle, whether internal, external or both, give non-state, renegade state and nonelite actors both reasons and political space to develop their own foreign policies. Osiel Cardenas and Charles Stillman, should they ever meet in the great hereafter, would have much to talk about, many stories to share, and undoubtedly many parallels to draw.

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