Royal United Services Institution. Journal

Publication details, including instructions for
authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rusi19>

The United States versus Mexico

T. Miller Maguire LL.D.

Published online: 11 Sep 2009.

To cite this article: T. Miller Maguire LL.D. (1914) The United States versus
Mexico, Royal United Services Institution. Journal, 58:435, 605-610, DOI:
[10.1080/03071841409420110](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071841409420110)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071841409420110>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan,

sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

THE UNITED STATES *versus* MEXICO.

By T. MILLER MAGUIRE, LL.D.

IT is not for me in this Journal to discuss at any length the causes of war; politicians decide the cause and the justification, the finance and the treaties, but soldiers must conduct the operations and bear the blame of strategic and tactical failures.

Whether the present campaign will result in the development of fierce antagonism as between the Latin and Anglo-Saxon populations of the great American continent and neighbouring isles, or be settled by mediation, as is now proposed, or result in future annexation, I do not pretend to say, but that in spite

VERA CRUZ TO MEXICO CITY.

of their enormous superiority by sea and land in every resource to Mexico, the Northern Republic has proved the accuracy of previous warning in this Journal that their Monroe Doctrine, as Captain A. Mahan, United States Navy, has so clearly demonstrated, is only to be justified by force. That they were not likely to gain much moral or strategic reputation by forcing its theories down the throats of their neighbours, is obvious. The whole body of the Mexican Hispano-Indian republicans,

however disunited among themselves, abhor Yankee rule, and would prefer the rule of the worst President since Juarez, or even of a "freebooting" adventurer of Spanish or Indian or mixed descent, to the most refined plutocrat or polished vote-catcher from Washington or New York.

Whether hostilities are protracted till peace is brought about by pure exhaustion or not, these facts are indisputable: that there is no pretence of justice for the attack on Vera Cruz; that the war is not one against a peccant chief in the interest of humanity at large as the matter now stands (April, 1914); and that whatever the bad repute of the chiefs of the civil strife before the North American blockade, they are now hailed as rivals in patriotism of Bolivar, and the enthusiasm of the populace for their independence is unbounded, while myriads of young men would gladly engage in a guerilla war, for which, in topography and materials, in food supply and in the fighting instincts of the women, their opulent country is so well adapted.

If the present generation of Hispano-Indians are true to their history, the invaders, once they get away from their floating citadels, the modern enormous ironclad ships of war, and move on the capital of Mexico, with each day's progress must "drag behind them a lengthening chain"; and the defenders ought to be able to harass and exhaust them, and by flank attacks soon compel retreat or capitulation. Negotiation, procrastination, worry, delay, and even duplicity, are all good strategy for the Mexicans.

The causes of the war against Mexico on the previous occasion were not very profound, and not characterized by honour, or justice; but, nevertheless, they followed necessarily from the annexation of Texas, which was a very doubtful transaction at best, and by the claims of Texas to the territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande del Norte.

As I have been accused of prejudice against the United States and their jurisprudence and Monroe Doctrine, and against their arbitrary and severe treatment of other nations and of the native races, I quote the great General U. S. Grant, the most successful Federal General—himself afterwards twice President—he says, "even if the annexation of Texas, 1845, could be justified, the manner in which the war was afterwards forced upon Mexico cannot. Texas as an independent State never had exercised jurisdiction over the territory between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. Mexico had never recognized the independence of Texas, and maintained that even if independent Texas had no claim south of the Nueces."

In taking military possession of Texas after annexation the Army of Occupation under General Z. Taylor was directed to occupy the disputed territory. The army did not stop at the Nueces, was not eager to negotiate for a settlement of the boundary question, but went beyond, apparently to force Mexico to initiate war.

The General goes on to say :—" To us the acquired territory was an empire, and of incalculable value, but it might have been acquired by other means. The southern rebellion was largely the outgrowth of the Mexican War; nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. We got our punishment in the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern times."

The United States West Point-bred officers and the enlisted men were very well trained and equipped up to date. Leaders were eager for glory and promotion and did not discuss the equity of the transaction. Major Steele, in his excellent modern summary, which I follow on the whole, is of this school of thought. But some officers to their last days looked back on the war of 1846-7 as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation.

The army was sent to provoke a fight, but for political purposes it was essential that Mexico should commence, and here follow indications of somewhat "slim and sly" manœuvring and plotting.

"It was very doubtful whether Congress would declare war, but if Mexico should attack our troops the Executive could announce 'whereas war exists by the acts of, etc.,' and then pursue the contest with vigour, and, once initiated, there were but few public men who would have the courage to oppose it."

In this connection I may point out that my friend the late Colonel Henderson, in his life of Stonewall Jackson, shows how this afterwards celebrated general got brevet rank for his courage in the Mexican War, at Contreras, and was publicly complimented for his services with the guns at Chapultepec by General Scott, the Commander-in-Chief. It will be interesting to officers, who study the American Civil War for Staff College and Promotion Examinations, to learn that most of the generals whose adventures they must follow are celebrated in the records of the Mexican Campaign. Magruder, Hooker, McDowell and A. Hill all served in Jackson's own regiment; McClellan and Beauregard were on the same staff as the still more famous R. Lee; Pope was a staff officer, Shields commanded a brigade, D. H. Hill received the brevets, Longstreet was wounded while carrying the Colours at Chapultepec, and E. Johnson was very distinguished at the same battle.

But much more instructive is Grant's estimation of the remarkable way in which, during the subsequent Civil War, he was able to profit by his Mexican experiences of the capacity, knowledge and readiness of the officers who joined the other side; able men like Jackson, Lee, Longstreet and Ewell made similar use of the knowledge acquired in 1846-7. This gives the clue to many an enterprise apparently so daring as to be rash in 1862-3.

From General Grant, who ultimately took R. Lee and his army captive, I quote another passage, which surely might be the text for a military sermon :—

“ All the older officers who became conspicuous in the rebellion I had served with and known in Mexico. The acquaintance thus formed was of immense service to me in the rebellion—I mean what I learned of the characters of those to whom I was afterwards opposed. I do not pretend to say that all my movements were made with especial reference to the characteristics of the commanders against whom they were directed, but my appreciation of my enemy was certainly affected by this knowledge. The natural disposition of most people is to clothe the commander of a large army whom they do not know with almost superhuman abilities. A large part of the National army, for instance, and most of the Press of the country, clothed General Lee with just such qualities, but I had known him personally, and I knew him to be mortal.”

“ It was just as well that I felt this,” naively remarks the General.

We have been made well aware of the inefficiency of the United States Army for its responsibilities during the last half century, but things were really scandalous in 1846. Most of the authoritative historians seem to slur over politics, but Grant could speak out in 1885, after he had been President and had experienced all that might and could be attempted by politicians. Not even the worst Czar, or the courtiers of a Bourbon could make more outrageous or baser attacks on the reputation and fortunes of their Generals than the Yankee wire pullers did.

I must not refer to our own history for precedents or analogies, but I quote General Grant, the victor of 1864-5, and elected President in 1869, and again I beg my readers to weigh his words carefully, lest their own turn should come all too soon.

General Grant was only 24 years of age in 1846, and yet he witnessed intrigues in which honour and many lives were sacrificed ; and he lived to save his country from ruin by tolerating conduct (in spite of the Secretary of the War Department) on the part of his ablest subordinates, to which our history supplies no parallel, explaining much concerning the war itself, and also proving the right of a General to resign if his plans and views as to the commencement and conduct of a war be either opposed or altered by political superiors.

The Mexican War of 1846 was a political war, and the administration responsible for it wanted it to suit their Party schemes. The head of the army was a Whig, the Government was Democratic. It would not pay to popularize Scott by giving him an army and means of rapid and conclusive victories. The sacrifice of the soldiery was a secondary matter. His plans were not supported by the War Office, and he replied

that "if a soldier's plans were not supported by the administration success was not to be expected." He wrote this on May 27th, 1846, and four days later he was superseded by General Zachary Taylor, a Whig also, strange to say. After his victories on the Rio Grande line of operations, and the fall of Monterey, he began to be nominated as a certain candidate for the Presidency, and was ultimately elected.

I will bring this article to an end by finishing the narrative of how Scott ultimately got command, enabling Grant and other young officers to realize their ambitions, complete the defeat of Mexico, take the capital of Santa Anna, and revel in all the luxuriance of the palaces of old Indian Emperors and Spanish Viceroy, after a triumphal progress through a country which is a very region of romance, possessing a lovely climate, historic cities and magnificent scenery; and whose story in the glowing pages of Prescott thrilled the imagination of every ardent youth, as Colonel Henderson says, "to follow the path of Cortez, to traverse the golden realms of Montezuma, to look upon the lakes and palaces of Mexico, the most ancient city of America, to encamp among the temples of a vanished race, and to hear, while the fireflies flitted through the perfumed night, the music of the black-eyed maidens of New Spain. Was there ever a more fascinating prospect for a young subaltern?"

Unfortunately, Grant felt keenly that all these glowing visions were based on moral and political wrong doing. But let us deal with the effect of politics on strategy. Grant records that:—

"Something had to be done to neutralize his growing popularity. He could not be relieved from duty in the field where all his battles had been victories; the design would have been too transparent. It was finally decided to send General Scott to Mexico in chief command, and to authorize him to carry out his own original plan; that is, to capture Vera Cruz and march upon the capital of the country. It was, no doubt, supposed that Scott's ambition would lead him to slaughter Taylor or destroy his chances for the Presidency, and yet it was hoped that he would not make sufficient capital himself to secure the prize.

"The administration had, indeed, a most embarrassing problem to solve. It was engaged in a war of conquest which must be carried to a successful issue, or the political object would be unattained. Yet all the capable officers of the requisite rank belonged to the opposition, and the man selected for his lack of political ambition had himself become a prominent candidate for the Presidency. It was necessary to destroy his chances promptly. The problem was to do this without the loss of conquest and without permitting another general of the same political party to acquire like popularity. The fact is, the administration of Mr. Polk made every preparation to disgrace

Scott, or, to speak more correctly, to drive him to such desperation that he would disgrace himself.

"General Scott had opposed conquest by the way of the Rio Grande, Matamoras and Saltillo from the first. Now that he was in command of all the forces in Mexico, he withdrew from Taylor most of his regular troops and left him only enough volunteers, as he thought, to hold the line then in possession of the invading army. Indeed, Scott did not deem it important to hold anything beyond the Rio Grande, and authorized Taylor to fall back to that line if he chose. General Taylor protested against the depletion of his army, and his subsequent movement upon Buena Vista would indicate that he did not share the views of his chief in regard to the unimportance of conquest beyond the Rio Grande.

"Scott had estimated the men and material that would be required to capture Vera Cruz, and to march on the capital of the country, two hundred and sixty miles in the interior. He was promised all he asked, and seemed to have not only the confidence of the President, but his sincere good wishes. The promises were all broken. Only about half the troops were furnished that had been pledged, other war material was withheld, and Scott had scarcely started for Mexico before the President undertook to supersede him."

I may say that the intervention of any Power, Anglo-Saxon, or German, or French, in the affairs of the Mexican Federation has always been bitterly resented, and on the whole these States may be regarded as one political body, and in spite of Punch's satire on the kind of war against Huerta, the National sentiment has been growing since 1846. No really popular movement against the invaders was then apparent, and two States, Vera Cruz and Zacatecas, refused by virtue of their autonomy to take part in the struggle. But the National feeling became much stronger at the time of the French invasion, 1862-3, and the short-lived rule of the Emperor Maximilian. When their country was delivered from these terrible dangers the national pride of victory and strength made Mexico a nation in the true sense of the word, but unfortunately the strong hands and clear heads of men like Diaz have been replaced by short-lived and cruel potentates who have revived civil strife and forgotten the comity of nations. On the other hand, the fact that the United States men have been alternately aggressive and timid, bumptious and conciliatory, has tended to consolidate the aspirations of all the Latin settlers (Ladinos), or descendants of Spanish and old Indians (Mestizoes), and unite the inhabitants, not only of Mexico, already despoiled of half its territory, as it existed before 1840, but of Central and Northern America in one great confederacy against the United States.