

## FRENCH VIEWS OF THE MONROE DOCTRINE AND THE MEXICAN EXPEDITION

From the beginning of its history, the United States has followed more or less consciously a policy of isolation. This tendency, noticeable as early as 1780 in the statements of Thomas Pownall, John Adams, and others, was continued by Washington, Jefferson, Adams, and Madison, until it found more definite expression in the famous statement of Monroe in 1823. This state of affairs was early recognized in Europe, as well; but however much the separation of the American continent in policy and in fact may have been appreciated by European statesmen, they have ever been careful to give it as little formal recognition as possible.

It was only in the United States, then, that the converse of our isolation policy—that of European aloofness—took shape. One phase of the doctrine, however, was as natural and inevitable as the other; and in order to impress on Europe our convictions as to the separation of the two hemispheres, it became necessary to formulate and state the further idea that it was the natural province of the United States, as the leading American power, to keep Europe from altering conditions in America. So it came about that the United States asserted its self-assumed authority as the natural guardian of the western hemisphere on a number of occasions. And it has been this phase of the policy which has given rise to a uniformly hostile attitude of European states, no less hostile because it has been for the most part latent or potential.

European unwillingness to accept our protective authority in the New World, or even in North America, has been displayed on practically every occasion when such an attitude could be shown to the possible advantage of European interests. Any indulgence or respect which has been displayed toward our traditional policy has been due to European rivalries and preoccupa-

tion elsewhere, or to the vigorous and easily-displayed strength of the United States, or, more particularly, to the Atlantic Ocean—the factor which first prompted our isolation policy and which has more than any other single thing made its continuation possible.

Now and then some particular issue has focused the attention of one power or another on the status in the New World and elicited a storm of criticism and disapproval in the foreign press. It is, of course, impossible to cite here the particular attitude of European states toward this characteristic policy of the United States in each specific instance where definite issues have been raised. The armed invasion of Mexico by the French, however, is a striking case in point, which offers a good opportunity for the study of European attitude toward the jealous American doctrine, not only because this was the only thorough violation of the Monroe Doctrine, but also because it was instituted by a combination of the three European colonizing Powers; England, France, and Spain. Moreover, it was no accident that the year 1861, when the United States was in the midst of a terrible civil struggle, was chosen for the only successful attempt ever made by a foreign state to plant a colony in America against the will of an Hispanic American state.

In this instance, the causes of intervention were many and confused, beginning with the Mexican revolt from Spain in 1821. From that time there had been internal war and anarchy in Mexico. For a number of years a contest raged between two parties, styled Liberals and Clericals. In that civil war, considerable damage was suffered by subjects of foreign nations, and notably by French, English, and Spanish nationals. Claims for damage in each case mounted high. England complained because of the long mistreatment of its subjects and the denial of the usual privileges to its diplomatic representatives. Besides the British Legation at Vera Cruz had been seized and rifled of a sum of £150,000 on November 16, 1860. Spain was wroth because the government of the Juárez faction, having the upper hand in 1861, refused to recognize a Spanish treaty of 1859 made with the then *de facto* government, whereby the validity

of certain long-standing Spanish claims had been recognized. To that had been added the expulsion of the Spanish minister later.<sup>1</sup>

The claim of France for reparation rested on supposed injuries to French subjects, culminating in the refusal of the Juárez government to honor the so-called Jecker bonds, which one of the many factional leaders, Miramon, had issued before his defeat and deposition somewhat earlier. Juárez agreed to repay the 5 per cent (\$750,000), which had been advanced by France in cash, but refused to pay the face value of the bonds, which amounted to \$15,000,000. The determination to press this unjust claim (Jecker was, moreover, a Swiss banker, naturalized in France under unusual conditions) led to the only instance where France offered a greater threat to the Monroe Doctrine than any other European power.<sup>2</sup> And France appears to have had the weakest case against Mexico of any of the injured powers in 1861.<sup>3</sup>

The first phase of the intervention was not wholly unreasonable. Having failed to receive satisfaction from separate presentation of their claims, the three powers formed a triple alliance at London, October 31, 1861, wherein they vowed that,

The high contracting parties engage not to seek for themselves, in the employment of the coercive measures contemplated by the present Convention, any acquisition of territory, nor any special advantage, and not to exercise in the internal affairs of Mexico any influence of a nature to prejudice the right of the Mexican nation to choose and to constitute freely the form of its Government.<sup>4</sup>

This pledge was kept by Spain and England, which at first coöperated with France in preparing a punitive expedition. A triple fleet, loaded with troops and commanded by a Spanish General (Prim), sailed for Mexico and prepared to bombard

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Antokoletz, *La Doctrine de Monroe et l'Amérique Latine*, p. 38; Hector Petin, *Les États-Unis et la Doctrine de Monroe*, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> M. de Barral-Montferrat, *De Monroe à Roosevelt*, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Petin, *op. cit.*, p. 167; a quite different view.

<sup>4</sup> *British and Foreign State Papers*, LI, 947. Cf. also Petin, *op. cit.*, p. 175; and Maurice D. Beaumarchais, *La Doctrine de Monroe, l'Évolution de la Politique des États-Unis au XIXe Siècle*, p. 80.

Vera Cruz. In view of the fleet, the *de facto* government asked to treat, offering to pay all the indemnities which had been asked and to give security for the execution of the agreement. England and Spain declared themselves satisfied, and signed a Convention at Soledad February 19, 1862, which brought their action to an end.<sup>5</sup>

However, the French plenipotentiary, Admiral Gravière, refused to sign, maintaining that the indemnities offered were insufficient, and demanding the entire redemption of the Jecker bonds. This furnished a pretext, at least, for further French action.<sup>6</sup> Hostilities were commenced shortly after by the French forces, while the government complained bitterly of the "violation" of the treaty of 1861 by its allies.<sup>7</sup>

France had from the first intended to seize Mexico, if possible, regardless of the attitude of Europe, the United States, or Hispanic America. Shortly after the expedition had begun, Napoleon III informed his military commander that he would need to remain in Mexico in order to assist those Mexicans who might desire a strong government, and added that it would be prudent if the two governments (England and Spain) did not discourage those efforts which might be attempted by the country to extricate itself from the anarchy into which it was plunged.<sup>8</sup>

The French lawyer and historian Petin states that it was obviously to the interests of both England and France to see a strong government set up in Mexico which would be favorably disposed toward them; the more so if the Confederate States won, for then there would be a desire on the part of both North and South to compensate themselves in Mexico. Also he states an European policy for America, by saying:

Such an event could not be looked upon with indifference by England and by France, and the principal obstacle which could prevent its ac-

<sup>5</sup> Antokoletz, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39 f.

<sup>7</sup> Barral-Montferrat, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Beaumarchais, *La Doctrine de Monroe*, p. 80.

complishment would be the reconstitution of Mexico by a government strong enough to stop internal dissolution; but the elements of a strong government do not exist in Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

Petin reiterates that the sole French motive in this intervention was to see anarchy succeeded by a stable government, at the same time recognizing the infringement of such an attempt on the Monroe Doctrine.

Other motives are, however, confessed by some French authorities, though all have constantly held that the Mexican enterprise was something of an errand of kindness. For instance:

Napoleon wished to oppose to the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race in America, as in Europe, a formidable union of Latin peoples; he began to see the need of an expedition from abroad to assist the realization of these policies. . . .

Also the French Government was brought to conceive the grandiose idea, that if she should succeed, she would be in conformity with the voices of the Mexican people—to make of Mexico otherwise a French colony, or at least, a kind of French protectorate.<sup>10</sup>

The Emperor had discerned all that the Monroe Doctrine contained of anti-Europeanism. He had seen that the declaration of the fifth President of the United States was nothing else than a declaration of war on the Old World, and he wished to show America that Europe had taken up the challenge. . . .

Napoleon was a dreamer. . . . He had adopted the principle of nationalities in his European policy. . . . He wished a federation of Latin races opposed to the federation of Anglo-Saxon peoples.<sup>11</sup>

Napoleon himself stated his motives in continuing his aggression in Mexico in a letter, dated July 3, 1863, to General Forey, commanding the French troops in Mexico. Among other things, he said:

Thus, France has extended her beneficent influence into the center of America. . . . It is, in fine, military honor, political exigencies,

<sup>9</sup> Petin, *op. cit.*, pp. 166, 175.

<sup>10</sup> Beaumarchais, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> Petin, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

industrial and commercial interests, which have imposed the obligation of marching on the capital of Mexico.<sup>12</sup>

According to French writers, Napoleon III was originally not alone in his intentions to flout the Monroe Doctrine and set up a new régime in Mexico. To quote:

That which they did not write into the treaty (the London Convention) they mutually said, however, in their despatches and exchanges of views, which was that they hoped that the presence of the allied forces would inspire the sane part of the (Mexican) nation to set up those institutions most conducive to the reestablishment in the country of the order and security needed. . . . They believed that the . . . country would never be pacified in a definite fashion except by an authority more firm and stable than that of divers presidents, who deposed each other time after time every two or three years. In consequence, they would see with pleasure the adoption by Mexico of a monarchical constitution and would give her for a sovereign any prince belonging to the ruling families of Europe.<sup>13</sup>

This desire for intervention, however, is partly justified by the statement that,

This desire for intervention was in a certain measure warranted by the anarchical condition in Mexico, which in 40 years had had 73 presidents and had modified its form of government 36 times.<sup>14</sup>

Article 4 of the Convention of 1861 provided for inviting the United States to join in the Mexican affair. Secretary of State Seward refused the joint invitation on the ground of United States traditional policy and sympathy for Mexico. In this connection, Petin remarks:

That reflection of the Secretary of State was clearly useless; every one knows, since the war that they have waged against Mexico, that they eagerly desire its annexation.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cepedes, *La Doctrina de Monroe*, p. 278 f.; cf. also, Antokoletz, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>13</sup> Barral-Montferrat, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> Beaumarchais, *op. cit.*, p. 80, note.

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 180.

The French thought the United States would have bitterly opposed any project of reparation whatever, had not its hands been tied by war, pointing out that this country had strongly protested to Spain in 1858 when that country was meditating single action against Mexico. The statement of the United States government to the contrary apparently was not convincing.<sup>16</sup>

As a final answer to the invitation of the powers, Seward said on December 4, 1861:

It is true that the United States have on their part claims against Mexico. Meanwhile, after mature reflection, the President is convinced that it would be inopportune at the moment to actually seek to obtain satisfaction by adhering to the Convention. Among the reasons which have led to this decision are these: In the first place, the United States prefer, as far as is practicable, to hold to the traditional policy which has been their legacy from the father of their country; a policy of which experience has shown the happy effects, and which keeps them from forming alliances with foreign nations. In the second place, Mexico is a neighbor of the United States; her system of government resembles ours in many respects. The United States, then, have naturally benevolent sentiments for that Republic, and are interested in her security, her prosperity and her welfare".<sup>17</sup>

In addition to a refusal to sign, the United States attempted to relieve the pressure by backing Mexico financially, proposing to guarantee the interest on the Mexican debt. This was rejected by the European alliance. "The claims of European countries were too strong to be satisfied by guarantees."<sup>18</sup>

But before the occupation of Mexico had begun, the government of France had decided to overturn that of Mexico. A future Mexican prince, Archduke Maximilian of Austria, had even been chosen, who was deemed acceptable to England and Spain as he was to France.<sup>19</sup> The French persuaded themselves that they were acting in as unselfish a manner as when in 1829,

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, p. 349.

<sup>18</sup> Beaumarchais, *op. cit.*, p. 82; Petin, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>19</sup> Barral-Montferrat, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-4; Petin, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

France, England, and Russia had helped to liberate Greece and had placed on the new throne a prince from a country not participating. The only concession to be made to American traditions was indicated by an intimate friend of Napoleon's, Michel Chevalier, who remarked in 1862:

For a republic which is nominal and derisive, there will be substituted a monarchical system, but a monarchy perfectly independent, and as liberal as possible.<sup>20</sup>

Following the withdrawal of England and Spain from the Mexican project, the work of the French went merrily on. The French government alternately complained of the "desertion" of its allies and asked for their moral support. This desertion was not prompted entirely by the satisfaction of their claims in Mexico, and certainly not by sympathy with the views of the United States. England had commercial interests which it conceived would be advanced by withdrawing from the affair. Spain turned its attention to the reconquest of Santo Domingo, which was as much a violation of the Monroe Doctrine as the Mexican venture itself. Ignoring an emphatic protest from the United States, the Spanish officially proclaimed Santo Domingo "reannexed", though the attempt to hold the island in subjection proved too much and the project was entirely abandoned in 1865 with the partial recovery of the American Union.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the French under General Forey had entered Mexico City on June 10, 1863. By decree a provisional government was established, consisting of 35 notables. These named a triumvirate of Mexican citizens, charged with the exercise of executive powers, to convoke an assembly of 205 notables, who should decide the future of the Mexican government.<sup>22</sup>

The Assembly which had these powers represented only a small part of the entire nation. However, it drew up a constitu-

<sup>20</sup> M. Chevalier, *L'Expedition europeenne au Mexique*, in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Apr. 1, 1862, p. 514. Cf. also the article by Mazade, "La Guerre de Mexique et les puissances europeennes", in the same journal for August 1, 1862.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. B. Hart, *The Monroe Doctrine, An Interpretation*, p. 151.

<sup>22</sup> Petin, *op. cit.*, p. 188.



tion providing for a limited monarchy, and designated Maximilian of Austria as Emperor. This arrangement was validated by a plebiscite, held under the auspices of the French army.<sup>23</sup>

Maximilian, believing himself regularly chosen, reluctantly accepted the position. He arrived in Mexico City, June 12, 1864, and was immediately recognized by most of the European powers. At the same time, a convention was signed whereby the expenses of the French expedition were to be paid by the new monarchy; and arrangements were made for the temporary establishment in Mexico of 25,000 French troops, 8,000 of whom were to remain permanently.<sup>24</sup> Thus was inaugurated the new government which was to have been "perfectly independent, and as liberal as possible".

At no time was there any doubt in French minds as to the violation of the Monroe Doctrine.

The Treaty of London had violated the Monroe Doctrine. If a monarchy were set up under a European prince, it would be still more menacing. To remove that danger, the United States should have subscribed to the Treaty of London, and abandoned, as in 1850 (in the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty), the principles of their foreign policy and practice with the Powers. They would then have the right to intervene and collect their own damages.<sup>25</sup>

That the French may have been acting under some serious misconceptions in undertaking the Mexican project in the belief that they might secure the consent, if not the aid, of the Confederate States, appears from historical comment later.

The North was of the Anglo-Saxon race, which was accustomed through its origin to liberty. It was Protestant in religion, largely Puritan. For the development of industries, it had adopted a protective tariff. The population of the South, on the contrary, had the traditions of autocracy. They were partly Catholic, and belonged to the Latin race. Moreover, the South was a country of great culture, and

<sup>23</sup> Barral-Montferrat, *op. cit.*, p. 97; Beaumarchais, *op. cit.*, p. 179; Petin, *op. cit.*, 188; Wheaton, *op. cit.*, II, 362.

<sup>24</sup> Petin, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-90.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180. Cf. Antokoletz, p. 40.

was anxious to exchange cotton for European goods. It was, in consequence, wedded to free trade.<sup>26</sup>

The delusion that the people of the south were Latin in sympathy, at least, was rudely terminated when the Confederate government was approached on the subject of a Franco-Confederate alliance against the North. This suggestion was summarily dismissed. A little later the United States government intercepted a letter which Benjamin, Secretary of State for the Confederacy, had addressed to Mr. Slidell, Confederate agent at Paris. In this letter, Benjamin showed the intrigues of the French government in Texas for keeping it from the Confederacy. The proofs for it were sufficient to have the French consul expelled from Galveston. Not only did the Emperor Napoleon have the design of retaining Mexico as a colony, but he desired to see a buffer state of little strength separate his new colony from the Confederate States.<sup>27</sup>

In the mean time, the government at Washington was unable to cope effectually with these events. Diplomatic protests were made on several occasions, but care was taken not to offend France seriously. It was necessarily assumed that the French were acting in good faith. The United States did not deny that France was justified in recovering satisfaction for losses. Secretary Cass is quoted as saying in September, 1860:

We do not deny to any European Power the right to take measures against Mexico for the reparation of damage caused. The Monroe Doctrine, altogether opposing the taking possession of any part of that country, is not opposed to the waging of hostile operations against that Republic for the satisfaction of certain substantial losses of which she has been the occasion.<sup>28</sup>

And Secretary Seward wrote in June, 1863:

France has the right to make war against Mexico and to arrange such affairs herself. We have the right and the interest to insist that France

<sup>26</sup> Barral-Montferrat, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas J. Lawrence, *Principles of International Law*, II. 359 f. Cf. also, Beaumarchais, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Antokoletz, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

shall not profit by the war which she makes to establish in Mexico a government anti-Republican and anti-American, or for maintaining there any such government. . . .<sup>29</sup>

The United States consequently refused to recognize the Mexican Empire, and declared,

that the people of the United States have the firm conviction that progress is not possible in that part of the world except by means of political institutions identical with those of the states of the American continent,

and that the French-established monarchy was dangerous to the peace and happiness of the United States, as well as to its republican institutions.<sup>30</sup>

The French government did not interpret this as official resistance and continued its aggression. But in the same year, 1863, the Confederates were defeated at Gettysburg and at Vicksburg, and Federal authority was reestablished in many of the states. Thereupon the North reaffirmed the principles of American tradition, and on April 4, 1864, the House of Representatives adopted this resolution:

The Congress of the United States does not by its silence intend to give the nations of the world the idea that it remains an indifferent spectator to the deplorable events which have actually taken place in Mexico. It deems it timely to declare that it is not suitable that the United States recognize a monarchical government, erected upon the ruins of a republican government in America, under the auspices of any European Power whatever.<sup>31</sup>

This resolution also was not taken seriously by the Napoleonic government, because consideration of it was postponed by the Senate. The *Moniteur* said,

It is known, moreover, that the Senate has indefinitely postponed consideration of that resolution, to which, in any case, the executive power would not give its consent.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Beaumarchais, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>30</sup> Antokoletz, p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence, *op. cit.*, II. 365.

<sup>32</sup> *Archives Diplomatiques*, 1864, III. 78.

With the approaching end of the Civil War, the United States recompensed Juárez for his indomitable tenacity by recognizing his government, and in sending him arms and money, and the Senate ordained that correspondence to American consuls in Mexico should bear the insignia of the Mexican Republic. The surrender of the southern armies caused a veritable stupor among the Mexican imperialists. The world waited to see the United States act, and on May 22, 1865, Seward wrote to the American minister at Paris that attention would be immediately given to the matter of French status in Mexico.<sup>33</sup> This statement was followed by another on December 6, to the French minister at Washington, which clearly indicated the change in American attitude with the close of the war.<sup>34</sup>

The French government feigned not to understand the disguised menace in this note. It reiterated the free choice of Maximilian by the Mexican people, and tried to show that the United States was the real obstacle to Mexican freedom of action.<sup>35</sup> This was answered by the demand that French troops be recalled. There ensued a bitter controversy over the terms of evacuation, paralleled by unprincipled violence by both belligerents in Mexico. Finally, in the face of the most determined French opposition, Napoleon took steps to recall his forces, laying all the blame for the excesses in Mexico at the door of Maximilian. He no longer thought he had the same interest as three years earlier in making sacrifices to insure the Mexican crown to an Austrian prince. On January 22, 1866, Napoleon told the French chambers that "the only real object of the Powers had been to enforce the execution of the obligations contracted by that State (Mexico)".<sup>36</sup> This disinterested attitude found many incredulous, even in France. In December, 1866, Napoleon renounced a monarchical government and accepted a republic in Mexico, on the condition that the United States would maintain the government thus established. The

<sup>33</sup> Beaumarchais, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>34</sup> *Archives Diplomatiques*, 1866, I. 394.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the article by Keratry, "Le Mexique et les chances de salut du nouvel empire", in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 15, 1866.

<sup>36</sup> Petin, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

last French troops were withdrawn March 13, 1867. Maximilian and his crumbling empire were left to their fate, and both soon perished.

A great discontent flamed up in France because of the hostile attitude of the United States and the ruinous expense of the expedition. This fiasco may be said to be at the bottom of the consistent opposition displayed by the French on subsequent occasions when the Doctrine was invoked, whether they were directly concerned or not. This attitude is well illustrated by the following quotation from the work of a recent French writer:

The Monroe Doctrine triumphed. The United States were going to place upon all independent America their heavy and arrogant hegemony. They were going to take the advantage for themselves of the deformed doctrine of 1823, for extorting, not more influence, but the sovereignty of Europe from her choicest colonies.<sup>37</sup>

The historian Beaumarchais says that with the Mexican episode the United States reached the parting of the ways. Before this time the American policy had been "America for Americans"; afterward it was "America for the United States"<sup>38</sup>; while Petin sums up the Doctrine under Roosevelt and his successors as "The world and America for the United States"<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Barral-Montferrat, *De Monroë à Roosevelt, 1823-1905*, p. 100. Cf. in this connection, Lawrence, *op. cit.*, II. 361; and an article by Barclay in *Revue de Droit Internationale*, for June 2, 1866, 516 ff.

<sup>38</sup> *La Doctrine de Monroë*, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> *Les États-Unis et la Doctrine de Monroë*, p. 445.