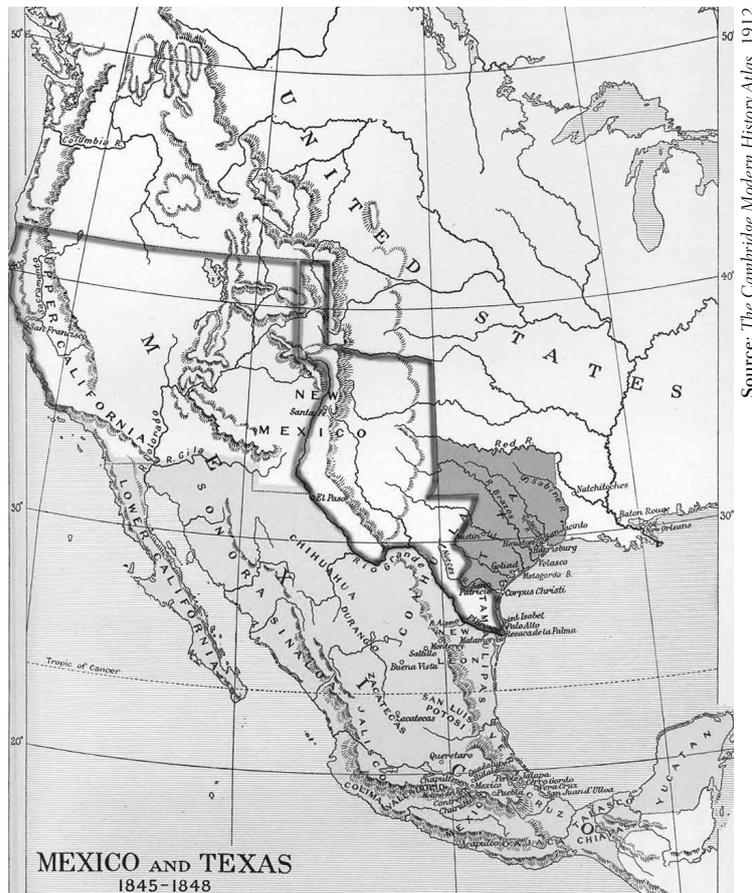


Two Hundred Years Of Living Next Door

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Source: The Cambridge Modern History Atlas, 1912

Map of Mexico and the United States before the 1846-1847 War, in which Mexico lost more than half its territory: what are now the states of California, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

The two constant objectives in Mexico's foreign policy have been, first, affirming its sovereignty and identity, and second, seeking the economic and human resources to speed its development once its federal republican form of government was consolidated. While it can be said that many other countries in the Americas that became

independent while Europe was engulfed in the Napoleonic Wars have shared these aims, Mexico's historic experience is unique as the neighbor of the greatest power the world has ever seen, the United States of America. The history of Mexico's international relations develops in cycles of approaching and distancing itself from the powerful country with which it shares a border; this has made it possible for it to both affirm its identity and to modernize its economy.

Since its birth as an independent nation, the United States has been the most important country for Mexico as a model of prosperity for all and a model of political organization for many. Edmundo O'Gorman thought that when Mexicans

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became independent of Spain, they did not make the reforms needed to eliminate the institutions of its colonial past. With citizens who did not fully exercise their rights, it was impossible to achieve the kind of productivity that existed in the United States.

Civic political participation and the rapid expansion of small agricultural producers in the United States contrasted with the almost feudal nature of agriculture in Mexico that held back the political activity of the majority of the population throughout the nineteenth century.

During that same period, the United States achieved its current territorial boundaries, to a great extent by absorbing Mexico's northern territories of California, New Mexico, and Texas, which were never really governed either by the ephemeral Mexican empire or the republic in its first stages. In fact, Mexico began losing those territories because of the absence of immigrants who would have identified with the Mexican nation, then barely in formation.

The rulers of Mexico who signed the treaty ceding that territory in 1848, with the U.S. army occupying a large part of the country, including the capital, averted the complete disappearance of the nationality as such, or at least that the United States appropriated an even larger part of Mexico. The trauma of losing more than half the national territory and the risk of disappearing as a nation altogether consolidated the two political parties with incompatible national projects: the Liberals and the Conservatives.

The Liberals had to seek a political model different from that of the United States, a country they admired, but that had a different historical experience from Mexico's, since it had been born without colonial structures to tear down and whose expansionism had become the greatest threat for Mexico's national survival. They turned their gaze to Europe, where the countries on the Continent had managed to establish a separation of the Catholic Church and the state. France became the model that implemented the most advanced legislation, even with a Catholic majority like Mexico.

For their part, the Conservatives saw the restoration of the monarchy with a European Catholic prince as the only way to stop the U.S. threat, thus leading them to support the second Mexican empire. The Conservative project could only survive with the support of the invading French army, which fostered the same liberal reforms as those Napoleon III had implemented in France. It is an irony of history that the invasion contributed to the victory of the Juarista Reform by weakening the Catholic Church in Mexico.

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SOVEREIGNTY IS FIRST

Between 1821 and 1871, the country that had reached no consensus about its form of government and that was born under the threat of the turbulence caused by Spain's attempts to re-conquer it, U.S. territorial expansion, and France's imperial ambitions in the Americas, had no foreign policy at all. National independence was consolidated a second time on the return of Benito Juárez to the capital in 1871 and his pre-stated aim of creating a foreign policy based on law: "Among individuals as among nations, respect for the other's rights is peace." The Conservative Party suffered a historic defeat by being identified with the foreign invader and clericalism, putting an end to it as a political force for more than a century.

When the Reform Laws came into effect, Mexico had healthy public finances for the first time in its history as an independent country. Since the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with European countries as equals took a certain amount of time, the nation had a breathing spell before it had to begin repaying the foreign debt.

Juárez not only established the principle of the sovereign equality of nations, but also between Mexicans and foreigners before the law. This was to prevent future interventions based on the much-reviled payment of reparations to the subjects of powerful countries. This put an end to Mexico's subordinate relations to other countries, at the same time that, worldwide, what prevailed was the right of conquest stipulated in international treaties.

MATERIAL IMPROVEMENTS

From the beginnings of the restored republic, U.S. rail magnates pressured to unite the two countries through the railroad, in order to develop trade and exploit Mexico's natural

resources. Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada feared the rapid economic penetration of the United States. Although during his tenure as foreign minister he had supported the alliance with Abraham Lincoln to expel the French army from Mexico, when he became president, he is said to have made the following harsh statement: “Between the powerful and the weak, the desert.” Circumstances had changed with the victory of the Yankees in the U.S. Civil War, while Mexico continued to be isolated from Europe, where the powers were still in mourning after the execution of Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg.

It was not until Porfirio Díaz returned to power in 1884 and gained control over the entire national territory that Mexico developed an active policy to foster foreign investment as a means to achieve what were called “material improvements.” With U.S. capital, the railroad lines so feared by his predecessor were built to the North. Díaz pacified the border region, which made direct communication possible with the United States, a country that soon became the main source of capital for recuperating mining and developing industry.

At the end of the century, the United States became a colonial power with the acquisition of Hawaii, the Philippine Islands, and Puerto Rico, and establishing a protectorate in Cuba. Given the concern over having the United States as a neighbor not only to the North, but also in the Caribbean, and in addition threatening to control countries south of its border, Porfirio Díaz initiated a diversification policy to counter U.S. influence with European capital. Once relations with Great Britain were reestablished, he cultivated personal contacts with European magnates to build infrastructure and develop the banking system and oil industry. He achieved all this without losing any territory during the greatest stage of imperial expansion the world had ever known.

The beginning of the twentieth century ratified the United States as the world’s foremost power, a place occupied by

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Great Britain in the previous century. The United States intervened actively in Central America and the Caribbean by sending armed forces to control customs and establish order, which was a source of friction in relations with Mexico. When the anti-reelection movement began in Mexico, Porfirio Díaz’s government had lost Washington’s ear because of his growing independence in international policy, which had led him to grow closer to countries as far away as Japan.

THE CARRANZA DOCTRINE AND NON-INTERVENTION

The 1917 Constitution jeopardized the thriving international mining and oil industries in Mexico. The governments of the great powers felt that their interests were threatened by the course the Mexican Revolution was taking, which they identified with the Bolsheviks when they took power in Russia. The U.S. economy emerged intact from World War I, allowing President Woodrow Wilson to impose a new world order at the Versailles peace negotiations. He promoted self-determination among the peoples of Europe, a principle that spread across the world to put an end to colonialism.

In this context, in 1918, Venustiano Carranza announced the principles of Mexico’s foreign policy, which to this day are still part of the Constitution: sovereign equality of states; non-intervention in internal affairs; the equality of Mexicans and foreigners before the law; and the quest for international peace and cooperation through diplomacy.

The revolutionary current that restricted foreigners’ rights on national soil took advantage of the international situation before World War II, through Franklin Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy, to nationalize the oil industry in 1938. Between 1918 and 1938, Mexico placed priority on projecting its nationalism in Latin America and the Caribbean, where it became the political and cultural paradigm for the region’s progressive forces.

Among other things, revolutionary nationalism put an end to the liberal dream of fostering industrious immigration to Mexico. However, it generously opened the doors to political exiles from Europe, and later from Latin America and the Caribbean, who have contributed greatly to Mexico’s cultural life. Immigrants developed important links to their countries of origin, and when they had the chance to return to office, like in the case of Chile, they helped build important political, cultural, and even economic ties that favored Mexico greatly.

THE ALLIANCE WITH THE UNITED STATES

In a context of national unity, President Lázaro Cárdenas began to collaborate with the United States in the fight against fascism. In 1942, Mexico established a military alliance with the United States to fight against the Axis. In 1947, when the Cold War between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) began, Mexico situated itself irremediably within the U.S. camp under its nuclear umbrella. While geography is destiny, Mexico had the diplomatic ability to negotiate room for autonomy that other more distant countries did not achieve, to a great extent thanks to its active presence in multilateral forums.

In contrast with the other countries in the region, Mexico preserved the validity of its Constitution and institutions during the entire Cold War, and began a period of exceptional economic growth known as the Mexican Miracle, which lasted more than three decades. When the Cold War ratcheted up in Central America, Mexico fostered intense diplomatic activity through the Contadora Group, which averted an armed U.S. intervention, supported a negotiated solution to the conflict, and strengthened Latin American consultation forums as the countries in the region returned to democratic regimes.

The model of industrialization via import substitution began to wear out in Mexico simultaneously with the decline of the international financial system created at Bretton Woods. However, the discovery of oil deposits made it possible to delay an economic and trade opening until 1986, when Mexico finally joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). When the Cold War ended, the European Community becoming the world's largest trade bloc and the creation of an economic region in Asia led Mexico to negotiate the creation of a North American market with the United States and Canada.

DIVERSIFICATION

The aim of decreasing the relative weight of economic treaties with the United States became urgent when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) concentrated our relations with our neighbor. Just like the twentieth century's two world wars, NAFTA had the immediate effect of focusing our trade on the United States. As in the past, after getting closer to that country, Mexico made an effort to seek new part-

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ners and political relations with other countries and regions to avoid excessive dependence on a single market. However, a qualitative difference *vis-à-vis* previous periods was the increase of the number of Mexicans living permanently in the United States—the figure approached 10 percent of Mexico's total population by the end of the century—with a significant electoral impact in both countries. Regarding foreign policy, that migration has been expressed in both countries as a constant pressure to strengthen links and avoid conflicts that could affect the transit of a growing number of citizens from one country to the other over the border.

The emergence of a structure with more poles of world power has presented an international situation favorable to diversifying trade and investment. This situation motivated the negotiation of free trade and strategic partnership agreements with countries of Latin America, the European Union, and Japan. It also allowed Mexico to give new impetus to the UN agenda, which encountered resistance during the Cold War. Since the foundation of the United Nations, Mexico has had a significant voice on issues like disarmament, maritime law, economic development, the fight against drugs and organized crime, and the preservation of the environment, which has won it a prestigious place in the community of nations.

Mexico's foreign relations have been marked by alternating closeness to and distancing from its powerful neighbor. No other country has experienced this except Canada, which gained independence much later than we did and still preserves a formal link to Great Britain. Mexican diplomacy has had the capability—sometimes to an epic degree—of ensuring the survival of its national identity, despite the increasingly conflictive 3 000-kilometer border with the world's greatest power. In spite of the enormous challenges and difficulties, in 1994 the three countries of North America began a process to build one of the most competitive regions in a globalized world. Despite the doubts and suspicions this has inspired worldwide, NAFTA has contributed significantly to raising employment and consumption for most Mexicans. ■■