
Pancho Villa and the Attack on Columbus, New Mexico

FRIEDRICH KATZ

ON MARCH 9, 1916, A MEXICAN RAIDING FORCE of five hundred men attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico, to cries of "Viva Villa" and "Viva México." According to all available evidence, the leader of the attack was the Mexican revolutionary general Francisco "Pancho" Villa. The raiders were repulsed by units of the 13th U.S. Cavalry, garrisoned in Columbus, after a six-hour battle. More than one hundred Mexicans and seventeen Americans died in the fighting. The United States response to the attack came quickly. Within one week a punitive expedition, initially composed of four thousand eight hundred men (later increased to ten thousand men) commanded by General John J. Pershing, invaded the Mexican state of Chihuahua under orders from President Woodrow Wilson to capture the leader and instigator of the Columbus raid, Pancho Villa. The Pershing expedition proved to be both a political and a military disaster. In political terms, it brought the United States to the brink of war with Mexico and antagonized large segments of the Mexican public. In military terms, it failed completely in its attempt to capture Villa. On February 5, 1917, the punitive expedition withdrew into the United States, having failed even to catch sight of its elusive prey.¹

U.S. military intervention in Latin America has been all too common; the Villa raid on Columbus is the one instance of Latin American military intervention in the United States. Perhaps for that reason, it has been the subject of widespread speculation and controversy. What led Villa to under-

I would like to thank the University of Chicago for both the research time and money it granted me to prepare this article.

¹ There is a very large body of literature on the punitive expedition into Mexico. For some of the main works written by Americans, see Haldeen Braddy, *Pershing's Expedition in Mexico* (El Paso, 1966); Clarence Clendenen, *The United States and Pancho Villa* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1971); Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Confusion and Crisis, 1915-1916* (Princeton, 1964), and *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace* (Princeton, 1965); Herbert Molloy Mason, Jr., *The Great Pursuit* (New York, 1970); Donald Smythe, *Guerrilla Warrior* (New York, 1963); Michael L. Tate, "Pershing's Punitive Expedition: Pursuer of Bandits or Presidential Panacea?" *The Americas*, 32 (1975): 46-72; and Frank Tompkins, *Chasing Villa* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1939). For two Mexican works, one a monograph and the other a collection of documents by authors sympathetic to Carranza, see Alberto Salinas Carranza, *La Expedición Punitiva* (Mexico, 1936); and Josefina E. de Fabela, ed., *Documentos históricos de la Revolución Mexicana XII Expedición Punitiva*, 2 vols. (Mexico, 1967-68). For works by Mexican authors sympathetic to Villa, see Alberto Calzadiaz Barrera, *Porque Villa atacó a Columbus* (Mexico, 1972); Nellie Campobello, *Apuntes sobre la vida militar de Francisco Villa* (Mexico, 1940); and Federico Cervantes, *Francisco Villa y la Revolución* (Mexico, 1960).

take this seemingly quixotic adventure? The dispute among historians as to his motives shows no signs of abating. Among the reasons usually given, the most prominent are (1) Villa's desire to revenge himself on the Wilson administration for its recognition and support of his enemy, Mexican President Venustiano Carranza; (2) Villa's desire to revenge himself on U.S. arms speculators who had cheated him; (3) Villa's wish to capture supplies of food and arms; and (4) Villa's hope of obtaining German arms and support in return for his attack against the United States.² Most historians have viewed the attack on Columbus as an act of irresponsibility at best and of complete irrationality at worst. Some have suspected Villa of harboring an almost pathological hatred of the United States after the Wilson administration had repaid him for his initial support of U.S. aims and his refusal to interfere with U.S. business interests by aiding his rivals. In any case, the great disparity between what Villa might have expected to gain and what losses Mexico could expect to suffer as a result of his attack on the United States has led many to interpret the raid as little more than the revenge of a reckless desperado.

New documentary evidence suggests that Villa was neither as irrational nor as irresponsible as is commonly suggested. The reasons and circumstances usually adduced to explain his decision to attack Columbus were at best secondary in importance. The primary motivation was Villa's firm belief that Woodrow Wilson had concluded an agreement with Carranza that would virtually convert Mexico into a U.S. protectorate. Although such an agreement never existed, Villa had reasonable grounds for supposing that it did. In light of this supposition, his actions can no longer be construed as the blind revenge of an unprincipled bandit. They must be viewed as a calculated effort to safeguard what Villa believed others had blindly surrendered—Mexico's independence.

TO UNDERSTAND HOW VILLA CAME TO BELIEVE in the existence of an agreement for which he never received any direct evidence, one must delve somewhat into the history of the constitutionalist movement, of which he was a part, and of its relations with the U.S. government and U.S. business interests. The constitutionalist movement emerged in northern Mexico in March 1913 after the overthrow and assassination of revolutionary President Francisco I. Madero by conservative forces led by General Victoriano Huerta. The immediate

² For interpretations of the motives for Villa's attack on Columbus, see, in addition to the works cited in the previous note, Charles Harris III and Louis R. Sadler, "Pancho Villa and the Columbus Raid: The Missing Documents," *New Mexico Historical Review*, 50 (1975): 335-47; Larry A. Harris, *Pancho Villa and the Columbus Raid* (El Paso, 1949); Friedrich Katz, "Alemania y Francisco Villa," *Historia Mexicana*, 12 (1962): 83-103, and *Deutschland, Diaz, und die mexikanische Revolution* (Berlin, 1964); Francis J. Munch, "Villa's Columbus Raid: Practical Politics or German Design?" *New Mexico Historical Review*, 44 (1969): 189-214; James A. Sandos, "German Involvement in Northern Mexico, 1915-1916: A New Look at the Columbus Raid," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 50 (1970): 70-89; Barbara Tuchman, *The Zimmermann Telegram* (New York, 1958); and E. Bruce White, "The Muddied Waters of Columbus, New Mexico," *The Americas*, 32 (1975): 72-92.

problem was to find ways to finance its war against the Huerta government. The short-lived Madero movement of 1910–11 had been financed essentially by funds “borrowed” by Madero’s brother, Gustavo, from a French railroad company, by forced loans levied on wealthy Mexicans in the northern parts of the country, and perhaps even by contributions made by U.S. oil and other business interests.³ From the beginning, it was clear to the various leaders of the constitutionalist movement that raising funds on such a makeshift basis would not suffice for them. They faced a longer and more exhausting struggle against a more vigorous and determined enemy than that opposed by the Madero movement.

Two very different strategies were evolved by the revolutionary leaders in northern Mexico to meet the expenses of the fight. Pancho Villa, whose sway extended essentially over Chihuahua and Durango, sought to shift the burden of financing the revolution onto the old Porfirian upper classes and some weaker groups of foreigners—above all, the Spaniards. At first he contented himself with exacting forced loans. By the end of 1913 he went further, confiscating all the landholdings of the Chihuahuan upper classes. These were managed on the state’s behalf by state administrators. Many Spaniards were expelled from the Villa-controlled territories and much of their land was confiscated.⁴ The property of other foreigners, especially Americans, was left untouched. Initially, Villa burdened them with neither heavy taxes nor contributions. Carranza’s financial strategy was very different. He strongly opposed confiscating the wealth of Mexico’s upper class, even though he was forced on occasion to accede to confiscations carried out independently by some of his generals. When Carranza could not prevent the confiscation of estates, he did everything in his power to emphasize the temporary character of such measures and prohibited the land from being divided among the peasantry. As soon as he could, he returned these properties to their owners.⁵ In order to meet his financial problems, Carranza decided to shift as much of the burden of new taxes as possible onto foreign companies. Since U.S. investments

³ See, especially, Stanley R. Ross, *Francisco Madero, Apostle of Democracy* (New York, 1955). For possible links between Madero and the oil companies, see Kenneth J. Grieb, “Standard Oil and the Financing of the Mexican Revolution,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 45 (1971): 59–71; and Katz, *Deutschland, Diaz, und die mexicanische Revolution*, 186.

⁴ Cervantes, *Francisco Villa*, 79; Friedrich Katz, “Agrarian Changes in Northern Mexico in the Period of Villista Rule,” in *Contemporary Mexico* (Papers of the Fourth International Congress of Mexican History, October 1973), ed. James W. Wilkie, Michael C. Meyer, and Edna Monzón de Wilkie (Mexico, 1976); and John Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* (1914; reprint ed., New York, 1969), 122.

⁵ The problem of the confiscation of *haciendas* by revolutionary authorities and the later return of these estates to their former owners by the Carranza government is one of the most important and least studied aspects of the Mexican Revolution. See Katz, “Agrarian Changes in Northern Mexico,” and Douglas Richmond, “The First Chief and Revolutionary Mexico: The Presidency of Venustiano Carranza, 1915–1920” (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1976), 60–61. Carranza did not very frequently deal with this problem in public, preferring instead to stress his commitment to agrarian reform; on one of the few times he did publicly address this issue, he spoke to the Constitutional Convention at Queretaro in 1917. See *Informe del C. Venustiano Carranza, Primer Jefe del Ejército Constitucionalista, Encargado del Poder Ejecutivo de la República: Leído ante el Congreso de la Unión en la Sesión de 15 de Abril de 1917* (Mexico, 1917). He very definitely showed his opposition when he reprimanded General Lucio Blanco, who in 1913 divided the lands of the Hacienda de los Borregos among the peasants. See Armando de María y Campos, *La Vida del General Lucio Blanco* (Mexico, 1963), 68.

predominated in northern Mexico, this produced repeated conflicts with U.S. business interests and, ultimately, with the U.S. government.

Villa solved his financial problems by dealing less reverently with Mexican-owned private property than Carranza, a policy that reflected, in part, the difference in the social origins of the two men. Villa grew up as a sharecropper and later became a cattle rustler; Carranza—at the other end of the social spectrum—was born and raised a *hacendado*. Villa's irreverence toward private property also reflected, however, the character of the region he controlled, in contrast to the states of Coahuila and Sonora dominated by Carranza. The latter's domain possessed a relatively liberal group of *hacendados*, many of whom had actively supported the Madero movement. Almost all of the Madero leaders in Coahuila and Sonora (for example, the Madero family, Carranza) were recruited from that group. By contrast, Villa's region had a far less liberal class of *hacendados*. Most of them fiercely opposed the Madero movement and showed themselves signally unprepared for even the most moderate reforms. No prominent *hacendados* supported the Madero movement in Chihuahua; in fact, they were the first to take an active stand against Madero by aiding the Orozco rebellion of 1912.

No revolutionary movement could have survived in Chihuahua without destroying both the economic and political power of the traditional ruling oligarchy. Realizing this, Villa expropriated Chihuahua's large estates, promising the peasants that the land would be divided up as soon as the victory of the Revolution had been ensured. The confiscations had the additional tactical advantage of diverting much of the popular support Orozco had been able to secure through vague promises of land reform.⁶ Thanks to his expropriation of large cattle estates in Chihuahua and, later, of the cotton grown by Spanish landowners in the Laguna area, Villa could count on sufficient resources to finance his revolution for most of 1914 without having to put pressure on U.S. companies, a fact which helps to explain why taxes on those companies were far higher in Carranza's zone than in Villa's.⁷ Through his restraint toward U.S. business, Villa doubtless hoped to gain access to U.S. arms and, eventually, even to gain official recognition by the U.S. government. Yet he did not cater to the interests of U.S. businessmen. Elsewhere in Mexico, U.S. companies purchased land and other assets from members of the upper class who panicked as the Revolution progressed and were ready to sell out at cut-rate prices. Villa's expropriations prevented this process from occurring in Chihuahua. Despite the obstacle to further Americanization, Villa's impressive ability to control his troops and his restrained taxation of U.S. companies won him a good measure of initial U.S. support.⁸

⁶ Pascual Orozco, a former leader of the Revolution of 1910–11, staged an uprising against Madero in 1912. In his program he emphasized the need for agrarian reform, though he never distributed any land. The Orozco revolt frequently has been linked to the large estate owners in Chihuahua. See Michael Meyer, *Mexican Rebel: Pascual Orozco and the Mexican Revolution* (Lincoln, Neb., 1967).

⁷ Harvey O'Connor, *The Guggenheims: The Making of an American Dynasty* (New York, 1937), 336–37. In a manifesto issued to the Mexican people after the United States recognized Carranza, Villa insisted that he had treated U.S. business interests far better than had his rival. See *Vida Nueva* (Chihuahua), Nov. 21, 1915.

⁸ One of America's most famous muckrakers, Lincoln Steffens, wrote in his autobiography, "The Reds in New York who were watching Mexico were on Villa's side, but the only reason they gave was that he was

How did Villa's tolerance toward U.S. business interests affect the policies of the Wilson administration? Unlike his relations with the business interests, Villa's relations with the administration have been the subject of intensive research.⁹ Wilson was willing to throw U.S. support behind any serious contender for power in Mexico who could meet five criteria: (1) a demonstrable inclination to carry out social and political reforms to stabilize the country, including some kind of agrarian reform (Wilson never specified how far-reaching such a reform had to be and at whose expense it was to be carried out); (2) respect for parliamentary institutions and an intention to carry out free elections as Madero had done; (3) dedication to the system of free enterprise without being subservient to any single business interest; (4) strict respect for U.S. property rights and no partiality toward European and, above all, British interests; and (5) a commanding personality, strong enough to

at least a bandit, a Barabbas, whereas Carranza was a respectable, landowning bourgeois. Jack Reed talked that way, and he later went in on Villa's side. I thought of a trick I used to practice in making a quick decision in politics at home. I'd ask Wall Street, which is so steadily wrong on all social questions. If I could find out which side Wall Street was on, I could go to the other with the certainty of being right. So I inquired down there for the big business men with Mexican interests, called on and invited several of them to luncheon. They came eager to 'start me off right.' And they agreed that Villa was the man. Their reason? 'Well, you see, we have tried out both of them and Carranza, the ———, we can't do a thing with him. He won't listen to reason. Obstinate, narrow-minded, proud as hell, he has thrown us out again and again. Whereas Villa . . . You mustn't get the idea that just because he's a bandit he's no good. We have had him seen and—he's all right, Villa is.' " Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York, 1931), 715. Steffens's statements are only partly true. Yet there is little doubt that some of the most important U.S. mining companies with large interests in Mexico supported Villa. This was certainly true of the largest of them—The American Smelting and Refining Co. See O'Connor, *The Guggenheims*, 334–36. J. D. Ricketts, whose company controlled the huge Cananea mine in Sonora, had a similar attitude. "Of course, the best man that they found is Villa," he wrote to General Hugh Scott in January 1915. Ricketts to Scott, Jan. 20, 1915, Library of Congress, Scott Papers, box 15 (general correspondence). For a brief period, William Randolph Hearst, who owned a huge ranch in Chihuahua, also favored Villa. In an editorial published on September 26, 1914, entitled "Pancho Villa, the Strong Man of Mexico," Hearst's New York *American* blamed Wilson for not supporting Villa as president of Mexico. This policy did not last long, and on June 3, 1915, before U.S. recognition of Carranza, the *American* referred to Villa as a bandit and called for U.S. intervention in Mexico. Hearst's change of attitude was probably due to the imposition of higher taxes on foreign holdings by Villa. Not all U.S. business interests favored Villa. The oil companies, at least through 1914, were far more sympathetic to Carranza. Edward Doheny, president of Mexican Petroleum, which had close links with Standard Oil, stated before a Senate hearing in 1919 that his company, like many others doing business in Mexico, had supported Carranza from 1913 onward and paid him \$685,000 as an advance on future taxes. See United States Senate Documents, Foreign Relations Committee, Investigation of Mexican Affairs, Reports and Hearings, 1 (66th Congress, 2d Session, Senate Document no. 285; Washington, D.C., 1920): 278. Henry Clay Pierce, head of another oil company, also linked to Standard Oil, established close relations with Carranza. Both he and the Mexican revolutionary chief retained the same lawyer, Sherbourne G. Hopkins, who—according to Paul von Hintze, the German Ambassador in Mexico—was more than just a lawyer. Von Hintze called him "a professional attorney for revolutions organized from the United States in Latin America." See Hintze to Bethmann-Hollweg, Feb. 16, 1912, Deutsches Zentralarchiv Potsdam, AA2, no. 4461. In April 1914, a break-in, probably organized by Huerta adherents, took place in Hopkins's Washington office. Some of the letters thus obtained were published in the New York *Herald* in June 1914. They indicate Pierce's strong sympathies for Carranza. Pierce, who was involved not only in the oil business but also in Mexican railroads, had lost much of his power to the British Cowdray interests. As a result of Carranza's control of much of Mexico, both he and Hopkins expressed the hope that he could now regain much of his former influence. He stated his strong support for Carranza's nomination of Alberto Pani as administrator of the Mexican railroads, as well as his disappointment over Villa's reluctance to recognize Pani's authority. See the New York *Herald*, June 28, 1919. The authenticity of the *Herald's* revelations is confirmed in a telegram sent by Felix Sommerfeld, a close collaborator of Hopkins, to Lazaro de la Garza, Villa's representative. Sommerfeld to de la Garza, undated, University of Texas at Austin, Lazaro de la Garza Collection, wallet no. 13.

⁹ See, especially, Clendenen, *The U.S. and Pancho Villa*; and Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality* (Princeton, 1960), chaps. 8, 14.

impose control over all of Mexico.¹⁰ For a time President Wilson, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, and a number of high officials in the administration believed they had found such a man in Villa. His public statements bespoke desire for reform, cordiality toward U.S. representatives, belief in free institutions, respect for U.S. property, and commitment to free enterprise. In addition, he had the appearance of a strongman, well able to seize and hold power in Mexico and ready to turn it over to an elected president once the Revolution had triumphed.¹¹

The Wilson administration's sympathetic attitude toward Villa manifested itself clearly in the comment made about Villa by an unnamed high official to the French ambassador in Washington as early as January 1914:

In contrast to what is generally stated, Villa is not a man without property. His parents owned a ranch and enjoyed a certain prosperity. He had no other schooling than primary school but he did attend that. He is not illiterate, as the newspapers describe him to be. His letters are even well formulated. He is of Indian origin, as Huerta is, an excellent rider, and a first-class marksman. He has no fear of physical danger or of the law, and he very early led the life of a ranchman. It is the same life which many people led in remote territories of our own West, territories where authorities had no control, where everyone was his own master, and sometimes imposed his rule on others, controlling his adherents, creating his own code of law.

Villa becomes popular very easily and is able to maintain his popularity. He takes care of his soldiers, helps them, and is very popular among them . . . He would be incapable of ruling, but, if he wanted to, he could very well re-establish order. Were I the president of Mexico, I would charge him with this task: He would successfully carry it out, I am convinced of that; he would force all revolutionaries to maintain order. In the present state of Mexico, I do not see anyone except him who would successfully carry out this task.¹²

The lack of complaints among the large U.S. interests located in Villa's territory and Villa's unwillingness to protest, as Carranza had done, against the U.S. occupation of Veracruz further strengthened the Wilson administration's sympathy for the Chihuahua revolutionary.

Villa's good relationship with U.S. business interests began to deteriorate, however, after his break with Carranza. This diminution of support emerged quite clearly in conversations he held with Duval West, Wilson's special emissary to Mexico, the man charged with making policy recommendations to the U.S. president. West reported that Villa,

on being questioned as to what extent foreigners would be encouraged to develop the country, stated that there would be no disposition to prohibit such development,

¹⁰ For an excellent assessment of Woodrow Wilson's attitude toward underdeveloped countries, see Robert Freeman Smith, *The United States and Revolutionary Nationalism in Mexico* (Chicago, 1971), chap. 2.

¹¹ See Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality*, 238–41. Wilson also expressed such ideas in a conversation on the subject of Villa with the French chargé d'affaires in Washington on July 27. The U.S. president said that Villa, upon entering Mexico City at the head of his troops, had declared that he would tolerate no excesses, and Wilson thought him capable of keeping his word. When the French diplomat asked him whom he would support in case of a break between Villa and Carranza, Wilson did not answer him directly. He only stated that he considered Villa's army the essential force of the Revolution and believed that its leader did not aspire to become a candidate for provisional president. See Chargé d'Affaires (Washington) to Foreign Ministry, July 27, 1914, Archives du Ministère de Affaires Étrangères, new ser. (Paris), Mexique Pol. 9.

¹² Jusserand to Doumergues, Jan. 27, 1914, Archives du Ministère de Affaires Étrangères, new ser. (Paris), Mexique Pol. 9.

except that, in the case of lands, foreigners should not, or would not, be permitted to own lands. That it was his idea that the country should be developed by Mexican capital and that this capital should be compelled or required—he did not say what or how or when—to employ itself in the establishment of the usual industrial enterprise.

I get the idea from the foregoing statement and from the failure of General Villa to take the opportunity afforded by the question to make clear the wish of his followers to encourage foreign capital that he is standing on the popular demand that “Mexico should be for Mexicans” and that an open door to foreign investors is an ultimate danger to the nation.¹³

It seems surprising that Villa, whose intelligence was attested to by friend and foe alike, chose to make such a declaration to the man on whom Wilson relied for a critical judgment concerning further U.S. support for Villa. His motive was certainly not propaganda. Villa’s statements were not designed for public consumption; they were never published. Perhaps by this time Villa simply felt strong enough to reveal concepts and sentiments he had not dared to express before. When he made the declaration in February 1915, his decisive defeat at Celaya was still two months off, and Villa, like many observers in Mexico, was convinced that Carranza’s defeat was imminent.

Whatever the cause, Villa’s remarks happened to coincide with his increased pressure on U.S. business interests in Mexico. Financial problems had already begun to plague him by the end of 1914. He had exhausted a great part of the resources—mostly cotton and cattle—that the confiscated estates had brought him. As the civil war with Carranza wore on and escalated, many U.S. enterprises, mainly the mining companies, suspended operations, further diminishing the flow of revenue. Villa was more acutely affected by such suspensions than Carranza. Many oil companies from which Carranza drew his revenue were located near the coast and felt sufficiently well protected by foreign warships even to expand their operations. To compound the evils besetting Villa by the end of 1914, his access to weapons was obstructed by the outbreak of the First World War. Suddenly, what had been a “buyer’s market” turned into a “seller’s market,” and Villa had to compete with Great Britain, France, and other powers for scarce U.S. arms. No wonder, then, that he should attempt to relieve his financial distress somewhat by imposing heavier taxes on U.S. companies and by trying to cajole them into resuming operations through threats of confiscation.¹⁴

After his defeat at Celaya in April 1915, Villa’s financial situation worsened. Mexican and U.S. speculators, as well as large U.S. companies, began to divest themselves of large amounts of Villa currency acquired when it seemed that he would soon prevail.¹⁵ The effects were immediately obvious: prices soared, food became scarce, and food riots broke out all over the Villa zone.¹⁶

¹³ Undated Report by Duval West to the Secretary of State, National Archives, Dept. of State Files, Record Group 59, File 812.00 14622.

¹⁴ Marvin D. Bernstein, *The Mexican Mining Industry, 1890-1950* (New York, 1964), chap. 9.

¹⁵ Report by agent Emilio Zapico to the Spanish ambassador in Washington, December 1915, Archives of the Spanish Foreign Ministry, as quoted in Vicente Gonzalez Loscertales, “Los Españoles en la Vida Social, Política y Económica de Méjico, 1910-1930” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Madrid, 1976).

¹⁶ Francisco Almada, *Historia de la Revolución en el Estado de Chihuahua*, 2 (Mexico, 1971): 236-38, and *Historia de la Revolución en el Estado de Sonora* (Mexico, 1971), 172-75. See the reports of special Spanish agent Emilio Zapico to the Spanish ambassador in Washington, August 1915, in Loscertales, “Los Españoles en la Vida Social, Política y Económica de Méjico, 1910-1930,” 293-395.

At this moment Villa suffered his most palpable loss of popular support. Nothing Carranza ever did in the way of promising social and political reform proved as detrimental to Villa as the economic collapse that struck the territories under his control. Villa sought relief by increasing the financial pressure on U.S. companies, which in turn provoked angry reprimands from the U.S. state department but not a complete break between Villa and the Wilson administration. Both sides still needed each other to forestall a complete victory by Carranza. Villa agreed to the administration's proposal that he send delegates to participate in a peace conference—sponsored by the ABC powers and the United States—at which the contending Mexican factions would be represented.¹⁷

From May 1915 onward, after Villa's military defeats had decisively if not fatally weakened his hold on Mexico, his relations with Washington grew more and more muddled. Tensions between Villa and U.S. companies mounted. Wilson tried to steer a precarious course, cooling his support of Villa appreciably though not entirely. He wished to avert a complete takeover by Carranza. Attempts were made to impose a solution to the civil war by eliminating both Villa and Carranza from the scene. In October 1915 Wilson finally recognized Carranza's government. U.S. fears of German intrigues in Mexico significantly influenced this decision.

The history of Mexican-American relations between May and October 1915 is a topic well beyond the scope of this paper, all the more so since the nature of these relations has been closely examined elsewhere.¹⁸ What has not been sufficiently analyzed, and is of relevance to this study, is the suddenness of Wilson's change of heart regarding Carranza. Only a few weeks before the United States government granted recognition to the Carranza government, Wilson sent General Hugh Scott to negotiate with Villa concerning the return of some expropriated U.S. holdings. Lansing told Scott to assure Villa that Wilson would under no circumstances recognize Carranza. Scott later stated that he never delivered this message to Villa, but Villa's agents in the United States did, in fact, learn of Wilson's assurances.¹⁹ The president's sudden about-face, coming only a short time after he had invited Villa to send delegates to Washington to participate in a peace conference and after Lansing had given assurances that the United States would never recognize Carranza, made Villa suspicious that some important clandestine event had changed Wilson's mind.

¹⁷ Clendenen, *The U.S. and Pancho Villa*, 165–91.

¹⁸ See, especially, Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality*, chap. 14, 456–94; and Clendenen, *The U.S. and Pancho Villa*, 155–207.

¹⁹ In a letter of October 14, 1915 to James R. Garfield, who was acting as a lobbyist for Villa, U.S. Chief of Staff General Hugh Scott wrote, "You are not the only one astounded by the action of the administration. Nobody in the State Department, below the Secretary himself, can understand it. You remember I told you that Mr. Lansing told me to say to Villa that under no circumstances would we recognize Carranza. I had a lucid interval down there while talking to Villa, and did not tell him what Secretary Lansing told me to tell him, as I believe that matters of that kind should be held back when dealing with primitive people unless you have the carrying out of them in your own hands, otherwise you can't explain to them that it was not your fault if not carried out." Library of Congress, Scott Papers, box 20 (general correspondence).

VILLA'S FIRST REACTION TO THE RECOGNITION of his enemy was mild. He made no overt declarations against the Wilson administration, and no Americans in his zone suffered harm. In fact, he still hoped to circumvent the most painful consequence of Wilson's action—the embargo on weapons—by carrying out his planned invasion of the border state of Sonora. The state was wracked by a civil war between the forces of Governor José María Maytorena, who had allied himself with Villa, and those loyal to Carranza. By invading Sonora, Villa hoped to tip the scale and assume control of the entire state. Domination of both Chihuahua and Sonora would have diminished significantly the effectiveness of the weapons embargo. It would have meant, as one U.S. military intelligence officer put it, “the increased possibility of smuggling arms from the United States.”²⁰ It would also have placed appreciable amounts of U.S. property under Villa's control. Perhaps the administration in Washington, even though it had already recognized Carranza, would be forced to accommodate Villa in some fashion.

This hope is probably one of the main reasons why Roque González Garza, former head of the Government of the Revolutionary Convention and Villa's representative in the United States, urged his chief in October 1915, after the recognition of Carranza by the United States, to proceed as rapidly as possible with plans to attack Carranza's forces at Agua Prieta, Sonora.²¹ The Sonoran campaign, however, ended disastrously for Villa. His army was decimated when Carranza unexpectedly reinforced the garrison at Agua Prieta by marching his troops across U.S. territory—with official U.S. permission.²² After this humiliating defeat, Villa assumed a new attitude toward the United States, one that was to dominate his actions more and more between November 1915 and March 1916, when his troops attacked Columbus, New Mexico. This new attitude doubtlessly owed much to the interpretation that Roque González Garza gave to Wilson's decision to recognize Carranza. On October 29 the emissary wrote Villa a long description and analysis of the events leading up to the recognition of his enemy:

It was a great blow to me to see that you have always been miserably deceived; possibly this took place in good faith but you were always deceived. I was also deceived After arriving in Torreon . . . I was clearly told that, from the point of view of international political relations, our situation was very good; we were one step from recognition by the United States A few days went by and you received the clearest assurances that, from the point of view of international politics, everything was proceeding in your favor; that only a small effort on our part was required for the U.S. government to take us into consideration and that the original plan of the participants at the conference would be implemented with satisfactory results for us.

²⁰ Report of Operations of “General” Francisco Villa since November 1915, Headquarters Punitive Expedition, In the Field, Mexico, July 31, 1916, National Archives, Mexican Claims Commission, 3. For a detailed description and analysis of Villa's Sonoran campaign, see Thomas H. Naylor, “Massacre at San Pedro de la Cueva: The Significance of Pancho Villa's Disastrous Sonora Campaign,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 8 (1977): 125–50.

²¹ Roque González Garza to Villa, Oct. 26, 1915, private archive of General Roque González Garza (Mexico City). I wish to express my thanks to General González Garza's daughter, Lourdes, for permission to use this archive.

²² Naylor, “Massacre at San Pedro de la Cueva,” 130.

González Garza did not mention the name of the person who had given these assurances to Villa. That he left open the possibility of the intermediary's good faith indicates that he was probably referring to George Carothers, the U.S. special agent in the Villa camp with whom Villa had entertained good relations.

Bitterly, González Garza then went on to describe how Villa's delegates at the Washington peace conference were treated by their American hosts:

Our situation was depressing. Everything turned out to have been a lie; we were very badly off; we were not even listened to The 9th of October arrived and the participants at the conference decided to recognize Carranza This decision, communicated *ex abrupto* to the four winds, was an enormous humiliation for us since we were delegates to the peace conference. We were not told anything and the solemn declarations made by Wilson at an earlier date were simply discarded. All historical precedents were ignored. Even common sense was not respected, since we had come to the conference ready to make peace but in an honorable way. This resolution was approved and we suffered a great blow.

He continued angrily,

I have seen many injustices, but I have never thought that Carranza would triumph in the international political field after he played the comedy of being the most nationalistic of all Mexicans and after he provoked the United States two or three times. I do not entirely know what has been decided concretely, but I am convinced that something very dark has been agreed on; for I have no other explanation for the sudden change in U.S. policy against our group and in favor of Carranza.

In another part of the letter, he stated, "God knows how many secret pacts" Carranza had signed with the United States.²³

The dark plot and secret pact that he intimated were spelled out in a manifesto issued on November 5, 1915 in Naco, Sonora, signed by Villa and probably drafted by Roque González Garza's brother Federico, who for a long time had been part of Villa's administration in the state of Chihuahua.²⁴ It was published in the November 21 issue of Villa's newspaper, *Vida Nueva*. The manifesto raised the question why Carranza—who "had never given guarantees to Americans, who had plundered them, who had deprived foreigners as often as he could of the lands they owned in the eastern and southern parts of the Republic, and who had always aroused the repugnance of the U.S."—had suddenly obtained not only the recognition but also the active support of the United States. According to Villa, U.S. support to Carranza entailed nothing less than a \$500-million loan and permission for Carranza's troops to cross into U.S. territory. The manifesto bluntly answered its own question: "The price for these favors was simply the sale of our country by the traitor Carranza."

The manifesto further charged that Carranza had agreed to eight conditions imposed by the United States: (1) amnesty to all political prisoners; (2)

²³ González Garza to Villa, Oct. 26, 1915, González Garza archive.

²⁴ Almada, *Historia de la Revolución en el Estado de Chihuahua*, 2: 382. Almada quotes a conversation with Villa's former secretary of state, Silvestre Terrazas, as the basis for his observation on the authorship of the manifesto.

a ninety-nine-year concession granting the United States rights over Magdalena Bay, Tehuantepec, and an unnamed region in the oil zone; (3) an agreement that the ministries of the interior, foreign affairs, and finance would be filled by candidates enjoying the support of the Washington government; (4) all paper money issued by the Revolution would be consolidated after consultation with a representative named by the White House; (5) all just claims by foreigners for damages caused by the Revolution would be paid and all confiscated property returned; (6) the Mexican National Railways would be controlled by the governing board in New York until the debts to this board were repaid; (7) the United States, through Wall Street bankers, would grant a \$500-million loan to the Mexican government to be guaranteed by a lien on the entire income of the Mexican treasury, with a representative of the U.S. government to have supervision over Mexico's compliance with this provision; and (8) General Pablo Gonzalez would be named provisional president and would call for elections within six months.

Villa's policies in the next months were clearly presaged in passages of this manifesto. "Can foreigners, especially the Yanquis," Villa asked, "harbor the illusion that they can exploit 'peacefully while thanking God' the riches of Mexican soil?" He continued,

Can they be naive enough to assume that Carranza's government can give them effective guarantees? . . . As far as I am concerned, I sincerely and emphatically declare that I have much to thank Mr. Wilson for, since he has freed me of the obligation to give guarantees to foreigners and, above all, to those who were once free citizens and are now vassals of an evangelizing professor of philosophy who is destroying the independence of a friendly people and who violates the sovereignty of the states of Arizona and Texas, allowing their soil to be crossed by the "constitutional troops." This does not imply a feeling of enmity or hatred against the real people of the United States of North America, whom I respect and admire for their glorious traditions, for their example of order and economy, and for their love of progress.

Villa raised the possibility of an armed conflict with the United States, while he denied that that was his intent:

After such a clear-cut declaration, I wish to state that I have no motive for wishing a conflict between my country and the United States. For this reason, after all I have said, I decline any responsibility for future events, since the American people know perfectly well that I have always carried out superhuman efforts to give guarantees to each of their nationals who is living in our country. Let history assign responsibilities.²⁵

Significantly, not one of the innumerable political, diplomatic, military, or financial agents the United States had stationed along the border reported the publication of this manifesto which contained such clear forebodings of Villa's intentions. Not even George Carothers, the former U.S. special agent with Villa, who was charged by the U.S. state department with assembling all possible information on Villa's activities, made any mention of the Naco Manifesto. Did these men simply not bother to read *Vida Nueva*, or had they

²⁵ *Vida Nueva* (Chihuahua), Nov. 21, 1915. Although it has been ignored by U.S. historians, Almada printed this manifesto in the appendix to his *La Revolución en el Estado de Chihuahua*, 2: 382.

become captives of their own image of Villa the Bandit, who, as events began to turn against him, would leave Mexico to enjoy elsewhere the enormous sums of money they believed he had accumulated while in power? Did Leon Canova, the head of the Latin American desk in Washington, know of the manifesto and decide, for reasons of his own, to suppress it?²⁶

On November 22, 1915, after his troops had launched an unsuccessful attack on the Carranza garrison at Hermosillo, capital of the state of Sonora, Villa sent a letter to the two commanders of Carranza's troops in that city—Manuel Dieguez and Angel Flores. In it he mentioned the eight provisions of the secret pact that, in his opinion, Carranza had signed with the United States and stated that “we are now in the hands of the North Americans; we have accepted a Yanqui protectorate.” He added that Carranza had now converted the conventionist movement (Villa and his allies) into the only group that defended the integrity and independence of Mexico, and, for this reason and in spite of all defeats, its triumph was now inevitable. That the United States allowed Carranza's troops to cross its territory meant that, “when the United States wants or needs to, it can enter Mexican territory. Will you allow this?” Villa asked Carranza's generals. He made no specific overtures to them; he only asked them to give their opinions on the charges. Villa, most likely, hoped to enter into some kind of negotiations with Carranza's commanders. But, although Angel Flores did send a reply to Villa (the contents of which are not known), Dieguez declined to do even that.²⁷

Villa's hope that the accusations against Carranza would stave off disaster in his Sonoran campaign proved unfounded. Three weeks after his unsuccessful overtures to the two Carranza generals, Villa returned to Chihuahua at the head of a decimated and demoralized army and found Carranza's troops gaining on his last strongholds in the state. As disaster approached, the specter of a pact between Wilson and Carranza began to loom ever larger in Villa's thinking. On December 16 he sent a letter to the commanders of the Carranza forces heading for Chihuahua, who had by now reached the city of Camargo. In it he made far more concrete proposals than before. After iterating his accusations against Carranza, Villa stated that, because of this new development, his troops had stopped fighting Carranzistas “so as not to shed Mexican blood.” To the Carranza generals he proposed an alliance “that would unite all of us against the Yanqui who, because of racial antagonisms and commercial and economic ambitions, is the natural enemy of our race and of all Latin countries.” In case such an alliance was signed, he wrote, he would give up command of his troops.²⁸ Three days after signing this letter, Villa made a farewell speech to the people of Chihuahua from the balcony of

²⁶ Since, as I contend, Villa's charges were based on a plot involving Canova, the latter might have wanted to prevent Villa's accusations from being brought to the attention of his superiors. There is, however, no evidence to substantiate this assumption.

²⁷ Alberto Calzadiaz Barrera, *Hechos Reales de la Revolución*, 3 (Mexico, 1972): 141–43.

²⁸ Francisco Villa to Jefe de la Columna Expedicionaria del Norte y a los demas Generales que forman parte de ella: Camargo o en donde se Encuentran, Dec. 16, 1915, University of California at Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Silvestre Terrazas Papers, vol. 78, pt. 1.



Villa in the mountains. From Jessie Peterson and Thelma Cox Knoles, eds., *Pancho Villa: Intimate Recollections by People Who Knew Him* (New York, 1977). Photo courtesy Hastings House Publishers.

the Municipal Palace. He repeated his accusations that Carranza had signed a secret pact with the United States.²⁹

As Villa's forces dwindled and the occupation of all cities in Chihuahua by Carranza's forces became imminent, many U.S. observers expected Villa to cross the border to find refuge in the United States.³⁰ This pattern of behavior had proved characteristic of many Latin American *caudillos* who left their countries after unsuccessful coups and revolts to reward themselves for their exertions with whatever wealth they had been able to accrue while they were masters of the national treasury. With no one restraining or supervising him, Villa had controlled the finances of the Division of the North for years. Had he wanted, he could easily have deposited large sums of money in foreign banks. But Villa did not conform to the model.

A few days after his farewell speech, Villa went to the railroad station of the capital city of the state to bid goodby to Silvestre Terrazas, his close collaborator and Chihuahuan secretary of state. He instructed Terrazas to go to El Paso to arrange with Carranza's authorities for the surrender of Villa's troops at the border town of Ciudad Juárez. Terrazas suggested to Villa that he leave Mexico, perhaps in order to go to Europe and study the new military techniques being utilized in World War I. Villa answered that he would instead retreat with a number of loyal men into the mountains, where he could easily elude any hostile troops. "I will never leave my country," he announced. "Here I will stay and fight." But he still had hopes for change in Mexico. "Before six months have passed," he told Terrazas, "it will become clear that U.S. recognition of the Carranza faction was not disinterested but in fact dependent on the same proposals which Washington made as the price of granting me recognition, proposals which I rejected."³¹

Villa did not reveal to Terrazas the meaning of his six months' timetable. But he did make his plans abundantly clear in a letter, written a few days later, to Emiliano Zapata, which was found on the body of a dead Villista after the Columbus attack. After attributing responsibility for his defeat at Sonora to Wilson for allowing Carranza's troops to cross U.S. territory and after describing the secret agreement contained in his Naco Manifesto, Villa wrote to his ally,

From the foregoing you will see that the sale of this country is complete and under these circumstances, for reasons stated previously, we have decided not to fire a bullet more against Mexicans, our brothers, and to prepare and organize ourselves to attack the Americans in their own dens and make them know that Mexico is a land for the free and a tomb for thrones, crowns, and traitors.

With the aim of informing the people of the situation and in order to organize and recruit the greatest possible number of men with the aforementioned aim, I have divided my army into guerrilla bands, and each chief will go to that part of the country he considers appropriate for a period of six months. That is the time period we

²⁹ Report of Operations of "General" Francisco Villa, 5.

³⁰ Clendenen, *The U.S. and Pancho Villa*, 222-23. Fidel Avila, Villa's Governor of Chihuahua, reinforced this interpretation by sending Wilson a telegram that indicated that Villa would seek refuge in the United States; *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (1915), 777.

³¹ Silvestre Terrazas, "El Verdadero Pancho Villa" (chap. 53 of Terrazas's *Memoirs*), in *Boletín de la Sociedad Chihuahuense de Estudios Históricos*, 8 (1955): 769-71.

have set to meet in the state of Chihuahua with all the forces we will have recruited in the country to carry out the movement that will unite all Mexicans.

The move we have to make to the United States can only be accomplished through the north, as we do not have any ships. I beg you to tell me if you agree to come here with all your troops and on what date so that I may have the pleasure to go personally to meet you and together start the work of reconstruction and enhancement of Mexico, punishing our eternal enemy, the one that has always been encouraging hatred and provoking difficulties and quarrels among our race.³²

The letter to Zapata was preceded by a conference of all military chiefs still loyal to Villa at the Hacienda de Bustillos on December 23, 1915. The conference adopted a resolution that stated,

Considering: that the C. VENUSTIANO CARRANZA as Chief of the opposing party has contracted compromises which place the country in the hands of foreigners, a thing the honorable Mexican people will never approve.

Considering: that the United States will exact the fulfillment of said compromises and that upon not obtaining same will intervene in our country under any pretext, . . . waiting but for the hour of our utmost weakness!

Considering: that rather than permit the hour to come when we would fall into the hands of the ambitious North Americans, we would become the accomplices to the traitor's party, who has looked for the ruin of our country.

In the meeting held today we have agreed that General FRANCISCO VILLA, Chief S. of C. of the conventional army, shall take the proper steps to advise the nation of the threatening danger to its integrity, and we shall proceed to organize in the respective regions of the country.³³

On the same day that Villa appealed to Zapata, he sent emissaries to mobilize troops in other parts of the country to fight against the United States.³⁴ It is significant that none of Villa's upper- or middle-class supporters—such as Felipe Angeles, Raul Madero, José Maria Maytorena, or even the González Garza brothers—were involved in this scheme.

While preparing his attack on the United States, Villa decided to implement the warning given the U.S. government and U.S. interests in his Naco Manifesto, in which he had stated that Americans should not believe that Carranza was capable of giving them sufficient guarantees to continue exploiting the resources of Mexico. Villa began to confiscate U.S. property wherever he found it. In January 1916 he occupied Babicora, William Randolph Hearst's ranch, which had long been spared, and confiscated a large number of cattle and horses. In Santa Isabel on January 17 loyal Villa troops under the command of Pablo Lopez stopped a train carrying seventeen American mining engineers who were returning to Mexico from the United States to restore operations in a U.S.-owned mine. All were executed.³⁵

³² This letter was part of a collection of documents found on a dead Villista after the Columbus attack. They never reached the state department files but are contained in the Adjutant General's Office, File 2384662, Record Group 94, along with File 2377632. The complete text of this letter was first published in E. Bruce White, "The Muddied Waters of Columbus, New Mexico," 72-92. A complete list of the documents and an attempt to analyze them was published at the same time in Harris and Sadler, "Pancho Villa and the Columbus Raid: The Missing Documents," 345-47.

³³ See Adjutant General's Office, File 2384662.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Investigators of the Punitive Expedition concluded in July 1916, "In this connection it will be observed



Villistas killed in the Columbus raid. From Peterson and Knoles, eds., *Pancho Villa* (New York, 1977). Photo courtesy Hastings House Publishers.

For reasons that are not clear, Villa decided to strike directly at the United States far earlier than he had announced in his letter to Zapata. According to one participant in the attack, Juan Caballero, Villa concentrated a large part of his troops at the Hacienda de San Jeronimo and told them he planned to attack the United States. Again, the main reason he gave was the secret U.S.-Carranza pact. Villa told them that the pact had been offered to him earlier at Guadalajara, but he had refused to sign it.³⁶ Caballero reported that Villa first decided to attack Presidio, Texas, but changed his plan after part of his forces deserted. He was afraid they might reveal his plans to the Americans. Thereafter, Villa became extremely reserved about the name of the town he planned

that Villa's location at the time of the massacre was far from the scene where the act was enacted and that he was so situated and the circumstances attending the accidental arrival of the train bearing the ill-fated seventeen Americans, were such that Villa could not have had first-hand advance information to have been able to issue direct orders to Lopez to kill them. There is reason to believe, however, that orders to rid Mexico were given Lopez by Villa, either by telegraphic instructions through Rodriguez before Lopez left Casas Grandes for Madera, or later in person at the unexpected meeting at El Valle between Villa and Rodriguez. Orders from Villa to kill Americans, could have reached Lopez at any time, of course, but it can be stated quite positively that Villa was not in the vicinity of Santa Ysabel at the time of the massacre, and further that when reports of the incident reached him by couriers he was inclined to deny its authenticity." Report of Operations of "General" Francisco Villa, 8. Nevertheless, this killing was definitely congruent with the warnings Villa clearly expressed to Wilson and to American mining companies in his Naco Manifesto.

³⁶ Confederación de Veteranos Revolucionarios de la División del Norte, Relato de Hechos Históricos de la Actuación del Gral. Francisco Villa y sus Tropas, Archivo de la Palabra México, Typescript by Juan Caballero (Dec. 7, 1971).

to attack. It was only when they arrived near Columbus, New Mexico, that his men found out where they were going.

Why Villa picked Columbus for his target is not apparent. He might have wanted to use the attack to settle old scores. Perhaps he wanted to take his revenge on the arms dealer, Sam Ravel, who he felt had betrayed him, although Caballero doubts this version. Perhaps he hoped to get money and supplies there.³⁷ But such considerations were clearly secondary; none constituted his main motive for launching an attack on the United States—his firm conviction that Carranza had sold out Mexico to the United States.

WHAT REAL SUBSTANCE WAS THERE to Villa's profound belief in the existence of a pact between Carranza and the United States? Had such a pact in fact ever been proposed by Wilson? Had it been hatched by members of his administration? Was it pure invention by Villa or his collaborators? Was it a scheme devised by U.S. business interests, which hoped Villa's actions would provoke U.S. intervention in Mexico? Was it a concoction of the German secret service, which hoped to distract U.S. attention from the European theater of war by forcing it to intervene in Mexico?

There is not the slightest evidence that Carranza ever signed such a pact. Of all the accusations Villa leveled against Carranza, only one—point five of the eight-point manifesto—contained a grain of truth. Carranza had indeed agreed to examine U.S. claims for damages suffered during the Revolution and was returning confiscated properties to their former owners.³⁸ This, no doubt, was a major victory for the conservative forces. It was not, however, the result of U.S. pressure but of Carranza's own conservative convictions, to which he had held fast from the day he joined the Revolution. His readiness to negotiate U.S. claims could scarcely justify the accusation that he had converted Mexico into a U.S. protectorate. Such a pact would have been entirely incompatible with his staunch nationalistic posture. Nor is there the slightest proof that Woodrow Wilson either proposed or contemplated such an agreement with any Mexican faction at any time during the Revolution.

The pact, nevertheless, was not entirely a figment of Villa's imagination; in fact, documents show that in 1915 such a plan had been conceived and was seriously considered by a leading official of the state department, representatives of U.S. business interests, and Mexican conservatives (but not of Carranza's faction). In May of that year, Leon Canova, head of the state department's Mexican desk, and Eduardo Iturbide, who had been Mexico City's chief of police during the administration of Victoriano Huerta, elaborated a scheme for a U.S.-supported counterrevolution in Mexico. They hoped to involve at least part of Villa's army at a time when Villa had suffered some serious defeats but Carranza's supremacy had not yet been clearly established.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ There is no evidence that Carranza ever went beyond the limited concessions he made publicly. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (1915), 705-07.

Wilson hoped to eliminate both Mexican leaders from the political scene by recognizing and helping a candidate who could gain overwhelming support from both factions and thus might be able to end the civil strife in Mexico. At that point, Canova proposed to a number of administration officials that the United States throw its support to a counterrevolutionary group headed by Iturbide, openly avow that support, and supply that group with stocks of food which it could then distribute among the population. These gestures, it was hoped, would secure for Iturbide the popularity he lacked.³⁹ In return for such help the conservatives were to grant wide-ranging rights to both the U.S. government and U.S. bankers, including "American supervision of customs collection," in exchange for a large loan—\$500 million was mentioned—from U.S. banks. The conservatives were also to accept the appointment by the United States of an "unofficial administrative advisor" with unspecified powers to "oversee the necessary reforms."⁴⁰ In his memorandum to then Secretary of State Bryan, Canova did not explain what he meant by "necessary reforms," but he did stipulate in another memorandum sent to Chandler Anderson, who frequently served as intermediary between the administration and business interests that "all Church and other real property confiscated by revolutionary bands or others without proper or due process of law since February 13, 1913 shall be re-occupied by their legal owners."⁴¹

Canova's plot was far more than an attempt by a high state department official and a few Mexican and American associates to secure advantages in Mexico. The plan was backed by important segments of Mexico's pre-revolutionary oligarchy, of whom Manuel Calero was a representative, and by U.S. business interests, for whom Chandler Anderson was spokesman.⁴² Its purpose was to exploit disunion within the revolutionary camp by re-establishing a Díaz-like regime that, unlike its real predecessor, would be dominated by the United States. The plan also had vocal support within the administration; most outspoken was Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane, who in later years became closely identified with oil interests.⁴³ On his initiative the plan was discussed at a cabinet meeting. But Bryan dismissed the plan, declaring that the United States "should not take up a man who

³⁹ For a description of the Canova-Iturbide conspiracy, see Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality*, 470–74.

⁴⁰ Canova to the Secretary of State, Dept. of State Files, RG 59, File 812.00 15531 1/2.

⁴¹ Diary of Chandler Anderson, May 28, 1915, Library of Congress. The state department papers contain only the barest outline of Canova's plot. Most of the available information is contained in Anderson's diary, especially the entries for April 23, May 14, May 19, May 28, June 1, June 29, July 23, and July 30, 1915. Very apparent is the conservatives' desire to apply a strategy in 1915 similar to that they applied in 1911. They were willing to agree to some "compromises" as far as the composition of the government was concerned. Iturbide was quite willing, for example, to include Manuel Bonilla as a representative of the pro-Villa forces and Alvaro Obregón as a representative of the pro-Carranza forces. To ensure conservative control of the Mexican army similar to that in 1911, "Iturbide himself would have no part in the new Government, but would act as the leader of the military forces, supporting it, which he regarded as essential, in order that he might be in a position to compel the new government to carry out the pledges which it would have to make in order to secure the support of the United States." Anderson Diary, July 22, 1915.

⁴² For Anderson's role as lobbyist for American mining, oil, and other interests, see Smith, *The U.S. and Revolutionary Nationalism*, 95.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

would probably play in with the reactionaries."⁴⁴ Although Wilson did not voice any opinion at these meetings, he later expressed agreement with Bryan's position, and Canova's plan was discarded.⁴⁵

The plan contained three of the main provisions to which, according to Villa's accusations, Carranza and the United States had agreed: (1) the \$500-million loan by U.S. bankers to Mexico and American financial control of essential parts of Mexico's economy, (2) strong influence over the Mexican government by advisers in Washington, and (3) the return of expropriated holdings to foreigners and Mexican enemies of the Revolution. In their talks with U.S. officials, the plotters never mentioned other provisions that appeared in Villa's Naco Manifesto, provisions that would have made Mexico not only economically but militarily dependent upon the United States: U.S. naval bases in Magdalena Bay; U.S. control of the Isthmus to Tehuantepec, the oil regions, and the Mexican railways; and the right of the U.S. government to send troops to Mexico whenever it considered such a step to be necessary. Nor did Canova and Iturbide mention the right of the United States to impose its candidates as secretaries of foreign relations and of finance on a new Mexican government.

Was there any validity, then, to the other charges of the Naco Manifesto? There is a very strong possibility that the Canova-Iturbide plot went far beyond what they were willing to reveal to U.S. authorities and that it included a covert pact encompassing most of Villa's charges. In their proposals to U.S. officials, the plotters had remained vague on three counts: what financial interests backed their plan; what they had promised these interests in return; and what the specific tasks and powers of the U.S. advisers were to be. In his letter to Bryan, Canova made only one reference to financial support. He included letters from Speyer and Company offering to lend \$500 million to the new Mexican government, if the United States were to go along with Canova's plan. Iturbide was somewhat franker in a conversation with Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson, according to a memorandum by Anderson:

Burleson . . . stated that he thought the administration would favor his [Iturbide's] movement, if it could show sufficient strength and backing, and that it was clean. This last seemed to offend Iturbide somewhat because he felt that his own connection with it was a guarantee of its cleanness. It appeared that what Burleson wanted to know was who was backing it financially and what, if any, obligations they had undertaken. Iturbide told him that there were three bankers who had offered to finance the movement. One was Mr. Williams, the brother of John Skelton Williams; the other was Mr. Kenna, who was vouched for by Senator Underwood, and another whose name he said frankly that he did not know because the offer had come in an indirect way. He said further that Speyer and Company were prepared to finance the movement if it were endorsed by the administration.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ As quoted in David F. Houston, *Eight Years with Wilson's Cabinet, 1913 to 1920*, 1 (New York, 1926): 133.

⁴⁵ Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality*, 475-76.

⁴⁶ Diary of Chandler Anderson, July 23, 1915, Library of Congress. Robert Lancaster Williams was a banker and railroad executive, whose brother, John Skelton Williams, had been appointed comptroller of the currency by Woodrow Wilson. Edward Dudley Kenna was also a railway executive, who had been vouched for by a Democratic senator.

That the third backer chose not to reveal his identity or that Iturbide chose not to disclose his identity may indicate that the person was judged unacceptable to either Bryan or the U.S. government. Significantly, Iturbide completely evaded the question as to what obligations his party had assumed toward U.S. special interests. Naturally, the intriguing question about the Canova-Iturbide plot is what was meant by “necessary reforms” and what was to have been the power of the “U.S. unofficial adviser” charged with implementing them. Although we have no direct evidence as to what was intended, we may surmise the outlines based on still other plans and agreements that were drawn up some time after the attack on Columbus.

On December 6, 1917—two and a half years after Canova and Iturbide came out with their first plot concerning Mexico—Secretary of State Lansing wrote a secret memorandum to Wilson concerning yet another plot. This document, which was classified until recently, merits extended quotation.

This afternoon, X came to see me and said that he had run across a most remarkable plot in relation to Mexico. (X is an intimate friend of mine in whom I have implicit confidence.) He had been consulted by a Mexican of good family belonging to the old regime, whom I will call “S.” I am personally acquainted with S and believe him to be honorable and straightforward. X said that S stated that he had been approached with a proposition to undertake a revolution against the Mexican government, that the general plan had been worked out, and [that] many prominent Mexicans and Americans in this country were involved and arrangements were made to place ample funds at the disposal of those that were engaged in the enterprise.

S told X that he had been interviewed by Cecil Ira McRaynolds, an attorney from New York, who said he was acting for Anderson Hurd, and that McRaynolds told him that this planned revolution had the approval of the Department of State, that V, a high official in the Department, knew of the plan and had assured him of the approval of the government.

S said that, while it seemed to be alright [*sic*], he did not wish to do anything in the matter unless he was absolutely sure that this government approved it. Knowing that X was a friend of mine, he asked him to see me and find the truth. X told him that he was familiar with my policy in relation to Mexico and that he was certain that V had not been authorized to speak for the Department or to encourage this movement but that he would see me if S desired him to do so. S replied that he did because he would have nothing to do with it unless it was alright. He then gave X a carbon copy on pink paper of a bilingual letter setting forth the arrangements for financing the movement and the concessions and compensation to be given by the new government when it came into power.

Six days later, X again saw Lansing and added more details to the plot:

He [X] said that he was informed that Anderson Hurd, who appeared to be the central figure in the movement, though probably only an agent, had been employed by the Shipping Board to negotiate for the purchase of German ships in Mexican ports, and that Cecil Ira McRaynolds, his attorney, had also been employed by the Board in some capacity. McRaynolds told the Mexican S that he was certain that the Department of State knew all about the plan because, he asserted, the Shipping Board was behind it and that Senator James A. O’Gorman of New York had talked the matter over with Frank L. Polk, a Counselor in the State Department. (Polk told me later that O’Gorman had called to see him about the purchase of some ships in Uruguay but never mentioned Mexico.)

McRaynolds told S that the primary purpose of the proposed revolution was to secure the oil at Tampico and the German ships in Mexican waters; and that he had had a conference at which were present Corwin, Swain, and Helm of the Standard Oil Co., and V of the Department of State. They met in New York and discussed the plan.

McRaynolds also told S the Standard Oil Co. was to put up \$5 million to begin with. Of that sum, \$2.5 million were to be used for purchasing the ships; \$1.5 million to finance the revolution; and the balance—\$1 million—was to go to those who had been instrumental in aiding the movement. S told X that he understood that V was to be paid out of the latter sum.⁴⁷

Obviously, Lansing felt that the matter was too sensitive for him to commit to paper the names of the persons involved, even though the paper was a secret memorandum to the president. Other documents in the same file, however, conclusively identify two of the three persons mentioned. The high official of the Department of State, "V," was Leon Canova, the man originally in charge of Washington's Latin American desk, later solely in charge of Mexican affairs. "S," the Mexican of "good family," was Eduardo Iturbide. After Lansing discovered the plot, he relieved Canova of his post.⁴⁸

The bilingual pact signed by the conspirators, which X (whose identity cannot be ascertained) handed to Lansing, contains provisions strikingly similar to those mentioned by Villa in his accusations against Carranza. Point 10 of this secret agreement stated,

In recognition of the services which you and your principals obligate themselves to perform I do, for myself, my principals, and associates, obligate myself and them to the end that I and they and the political party which sustains us will use all our influence and the means at our disposal to bring about the following: (a) That the appointments of the secretaries of Foreign Relations and of the Treasury of the Mexican government will be given to men especially fitted to re-establish and maintain complete harmony between the governments of Mexico and the United States and inspire confidence in you and your principals with reference to the carrying out of

⁴⁷ Secret Memoranda of Secretary of State Lansing, Dec. 6 and Dec. 12, 1917, National Archives, Dept. of State, Office of the Counselor, Leland Harrison File, box 208 (Mexican intrigue).

⁴⁸ Canova's identity as "V" is confirmed by a document that was included in the file, namely, a wire from the U.S. Embassy in London, which stated, "Admiralty greatly disturbed by a report that Canova has been implicated in some Mexican intrigue and is likely to lose his job." See Harrison to Bell, Jan. 17, 1918, National Archives, Dept. of State, Leland Harrison File, box 208 (Mexican intrigue). Another memorandum in the same file of July 12, 1918 confirmed Iturbide's identity as "S": "Informant told me that Michael Spellacy, an oil man, had told Congressman McLemore of Texas in confidence, and that McLemore had told informant in confidence, and informant told me in confidence, practically the identical information that was in the secret memorandum of Secretary Lansing which was turned over to this office at the beginning of the investigation of Mexican affairs. Informant said that all this came from Iturbide telling Spellacy some time ago that the State Department, through "V," had half sanctioned the financing of a revolution in Mexico through certain New York bankers to the amount of five million dollars, and that it was understood between I and "V" that "V" was to get a portion of this money for helping to put the deal through; that "V" said that the revolution had the sanction of the State Department and that the bankers made arrangements to produce the five million dollars for that purpose, but at the last moment, the higher officials of the State Department refused to sanction it." The state department was obviously afraid of the scandal an immediate dismissal of Canova might produce. He "resigned" from the state department on December 2, 1918, and the reasons were carefully concealed from public scrutiny. So well organized was this concealment that nearly fifty years later Louis M. Teitelbaum, a historian trying to find the reasons for Canova's resignation, wrote, "The cause of his leaving is nowhere stated in the published or private records available for study, a circumstance nearly unique in the State Department"; Teitelbaum, *Woodrow Wilson and the Mexican Revolution* (New York, 1967), 269. After his resignation, the state department carefully followed his every movement; *ibid.*, 411.

the obligations herein contained. (b) That the Mexican government will appoint your principals, with the character of financial adviser or fiscal agent, for the negotiation of all financial questions which are to be negotiated in the United States Such appointment as fiscal agent will also carry with it the designation of the bank recommended by your principals as depository of the Mexican government upon qualification as such in a proper way.

Point 10 (g) specified that a mission be nominated by the new government which would be empowered to negotiate with the United States concerning "the bases which are to serve for the following matters: Chamizal, the waters of the Colorado River, naval stations in the Pacific, the strategic military railroads of the Republic of Mexico; and to agree upon the appropriate measures that are to be taken so that your principals may supervise in Mexico the expenditure of the Funds secured by loans placed by them."

In Point 10 (i) it was stated that "To bring about the utmost harmony and cooperation between the government of Mexico and the United States . . . we are in favor of and will work to bring about the voluntary creation by the government of Mexico of military zones to cover and include the lines of all north and south trunk railways, now existing or to be hereafter constructed under a stipulation that will provide for a mutual offensive and defensive alliance and require both parties to protect the said zones in all cases of threatened danger." Point 10 (j) had as its purpose "the termination to a compromise satisfactory to them of the concession under which Sir Weetman Pearson, now Lord Cowdray, and his associates operate the railway line between Puerto Mexico and Salina Cruz, across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and the return of the said railway and the control and complete operation of the same to the government of Mexico." It did, moreover, grant to the parties involved, "the conditions being equal, the profits from the sale of the bonds to provide the necessary funds to enable the government of Mexico to bring about the termination of such concessions, to place the said railway in first-class operating condition, and to double-track the same for its entire length, with all the necessary equipment, terminals, etc." It was "understood," under the terms of the agreement, that "in all cases the Mexican government" would "retain control or majority of the stock of the railway company, granting to your principals, together with such compensation as may be agreed upon, such portion of said stock as may be proper but not exceed 49% of the same." Also included was a clause which provided that this railway would be made part of a military zone, which the United States would have the right to protect if it felt the railway was threatened.⁴⁹

Did a similar agreement underlie the 1915 Canova-Iturbide scheme? Although there is no conclusive evidence for such an accord, there is a strong probability that it existed. One indication is the remarkable similarity between the charges Villa leveled at the United States in his Naco Manifesto of 1915 and the provisions of the 1917 accord. U.S. interests were to have the deci-

⁴⁹ Bilingual unsigned agreement, November 1917, National Archives, Dept. of State, Leland Harrison File, box 208 (Mexican intrigue).

sive influence in selecting Mexico's secretary of foreign relations and secretary of finance. The United States was to grant a large loan to Mexico and supervise its finances in turn. The United States was to be given naval bases in the Pacific, mainly in Magdalena Bay. U.S. business interests were to share control of the Tehuantepec railroad, which hitherto had been under British control. Also included were other concessions to the United States that Villa had not mentioned in his accusations.⁵⁰

Since the same plotters, Canova and Iturbide, were involved in both schemes, there is good reason to assume that they were ready to enter into the same kind of agreement in 1915 that they did in 1917. And, although there is no definite evidence that the oil companies were as involved in the plot of 1915 as in that of 1917, that a man like Chandler Anderson, who was very sympathetic to oil interests, had backed Canova's plan in 1915 could indicate a similar support by oil companies. Certainly, there is no reason to assume that the oil interests had less compunction about supporting a plot in 1915 than in 1917. Carranza had forfeited their original support after he began raising taxes on oil.

IT IS NOW POSSIBLE TO GET A CLEAR IDEA of the events leading up to and motivating Villa's attack on Columbus. What may be termed Canova's "overt" plan of May 1915 would have sufficed to put an end to the Revolution and have transformed Mexico into a U.S. protectorate. If complemented by the "covert" plan of 1917, it would have spelled complete political and economic domination of Mexico: the overt provisions provided for an "unofficial administrative advisor" and U.S. supervision of customs; the covert provisions, for (1) U.S. intervention in Mexico whenever the United States perceived a threat to the operation of the railroads and to a number of important ports and other strategic facilities, (2) strong influence by U.S. business interests over the Tehuantepec railroad, and (3) probable control by the U.S. Navy over Magdalena Bay. Villa's army held a key position in the scheme. "I'm assured," Canova wrote Bryan, "that 20,000 men, mostly trained soldiers of the old Federal Army coming largely from Villa's ranks, would adhere to it; but, in all probability, Villa's entire army will join the movement." He also wrote that he had discussed those parts of the plan that he had revealed to Bryan with two representatives of Villa, of whom more will be said later.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Among the other concessions to its U.S. backers, the Mexican side was willing "to bring about the attachment and return to the true owners, by legal means, of the funds which the so-called Commission for the Regulation of Henequén has in this City . . ." and "(d) To bring it about that the Mexican Government grant to your principals, other conditions being equal, the preference for the upbuilding and operation in the Republic of Mexico, of the industries of iron and steel, and those related thereto, including the acquirement and exploitation of mines of iron. (e) That the Mexican Government will give facilities to your principals for the upbuilding of the sugar industry in the country, and will not impose new taxes or burdens which impede this industry. (f) That the Mexican Government will grant to your principals, other conditions being equal, the right to purchase the vessels to be sold because of having been interned by the Government by any reason." *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Canova to the Secretary of State, July 17, 1915, National Archives, Dept. of State Files RG 59, File 812.00 15531 1/2.

Villa did not for long remain in the dark about the contents of the plan, although it is not quite certain how he first found out. Perhaps, as he later reported, he was simply approached and offered U.S. support if he were to approve all the provisions contained in Canova's plan. (Canova may have felt that in May 1915 Villa had little to lose and that, having already been decisively defeated, Villa would be ready to settle for anything in order to retain at least some remnants of his power.) At any rate, it is certain that by the summer of 1915 news of the Canova-Iturbide plot had reached Villa's representatives in Washington, who were deeply incensed about it. William Teitelbaum, a journalist and businessman who kept in touch with the various Mexican factions represented in Washington, described in a letter to H. G. Wright, editor of the *New York Globe*, the reaction of Villa's emissaries to the plot:

On several occasions during the past weeks I have discussed with you the serious charges being made by Mr. E. C. Llorente, the accredited representative of the Mexican Convention forces, that Mr. Leon Canova, chief of the Mexican division of the State Dept., was secretly advancing the candidacy of Eduardo Iturbide for Provisional President of Mexico. . . .

A few days before General Angeles came to Washington, I called on Mr. Llorente, who complained with a degree of temper that Mr. Canova was complicating the Mexican trouble by injecting and fathering Iturbide's candidacy, which they would fight to the last ditch, even if backed by American forces. When, in proof of the statement all he could offer was that newspaper correspondents whose names he was not at liberty to divulge, kept him informed of the matter, I frankly told Mr. Llorente that it looked to me like a mote in his eyes. The same evening I carried the complaint to Mr. Canova for his guidance and he coolly dismissed the affair, saying, "I don't pay any attention to them. They are hard to please." which assured me that Mr. Llorente was mistaken.

A few days later I arranged an appointment to have Mr. Canova meet General Angeles, which was held in Mr. Canova's home. General Angeles, following the conference, claimed he felt so insulted by Mr. Canova's praise of Iturbide and the overtures he made in seeking General Angeles' cooperation, that a further appointment at the same place accepted by General Angeles before Mr. Canova "showed his hand" that General Angeles could not and did not meet.⁶²

Since Canova was the highest state department official directly concerned with Mexican affairs, there was every reason for Villa to presume that he acted on instructions from the administration. There was no way for Villa to learn that the cabinet had rejected Canova's plan. To the Mexican revolutionary, Canova's plan was nothing short of official U.S. policy.

When, in October 1915, shortly after inviting Villa's representatives to a peace conference in Washington, Woodrow Wilson reversed himself with inexplicable suddenness and recognized Carranza, even Roque González Garza, a far more moderate revolutionary than Villa, concluded that Car-

⁶² Wright judged the contents of the letter so significant that he transmitted it to Lansing. Teitelbaum to Wright, Aug. 17, 1915; enclosed in Wright to Lansing, Aug. 18, 1915, National Archives, Dept. of State Files, RG 59, File 812.00 15834.

ranza must have bought this recognition by agreeing to importunate U.S. demands. The following month Wilson went one step further and allowed Carranza's troops to cross U.S. territory in order to inflict a crushing defeat on the man he had backed only a short time before, and Villa rid himself of all lingering doubts as to the cause of the blatant reversal by the American president. He became firmly convinced that nothing less than Carranza's consent to the terms spelled out in Canova's original plan could have swayed Wilson so quickly. Little wonder, then, that Villa soon made his convictions known publicly and accused Carranza of having "sold out."

VILLA'S PUBLIC ACCUSATIONS FOUND NO RESPONSE. The Naco Manifesto fell on deaf ears. Neither Dieguez nor other Carranza generals (except one) deigned to reply to his letters. The people of Chihuahua did not flock to his banner after he exposed Carranza's plans from the balcony of the Municipal Palace. As a consequence of this poor response, Villa no doubt became extremely frustrated, his frustration further aggravated by Carranza's ability to assume an extremely nationalistic posture even after having consented—so Villa thought—to Mexico's conversion to a U.S. protectorate. For a time Villa hoped—as he told his collaborator Silvestre Terrazas—that Carranza would himself jeopardize his situation. If he applied any of the provisions of the pact, his generals would see Villa's accusations confirmed and turn against their chief. If he did not comply with the provisions, Wilson would drop him and Villa's own movement might revive.

As the weeks passed and none of these hopes was realized, Villa's anger and despair mounted. It is a measure of the depth of that despair that Villa seriously proposed to Zapata that he abandon his home territory and cross wide sections of Carranza-controlled land to attack the United States. Villa's main problem was that he had no way of substantiating his charges—with one exception: his accusation that Carranza had given U.S. troops the right to enter Mexican territory in return for permission to cross the United States to rescue Agua Prieta from Villa's attack. In his letter to Flores and Dieguez, Villa had already touched on the issue. "If American troops enter Mexico," he asked, "what will you do?" This issue remained uppermost in his mind for a long time. In the first manifesto he issued after Pershing's invasion, he railed against Carranza:

With the greatest good faith, I have remained inactive with my forces in the hope that the activities of the so-called Constitutionalist Government would be directed toward repelling the invasion and securing the re-unification of the Mexican people. But . . . far from trying to expel the invader, this government utilized with the greatest perversity the gravity of international relations for personal gain and without in any way respecting the honor of Mexico.⁵³

⁵³ For a full text of this manifesto, see the appendix to Antonio M. Delgado, ed., *Romance histórico villista* (Chihuahua, 1975), 172-73.

By attacking the United States and inviting possible reprisals, Villa hoped to create an insoluble dilemma for Carranza. If the latter allowed U.S. troops to penetrate into Mexico without offering resistance, Villa hoped to expose Carranza for what he thought he was: a tool of the Americans. If Carranza refused to have himself exposed and simply ignored the original agreement and resisted the Americans, so much the better. The tie between him and the Wilson administration would have been ruptured and his position severely shaken. Max Weber, the German vice-consul in Ciudad Juarez, wrote to a business partner in the United States in December 1916, "Villa wants intervention and stated in public in Chihuahua that, as long as the washwoman in Washington is at the head, he will continue to burn and loot until America intervenes in Mexico and brings about the downfall of Carranza."⁵⁴

One more question needs to be considered: What role, if any, did Germany's much-rumored involvement play in Villa's decision to attack Columbus? In May 1915, Bernhard Dernburg, Germany's propaganda chief in the United States, without consulting Count Bernstorff, the German ambassador, submitted a plan to Admiral Henning von Holtzendorff (a high official in the German admiralty who was soon to become its head) to use Villa in order to provoke U.S. intervention in Mexico. Dernburg reported that Felix Sommerfeld, Villa's representative in the United States, had told him that he (Sommerfeld), while engaged in negotiations two months earlier between Villa and the U.S. chief of staff at the Arizona border, could easily have provoked U.S. intervention. But Sommerfeld stated that he had not done so because he was not sure whether German authorities wanted such an intervention. He did point out that a U.S. invasion of Mexico would stop U.S. arms shipments to the Allies and distract U.S. attention from the European theater. He also told Dernburg that he "was convinced that an American intervention in Mexico could be brought about."⁵⁵

Holtzendorff judged the matter to be of such gravity that he submitted it for approval to Germany's secretary of state, Gottlieb von Jagow, who gave it his wholehearted approval. He wrote,

In my opinion, we must answer "yes." Even though I am not fully convinced that deliveries of munitions can be stopped entirely, it would be very desirable that America be drawn into a war and be distracted from Europe, where it tends to be pro-English. It will not intervene in Chinese affairs, so that an intervention in Mexico would constitute the only distraction for the American government. Since we cannot now do anything in Mexico, American intervention would also be best for our interests there.⁵⁶

Sommerfeld obviously had undertaken extensive preparations for carrying out this plan. In the same month that Jagow gave his approval, two men—J. M. Keedy and Eduardo Linns—turned up in Washington as representatives of

⁵⁴ Max Weber to Major Britton Davis, Dec. 5, 1916, Private archive of Max Weber, El Paso, Texas.

⁵⁵ Dernburg to Holtzendorff, May 1915, German Foreign Ministry Archives, Bonn, Mexico 1, Secret, vol. 1.

⁵⁶ Jagow to Holtzendorff, May 1915, *ibid.*

Pancho Villa. They had never before and were never again linked with Villa in any way. According to the project for counterrevolution in Mexico that he submitted to Bryan, Canova negotiated primarily with these men to win the support of the Villista faction for his plan. Actually, the two men were German agents whom Sommerfeld had probably recommended to Villa as skilled negotiators, capable of wielding influence in the United States. In several reports by Kurt Jahnke, who headed German naval intelligence in North America from 1917 to 1919, Keedy is mentioned as Jahnke's collaborator.⁵⁷ Linns was suspected in 1917 by U.S. authorities of being linked to Germany.⁵⁸

There is no information about what role these men played in the negotiations with Villa. They may very well have revealed to him those aspects of the Canova-Iturbide conspiracy that Canova would have kept secret. They may also have suggested to Villa that Carranza was involved in the negotiations with Canova. The one thing they did not need to do was to invent a plot that would have imposed a quasi-American protectorate over Mexico. Canova, Iturbide, and their allies among Mexican conservatives and U.S. business interests had done that already.

Nor did the German government itself believe that any of its agents had caused or were even involved in the raid on Columbus. On March 28, 1916, a few weeks after the attack, Bernstorff, who had not been informed of Sommerfeld's plan, wrote to German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, "It is not surprising that the attempt was made to state that German intrigues were responsible for Villa's attack and to depict Germany as the disturber of the peace. Naturally, no proof of this erroneous statement was forthcoming." An official of the German foreign office, probably Max von Montgelas, the head of the Mexican desk, added the word "*leider*" ("unfortunately") before the word "erroneous." He was regretful that, as far as he knew, Germany had not been involved in the Columbus attack.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Keedy was first referred to as a German agent by Customs Agent Zachary Cobb; see Cobb to the Secretary of State, Oct. 2, 1917, Dept. of State Files RG 59, File 862.202 12/742, MC 336 roll 59. In an unsigned report to Wolfgang Kapp, Jahnke describes extensive negotiations with Keedy; Kapp papers, Deutsches Zentralarchiv Merseburg, Rep. 92, El. no. 13.

⁵⁸ Linns was placed on a confidential "Trading with the Enemy" list. U.S. Ambassador Fletcher, in a report to Lansing on July 27, 1918, called him "very pro-German." Teitelbaum, *Woodrow Wilson and the Mexican Revolution*, 419.

⁵⁹ This evidence does not entirely rule out the possibility of German sponsorship of or participation in the attack. There are some indications that Sommerfeld remained in touch with Villa both before and after the Columbus raid. In March 1917, Mexican authorities suspected him of supplying arms to Villa; see Monteverde to the Mexican Consul in Los Angeles, March 7, 1917, Archivo de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico. On the basis of interviews with one of Villa's former lieutenants, James Sandos raises the possibility that Dr. Rauschbaum, who was of German origin and served as Villa's personal physician and financial adviser, may have induced Villa to attack Columbus by reporting that a bank in that town (the Columbus State Bank with which Villa had dealings) had cheated him. Sandos, "German Involvement in Northern Mexico, 1915-1916," 70-89. On the whole, this evidence is not sufficient for assuming German responsibility for the raid. The best sources for a definitive answer to this question would be the files of the German intelligence agencies. Whatever files of German Army Intelligence (about whose involvement in the Villa intrigue there is no evidence) that survived World War I were destroyed by bombs in World War II, together with German military archives in Potsdam. The records of the German navy, whose clandestine services were those principally involved with Villa, survived World War II and are now available to researchers at the Deutsches Militärarchiv in Freiburg im Breisgau. During a recent visit to this archive, I

IN THE SHORT RUN THE ATTACK PROVED BENEFICIAL to Villa, in almost the same way he thought it would. For many months—as long as Carranza seemed incapable of expelling Pershing's punitive expedition—Villa became a symbol of national resistance in Chihuahua. Battered and nearly destroyed in December 1915, his army multiplied, reaching several thousand by September 1916. It even retook the capital city of Chihuahua and held it against Carranza's forces. Its strength ebbed again only after the punitive expedition left Mexico in February 1917. A further benefit of the raid was Villa's receipt of several coffins filled with arms shipped from Germany after the attack. They had apparently been purchased from an arms factory in Bridgeport, Connecticut before the outbreak of the war.⁶⁰

Carranza, too, was deeply affected by Villa's attack, though not in the fatal way Villa had hoped for. Mexican-American relations deteriorated and stopped just short of open belligerency. From March 1916 onward, Wilson imposed a weapons embargo on Mexico—never strictly observed—which was to last until the fall of Carranza in 1920. The latter, deprived of easy access to arms and despairing of his ability to expel the punitive expedition, successfully sought a rapprochement with Germany, which continued even after the exit of Pershing's troops from Mexico. Villa, meanwhile, faced a severely shaken Carranza and survived five hard and savage years of guerrilla warfare until Carranza was overthrown in 1920 and Villa made peace with his successors.

But what of Villa's avowed main purpose in attacking the United States—

was informed that the most sensitive files relating to sabotage and secret operations during World War I were destroyed by the navy itself after the war. The only reports on the clandestine activities of the intelligence service of the German navy that I managed to locate are contained in the German Foreign Office archives in Bonn and among the papers of a leading German politician, Wolfgang Kapp, now in the German Democratic Republic: Kapp Papers, Deutsches Zentralarchiv Merseburg, Rep. 92, El. no. 13. There I found an anonymous report on the activities of German naval intelligence in Mexico between 1917 and 1919, which was probably written by Kurt Jahnke, who headed German naval intelligence in North America from 1917 to 1919 and who had already been a German agent in 1916. Neither in these reports nor in the telegrams of the German secret service intercepted by the British is there any indication of German sponsorship of Villa's Columbus attack. While rejoicing at Villa's attack, the Austrian Foreign Office (which carefully monitored the activities of its closest ally) never attributed it to Germany. Austrian Ambassador in Washington to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, April 17, 1916, Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv Wien, PA Berichte Mexico. A more important indication than all of this is that the German navy, had it been responsible for Villa's attack, would have had every reason to claim the credit with other branches of the German government. In 1916 the navy was engaged in a growing power struggle with other government agencies because of its demand for unrestricted submarine warfare. A successful operation such as the organization of Villa's attack on the United States, a plan which had previously obtained the wholehearted endorsement of the German Foreign Office, would certainly have enhanced the navy's prestige with the rulers of Germany. I have found no evidence for any claim of this kind by the navy in any of the relevant archives. Neither the files of the German Foreign Office in Bonn, Potsdam, and Merseburg nor the papers of the Reichskanzlei in the Deutsches Zentralarchiv in Potsdam contain any evidence for Germany's involvement in the Columbus raid. The same is true for the diaries of Kurt Rietzler, a close collaborator of the German chancellor, which contain some of the most sensitive data that reached Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg during the course of the war. Kurt Rietzler, *Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente* (Göttingen, 1972). All that one can say is that, immediately after receiving news of the raid, the German Foreign Office sought ways to supply Villa with arms; the head of the Mexican desk at the German Foreign Office wrote a memorandum to this effect in March 1916. Memorandum by Montgelas, March 23, 1916, German Foreign Office, Bonn, Mexico 1, vol. 56.

⁶⁰ Emmanuel Voska and Will Irwin, *Spy and Counterspy* (New York, 1940), 167.

the preservation of Mexico's independence? Villa actually increased immeasurably the real threat to his country's independence. U.S. troops penetrated into Mexico, and, in 1916, the United States sought to impose conditions severely limiting Mexico's sovereignty as a prerequisite for the withdrawal of its troops. And if Villa, by attacking Columbus, had sought to alert Mexican and U.S. public opinion to the threat to Mexico's independence that loomed uppermost in his mind—plots by U.S. interests to convert Mexico into a protectorate—he failed completely. Subsequent events not only failed to bear out the charges of his Naco Manifesto insofar as Wilson and Carranza were concerned, but they even failed to direct attention to the very real foundations that underlay some of those charges. It was Villa's misfortune to have been right in his general suspicions, but wrong in his specific assumptions. Plots like the one he outlined at Naco, that is, involving the same purpose but different names, continued to be hatched and to escape public notice. Only a few months after Secretary of State Lansing discovered and rejected Canova's plot to secure domination over Mexico for Standard Oil and other U.S. business interests in December 1917, a new scheme had already been conceived.

For this pact the politician involved was Alfredo Robles Dominguez, a long-time adherent of Carranza, who was now willing to aid in the overthrow of his erstwhile leader. In a conversation between a representative of Robles Dominguez and a British diplomat in Washington, the Mexican politician let it be known that his movement was to be financed by "the International Harvester Company, the St. Louis Car Company, certain oil interests represented by a Mr. Helm, and others."⁶¹ A few days later, the British representative in Mexico, Cunard Cummins, reported on some of the conditions Robles Dominguez had accepted as a price for gaining the support of these U.S. companies, and it is worthwhile to quote them for the similarity they bear to previous agreements. Robles Dominguez agreed

(a) To act in Mexico and Latin America as the interpreter of President Wilson's policy of confidence and fraternity between the United States and Latin America.

(b) To establish here the "Bank of Mexico," the Consultative Board of which composed of British, Americans, French, and Mexicans, two of each, will handle and check the receipts and expenditure of the Government. It will practically be the Ministry of Finance though for appearances sake a Mexican Minister, an obedient dummy, will be appointed.

(c) To deliver to the League of Nations Magdalena Bay which on account of the interest displayed in it by Japan and the United States threatens to involve Mexico with both. He presumes that the League would place this strategic point in the hands of the United States for use as a naval base on the Pacific and that through the intermediation of the League, Mexican interests would be duly protected.

(d) To bring up for prompt settlement all pending questions with the United States which serve as a cause of friction. The "Chamizal" dispute, the difficulties of the Tlahualilo Company, etc., etc., he would settle in a spirit favourably disposed towards the foreign interests.⁶²

⁶¹ Hohler to Foreign Office, April 11, 1918, Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office 371 3244 2658.

⁶² Cummins to Foreign Office, April 1918, *ibid.*

The failure to implement these plans was due in the main to the unwillingness of both the U.S. government and some important U.S. business interests to carry out any aggressive policy in Mexico as long as the United States was involved in World War I. It was also due, however, to Wilson's objection in principle to establishing a U.S. protectorate over Mexico.

If Villa's attack on Columbus had done much to imperil Mexico's precarious independence, the failure of the Pershing expedition did much to repair the damage. Ultimately, it convinced the American public, as well as the U.S. military, that future intervention in Mexico would be more difficult and costly than had been assumed. In 1914 Secretary of War Lindley M. Garrison estimated that fourteen U.S. divisions would be needed to occupy Mexico;⁶³ by 1918 that estimate had to be revised upward. In April of that year the British general staff reported that the U.S. military now believed that, at the very least, twenty divisions (five hundred thousand men) would be needed.⁶⁴ The failure of the Pershing expedition, however, not only enhanced Mexico's standing vis-à-vis the United States, but also Villa's standing with many of his own countrymen. In the pantheon of popular legend, expressed in countless stories and *corridos*,⁶⁵ he is still celebrated as the man who attacked the United States—and got away with it.

⁶³ Richard D. Challener, *Admirals, Generals, and American Foreign Policy, 1898–1914* (Princeton, 1973), 351–52.

⁶⁴ Memorandum of the General Staff, May 9, 1918, Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office 371 3244 2658.

⁶⁵ The legends about the attack on Columbus have been compounded by the fact that Villa never officially assumed responsibility nor gave an explanation for the attack. As a result, some authors have gone as far as to claim that the raid was a provocation by interventionist groups in the United States. See, for example, Edgcomb Pinchon, *Viva Villa!* (New York, 1933), 338–39. The facts I have established here as well as the testimony of a large number of witnesses and participants leave no doubt about Villa's involvement. See Clendenen, *The United States and Pancho Villa*, 234–47; Calzadiaz Barrera, *Porque Villa atacó Columbus*; and the testimony of Juan Caballero. In the manifesto he issued after Pershing's invasion, Villa neither claimed nor disclaimed responsibility. For the text of the manifesto, see Delgado, *Romance histórico villista*, app., 172–73. One of the reasons for his attitude may have been that he began to doubt the veracity of the secret Carranza-Wilson pact. It is significant that, although in the manifesto Villa accused Carranza of capitulating to the Punitive Expedition, nowhere in the manifesto nor at any time thereafter did he again refer to the secret pact, which had figured so prominently in his Naco declaration. By 1917, Villa may have had additional reasons for avoiding any responsibility for the Columbus raid. The adoption of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, as well as Carranza's German-inclined neutrality, led to a worsening of relations between the Carranza administration and the U.S. government. Under the circumstances, Villa may have hoped to obtain U.S. neutrality, if not support, in his fight against Carranza.