

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Clashing Exceptionalisms:

The American Perspective of the Second French Intervention in Mexico,

1861-1867

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL SATISFACTION OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN HISTORY

by

Jacob Varela

Professor Jarrett Henderson, Seminar Instructor

Professor Manuel Covo, Mentor

March 2025

ABSTRACT

Clashing Exceptionalisms:

The American Perspective of the Second French Intervention in Mexico,

1861-1867

by

Jacob Varela

This thesis is an investigation and analysis of the ideological underpinnings of the Second French Intervention in Mexico, the 1861-1867 attempt by the French government to install a puppet regime in Mexico. The expedition was initially successful, expelling the previously established Second Federal Republic of Mexico and its President Benito Juárez and replacing it with the Second Mexican Empire under Emperor Maximilian I. However, the French position became untenable with the Juárez government engaging in a protracted guerilla conflict and the United States applying diplomatic pressure, and the intervention ended in withdrawal and failure for France. The conflict is not covered extensively in the regular canon of history, and generally only as a colonial failure of the Second French Empire shortly before its demise in 1870. However, this thesis argues that, while French miscalculations and hubris played into the result of the war, it was actually the ideological positions of France and opposing and misunderstood ideological positions

of the United States and Mexico that played a larger role in the culmination of French defeat in the expedition.

Through the use of State Department and Congressional records in the United States National Archives, I have been able to glean a comprehensive picture of the American perspective of the conflict, including the web of diplomatic interactions that took place and how French and Mexican actions were perceived and reacted to by Washington. By putting these sources into conversation with secondary literature, I have developed an in-depth understanding of the conflict and its ideological background. As France was attempting to embark on its imperial mission, Washington and Juárez were fundamentally and ideologically opposed to it, specifically manifesting in a guerilla war in Mexico and shrewd diplomacy by Secretary of State William Seward in denying France its goal. Ultimately, the ideological positions, misunderstandings, and oppositions of the four main governments involved in the conflict created a difficult, then near impossible, situation for Paris. French troops left Mexico by 1867 and the collapse of the Second Mexican Empire shortly followed. As a whole, the conflict demonstrates the importance and influence of ideology in short-term conflicts through policy and diplomatic interactions.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Napoleon III's "Adventure".....	19
Seward's Monroe Doctrine.....	39
Mexico City, Paris, Washington, and Juárez.....	57
Conclusion.....	75
References.....	85

Introduction

The imposing National Archives of the United States building stands deep in the woodsy Maryland suburbs. In its shelves are stored a litany of records from American history, ranging from the last will and testament of Adolf Hitler to the photograph of Abraham Lincoln at Antietam.¹ Far away from these oft-requested documents and hidden by rows of Civil War documents lie boxes of delicately protected letters between American, French, and Mexican diplomats. These State Department records, rarely touched by historians of American and world history alike, provide a direct window into the negotiations, agreements, and aspirations of many individuals from different nations involved in the Second French Intervention in Mexico. Nervous American diplomats discuss the true ambitions of Napoleon III's project, French diplomats assuage and pander their mission in Mexico, and Mexican diplomats discuss the direness and nuance of their position.² Together, these letters and other records in Washington paint a unique image of a largely forgotten conflict, differing from the images of records in Paris and Mexico City. They show individuals' interactions and ideas directly and the application of broader ideologies and trends from each government.

Tucked away in history, this conflict holds an equally neglected place in the

¹ "Highlights from Our Textual Holdings at the National Archives at College Park." National Archives and Records Administration, September 24, 2024.

² Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789-1906, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

collective consciousness of the United States, France, Mexico, and elsewhere compared to other conflicts. The concurrent Civil War almost entirely blots it from the American mind. Meanwhile, the domestic defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and humiliation in the Mexican-American War detract from the French and Mexican memories, respectively. However, the importance of the event should not be underestimated. The expedition and the manner in which it was undertaken by Napoleon III's government and military demonstrates the nature of imperial attitudes during the long nineteenth century and how various ideologies influenced them. The turmoil and conflict in Mexico indicate the difficult decades the nation experienced between its independence and its defining revolution in the early twentieth century. The complexity and delay of the American response to the invasion illustrates the interplay of the Civil War, Monroe Doctrine, and American foreign policy that occurred in the late nineteenth century. Nonetheless, various histories have recounted these aspects in portraying the conflict as important to the belligerents and neutrals.

This thesis will add to these aspects with an American perspective that expands upon the understanding of each nation's part in the conflict and discusses it through the lens of opposing ideologies and misunderstandings. It argues that the Second French Intervention in Mexico was fundamentally difficult for Napoleon III's government and its aims. It is predicated on the explicit and implicit oppositions between exceptionalist ideologies in France and those in the United States and Mexico, creating a proxy conflict of ideas as much as military engagement.

The Context and Consequences of the Second French Intervention in Mexico

The story of the conflict can read like a tale of errors on the way to ultimate failure, a tragicomedy for a well-meaning German prince, or a curious extant of unwieldy European colonialism, depending on the author. After decades of revolutions and revolving governments, Napoleon III and his Second French Empire emerged as the leader of a beleaguered France in 1852. While the government resembled the empire of Napoleon with some of the luster of the Ancien Régime before that, it was now checked by a French people that would not be denied *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, protected by republicanism, liberalism, and exceptionalism.³ Meanwhile, imperialism led Napoleon III to seek prestige for his new empire from Vietnam to Algeria, and Pan-Latinism brought his eye to Mexico.⁴ During this time, Mexico was also defined by instability. Since its independence from Spain in 1821, the nation swayed from an empire to a republic to a dictatorship, with none proving to provide substantial economic, political, or social stability. While the Reform War of 1858-1861 brought peace under Benito Juárez's liberal government, it also inflamed conservatism and monarchism amongst those that lost the war.⁵ All the while, the confluence of French and Mexican troops in 1861 was heavily brought on by the United States being embroiled in their own civil war after decades of domestic tensions.

³ Miquel de la Rosa, *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III: Empire at Home, Colonies Abroad*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 24.

⁴ Christina Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France, 1850-1900*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2022), 17.

⁵ Tom Long and Carsten-Andreas Schulz, "A Turn Against Empire: Benito Juárez's Liberal Rejoinder to the French Intervention in Mexico" (*The American Political Science Review*, 2024), 5.

The conflict began in earnest with the signing of the Convention of London in 1861 between Britain, Spain, and France, agreeing to send a small naval convoy to Mexico to collect foreign debts that Juárez placed a moratorium over.⁶ However, the British and Spanish contingents quickly realized their ally had regime change ambitions and quickly withdrew as French troops readied for invasion. Through the affair of Napoleon's justifications of Pan-Latinism and liberalism with Mexican conservatives' desires for monarchism, French troops pressed toward Mexico City with the intention of toppling the republic. This goal would be realized swiftly, with Veracruz being seized and the capital captured by mid-1863 (although not before that famous victory at Puebla on Cinco de Mayo of 1862).⁷ Shortly thereafter, Maximilian of Habsburg-Lorraine, an Austrian prince friendly to the Bonaparte government, was created *Emperor* Maximiliano I de Habsurgo-Lorena. Napoleon III had seemingly upheld the claims of exceptional French resolve for liberty. While the United States was adamantly against European intervention in the Americas, their reaction was muzzled by the more pressing need to militarily and diplomatically respond to the Civil War. However, the Mexican resolve for republicanism and liberalism proved just as weighty, with Juárez retreating to San Luis Potosi and waging a guerilla war in Central Mexico.⁸ Over the years, French troops were drained by constant fighting, and Maximilian I gradually lost the support of the Paris and

⁶ "The Convention Between England, France, and Spain." The New York Times, December 5, 1861.

⁷ Letter from Charge d'affaires Mattias Romero to Secretary of State William Seward, May 6, 1862, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Mexico, 1823-1906, Volume 29; February 18, 1862 - May 1, 1863, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸ Letter from Charge d'affaires Mattias Romero to Ambassador Thomas Corwin, May 10, 1862, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Mexico, 1823-1906, Volume 29; February 18, 1862 - May 1, 1863, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Mexico City courts. In 1865, the United States triumphed over its civil war, and diplomatic pressure on Paris turned to the threat of military intervention. In 1867, the last French troops left Mexico and Maximilian I was summarily executed.

Thus, every story about the conflict can be proven correct. Napoleon III's government committed a series of diplomatic and military errors, from breaking the Convention of London to overextending his forces into Northern Mexico to failing to placate the United States. Maximilian I may have genuinely cared for his post and the prosperity of the Mexican people, but was fundamentally seen as an unwanted savior by those he ruled over.⁹ France had no significant reason to extend an already sprawling imperial army to Mexico other than imperial hubris and blinding by ideology. The complexity of the conflict comes from the interconnected nature of the conflict. Despite several encounters between France, Mexico, and the United States in the previous century, this marked a significant convergence of the three nations and their ideologies, idiosyncrasies, and ambitions. In these connections and interactions, the true causes and effects of the conflict become apparent.

Historiographical Context and Gaps in Literature

While other historical conflicts and events have overshadowed the Second French Intervention in Mexico, it has been covered, especially in French, Mexican, and Anglophone scholarships. These histories vary widely in their tone and detail, largely due

⁹ Edward Shawcross, *The Last Emperor of Mexico: The Dramatic Story of the Habsburg Archduke Who Created a Kingdom in the New World*, (First edition. New York: Basic Books, 2021), 280.

to the ideological and cultural differences in the conflict itself. Even fewer scholarships cover the conflict apart from larger historical events. Rather, it is generally discussed with relation to other historical periods and broader trends in the nations' histories. Nonetheless, it remains an integral part of the story of these nations' histories and world history. The most robust scholarship on the conflict exists from Mexican authors. The French intervention was one of many chapters in the tumultuous century between independence from Spain and the revolution of the 1910s that would define modern Mexico. Most important in these accounts is the internal divides between liberal and conservative government factions. Before the conflict, this divide paralyzed the government and stagnated the young nation's development, causing violent infighting. Despite this, the story also serves as a testament to Mexican resilience through the guerilla war, as well as plays into the still-enduring legacy of Benito Juárez as a Mexican hero.¹⁰ Mexican sources typically reflect the nature of the conflict as it was seen in Mexico: a foreign invasion and an existential threat to Mexican sovereignty and its form of republican government.¹¹ It was these conservative and liberal sentiments that formed a broader topic in Mexican history, including how the current United Mexican States formed and the conflicts with foreign belligerents that shaped it. With this understanding, there is little exploration into international ideological or geopolitical causes, especially those from France and the United States, that led to French withdrawal outside of Mexican resistance or later American material involvement.

¹⁰ Long and Schulz, "A Turn Against Empire," 5.

¹¹ Edward Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America, 1820-1867: Equilibrium in the New World*, (1st ed. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 3.

French scholarship generally looks at the conflict within the context of other colonial undertakings by Napoleon III's regime, such as those in Algeria or Cochinchina. Like his uncle, Napoleon III's reputation in French history is complex. On one hand, he oversaw a vast modernization and industrialization of France, including Haussmann's famous renovation of Paris. On the other hand, he was an authoritarian figure who came to power through a coup d'état and led the nation into a number of foreign policy failures, including the failed expedition into Mexico. Early narratives were a mix of apologetic and critical perspectives of the conflict, recognizing the failure of the mission but forgiving Napoleon III's vision.¹² More modern scholars have seen the intervention largely as a case study in imperial overreach and hubris.¹³ As with the extensive literature on French history at large, there is considerable attention to broader narratives and ideologies, especially the informal empire of Napoleon III and the effect of Pan-Latinism.¹⁴ Nonetheless, exceptionalism is largely absent from the discussion, especially concerning competing understandings of exceptionalism between the United States and Mexico.

Despite not being directly involved in the conflict, there are several works about or discussing the conflict from the United States and UK. These perspectives have generally focused on the geopolitical nature of the conflict, taking place during an eventful nineteenth century between events ranging from the German wars of unification to Anglo-American disputes in South America. This event is significant because it is one of a European power's most important and consequential imperial ventures before the

¹² Rosa, *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III*, 9.

¹³ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France, 1850-1900*, 7.

¹⁴ Long and Schulz, "A Turn Against Empire," 1.

Scramble for Africa, despite not amounting to lasting change in Mexico or France.

American scholarship has also noted another triumph of republicanism over imperialism in the New World, seemingly preventing large-scale European meddling there from taking place again.¹⁵ British narratives have also focused on ideological undercurrents, such as the French design of empire and Napoleon III's goals, as their failure brought Europe closer to the late twentieth century and contemporary history.¹⁶ While these sources are more removed from the conflict, they provide useful perspectives and lenses in understanding the conflict and its nuances.

Like these other secondary sources, this work depends upon various primary sources. However, because this work focuses on the American perspective, diplomatic relations, and national ideologies, a unique subset of these primary sources will be more closely analyzed. The bulk of archival research conducted for this project was done at the National Archives of the United States government, which contains State Department and Congressional records. These records represent different levels of policy and decision-making throughout the conflict, including those between different nations, from Senate memos sent to the French court to correspondences between American and Mexican ambassadors about materiel support. Nonetheless, this work also utilizes primary sources from French and Mexican sources and more American sources outside the highest diplomatic level within Washington. This further collection of primary sources to be contextualized by the broader story of the conflict allows for the analysis of

¹⁵ Joseph A. Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era* (1st ed. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 146.

¹⁶ David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 218.

a more in-depth diplomatic and ideological history. Putting these primary sources in conversation with the previously mentioned secondary sources gives a fuller picture of the conflict. The ideology and broader historical trends manifest in the decisions of individuals and governments, allowing us to construct our conclusions.

This thesis builds upon existing works and sources while addressing the notable gap in literature concerning the ideological interactions between the United States and France as a fundamental aspect of the conflict. By emphasizing the impact of exceptionalism, a deeply ingrained and influential belief in all three nations involved, it offers a novel approach to the understanding and application of the study of the Second French Intervention in Mexico. While there is value in the military and geopolitical aspects of the event, the ideological frameworks that clashed in the war are nearly as influential as the policies that they affected.

Ideological Intersections Among France, Mexico, and the United States

The ideological similarities between France, Mexico, and the United States seem obvious. Liberalism and republicanism were fundamental in American independence, the toppling of the Ancien Régime of Louis XVI, and the establishment of a Mexican republic. Egalitarianism and federalism shaped the creation and development of many aspects of the French, Mexican, and American governments that existed throughout the nineteenth century. Each nation was exceptional in its revolutionary birth, France being the first major European power, the United States being the first major European colony,

and Mexico being the first North American Spanish colony. However, the context of each ideology and other national idiosyncrasies displays the differences between the nations. It previews how they would later clash following the arrival of French troops in Veracruz. The United States, being the first to have their defining revolution, developed American liberalism and republicanism with an emphasis on individual liberties, representative government, and an almost allergic reaction to aristocratic or monarchic power.¹⁷ These ideas took hold across American political and social spheres, from the structure of the government to the development of foreign policy objectives, such as the Monroe Doctrine. To Americans, their brand of republicanism was as much revolutionary self-image as it was moral imperative, becoming the Western Hemisphere's exceptional leader and protector against tyranny and absolutism. Throughout these three nations, the transnational currents of republicanism and liberalism took each by storm and intrinsically linked them together as exceptional in their own definitions.

French revolutionaries, revolting later than their American counterparts, took inspiration from the American Revolution and applied their respective histories and national sentiments. France had been a nation-state under monarchy for centuries, leading to a messy and fractional revolution. Liberalism and republicanism were made into an explicit banner of the French Revolution, but the revolutionaries, both liberal and conservative, and royalists often clashed over how the nation should change and move forward.¹⁸ It also had to contend with a royal Catholic legacy of centuries and a militant

¹⁷ Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America*, (1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 10.

¹⁸ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 39.

aspect brought on by a coinciding war with nearly all of Europe's monarchies. These nuances manifested in an oscillating government between absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, legislative republic, presidential republic oligarchy, dictatorship, and emperors (with one Reign of Terror, one conquest of Europe, and several revolutions included) for several decades of French history. Importantly, these events shaped France as a unique and powerful leader in Europe, exceptional from the traditional powers it contended with. Thus, the government of Napoleon III was a strange conglomerate of these ideologies and ambitions, notwithstanding ideologies picked up over time, such as economic liberalism, and pet ideologies picked up through the social changes that also took place, such as Pan-Latinism.¹⁹ This complex ideology pushed toward Mexico and ultimately confronted those of Mexico and the United States.

Mexico was the final nation to achieve its independence, but also the smallest and most removed of the three revolutions. Unlike the American Revolution, independence did not bring republicanism immediately. Mexican conservatives sought to conserve much of the colonial hierarchy and centralization, often relying on monarchism and Catholicism. Mexican liberals sought to create a new nation based on democracy, secularization, and federalism.²⁰ Mexican liberalism often developed in direct opposition to the established status quo, from having to dismantle a brief flirt with the empire and pull power away from military dictators like Santa Anna. Although the Reform War seemingly brought liberalism to lasting power under Juárez, the civil war left the country in financial ruins, indebting Mexico to foreign powers that would later manifest in the

¹⁹ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 6.

²⁰ Long and Schulz, "A Turn Against Empire," 6.

Convention of London, and left Mexican conservatism embittered and desperate for a lifeline like Maximilian I.

The French expedition into Mexico sought to install a foreign monarchy to act entirely in France's interests in North America. This project clashed with the republican and independent governments of Mexico and the United States. Regardless of the ideological justifications that Napoleon III gave, both nations had been unmovingly affronted. Washington saw the intervention as a direct challenge to its hemispheric hegemony under the Monroe Doctrine and its expressed policy of opposing European interventions in the New World.²¹ This state of affairs was exacerbated by the sheer ideological contrast between Napoleon III's imperial government and the American federal republican system. Meanwhile, the Juárez government saw the installation of monarchy as a direct reversal of their struggle to establish a novel order in Mexico. For the Mexican liberals, the French intervention represented both a violation of Mexican sovereignty and an existential threat to the ideals of liberalism and nationalism that their future Mexico would be built upon.²² The ideological stakes were thus high for all parties involved, even as the conflict's practical dimensions of military campaigns, economic pressures, and diplomatic maneuvering took precedence.

The conflict did not create a theater of an open contest of ideas but a mess of calculated diplomacy, policy, and military engagements that were heavily influenced by one or more of these ideas. French forces implemented a swift military occupation followed by monarchical state building, establishing Maximilian I's court and

²¹ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 145.

²² Long and Schulz, "A Turn Against Empire," 2.

government as a Catholic monarchy that would please the ideological desires of Napoleon I's imperial government, Mexican conservatives' desire for hierarchical monarchy, and the Mexican people's desire for political stability. However, this underestimated the Mexican people's coexisting desire for sovereignty from Europe and liberal ideals, represented by the Juárez government retreating into the countryside and waging an existential guerilla war that would undo France's mission.²³ Meanwhile, the United States was also intrinsically opposed to the French intervention. Still, the American reaction was burdened by domestic troubles and its complicated relations with both nations involved in the conflict. Ultimately, the conflict became a proxy for these competing ideologies driven by an overarching idea: exceptionalism.

Exceptionalism as a Framework for Understanding the Conflict

Exceptionalism is the belief that one's nation or people hold a unique destiny or moral superiority over others. This belief system was the ideological undercurrent of the Second French Intervention in Mexico. For the United States and France, the idea of being an exceptional nation and people was not just an abstract concept but a fundamental element of their identities. A common sentiment between the French government, intellectuals, and citizens alike was that their nation held the place of the cradle of revolutionary ideals, republicanism, and intellectualism, leading the entire Western world in these regards. Napoleon's — often explicitly stated — reason for

²³ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 7.

intervention was deeply intertwined with the belief that France had and could continue to export civilization and order across the world, especially to its Pan-Latin cousins.²⁴ This belief often also became an obligation under Catholic values, harkening back to previous civilizing missions to Canada and the Caribbean during the Age of Exploration.²⁵ For the United States, exceptionalism took the literal form of being an ocean away and armed revolution against its mother country. With this, it invented an entire hemisphere of leadership and responsibility that it deemed its ideology to command over, especially over the monarchies from which it broke away so violently. While the Monroe Doctrine was muted during the struggles of civil war, it was still made clear to Paris through diplomacy and ever-increasing support for the Juárez government.²⁶ It was these fundamental beliefs that led to a fundamental disagreement between Washington and Paris during the conflict, albeit an unspoken one.

Mexico also claimed a form of exceptionalism, notwithstanding a more fractured and unstable one. Between consistently divided governments of liberals and conservatives, clear visions for Mexican ideologies and futures took shape. Conservative factions clung to the Spanish colonial model of hierarchy, monarchy, and Catholicism, coming to power during the old empire of Augustin I and the dictatorships of Santa Anna, a supposed “uncrowned monarch.”²⁷ Liberal factions touted their Northern neighbors’ championing of republicanism, secularism, and liberalism, pushing against conservative

²⁴ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 34.

²⁵ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France, 1850-1900*, 16.

²⁶ Message of President communicating information on occupation by French troops of republic of Mexico, and establishment of monarchy; Senate (Serial No. 1237 S.exdoc.6); 39th Congress, Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

²⁷ Brian R. Hamnett. *A Concise History of Mexico*, (Third edition. N: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 189.

regimes with republican intermissions between conservative caudillos, culminating in the Juárez government. Nonetheless, sentiments of sovereignty, pride in Mexican culture, and exceptionalism from Spain and its colonies were common on both sides of the aisle, further summing to the idea of Mexican exceptionalism. These competing ideas invited Maximilian I to Mexico City. They ultimately pushed him out, with more Mexicans falling out of the imperial camp than in the seven long years of his rule.

Exceptionalism offered different forms of recompense to each government and people, shaping how they would engage and justify the conflict. Since the defeat at Waterloo, France had decidedly declined in its global clout, many in Europe perceiving the island across the channel as the leader and exception in Europe. The assertion of a French-placed monarch in Mexico was a major step within Napoleon III's grand plan of restoring the glory his uncle brought to France, a Pan-Latin empire to rival the new Anglo-Saxon supremacy dotted by British ports worldwide. For the United States, every assertion of the Monroe Doctrine was an assertion of exceptionalism from the encroaching hands of European powers and the independence of New World republicanism and liberalism. This application of the policy would go a step further: proving its wherewithal in affirming the doctrine amid civil war.²⁸ For Mexico, resisting the French incursion brought millions of Mexicans together in national unity, from Chihuahua to Oaxaca. One of the most agreed upon (although far from universal) sentiments in Mexican politics was political independence from Europe, proven by the

²⁸ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 147.

mobilization of soldiers, citizens, and entire governments across the country against the new threat.

The Structure and Aims of This Work

Given the existing gaps in literature and the sources that this work utilizes, this work will work chronologically and thematically to discuss the nuances of this conflict and its ideological underpinnings. The next section investigates Napoleon III's "Adventure" and the strategic and hubristic strategy that led the French force into Mexico. It discusses the conflict largely chronologically and objectively from the French perspective, from the revolutionary origins of much French ideology, to the rise of the Napoleon III and the foreign policy of aims of the expedition, to the successes that the French forces saw while building Maximilian I's government, to the ultimate decision to remove troops from the Americas and accept defeat. It will also demonstrate how the French government acted in its political and social decisions and illustrate the objective conflict that is complicated by American and Mexican actions and their own ideological backings. The following section shifts to a still largely chronological, but slightly more thematic, discussion of the American perspective of the conflict. There are discussions of the origins of American ideology and exceptionalist thought throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, then how these implicated foreign policy and the unique foreign policy position the United States found itself in in the 1860s, then how Secretary of State Seward worked between the Civil War and the French intervention to ultimately effectively enact the

Monroe Doctrine to urge the French to withdraw from Mexico. The section will utilize the textual records from American representatives and diplomats to demonstrate how the United States government reacted to French goals through the lens of their own ideology and how these interactions resulted in the diplomatic arrangement that played a role in bringing the conflict to an end. The final main analytical section is almost fully thematic and brings the actions and agency of the Mexican governments fully into conversation with the previously discussed topics and themes. It will elaborate on the dynamics surrounding the twin governments that existed in Mexico and their connections to Mexican identity and ideology, then how those governments interacted with the United States and France and how those interactions played into the outcome of the conflict, then finally how the nuances of these interactions coalesce into a far more complex conflict.

Together, these sections paint a multipolar conflict that involved several different governments and individuals who were influenced by their own ideologies that manifested in the policies and decisions that culminated in the story that history tells us today. This thesis argues that the Second French Intervention in Mexico was a fundamentally and ideologically isolating and challenging expedition for the French, massively guided by French exceptionalism and other national idiosyncrasies and their opposition by the United States, which held its own, conflicting idiosyncrasies. This also does not negate the ideologies present in Mexico, split between the twin governments that existed there and further complicated the conflict. These competing ideologies and visions of exceptionalism collided both on the battlefield and in the realms of diplomacy,

policy, and culture, devolving into a war that could only end in French retreat and the reaffirmation of Mexican sovereignty.

Napoleon III's "Adventure"

Although the Second Intervention in Mexico is largely forgotten within the canon of French history, it represents the convergence of several ideologies and policies that not only governed the imperial visions of the consecutive French republics and empires of the nineteenth century, but the ideologies and policies that the society and cultures that formed the very metropole of those republics and empires. The French expedition into Mexico was not a one-off event of conquest, as its historical reputation may suggest, but a calculated and substantial portion of Napoleon III and the Second Empire's long-term goals.²⁹ And while the Second Empire has been seen as a stopgap between the uneven triumphs of revolution and republicanism during the chaotic preceding half century and the Belle Epoque of the following half century, its long-term goals and policies, especially as they were applied to Mexico, demonstrate the connective threads that create a cohesive history from the Storming of the Bastille through, not around, the emperors of Napoleon III and the expedition in Mexico to modern France. For the purposes of this thesis, the view of these policies as deeply embedded in French ideology and culture demonstrates why and how deeply they were embedded in diplomacy with Mexico and

²⁹ The Second French Intervention in Mexico, also known as the Second Franco-Mexican War in some literature, is not very widely covered in any academia. It has been written about and represented differently in French, Mexican, and American historical scholarship, but is generally given significantly less importance compared to other nineteenth century French imperial projects, periods of Mexican history, and subsumed by the Civil War in much other scholarship.

the United States, playing a major role in driving France into Mexico and the ultimate failure of the intervention.

Exceptionalism, Pan-Latinism, and Prestige

The core tenets of the French social, political, and cultural identity first majorly arose with the French Revolution. The banner of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* was developed in tandem with French republicanism and nationalism as the messages and binding forces of the republican governments and revolutionaries that defined the new French state.³⁰ Importantly, all of these themes were wrapped into a sense of French exceptionalism, aided by the fact that none were ever popularly attributed to the government or people of any major state in Western history and the new ideas were immediately the target of a rare coalition of the now-backwards absolute monarchies and empires of Europe. Prestige, empire, and glory had long been the marks of the French state, from the triumph in the Hundred Years War through the opulence of King Louis XIV.³¹ This old material superiority over Europe was now furnished with moral superiority, first by victories in the French Revolutionary Wars, then the largest scale of European conquest since the Roman Empire. After decades of its absence, Napoleon III was eager to restore not just the prestige that his uncle brought to France, but the material

³⁰ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France*, 8.

³¹ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France*, 71.

and moral superiority he inherited from decades of revolution and conquest that came in the half century before his ascension.³²

The idea of French exceptionalism and its composite parts has a long history of export to Latin America. In the heat of the events of the late eighteenth century, revolutionaries turned to the old colonies of Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and other French possessions that remained under French rule following the Seven Years War. Those revolutionaries asked if the inhabitants of those far-flung French possessions should be included in the new French identity. They grappled with the distinctions of race, ethnicity, language, and other measures of “Frenchness” as they determined if these men and citizens were those promised rights and liberties in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.³³ Ultimately, the Convention guaranteed freedom and the right of French citizens to enslaved people in colonies, seemingly mandating the revolution across the empire.³⁴ However, this decision, made in the wake of the Reign of Terror in the metropole, was largely enacted to quell social strife and respond to a brewing slave revolt in Saint-Domingue. The rise of Napoleon I saw many rights gained by the colonies quickly revoked, including the abolition of slavery, and the question was left unresolved by the time of the Restoration.³⁵ Slavery would be abolished across the empire for good in 1848. Still, other forays of imperialism brought similar questions in Africa and

³² Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 39.

³³ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France*, 13.

³⁴ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France*, 14.

³⁵ David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 9.

Southeast Asia, until the question came again to Latin America, but having evolved into ideology.

Ostensibly, the purpose of the intervention in Mexico admitted in Napoleon III's court was the expansion of French power across the globe with the establishment of a foothold in Latin America.³⁶ More subtly, the intervention was also a pragmatic mission to increase the extent and prestige of the French Empire in a geopolitically vulnerable region, and it calculated an understanding and plan for how to bring the region into the French sphere of influence. However, this mission was heavily undercut by new forms of ideology, specifically Pan-Latinism and Napoleonic prestige. While the movements of French troops in Mexico and the policies implemented by Maximilian I controlled the situation on the ground, Paris would ultimately determine the outcome of the conflict. From the outset of the conflict, Maximilian I's government was incredibly fragile, relying entirely on the French troops, funds, and international relations directed to the region by Napoleon III. This effort was massively dependent on diplomacy, as Maximilian I's empire was an independent state, despite the machinations of French long-term goals, and the looming threat of US diplomatic pressure and armed involvement still loomed.³⁷ Thus, the exceptionalist ideology of Napoleon III's government carried significant weight in determining how diplomacy would be conducted from Paris and how the support that the Second Mexican Empire's very existence relied upon would be extended.

Napoleon III came to Mexico seeking not to export but unify exceptionalism. Pan-Latinism was an extant strand of French ideology that had developed in the decades

³⁶ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 2.

³⁷ De la Rosa, *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III*, 144.

of Napoleon III's ascension. It was first discussed by French statesman Michel Chevalier, who first referenced an affinity between France and the Catholic, Latin republics of the New World.³⁸ It specifically allied these "Latin" peoples and states against the rising power of their "Anglo-Saxon" counterparts of German, British, and Slavic origins.³⁹ Contrary to centuries of theory on race and colonization, Pan-Latinism did not group Europeans together against outside, barbaric peoples of Africa, Asia, and the New World. Rather, in a particularly post-revolution form of thought, it allied a European nation with the peoples of non-European nations based on shared identity, experiences, and cultures. With alteration, the ideology fit neatly into Napoleon III's program. It gave Paris ample pretext to meddle in Mexican affairs and plant its empire firmly in Mexico City. Rather than establishing a puppet government in clear contention with American supremacy in the Americas, Napoleon III justified his conquest as a good-faith attempt to bring stability to a familial Latin ally.

Nonetheless, regardless of the cultural and social value of Napoleon III's mission, no ideology would maintain priority over his main goal, also borne of exceptionalism: prestige. At this point, the myth of Napoleon I still reigned supreme. Since the First French Empire represented the peak of a long line of French ascendancy in Europe, France had been overtaken by Britain, Russia, and unifying Italian and German states.⁴⁰ Napoleon III's desperation to restore French prestige is clear in his several foreign expeditions. Almost immediately after coming to power, he sent troops to Rome to

³⁸ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 35.

³⁹ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France*, 34.

⁴⁰ De la Rosa, *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III*, 50.

restore the papacy of Pius IX.⁴¹ He sent troops to European conflicts in Crimea and Lombardy to assert French presence in continental affairs and gain territory and influence in new regions.⁴² He inaugurated the French administration in Cochinchina to expand the empire to new corners of the globe.⁴³ Despite all this, his empire was still a fraction of his uncle's and those of the other European powers at the time. The intervention in Mexico was Napoleon III's most financially and politically ambitious project yet, seen as a necessary risk in a continually lacklustre list foreign policy goals. Understanding the vision and failure of Napoleon III's plan is key to understanding why diplomacy was conducted as it was.

Economics of the Informal French Empire

France had a globe-spanning empire and the finances and economy to support it, such as its eventual intervention in Mexico. The intervention was also supported by broader shifts in the political economy that would define its financial and political strategies. Between the fall of Napoleon I and the foray into Mexico, the various French governments pursued what historian Edward Shawcross describes as “informal empire,” which defines an empire that relies on economic dominance over regions, financial entanglement of monetary levers, and the spread of cultural influence, as opposed to direct territorial rule.⁴⁴ While the British, Russian, and other contemporary empires also

⁴¹ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 163.

⁴² Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 157.

⁴³ De la Rosa, *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III*, 109.

⁴⁴ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 15.

employed similar tactics, it was the French Empire that utilized them most clearly, both out of desire to construct their empire in this way and out of the necessity created by a declined position in world power following decades of revolving governments.⁴⁵ It was this understanding of empire that informed the understanding of the political economy and the effects it had on that empire, such as the linking of international power with economic power, market and goods that the empire chose to promote and export, and how the empire interacted with other actors on the international stage. Napoleon III himself did not see the empire's extensions as conquests, but as an "Arab kingdom" in Algeria and an "expedition" in Mexico, overarching rather than imposing rule.⁴⁶ Not only would the extension of French finances and culture into a widening sphere of influence bring trade to French ports, but it would also allow for the use of French troops where they would otherwise be unwanted. This was the logic that brought French troops to Mexico. Mexico, representing vast natural resources and millions of potential customers for French goods, was an ideal candidate to be softly integrated into France's political and economic system.

The inferred relationship between imperial growth and a modernizing economy was central to this empire and its growth. Napoleon III's court was filled with advisors that were influenced by Saint-Simonians, and even Physiocrats, whose ideas fused national and imperial grandeur with economic policy, seeing the French Empire as a modernizing force, bringing trade and industry to economies where it had not been seen

⁴⁵ Roger (Roger David) Price. *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 56.

⁴⁶ Todd, *A Velvet Empire*, 111.

on such a scale before.⁴⁷ Again, the idea of the political economy was influential, seeing the French state as the main exponent of establishing economic stability and progress in markets under its influence. And while economic means were discussed in their own right, it should not be lost that they were also ideologically backed. The economic modernizations in Mexico and elsewhere also served as “civilizing missions,” seen specifically for the Pan-Latin brothers of French citizens who needed magnanimous French aid in their far-flung societies. Napoleon III and his advisors saw these arrangements as mutually beneficial. France could secure its own economic interests and advance global economic growth, while Mexico could benefit from the French investment with only the cost of subservience to a foreign empire. Unfortunately, millions of Mexican patriots saw that drawback far differently than their French counterparts.^f

Not only was it the economic system that France imposed, but also how it functioned, that affected how France pushed into Mexico. Historian David Todd described French economic priorities as “champagne capitalism,” which refers to the state-directed and luxurious market that the French Empire pursued, different from the laissez-faire market of raw materials and other low-cost commodities that the British and other empires favored constructing.⁴⁸ The French state promoted collaboration with private businesses in its overseas ventures and debt-financed projects in a complex web of financial arms aimed at its foreign projects. Not only did this fit neatly into a French Empire that was not able or willing to dominate territory and the actual creation of goods in many places, but it also allowed for the movement of French individuals and markets

⁴⁷ Todd, *A Velvet Empire*, 157.

⁴⁸ Todd, *A Velvet Empire*, 14.

across the globe. In Mexico, this manifested in infrastructure, such as railroads and ports, and some exports, mostly minerals and agricultural products, being subsumed into French business ventures. As with Napoleon III's vision, this arrangement would modernize and globalize the Mexican economy far more than before. It would be highly beneficial and profitable for the French government and the private businesses it supported. The making of long-term dependence on the French political economy in Mexico was a key aspect in a shrewd plan by Napoleon III's government to incorporate Mexico into the French sphere of influence fully.

While the economic vision for Mexico under French influence was a massive undertaking that Napoleon III's government carefully plotted out, it faced harsh resistance from Mexican and American opponents alike. In Spanish Mexico, colonists quickly established the *encomienda* system that effectively forced indigenous peoples to labor in agricultural and mining work, significantly contributing to the profits of their Spanish overlords. In British America, there was not a widespread system of forced labor in some colonies, but economic measures like the Stamp Tax and Intolerable Acts were the main impetus for pushing the Americans toward an armed revolution.⁴⁹ Furthermore, over the nineteenth century and with the movement of Manifest Destiny, the United States promoted a free market economy that restricted government controls. This allowed for free commerce internationally and between the burgeoning states. In between the battle between national and social ideologies existed an ideological struggle between the state-controlled and centralized model of the Second French Empire and the *laissez-faire*

⁴⁹ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 31.

and free market model of the United States. Ultimately, these economic aspects and contradictions would contribute to the expedition's early successes and later failures. French investment in Mexico encouraged many Mexican conservatives with another reason to welcome the foreign regime that found another intrinsic connection to the nation it was occupying. However, as later demonstrated, it also provided another point of opposition for millions of Mexicans and the American government to see the French as illegal occupiers and fight for their economic sovereignty.

Early Successes in the French Invasion

Before the expedition, Napoleon III and the Second French Empire's international connections were complex but largely strong due to the careful balance of power established in the Concert of Europe and similarly careful diplomacy practiced by Paris. Despite centuries of rivalry with Britain, London and Paris worked together regularly to maintain the continental balance of power, most closely coordinating in the Crimean War in the previous decade. Despite disagreements in the Revolutions of 1848 and armed opposition in the Second Italian War of Independence just years prior, relations remained warm enough that Napoleon III would handpick the Austrian Maximilian of Habsburg-Lorraine as his puppet ruler in Mexico. While it had somewhat rivalrous aims in the New World with Spain, Paris was decidedly more powerful and wealthy than Madrid, and the governments regularly had good relations. These good relations had been built over time between the powers of Europe to maintain stability across the continent

while many nations like France were involved with projects abroad and provided a cushion against rising powers in Russia and Prussia.

Diplomacy in the intervention began as a public proclamation from London of a seemingly benign mission to collect unpaid debts. Given the instability of the Mexican Republic during the middle of the nineteenth century, having passed through several forms of monarchy, republic, and dictatorship, the infringement of European powers to collect debts was not entirely unsurprising.⁵⁰ In fact, the most surprising aspect of the announcement had to do with the United States, not Mexico. Such an overt show of European force in the Americas clearly violated the American Monroe Doctrine, which had protected the region from European involvement for decades. However, the Civil War had recently settled into a much more bloody, protracted conflict than anticipated, opening just enough leniency for European ships to land at Veracruz.⁵¹ While there were some weak protests in Congress and some diplomatic oppositions, the United States was surprisingly quiet in its reaction to the proclamation.⁵² To further demonstrate European goodwill, Article II of the Convention of London explicitly stated that

The high contracting parties engage not to seek for themselves, in the employment of the coercive measures contemplated by the present Convention; any acquisition, of territory nor any special advantage, and not to exercise in the internal affairs of Mexico any influence of a nature to prejudice the right of the Mexican nation to choose and to constitute freely the form of its Government.⁵³

⁵⁰ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 6.

⁵¹ While the Civil War had not reached the heights of the bloody stalemate that it would later prove to be, it had already shown signs that it would not be the quick Union victory that many in the nation had hoped for. Just months earlier, the Battle of Bull Run (First Manassas) ended in a shocking Union defeat and sent Union forces scrambling back to Washington, where the true state of the war had become clear.

⁵² Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 231.

⁵³ “The Convention Between England, France, and Spain.” *The New York Times*, December 5, 1861.

This guarantee of Mexican sovereignty and prevention of ulterior aims by the aggressing parties demonstrates the extent to which Napoleon III was willing to gamble on his imperial expedition. France entirely betrayed its commitments to Britain and Spain, not only turning on its brief allies but obligating itself to a war of conquest half a world away without any foreign aid. Despite the intervention beginning fairly smoothly for the coalition, it began a series of poorly weighed diplomatic decisions from Paris.

Within his court, Napoleon III was confident about the mission to Mexico and the completion of his true intentions. He spoke of maintaining the territorial integrity of Mexico, citing American territorial ambitions that were made clear during the Mexican-American War, and ensuring that the will of the Mexican people was respected, citing the oppressive forms of government that had been present under President Antonio López de Santa Anna and his allies.⁵⁴ These sweeping declarations of self-determination and liberty for the Latin allies of France played well with the French population, which had been hesitant over the question of foreign intervention in Mexico, especially given the liberal use of French troops abroad under Napoleon III.⁵⁵ The emperor had been stirred by the Mexican delegation led by José María Gutiérrez de Estrada, a prominent Mexican monarchist, who also officially offered the Mexican throne to Maximilian I during the same trip.⁵⁶ From the promises of protecting their Latin allies to foreign delegations paying lip service to the emperor, the entire project brimmed with the idea of French prestige, the exceptional European power expanding its magnanimous empire to

⁵⁴ Michele Cunningham, *Mexico and the Foreign Policy of Napoleon III*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; Palgrave, 2001), 47.

⁵⁵ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 132.

⁵⁶ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France*, 32.

another corner of the globe. Sentiments in Paris were so lively that Edward Shawcross explains how it is one of the last imperial ventures that historians describe as an “adventure.”⁵⁷

Importantly, the United States was alarmed by the expedition, even more so after France deviated from the stated terms of the Convention of London. Despite being embroiled in its own civil war, the United States maintained its foreign policy as much as it could. Secretary of State William Seward was already embroiled in a vigorous effort to prevent Britain and France from recognizing the Confederate States or otherwise intervening in the war. Minister to France William Dayton was lobbying directly to Napoleon III in Paris against French recognition and aid of the Confederate States.⁵⁸ Another diplomat, Minister to Mexico Thomas Corwin, wrote a letter to Congress shortly after the landing in Veracruz that read, “I beg [US Congress] to take measures to ensure [an end to the conflict]. Spain and France, it is to be feared, have a covetous eye on the weak Spanish American republics. They should meet them here where they make their first demonstration.”⁵⁹ Given Paris’s warmness toward Richmond, the entirety of the United States government was already untrusting of Napoleon III’s advances, leading Seward and Dayton to begin their diplomatic pressure for a French exit. Before France had even begun the conquest in its own right, it had already invoked the spectre of the Monroe Doctrine. Although the United States was not able to oppose the intervention, it

⁵⁷ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 5.

⁵⁸ Minister to France Charles Faulkner to Secretary of State Jeremiah Black, January 14, 1861, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789-1906, Jan. 14-Aug. 7, 1861, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁹ [Dispatch from Mr. Corwin, Minister in Mexico.] Message from the President; Committee on Foreign Relations (Serial No. SED-37-2-8); 37th Congress; Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

made its diplomatic opposition known. While the dreams of exceptionalism and Pan-Latinism pushed the French forces valiantly across the Atlantic, they were not properly backed by strong or shrewd diplomacy.

At first, the egotism burgeoned by exceptionalism was warranted by initial successes. After a year and a half of fighting, French troops had decisively defeated Mexican resistance, entered Mexico City, exiled President Benito Juárez and his government to San Luis Potosí, and formally installed Emperor Maximilian I and his government.⁶⁰ Napoleon was able to frame the invasion as a triumph of French and Latin civilization, with the ideals of French liberalism supposedly being enshrined upon a previously oppressed Mexican people. It was doubly impressive given the firm grasp the United States had established in the sphere of influence in the region, specifically Mexico, over the course of the previous century. For a brief time, Napoleon III seemed to be the only European leader sly enough to capitalize on American domestic turmoil for foreign benefit in this way. Maximilian I even enjoyed varying amounts of popular support, a major factor in Britain, Austria, Brazil, and China recognizing the young empire and granting French exceptionalist diplomacy another victory.⁶¹ Despite the initial successes of the expedition, the looming threats to Napoleon III's plan remained. Rather than a formal surrender, the Juárez government remained in exile, waging a widespread guerilla campaign against French troops attempting to entrench the new regime in Mexico more firmly.

⁶⁰ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 206.

⁶¹ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France*, 49.

Tide of War Begins to Turn Ideologically and Materially

The most troubling thing for French aspirations was the increase in US diplomatic resistance. Dayton remained in Paris to lobby against French involvement in Mexico and the United States. It was not until December 22, 1863, two years into the conflict, that Seward instructed Dayton to threaten full sanctions against France.⁶² On May 28, 1864, Lincoln released a correspondence between Seward and the Envoy to the United States Matias Romero that detailed Seward ensuring that considerations would be taken to further limit trade against France.⁶³ Between 1863 and 1864, the conflict began to drag out. Although imperial troops controlled large swaths of land in Central Mexico, the countryside was rampant with republic forces and influence. While Maximillian I was attempting to exercise policies and other functions within his government, military endeavors constantly drew on the young empire's attention and funds. Napoleon III maintained troops and investment in his Mexican project, but the first court rumblings of returning troops to Europe began in Paris.⁶⁴ The adventure that Napoleon III had once hoped to embark upon was slowly dredging more resources from the empire. The court also felt the effect of increasing American pressure to withdraw, as the lack of European

⁶² Secretary of State William Seward to Minister to France William Dayton, October 22, 1863, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789-1906, Oct. 23, 1863-June 8, 1864, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD..

⁶³ Message of President with correspondence on course of trade with France while France and Mexico were at war; Senate (Serial No. 1176 S.exdoc.47); 38th Congress; Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

⁶⁴ De la Rosa, *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III*, 177.

support since the Convention of London was broken effectively left France diplomatically and materially isolated in the conflict.

After 1864, the expedition in Mexico turned into a failure. Politically, Maximilian I's regime failed to render much support. The foreign intervention was opposed by nearly all republicans and liberals from its outset, but his attempt to establish some liberal policies disenchanted much of the minority base of conservatives and military personnel that had supported the new regime.⁶⁵ Militarily, the increasingly small French expeditionary force was spread thin across the nation, with the guerilla forces of the Juárez government encroaching closer to Mexico City every day.⁶⁶ Economically, the movement of troops and supplies across the Atlantic became increasingly expensive for the French people, and they quickly lost their patience with the project. French economic struggles were exacerbated by the lack of trade stimulus from the United States, which continued to limit trade as French troops remained in Mexico.⁶⁷ Diplomatically, Napoleon III was still fighting a losing battle. Seward and the new Minister to France, John Bigelow, continued to pressure France extensively to withdraw. In 1865 and 1866, Bigelow wrote to Napoleon III and the French multiple times that American troops were being resupplied and retrained following their service in the Civil War in preparation for possible armed intervention in the conflict in Mexico.⁶⁸ After five years of fighting, Napoleon III could no longer hide behind the shroud of Pan-Latinism or the liberation of

⁶⁵ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 246.

⁶⁶ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France*, 28.

⁶⁷ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 214.

⁶⁸ Secretary of State William Seward to Minister to France John Bigelow, October 18, 1865, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789-1906, Oct. 11, 1865-Jan. 13, 1866, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

the Mexican people. It became clear that the tenets of French exceptionalism that made the French court so enthusiastic failed to manifest in tangible success in Washington, Mexico City, and most painfully, Paris.

Despite the significant proliferation of the French ideology that led them into Mexico, the American position was not only unswayed but entirely unresponsive to Napoleon III's message. By 1865, French diplomats continued to seek international recognition and aid for the new regime in Mexico, especially from European and American nations that could sway other nations to discard their recognition for the Juárez government that many nations still saw as the rightful government of Mexico. In a correspondence between Dayton and Seward debated by the Senate, Seward informed

I send you a copy of a resolution which passed the House of Representatives on the 4th instant, by a unanimous vote, and which declares the opposition of that body to a recognition of a monarchy in Mexico. Mr. Geofroy had lost no time in asking for an explanation of this proceeding. It is hardly necessary, after what I have heretofore written with perfect candor for the information of France, to say that this resolution truly interprets the unanimous sentiment of the people of the United States in regard to Mexico.⁶⁹

In the most frank terms, the United States entirely rejected the messaging and project of Napoleon III in Mexico. Given their history of revolution and liberation, Napoleon III continued to encourage Washington of the benevolence of his mission. However, the United States saw European intervention in the Americas all the same, regardless of its intent, especially given the imposition of monarchy. Although the United States shared its own sense of exceptionalism

⁶⁹ Message of President communicating information on occupation by French troops of republic of Mexico, and establishment of monarchy; Senate (Serial No. 1237 S.exdoc.6); 39th Congress, Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

with many of the same aspects, it did not accept France's claims of exceptionalism as justification for its intervention in Mexico.

French Failure and Withdrawal from Mexico

By 1866, the French cause had clearly been lost. Most conservatives who supported Maximilian I's ascension were put off by the neverending state of the republican guerilla campaign and no longer supportive of the unexpectedly liberal emperor. French forces had lost considerable territory once considered safely imperial due to Juárez's troops' lack of resources and determination. The Civil War had ended the prior year, leading to the open sale of American arms to Juárez's armies and US troops moving from Civil War combat zones to the United States-Mexico border. Bigelow openly threatened Napoleon III with armed American intervention if French troops were not removed from Mexico within the year.⁷⁰ Seeing the imminent end, Napoleon III proclaimed in early 1867 that France would be withdrawing the remainder of its troops from Mexico.⁷¹ Shawcross notes that "There was nothing spontaneous about it, and the sacrifice Louis-Napoléon was unwilling to make was confrontation with Washington."⁷² After years of diplomatic attempts to sway the American position, Napoleon III ultimately failed to convince Washington of France's exceptionalism, the critical battle in

⁷⁰ Minister to France John Bigelow to Secretary of State William Seward, October 4, 1866, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789-1906, Oct. 4, 1866-Aug. 23, 1867, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷¹ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 223.

⁷² Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 224.

the course of the conflict. Devoid of Pan-Latin cooperation, protection of liberalism around the globe, and French revolutionary ideals of radical equality for all, French troops would be withdrawn by early 1867 and Maximilian I would be executed on June 19, 1867. Napoleon III's Mexican adventure ended in failure.

From the French perspective, the story of the Second French Intervention in Mexico can be seen in several different lights. Militarily, the initial conquest of Mexico was sweeping, having captured Mexico City within two years of the expedition. However, the French troops that arrived in Mexico were poorly supplied for a campaign of conquest against a guerilla army, subjecting more than 14,000 young French men to death.⁷³ Economically, the conflict was specifically crafted to serve the informal French Empire and bring new markets and dependents into the worldwide French economy. Nonetheless, it also demonstrated the weakness of the reliance on trade with nations like the United States, less able to finance the empire than its British counterpart. However, the most comprehensive view of this conflict is the diplomatic one, where Pan-Latinism and French ideas of liberty and egalitarianism were popular ideologies that supported the vision of empire under Napoleon III, whose last attempt to gain legitimacy and live up to the Napoleonic myth that France still believed in led to the "adventure" into Mexico. Napoleon III clung to these ideas throughout the conflict, which initially was successful in advancing into Mexico and establishing a somewhat legitimate government, but waned over time into the failure that it has become known as. While the American perspective

⁷³ Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1618-1991*, (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 1992), 237.

sees a flawed and failed application of exceptionalism, France saw its exceptionalism tarnished by its imperial expedition.

Seward's Monroe Doctrine

The previous section of this thesis discussed the ideology and ambition that drove the ill-fated expedition to Mexico from Paris, with the American reaction serving as a subsidiary aspect of the French withdrawal and the greater course of the conflict. This section will focus on the United States as its own agent, where its ideology of exceptionalism helped create an unrelenting opposition to the French intervention. From the first landing of French troops in Veracruz, the expedition was a fundamental challenge to the American principles of republicanism, sovereignty, and independence from European imperialism. However, this response was neither immediate nor absolute. Still, it was shaped by the extant capabilities of the American government during the Civil War, evolving understanding of the Monroe Doctrine under Secretary of State William Seward, and the gradual shift from diplomatic pressure to the threat of military force by Washington. All throughout, American exceptionalism, which had long been a guiding force of American foreign and domestic policy, demonstrated itself as an active and dynamic ideology that influenced reaction and strategy.

Since the outset of the American Revolution, the United States was able to posture itself as the first bastion of liberty and republicanism against the empires and despots that sat opposite the Atlantic. This line of thought was quickly enshrined into national policy with the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, which explicitly opposed European intervention in the Americas. As the nation grew physically and ideologically, this

foreign policy position became ingrained into the American political conscience.⁷⁴ Even through the existential crisis of civil war, Seward maintained this view and pragmatically altered American opposition to French imperialism in Mexico to fit the constraints of the moment. This manifested in leveraging trade heavily against the diplomatically isolated French government, utilizing American diplomats in Paris to pressure Napoleon III into retreat, and gradually moving toward armed threats. Through tracing and understanding the ideological and strategic aspects of the American response, the American and American exceptionalist response and successful deterrence of French troops from Mexico become much clearer.

Another Revolutionary Beginning for the United States

By the time of Napoleon III's expedition into Mexico in 1861, American exceptionalism had become deeply embedded into the fabric of the American identity, rooted in the ideals that freed the 13 colonies from British control and solidified by nearly a century of expansion and consolidation. The United States' existence was not seen as simply a nation-state by many Americans but a living embodiment and experiment of republicanism and liberalism. While many of the nations that it traded and interacted with were centuries-old institutions with centuries-old monarchies and governmental systems, the United States was entirely new and a different entity apart from those nations.⁷⁵

Nonetheless, these ideological factors were present not only through the revolutionary

⁷⁴ Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine*, 33.

⁷⁵ Robert B. Zoellick, *America in the World: A Definitive History of U.S. Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, (First edition. New York, NY: Twelve, Hachette Book Group, 2020), 22.

period but also when the American government was being built. Rather, these ideologies survived into the modern day and were greatly shaped by political, social, economic, and cultural factors while maintaining their core beliefs and roots. Many of these changes occurred during the tumultuous Antebellum Era, leading up to the Civil War, which led to American involvement and interaction with the Second French Intervention in Mexico. By understanding these ideological underpinnings, the fate of an entirely foreign and disconnected conflict gains unexpected clarity.

Both the American and French Revolutions grounded themselves in Enlightenment ideas and the rejection of an archaic aristocratic order, yet they had some very different ultimate political systems and ideologies.⁷⁶ The American Revolution was grounded in the liberal traditions of the English and Scotch-Irish that prioritized sovereignty, self-governance, and the protection of individual liberties. Many of these ideological underpinnings were very similar to those of the contemporary Enlightenment thinkers on the continent, creating a similar philosophical backdrop between the movements. Benjamin Franklin and Maximillian Robespierre quoted John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, they simply applied it to their revolutions differently. The American revolt was carried through the colonial period with protests from the Boston Tea Party to the naming of the “Intolerable Acts” and into the forming of a constitutional government in 1787.⁷⁷ The ideas also varied and often disagreed with each other, given the different populations of the different colonies. What resulted was a government of compromises that placed liberty, republicanism, and stability first. Such a government

⁷⁶ Ben Marsh and Michael Rapport, *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions*, (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2017), 51.

⁷⁷ Marsh and Rapport, *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions*, 81.

was almost entirely novel to the European monarchies that preceded it, from the position of president to the protection of enumerated liberties. This creation of a unique government and its enlightened beginnings separated the American government from the other nations, even France.

Many aspects separated the American Revolution from the radical upheaval that France went through. The French Revolution had a far more universalist and transformative vision, fully dismantling some longstanding French institutions in the desire for a completely new social order. The revolution in France faced hundreds of years of political, social, and religious tradition, unlike its American counterpart that was faced with a few decades of British colonial rule.⁷⁸ With the centuries of turmoil and poverty for the French Third Estate, the revolution took a radical, wholesale, and often bloody atmosphere. While both revolutions were built upon the same Enlightenment thoughts, France's aristocratic and semi-feudal order was the very foundation of society. The execution of Louis XVI and the Reign of Terror of the Jacobins were life-altering changes to many French citizens, turning the revolution against the state into one against society itself.⁷⁹ While the American revolutionaries were not lacking in revolutionary fervor—overthrowing the monarchy and establishing a new social order in their own right—the American Revolution stood more for the reassertion of personal rights and self-governance that had already been fairly present in the colony.⁸⁰ The difference in

⁷⁸ The idea of "statutory neglect," or the fact that the British government did not forcefully enact its policies and laws on the American colonies in return for loyalty, until the agitations of the 1760s and 1770s, has become the topic of historical debate. Historians such as James Henretta have questioned if this neglect was, in fact, the case or not. Nonetheless, the effects of British rule applied to the colonies were felt in later American ideology, as discussed for the purposes of this thesis.

⁷⁹ Marsh and Rapport, *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions*, 26.

⁸⁰ Marsh and Rapport, *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions*, 103.

tone was made clear through the thoughts and actions of the Founding Fathers. Fearing the spectre of direct democracy and mob rule—what many American leaders would later attribute to the French Revolution—the American government maintained a system of hierarchy and pragmatic institutions, such as the Electoral College and Senate, which could guarantee the rights of the people through their ordered processes. What resulted was a free and fair American government that maintained stability through its adherence to some structures of the previous governance. At the same time, France successfully tore down the remnants of the Ancien Régime but would search for stability through multiple empires, republics, and kingdoms. France may have been exceptional in its commitment to radical progress and republicanism, but the United States was exceptional in stabilizing the liberties and ideas the nations shared.

As the United States developed considerably and rapidly over the next century, so did its understanding of its own exceptionalism and how it saw the exceptionalism of other nations. While the political and social spheres of Americans were shaped by territorial expansion, economic development, and the leadup to the Civil War, so did their ideologies.⁸¹ Through the survival of the young republic through its first transitions of power and gaining political and economic stability, the leaders and people of the United States increasingly saw the nation as a successful experiment in republicanism and as a model for all other newly independent nations in the Western Hemisphere to follow. Although the Civil War challenged many of these understandings and even divided how many Americans saw and applied them, they still persisted. This was especially crucial in

⁸¹ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 5.

understanding how Washington and Americans everywhere perceived the French invasion of Mexico.⁸² Familiar ideas of European intervention in the Americas, its relationship with France and the French people, and the existence and identity of Mexico were all warped by the events of the intervention. Most importantly, it became increasingly clear that the two nations saw themselves as exceptional and the other as not, not to mention multiple understandings of Mexican exceptionalism that were also in competition with the United States and France.

Foreign Affairs of the Civil War as it Related to Mexico

Before the Civil War, American foreign affairs had largely taken a backseat to the long nation-building and domestic affairs process. Of course, there were wars, treaties, and trade agreements, but all were generally enacted with the effects of domestic policy in mind. The War of 1812 with Britain and the Quasi-War with France both involved armed interactions with European powers, but both were rooted in maintaining the safety and efficiency of American merchants and sailors.⁸³ Disputes with Britain took place with Britain and Spain for a host of territorial and economic disputes across the Americas.⁸⁴ Still, their cause, the old Monroe Doctrine, was implemented to push European powers back to the other side of the Atlantic, such that the American agenda in the New World could be implemented without interference. Efforts were made to remain on good terms

⁸² Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 130.

⁸³ Zoellick, *America in the World*, 42.

⁸⁴ Zoellick, *America in the World*, 43.

with the dominant imperial powers of Britain, France, and Spain, but often only to serve the nation's development. Quickly following the Revolutionary War, trade agreements were set with Britain and France to ensure that the Hamiltonian economy could run successfully.⁸⁵ Perhaps the most important interaction with its main revolutionary ally France had nothing to do with involvement in European affairs, but was the Louisiana Purchase, which effectively allowed France and the United States to avoid their spheres of influence.⁸⁶ The rejection and avoidance of European meddling in the United States and neighboring countries were borne directly from its exceptionalist ideology. As the shining city on the hill of new nations outside the traditional order of European powers, the United States could build its own hegemony in the Americas, revolving around its novel and unique form of governance and identity.

An independent Mexican state was created decades after the United States had gained independence, such that the United States had already become an established regional power and stable government. While the United States was supportive of another freed colony from European colonialism, it maintained a sense of primary and seniority over newer Latin republics, including Mexico.⁸⁷ This became quickly apparent with American interests in Texas, which dominated the perspective of Mexico in Washington. Here, foreign affairs again became entangled with domestic disagreements. The spread and preservation of slavery had become an increasingly unbridgeable conflict between Northern and Southern sympathizers, including the invasion and annexation of nations like Mexico to expand further South and continue the institution there. And again, the

⁸⁵ Zoellick, *America in the World*, 19.

⁸⁶ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 23.

⁸⁷ Long and Schulz, "A Turn Against Empire," 2.

political and social debates of the nation were held largely with the exceptionalist that American hegemony and power in the region would simply allow for Mexico to become a proxy for American policy debates. Ultimately, Americans would cross the Rio Grande and begin the Mexican-American War for these reasons, partially swayed by the dislike of General Santa Anna's dictatorial rule over Mexico, another dislike of egalitarian and republican American ideology.⁸⁸ Thus, Mexico was a partner and ally of the United States, especially as another breakaway republic in the Americas. Still, it was seen as less than by the United States for much of its existence and viewed largely as a theater for political debates rather than in its own light.

Whereas the United States saw itself as the more dominant power over Mexico, the same could be said about France in its view of the United States. The two nations had a long history of working together since the beginning of the Revolutionary War, in a complex relationship shaped by ideological similarities, historical cooperation, and strategic uncertainties. Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States and France interacted regularly and fairly neutrally. France was far more concerned with continental affairs and domestic struggles, much like the United States was far more concerned with New World affairs and its own domestic struggles, but they still saw each other as valuable trade partners. There was also the pragmatic aspect of both governments feeling threatened by their mutual and tentative ally, Britain, which maintained a globe-spanning empire that challenged the political and economic interests of both. Nonetheless, Washington and Paris, as well as many Americans and French, remained intrinsically

⁸⁸ Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine*, 55.

linked in their ideological similarities.⁸⁹ Both nations were regular claimants of their supposed exceptionalism and superiority over their neighbors, sought to level the global power and reach of the British Empire, and were arbiters of democracy and egalitarianism across their respective societies. Cultural exchanges, such as those famous ones of Alexis de Tocqueville and other diplomats and philosophers, were common between the nations and promoted a general sense of mutual respect.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, the two nations were not entirely allied. Many in Washington were made nervous by the explicit monarchical and imperial visions of Napoleon III, especially with his supposed designs on the Americas. As early as 1858, the Annual report of the Secretary of War noted that Napoleon III had “troublesome colonial designs” and recommended being prepared for such an event.⁹¹ The Second Intervention in Mexico would demonstrate the complexity of this relationship and the relative importances of exceptionalism, pragmatism, allegiance, anti-imperialism, and sovereignty of postcolonial states to the overall American ideology.

Like many relationships, those of Mexico and France were significantly changed with the onset of the Civil War. As it had been during the Texan Revolution and Mexican-American War, the Mexican Republic was decidedly anti-slavery, which brought it squarely into support of the United States.⁹² Throughout the Civil War, the State Department in Washington spent the vast majority of its time and resources

⁸⁹ Zoellick, *America in the World*, 24.

⁹⁰ Zoellick, *America in the World*, 210.

⁹¹ Annual report of Secretary of War, 1858, 2 vols. Message of the President of the United States to the Houses of Congress at the commencement of the second session of the Thirty-fifth Congress; Senate (Serial No. 975 S.exdoc.1/16); 35th Congress, Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

⁹² Hamnett, *A Concise History of Mexico*, 132.

attending to the foreign delegations of Britain and France. While London and Paris had been longtime maintainers of peace with Washington, Confederate cotton was a massively important and influential resource in their empires.⁹³ Both governments heavily considered recognizing the Confederate States to continue this trade, especially through the first surprising Confederate victories in the first year of the war. However, the British and French publics had largely stood with the United States, given their anti-slavery sentiments, and American diplomats heavily pressured their British and French counterparts against any such recognition.⁹⁴ Here, ideology became a driving force in negotiations and manifested as misunderstanding. The United States had a vastly different understanding and relationship with slavery than France and its colonies did. Thus, French diplomats and advisors to Napoleon III did not misunderstand its effect on the conflict. While the debate over slavery was an existential one for the very existence of the United States, French recognition of the Confederate States mostly considered the economic and political terms of the war, not the social and ideological forces that created it.

Of the nearly 6 years that French troops occupied Mexico, the entire 4 years of the Civil War were waged just North of the border. Many diplomats within the State Department spent the entirety of this time attending to one of these two conflicts. Given the pivotal position the United States took in the French intervention toward both Mexico and France, the Civil War is massively integral in understanding and analysing the Second French Intervention in Mexico. It also heavily involved many ideological battles

⁹³ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 252.

⁹⁴ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 71.

and misunderstandings, specifically between the United States and France, that would later drive the United States into the diplomatic pressure that aided in pushing the French out of Mexico. Secretary of State William Seward, his State Department, and the United States government acted between the two conflicts. It helped drive much of the ideology and policy that manifested the American perspective of the conflict.

Seward's Monroe Doctrine

Upon hearing of the news of the tripartite expedition, many in the American government were dismayed and wary of the involved powers' ulterior motives. Upon hearing of the French invasion of Mexico, Washington moved from dismay to distress. This invasion struck at the core of practical and ideological American concerns. It was the most blatant violation of the Monroe Doctrine since the War of 1812, which had been one of the most fundamental commandments of American policy since its creation.⁹⁵ In its weakened state, Washington was especially concerned about the fallout from the conflict. Seward and other advisors to Lincoln worried that Mexico would be the first Latin Republic to fall, with young nations like Columbia, Brazil, and others to follow. In a report to Congress, Bigelow and Seward go as far to discuss France and Spain supporting each other in imperial ventures that would effectively take control of Mexico, Columbia, and Peru.⁹⁶ Such a pattern would constitute the reestablishment of a European

⁹⁵ Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine*, 125.

⁹⁶ Message of President communicating information on occupation by French troops of republic of Mexico, and establishment of monarchy; Senate (Serial No. 1237 S.exdoc.6); 39th Congress, Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

order in the Americas, reversing decades of American progress in the region and rejecting the ideological position that the United States held atop the American power system.

While these anxieties were far less than the impending fissure of the Union for Washington, they were still priorities for Seward and those tasked with maintaining the foreign relations of the United States. With such a practically and ideologically challenging task, every aspect of Washington, from Lincoln to Seward to Congress, privately demonstrated dismay at the panic of the situation. However, it was up to Seward and his staff to face the French delegation with a formal response.

Given the circumstances, the United States could not challenge France militarily or diplomatically. The entirety of the United States military force was spread across the border states or defending the Capitol, the South's grasp on agriculture had severely limited American food supply, and the full force of Washington was committed to communicating with state governments or the Confederate States itself.⁹⁷ From here, Seward made an important strategic decision. Monroe Doctrine typically called for immediate diplomatic and, if needed, military opposition toward the encroaching European power. Seward would apply that diplomatic pressure only once pragmatic objectives were met. A French puppet kingdom in Mexico could threaten the carefully crafted American sphere of influence in the New World. Still, French recognition of the Confederate States could threaten the carefully crafted nation of the United States. Thus, Seward would have to maintain diplomatic cordiality to kindly, yet forcefully, ensure that France would not take such a step.

⁹⁷ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 13.

Much of this calculated decision fell to Minister to France William Dayton, who was present in Paris at the time and was in charge of communicating Washington's message to Napoleon III and his court.⁹⁸ Per Seward's instructions, Dayton emphasized the United States government's desire to enforce the Monroe Doctrine but offered the position of not taking immediate action if the French forces did not escalate their takeover of Mexico and France did not internationally recognize the Confederate States.⁹⁹ In a private message between Dayton and a French diplomat, Dayton did explicitly state that the United States government was not pleased with the state of affairs but also spoke on friendlier terms about lamenting the effects of the Mexican-American War and wishing for peace between the United States and France.¹⁰⁰ Despite British influences and Napoleon III's willingness, the French foreign staff ultimately decided against the move, which was a massive coup for Seward and his staff. With this, Washington successfully won the most important foreign aspect of the Civil War and established a baseline of where it would tolerate French activities in Mexico. From this point on, Seward negotiated his own Monroe Doctrine, where he could increase diplomatic pressure toward the French invasion as the course of the Civil War permitted, which was contained to influence entirely between the North and South.

Meanwhile, Washington maintained that the government of Mexico was that of Juárez and the republicans, even as they fled from Mexico City to San Luis Potosi to

⁹⁸ Because of the formalities surrounding diplomats at the time, there are several dates and correspondences that put Dayton in France at different times. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed upon that the vast majority of the lobbying against international recognition of the Confederate States was done in person.

⁹⁹ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 110.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Minister William Dayton to the Tuileries, February 7, 1861, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789-1906, Record Group 59; January 14, 1861 - August 7, 1861, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Chihuahua to El Paso del Norte over the course of the war.¹⁰¹ With that, Seward ensured that lines of communication and aid remained open, most pointedly starting with Minister to Mexico Thomas Corwin remaining with the government as it relocated. He continuously ensured Juárez and his supporters that the United States would continue to support and supply the resistance government as much as it could, given the circumstances. In fact, Corwin and Seward approached Congress about the sending of aid to Mexican armies from as early as the beginning of 1863.¹⁰² This included Corwin preventing a short, but deliberate, attempt to sway the Mexican Republic to support the Confederate States from Confederate diplomats in Veracruz.¹⁰³ From the liberated port in New Orleans to California, Washington utilized its resources and border points to supply the Mexican army with arms as early as 1862, albeit in limited amounts and with the cover of commercial trade.¹⁰⁴ Through the distribution of aid and support, the United States could still maintain its position as the regional power and the authority of peace in the region. Seward's Monroe Doctrine was predicated on ideological presence just as much as it was on practical aid. While the supply of some American artillery could afford Mexican troops a better chance in some battles and a slight edge in some theaters of the conflict, American ideological support threatened the French campaign with a looming intervention that could entirely undo the expedition. It also firmly established the networks of republics across North America that supported each other and stood for their

¹⁰¹ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 133.

¹⁰² Presidential message transmitting correspondence with Mexican minister on exportation of articles contraband of war for use of French army in Mexico; Committee on Foreign Relations (Serial No. 1149 S.exdoc.24); 37th Congress; Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

¹⁰³ Edward J. Berbusse, "Two Kentuckians Evaluate the Mexican Scene from Vera Cruz, 1853-1861," (The Americas 31, no. 4 (1975)), 502.

¹⁰⁴ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 133.

own republican ideals. Maximillian I's regime, supported by Napoleon III's empire, was physically and metaphysically out of place.

Seward was also shrewd in his estimation of French goals. Through his experiences as a Senator and Secretary of State, he garnered an understanding of contemporary empires and the various means of expanding their power. For example, it was Seward who correctly capitalized on Russian worries about British ambitions in Russian America and negotiated the purchase of Alaska in 1867 for a historic bargain.¹⁰⁵ Since French troops abandoned their early British and Spanish allies in Mexico, it was blatantly clear to all involved powers what Napoleon III's motives were, despite his ideological posturing. Therefore, Seward was able to act more calmly and gently with his diplomacy toward France, being careful not to antagonize Paris into recognizing the Confederate States or pressing more harshly into Mexico. This understanding of French ideological goals, paired with a lesser understanding of the American ideological stance in Paris, allowed the United States government to successfully buy time and gradually pressure for a French retreat.

United States Pushed to the Verge of Mobilization

In 1865, the Union finally prevailed in the Civil War. While some military attention had to be maintained in reconstructing the Union and negotiations were still being held with the defeated Confederates, Seward was now free to pursue French

¹⁰⁵ Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man*, (1st Simon & Schuster hardcover ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 490.

withdrawal from Mexico far more freely. It began with Lincoln's replacement of Dayton with John Bigelow in Paris, who had proven to be an adept diplomat.¹⁰⁶ With Bigelow, Seward instructed the American delegation to Napoleon III's court to be far more emphatic in its demands of French withdrawal. Notes to Paris increasingly claimed that the French presence in Mexico was not only unwelcome by Washington but was seen as tantamount to a violation of American sovereignty and hegemony in the region.¹⁰⁷ Upon hearing of the training and preparation of thousands of Austrian troops to volunteer in Mexico in early 1866, Bigelow wrote directly to France and Austria's foreign ministers and "demand[ed] a frank explanation" and threatened to consider it an act of war. No more Austrian troops arrived in Mexico after that date.¹⁰⁸ While military force was alluded to, it was not openly threatened. The Monroe Doctrine was not hawkish in nature. The imposition of military force for foreign wars was rarely used in American history for a plethora of both practical and ideological reasons, such as the distaste for imperial actions and the need for military force in the process of Manifest Destiny. However, Napoleon III could not afford to gamble on American neutrality. The campaign in Northern Mexico had dissipated into a drawn-out guerilla conflict, many Mexican conservatives had turned against the governance of Maximilian I, and there were growing concerns that troops would be needed in Europe for a potential conflict with the upstart Prussia.¹⁰⁹ Lincoln had also begun deploying troops to the Rio Grande, seemingly ready

¹⁰⁶ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 164.

¹⁰⁷ Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁸ Message of President on departure of troops from Austria for Mexico; Committee on Foreign Relations (Serial No. 1238 S.exdoc.54); 39th Congress, Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁹ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 244.

to march into Mexico with fully armed support for the Juárez government.¹¹⁰ Napoleon III ultimately acquiesced to the repeated demands of Seward and Bigelow and removed French troops by mid-1867.

Seward's approach toward the Second French Intervention in Mexico and the remaking of the Monroe Doctrine at the most perilous American foreign position in its history was masterful and ideologically driven. From the outset of French troops attempting to enact regime change in Mexico, the United States government correctly calculated that Napoleon III was aiming for a dramatic addition to his informal empire. This was an affront to pragmatic American gains in the Americas and its ideological stature as the preeminent power and republic in the region. Despite disapproval from all levels of the American government, Seward, through Dayton and his staff in Paris, was careful to prioritize the foreign position of the Civil War while still maintaining some diplomatic pressure on Paris. It maintained the Monroe Doctrine as a powerful deterrent of foreign aggression, even as diplomatic capabilities largely replaced the material capabilities of the United States. As the Civil War drew out, Washington gradually increased its involvement in Mexico, all the while balancing its aid to the Juárez government and ensuring that Paris was constantly reminded of its disapproval of the French presence. By the time the South surrendered, the United States was in a decidedly advantageous position to help the Mexican cause and land the final blow by pushing the flailing French forces out of the country. That being said, the decisions and ideological forces of Washington and Paris are only a fraction of the conflict, as Mexico was

¹¹⁰ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 162.

embroiled in a disagreement between two different governments and those governments' involvements with foreign powers in their own rights.

Mexico City, Paris, Washington, and Juárez

This thesis has mostly investigated the ideological and diplomatic interactions of the United States and France during the Second French Intervention in Mexico, the two major powers engaging in a complex proxy conflict over their opposing ideas of exceptionalism and other ideas. While that view is telling of the international relations and ideological repercussions of the invasion, it also largely ignores the people and states that were directly affected by the event in Mexico. For millions of Mexicans, this conflict would determine their government, economy, and livelihoods for the remainder of their history. Two governments that both claimed legitimacy and international recognition vied for supremacy over Mexico: the Juárez government in exile and the imperial government of Maximilian I in Mexico City. Juárez and his liberal allies had long sought an independent, republic, and largely secular government in Mexico. Maximilian I and the conservatives that welcomed him to Mexico sought close political and economic ties to France, while setting up a centralized and Catholic monarchy to rule over Mexico. While one had been an established government in Mexico and the other was propped up for foreign actors, both had significant popular support from Mexicans and both claimed to genuinely want to help the Mexican people. These competing visions and ideologies were shaped by decades of Mexican history and would heavily shape the conflict and its outcome.

Meanwhile, the conflict developed into a multipolar set of interactions between the twin governments in Mexico and the United States and France. As discussed, France bankrolled and provided the vehicle for establishing Maximilian I's government in Mexico City, while the United States was a regional and ideological sponsor of the Juárez government. Throughout the intervention, these actors all interacted with each other and sought to end the conflict on their terms, governed by their ideas on exceptionalism, governance, and national goals. The two governments in Mexico both enacted policies that demonstrated these beliefs and created an identity for each. The United States and France took different avenues in supporting and influencing the conflict, especially within their worldview and seeking to ensure the continuity of their spheres of influence and economies. Ultimately, various factors contributed to the fall of Maximilian I's regime, failure of the French imperial program, survival of Juárez's government, and continued American hegemony in the region.

Differences and Similarities Between the Twin Governments in Mexico

Both governments in Mexico had drastically different perspectives of Mexico and the Mexican people, but both were rooted in deeply woven ideological debates in Mexican history and had valid claims to legitimacy. The Juárez government was the direct continuation of the Mexican Republic that was established with the fall of the First Mexican Empire in 1823.¹¹¹ However, the government did not take its final shape until

¹¹¹ Hamnett, *A Concise History of Mexico*, 148.

the Reform War leading into the 1860s, when the constitutional government and its liberal supporters triumphed over their conservative opponents, significantly restricting the power of the executive branch and Catholic Church in favor of a more representative system. The liberals of the Reform War and Juárez government were the actual and ideological descendents of those that toppled Emperor Iturbide 40 years prior and even those that freed Mexico from Spanish rule just a few years before that.¹¹² They saw Mexico as an exceptional state in the New World that rejected the old Spanish structures of empire, Catholicism power, and centralized control in favor of a representative democracy for the Mexican people. Much like the American patriots that came before them, they predicated their revolution on egalitarianism, sovereignty, and personal freedoms. The ideals of this government were perhaps best summarized by the Constitution of 1857, written largely by the liberal reformers that fought for it and its terms in the Reform War. It begins

The Mexican people recognize that the rights of man are the basis and the object of social institutions. Consequently they declare that all the laws and all the authorities of the country must respect and maintain the guarantees which the present constitution grants.¹¹³

The document later guarantees freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and bearing arms, as well as those further than the American constitution, such as universal male suffrage, abolition of slavery, and restricting religious and civil institutions from owning property

¹¹² Long and Schulz, "A Turn Against Empire," 3.

¹¹³ "The Constitution of 1857." trans. H.N. Branch, The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1917.

outside of their stated purposes.¹¹⁴ It would be the testament that the Juárez government saw itself protecting the practice and exceptionalism of.

Nonetheless, the first few decades of the liberal transformation and nation building of Mexico proved to be incredibly bloody and chaotic. Between the Mexican Revolution, Mexican American War, and Reform War, hundreds of thousands of Mexican lives had been lost and the promise and prestige that an independent Mexico once had had evaporated. Many in Mexico sought the stability that European monarchs seemed to bring, looking back to the First Mexican Empire as precedent.¹¹⁵ It was an ideology seeming present and inviting to Santa Anna during his dictatorial rule over Mexico. Although monarchism had become fairly rare by the time of Maximilian I's arrival, the forces of conservatism, centralization, and Catholicism saw a friendly monarch in him. Between 1863 and 1865, French forces had taken Mexico City, an Assembly of Notables had been collected to form a government, and Maximilian I had assumed the throne. While a formal constitution was never created, the Provisional Statute of the Mexican Empire was written to organize the government, its powers, and determine how it would govern. Conversely to the Constitution of 1857, it read

The form of Government proclaimed by the Nation, and accepted by the Emperor, is the moderate hereditary monarchy, with a Catholic Prince. . . . The Emperor represents the National Sovereignty, and until otherwise decreed in the definitive organization of the empire, exercises it in all its branches either personally or through public authorities and officials.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ "The Constitution of 1857." trans. H.N. Branch, *The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1917.

¹¹⁵ De la Rosa, *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III*, 142.

¹¹⁶ "Provisional Statute of Imperial Mexico." trans. J.M. Andrade and F. Escalante, *Bajos de San Agustín*, 1865.

Despite the ideological expressions of Napoleon III and the sovereign desires of the Mexican conservatives, the Second Mexican Empire was, at its very basis, a European-sponsored monarchy in the Americas. That alone fundamentally opposed Mexican liberals and Washington alike, pushing unlikely compromise to an unbridgeable gap between the Mexican governments and their supporters.

Ironically, the most liberal aspect of the new empire may have been Maximilian I himself. In the years leading up to his assumption of the Mexican throne, he was appointed as the Viceroy of Lombardy-Venetia by his brother, Emperor Franz Joseph II of Austria. There, he was tasked with bringing the Italian-speaking province of the expansive Austrian Empire under the control of Venice while Italy was rapidly unifying. Unlike the imposing hand of the Austrian government, Maximilian I sought to revolutionize the bureaucracy, administration, institutions, and infrastructures to assuage the Venetians into accepting Austrian rule into the future.¹¹⁷ This method was modeled after the constitutional governments that developed over the nineteenth century in Europe, including that of his brother. Thus, upon his arrival in Mexico, Maximilian I pursued a hybrid government of both conservative and liberal aspects. At first, the conservatives of his government were placated by the stability of monarchism and immediate surge of power it brought to the military and church, all the while the emperor upheld many of the reforms of the Reform War and developed a political system that protected all Mexicans.¹¹⁸ His agenda included the expansion of land redistribution programs from confiscated church lands and protections for indigenous communities,

¹¹⁷ Shawcross, *The Last Emperor of Mexico*, 39.

¹¹⁸ Shawcross, *The Last Emperor of Mexico*, 142.

both partially out of genuine efforts to help the Mexican people. Over time, the ideological contradiction became more apparent and complexified the already-chaotic political situation of the empire. The loss of support amongst conservatives in the Mexican government came as a critical factor in Napoleon III determining the untenability of the imperial position.¹¹⁹ Ideology was not only an external direct threat to the French goals in Mexico, but the differences of ideology between individuals and policies in Mexico City also presented an internal threat.

From the outset of the war, the liberal faction of Juárez was far more popular. The average Mexican citizen was far less likely to support the autocratic regime that harkened back to the times as a Spanish colony and under Santa Anna. The ideals of republicanism and national sovereignty had developed far more fully in the Mexican consciousness than monarchy and stability, largely owing to the decades of struggle dedicated to escaping autocratic regimes. The majority of Mexicans also stood to gain massively with the liberal reforms that the Juárez government brought, such as confiscating collectively-owned lands to be passed to individuals and the expansion of public education to all.¹²⁰ However, conservatives were ever present in the government and military. While many of these conservatives were not monarchists, they did see the imperial government as an opportunity to reassert their vision of the Mexican government. Much like their French counterparts, significant funding came to Maximilian I's court from conservative financiers in Mexico that saw economic opportunity in the survival of the new government. Conservative governors of Mexican

¹¹⁹ De la Rosa, *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III*, 175.

¹²⁰ Long and Schulz, "A Turn Against Empire," 7.

states, like Santiago Vidaurri, jumped at the opportunity to become *caudillos* in their own right.¹²¹ The factionalism of the conflict made it difficult to centralize and organize authority under Juárez or Maximilian I's government, favoring the imperial government by the simple virtue of controlling Mexico City and having a technological advantage thanks to French aid. Similarly to the preexisting ideological state of Mexico, the nation split into a complex web of governments and parties, all seeking to see their vision of Mexico come to fruition. Thus, the conflict somewhat evenly split the Mexican nation and resulted in a far more sluggish affair than anticipated.

The ideologies of these separate nations and their backers was massively influential in how the conflict played out. The imperial perspective of Maximilian I and Napoleon III brought a land-based conquest that was backed by a financed empire and system of trade. Mexican conservatives would be able to create a stable and centralized Mexico under a European monarch, maintaining Mexico as the exceptional and successful Latin monarchy that Iturbide I and Santa Anna sought. The republican perspective of Juárez and Seward promoted guerilla warfare and a pragmatic government that tried at all costs to maintain its sovereignty and liberal ideals. Their version of Mexican independence and sovereignty was inextricably linked with republicanism, liberalism, and self-rule, which was importantly shared with Washington. The interactions between these different governments and ideologies would massively affect the material actions that occurred on the battlefield and affect the conflict and its results.

¹²¹ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 218.

Web of Interwar Diplomacy

The main diplomatic interaction across the actors of the war was that between Washington and Paris, the two governments and economies that dominated the diplomatic and ideological environment that the conflict would take place in. This was largely because the United States and France were preeminent regional powers, with stable governments and the capital and wealth to support such an event. While this does not amount to national territory or populations being tangibly affected, with the exception of the French expeditionary force, it was further magnified by the international system of the time. While Washington and Paris were geographically removed from the region, both were intensely and intimately invested in the region. The informal empire was a main aspect of Napoleon III's rule. The French economy and the economic well-being of its people in the metropole were directly tied to its successes abroad, where many of its most important imports, financially and culturally, came from.¹²² Conversely, the protection of the Americas was an intrinsic need for American foreign affairs. The existence of a French puppet in Mexico threatened the sovereignty that the United States had won wars and built a government to establish and defend.

Their independent diplomatic strategies have already been discussed. Paris was maneuvering a complex imperial and ideological strategy, simultaneously attempting to force Mexico into its empire through the weight of the military and political strength while placating the United States from entering the conflict and maintaining its affairs on

¹²² Todd, *A Velvet Empire*, 14.

the continent. Washington was primarily focused on ensuring that France did not side with the Confederate States, while also communicating its displeasure with the French intervention and ensuring that France was not successful in establishing its empire in Mexico. Ultimately, Seward, Dayton, and Bigelow were savvy in preventing French interference in the Civil War, while constantly establishing the correct amount of forcefulness and restraint toward the French position in Mexico.¹²³ The existence of a European monarchy in Mexico would never be acceptable to the United States government's ideological standing with the Monroe Doctrine, proven by the sheer distress that the intervention caused the United States government, even in the midst of the Civil War. In fact, in the midst of watching French troops push toward the capital a message from Lincoln and Seward to Congress mentions "swiftly accepting" the shock of the invasion while still assuaging Paris, all in hopes that it would prevent the looming recognition.¹²⁴

However, the measured responses that Seward dictated to Paris led to the general miscalculation amongst Napoleon III's ministers that long-term French influence in Mexico could be acceptable to the United States through the sheer force of the French empire or negotiating a regional peace between the two powers. While the French strategy toward the United States accounted for the existence of the Monroe Doctrine, it simply did not account enough for the policy, even in its weakened state, to so intrinsically and permanently stand Washington completely against French designs in the

¹²³ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 40.

¹²⁴ Message of President with correspondence on course of trade with France while France and Mexico were at war; Senate (Serial No. 1176 S.exdoc.47); 38th Congress; Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

New World. It was this ideological misunderstanding that allowed for Seward's subtle diplomatic triumph over Napoleon III and its later implications in the conflict.

Meanwhile, the Mexican governments were obvious ideological and practical enemies. They had little to no diplomatic interactions and mostly interacted non-militarily through policies and proclamations.¹²⁵ Rather, their ideological differences were carried out directly on the battlefield. The French forces resembled a centralized, professional army of conquest, emblematic of their imperial visions of the conquest and integration of Mexico into the empire. In turn, the Mexican forces were fighting a disorganized, guerilla conflict, representing the desperate stand for sovereignty and republicanism that the Juárez government was carrying out. The material reasons for the Mexican victory—mostly importantly the French unpreparedness for a guerilla conflict, French commanders lacking understanding of Mexican geography, and Mexican resilience—were likewise similar to the ideological reasons for their victory, which included the overextension of the already-vast French empire, diplomatic mishandlings of Paris, and the Mexican desire to prevent a foreign regime in the country.¹²⁶ By the end of the conflict, there were fewer ideological stances and more sheer military force, especially as the conflict grew more chaotic and bloody in its final years. In fact, in the final two years of the conflict and when French forces were spread thin fighting the guerilla war across the Mexican countryside, Maximilian I ordered all Mexican opposition to be killed, a

¹²⁵ Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine*, 152.

¹²⁶ It is disagreed upon how unprepared for the Mexican terrain of the war the French army was. Edward Shawcross notes that the French expeditionary forces lacked sufficient mapping and heavily relied on local allies to lead them in their marches, but also stipulates that these were common in other expeditions, like that in Algeria. Nonetheless, there seems to be a general consensus that the French forces were not entirely prepared for the Mexican geography they were forced to fight on.

significant difference from the more cordial conflict that the emperor presided over upon his arrival to Mexico.¹²⁷ The conflict did, in fact, end in a direct confrontation between the sides. Following the final defeat of imperial forces and capture of Maximilian I, Juárez reluctantly, yet firmly, ordered the execution of the former emperor.

Despite being the most stable governments in the region for a period, Washington and Mexico City had very few diplomatic interactions. There were some overtures made, but they were mostly that of Maximilian I's government communicating to Washington with little to no response.¹²⁸ Diplomats in Mexico City contacted Washington about international recognition of the government and, later, attempting to negotiate a long-term settlement that allowed the imperial government to survive. With every attempted contact, Washington reaffirmed its silence. An integral aspect of the American ideological standpoint was denying the legitimacy of a forced European intervention in the Americas. Decades prior, it was the international recognition of France, the Netherlands, Spain, and other established nations that allowed the United States to be recognized as a nation-state, also making it an important aspect of the United States gaining its exceptionalism as a people and nation. By granting the Juárez government recognition and denying it to the imperial government despite its stability and location, the United States aligned itself and the popular sentiment of exceptionalism with the liberal vision of Mexico's future. Again, France and the Second Mexican Empire found themselves fundamentally unable to align with the United States, which would ultimately

¹²⁷ Shawcross, *The Last Emperor of Mexico*, 235.

¹²⁸ Message of President communicating information on occupation by French troops of republic of Mexico, and establishment of monarchy; Senate (Serial No. 1237 S.exdoc.6); 39th Congress, Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

make the expedition and long-term sustainability of their partnership much more difficult. This was just another of several diplomatic interactions that shaped the course of the conflict, largely through the application and understanding of the respective ideologies and goals of each government.

Different Routes of Exceptionalism Taken by Each Nation

It has been established over the course of this thesis how each of the belligerents of the conflict and their sponsors saw themselves as exceptional. The Second French Empire was desperate to expand its informal empire into a new sphere of the globe, specifically as the global leader of Pan-Latin people and the birthplace of European liberalism. The United States was in the midst of the Civil War, but was still determined to preserve its status as the sole power of the New World and prevent European meddling in its sphere of influence. The Juárez government was fighting to continue decades of Mexican progress toward republicanism, liberalism, and sovereignty against European and Mexican autocrats. The Second Mexican Empire was eager to establish a conservative vision for Mexico, bringing the stability of monarchism and success in its partnership with French political and economic interests. It also has been discussed how this affected their policies and how the respective governments and diplomats acted and communicated with each other. However, these perspectives also affected how each government fundamentally perceived the conflict. The government in Washington, much like its allies under Juárez, understood the conflict as the fight for the survival of a young

republic, expecting a long-term conflict for survival. The government in Paris, much like its puppet government in Mexico City, understood the conflict from an imperial and European perspective, attempting to complete a swift expedition of conquest. These differing understandings of the conflict manifested in vastly different ways, ultimately being subsidiary to the failure for Paris and Mexico City.

In both their ideology and policy, Washington and the Juárez governments were defined by pragmatism. Both nations were born from bloody revolutions that were fought against far superior armies of their European rulers, involving volunteer armies and guerilla warfare.¹²⁹ In fact, it was this pragmatism that each nation saw itself as exceptional to the inflexible government structures and histories of European monarchies. The United States spent decades sacrificing a more perfect nation building process to maintain its union through piecewise compromises between the North and South. Mexico passed through a series of republics, monarchies, and other governments as its political system sought to appease a wide variety of political beliefs and identities. Pragmatism in ideology and policy was clear for both governments throughout the conflict. The Monroe Doctrine, one of the most protected aspects of American foreign policy, was reoriented and muted by Seward in a successful, yet difficult, diplomatic strategy to preserve American interests in multiple conflicts. The Juárez government fled from city to city while suspending elections, an especially sacred aspect of Mexican democracy, to ensure the survival of the republic. It was these alterations to closely ideologies and policies that

¹²⁹ Marsh and Rapport, *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions*, 213.

allowed both governments and people to not be entrapped by their philosophies and be successful in the conflict.

Meanwhile, Paris and the imperial government in Mexico were far more idealist and rigid in their exceptionalism. While France had experienced its own bloody revolution against European monarchy, it chose again and again to reinstitute monarchism, twice with traditional monarchies and twice with Napoleonic imperialism.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the pragmatism and progressivism of revolution had to contend with hundreds of years of monarchical tradition, tying French exceptionalism to its status as an old European power as much as it is tied to a few decades of radicalism. Despite its backing by Mexican conservatives, Maximilian I's government was built entirely through the lens of a European monarchy, instilling its exceptionalism and vision for Mexico with many of the values that Paris held for itself. The result was a rigid and idealistic approach to the conflict from the combined efforts of Paris and Mexico City. Napoleon III and his advisors desired a brief expedition of conquest, much like he accomplished a few years earlier in Vietnam.¹³¹ Maximilian I also sought a quick establishment of his government and extinguishment of the Juárez government, such that he could get to the more serious business of governance and administration. It was this perspective that saw French troops sweep through Mexico within two years and Maximilian I be crowned in Mexico City by 1864, but also a guiding factor in French unpreparedness for a prolonged guerilla war and diplomatic pressure on both governments to retreat from Mexico. The rigidity of European conquest was massively

¹³⁰ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 13.

¹³¹ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France, 1850-1900*, 149.

successful in the short-term, but began to crumble upon its later encounter with protracted resistance.

Although Washington and the Juárez government were partners in their simple goal of survival and the maintenance of New World republicanism and sovereignty, they both viewed the conflict as a long-term event. Much like their own revolutions, the conflict the Juárez government had entered was a zero-sum game. The republic was going to do whatever it could, including guerilla warfare, to survive and never relent to the occupying force. When a traditional opponent in a European conflict or even other colonial conflicts would sue for peace or otherwise surrender, the Mexican guerillas would simply retreat further into the country. Unlike contemporary conflicts where the capture of a capital would typically allow the occupying force to dictate the terms of surrender to the defeated government, Juárez and his government simply moved across the country and kept fighting. It was this long-term and unrelenting view of the conflict that put the republicans in a decidedly immovable position to outlast the French forces. Much like the rigid approach to the conquest, Napoleon III and Maximilian I were idealists in their ultimate goals for Mexico. The governments in Paris and Mexico City sought a brief conflict that would allow for the rebuilding of the nation in the Franco-Mexican vision to take place as soon as possible. The longer fighting took place and the more agitated Mexicans, conservative and liberal alike, against the imperial government, the more difficult the situation became to manage. This prolonged mission of stabilization then simply did not have the legitimacy or resources to outlast the republican force that were ready to retake the country at once. While the grandiose plans

of the French expedition were expansive and fit within the abilities of the new government, they were untenable in the face of a more pragmatic and pre-established enemy.

No Victories for Paris

Prior to the French expedition into Mexico, the plan was meticulously crafted by Napoleon III and his advisors.¹³² Unlike smaller scale and more reactive European projects in the Americas, this project was geopolitically, militarily, and economically clever, while being ideologically fitting for both France and Mexico. The expedition was framed as a noble and civilizing mission to stabilize the fellow Pan-Latin Mexico by returning it to the Catholic monarchy. France would be able to expand its informal empire and create a mutually beneficial market of investment and exchange of goods and finances between the two nations and peoples. Other European powers were arranged to not challenge French aims in Mexico and the sole regional power, the United States, was too embroiled in the Civil War to materially oppose the invasion. The French military was among the most technologically advanced and well-experienced in the world. A comprehensive plan of conquest was planned from Veracruz to Chihuahua, which would be aided by supply lines that stretched from Toulon to Veracruz.¹³³ And at first, this detailed plan worked. Through the first few years of the conflict, French troops swept toward the Pacific and Maximilian I began rearranging Mexico as he deemed fit.

¹³² Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 56.

¹³³ Shawcross, *The Last Emperor of Mexico*, 236.

However, in about the same period of time, France and its puppet government would be permanently removed from Mexico. A litany of problems befell the French and imperial Mexican goals, many of which were directly driven by ideology.

The web of diplomatic interactions was telling of the increasingly difficult ideological and practical situation that Napoleon III watched develop over the course of the conflict. France saw itself and its noble mission in Mexico as exceptionalist and indicative of the greatness and expansiveness of the Second French Empire, but was met with a fiercely sovereign and republican Juárez government, a still powerful and willing US that utilized its shrewd diplomats to put itself in an advantageous negotiating position, and an imperial Mexican government that was struggling to maintain ideological unity and fighting a losing guerilla war. All of these were fundamentally opposed to the success and long-term existence of a French puppet government in Mexico. France found itself diplomatically isolated, especially with an increasingly aggressive US government that was seemingly preparing to march into Mexico on behalf of Juárez's request. While this was ideologically and diplomatically daunting, it occurred in tandem with other threats to French success. By 1866, French troops were exhausted and retreating from their positions stretched thin across Mexico. Both the French government and people were growing uncomfortable with such an expensive and flailing enterprise halfway across the globe. And, most pressingly, Prussia seemed primed to unify the German states and threaten French territory in Europe.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 166.

Ultimately, Napoleon III's ultimate choice to withdraw loomed not because of ideology alone, but because of its widespread effects across all aspects of the French mission and difficult diplomatic, geopolitical, and military situations that arose alongside it. While the communications between Paris and Washington represented the overarching interests of the regional powers and perhaps best demonstrated how ideology played directly into the actions of the respective governments, it was only a fraction of the overall network of diplomatic interactions that took place between Mexico City, Paris, Washington, and Juárez.

Conclusion

The Second French Intervention in Mexico was a massively important and influential event to take place during the nineteenth century. It massively impacted the history of France, Mexico, the United States, Latin America, and European power struggles. However, it is often less discussed than other contemporary events that took place in the course of world history, such as the Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War. Despite this, it is rich in aspects and trends that demonstrate important historical trends and interactions. This thesis has sought to explore that through the ideological battles that took place between the United States, France, and Mexico. Mainly, it discussed exceptionalist ideologies in the four main belligerents of the conflict and how ideological oppositions and misunderstandings resulted in a difficult French endeavor turning into a failure. While ideologies sometimes were directly argued against each other, it was their application to policies and interactions between governments where their effects on the conflict manifested. In fact, these effects can be seen in the geopolitical, political, military, and economic fronts of the French intervention, each of which turned in the Juárez government's favor by the time of the French withdrawal.¹³⁵ There are more specific approaches to understanding the ideological situation of the conflict, such as the justifications and decisions Napoleon III's government made venturing into Mexico, the smart diplomacy of Seward and the United States government throughout its conflicts,

¹³⁵ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 245.

and the web of interactions between the four governments, but nonetheless the conflict as a whole could best be described as heavily driven by opposing ideologies.

Assessing the conflict from a multipolar ideological perspective offers a valuable comprehensive overview of the history of the event. Not only can these separate exceptionalists—French hegemony and imperialism, American republicanism and liberalism, Mexican sovereignty and liberalism, and Mexican conservatism and monarchy—be investigated in their own rights, but can also be observed in their actions toward the conflict and interactions with each other. These differing worldviews led to constantly shifting policies, strategies, and goals, all of which are important for understanding the conflict and its consequences. Such an analysis is often utilized in the historical analysis of long-term trends, such as the ideological complexities of the leadup to the Civil War or decline of the Second French Empire. However, this conflict demonstrates the value of this analysis in specific events, demonstrating the ideas that led to the conflict and how they influenced individual decisions by the actors that shaped it. In fact, the ideologies of republicanism, imperialism, liberalism, and sovereignty in the French intervention serve as a microcosm for much broader trends in that century. It can be seen as both a final vestige of Napoleonic empire-building from the start of the century to the imperial projects that amounted to much of the leadup to World War I. The ideology of the course and failure of the Second French Intervention in Mexico is valuable in its complexity and application to world history as a whole.

The Second French Intervention in Mexico in Each Nation's Perspective

Since Napoleon III's rise to power and the establishment of his imperial plan, his advisors developed a plan to create and incorporate a Mexican kingdom into it. It was the convergence of Pan-Latinism, prestige, and exceptionalism that expressed the French view of a civilizing power that sought to bring stability and prosperity to Mexico, while bringing a lucrative bevy of natural resources and consumer market into the informal French empire.¹³⁶ In that, it was molded into the French vision of a globe-spanning empire that could rival the preeminent and emerging empires of Britain and Germany, respectively. It also fit snugly into the informal system of economic spheres of influence and incorporating foreign kingdoms that Napoleon III pursued in building his empire. Through the first years of the conflict, both the practical and ideological aspects of the expedition fell into the French favor. By the end of 1864, Maximilian I's government in Mexico City had been established and somewhat internationally recognized and the French forces were seemingly hunting the final vestiges of republican resistance across the countryside.¹³⁷ However, the success could not be sustained. Ideological differences between Maximilian I and his subjects and ideological firmness of Seward and Juárez, along with the material losses, eventually proved too much for the then floundering French effort. Although there were still French prospects in the prolonged version of the conflict, the mission had become a strategic liability for Paris, unjustifiable with an ideological stance. Despite detailed planning and early successes, Napoleon III's

¹³⁶ Carroll, *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France, 1850-1900*, 126.

¹³⁷ Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 178.

“adventure” in Mexico failed most tangibly because of a prolonged conflict that was complicated by external factors and some poor French decision-making, both of which being heavily influenced by French principles and the staunch American and Mexican opposition to them.

Similarly to France, the United States had developed a long history of exceptionalism and other specifically American ideologies, specifically including the stringent Monroe Doctrine that allowed the United States to grow into a regional power. During the 1860s, the Civil War and its extant effects reshaped and restricted many aspects of this ideology, including preventing the full force of the United States government from enacting the Monroe Doctrine against the French meddling in Mexico.¹³⁸ Nonetheless, Lincoln, Seward, Dayton, Bigelow, and others all remained ardently attached to the ideologies that many Americans saw as intrinsic to their identity. Thus, the United States government crafted Seward’s Monroe Doctrine to approach both conflicts with American interests in mind. While it was not the most perfect application of the foreign policy, it pragmatically allowed Washington to achieve a strategic win and advantage over both the Confederate States and France by ensuring the neutrality of France toward the Civil War and communicating American desires for French forces to withdraw from Mexico.¹³⁹ It also allowed the United States to maintain the support of their ideological counterparts in the Juárez government and continued to deny Maximillian I’s government an important aspect of legitimacy in American international recognition. For the remainder of the conflict, American military victories in the South

¹³⁸ Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine*, 123.

¹³⁹ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 56.

mirrored French losses in Mexico, amounting to a practical advantage to match the diplomatic triumph. The ending of the Civil War, along with intense diplomatic pressure toward Paris and the lining up of American troops on the Rio Grande, was ultimately a major factor in the French withdrawal from Mexico.¹⁴⁰ Thus, Secretary of State Seward molded his own application of the Monroe Doctrine through his and his staff's diplomacy, ensuring the United States could gain a massive advantage in the Civil War and force France out of its sphere of influence.

While ideological battles were waged between Washington and Paris, the material fighting occurred between the twin Mexican governments under Juárez and Maximilian I. These governments and the people that they fought for retained their agency, differing from the ideas and policies that both the United States and France attempted to apply toward Mexico. Upon the French push toward Mexico City, tens of thousands of Mexicans took up arms to defend the republic and restore the republican, liberal, and self-governing vision of Mexico that had developed for decades. Although the imperial government was headed by a foreign leader, it enjoyed significant support from Mexican conservatives and many in the military, creating a fairly even conflict through the first few years of war. Each government claimed legitimacy and exceptionalism in ruling Mexico, while both were followed by populations that saw ideologically different Mexicos. Both governments also interacted with the United States and France, making for a web of diplomatic interactions, fueled by each nation's search for exceptionalism and enacting its own interests in Mexico. Not only did each nation have different beliefs

¹⁴⁰ Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*, 162.

toward the conflict, but those beliefs caused them to fundamentally understand the conflict differently. The United States and Juárez government were pragmatic in their ideology and saw the intervention as an existential struggle to maintain Mexican independence and liberalism. France and the imperial government were more rigid in their application of ideology and saw the intervention as a brief colonial mission in the ever-expanding informal French empire. As the conflict dragged out and turned from conquest to guerilla warfare, it heavily favored the pragmatists, which ultimately held great weight in determining the result of the French intervention.

The Power of Exceptionalism in This Conflict

The entire French intervention was driven by policies and actions that were indicative of competing ideologies. It was Pan-Latinism, imperialism, and champagne capitalism that drove the French forces toward Mexico in the first place. The United States government and Mexican republicans were so ardent in their cause of rejecting the French from the region because of their closeness to republicanism, sovereignty, and the rejection of European involvement in the Americas. The Mexican imperialists saw a completely different vision for Mexico that brought stability, a global economy, and European monarchism.¹⁴¹ Each of these nations saw itself as the exceptional nation that would sway Mexico toward prosperity. It was this ideology that brought the French to Mexico in an attempt to expand the informal empire and return to Napoleonic prestige. It

¹⁴¹Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America*, 251.

was this ideology that forced Seward to alter the Monroe Doctrine to desperately prevent long-term European meddling in the Americas and prevail in its own civil war. And it was this ideology that divided Mexico into two factions and decided between American republicanism or European monarchism.

In the analysis of the resulting failure for the French intervention, it is easy to point to diplomatic miscalculation, strategic blunders, or general hubris in assessing why the French failed. In fact, as discussed, much historiography of the conflict takes this approach in assessing Napoleon III's mission. While these did play a factor in the ultimate result of the conflict—not leveraging recognition of the Confederate States more heavily against Washington, failing to properly prepare for a protracted guerilla conflict, or overestimating the support Mexican conservatives had for Maximillian I—solely placing the blame here overlooks a host of other factors. Napoleon III and his government was one of the strongest nations and militaries in the world and had just achieved colonial successes in Algeria and Vietnam, both of which involved many of the same ideological and practical preparations and justifications as the Mexican expedition. While ambitious, Napoleon III's project in Mexico was largely well-calculated and well-executed. Some of the most crucial barriers to French success were rooted in the ideological perceptions and actions of Washington and Juárez. The French plan was partially predicated on eventually establishing a long-term government in Mexico City, but neither pre-existing government would ever tolerate such a French position of power and influence in the Americas, preventing Napoleon III from ever seeing his long-term plan accomplished. While military victories and traditional diplomacy would bring

success in a European conflict, Juárez, Lincoln, Seward, and others saw a guerilla war that could never truly be won by France. While French miscalculations certainly played a role in the conclusion of the conflict, deeper ideological and geopolitical currents truly dictating the terms of the war.

For the purposes of this thesis, the vast majority of primary sources were from the United States government and its internal and external communications, given the time and resource constraints of an undergraduate thesis. With this, I developed an intimate understanding of the American perspective of the conflict, as well as how American diplomats and statesmen perceived French and Mexican policies and actions.

Furthermore, the vast majority of secondary sources were Anglophone, not incorporating Francophone or Hispanophone texts heavily in the overall research. In conversation with each other, these sources created a complex picture of ideological and diplomatic interactions between the nations as the conflict dragged on. This was incredibly valuable and allowed the writing of a comprehensive thesis that discussed each nation, its individuals, its actions, and its beliefs at length. However, the next step of research to complete would be including primary sources that originated and were circulated in Paris, Mexico City, and the Juárez government. This would allow the investigation of how American ideology and actions were perceived by other governments, as well as expand upon previously lesser explored topics, like the inner workings of Maximilian I's governments and a broader French perspective of the situation of the conflict. This step could allow for a wider understanding of the practical and ideological image that this thesis investigates.

Not Sedan, but Mexico City

The best throughline of history for demonstrating the importance of the Second French Intervention in Mexico is the result of the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent end of the Second French Empire. Just a few years after French troops returned to Europe from Mexico, a much weaker France and French army was goaded into war with Prussia in 1870. To Napoleon III, it was an existential battle for the prestige and survival of the Second French Empire. Both France and Prussia sought the prestige and exceptionalism of being the paramount power in continental Europe, building on hundreds of years of ideology and history. However, it was simply a decisive defeat of the French army. The modernized Prussian military roundly defeated Napoleon III's personally led army at Sedan, resulting in Napoleon III's abdication and the end of the monarchy in France. France was reduced to anarchy for a brief time before restoring republicanism in the Third Republic, completely reshaping the French empire and France's global image.¹⁴²

Like in Mexico, the exceptionalism of France was defeated by an upstart German Empire. The same flaws of exceptionalism and ideological strategy continued through history to fail them. The surge of French influence and imperial power was less strong than anticipated, rigid imperial missions of expansion and power proved brittle against more pragmatic belligerents, and Napoleon III was again diplomatically outmaneuvered.

¹⁴² Price, *The French Second Empire*, 445.

In the grand scheme of world history, it is this conflict that is remembered as ending monarchism in France, allowing Germany to rise to continental dominance, and put Europe on its path to contemporary history. However, after a careful ideological analysis of the Second French Intervention in Mexico, one could argue that Napoleon III's empire was ideologically defeated when its last ship left Veracruz, long before any Prussian troop marched into France. This idea demonstrates the sheer importance of understanding the ideological underpinnings of history, even in brief conflicts that take place outside the canon of major historical events. Thus, it can be said that the fate of the Second French Empire, Europe, and the world was decided not in Sedan, but Mexico City.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

[Dispatch from Mr. Corwin, Minister in Mexico.] Message from the President; Committee on Foreign Relations (Serial No. SED-37-2-8); 37th Congress; Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789 - 1906, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Letter from Charge d'affaires Mattias Romero to Secretary of State William Seward, May 6, 1862, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Mexico, 1823 - 1906, Volume 29; February 18, 1862 - May 1, 1863, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Letter from Charge d'affaires Mattias Romero to Ambassador Thomas Corwin, May 10, 1862, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Mexico, 1823 - 1906, Volume 29; February 18, 1862 - May 1, 1863, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Letter from Minister John Bigelow to the Tuileries, June 15, 1865, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789 - 1906, Record Group 59; June 14, 1866 - May 13, 1867, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Letter from Minister William Dayton to the Tuileries, February 7, 1861, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789 - 1906, Record Group 59; January 14, 1861 - August 7, 1861, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Message of President communicating information on occupation by French troops of republic of Mexico, and establishment of monarchy; Senate (Serial No. 1237 S.exdoc.6); 39th Congress, Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

Message of President on departure of troops from Austria for Mexico; Committee on Foreign Relations (Serial No. 1238 S.exdoc.54); 39th Congress, Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

Message of President with correspondence on course of trade with France while France and Mexico were at war; Senate (Serial No. 1176 S.exdoc.47); 38th Congress; Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

Minister to France Charles Faulkner to Secretary of State Jeremiah Black, January 14, 1861, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789 - 1906, January 14 - August 7, 1861, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Minister to France John Bigelow to Secretary of State William Seward, October 4, 1866, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789 - 1906, October 4, 1866 - August 23, 1867, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Presidential message transmitting correspondence with Mexican minister on exportation of articles contraband of war for use of French army in Mexico; Committee on Foreign Relations (Serial No. 1149 S.exdoc.24); 37th Congress; Record Group 94; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

“Provisional Statute of Imperial Mexico.” trans. J.M. Andrade and F. Escalante, Bajos de San Agustin, 1865.

Secretary of State William Seward to Minister to France John Bigelow, October 18, 1865, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789 - 1906, October 11, 1865 - January 13, 1866, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Secretary of State William Seward to Minister to France William Dayton, October 22, 1863, Despatches from U.S. Ministers to France, 1789-1906, October 23, 1863 - June 8, 1864, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

“The Constitution of 1857.” trans. H.N. Branch, The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1917.

“The Convention Between England, France, and Spain.” The New York Times, December 5, 1861.

Secondary Sources

- Berbusse, Edward J. "Two Kentuckians Evaluate the Mexican Scene from Vera Cruz, 1853-1861." *The Americas* 31, no. 4 (1975): 501–12.
- Carroll, Christina B. *The Politics of Imperial Memory in France, 1850-1900*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2022.
- Clodfelter, Michael. *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1618-1991*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 1992.
- Cunningham, Michele. *Mexico and the Foreign Policy of Napoleon III*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001.
- Fry, Joseph A. *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*. 1st ed. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2019.
- Hamnett, Brian R. *A Concise History of Mexico*. Third edition. N: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- "Highlights from Our Textual Holdings at the National Archives at College Park." National Archives and Records Administration, September 24, 2024. <https://www.archives.gov/college-park/highlights/textual>.
- Long, Tom, and Carsten-Andreas Schulz. "A Turn Against Empire: Benito Juárez's Liberal Rejoinder to the French Intervention in Mexico." *The American Political Science Review*, 2024, 1–15.
- Maass, Richard W. *The Picky Eagle: How Democracy and Xenophobia Limited U.S. Territorial Expansion*. Cornell University Press, 2020.
- Marsh, Ben, and Michael Rapport, eds. *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2017.
- Price, Roger (Roger David). *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Rosa, Miquel de la. *French Liberalism and Imperialism in the Age of Napoleon III: Empire at Home, Colonies Abroad*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.
- Sexton, Jay. *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America*. 1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 2011.
- Shawcross, Edward. *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America, 1820-1867: Equilibrium in the New World*. 1st ed. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.

Shawcross, Edward. *The Last Emperor of Mexico: The Dramatic Story of the Habsburg Archduke Who Created a Kingdom in the New World*. First edition. New York: Basic Books, 2021.

Stahr, Walter. *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man*. 1st Simon & Schuster hardcover ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Todd, David. *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.

Zoellick, Robert B. *America in the World: A Definitive History of U.S. Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*. First edition. New York, NY: Twelve, Hachette Book Group, 2020.