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**THE MONROE DECLARATION AND THE ANGLO-AMERICAN RIVALRY
OVER REVOLUTIONARY HISPANIC AMERICA**

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Mondi occidentali. La dottrina Monroe al bicentenario

THE MONROE DECLARATION AND THE
ANGLO-AMERICAN RIVALRY OVER
REVOLUTIONARY HISPANIC AMERICAIL DISCORSO MONROE E LA RIVALITÀ ANGLO-STATUNITENSE
PER L'AMERICA LATINA IN RIVOLUZIONE*Deborah Besseghini ** ORCID: DB 0000-0002-6266-5521

ABSTRACT

[ENG.] This article reconstructs the genesis and consequences of President Monroe's message of December 2, 1823, by studying the tormented relationship between the United States and Britain, and their tacit conflict for a "sufficient" strategic control over Spanish America's political and commercial reconfiguration during the global war marking the final clash among the old Atlantic empires. We will first investigate Britain's reactions to US official and unofficial policies as a driving force of informal imperialism in South America. We will then describe the two powers' rivalry in unofficially supporting the liberation campaigns in South America and the impact of their indirect aid. Finally, we will retrace the origins of Monroe's message in the initiatives of both powers to recognize Spanish-American independence, but also the US ambiguities on their hemispheric "doctrine", with particular reference to Mexico. Here the prospect of a continental "empire" of republican freedom represented the detonator of a profound internal instability. Through entangled stories of British and US agents, the last sections consider the case of Texas as the terrain in which the British dream of a buffer against US expansion in the Americas faded.

Keywords: Hemispheric Dream – British American Rivalry – Spanish American Independence – Western Question – Mobility and Empires

[It.] L'articolo ricostruisce la genesi e le conseguenze del messaggio del Presidente Monroe del 2 dicembre 1823, attraverso la lente del tormentato rapporto tra Stati Uniti e Gran Bretagna e della loro tacita rivalità per ottenere "sufficiente" controllo strategico sul processo di riconfigurazione politica e commerciale dell'America ispanica durante la guerra globale che segnò l'ultimo scontro tra vecchi imperi atlantici. Analizzeremo le reazioni britanniche alle politiche statunitensi, ufficiali e non, come un motore dell'imperialismo informale in Sud America. Mostriamo poi la competizione tra le due potenze nel fornire sostegno ufficiale alle campagne di liberazione in Sud America e l'impatto degli aiuti indiretti. Infine, ripercorreremo l'origine del messaggio di Monroe nelle iniziative di entrambe le potenze per il riconoscimento delle indipendenze ispano-americane, ma anche le ambiguità statunitensi sulla "dottrina" emisferica, soprattutto in relazione al Messico. Qui l'idea di un "impero" continentale della libertà repubblicana funse da detonatore di una forte instabilità. Intersecando traiettorie di agenti britannici e statunitensi, le ultime sezioni mostrano perché il sogno britannico di arginare l'espansione statunitense nelle Americhe svanì in Texas.

Parole chiave: Sogno emisferico – Rivalità britannico-statunitense – Indipendenze ispano-americane – Questione occidentale – Mobilità e imperi

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1. EMANCIPATION

The profound motivation behind President Monroe’s Annual Message of December 2, 1823 (which became a “doctrine” much later¹) was US fear that the Americas would once again become a bargaining chip between the European powers in their mutual rivalries, even after the independence of almost the entire continent².

It has been stated that the message met the tacit British approval as a move against the “Holy Alliance”, and Jay Sexton supports this view with his idea of a «collaborative competition» between Britain and the United States³. Differences in interpretation may be a question of degree. However, we must consider that the Monroe Declaration, recognized as a propaganda tool since the beginnings in Europe, in British Foreign Secretary George Canning’s opinion represented a principal threat in the cultural political sphere: «a division of the World into European and American, Republican and Monarchical; a league of worn-out Gov[ernmen]ts on the one hand, and of youthful and stirring Nations, with the Un[jited] States at their head, on the other»⁴.

Historiography is still debating about the exact measure of hostility and collaboration between Britain and the United States in the 1820s, and the special issue in *Diplomatic History* published in November 2023 on *The Monroe Doctrine at 200* reflects this debate⁵. What has received much less attention is how the more or less explicit rivalry of the United States with Britain contributed to redefine the political structure of the Americas during the global conflict that began with the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and which includes both the Second War of Independence of The United States (The War of 1812) and the Spanish-American Wars of Independence⁶. The aim of this article is to show why it is necessary to consider these fights as a single global war, and the message of December 2, 1823, as deeply linked to the dynamics of this long global conflict, and the related reconfiguration of the world. The use of the concept of “informal imperialism” may sound reductive, but the promise of aid, which is a key element in this theory on 19th century empires inspired by the Marshall Plan, was undoubtedly a weapon of political influence used by the United States in the Americas, even if this weapon was

¹ J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America*, Hill and Wang, 2011, chapter 3.

² S. E. Morison, *The Origin of the Monroe Doctrine, 1775-1823*, in *Economica*, No. 10, 1924.

³ J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine*, cit. “Collaborative competition” is a section’s title in chapter 2.

⁴ H. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827*, G. Bell and Sons, 1925, 43, 159.

⁵ *Forum: The Monroe Doctrine at 200*, in *Diplomatic History*, No. 47, 2023.

⁶ A limited exception is D. Besseghini, *The Anglo-American Conflict in the Far Side of the World. A Struggle for Influence over Revolutionary South America*, in *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi*, No. 54, 2020.

a propaganda tool, which later became an invented tradition⁷. Even if the United States were in no position to provide concrete assistance in the unlikely event of a European attack on the new Spanish American states, Monroe's message postulated a hemispheric sentiment in the sphere of peoples' rights, which served to reaffirm the defensive interests of the United States and their desire to be influential, at least morally, in the Americas.

The morally charged message was accompanied by significant statements of principle in favour of the birth of an American system, republican and autonomous from Europe. It set out a political agenda. However, according to the traditional narrative – a more robust interpretation than recent revisionist views –, the real author of the declaration, John Quincy Adams, used it to disengage from a British proposal for collaboration that implied renunciation of future US expansion in Spanish America⁸.

In August 1823, the British Foreign Secretary Canning proposed to the US envoy in London, Richard Rush a joint declaration affirming a non-interference principle in independent Spanish America⁹. It was immediately clear that the United States did not like the British proposal to add reassurances that the Anglo-Saxon powers would not expand into the former territories of the Spanish monarchy, nor London's wish to postpone the recognition of Spanish American states. While the British attempted to use collaboration with the United States as a single knight's move on the European and American chessboard, President Monroe's message of December 2, 1823, made it clear that the US would not be tied to Britain's coattails.

Based on the idea that the British had already changed their mind, Jay Sexton suggests that US refusal of Canning's proposal for a joint declaration is a myth¹⁰, but it is not. First because Rush, the envoy in London, stated that he had refused the British conditions since the first moment¹¹. Second, because the fact that Canning had already secured the more valuable French declaration of non-interference in Spanish America was unknown in the United States in December 1823. The drafting of the Monroe's message preceded the news of Canning's reconsiderations. Monroe's message represents, therefore, an independent choice to partially discontinue the friendly attitude towards London¹². News on the British agreement with the French ambassador Polignac were enclosed only in Rush's communication

⁷ J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine in an Age of Global History*, in *Diplomatic History*, No. 47, 2023. On informal imperialism and the Marshall Plan: R. Robinson, *Oxford in Imperial Historiography*, in D. Fieldhouse, F. Madden (Eds.), *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth*, Croom Helm, 1982, 43, 45. See also: R. Robinson, J. Gallagher, *The Imperialism of Free Trade*, in *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., No. 6, 1953; W. Roger Louis, *Imperialism: the Robinson and Gallagher Controversy*, New Viewpoints, 1976; D. Besseghini, *Pax Britannica. Il dibattito sull'imperialismo informale ottocentesco in America Latina*, in *Passato e Presente*, No. 108, 2019; B. Attard, *Informal Empire: The Origin and Significance of a Key Term*, in *Modern Intellectual History*, No. 20, 2023.

⁸ N. Guyatt, *The Adams Doctrine and an "Empire of States"*, in *Diplomatic History*, No. 47, 2023, embraces the revival of this more robust view. Cfr. J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine in an Age*, cit., 850 where a sharp statement refers to a much more nuanced reconstruction in G. McGee, *The Monroe Doctrine, A Stopgap Measure*, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, No. 38, 1951.

⁹ Canning to Rush, August 20, 1823; Rush to Canning, August 23, 1823; Rush to Adams, August 23, 1823; Canning to Rush, August 23, 1823; Rush to Canning, August 27, 1823; Rush to Adams, August 28, 1823; Canning to Rush, August 31, 1823; Rush to Adams, September 8, 1823, all in W. Manning (Ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin-American Nations*, Vol. 3, Oxford University Press, 1925, 1478-1487.

¹⁰ J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine in an Age*, cit., 850

¹¹ Rush to Adams, October 2, 1823, in W. Manning (Ed.) *Diplomatic Correspondence*, Vol. 3, cit., 1494.

¹² Communications about the end of the negotiations for a joint British-US declaration came with Rush's letters to Adams of November 26 and December 27, *Idem*, 1503-1512. On the date of receipt of such communications in 1824: G. McGee, *The Monroe Doctrine*, cit., 238. Rush's letter of October 10, 1823, which marked the beginning of Canning's cooling on the joint declaration, was received by Adams on November 19 (J. Monroe, *Writings, Including a Collection of his Public and Private Papers and Correspondence*, Vol. 6, Putman's Sons, 1902, 390-391). This document had an influence in fueling US apprehensions on Britain's ambiguous position towards the Holy Alliance, but in November 1823, in the United States, it was inferable from it that perhaps something had happened in London with relation to Spanish America, not what it had happened. This ignorance is crucial.

of December 27, 1823¹³. In other words, although the airing of a possible British-US collaboration on the issue of Spanish American independence had already had the effects hoped for by London in Europe (as we will see), in the United States this was not known, and the presidential message represented a gesture of emancipation from the former mother country, which was considered in need for US help. The United States did not feel part of and did not want to be part of a British world system¹⁴. Canning's proposal for a joint declaration on Spanish America was first discussed in the US Cabinet meeting of November 7, 1823. Adams thought that a future enlargement of the Union to include some American peoples, particularly the colonists in Texas and the Cubans, should not be dismissed.

We have no intention of seizing either Texas or Cuba. But the inhabitants of either or both may exercise their primitive rights and solicit a union with us. They will certainly do not such a thing to Great Britain. By joining with her, therefore, in her proposed declaration, we give her a substantial and perhaps inconvenient pledge, and really obtain nothing in return¹⁵.

Expansion into the Spanish territories was not immediately possible, but in time it might be. The fate of the Spanish territories on the Pacific coast was also uncertain. It was Adams who had secured Spanish recognition not only on US possession of Florida but of a north-western border, something that gave the US a solid claim on the Pacific coast¹⁶.

To understand the motives behind Monroe's message and why it was a negative response to the British (and not just a message for internal use, nor part of the cooperation plan with London), we need to understand how the global unfolded and how the United States became the main undeclared antagonist of British interests in the Americas. London continued to fear US influence in Spanish America for decades, after the War of 1812, well before the US-Mexican War, and British agents kept trying to contain it.

From the 1790s to the 1820s, the political geography of the Americas was completely redefined. Despite the United States' relative weakness, its discreet interventions in Hispanic America represented one major worry for Britain after the crisis of the Spanish monarchy. British imperial agents tried to foil US influence through the most disparate initiatives, which pushed Britain to adopt the mantle of the main European power friendly to the Spanish American independence cause, which, at least right after the victories in Spain against Napoleon, was not in London's plans¹⁷. Especially during the War of 1812 against the United States, and again in the phase marked by the leadership assumed by Restoration France in containing liberal and radical pressures in Europe and the Americas, and culminating at the Congress

¹³ W. Manning (Ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence*, Vol. 3, cit., 1495 (consider the footnote).

¹⁴ J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine in an Age*, cit., 851; Id. *The British Empire after A.G. Hopkins's American Empire*, in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, No. 49, 2021. M.-W. Palen, *Empire by Imitation? US Economic Imperialism within a British World System*, in M. Thomas, A. Thompson (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2018. Debate on the concept of a British World System is related to that on informal empire, and to different views on "local collaboration" in settlers' societies, starting from Robinson's essay on *Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration*, in R. Owen, B. Sutcliffe (Eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, Harlow, 1972; *The Excentric Idea of Imperialism, with or without Empire*, in W. Mommsen, J. Osterhammel (Eds.), *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, Allen and Unwin, 1986. Also: J. Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970*, Cambridge University Press, 2009; J. Vernon, *The History of Britain is Dead; Long Live a Global History of Britain*, in *History of Australia*, No. 13, 2016, 26; B. Attard, *Informal Empire*, cit.

¹⁵ J.Q. Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, Vol. 6, Lippincott and Company, 1875, 178-179.

¹⁶ N. Guyatt, *The Adams Doctrine*, cit., 825-826. See also: P. Brooks, *Diplomacy and the Borderlands: The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819*, University of California Press, 1939.

¹⁷ But the attitude was again different in 1809-1811: D. Besseghini, *Imperialismo informal e indipendenza: los británicos y la apertura del comercio en el Río de la Plata*, in *Illes i imperis*, No. 23, 2021.

of Verona in 1822, Britain felt threatened in its strategic interests by the maritime, commercial and semi-diplomatic presence of the United States in Spanish America and acted to ensure that the United States did not have the structural and relational power necessary to gain a special influence over the revolutionary governments¹⁸. The rise of a hemispheric community, in fact, had never been in the interests of the hegemonic power on the seas, because it called into question the security of British interests in spaces fundamental to control the oceans, such as the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic and the American Pacific coast. Let us look at how the Monroe Declaration should be interpreted as an implicit anti-British move within the context of the tacit clash between Britain and the United States for influence in Hispanic America¹⁹. Although the move was premature, it opened a whole new political scenario.

2. A HEMISPHERIC COMMUNITY IN THE GLOBAL WAR

President Monroe's message of December 1823 gave form and substance to a dream of hemispheric autonomy that had grown out of the culmination, in the Age of Revolution, of the centuries-old struggle between European empires for control of routes, trade, and strategic positions on the oceans. From the mid-1760s, the reorganization of the Atlantic imperial systems for war produced various forms of popular resistance to the abolition of traditional privileges and consuetudes. Conventional wisdom has seen this resistance as the principal motor of independence in the American territories, especially from Britain and Spain²⁰. However, inter-imperial conflicts were undeniably among the direct causes of the success of such revolutionary movements, and not just their indirect driving force.

Since the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the rivalry between France and England marked a long series of inter-imperial conflicts for the control of global trade and for hegemony in Europe, culminating with the Napoleonic Wars. These wars pitted the French project of global "Bourbon space" against British interests. France was gradually ousted from India (where it had been the first European power to establish a significant dominion), while Britain lost a good part of its American colonies, thanks to the support of the Bourbon monarchs to the rebels during the US War of Independence²¹. The League of the Armed Neutrals took anti-British positions as well²². During the American Revolution, the Spanish Bourbons formally opened doors to trade between Spanish American territories, neutral powers, and the rebellious settlers, and this opened the space of the Spanish Empire to US merchants²³. Madrid took to its logical conclusion a policy aimed at strengthening the Spanish empire

¹⁸ D. Besseghini, *Consoli, mercanti e marinai in fondo al mondo. La Guerra del 1812 in America del Sud*, in M. Sioli (a cura di), *War Hawks, gli Stati Uniti nella guerra del 1812*, Franco Angeli, 2019.

¹⁹ F. Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain over Latin America, 1808-1830*, Johns Hopkins Press, 1929; A. Whitaker, *The United States and the Independence of Latin America, 1800-1830*, Norton and Co., 1964.

²⁰ On the famous definition of the Bourbon Reforms as a «second conquest»: J. Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1973, 1-37. This view has been successfully challenged by John Fisher, François-X Guerra, Annick Lempérière, Stanley and Barbara Stein, Regina Grafe, Gabriel Paquette, and others.

²¹ O. Chaline, P. Bonnichon, C.-P. de Vergennes (Eds.), *La France et l'indépendance américaine*, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008; B. Smith, *Les États-Unis de l'Inde*, in *La Révolution française* [En ligne], No. 8, 2015; D. Stoker, K. Hagan, M. McMaster (Eds.), *Strategy in the American War of Independence: A Global Approach*, Routledge, 2010; M. Vaghi, *Claude-François-Parfait Boutin en Inde et aux Mascareignes (1782-1786). La France en Asie à l'époque de la révolution américaine*, Mimésis, 2024. On previous French expansion in India, M. Vaghi, *Between Commerce and Conquest: Franco-Anglo-Indian Relations in the Middle of the 18th Century*, in *Rendezvous*, No. 5, 2022.

²² L. Müller, *The League of Armed Neutrality*, in D. Stoker, K. Hagan, M. McMaster (Eds.), *Strategy*, cit., 202-220.

²³ See Javier Cuenca Esteban's work, e.g., *Trends and Cycles in U.S. Trade with Spain and the Spanish Empire, 1790-1819*, in *The Journal of Economic History*, No. 44, 1984.

through alliances of interest, i.e., commercial reforms such as the *comercio de negros*, the *comercio de colonias* and above all the *comercio de neutrales*, that favoured exchanges between “colonies” but not with the heart of Spain’s rival empires, especially Britain²⁴. The Bourbon dynasty, symbol of absolutism, thus unwittingly offered institutional support for stronger inter-American relations. Exchanges between settlers from different imperial traditions in the Americas became massive and almost free²⁵. In this context, the “peripheries” began the process of becoming new centres. The Bourbons ended up creating the material basis for the birth of an American hemispheric community—a side effect in their imperial strategies that paved the way for the political theory of the two hemispheres of de Pradt, Jefferson, etc.²⁶.

From the point of view of London, Paris, and Madrid, it was a struggle for the strategic spaces and resources of the West, but from an American perspective the cooperation and synergy between the settlers of all the rival empires meant that the main imperial barriers to reciprocal exchange were falling. US trading communities established in the Spanish colonies despite residential restrictions against non-Catholic and foreigners. They were defended by unofficial consuls, unofficially recognized by Spanish authorities²⁷. Particularly because of their freedom to trade with the Spanish territories in wartime, US merchants soon became leading players in the global trade. Trade with Spanish America gave the United States the opportunity to become the main intermediary in the Atlantic during the wars that followed the French Revolution. The French Revolution was itself, at least in part, a consequence of the French intervention in support of the Anglo-American colonists and the financial problems it left behind, which might have been avoided if France had also won in India (and indeed, the last battle of the American Revolution was a French victory in India) – a success that had been very near, but London had recognized US independence as soon as the French threat to India became concrete²⁸. The United States played a crucial role in connecting global Spanish merchants to economic spaces closed to them by mercantilism and war²⁹. This greatly strengthened the US position as a maritime and commercial power. During the “French Wars”, US merchants became the main intermediaries in the global circulation of Spanish American silver, which fuelled trade with Asia. By 1790, the United States was the leading exporter to China of the *real de a ocho*, the epoch’s global currency, produced mainly in Mexico³⁰.

After the destruction of most of the Franco-Spanish fleet at Cape Trafalgar in 1805, US intermediation became even more essential, but it also rekindled tensions with Britain. The preference of Jefferson’s party for France was evident, and it was fuelled by widespread Anglophobia³¹. The United States became

²⁴ On these reforms literature is too broad to be quoted. I mention: S. Stein, B. Stein, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759-1789*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003; Id., *Edge of Crisis: War and Trade in the Spanish Atlantic, 1789-1808*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

²⁵ J. Fisher, *Commerce and Imperial Decline: Spanish Trade with Spanish America, 1797-1820*, in *Journal of Latin American Studies*, No. 30, 1998; A. Pearce, *British Trade with Spanish America*, Liverpool University Press, 2007.

²⁶ On the origins of the two hemispheres’ theory: A. Whitaker, *The United States*, cit., 105 ff.

²⁷ R. Nichols, *Trade Relations and the Establishment of the United States Consulates in Spanish America, 1779-1809*, in *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, No. 13, 1933; F. De Goey, *Consuls and the Institution of Global Capitalism, 1783-1914*, Routledge, 2016.

²⁸ D. Stoker, K. Hagan, M. McMaster (Eds.), *Strategy*, cit., 51.

²⁹ S. Marzagalli, *Establishing Transatlantic Trade Networks in Time of War: Bordeaux and the United States, 1793-1815*, in *The Business History Review*, No. 79, 2005; J. Cuenca-Esteban, *British “Ghost” exports, American Middlemen, and the Trade to Spanish America, 1790-1819*, in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., No. 71, 2014.

³⁰ A. Irigoin, *The End of a Silver Era: The Consequences of the Breakdown of the Spanish Peso Standard in China and the United States*, in *Journal of World History*, No. 20, 2009, 210.

³¹ L. Peskin, *Conspiratorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812*, in *Journal of American History*, No. 98, 2011.

a competing maritime power, neutral and unassailable. London tried to curb this, appealing to one of the many instrumental interpretations of the neutrals' rights to which warring power resorted, arguing that neutrals were attackable when trading with "the enemy"³².

Before 1808, Jefferson attempted exploiting his party's synergy with Napoleonic France against the interests of Napoleon's weak Spanish ally, even threatening a rapid, spontaneous descent of US forces to Mexico City. In an era in which the exploration and colonization of several regions in the Americas was embryonic and the borders were uncertain and changeable (like the Louisiana purchase demonstrates), the idea of triggering an independence process in Spanish America through military expeditions from the US, and/or creating buffer states between the United States and the Spanish Empire, was seriously taken into consideration. Not even the US borders were indisputable, as demonstrated by the so-called Burr Conspiracy, for which former vice president Aaron Burr was charged with treason (and acquitted) in 1807, accused of planning to secede the West from the Union and invade Mexico. Filibustering expeditions against Spanish settlements were often tacitly supported by the US government, and they gave bargaining power vis-à-vis Europe. But semi-spontaneous ventures straddling conquest and liberation could wittingly or unwittingly play into European plans for "imperial security", for example, the British semi-official plans to trigger an independence process in Spanish America to remove it from Napoleon's influence, when Spain was Napoleon's ally. Frontier movements in the United States could, theoretically, facilitate such a plan. In 1805 the Miranda expedition to liberate Venezuela, conditionally supported by the British government (as revealed by new evidence and historiography), should have intertwined with the expeditions in Mexico General Wilkinson denounced³³.

The new position of the United States as a maritime trading power led to growing conflicts with Britain. President Jefferson's reaction to the British attacks on US neutral ships was the 1807 embargo against both French and British trade. Contrary to the mainstream narrative³⁴, this was not a useless gesture but a wise move to weaken Britain in the context of Napoleon's Continental Blockade. Indeed, combined with Napoleon's Milan Decree, the embargo cut off Britain from indirect trade with Spanish America through neutrals, and thus from Spanish American gold and silver (Spanish America at the time was the main producer of both³⁵) in a context of war and financial distress³⁶. But in 1807-1808 the transfer of the Portuguese royal family to Brazil (another gold producer), the opening of Brazilian trade, and of massive contraband with South America from there, prevented an economic disaster for Britain. Both Napoleon's Tilsit system and Jefferson's embargo crumbled in 1809, after it was clear that Britain fully controlled the South Atlantic from her Rio de Janeiro naval station, and her traders had re-gained the lion's share in the Atlantic trade³⁷.

³² G.E. Sherman et al., *Orders in Council and the Law of the Sea*, in *The American Journal of International Law*, No. 16, 1922.

³³ *The Trials of the Honb. James Workman, and Col. Lewis Kerr [...] for an expedition for the conquest and emancipation of Mexico*, Bradford & Anderson, 1807 (this document is consultable in the Miscellanea Vidua Collection at the Accademia delle Scienze in Turin, a "global archive" of printed material which I have been studying during the last four years); *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, Vol. 8, 1851, 321; W. Kaufmann, *La política británica y la independencia de la América Latina, 1804-1828*, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1963, 20-23; J. Lewis, *The Burr Conspiracy*, Princeton University Press, 2017; D. Besseghini, *The Space of Imperialism: An Informal Consul on the Banks of the River Plate*, in *Nuova Rivista Storica*, No. 107, 2023.

³⁴ K. O'Rourke, *War and Welfare: Britain, France, and the United States 1807-14*, in *Oxford Economic Papers*, No. 59, 2007.

³⁵ On this point, I thank James Torres for sharing with me his unpublished manuscript *Currents of Gold in a Sea of Silver, 1770-1810*, thus helping me in my research on Spanish American coin and bullion.

³⁶ The Bank of England was facing a dramatic reserves' crisis: P. O'Brien, N. Palma, *Danger to the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street?*, in *European Review of Economic History*, No. 24, 2020.

³⁷ R. Caillet-Bois (Ed.), *Mayo Documental*, Vol. 9, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1965, 70-73.

After Joseph Bonaparte became king of Spain in 1808, anti-French resistance in the Hispanic world allied with Britain, and all Spanish America declared itself loyal to Ferdinand VII of Bourbon, who was considered the legitimate king. The movements in the Americas against the central government of anti-French Spain, but still in the name of Ferdinand VII of Bourbon, did not go against British interests. On the contrary, they responded to the British notorious plan to prevent France from expanding its control from Spain to Spanish America, in the case of a French victory in the Peninsular War³⁸. If the French conquered all of Spain, Hispanic America could continue fighting for the rights of Ferdinand VII against Napoleon. Therefore, a relative British support, especially in the year 1810, was not for *independence* from the Spanish Monarchy (in the event of a declaration of “absolute” independence, the new states could establish friendly ties with France) but for *autonomy* from the central government in Spain in the name of the king deposed by Napoleon. The “rebellious” territories would thus remain within the anti-French alliance. Removing the “colonies” from the central government’s authority kept their destinies separated from Spain’s fate, whatever the outcome of the Peninsular War.

When Napoleon realized that the *Juntista* movement and the revolutions *in the name of Ferdinand VII* in America strengthened the British position, he proclaimed himself in favour of Hispanic America’s *absolute* independence, if it had no contact with Britain³⁹. For Napoleonic France, the absolute independence of the Spanish American colonies was a means of removing these territories from the naval protection and political-economic influence of Britain. It was clear that the French Navy after Trafalgar would not be able to assert control over Spain’s empire if its territories had not accepted French control voluntarily, but in the absence of sufficient naval protection from France, transatlantic trade would have been impossible during a war with Britain. Therefore, Napoleon did not insist on the rights of his brother, Joseph I, over the Spanish Indies. New Spanish American governments, neutral in the war, could have defended their rights to free trade, and therefore to trade with France, as the United States was doing.

The United States became the channel through which France could get connected to Spanish American “rebels”. France went so far as to start preparing with Washington the recognition of Venezuela, the only absolute independence proclaimed during the Napoleonic Wars, even though Joseph Bonaparte still held the Spanish throne⁴⁰. The French Foreign Minister Bassano proposed sending military aid to the independentists via the United States, which had become the operations centre of French agents in Spanish America⁴¹. In the same context, there is a little-known Franco-Venezuelan attempt to obtain a bull from the Pope that would sanction Rome’s favour towards Spanish American (revolutionary) peoples, based on a precedent during the Italian campaigns⁴².

³⁸ This “plan” has been analyzed in Besseghini, *Imperialismo informal*, cit., but it is also mentioned in classical works of Robert Humphreys, William Kaufmann, John Street, Timothy Anna. Also: *Communication of Charles Stuart to the Foreign Office*, September 15, 1809, in The National Archives, Kew, UK (TNA), Foreign Office, General Correspondence before 1906, Spain (division FO 72), Vol. 90 (hereafter FO 72/90).

³⁹ *Le Moniteur Universel*, December 14, 1809, quoted in W. Robertson, *France and Latin American Independence*, Oxford University Press, 1939, 75.

⁴⁰ *Idem*, 72-104. See Barlow to Monroe, September 29, 1811, in W. Manning (Ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence on the Independence of the Latin American Nations*, Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, 1925, 1372-1373; A. Whitaker, *The United States*, cit., 55.

⁴¹ Russell to Monroe, September 2, 1811, Barlow to Monroe, September 29, 1811, and Barlow to Bassano, January 8, 1812, in W. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, Vol. 2, cit., 1371-1373; T. Hawkins, *A Great Fear: Luís de Onís and the Shadow War against Napoleon in Spanish America, 1808-12*, University of Alabama Press, 2019.

⁴² P. de Leturia, *Conatos Francovenezolanos para obtener, en 1813, del Papa Pio VII una encíclica a favor de la independencia hispano-americana*, CSIC, 1952.

After the 1810 revolutions in Spanish America, the US government sent emissaries and agents to the “rebellious” provinces, one of whose implicit goals was to push these territories towards “absolute” independence, i.e., not only independence from the anti-French government in Cadiz, whose authority the provincial juntas did not recognize, but from the Spanish nation as well as the Bourbon dynasty. Absolute independence would have put in question Spanish American territories’ anti-French position in the global war led by Britain, and on the eve of the United States’ Second War of Independence in 1812, figures in Madison’s government like Robert Smith pursued severing the imperial ties in the Spanish territories⁴³. The US Consul General in South America, Joel Poinsett, also advised for absolute independence⁴⁴. The main reason was obvious then, even if it is underestimated by historians today. The absolute independence of the rebellious Spanish American territories would weaken Britain, which was in the interests of both France and the United States. But while European powers were ambiguously building possible alliances with the “rebels”, especially to obtain silver and gold necessary for the war in Europe, the United States were concerned about defence against real or perceived threats coming from Europe, including the former mother country’s attitude on neutral trade. The struggle of the United States against Britain in the name of «free trade and sailors’ rights» culminated in the War of 1812. France, however, was soon absorbed in the European campaigns and had to drop the American question in the same 1812, thus preventing an effective alliance in the Atlantic, but also preserving US neutrality in the global war.

The porous and uncertain US border with the Spanish Empire in Mexico was perceived as a vulnerability, and, in the hope of a future definition of the border, too explicit actions could not be taken against anti-French Spain, which controlled parts of Mexico⁴⁵. However, it was not until the end of the European conflict that it became clear that anti-French Spain would emerge victorious. Until then, uncertainty drove adventurers who were more or less formally in contact with the US government to embark upon political or military actions that would add to the political chaos necessary for more advantageous agreements, and to control border territories perceived as insecure⁴⁶.

The United States could not take sides between French and anti-French Spain explicitly, because that would have enmeshed them in the increasingly uncertain European conflict but starting with the War of 1812 they occasionally sided against the interests in America of (anti-French) Spain, an ally of Britain with whom they were now at war. To do this, they sought to increase their influence in South America through the informal joint work of Consul Poinsett and David Porter, a naval officer whose actions in the Pacific forced both Britain and Spain to react. Porter offered protection to autonomist Chile, the so-called *patria vieja* (1810-1814), representing a maritime threat to the loyalist viceroyalty of Peru. Meanwhile, through his influence on the Carrera family’s party and other subjects, Poinsett was building a space of US influence in Chile and actively pushing the region towards its absolute independence⁴⁷.

⁴³ Smith to Poinsett, June 28, 1810, in W. Manning (Ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence on the Independence of the Latin American Nations*, cit., Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 1925, 6-7, Monroe to Poinsett, April 30, 1811, in *Ibidem*, 11; Barlow to Bassano, January 8, 1812, in W. Manning (Ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence*, Vol. 2, cit., 1373; A. Whitaker, *The United States*, cit., 55-66; R. Nichols, *William Shaler*, in *The New England Quarterly*, No. 9, 1936.

⁴⁴ D. Parton, *The Diplomatic Career of Joel R. Poinsett*, The Catholic University of America, 1934, 15-16.

⁴⁵ On revolution and independence in Mexico, see: M. De Giuseppe et al. (Eds.), *Otras miradas de las revoluciones mexicanas (1810-1910)*, Juan Pablos Editor, 2015, in particular M. Benzoni’s essay on the 1810 global context.

⁴⁶ R. Nichols, *William Shaler*, cit., T. Hawkins, *A Great Fear*, cit. An example of US reassurances to the Spanish Ambassador after 1815, Monroe to Onís, June 10, 1816, in W. Manning (Ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence*, Vol. 1, cit., 31-35.

⁴⁷ Recent different interpretations in D. Besseghini, *The Anglo-American*, cit., and D. Hardy, *The Royal Navy’s Intervention at the Beginning of Chile’s Independence Process*, in *Historia*, No. 56, 2023.

It was not just a matter of weakening the British enemy during the War of 1812, but of protecting the United States' own independence, which many believed could still be questioned in the ongoing global war. Chile was strategic for US trade with Asia and as a base to undermine the theoretically Spanish control of the Pacific and residual British interests on the western coast (such as Oregon). Valparaíso was the Atlantic key to the Pacific. Chile therefore represented the unfulfilled ambitions of the United States on the western coast. It is no coincidence that during the War of 1812, Porter was defeated at Valparaíso by a British fleet sent to conquer Astoria, a US "colony" on the Pacific coast of North America⁴⁸.

3. THE US ROLE IN SOUTH AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

In the midst of his hunt for Porter's small fleet in the Pacific, the British captain James Hillyar had been commissioned by the viceroy of Peru to mediate an agreement between the loyalist vicerealty and Chilean autonomists after the defeat of the US captain in South American waters (in the context of the War of 1812). This was the only on-the-ground implementation of the British plan for mediation between Spain and the rebellious colonies, which London had proposed to Cadiz in 1811⁴⁹. It failed, however, because the commercial opening advocated by Hillyar was not accepted by the viceroy of Peru, who, as soon as the long-awaited Spanish troops arrived, disavowed the agreement and reconquered Chile, weakened by internal struggles and Hillyar's defeat of the US captain (which had also led to the flight of the US Consul)⁵⁰. In other words, the end of this phase of US influence in Chile meant the end of the *patria vieja*, in the context of the loyalist reconquest of several American territories. But the collaboration between Britain and Spain in the Americas, tested in the case of Chile, did not last⁵¹. The British did not want to lose the opportunity to trade once they had gained it, as it had happened with Chile. The policy of mediation had shown its limits in its only practical (informal) experiment.

The presence of British merchants in South America had non-economic implications: according to the British interpretation of the law of nations, it justified the presence of warships to protect trade. Britain used it before Spain and the independentist governments to assert its right to trade with everyone⁵². Yet this interpretation was quite similar to the one that Britain had refused to recognize vis-à-vis the United States and other neutrals during the previous wars. Such naval presence, in turn, constituted a garrison of the South American Atlantic coast, which, given how the routes worked, was key to all the oceans (Indian and Pacific, as well as the Atlantic). At least one *de facto* independent territory had to remain, to give meaning to the British mediation and to open up trade. The network of the British unofficial consul, Robert Staples, worked to preserve the independence of Buenos Aires by facilitating the liberation of Montevideo from Spain, just as Hillyar in Chile was working to mediate with Cadiz in anti-US capacity. The reason was clear: Spain would not give up its commercial monopoly easily and with the end of the Napoleonic

⁴⁸ D. Besseghini, *Anglo-American Conflict*, cit., 40-45; Lloyd Keith, *The Voyage of the Isaac Todd*, in *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, No. 109, 2008. See also Andrew Lambert's research work.

⁴⁹ W. Kaufmann, *La política*, cit., 74-75; an interesting document is the *Dispatch privately communicated to Mr. Wellesley [1811]*, TNA FO 72/108, ff.148-155v.

⁵⁰ V. Rodríguez Casado, J.A. Calderón Quijano (Eds.), *Memoria del gobierno del Virrey José Fernando de Abascal y Sousa*, Vol. 2., Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1944.

⁵¹ C. Webster, *Castlereagh and the Spanish Colonies I. 1815-1818*, in *The English Historical Review*, No. 105, 1912, 80-81, 89-90; W. Kaufmann, *La política*, cit., 112.

⁵² D. Besseghini, *The Space*, cit., 177; W. Kaufmann, *La política*, cit., 76-82; Castlereagh to Wellesley, March 14, 1815, and annotations, in TNA, FO 72/172.

wars, the British veto on the deployment of large Spanish forces in the Americas fell. If a restored Spain had retaken Buenos Aires, the key to South America (and it would have been easy from Montevideo), Britain would have had less bargaining power and would probably have found itself excluded from access to the region, as before 1808⁵³. Supporting Spain in the reconquest in exchange for commercial privileges would have been a risky move for London, too tied to the operation's success, and would have opened the way for other powers, namely the United States, to explicitly support the independence fighters⁵⁴. After 1815, several Bonapartists had taken refuge in the United States alongside Joseph Bonaparte, some of whom hoped that the opportunity would arise to free Napoleon from Saint Helena⁵⁵.

After the War of 1812, the US government backed away from a "policy" of informal support for Spanish American independence⁵⁶. However, this did not put an end to the initiatives of adventurers, such as the many US initiatives to arm privateers in the service of the new republics, or the US involvement in the independence campaign of the Spanish hero Xavier Mina in Mexico (financed by British subjects too)⁵⁷. Miguel de Carrera, who had fled his country during the Spanish reconquest, looked to the United States for the men and means to liberate Chile – a moot endeavour, because Chile was liberated by San Martín –, thanks to the business network of David DeForest, who was later closely linked to the government of Director Pueyrredón in Buenos Aires, and of John Jacob Astor, the founder of Astoria and king of US trade with China. Meanwhile the rival faction of O'Higgins and San Martín began to receive more and more informal British assistance⁵⁸.

Even without entering the conflict directly, the United States appeared as a dangerous ally of the independentists in the eyes of Restoration Europe. The British were concerned about the massive US sale of mostly European weapons (surplus from the Napoleonic Wars) to Hispanic America and about the US privateering activity under Spanish American flags, as those promoted by DeForest⁵⁹. Informal aid to the same cause, but to different groups, was therefore necessary for Britain to deter the creation of a US sphere of influence, especially in the Southern Cone. It was rumoured among European diplomats that this was the main reason behind Britain's informal support for Bolívar and San Martín: a clandestine aid that was considered a fact at the time, despite British declarations of neutrality, and which recent research has confirmed⁶⁰. Among other things, San Martín bet on

⁵³ D. Besseghini, *The Space*, cit., 185-189.

⁵⁴ C. Webster, *Britain and the Independence of Latin America*, Oxford University Press, 1938, 14.

⁵⁵ E. Ocampo, *The Emperor's Last Campaign: A Napoleonic Empire in America*, University of Alabama Press, 2009.

⁵⁶ R. Blaufarb, *The Western Question: Geopolitics of Latin American Independence*, in *The American Historical Review*, No. 112, 2007, esp. 750.

⁵⁷ M. Ortuño Martínez, *Xavier Mina en los Estados Unidos (1816)*, REDEN, No. 17-18, 1999; Id., *Xavier Mina: Guerrillero, liberal, insurgente. Ensayo bio-bibliográfico*, Universidad de Navarra, 2000, K. Racine, L. Graham, *James A. Brush's Memoir of the Mina Expedition to Liberate Mexico, 1817*, University of New Mexico Press, 2020. There is a manuscript collection on US private support to Mina in Yale University Library. On British help: G. Jiménez Codinach, *La Gran Bretaña y la independencia de México, 1808-1821*, FCE, 1991, 302.

⁵⁸ D. Besseghini, *The Weapons of Revolution: Global Merchants and the Arms Trade in South America*, in *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business*, No. 8, 2023.

⁵⁹ D. Besseghini, *The Space*, cit. 177-196; Id., *The Weapons*, cit.; G. Graham, R. Humphreys (Eds.), *The Navy and South America, 1807-1823*, Navy Records Society, 1962, 247. DeForest recently re-gained attention, along with informal rivalries and agents. Along with Besseghini's research on his arms trade (*The Weapons*, cit.), see: E. Bassi, F. Prado, *Foreign Interaction and the Independence of Latin America: Local Dynamics, Atlantic Processes*, in M. Echeverri, C. Soriano, *The Cambridge Companion to Latin American Independence*, Cambridge University Press, 2023, 106. It is unclear why the authors state that DeForest paid 13,4 % of the total customs revenues for his imports derived from corsair activities, as the quoted source does not give it. He paid a smaller percentage which includes imports untied to privateering.

⁶⁰ The concrete forms of this aid can be analysed through the story of the British imperial agent Staples, in the case of the preparation of the Chilean fleet: D. Besseghini, *The Space*, cit., 191-201.

British fears, and with good reason. He persuaded the British agents to indirectly help him prepare the Chilean fleet to attack the Spaniards in Peru, based on the news, perhaps unfounded, that Carrera had previously agreed to US aid in exchange of the transfer to the United States of strategic bases north of Cape Horn⁶¹. Convinced that US influence in the independence process would increase the risk of Napoleon's liberation, which could only be saved by naval adventurers like DeForest's privateers in the service of Buenos Aires (who once almost succeeded), Restoration France decided to enter the thorny issue of Spanish-American independence⁶². Some French officials devised a plan communicated to Madrid and accepted by Pueyrredón's government, to recognize the independence of Chile and Río de la Plata as a single Bourbon monarchy, implicitly in exchange for the cessation of hostilities in Peru. In the French plan, Peru, Mexico, and the Philippines would remain Spanish⁶³. Informal knowledge of this plan, itself a reaction to the influence that the United States was gaining through private military aid, most probably was one reason that further encouraged the British agents to support San Martín. With the liberation of Lima, in fact, the French plan would no longer have made sense. In the end, the Buenos Aires government that had negotiated with the French, fell. It was defeated by the same "Oriental" *caudillos* against whom Pueyrredón had unsuccessfully appealed to San Martín for help⁶⁴.

The new government of the Province of Buenos Aires denounced the negotiations with France as high treason, because there was a risk that they were in fact a plan for Franco-Spanish reconquest. Indeed, a French army was supposed to arrive with the new king in the River Plate. At the same time a great Spanish expedition from Cadiz was most likely destined for Peru, from where it would be easy to reach the River Plate, and the French forces. Thanks to this denunciation, the British were able to present French negotiations as a violation of the Aix-la-Chapelle agreements, which laid down a precise procedure, shared by the European powers, for settling disputes between Spain and its colonists⁶⁵.

Spurred on by the scandal of the French plans that London itself had created and considering the Aix-la-Chapelle agreement as broken, the British government began the process of recognizing the independent republics in 1820 without waiting for the agreement of the whole European "concert"⁶⁶. After the Riego Revolution in Spain had stopped the Cadiz expedition, the Foreign Office hoped to persuade liberal Spain to recognize Spanish American independence, or at least to accept British mediation. Foreign Secretary Castlereagh therefore politely rejected the proposal to proceed with a joint recognition made by the United States, which having finally secured the signing of the border treaty with Spain, wanted to bring Britain into a position clearly favourable to Latin American independence⁶⁷. Contrary to British official expectations, however, negotiations between the liberal Spanish government and the independentists failed.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, R. Blaufarb, *The Western Question*, cit., 747.

⁶² See at the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (AAE) in La Courneuve and Nantes the correspondence of the French consul-general in Brazil and the ambassadors in the United States and Britain.

⁶³ The only detailed, though debatable, account of these plans is still W. Robertson, *France*, cit., 129-177.

⁶⁴ Staples to Hamilton, March 19, 1819, in TNA, FO, 72/227, also D. Besseghini, *The Space*, cit., 198-199.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, C. Webster, *Britain*, cit., 15.

⁶⁶ This meant that Britain established official relations with the Spanish-American envoys for the first time.

⁶⁷ A classic reading: D. Waddell, *Anglo-Spanish Relations and the 'Pacification of America' during the Constitutional Triennium*, in *Anuario de estudios americanos*, No. 49, 1989.

4. THE MESSAGE OF DECEMBER 2, 1823

When France obtained partial approval at the Congress of Verona to attack liberal Spain, it was the British who asked the US representative in London to proceed jointly with a declaration against the interference of European powers in America. But Britain included in said proposal a proviso that both powers would refrain from expanding into Hispanic America. Despite his personal distrust of “hawks” on Spanish America like Henry Clay (at the time), Adams saw such expansion as natural, as it was in the right of settlers, in territories such as Mexico, to enter the Union if they wanted to⁶⁸. This point was not negotiable, but the Monroe (Adams) Declaration did not reject the British proposal openly. The message was intended to raise the stakes in relations with Britain and, above all, to publicly mark fundamental principles that could not be renounced. America belonged to the Americans, it was republican, and all the countries of Europe, which were implicitly and indiscriminately identified with monarchical tyranny, were urged not to interfere with its future trajectory. European intervention against the new republics would be considered a threat to the security of the United States.

Adams had decided to proceed separately from Britain, just as Canning did in London. The famous Polignac Memorandum of October 9, 1823, made cooperation with the United States unnecessary for Britain. However, while the declaration of December 2 was being discussed and prepared in the United States, Canning’s decision not to go ahead with the joint declaration with the United States was not yet known (it would be in February 1824). Perhaps Adams had miscalculated or, on the contrary, by responding with a provocation he had avoided humiliation. A certain cooling of British intentions was inferable from despatches he received in November, but its measure was unclear⁶⁹.

Britain had sought guarantees of non-interference from the two main powers that had acted indirectly in Hispanic America, the United States and France, but the French guarantee proved to be more important when absolutist France invaded liberal Spain in 1823. This agreement was made public in the form of a transcribed dialogue between French ambassador Jules de Polignac and British Foreign Secretary Canning. The famous Polignac Memorandum, indeed, gave the explicit guarantee – which the United States refused to give –, that France would not «appropriate to Herself any part of the Spanish Possessions in America, or [...] obtain for Herself any exclusive advantages»⁷⁰. The acceptance by Bourbon France of the independence of Spanish America and the return of absolutism in Spain were part of the same “gentlemen’s agreement” between France and Britain. This aspect, although well known, has not been sufficiently considered in recent analyses⁷¹. The Polignac Memorandum was the public formalization of one of Britain’s three conditions to France prior to the French invasion of Spain, on the base of which Britain did not oppose the restoration of absolutism in Spain – the guarantee that France would not interfere «by force or menace» in the Americas⁷². France would not help Spain in reconquest. Polignac implicitly accepted that British recognition would not depend «upon Spain, but upon time and circumstances»⁷³. Canning wanted the first official envoys to Hispanic

⁶⁸ See the direct quotation from Adams at the beginning of this article.

⁶⁹ Rush to Adams, October 10, 1823, in W. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, Vol. 3, cit., 1500-1503. See also the footnote 11, above in this article.

⁷⁰ Quoted in H. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy*, cit., 115.

⁷¹ On this point, I agree with J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine in an Age*, cit., 849; H. Temperley, *Foreign Policy*, cit., 114.

⁷² *Idem*, 83-87, 114-118.

⁷³ *Idem*, 116.

America to circulate the Polignac Memorandum. It was the assurance of independence, signed by the British Foreign Office⁷⁴.

Monroe's message came a good month later. It was propagandistic in nature and seemed to tarnish the image of British mediation policy more than the explicitly legitimist policy of the Holy Alliance. It presented the effort to restore absolutism in Europe as a prelude to a possible restoration in the Americas. By portraying itself as the only power willing to defend the freedom of the "sister" republics as if it were its own (though it was unclear under what circumstances and by what means), the United States scored an important point in the struggle with Britain for moral influence in Spanish America. Even after the expulsion of the Spanish from their last strongholds in Peru and Mexico in 1825, the Spanish American public did not fully realize that reconquest had become impossible. This was partly due to the effect of Monroe's message, as the perception of a sort of defensive alliance implicitly fostered a sense of threat⁷⁵. Britain's assimilation to the Holy Alliance gave the United States a potential advantage in negotiating the first commercial treaties with the republics on the eve of the Panama Congress⁷⁶.

The limits of Monroe's declaration lie in the reluctance of the United States to govern a hemispheric space that it sought to control only to the extent necessary for its own security⁷⁷. Hispanic America was the "backyard", a barrier between the home and the world, to protect the (white, Protestant) civilization of a narrow American elite from the chaos that European powers could still bring⁷⁸. Monroe's message created a myth of solidarity with two aims: to give the impression of a general republican alliance in the Americas, and to limit Europe's (including Britain's) room for manoeuvre in proposing compromises. Given that the Hanover themselves could hardly have been called upon as monarchs in the Americas in the absence of a reliable candidate (the most reliable being the widowed son-in-law of the British king), the British cabinet was in no hurry to place a Habsburg or a Bourbon on an American throne. And as we will see in the case of Mexico, the vague promise of a commitment to defend the hemispheric community against external threats was a double-edged sword for the United States. As Canning helped to clarify, it was unworkable⁷⁹. But the declaration presented the United States as a special friend to the new republics. While US envoys rushed to negotiate trade agreements, Britain accelerated the independence recognition process. It did so through trade treaties, carefully written to avoid that trade privileges could be used to establish "American" political alliances, or that the US shipowners and sailors who had caused so many problems with privateering under Spanish American flags were hidden behind diverse Latin American fleets. Reading the reasons behind the Foreign Office's corrections to the first draft of the treaty with Mexico, it seems that even the most favoured nation clause served to prevent special American alliances⁸⁰.

In Mexico, the US minister plenipotentiary, the same Poinsett we met in Chile, helped to establish a strong pro-US radical party based on some York Rite masonic traditions⁸¹. The exponents of this party – particu-

⁷⁴ Planta to Hervey, October 15, 1823, and Planta to Hervey, O'Gorman, McKenzie, February 24, 1824, in TNA, Foreign Office, General Correspondence before 1906, Mexico (FO 50), Vol. 3 (hereafter FO 50/3).

⁷⁵ H. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy*, cit., 162-168.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*. J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine*, cit., 79.

⁷⁷ Adams' reply to Colombian minister Salazar made it clear: A. Whitaker, *The United States*, cit., 555-558. David Weber used the category of "Hispanophobia" to describe the US narrative of Texas history: D. Weber, *The Spanish Legacy in North America and the Historical Imagination*, in *The Western Historical Quarterly*, No. 23, 1992, 8-9.

⁷⁸ M. Mariano, *L'America nell'Occidente: Storia della Dottrina Monroe*, Carocci, 2013, 64-65.

⁷⁹ H. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy*, cit., 126-130.

⁸⁰ Canning to Ward, September 9, 1825, in TNA, FO 50/9.

⁸¹ J. Smith, *Poinsett's Career in Mexico*, in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, No. 24, 1914, 87.

larly Lorenzo de Zavala and José María de Alpuche e Infante, founders of the *Yorkino* party in synergy with Poinsett – made great use of the press, spreading the idea that the Holy Alliance was slowly preparing an attack from Cuba (whose defences had been strengthened by the Spanish) and that London would not intervene pretending not to see the surreptitious help France and Russia were supposedly giving to the Spanish under the pretext of defending their remaining imperial spaces⁸². This happened while the US government was trying to obtain a Mexican revision of the 1819 Adams-Onís border treaty. It seems Poinsett believed the French threat from Cuba was real, as he communicated in his cyphed despatch of September 22, 1825, to the new Secretary of State, his old friend Henry Clay⁸³. The same day, in a communication to Canning, the British minister in Mexico Henry George Ward denounced Poinsett's pro-US party in the Congress as a threat to Mexican stability⁸⁴. However, the Mexican president was not swayed by public pressure: he wanted to free Cuba and was disappointed by the United States, which had recognized Spanish rights on Cuba and other possessions⁸⁵. Mexico then granted Britain changes to the text of the trade treaty, which, as the correspondence between William Huskisson (president of the Board of Trade and former promoter of Bullion Contracts in Spanish America) and Canning shows, sought to limit US influence⁸⁶. The pro-US party then won the congressional elections, but this would not have given the United States any advantage – or borders' revision⁸⁷.

5. "MEXICO THE BUFFER": A BRITISH DREAM

After the Monroe Declaration, radical republicans in Latin America began to see the United States as a bulwark against European plans to regain control over the Americas, while moderates saw France as a centre of "Latinity" and a barrier against US expansionism, especially in Mexico⁸⁸. This enlarged internal political struggles.

When Mexico became independent in 1821, the Onís-Adams treaty, which had settled the question of the border between the United States and the Spanish empire in 1819, had to be ratified by Mexico. Poinsett was sent to Mexico with the task of changing the treaty in US favour, among other things⁸⁹. As we have seen, he cemented by masonic ties the *Yorkino* party, equipped to avoid any rapprochement with the Bourbons, Spain and her «Holy Allies». As demonstrated by the enormous debate generated by the writings of the Italian exile Orazio de Attellis di Santangelo on the Pan-American Congress in Panama, the *Yorkino* party spread anti-European propaganda by warning the public against an imminent attack by the Holy Alliance, which, according to the *Yorkinos* and their European exiles allies, Britain would not

⁸² V. Filisola, *Tercera parte. Si no se organiza el ejército perece la independencia*, Ontiveros, 1826; O. de Attellis, *¿En donde estamos? En Mexico, ó en Constantinopla?*, Ontiveros, 1826. In the Vidua Collection.

⁸³ R. Weber, *Joel R. Poinsett's Secret Mexican Dispatch Twenty*, in *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, No. 75, 1974.

⁸⁴ Ward to Canning, September 22, 1825, in TNA, FO 50/14. This was also the opinion of the Italian traveler Carlo Vidua, a friend of Poinsett. Archivio Storico di Casale Monferrato, Fondo Vidua, X 11.

⁸⁵ V. Delgado, *Los planes colombo-mexicanos de expedición conjunta para la liberación de Cuba (1820- 1827)*, in *Caribbean Studies*, No. 36, 2008.

⁸⁶ Huskisson to Canning, July 25, August 3, September 8, 1825, in TNA, FO 50/18.

⁸⁷ Pakenham to Dudley, January 14, 1828, in TNA, FO 50/42. Ward wrote that he did not know if Poinsett's plans to enlarge the US border by including Texas were supported by his government (Ward to Canning, February 21, 1827, in TNA, FO 50/31B). However, in his instructions of March 26, 1825, Secretary of State Clay did ask Poinsett to revise the border treaty and, on March 15, 1827, to buy territories in Texas (with Adams' agreement). Documents quoted in W. Manning, *Texas and the Boundary Issue, 1822-1829*, Texas State Historical Association, 1914.

⁸⁸ E. Shawcross, *Informal Empire in Latin America: Equilibrium in the New World*, Palgrave, 2018.

⁸⁹ See above in this text, footnote 79.

oppose, just as it had not opposed the French intervention in Spain of 1823⁹⁰. Only the United States would defend America.

This campaign took place in the context of Poinsett's negotiation on the bounders' issue and the first US-Mexican trading treaty. The United States' first minister in Mexico tried unsuccessfully to use the Monroe Declaration to gain a "moral" advantage. Yet his only result, as he himself lamented⁹¹, was that, despite the growing strength of the *Yorkino* party, its propaganda became offensive to the government and thus contributed to the failure of his negotiations. But Poinsett was unsuccessful mostly because of the Mexican Foreign Secretary Lucas Alamán's firmness in defending the 1819 agreement. The British representative – and Poinsett's main rival – Henry George Ward had a strong influence on leaders of the conservative and pro-European party⁹². He promoted an anti-US campaign by publishing Onís's memories on the 1819 treaty with Adams, in which, in Ward's words «a very good idea is given of the United States' designs on Texas»⁹³.

Many years ago, Fred Rippy was inspired to describe Canning's Mexican policy as «Mexico, the buffer», in relation to US expansion⁹⁴. His idea has not been sufficiently developed in the historiography, although some recent work has highlighted the continuation of this "buffer" policy into the 1830s⁹⁵. A rather influential branch of British historiography has regarded British policy in Latin America as non-interventionist, because it was not aimed at obtaining privileges⁹⁶. But this official stance was the logical consequence of the British desire to avoid the granting of any kind of privilege to rival powers. This explains why official non-interventionism was often accompanied by unofficial interventions, as we have seen in the case of South America.

Although in the twenty years after the Monroe Declaration the United States did not establish a hegemonic position in North America, the Foreign Office and the British agents on the ground did not doubt they could do so. Mexico was a barrier against any expansion of US economic or geopolitical control in the American space. The Gulf of Mexico was one of the most important neuralgic centres in the British war against slave trade, which had global maritime strategic implications⁹⁷. Texas was a barrier to US expansion towards the Pacific and Asia, in the Atlantic and the Caribbeans, and in the hemisphere. Events in Texas informed several international networks that operated both in relation to Mexican politics and to British and US policies. The rapid colonization by US immigrants was perceived as a threat by both Mexico and London. The study of these networks sheds light on what Stuart Reid has called a «secret war» over Texas⁹⁸.

⁹⁰ O. de Attellis di Santangelo, *Las cuatro primeras discusiones del Congreso de Panamá*, Ontiveros, 1826. J.M. Alpuche e Infante, *Grito contra la inhumanidad del Gobierno*, Alejandro Valdés, 1826; J.J. Fernández de Lizardi, *Si a Santangelo destierran, ya no hay justicia en la tierra*, Ontiveros, 1826 (in the Vidua Coll.).

⁹¹ W. Manning, *Poinsett's Mission to Mexico: A Discussion of his Interference in Internal Affairs*, in *The American Journal of International Law*, No. 7, 1913, 799. H. Templerley, *The Foreign Policy*, cit., 163-166.

⁹² Ward to Canning, September 6, 1825, in TNA, FO 50/14.

⁹³ Ward to Planta, April 8, 1826, "Private", and March 30, 1826, in TNA, FO 50/20, only the latter referred to in the official reply, Planta to Ward, June 20, 1826, in TNA, FO 50/19. Ward drawn costs on the Secret Service Account, but Planta replied that the Foreign Office must revise the book before. The principal point, however, was that Ward could not use this fund to pay for «balls and fêtes» (Ward's reply was that «not one sixpence» of these had been expended so: Ward to Canning, September 15, 1826, TNA FO 50/23). Eventually, Canning authorized to cover the costs on Ward's private account against his regular allowance.

⁹⁴ F. Rippy, *Historical Evolution of Hispanic America*, Crops and Co., 1932, 374, title of a whole section.

⁹⁵ W. Fowler, *Henry G. Ward's Mexico in 1827*, in *Journal of Latin American Studies*, No. 50, 2018, 284.

⁹⁶ This branch, still very influential, is inspired especially by Christopher Platt's works, especially *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy*, Clarendon Press, 1968.

⁹⁷ L. Bethell, *The Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, in *The Journal of African History*, No. 7, 1966.

⁹⁸ S. Reid, *Secret War for Texas*, Texas University Press, 2007.

Business groups and Britain's representatives in Mexico collaborated to implement political strategies for which they provided means. Each of the first three British official consuls in Mexico, Charles O'Gorman, Charles Mackenzie and Robert Staples (the same as in the River Plate), as well as Ward, can be linked to political and business networks of strategic importance. These were often interconnected and included international bankers such as the Barings; mining companies; merchants like Eustace Barron; powerful Mexican families, and key figures in the events of Texan independence. Analysing these networks illuminates in greater detail the formal and informal strategies and designs deployed by Britain and the United States over the fate of Northern Mexico and Texas⁹⁹.

Consul general Charles O'Gorman was linked to the interests associated with the Goldschmidt loan in Mexico through his brother George, and consequently to Francisco de Borja Migoni, the Mexican merchant who was serving as envoy in London. Borja Migoni had ties to the Minister of Finance Francisco de Arrillaga¹⁰⁰. Consul Charles Mackenzie, on the other hand, was the reference for a business group linked to the optician William Adams, later known as Rawson, and to the merchant-banker John Diston Powles, financiers of Arthur Wavell¹⁰¹. Wavell hunted mining concessions on behalf of the Anglo-Mexican Mining Association as well as concessions for the colonization of Northern Mexico. Also connected with Wavell were Ward and James Grant – a British physician, informer and an investor in the famous colony of Stephen Austin in Texas. In 1822, Wavell travelled to England as an agent of the first Mexican emperor, Agustín de Iturbide, with the goal, among others, of finding British settlers and investors for the colony that had been granted in concession to the US citizen Moses Austin. Wavell had met Austin in Chile, where they had both fought in the independentist army, and during Iturbide's reign he supported Stephen Austin's rights to the Mexican colony. But Wavell was unsuccessful in attracting British settlers. On the contrary, Austin succeeded in populating his Mexican colony with US settlers and eventually excluded Wavell from the project. Wavell tried to win concessions for rival settlements in northern Mexico, with the financial backing of a group of capitalists who, on the initiative of John Lubbock and with the initial support of Baring, had managed to establish a mining company. This group of investors appointed Wavell as their agent in Mexico, thanks to the good offices of Patrick Mackie, a secret emissary of Canning in Mexico, and of Consul Mackenzie¹⁰². The Adams-Powells group had an unexpected political ally in José Mariano de Michelena, the minister in London under Foreign Secretary Alamán, and the rival of Borja Migoni¹⁰³. Staples, consul in Guadalajara in 1823-24, had already acted as a British agent for the acquisition of silver and gold, first on behalf of the British Treasury, and later in connection with the Royal Navy. He was the promoter and commercial agent for the British mining company Real del Monte, for which Grant also worked¹⁰⁴. Since 1828, Grant was agent for the administration of the estate of Aguayo on behalf of the firm Staples & Co., which had bought this large

⁹⁹ On this point see: D. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, Yale University Press, 1992.

¹⁰⁰ Migoni to Arrillaga, August 21, 1823, in Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico, Hacienda pública, carpetas azules, galería 8, leg. 17, ex. 128, 1823, f. 3.

¹⁰¹ See the correspondence between these characters in TNA, *Exchequer: Private Papers and Exhibits, Supplementary* (E 192) Papers and Correspondence Relating to Arthur Wavell (5), hereafter E 192/5.

¹⁰² Adams to Wavell, March 6, 1825, in TNA, E 192/5.

¹⁰³ On the Migoni-Michelena rivalry: K. Racine, *Deferred but not Avoided: Great Britain and Latin American Independence*, in W. Klooster (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Age of Atlantic Revolutions*, Cambridge University Press, 2023, 419.

¹⁰⁴ D. Besseghini, *The Space*, cit., Id., *Commercio britannico e imperialismo informale in America Latina: Robert. P. Staples tra Río de la Plata, Perú e Messico*, Università di Trieste, 2016.

estate, together with Baring & Co¹⁰⁵. From this position Grant built part of his career in the North. It is worth noting that Grant had important links with the Saltillo elite, at the time of the federalist and later independence movements in which he was a protagonist. Staples was also active in trade between the Americas and Asia. His role as an exporter of silver from Mexico was inherited by the Spanish-Irish merchant and British vice-consul Eustace Barron¹⁰⁶. Barron would become the father-in-law of Antonio Escandón, brother of the *agiotista* Manuel. Their sister, María de la Luz, was romantically linked to the Irish Richard Pakenham, the British *chargé d'affaires* after Ward, and from 1835 to 1842 Minister Plenipotentiary to Mexico (later British Ambassador to the United States), who was Robert Staples' nephew¹⁰⁷.

The Mexican government hoped to control the colonization of Texas by US settlers through an acculturation process, but as in Louisiana before, it did not work¹⁰⁸. It was clear that settlement of US colonists in Northern Mexico would soon make the US union with Texas a reality, or at least, this was the main fear of political figure such as the Minister of Justice, Miguel Ramos Arizpe, an ex-*Yorkino* from Coahuila, who supported the union of his state with Texas¹⁰⁹. Yet British influence in Mexico – independent from the party in power after 1828 – could have checked US expansion in the region.

James Grant, the protagonist of the book by Stuart Reid mentioned above, was a Scottish physician formerly employed by the East India Company in India and Canton, and a relative of Lord Glenelg, Vice President of the Board of Trade and later Secretary of War and the Colonies. According to Reid, Grant was recruited as an agent of the British government in 1823¹¹⁰. Recent research put in a new light Reid's interpretation. Formally, Grant had two assignments as a physician: for the British legation in Mexico; and for the Real del Monte Company promoted by Consul Staples, the same kinsman and client of the late British Foreign Secretary Castlereagh who had provided crucial indirect support to San Martín's liberation campaign and opposed US influence in Buenos Aires. Through his firm, Staples promoted the first international loans to Argentina, Chile, Peru and Mexico in order to guarantee the desired political stability and the establishment of a political framework for British trade and investments. The point here is that, through the Real del Monte and the Parras Estate companies in Mexico, Staples indirectly paid also for Grant's activities in Northern Mexico¹¹¹. As early as 1823, Grant contacted Austin to invest in his Texan colony. He spent three years gathering information on the colony, which sometimes he passed on to Ward, who used it to oppose the expansion of US settlers¹¹². At the same time, Wavell received the theoretical support of the Mexican government for the establishment of a colony. The project was of political and strategic importance to both the British and Mexican governments, for it would cut off communications between Louisiana and Texas¹¹³. Consul Mackenzie, through the

¹⁰⁵ T. Kinder, *Mexican Justice and British Diplomacy: the case of Thomas Kinder as regards the Parras Estates purchased by him in joint account with Messrs Baring, Brothers, and Co.*, 1837.

¹⁰⁶ J. Mayo, *Commerce and Contraband on the Mexico's West Coast in the Era of Barron, Forbes & Co., 1821-1859*, Peter Lang, 2006; D. Besseghini, *Los irlandeses en Hispanoamérica y la reconfiguración comercial: 1797-1824*, in *Macrohistoria*, No. 3, 2022; On Barron's partner, Forbes (another vice-consul) and his knowledge of plans for the independence of California, see: D. Weber, *La frontera norte de México, 1821-1846: el sudoeste norteamericano en su época mexicana*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988, 358.

¹⁰⁷ D. Besseghini, *The Space*, cit., 169, 181, 204.

¹⁰⁸ D. Weber, *La frontera*, cit., 222-225.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 54.

¹¹⁰ Reid, *Secret*, cit., 13.

¹¹¹ D. Besseghini, *Commercio*, cit., 484-485; Id., *The Space*, cit.; Id., *The Anglo-American*, cit.; Id., *The Weapons*, cit.; T. Kinder, *Mexican Justice*, cit. Ward initially mentioned Grant as a political collaborator.

¹¹² S. Reid, *Secret*, cit., 14-19.

¹¹³ *Idem*, dispatch No. 18.

ubiquitous Staples, tried to finance Wavell's colonization plans in 1826 as well¹¹⁴. It was however uneasy to find non-US settlers for Wavell's colony¹¹⁵.

Communication between Mexico City and Texas was more difficult than between Texas and the United States because of poor roads. Ward's idea was to use a pro-British colony to cut off the communication routes that US settlers were building to link their colonies with the US¹¹⁶. He tried to combine Wavell's project for a colony in Texas with the project for a Cherokee colony in northern Mexico that would thwart US expansion in Texas. The Cherokee were harassed by US settlers, who had in several cases stolen their land through fraud or violence. They decided to petition the Mexican government for land, and the adventurer John Dunn Hunter was sent on the mission. Hunter had published a book in London about his life among the Indians, and he described himself as a Native American by adoption. Carefully concealing his role in the Cherokee application to the Mexican government, as he wrote to Canning, Ward wrote up the project for the Cherokee colony and had Hunter copy the text in his own handwriting. Ward then put Hunter in touch with Wavell, and through him got the application into the hands of the representative of Coahuila y Texas in the Senate. Ward also spoke in general terms of the idea to President Guadalupe Victoria. The Indian tribes would adopt Catholicism, settle down as farmers, and defend the frontier against aggressors and illegal settlers. Ward wrote to Canning: «A better opportunity would not easily be found of opposing a formidable obstacle to the designs of the United States upon Texas»¹¹⁷. However, as Poinsett reported to Clay, the government did not agree to settle the whole Cherokee nation in one colony but proposed to divide it¹¹⁸. Hunter returned among the Cherokees in May 1826 without further negotiating. Ward made two consecutive trips north, to the mining districts, gathering information for the Foreign Office on the British mining companies, which lately used for his book, *Mexico in 1827*¹¹⁹. Wavell also travelled north. After meeting the British Minister to the US in New Orleans, with letters of introduction from Ward, he returned to Northern Mexico during the Fredonia insurrection.

Between 1826 and 1827 settlers from the United States attempted to create a new independent state, Fredonia, after a dispute with Mexican authorities and old US colonists. It seems from the Austin Papers that Hunter had promised the rebels British troops and had convinced the Cherokees to support the uprising against the Mexican government in exchange for the land West of Nacogdoches, in a strategic place towards the US border. Yet the Cherokee soon abandoned their alliance with Fredonia¹²⁰. Austin and other US settlers fought with the Mexican army against their insurgent compatriots. In March 1827, Ward wrote to London that Austin opposed the uprising because he disapproved of the alliance with the Cherokee and the land grants it entailed¹²¹. There were rumours that the Fredonia uprising was a British initiative to create a pro-British state in northern Mexico. Ward advised the Foreign Office to consult Wavell for information: «It is upon the execution of his project

¹¹⁴ Rawdon to Mackenzie, September 9, 1825; Mackenzie to Staples, January 2, 1826, in TNA E 192/5.

¹¹⁵ D. Weber, *La frontera*, cit., 225-226.

¹¹⁶ Ward to Canning, March 19, 1826, in TNA FO 50/20.

¹¹⁷ The whole story of Hunter's application is narrated in: Ward to Canning, March 19, 1826, *Ibidem*. This plan is recurrent in classical historiography on Texas.

¹¹⁸ Poinsett to Clay, March 18, 1826, quoted in W. Manning, *Texas*, cit., 231n.

¹¹⁹ This information by Ward is available in TNA FO 50/24 and 50/25. The book (still widely consulted) was published by Colburn in London in 1828.

¹²⁰ S. Reid, *Secret*, cit., 21-26.

¹²¹ Ward to Canning, March 31, 1827, in TNA FO 50/31B.

of European Colonization that General Victoria relies for the reestablishment of the authority of Mexico in Texas»¹²².

Canning's idea of Mexico as a buffer against US expansion in the Americas was compatible with that of a pro-British independent Texas or a buffer between Mexico and the US, like the Cherokee colony. Ward used the Fredonia uprising to show that the US settlers indeed represented a threat. Ward had also influenced, through the Countess of Regla, the appointment of Manuel de Mier y Teran as inspector in Texas, with the charge of analysing the situation of the borders with the United States¹²³. They shared information to counter US expansion¹²⁴. Mier y Teran promoted the colonization of Texas by Mexican settlers, but his project was thwarted by political divisions in Mexico¹²⁵. The Foreign Office overall approved Ward's work and in February 1827¹²⁶. Ward's successor in Mexico was Pakenham, the nephew of Staples, whose policy was in continuity with Ward's, albeit more discreet. Poinsett was expelled from Mexico, just when the *Yorkino* party gained the presidency, because – as President Guerrero told Pakenham – he did not want to appear: «acting under the influence of the Agent of a Foreign power»¹²⁷.

In 1828 the Real del Monte Mining Company dismissed Staples from his position as the company's banker. It also dismissed Grant, who became the manager of the Parras Estate Company, the vast property bought by Staples and Baring in northern Mexico from the Marquese of Aguayo¹²⁸. Grant settled in northern Mexico and became a member of the Congress of the State of Coahuila y Texas, where in 1834 he was instrumental in the unilateral proclamation of a new state of the Mexican federation, Texas. According to Reid, Grant's goal was to become the president of a pro-British state, and for this he participated the 1836 Texan independence conflicts, and he died at Matamoros – news Pakenham transmitted to the Foreign Office¹²⁹. Grant had tried to convince the Texas government to seek an alliance with local caudillos who were enemies of Antonio López de Santa Anna and planned to create a Greater Texas within the Mexican Confederation, or in the event of Santa Anna's victory, an independent confederation of northern Mexican states, the Republic of the Rio Grande, which would have prevented the creation of an independent state dominated by US settlers. As late as 1842 this project was overall still considered valid by the British. Yet British influence in Mexico did not prevent the United States from reaching the Pacific and gaining greater control of the Gulf of Mexico and Central America, as Britain had to concede with the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in 1850.

6. THE FOX AND THE GRAPES

One of the main theorists of the idea of a British non-interventionism in Spanish America after 1807, the renowned Latin-Americanist Christopher Platt, in 1968 wrote:

¹²² Ward to Canning, February 21, 1827, in *Ibidem*.

¹²³ Ward to Canning, March 26, 1826, in TNA FO 50/20; See also: W. Manning, *Texas*, cit., 239.

¹²⁴ Ward to Canning, March 25, 1826, in TNA FO 50/20.

¹²⁵ D. Weber, *La frontera*, cit., 235.

¹²⁶ Planta to Ward, February 15, 1827, in TNA FO 50/31A.

¹²⁷ Quoted in F. Rippey, *Rivalry*, cit., 299, and 289 where Pakenham expressed this wish.

¹²⁸ T. Kinder, *Mexican Justice*, cit.; Pakenham communicated much on the subject with London. His correspondence on the subject is too extensive to be quoted, it is available in TNA FO 50/42, TNA FO 50/80A, TNA 50/83, and especially in TNA FO 50/85. I will analyze this case elsewhere.

¹²⁹ S. Reid, *Secret*, cit., 1.

British Governments were simply not interested in Latin American territory and, in the absence of any political threat or any danger of a partition leading to the erection of tariff barriers, British diplomatists had no motives to intervene further than protect the persons and property of British Subjects¹³⁰.

And yet, Platt argued, in 19th-century Central America the security of the existing colonies here and in the Caribbean, the passage from Panama to Australia and Peru, the protectorate over the Mosquito, did represent key interests for Britain. But this changed around 1850, after which Britain fully accepted the informal hegemony of the United States in the Caribbean and Central America, not out of fear of the growing US strength, following Platt, but because the centre of British imperial interests had long since shifted away from America. It is not clear why an interest with global implications (as it had always been in America, control of the sea lanes and of silver were needed for expansion in Asia) could be important until 1850 and irrelevant immediately afterwards¹³¹.

The war of 1846-48 against Mexico made it clear that the United States was the greatest military power in the Americas. During that war, as is well known, the United States expanded decisively South and West into former Spanish territories which at the time represented more than half of Mexican territory.

From London's point of view, a direct conflict with another power over Spanish America was to be avoided at all costs. This was a rule since 1815 at least, as such event could challenge the favourable order established in Vienna, potentially triggering a new global war¹³². London could still intervene with its navy to "neutralise" the Gulf of Mexico in the event of an attack on Cuba, which was still a Spanish possession. It was precisely to avoid inadvertently giving rise to a further extension of informal British control in the Gulf of Mexico that the United States had rushed to recognize Spanish rights over Cuba after the Monroe Declaration¹³³. America for the Americans thus immediately revealed itself as a negotiable principle. But faced with the failure of plans to turn Texas into a kind of buffer state, Britain did not intervene because it could not impose mediation in a war between two states with a large territorial border in North America, in which it would not have been enough to blockade the ports under the pretext of defending its own trade and subjects. Even the war against the slave trade was not a sufficient pretext to attack slave-owning states like Texas, and there was no military alliance with Mexico. Britain was global hegemon because it accepted to lose what it could not control. It could control free access to strategic areas, i.e. negotiate it on the basis of implicit threat of its naval power.

Platt's reconstruction was a response to Robinson and Gallagher's view of British informal imperialism in the Americas. They argued that «British intervention, in any case, became more difficult once the

¹³⁰ C. Platt, *Finance*, cit., 351.

¹³¹ Platt was aware of Consul Frederick Chatfield's desperate attempts to maintain Britain's position in Nicaragua and over the future Canal, but he argued that it was a personal initiative the Foreign Office disavowed (*Idem*, 41). However, failed initiatives must have a scapegoat, which satisfies everyone if it helps to avoid serious political crises. The golden rule of British foreign policy, when it was necessarily delegated to agents working at a distance, was «if it walks, it has legs». In Z. Steiner's critique of Platt's book (*Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy*, in *Historical Journal*, No. 8, 1970, 547) it is described as "a large intermediate area which fell between what local agents could do and what the Foreign Office would veto". On Chatfield, M. Rodríguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat in Central America: Frederick Chatfield Esq.*, The University of Arizona Press, 1964.

¹³² C. Platt, *Finance*, cit.; R. Blaufarb, *The Western Question*, cit.; D. Besseghini, *The Space*, cit.

¹³³ C. Webster, *Britain*, cit., 34-40; H. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy*, cit., 168-171. On the view of the United States over Cuba and the racial question behind local elite's loyalty to Spain: A. Lorini, *L'impero della libertà e l'isola strategica: gli Stati Uniti e Cuba tra Otto e Novecento*, Liguori, 2007, chapter 1.

United States could make other powers take the Monroe doctrine seriously»¹³⁴. This happened starting from the 1840s. Platt argued that London was happy to delegate the management of order in the Americas (a sort of civilising mission, on business' rules) to the United States¹³⁵. And yet, when we analyse the strength of British anxieties about the United States during the Spanish American independence process and up until the 1840s, declarations of disinterest in formal and informal US expansion in North America as far as Panama sound like those of the fox for the grapes.

¹³⁴ R. Robinson, J. Gallagher, *The Imperialism*, cit., 11.

¹³⁵ C. Platt, *Finance*, cit., 350; D. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, cit.