

**Congress and Woodrow Wilson's  
Military Forays Into Mexico  
An Introductory Essay  
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*One of the chief objects of my administration will be to cultivate the friendship and deserve the confidence of our sister republics of Central and South America.... We hold...that just government always rests upon the consent of the governed and that there can be no freedom without order based upon law and upon the public conscience and approval. We shall look to make these principles the basis of mutual intercourse, respect, and helpfulness between our sister republics and ourselves.*

—President Woodrow Wilson (March, 1913)

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*I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men!*

—President Woodrow Wilson (Nov., 1913)

### **Introduction**

President Woodrow Wilson is perhaps best known as the president who led the United States to victory in the First World War but then failed to win ratification of the peace treaty by refusing to compromise with the Senate on the League of Nations Covenant (Article X). He is less known for some of his earlier military exploits in Latin America. And yet, as some historians have noted, those incidents perhaps hold the key to his evolving world view and America's place in it as the shining beacon of democracy and freedom. Historian Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., sums it up as follows:

Wilson's idealism gradually acquired the character of a stern, crusading, self-righteousness—resulting, paradoxically, in high-handed, imperialistic interferences in the affairs of other countries that, playing up to feelings of pride, honor, and the cultural pre-eminence of the United States, foreshadowed popular backing for similar unilateral overseas “police” activities on a much grander scale after World War II.<sup>1</sup>

Josephy goes on to note that, “Wilson's military-like interventions in Nicaragua, Santo Domingo, Haiti, and Mexico—announced as necessary to save those nations from themselves—increased anti-Americanism throughout Latin America.”<sup>2</sup> The two epigraphs to this essay capture the two faces of this high-minded foreign policy. The first, from “A Statement on Relations with Latin America” that Wilson released shortly after his inauguration, emphasizes the expectation that

other nations will organize themselves along the same democratic principles as the U.S., serving the interests of the people, acting in the interest of peace and honor, protecting private rights, and respecting the restraints of constitutional provision.<sup>3</sup>

The second epigraph, about teaching the South American republics to elect good men, reflects Wilson's own impatience and paternalism towards those countries that don't organize themselves according to his idea of democracy. It was reportedly uttered to Sir William Tyrell of the British Foreign Office who was about to return to England and asked Wilson what his Mexican policy was. Commenting on this remark, the historian Burton Hendrick has written, "In its attitude, its phrasing, [this statement] held the key to much Wilson history."<sup>4</sup>

This essay will sketch one piece of that history, Wilson's futile attempts to influence the Mexican revolution and governments between 1913 and America's entry into World War I. If nothing else, these efforts should dispel any notion that such things as unilateralism, preemption, regime change, and imposing democracy by force of arms are somehow new to the American experience.

### **The Price of Recognition**

Wilson came to the presidency determined to set a different tone and standard for American foreign policy, and that began by repudiating past practices of recognizing any new foreign government, regardless of how it came to power or how it governed. Instead, he improvised a new policy of recognition, beginning with Mexico, based on something he would later refer to as "constitutional legitimacy." As Milkis and Nelson characterize it, the policy "implied the right of the American president to determine whether the Mexican government was adhering to its own constitution, and, beyond that, whether it was motivated by self-interest and ambition or by a sincere desire to eliminate despotism." To Wilson, explain these two authors, "the test seemed reasonable and honorable," but, "to the Latin Americans it was meddling in their internal affairs."<sup>5</sup>

Meddling in Latin American affairs was not a new American tendency. President Theodore Roosevelt had done it when American interests were involved, as did his successor, William Howard Taft. Taft sent Marines into Nicaragua in 1912 to put down an insurrection, acting without the advice of the Senate or a declaration of war. Taft's action served as a precedent for future presidents to use armed and clandestine intrusions to achieve their foreign policy ends without a war

declaration.

When Wilson entered the White House in 1913, the Mexican problem was already waiting on his desk. In 1911, Mexican liberals under Francisco Madero had ousted a 42-year old dictatorship and established a constitutional democracy. But the new government was short-lived when it was overturned by a military coup led by Victoriano Huerta in early 1913, and Madero was murdered. Although the State Department urged Wilson to immediately recognize the new regime, as was customary, Wilson was so shocked by Madero's murder that he withheld recognition. "I will not recognize a government of butchers," he remarked. Instead, he wanted to make clear his opposition to "those who seek to seize the power of government to advance their own personal interests or ambition."<sup>6</sup>

In April 1913 Wilson sent a journalist, William Bayard Hale to Mexico to report on the situation. Hale reported back that Huerta had launched "an assault on constitutional government" and that if the U.S. had any moral principles, it is to discourage violence and uphold the law. Hale's report confirmed for Wilson that Mexico's problems were basically political and that all would be well if Huerta would just hold to his promise of free elections. Wilson later sent another observer to Mexico, former Minnesota governor John Lind, who was not a practiced diplomat. He delivered a message to Huerta from the president, demanding that he hold immediate elections and that he not be a candidate himself. Lind's proposals were rejected and his mission was a failure.

Wilson appeared before a joint session of Congress on August 27, 1913, to report on these developments. Not discouraged, Wilson said, "We shall yet prove to the Mexican people that we know how to serve them without first thinking how we shall serve ourselves." America waits upon the development of Mexico, Wilson continued, but that can only be sound and lasting if it is the product of genuine freedom, a just and ordered government founded upon law. Yet, things had gotten worse rather than better, Wilson informed Congress:

War and disorder, devastation and confusion, seem to threaten to become the settled fortune of the distracted country. As friends we could wait no longer for a solution which every week seemed further away. It was our duty at least to volunteer our good offices—to offer to assist, if we might, in effecting some arrangement which could bring relief and peace and set up a universally acknowledged political authority there.<sup>7</sup>

Wilson went on to tell the joint session that the Lind mission had probably failed because the authorities in Mexico City did not realize the spirit of friendliness and determination of the American people in the matter, and did not believe that the present administration spoke through Mr. Lind for the American people. The effect of this “unfortunate misunderstanding” had left Mexico “isolated and without friends who can effectually aid them.” Wilson added, “We can not thrust our good offices upon them,” and that the situation must be given more time to work itself out. “We can afford to exercise the self-restraint of a really great nation which realizes its own strength and scorns to misuse it.” And he concluded, “The steady pressure of moral force will before many days break the barriers of pride and prejudice down, and we shall triumph as Mexico’s friends sooner than we could triumph as her enemies....”<sup>8</sup>

Notwithstanding these new pleas for a democratic resolution of the conflict, in mid-October Huerta dissolved the Mexican legislature and arrested most of its opposition members. Obviously unhappy with these developments, Wilson sent Hale back to Mexico, this time to the northern part of the country to interview the rebel forces who called themselves, “Constitutionalists.” Hale was impressed by the rebels, but they would have no part of him or his suggestions or intervention. They made clear that if they succeeded in toppling Huerta, they would not hold elections until they had enacted “social and political reforms” by decree.

Based on this revelation, Wilson told the British that Mexico’s problems were not political but were economic. No peace in the country would be possible until “the land question” was settled, and the power of the landowners was crushed “in a fight to the finish.” Wilson consequently lifted the embargo on the sale of the arms to the rebels, but, beyond that, said he would avoid any intervention since it would likely “unite against the invading party all the patriotism and all the energies of which the Mexicans were capable.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Price of Tribute**

While Wilson seemed to understand well that nations would resent and resist intervention by other countries, his idea of what constituted intervention differed markedly from that of the “Constitutionalists” in Mexico who equated it with interference of any kind. To Wilson, however, intervention meant a full-scale invasion with the goal of imposing “a government upheld by a foreign power as a consequence of a successful intervention.” As historian Kendrick Clements notes on this

point, Wilson “defined intervention only as a conquest and believed that all other forms of pressure and interference were acceptable. Given that limited and eccentric definition, the ground was prepared for conflict.”<sup>10</sup>

That conflict erupted on April 9, 1914 when a whale boat of American sailors from the *U.S.S. Dolphin* went ashore for supplies in a prohibited zone of the port of Tampico. The sailors were promptly arrested by an officer and squad of General Huerta’s army. While parading the sailors up the streets of the town, the Mexican officer was met by an officer of higher authority who ordered him to return to the landing. Within an hour and one-half of the arrest, the sailors were released on the orders of the commander of the Huerista forces in Tampico, along with an apology. Later, an expression of regret was proffered by General Huerta himself who explained that at the time of the arrest, martial law had been in effect in Tampico, and orders had been given that no one was to land at the port. Admiral Mayo, the commander of the fleet, was not satisfied with the apologies, and demanded that the flag of the United States be saluted with special ceremony (a 21-gun salute) by the military commander of the port. The Mexicans did not comply with this demand of tribute.

On April 20, President Wilson went before a joint session of Congress to lay out the facts of the situation “which has arisen in our dealings with General Victoriano Huerta at Mexico City which calls for action, and to ask your advice and cooperation in acting upon it.” After outlining the facts of the Tampico incident, Wilson emphasized that “the incident cannot be regarded as a trivial one” because two of the men arrested were taken from the boat itself which was territory of the United States. Moreover, Wilson continued, a series of recent incidents had occurred “which cannot but create the impression that the representatives of General Huerta were willing to go out of their way to show disregard for the dignity and rights of this government and felt perfectly safe in doing what they pleased, making free to show in many ways their irritation and contempt.” He cited one example which occurred a few days after the Tampico incident, in which an orderly from the *U.S.S. Minnesota* was arrested and thrown in jail in Vera Cruz while ashore in uniform to obtain the ship’s mail. An official dispatch from the U.S. government to its embassy at Mexico City was withheld from authorities until demanded by the American Charge d’Affaires in person.<sup>11</sup>

Wilson told Congress that “the manifest danger of such a situation was that such offenses might grow from bad to worse until something happened of so gross and intolerable a sort as to lead

directly and inevitably to armed conflict.” That is why Wilson felt it was so important to press for more than just the apologies of General Huerta and his representatives, and “to sustain Admiral Mayo in the whole of his demand and to insist that the flag of the United States should be saluted in such a way as to indicate a new spirit and attitude on the part of the Huertistas.” Since Huerta has refused that salute, Wilson continued, he was now asking Congress for its “approval that I should use the armed forces of the United States in such ways and to such an extent as may be necessary to obtain from General Huerta and his adherents the fullest recognition of the rights and dignity of the United States, even amidst the distressing conditions now unhappily obtaining in Mexico.”

Wilson framed his request for approval of using armed forces by making clear he “could do what is necessary in the circumstances without recourse to the Congress” without exceeding his constitutional powers as president, but that he did not want to act in a matter of such possible grave consequences, “except in close conference and cooperation with both the Senate and House.” He also made clear that he was not talking about war with Mexico: “This government can, I earnestly hope, in no circumstances be forced into war with the people of Mexico....If armed conflict should unhappily come as a result of his attitude of personal resentment towards this government, we should be fighting only General Huerta and those who adhere to him and give him their support, and our object would be only to restore to the people of the distracted republic the opportunity to set up again their own laws and their own government.” Here was his differentiation between intervention (or interference) and mere assistance: “We do not desire to control in any degree the affairs of our sister republic....The present situation need have none of the grave implications of interference if we deal with it promptly, firmly, and wisely.”<sup>12</sup>

Leading up to his appearance before the joint session, Wilson had carefully laid the political and legal groundwork for his message. On April 14, for instance, Robert Lansing at the State Department sent Wilson a memorandum in response to a question the president had raised with Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan about “the constitutional power of the President to use force in compelling a foreign government to submit to demands made upon it.” The Lansing memorandum opened with the opinion that, “the power reserved to Congress to declare war does not include the enforcement of claims or demands by the display or use of force, or the making of reprisals.” These may be made in times of peace and, though they have the characteristics of war

by appealing to force rather than reason, “they are not deemed by governments to be actual warfare.” After citing precedents to back up this finding, Lansing cited one contrary precedent from Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson in 1793, in which Jefferson had opined that, “The making of reprisal on a nation is a very serious thing;” that remonstrance and refusal of satisfaction ought to precede; and that “when reprisal follows, it is considered an act of war, and never failed to produce it in the case of a nation able to make war.” Jefferson concluded, “if the case were important and ripe for that step, Congress must be called upon to take it; the right of reprisal being expressly lodged with them by the Constitution, and not with the Executive.” (7 Jefferson’s Works, p. 628)<sup>13</sup>

The following day, April 15, Wilson met with the chairmen and ranking Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs and the Senate Foreign Relations committees, and issued a public statement, explaining why he had sent all but one ship from the Atlantic fleet to Tampico. An account in the *New York World* listed nearly a dozen incidents, from arrests to slights and snubs of American envoys contained in the president’s indictment of the Huerta regime that formed a pattern and practice of “ill will and contempt for the American government on the part of Huerta.” According to the news account, Wilson told the committee chairmen and ranking members “that he would not fire a gun or land a man without first asking Congress for authority to do so,” and that if Huerta did not comply with the demands following the demonstration off Tampico, he would appeal to Congress for assistance.” The members of Congress reportedly left the White House convinced the president was acting in the best interest of the nation, and that if his demands were not complied with, the U.S. would be justified in taking extreme measures. The newspaper account even referred to plans being made for armed intervention, a blockading of all ports and the landing of men and seizure of government offices, depending on events. The congressional action would decide the plan of campaign to follow.<sup>14</sup>

On April 16 and 20, Wilson held press conferences at the White House in which he answered questions from reporters on the Mexican situation. On April 16, it looked like a resolution of the situation had occurred whereby Huerta would authorize the 21-gun salute to the American flag, and the U.S. would return the salute as a matter of courtesy and tradition. But, when Wilson was asked whether it was a “return of recognition of the Huerta government,” Wilson replied, “No, it is the return of a recognition. I mean it is a return of a courtesy. [since the U.S. did not recognize Huerta

as the legitimate head of the American government]. Wilson was also asked about his comments to the committee chairmen and ranking members the previous day that he would not resort to the use of force without first going before Congress, explaining his position, and obtaining “the sanction of Congress to whatever program you had in mind.” Wilson responded that was the case, though “nobody doubts, as I understand it, that the Executive would have the right to take the immediate steps necessary in a case like this just to obtain the recognition of the government’s dignity,” though, when Congress is in session, “it would be natural for the president to keep in close cooperation with them, no matter whether he had the authority to act without it or not.” The final question at the April 16 press conference was whether, “under international law we can land marines without that being construed as a declaration of war?” “Oh, yes,” Wilson replied.<sup>15</sup>

Later that same day, however, Wilson received word by telegram from his agent in Mexico, Nelson O’Shaughnessy, that the Minister of Foreign Affairs for General Huerta had refused, as mouthpiece for Huerta “absolutely to salute the American flag unconditionally.” The U.S. had refused to stipulate in writing that it would return the salute as a matter of courtesy, leading to the breakdown in the arrangements. At his April 20 press conference, Wilson advised reporters in his opening statements not to get the impression that the U.S. was about to go to war with Mexico. He was simply going to Congress to present a special situation and seek their approval in meeting that situation. Wilson said he was distressed to read in the morning’s papers that country was getting on fire with war enthusiasm. “I have no enthusiasm for war; I have an enthusiasm for justice and for the dignity of the United States, but not for war. And this need not eventuate into war if we handle it with firmness and promptness.” Wilson reiterated that he was going to Congress, even though it was not necessary for him to do so “because it would fall very short of a declaration of war, which lies only with Congress.” When asked whether his main purpose was the elimination of Huerta, Wilson replied, “Not of this act, no sir.” “To compel the recognition of the dignity of the United States?” he was then asked. “That is all we want, a full recognition of that dignity, and such a recognition that will constitute a guarantee that this sort of thing does not happen any more.”

Wilson subsequently met with his cabinet before going to Capitol Hill to address a joint session of Congress on the Mexican crisis. The cabinet approved a resolution drawn up by Robert Lansing at State. It was introduced in the House by Representative Flood, chairman of the House

Foreign Affairs Committee, and read as follows:

Resolved, That the President of the United States is justified in the employment of armed forces of the United States to enforce the demands made upon Victoriano Huerta for unequivocal amends to the Government of the United States for affronts and indignities committed against this Government by Gen. Huerta and his representatives.

The resolution was considered by the House the same day, and adopted, 337 to 37. As Republican Leader James Mann noted, though, if the incident had involved England, Germany, France, or another great power, there would be no clamor for a military response. But, because Mexico is weak, “We think we have the moral right to declare practical war against her.”<sup>16</sup>

The Senate took longer, referring the resolution first to the Foreign Relations Committee which reported it with an amendment that deleted the name of Huerta. The Senate began consideration of the resolution on April 21 and into the early morning of the next day. During the Senate debate, Senator George Norris (R-Neb.) deplored the demand by Wilson of flag salutes from small countries, predicting that, “a hundred years from now, when the world has advanced farther in civilization, this silly custom, this foolish rule, this international courtesy that has outlived its usefulness, will be forgotten and will be unknown, at least in practice.”<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, Wilson himself seemed to privately agreed with this view, according to Colonel House’s diary entry of April 15, 1904. House recommended that Admiral May be warned never again to do what he did at Tampico without first referring the matter to Washington. He should remember that the wireless had done away with the necessity for a commander to act on his own initiative. “The President agreed to this.” House illustrated his point by saying “that such things were as obsolete as dueling.”<sup>18</sup>

However, while the debate was still proceeding in the Senate on April 21, Wilson ordered a thousand marines and sailors ashore at the port of Veracruz to block the landing of the German ship *Ypiranga* which contained a shipment of arms for Huerta’s forces. Mexican naval cadets attempted to resist the invasion, killing 19 U.S. troops and wounding 71. But the Mexicans lost 126 of their own forces in the process, and another 195 were wounded.<sup>19</sup>

When word reached the Senate that the invasion had gone forward before the use-of-force resolution had been approved, Republicans reacted angrily. Senator Joseph L. Bristow (R-Kan.)

bitterly attacked Wilson for starting a war over a trifle and in direct evasion of the constitutional mandate that only Congress could declare war. The American invasion created an angry backlash across Mexico that brought the Huertistas and Constitutionals together. Thousands of Mexicans volunteered to go to war with the U.S., and mobs stormed American consulates. Stunned by this reaction, Wilson sent orders to the commander at Vera Cruz ordering him not to do anything that “might tend to increase the tension of the situation or embarrass” the American government. Plans to blockade the Mexican coast and to expand military operations were abandoned, and Wilson hastily accepted a mediation offer by Argentina, Brazil, and Chile (the ABC countries). Wilson told the ABC ambassadors that any settlement must include the entire elimination of General Huerta, an adamant stand that led to the failure of the negotiations in Niagra Falls, Ontario, in May and June 1914.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, Huerta became convinced that his own situation was hopeless as Constitutionals again stepped up their attacks on his forces, and he fled to Spain in mid-July. Wilson wrote to a friend that the administration’s position had “cleared the stage and made a beginning,” and that now “it should be possible to hold things steady until the process is finally complete.” Clements writes of this, “His words and the continued presence of American troops in Veracruz suggested that he did not yet understand that the Mexican definition of intervention was a great deal broader than his own.”<sup>21</sup>

### **The Price of “Hot Pursuit”**

With the departure of Huerta, things only worsened in Mexico as the various factions fought among themselves for control. Wilson was initially tempted to recognize the Pancho Villa whom he considered something of a Robin Hood, and seemed to be the most overtly pro-American of the Constitutionalist leaders. By June 1915, anarchy gripped Mexico, eventually resulting in the emergence of a faction dominated by Venustiano Carranza who had routed Pancho Villa and controlled most of the countryside. In October 1915 Carranza became president of Mexico. On October 19 Wilson joined with several other Latin American countries in granting defacto recognition to the Carranza government after it had pledged its commitment to constitutionalism, separation of church and state, public education, land reform by legal means, and respect for foreigners’ lives and property.

Pancho Villa reacted angrily to the American recognition, charging that Carranza had sold out to the gringos in return for the promise of an American loan. In January 1916, Villa seized and ordered 18 Americans shot at Santa Ysabel near the American border, and, on March 9, 1916, Villa and his armed band attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico, killing 17 Americans and wounding eight others before being driven off by the U.S. cavalry.

Following the two massacres, the Senate considered several joint resolutions authorizing military action in Mexico, but no votes were taken on any of them.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, demands for retribution were running high in the country and the Congress, and Wilson was under attack by Republicans as being weak. The situation in Congress was so volatile, according to one account, that if no action had been taken, there may have been an uprising.<sup>23</sup>

Wilson convened his cabinet on March 10 and they agreed with him that Villa must be pursued and captured. There was disagreement, however, as to whether the specific approval of Carranza for such an expedition should or could be obtained. Given the possibility that it might not be, the administration instead issued a statement announcing the pursuit of Villa and assuring the Mexicans that the U.S. did not mean an affront on Mexican sovereignty.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, once again Wilson tried to avoid any perception of intervention by narrowly defining it. The statement read in part that the operations of the U.S. government would be scrupulously confined to capturing Villa and “that in no circumstances will they be suffered to trench in any degree the sovereignty of Mexico or develop into intervention of any kind in the internal affairs of our sister Republic. On the contrary, what is now being done is deliberately intended to preclude the possibility of intervention.”<sup>25</sup>

On March 15, 1916, Wilson ordered General John Pershing into Mexico to pursue Villa, at the head of an expeditionary force of 6,000 troops (later increased to 12,000). The deeper Pershing’s troops pressed into Mexico, the louder Carranza’s protests became. With the expedition some 350 miles into Mexico, Carranza issued a statement asserting that, “there is no justification for any invasion of Mexican territory by an armed force of the United States, not even under the pretext of pursuing and capturing Villa to turn him over to the Mexican authorities.”<sup>26</sup>

The clear implication was Mexico would resist any invasion, though Wilson and Secretary of State Lansing concluded that it had only been issued for political reasons. However, on June 21

Pershing's troops clashed with Carranza's forces, resulting in the deaths of nine Americans and 30 Mexicans, with another 12 Americans and 43 Mexicans wounded. Moreover, 25 U.S. troops were captured. The next day, Wilson confided to his trusted advisor, Colonel House, that perhaps he had made an "error of judgment" in not withdrawing the troops when it became apparent they could not capture Villa. However, now he was confronted with a worse affront to the country, and Wilson took actions that seemed to indicate movement towards a full-scale war with Mexico, mobilizing nearly 130,000 National Guardsmen, and dispatching 30,000 regular troops to the border area—the largest concentration of U.S. forces since the Civil War.<sup>27</sup>

When Carranza released the U.S. prisoners, Wilson suggested the creation of a joint commission to resolve the immediate crisis and draft agreements on the future status of the border areas. Carranza reluctantly went along, and the commission met from September 1916 to mid-February 1917, but made no progress. In the meantime, Wilson ordered Pershing and his troops to return to Texas on January 16 with the news that Germany had resumed its submarine warfare against U.S. ships. The commission expired, but it had served its purpose. Subsequent difficulties between American oilmen and the new Mexican constitution that allowed for expropriation of surface lands and subsurface minerals for Mexican nationals and foreign countries who renounced the protection of their governments, failed to move Wilson to action. However, Secretary of State Lansing was sympathetic with the business interests and their calls for intervention and consequently was fired by Wilson. As Clements concludes, "By 1920 [Wilson] could no longer believe that American intervention would benefit the cause of progress in Mexico instead of the selfish interests of businessmen. Ironically, he could no longer justify intervention to himself. He gave up the policy not because he had decided it was mistaken or ineffective, but because its support by greedy men had corrupted it and made it unacceptable."<sup>28</sup>

### **Conclusion: In Pursuit of Balance**

Some of the characteristics demonstrated by President Woodrow Wilson during this period of American forays into Mexican territory and politics from 1913 to 1917 not only tell us a great deal about the thinking and behavior of our twenty-eighth president, but about the evolving basis of American foreign policy in the twentieth century. While some American military interventions abroad were executed to protect Americans lives and property, others were ostensibly carried-out

for higher, moral and humanitarian purposes. These include saving a country from the ravages of a civil war, brutal despotism, anarchy, starvation, or genocide, and, beyond that, to make it possible for those saved from such depredations to govern themselves freely and democratically. After all, our own country was founded on the principle of popular sovereignty and the belief that all people had the unalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Why shouldn't we now make it possible for other peoples of the world to enjoy the same blessings of liberty that we enjoy? As Wilson learned, it's not always self-evident to the people of other countries that our interventions are as benign as we say they are, and therein lies the rub. As historian Kendrick Clements concludes of this approach:

Benevolent motives, backed by seemingly unlimited force, tempted the Americans to intervene where they were not wanted and where they did not understand the situation. Moreover, they sought to force peoples to become democratic, a task that proved beyond the ability of even the strongest military expedition. Security concerns and economic interests played only small parts in determining this policy indeed, its main motive was genuine, albeit patronizing, benevolence. Its result was a dangerous, destructive, and ultimately unsuccessful moral imperialism.<sup>29</sup>

Members of Congress, meantime, can easily be whipped back and forth like so many reeds swaying in the winds of popular sentiment--from seeking military retribution for perceived attacks on our national pride, dignity, honor, or territory, to opposing humanitarian intervention on grounds that the situation does not directly threaten our national security. The constitutional lines of authority for using military force abroad may be sharply drawn or conveniently blurred, depending political conditions. But even in the early part of the twentieth century, there was already a body of authority that supported granting a much wider degree of flexibility to the president than was originally contemplated by the Framers.

As the constitutional scholar, Edward Corwin has noted, when it comes to the privilege of directing America's foreign policy, the Constitution is "an invitation to struggle" between the branches. It is an ongoing struggle that will never be finally resolved in favor of one branch or the other. Instead, the nature and outcome of the struggle will continue to vary from situation to situation, with popular sentiment often tipping the balance one way or another. It is that uncertainty that serves to remind both branches that neither can hope to dominate the other for long.

**Endnotes**

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12. Ibid, 473-74.
13. "From Robert Lansing, With Enclosure," April 14, 1914, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 29 (1979) 436-438.
14. "Wilson Tells Long Series of Affronts That Caused Action to Curb Huerta," New York Word, April 15, 1914, in *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 29 (1979), 440-443.
15. "Remarks at a Press Conference, " April 16, 1914, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 29 (1979), 450-53.
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17. Fisher, 51.

18. From the Diary of Colonel House, April 15, 1914, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 29 (1979), 448,

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22. Fisher, 51.

23. Clements, 101.

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25. To Robert Lansing, with Enclosure, The White House, 13 March 1916, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 36 (1981), 298.

26. Clements, 100

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid, 102-03.

29. Clements, 105.