JAIME RODRÍGUEZ O. HAS CONVINCINGLY REINTERPRETED Latin American independence as a transatlantic civil war between Spaniards. At stake was the fate of the old Spanish monarchy, to which they all belonged. Would it be preserved along traditional lines? If it were dissolved, what would replace it? What kind of social change would political transformation entail? Many of these questions remained unresolved after independence and continued to color the history of the new nations. Given the manifold repercussions of Spanish imperial collapse, it is understandable that historians of the subject are primarily concerned with understanding the “significand of independence to Latin America.” But focusing on the internal ramifications of independence risks overlooking not only its international consequences, but also the role of geopolitical forces in the conflict.

Between 1815 and 1820, as the international dimensions of Latin American independence intersected with the internal struggle, the collapse of Spanish rule produced a revolution in Atlantic power relations by sparking international competition over Spain’s former empire. This international rivalry over the fate of Spanish America can be termed the “Western Question.” Like the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Question it posed, the erosion of Spanish authority in the Americas fueled international competition during the early nineteenth century. Yet this struggle for influence in former Spanish America is neglected in the scholarship on both European diplomacy and Latin American independence. Diplomatic histories of post-Napoleonic Europe focus on Continental affairs—the German, Polish, and, of

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1 Most recently in Jaime E. Rodríguez O., The Independence of Spanish America (Cambridge, 1998). His reconceptualization of Latin American independence has revalorized its constitutional aspects and inspired something of a “political turn” in the field.


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course, Eastern questions. And work on Latin American independence, generally
social-historical in focus and methodology, neglects the international aspects of the
struggle. The concept of the Western Question fills these voids and bridges these
two bodies of scholarship.

International competition over Spanish America not only colored relations be-
tween the North Atlantic powers, but also concerned Latin American insurgents,
who sought to exploit it for their own ends. The contending forces in Spanish Amer-
ica—insurgents of different, sometimes rival, factions, as well as royalists—per-
ceived in the Western Question opportunities to advance their causes by playing
upon the hopes and fears of the rival powers. The Spanish government also ma-
nipulated international tensions to win support for its program of repression, obtain
European mediation, and neutralize predatory foreign countries (particularly the
United States). All of this—the rivalry of the great powers, insurgent and royalist
attempts to draw them into their struggles, and Spain’s efforts to enlist them in its
case—produced a vacuum in which opportunities for unorthodox, adventurous, and
piratical action flourished. The activities of the foreign revolutionaries, mercenaries,
spies, and freebooters who lurked in the back alleys of Latin American independence
furnish material for a transnational diplomatic history “from below” in which states
figure as just one among several types of actor. The struggles for Latin American
independence were indeed civil wars, but—like many civil wars—they were influ-
enced by and, in their turn, influenced the supercharged international context in
which they unfolded. By bringing together the international and internal dimensions
of Latin American independence, the concept of the Western Question reveals the
struggle as part of the process of geopolitical realignment in the post-Napoleonic
world.

4 Examples of European diplomatic histories that neglect Spanish American affairs include René
Albrecht-Carrière, A Diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna (New York, 1958); Henry
A. Kissinger, A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822 (Boston,
1973); Harold Nicolson, The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity, 1812–1822 (San Diego, 1974);
Hans G. Schenk, The Aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars: The Concert of Europe—An Experiment (London,
1947); Paul W. Schroeder, The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848 (Oxford, 1994); and

5 Some examples include Sarah H. Chambers, From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender, and Politics
in Arequipa, Peru, 1780–1854 (University Park, Pa., 1999); and Eric Van Young, The Other Rebellion:
For a contrasting historiographical assessment, which holds that scholarship on Latin American inde-
pendence privileges elite agency and traditional, top-down political narrative, see Victor M. Uribe, “The
Enigma of Latin American Independence: Analyses of the Last Ten Years,” Latin American Research

6 Although “insurgent” is a loaded term, I use it because it was the term most frequently used at
the time to designate those Latin Americans seeking independence.

7 What has been called “the new diplomatic history” (but should probably be termed “transnational
history”) is exemplified by Matthew Connelly’s brilliant work on the war of Algerian independence. See
Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post–Cold War
Era (New York, 2002). Another fine example of a bottom-up approach to diplomatic history is Karen
Racine, Francisco de Miranda: A Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution (Wilmington, Del., 2003).
For a general discussion of the field of transnational history, see C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew
Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational
History,” American Historical Review 111, no. 5 (December 2006): 1440–1464.

8 In his comparative work on the French and Russian revolutions, Arno Mayer emphasizes that “civil
war” is “inseparable from international relations.” Mayer, The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French
If any one individual bears responsibility for precipitating Latin American independence, that individual is Napoleon Bonaparte. By invading Spain and depositing its monarch, he severed the links between Iberian and overseas Spain. Moreover, the invasion consummated Spain’s financial and military ruin and sparked a divisive debate within the Spanish world over the nature of sovereignty—a debate that degenerated into civil war. As if all this were not enough to have cast the Spanish monarchy into turmoil, Napoleon’s appetite for conquest precipitated Europe into total war. This ensured that his ultimate defeat did not result in a traditional treaty of compromise, which would have restored some kind of equilibrium. Rather, it destroyed the last vestiges of an Atlantic power balance between Britain and France and opened the way for a fundamental reworking of the world order. It was onto this geopolitical scene that the movements for Latin American independence exploded.

The struggle began in earnest with Napoleon’s occupation of Spain in 1808, but by 1815 it seemed to have been defeated or checked. The apparent coup de grace came in April 1815 with the arrival in New Granada of a major Spanish expeditionary force. Within a year, the insurgent leaders had fled, and Spanish authority had largely been restored. With the end of the Napoleonic wars and all that entailed—the liberation of Spain, the restoration of Ferdinand VII, the reopening of sea communications, and the freeing of military forces for dispatch overseas—Spanish America seemed to have lost its best chance for independence. Simón Bolívar himself admitted in May 1815 that “the restoration of Spanish government in America . . . appears certain.”

But the next five or six years would see the triumph of the independence movement. This reversal of fortunes has prompted historians to wonder why Spanish America did not secure independence during the Napoleonic occupation of Spain—a period that Timothy Anna has described as a “moment of stupendous opportunity”—but only after the (relative) revival of Spanish power. Anna and others have attributed this delayed reaction to the tenacity of traditional political culture. Still others have emphasized how the reversion of sovereignty to the people generated local freedom and opened unprecedented possibilities for self-government. But neither political backwardness nor the experience of self-government fully explains the hesitant beginnings of the independence movements, for they both overlook the role of international forces in keeping the Ibero-Atlantic world intact during the Napoleonic wars.

From its victory at Trafalgar in 1805, Britain enforced a muscular Pax Britannica throughout the Atlantic world. After Napoleon’s invasion of Spain, Britain strove
to hold together the Spanish world in order to harness its resources and prevent an open breach between metropole and colonies that France could exploit. In this difficult task, it was aided by the idiom of monarchical fealty, in which the insurgents voiced their autonomist aspirations. This language tended to prevent an open, irrevocable rupture within the Spanish monarchy. In addition, Britain benefited from the suspension of restrictions on trade with Spanish America for the duration of the conflict—a policy welcomed by creoles. And decisively, there was the Royal Navy, which ranged unchallenged throughout the Atlantic. Britain did not hesitate to wield its armed might to keep the peace, for example between Portugal and Spain in the Banda Oriental (present-day Uruguay). Britain also enforced order farther north, where the threat of intervention helped restrain American expansionism. When war finally came in 1812, it gave the Americans such an apprehension of British power that they dared not undertake new conquests for another thirty years. Finally, Britain’s control of the Atlantic during the Napoleonic wars meant that even if it had had the wherewithal, Spain could not have pursued divisive policies of colonial repression without British approval.

There were further geopolitical forces at work among Spaniards on both sides of the Atlantic that kept them from going past the point of no return. Even as it severed the ties between European and Spanish America, the French invasion was also a source of unity. Spaniards of contrasting political sympathies could at least agree on the need to expel the French and set aside their differences until that had been achieved. Once the French were gone, wartime unity evaporated, and some Spaniards who had fought Napoleon now turned against Ferdinand VII. They pursued their struggle not only in Spain itself, but also in alliance with the Latin American insurgents, whose cause they did not distinguish from their own battle against integral absolutism. In the Americas, the French occupation of Spain also had a restraining effect. To exploit the motherland’s agony to seize independence would constitute a despicable act of treachery. Moreover, hopes were high that Ferdinand

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14 From 1809, Napoleon tried to precipitate a formal break between Iberian and American Spain. He dispatched secret agents to the Americas to foment rebellion, offered financial and military aid to the insurgents, and even planned to recognize Venezuelan independence (in 1812). Napoleon’s sale of Louisiana (effectively a Spanish possession at the time) to the United States can be seen as one of the first instances of a Spanish American province exiting the transatlantic Spanish monarchy. On these French antecedents to Latin American independence, see Caracciolo Parra-Pérez, Bayona y la política de Napoleón en América (Caracas, 1939); William Spence Robertson, France and Latin-American Independence (Baltimore, Md., 1939), 16–104; and John Rydjord, Foreign Interest in the Independence of New Spain: An Introduction to the War for Independence (Durham, N.C., 1955).

15 For a view that emphasizes the elements of disunity, civil strife, and lawlessness that the anti-French struggle unleashed, see Charles Esdaille, Fighting Napoleon: Guerrillas, Bandits, and Adventurers in Spain, 1808–1814 (New Haven, Conn., 2004).

16 One prominent figure who underwent such a conversion was Francisco Xavier Mina. Commander of the most effective guerilla army to fight against Napoleon in Spain, Mina led an uprising in 1814 against the restoration of absolutism. When his rebellion failed, he fled to Great Britain, where, aided by British liberals and the American general Winfield Scott, he organized a military expedition to liberate New Spain. It departed in 1816, picking up reinforcements in the United States. The expedition was unsuccessful, and Mina was captured and executed in 1817. On Mina’s career, see Manuel Ortuno Martinez, Xavier Mina: Fronteras de libertad (Mexico, 2003); and J. M. Miquel I. Verges, Mina: El español frente a España (Mexico, 1945).
would embrace a policy of reform upon his restoration. French occupation thus gave all Spaniards reason to avoid taking irrevocable steps. A wait-and-see attitude was more prudent—and more realistic, given British power and Spanish weakness.

In 1815 the situation changed dramatically, becoming at once more fluid internationally and more polarized internally. It was more fluid because, with the end of the Napoleonic wars and the relaxation of Britain’s naval grip, the Atlantic again became a thoroughfare between Europe and the Americas. Peace eased the atmosphere and opened possibilities for more subtle modes of political action than brute force. Yet the end of war in 1815 also sharpened tensions within the Spanish monarchy. After it became clear that the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty was not going to return the rebellious Americans to obedience, Ferdinand VII opted for a policy of repression. His intransigence presented the insurgents with a stark choice: submission or independence. Compromise solutions that were broached—generally autonomy within the framework of Spanish monarchy—became increasingly untenable as the battle lines were drawn ever more sharply and more blood was spilled. By 1815, the situation was characterized by deepening polarization of the Spanish world within an international context of demilitarization and imminent postwar geopolitical reconfiguration.

The efforts of the Atlantic powers to navigate the uncharted waters of the post-Napoleonic international order were complicated by the Spanish American crisis. Doubt over its outcome injected a note of hesitation, sometimes verging on paralysis, into their policies. This air of indecision was exacerbated by competition between the powers as they sought to thwart their rivals’ maneuvers. Their wary circling about the expiring body of the Spanish monarchy was the Western Question. Presiding over it and giving it a certain structure was the participants’ shared fear of British predominance. Countries with interests and aspirations in the Americas—notably Britain’s recent adversaries France and the United States—were deeply involved in the Western Question. But even countries such as Russia—which, as the Continental European hegemon, found itself drawn into conflict with its maritime counterpart—viewed British power with apprehension. Soon after the start of the Spanish American revolt, for example, Tsar Alexander I wondered whether the uprising was a plot designed to place “all the treasure of the Americas at the disposition of England.” He instructed his ambassador to Washington to “seek in the United States a rival to England” capable of counterbalancing the “fatal despotism Britain exercises over the seas.” Curiously, the European country least hostile to Britain was Spain. But

17 For example, see the widely distributed and much-reprinted *Catecismo civil, y breve compendio de las obligaciones del español, conocimiento práctico de su libertad, y explicación de su enemigo, muy útil en las actuales circunstancias, puesto en forma de diálogo* (n.p., 1808). It promised that Ferdinand, once restored to his throne, would remedy the “despotism and indolence of the supreme authorities who governed” before the French invasion.


20 Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Russian Reproductions, Petrograd, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carton 1, no. 5, “Projet d’instruction au chambellan actuel comte de Prahlen” (Washington, D.C., 1809).
even cordiality toward Britain was forced upon Spain by its recognition that only the British could decisively influence the destiny of Spanish America. The Western Question was thus less about the question of independence per se than about how the conflict would affect the geopolitical order. The question was given urgency by the fear that Britain would achieve global hegemony by turning South America into a “second Hindoustan.”

The example of France is especially revealing. Powerful enough to matter and interested enough in Atlantic affairs to care, France was far enough removed from the convulsions of Latin America to view the Western Question with some clarity. This is not to say that the French perspective was objective. France hoped to profit from the troubles of Spanish America and, like the other participants in the Western Question, saw Britain as its principal obstacle. Although much has been made of the French Bourbons’ commitment to the principle of legitimacy, the relatively moderate Richelieu ministry and its diplomatic agents were never completely hamstrung by the constraints of conservative ideology. For one thing, the defeat of Napoleon and the Bourbon Restoration did not diminish French Anglophobia. Despite their public expressions of gratitude for the removal of the usurper, even the strongest supporters of the Bourbon monarchy nurtured pride in Napoleon’s triumphs and resentment toward the power they held responsible for laying low French grandeur. “England is for France the pole of repulsion,” wrote the Russian ambassador to Paris in 1816. “Neither reason, policy, nor even the force of circumstances will diminish the bitterness and distrust that rivalry excites between these two countries.”

The French example shows that the Continental European powers saw the Spanish American crisis not only in terms of revolution and legitimacy, but also as a continuation of traditional geopolitical rivalries.

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21 The term is from the dispatch of June 4, 1818, from the French Ambassador to the United States, Hyde de Neuville, to the French Foreign Minister, the Duke de Richelieu, Archives des Affaires Etrangères [henceforth AAE], Correspondence Politique [hereafter CP], Etats-Unis, 75.

22 The excitement generated by the publication of the Abbé de Pradt’s two-volume Des colonies et de la révolution actuelle de l’Amérique (Paris, 1817) offers one of the clearest illustrations of French interest in the struggles of Spanish America.


25 A good example is provided by the experience of the Marquis de Bouthillier. A major general in the counterrevolutionary émigré army of the Prince de Condé, Bouthillier decided to return to France in 1801. He explained at length his decision to lay down his arms. Although he rejected the Revolution, he recognized that Napoleon was a “great man” who had restored French fortunes at home and abroad. In particular, Bouthillier admired the way Napoleon had revived French military spirit and reintroduced honor and order into the ranks of the army. Archives Départementales, Cher et l’Indre, J 2192, “Mémoires particuliers de M. de Bouthillier,” 504–533.


27 A parallel can be seen in the American tendency to view decolonization in the 1950s not only through the lens of the Cold War, but also as part of an older demographic struggle between “the West” and “the rest”—the Yellow Peril. See Matthew Connelly, “Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence,” American Historical Review 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 739–769.
Competition with Britain underlay France's approach to the Spanish American crisis—to find a way to exclude British commerce while letting French commerce in. Neither independence nor submission could achieve this end. Were Spanish America to achieve independence, French statesmen feared, it would be drawn into the orbit of British commercial hegemony. Freed from the exclusivist trade regulations of the Spanish monarchy, the new nations would adopt the fine-sounding policy of *commercio libre*. But far from liberating the circulation of goods and capital, free trade would secure a de facto monopoly for British commerce, against which France could not compete. In practice, explained the French diplomat Jean-Guillaume Hyde de Neuville, independence would inaugurate a new age of British "commercial despotism."  

28 England, he claimed, was seeking to exempt itself from the "general equilibrium" and make its commerce "universal." "What it accomplished in the Indies, what it was trying in Africa, what it had obtained in Saint-Domingue, it wanted to take in South America." If the great powers did not act decisively, "nothing would remain for them but miserable debris."  

29 French statesmen realized that Britain's economic advance could be hindered by the restoration of Spanish dominion in the Americas and the reimposition of trade restrictions. But just as the exclusionary policies of the Spanish monarchy would restrict British penetration of Latin American markets, so too would they shut out the French. That was unacceptable. If France could not develop new markets—and Latin America appeared the most promising in 1815—it would never catch up with Britain. Repression and restoration, no less than independence and recognition, would reinforce British predominance in the Atlantic world. French policy was caught on the horns of a dilemma—a dilemma described by Tsar Alexander I as a choice between "the medieval methods of Cádiz and Madrid" and the "commercial activities of the merchants of London."  

30 Fear of British hegemony forced France to seek another outcome than recognition or repression. The French government set about this task with energy and imagination. One possibility it considered was to form a grand alliance to thwart British ambitions in Spanish America and secure a settlement that would ensure its members commercial privilege in the Americas. In 1817, Hyde de Neuville proposed to Secretary of State Richard Rush a triple alliance between France, Russia, and the United States to achieve a mutually satisfactory solution to the Spanish American crisis. If these powers did not act in concert, Hyde warned, "England would be likely to run away with the chief profit of [Latin America's] independence."  

31 Although the Monroe administration ultimately declined the French invitation, it took the proposal seriously enough to direct Rush to hold a series of further meetings about it. By 1823, the French seem to have abandoned this approach; in that year, the French ambassador to Russia rejected that country's proposal for joint intervention in Latin America.  

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29 AAE, CP, Etats-Unis, 74, Hyde de Neuville to Duke de Richelieu (Washington, D.C., May 14, 1817).  
31 Monroe Papers, reel 6, Richard Rush to James Monroe (Washington, D.C., April 24, 1817).  
France pursued another policy with greater constancy: the foundation of independent Bourbon monarchies in Latin America.\footnote{33 Mario Belgrano, \textit{La Francia y la monarquía en el Plata} (Buenos Aires, 1933); Dardo Pérez Guilhou, \textit{Las ideas monárquicas en el Congreso de Tucumán} (Buenos Aires, 1966); Joaquín Pérez, \textit{Artigas, San Martín y los proyectos monárquicos en el Río de la Plata y Chile} (1818–1820) (Montevideo, 1960); and Carlos A. Villanueva, \textit{La monarquía en América: San Martín y Bolívar} (Paris, 1911). The idea of granting independence under European princes to the Spanish provinces of America was seriously considered by all the great powers. The British minister Castlereagh seems to have been the first to broach the idea, when in 1807 he contemplated installing the Duke d’Orléans on the throne of Buenos Aires. The European powers were attracted to the idea because it promised them access and offered an alternative to both republicanism and the reimposition of integral absolutism. Even Spanish American insurgents, notably San Martín, advocated monarchy for the independent polities they were fighting to create. By 1822, monarchical schemes for Latin America were so abundant and varied that John Quincy Adams commented that “a hankering after monarchy has infected the politics of all successive governing authorities of Buenos Ayres.” Lord Castlereagh, “Memorandum for the Cabinet, Relative to South America” (1807), in Charles William Vane, ed., \textit{Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry}, 12 vols. (London, 1848–1853), 7: 320; C. K. Webster, \textit{The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1815–1822} (London, 1934), 563; and John Quincy Adams, \textit{The Writings of John Quincy Adams}, ed. Worthington Ford, 7 vols. (New York, 1913–1917), 7: 424–441. I thank Emilio Ocampo for providing me with these references.} Even as it publicly supported Ferdinand VII’s sovereignty over Spanish America, the French government was involved in secret projects to transfer that sovereignty to Bourbon princes—preferably of the French line. In early 1818, it sent a Colonel Le Moyne to the Río de la Plata to “sound out the dispositions of Buenos Aires on the adoption of monarchical government.”\footnote{34 Armand-Emmanuel du Plessis, duc de Richelieu, \textit{Lettres du duc de Richelieu au marquis d’Osmond}, 1816–1818, ed. Sébastien Charlety (Paris, 1939), 232–233. For a detailed but somewhat tendentious treatment of this affair, see Miguel Cané, \textit{La diplomacia de la revolución: El director Pueyrredón y el emisario Le Moyne} (Buenos Aires, 1960). See also Belgrano, \textit{La Francia y la monarquía.}} Supreme Director Juan Martín de Pueyrredón responded positively to these overtures, although he probably had no desire to see a European monarchy imposed on his country. Rather, he saw in Le Moyne’s proposition an opportunity to play upon French hopes of replacing Britain as the dominant influence in the Plate. By holding out this prospect, Pueyrredón hoped to get the French to pressure the Spanish government to delay or redirect the Platine expeditionary force then assembling in Cádiz. His agent in Paris skillfully exploited French geopolitical ambition. Assuring the French government that the “similarity of manners, the identity of religion, and the old custom of considering the French as their friends” would facilitate this project, he sought in return monetary assistance, commercial links, movement toward recognition, and military aid.\footnote{35 Robertson, \textit{France and Latin-American Independence}, 166–169. Was this discourse of cultural affinity (a standard trope of insurgents seeking French aid) on the religious and cultural affinities of Spanish America with France at the root of the concept of “Latin America”? The term itself was not employed until several decades later. As they constructed their own national identities in the mid-nineteenth century, some Latin American nationalists gravitated toward Frenchness as a welcome alternative to Spanish colonial oppression, cold-hearted British commercialism, and the rising imperialism of the United States. For their part, the French clung to this same notion of a special affinity between “Latinins,” first in the vain hope that it could help offset the preponderance of British commerce, and then in the equally vain ambition of securing a Gallic foothold in Mexico in the 1860s.} And as Pueyrredón had hoped, the French government suggested that the expeditionary force be diverted from the Río de la Plata. Although the Spanish responded angrily to French interference, the discussions that ensued delayed the expedition and raised French and Russian frustration with Spanish inflexibility. If deftly manipulated by the insurgents, international rivalry over Spanish America could help advance the cause of independence.

Although this particular scheme fell through, the French continued to view the
erection of Bourbon monarchies in Spanish America as the best way to promote French interests there. As late as March 1830, the French government was holding talks with Argentine diplomats about the possibility of establishing a Bourbon monarchy.36 The notion of creating new world monarchies was so appealing to the French that they pursued it even after recognition—although the idea increasingly came to be seen as a means of checking the expansion of the United States. From this perspective, French support for Texas independence in the 1830s and the installation of monarchy in Mexico in the 1860s reflects France’s persistent determination to halt the advance of “Anglo-Saxon” power in the Americas.37

Even if some observers foresaw the rise of a North American superpower, the United States had not yet reached that point in 1815. On the contrary, the triumphalism that accompanied the end of hostilities with Britain concealed insecurity. It would be too much to say that the United States had emerged from the war a chastened, fearful nation, but the conflict had certainly given its leaders a new respect for British power. Even though popular Anglophobia—often expressed through sympathy for Latin American independence—ran strong after 1815, the Madison and Monroe administrations followed a prudent course in foreign policy.38 While ideological, political, and economic factors played a role, the decisive influence over U.S. policy toward “the civil war now raging between Spain and her colonies” came from lessons learned in the War of 1812.39

The situation of the United States in 1815 resembled that of France. Both countries nursed a tradition of hatred for Great Britain, a sentiment sharpened by recent military encounters. Both viewed the disintegration of Spanish dominion in the Americas with a combination of fear (that Britain would appropriate the spoils) and longing (to reap the spoils themselves). But the United States differed from France in one critical respect: it shared a land border with Spanish America. Thus, with the exception of Portugal, the United States found itself in the unique position of being able to profit territorially from the crisis by annexing adjacent Spanish provinces. One can even speak of a borderland variant on Latin American independence (prefigured a decade earlier by the transfer of Louisiana to the United States) in which annexation rather than self-determination provided a way out of the Spanish monarchy. American hunger for Spanish land—Florida, Texas, Mexico, and Cuba—was barely concealed. But fearing that too aggressive a policy would provoke British or

36 Robertson, France and Latin-American Independence, 519–520.
37 Like the Latin American insurgents, the “Texians” sought to play on France’s geopolitical ambitions to secure military and financial assistance in their struggle against Mexico. And like the insurgents, they tried (however improbably) to stress the affinities between France and Texas. Consider, for example, the monarchical profession of faith offered by Texas president Sam Houston to the French ambassador Dubois de Saligny: “You are very fortunate in France to have a monarchy. May we one day be able to enjoy the same advantage in this country . . . It is impossible that the whole world not be disabused by the example of what goes on in all the republics of America, beginning with that of the United States; and between us, Monsieur de Saligny, as I’ve often said, I’m confident that, for the good of humanity, there will no longer remain a single republican government on the face of the globe within fifty years.” AAE, CP, Texas, 4, Dispatch (Galveston, May 16, 1842). Saligny later became one of the principal architects of the French intervention in Mexico.
39 Madison Papers, reel 18, William H. Crawford to James Madison (Washington, D.C., September 27, 1816).
European countermeasures, the U.S. government resisted public pressure and restricted its ambitions to acquiring Florida legally from Spain.

The U.S. government had gained from the War of 1812 the understanding that obtaining Florida was essential to the survival of the Union. During the war, the British had used that province as a sanctuary for guerrilla operations against the southern states and as a base of operations for an amphibious assault on New Orleans.\textsuperscript{40} In 1815, this city was the most sensitive strategic point in the United States, for all commerce to and from the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys had to pass through it. Whoever held New Orleans controlled the destiny of the trans-Appalachian West, and hence the fate of the Union itself.\textsuperscript{41} Florida was an ideal launching point for attacks on this vulnerable chokepoint. As long as it remained in weak Spanish hands or, worse, fell into the hands of a powerful foe such as Britain, the United States’ hold on New Orleans and the inland empire it served would remain tenuous. In itself, Florida was “comparatively nothing,” wrote President Madison, but because it was occupied by a hostile power, it was “of the highest importance.”\textsuperscript{42} This overriding aim—to secure Florida—powerfully shaped the United States’ approach to the upheavals of Spanish America.

The efforts of the United States to obtain Florida were constrained by interlocking imperatives.\textsuperscript{43} The first of these was to secure the territory without provoking war with Britain. This ruled out the use of force; the United States would have to treat with Spain for the purchase or transfer of Florida. Accordingly, in 1818 the United States opened negotiations with Spain, negotiations that became tied up with the Spanish American insurgency. To exert pressure on the dilatory Spanish, the United States threatened to recognize Latin American independence. It also threatened to use military force.\textsuperscript{44} At the same time, the U.S. government realized that excessive pressure could backfire. Spain might withdraw from talks and possibly declare war. Premature recognition could turn to Britain’s exclusive advantage or even spark European retaliation. A heavy-handed approach, the U.S. government realized, could be disastrous. But it also realized that too accommodating a position toward Spain carried its own risk. If negotiations dragged on, international circumstances might shift in Spain’s favor, or it might be able to crush the insurgency. If the administration were seen as treating Spain with too much sympathy, it might lose domestic support, alienate the insurgents, and drive them into the arms of the British. For the United States, the path to Florida was squeezed between clashing in-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} James G. Cusick, \textit{The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida} (Gainesville, Fla., 2003); and Frank L. Owsley, Jr., \textit{The Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans, 1812–1815} (Gainesville, Fla., 1981).
\item \textsuperscript{41} James E. Lewis, Jr., \textit{The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783–1829} (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998).
\item \textsuperscript{43} For a comprehensive history of the United States’ attempts to obtain Florida, see Hubert Bruce Fuller, \textit{The Purchase of Florida: Its History and Diplomacy} (Gainesville, Fla., 1964).
\item \textsuperscript{44} In 1818, General Andrew Jackson actually invaded Florida. But since he had done so without official authorization, the Monroe administration ordered him to withdraw. Negotiations with Spain for the purchase of Florida and the settlement of the boundary question then resumed, perhaps accelerated by both the ease of Jackson’s conquest and the goodwill that the United States government had shown in disavowing it.
\end{itemize}
international and domestic imperatives. In 1821, Spain finally relinquished Florida for an indemnity, a defined border with the United States, and the abandonment of Washington’s claims to Texas.45 It was with evident relief that, several months later, President Monroe could finally voice personal and public sentiment by recognizing Latin American independence. But until it secured Florida, the United States trod softly.

The reserved policy of the United States ran against a strong current of public opinion shared by certain members of the government, who sometimes acted independently on their feelings. For example, the 1817 expedition of the Scottish adventurer Gregor MacGregor against Spanish Florida was an enterprise in which members of the Monroe administration—possibly the president himself—were implicated.46 A former British soldier, MacGregor had joined the cause of Venezuelan independence in 1811, first as Francisco Miranda’s aide-de-camp and then as a general under Simón Bolívar. By early 1817, however, he had fallen out with Bolívar and moved to the United States to organize an invasion of Florida. He first secured authorization from insurgent agents to seize the province. He then approached the governments of the United States and Great Britain. To William Thornton, head of the Patent Office and a close friend of Richard Rush (who probably transmitted the information to Monroe), MacGregor offered to sell Florida to the United States.47 To the British ambassador Charles Bagot, however, he proposed to occupy Florida to keep it out of American hands.48 MacGregor’s real aim was to exploit Anglo-American rivalry to secure backing from one or the other government, or, better yet, to spark a bidding war between them.49 It was a strategy that other adventurers employed as they sought to turn the great powers’ rivalries over Spanish America to their personal advantage.

In June 1817, MacGregor captured Amelia Island, a smuggling entrepôt at the mouth of the Saint Mary’s River, the border between Spanish Florida and Georgia. After proclaiming the independence of the Republic of the Floridas, MacGregor did little to extend his conquest or create republican institutions. Rather, he focused on privateering and smuggling. These lucrative activities intensified with the arrival of Louis Aury in September.50 Formerly of Napoleon’s navy, Aury had become a pri-

45 For a comprehensive treatment of these negotiations, see Philip Coolidge Brooks, Diplomacy and the Borderlands: The Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819 (Berkeley, Calif., 1939).
46 Unless otherwise indicated, the following account of the Amelia Island affair is based on T. Frederick Davis, “MacGregor’s Invasion of Florida, 1817,” Florida Historical Quarterly 7, no. 1 (1928): 2–71; and David Bushnell, ed., La República de las Floridas: Texts and Documents (Bogotá, 1986). For an overview of MacGregor’s adventurous life, see Tulio Arends, Sir Gregor Mac Gregor: Un escocés tras la aventura de América (Caracas, 1988).
47 Adams Papers, reel 33, diary entries for February 13 and 23, 1818; Adams, Memoirs, 4: 53, entry for February 7, 1818.
48 Public Record Office [hereafter PRO], Foreign Office [hereafter FO], 115/30, Charles Bagot to Lord Castlereagh (Washington, D.C., April 25, 1817). In this meeting, MacGregor also informed Bagot that he had held talks with Regnault Saint-Jean d’Angély, a close advisor to the exiled Joseph Bonaparte, and then with Joseph himself. He claimed that the Bonapartists were trying to enlist him in a grand scheme to crown Joseph king of New Spain and rescue Napoleon from Saint Helena.
49 The French ambassador, Hyde de Neuville, suspected as much when he noted in his dispatches that MacGregor was letting it be known that he was “supported and protected” by both Britain and the United States. AAE, CP, Etats-Unis, 74, Hyde de Neuville to Duke de Richelieu (New Brunswick, May 14 and July 7, 1817).
50 On Aury, see Stanley Faye, “Commodore Aury” (unpublished manuscript), Aury Papers, Center
vateer and had risen to command the insurgent fleet at the siege of Cartagena in 1815. Like MacGregor, he had left Bolívar and struck out on his own, establishing the privateering base of Galveston in 1816 before joining MacGregor on Amelia. During Aury’s two-month stay, the island’s economy boomed. According to Lloyd’s of London, Aury’s crew of Haitian ex-slaves, free blacks, and mulattoes smuggled into the United States contraband worth $500,000, mainly Africans taken from Spanish slave ships.\footnote{Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800–1821* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1997), 139.}

Aury’s success was his undoing. Citing slave smuggling and the proximity to Georgia of “a body of [armed] Blacks from St. Domingo,” President Monroe ordered troops to occupy the island in December.\footnote{John Quincy Adams to Caesar A. Rodney, John Graham, and Theodorick Bland, Special Commissioners of the United States to South America (Washington, D.C., November 21, 1817), in *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, 1: 47–49.} MacGregor’s attempt to manipulate Anglo-American rivalry had failed; he had become a pawn in their geopolitical machinations by providing the United States a pretext for getting a foothold in Florida.

During the period 1815–1820, other incursions into Florida and Texas were launched from American territory.\footnote{Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*; Harris Gaylord Warren, *The Sword Was Their Passport: A History of American Filibustering in the Mexican Revolution* (Baton Rouge, La., 1943).} But those expeditions paled in significance beside another unauthorized activity: the fitting out of insurgent-flagged privateers in U.S. ports.\footnote{By interdicting Spanish commerce and communications with America, the privateers forced Spain to fight a costly guerrilla war at sea.\footnote{Jose Correa da Serra, *Ambassador du Royaume-Uni de Portugal et Brésil à Washington, 1816–1820*, ed. Léon Bourdon (Paris, 1975), 106.} In 1818, they joined forces again in an attack on the Isthmus of Panama that temporarily succeeded in taking the Spanish port of Portobello, but failed to link up with Lord Thomas Cochrane’s fleet in the Pacific and cut Spanish America in two. While Aury died of disease soon after Portobello, MacGregor continued his adventurous activities both under Bolívar and on his own. In 1820, he founded a short-lived “Kingdom of the Poyais” in present-day Honduras.\footnote{Almost 3,000 cases of “piratical aggression against merchant ships” were reported between 1815 and 1823. Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The United States and the Independence of Latin America, 1800–1830* (Baltimore, Md., 1941), 305.} Although we lack a comprehensive study of insurgent privateering, it appears to have overwhelmed the Real Armada. By 1820, Spain had lost control of the At-
Atlantic, and privateers cruised the Mediterranean, off the African coast, and in Philippine waters in search of Spanish shipping. The naval insurgency alone did not win Latin American independence, but it contributed significantly to the outcome. The importance of the naval conflict underlines the global scale of the wars of Latin American independence.57

While deploring insurgent privateering, one European diplomat dismissed it as a “pinprick” compared to the “sword thrusts” that Britain was delivering to the Spanish cause.58 Britain’s policy was more subtle than that of the United States, but arguably more deadly. The British sought to prevent clear resolution of the Spanish American conflict while preserving the insurgents’ goodwill and avoiding the European peace. Having emerged triumphant from the Napoleonic wars, Britain was happy with the status quo—which allowed it to trade with Latin America without repudiating the principle of legitimacy. Uncertainty about the fate of Spanish America did not slow the burgeoning commerce between British and insurgent ports. On the contrary, only absolutist restoration and the reimposition of trade restrictions could hamper this lucrative trade. “The avowed and true policy of Great Britain,” wrote the British foreign minister, Robert Stewart Castlereagh, in 1817, was “to appease controversy, and to secure, if possible, for all states a long interval of repose.”59

The British government thus quietly endeavored to prevent such a restoration. Despite official prohibition, it tolerated the recruitment on its territory of volunteers for the armies of Bolivar and San Martin.60 Of greater significance were its efforts to block European intervention in the conflict. In British thinking, intervention would upset the status quo, entangle European power politics even more tightly with American affairs, and increase the risk of a new war. Britain sabotaged intervention in two ways: by blocking Spanish attempts to assemble a coalition of armed mediators

57 Although it is beyond the scope of this essay, the phenomenon of insurgent privateering raises questions about the relationship between slavery, shifts in Atlantic trade patterns (particularly the growing importance of direct trade between Iberian America and Africa), and the independence movement. Many of the insurgent privateers doubled as slavers or slave smugglers, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico, where the demand of southern planters coupled with the official prohibition of slave importation made this business profitable. The link between insurgent privateering and illegal slave trading was significant. It highlights the accommodating plasticity of racial solidarities, even in the banned slave trade. For example, take the Colombian-flagged privateer/slaver/smuggler Fortuna. Its captain was a Connecticut Yankee, its second-in-command was Danish, and its crew counted numerous hands classified as “pardos,” “morenos,” and “chinos” by the Spanish authorities who captured them in 1816, as well as Haitians, “negros,” and “blancos” from the United States, Spanish deserters, a stray Irishman, and a lone Frenchman. Franco, Política continental, 142. On the trade generally, see Joseph C. Dorsey, Slave Traffic in the Age of Abolition: Puerto Rico, West Africa, and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean, 1815–1859 (Gainesville, Fla., 2003).

58 AAE, CP, Etats-Unis, 74, Hyde de Neuvelle to Duke de Richelieu (Washington, D.C., May 14, 1817).

59 PRO, FO, 5/120, Lord Castlereagh to Charles Bagot (London, November 11, 1817).

60 The 4,000–6,000 British volunteers who served in Bolivar’s army played a key role, particularly at the battles of Boyacá (August 7, 1819) and Carabobo (June 24, 1821). More research is needed on the British and other foreign volunteers, as the only book on the subject is dated, Anglocentric, and purely anecdotal. Alfred Hasbrouck, Foreign Legionaries in the Liberation of Spanish South America (New York, 1928). Foreign volunteers also fought for Spain. In 1817, the Spanish legation in London began negotiations with an English volunteer (the unfortunately named Colonel Fucker), who proposed to form a “Real Legión Anglo-Hispana” of demobilized British soldiers to fight against the insurgency. Edmundo A. Heredia, Planes españoles para reconquistar Hispanoamérica (1810–1818) (Buenos Aires, 1974), 358–359.
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(generally centered on France and Russia) and by proposing to mediate the conflict itself on terms (free trade) that Spain would reject. British offers of mediation also encouraged European frustration at Spanish intransigence, thereby making the possibility of intervention even more remote and showing the insurgents that Britain was doing something for their cause.

Even as British diplomats were undercutting Spanish diplomacy and destroying that country’s best prospects for restoring its authority in America, Britain endeavored to postpone the inevitable recognition of independence. Like European intervention, recognition would upset the balance that Britain was trying to preserve, dash any hope of compromise, polarize the international community, and produce changes that none could foresee. Specifically, the British government feared that recognition might invite a European riposte—whether diplomatically, on the battlefields of South America, or in another region where British interests collided with those of France and Russia. The main British effort to discourage premature recognition of Latin American independence was directed toward the United States. To this end, Castlereagh played on American fears of British might. In 1816, he informed John Quincy Adams, U.S. ambassador to London, that if Britain should find his country “pursuing a system of encroachment upon [its] neighbors,” he could not rule out military retaliation.61 This, the only hint ever dropped that Britain might counter American designs on the Spanish borderlands by force, was enough (together with the pending Florida negotiations) to keep the North Americans from open aggression. One false step, Adams warned his government, would “plunge us into a new contest with [England].”62 It was not until 1822, when Florida had been transferred and British diplomats had admitted that they viewed independence as inevitable, that the United States dared offer formal recognition. The power vacuum in which the Western Question played out was not simply the consequence of rebellion in Spanish America; it was also a deliberate aim of British diplomacy. The “busy procrastination” of the British government perpetuated a “precious stalemate” in Atlantic geopolitics.63

With the exception of independence, stalemate was the last thing the Spanish monarchy wanted. When Ferdinand’s restoration in 1814 failed to end the rebellion, his government resolved to “pacify” Spanish America. With the exception of the interlude of the government of José García de León y Pizarro (1816–1818), Spanish policy was dictated by hardliners who rejected conciliation. Their efforts to quell the insurgencies—primarily by force, but also through foreign intervention—have been closely examined.64 But existing accounts concentrate on the internal aspects of pacification. Just as the Spanish American insurgency had a significant international

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62 Adams Papers, reel 143, John Quincy Adams to William Eustis (Ealing, March 19, 1816).
dimension, so too did the pacification campaign. To the Spanish government, pacification was not only about quelling internal strife and restoring obedience within Spanish America. It was also about protecting Spanish lands from foreign predators who threatened the territorial integrity of the empire, fomented instability, and aided the insurgents. To the Spanish government, the internal and external facets of pacification were inextricably linked. We have already seen one example of this interconnection in the case of MacGregor’s invasion of Florida. For Spain, pacification was a two-front war against internal rebellion and foreign aggression.

Although it ultimately failed to preserve its overseas dominions, the Spanish government pursued an ingenious strategy in its efforts to do so. It sought in the internal struggle resources for defending the external borders of its empire, while simultaneously exploiting the international situation to quell internal disorder. Only in the maneuvers of the insurgents, who displayed similar flexibility, is there such clear illustration of the imbrication of the internecine and the international in the wars of Latin American independence.

One example of the interplay between the local and the geopolitical in Spanish pacification efforts can be found in the misadventures of a group of Bonapartist refugees who in 1818 founded an armed camp in Texas, on land claimed by both Spain and the United States. Although nothing in the background of these Napoleonic veterans suggested sympathy for Ferdinand VII’s cause, they were actually encouraged in their design by the Spanish ambassador to Washington, Don Luis de Onís. In secret talks held at the end of 1817 between Onís and the refugees’ spokesman, the adventurer Louis-Jacques Galabert, an extraordinary plan took shape. Galabert claimed that although he and his comrades had come to America to join the insurgents, they had become disillusioned with the revolutionary cause. Repentant, they now longed to serve the Spanish monarchy and earn royal clemency. Onís, who advocated the formation of an independent Bourbon monarchy in Texas to shield New Spain from the United States, welcomed Galabert’s offer of service as an opportunity to enlist “these auxiliaries to the South American Revolutions” as border guards. Onís extolled them as the best “antidote against the ambitious views of this Republic.” Their military prowess was unquestionable, and they “hated the Anglo-American, . . . could not stand his pride, . . . [and] could not adapt to his customs and religion.” In the ambassador’s scheme, potential insurgents would defend the empire from foreign aggression.

66 To put further pressure on Onís, the group’s leader, General Charles Lallemand, held a series of ostentatious meetings with the U.S. secretary of state, John Quincy Adams. He also spread rumors that the expedition to Texas was supported by France, which (he claimed) intended to turn that province into a New Louisiana. These maneuvers are strongly reminiscent of MacGregor’s intriguing. The resemblance was not lost on members of the European diplomatic corps, who wondered whether the Bonapartists were not “replaying at Galveston the same comedy Aury had performed at Amelia.” AAE, CP, Etats-Unis, 75, Hyde de Neuville to Duke de Richelieu (Washington, D.C., July 2, 1818).
67 Adams Papers, reel 146, John Quincy Adams to Pierre-Paul-François Degrand (Washington, D.C., January 21, 1818).
68 Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Estado, Legajo 5642, dispatch 175 (Philadelphia, October 9, 1817).
At the same time, the Spanish government used the Bonapartist desperadoes to argue the necessity of European intervention. First, the Spanish ambassador to Paris pointed to them in his effort to get the French to join his government in pressuring Washington. International revolutionaries, their principles were “subversive of the social order” and a threat to “the august Bourbon house.” No less than Spain, France “could not view with indifference . . . a colony composed of such elements in the vicinity of land stolen from Spain, bordering on Spanish possessions, and on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico.”69 Next, the Spanish government brought the Bonapartists to the attention of the European cabinets as they prepared for the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle. In a circular note, it argued that the doings of the Bonapartists in Texas revealed a deadly threat imminent in the Spanish American crisis: Napoleon’s return to the world stage.70 The Spanish note began by warning that European malcontents and criminals who have sought refuge in the United States have leagued with Bonaparte and seek to continue in the New World his plans of ambition, usurpation, and disorder . . . The allies cannot disregard the new aspect these circumstances give to the whole matter of the revolution in America . . . America has become the theater of organized subversion, usurpation, and domination under the hateful name of a family which has destroyed thrones and public happiness everywhere in Europe! The cause of America is not only the cause of a false and impossible liberty; it is the cause of Napoleon’s domination . . . The American revolution is the European revolution; all that remains is for the Bonaparte family to take a personal part in it.71

While even the most conservative European powers did not consider the prospect of a republicanized Western Hemisphere sufficiently menacing to intervene on Spain’s behalf, perhaps the threat of Napoleonic resurgence would change their minds.

Providing opportunities for the adventurous and the unscrupulous, the struggle for Latin American independence also illustrates the entwining of interest and ideology in the revolutionary movements—even in the motivations of individual revolutionary actors. Indeed, the vacuum created by international competition over Spanish America favored adventurism to a degree unknown since the time of the buccaneers. An example of the relationship between the powers, the adventurers, and the insurgency is provided by the career of the infamous Lafitte brothers of New Orleans.72 It is not known when they arrived there, but by the outbreak of war with Great Britain in 1812, they were already key figures in a piratical smuggling syndicate operating in the swampy Barataria region below the city. By this time, American authorities were beginning to take steps against the Baratarians. To exempt their “business” (whose most lucrative component was slave smuggling) from the impending crackdown, the Lafittes agreed to work for the United States. During the war,

70 The fear that Napoleon might escape from St. Helena and place himself at the head of a world revolution was very seriously by European statesmen in the late 1810s. At least one rescue attempt was actually made in 1817, launched from the short-lived Republic of Pernambuco. There is no comprehensive work on the attempts, real or rumored, to free Napoleon from his island prison.
72 Over the years, the “Louisiana Historical Quarterly has published many articles (too numerous to cite here) on the Lafittes. The most helpful are those by Stanley Faye, especially his survey “Privateersmen of the Gulf and their Prizes,” Louisiana Historical Quarterly 22, no. 4 (1939): 1012–1094.
they monitored British operations in the Gulf and fought to defend New Orleans in 1815. Soon after the cessation of hostilities, the brothers offered to serve the Spanish American insurgency. By early 1817, they had obtained letters of marque from Cartagena and supplanted Aury as masters of Galveston. Their association with the insurgency did not stop them from also working for Spanish spymasters in New Orleans. Over the next several years, they informed on the activities of insurgents and adventurers in the Gulf. As spies for both the United States and Spain, the Lafittes could denounce their business competitors—including Aury—to those powers while simultaneously protecting their own operations. Perhaps their crowning moment came in 1818, when—in consultation with both Spanish and U.S. authorities—they drafted plans for capturing the Bonapartist invaders of Texas. Although the intruders withdrew before their plan could be set in motion, the brothers earned both Spanish and American gratitude and removed from their area of operations the uninvited newcomers. Just as Spain and the United States used the Lafittes’ services, the brothers used these powers to eliminate their rivals in piracy and smuggling.

The same interplay between the local and the geopolitical characterized the activities of Spanish American royalists and insurgents as they sought to manipulate international rivalries to advance their respective causes. This was nowhere more evident than in the Banda Oriental, a borderland where Portuguese and Spanish ambitions collided. There, local royalists and insurgents—both provincial “federalists” and centralizers seeking to create a unitary state ruled from Buenos Aires—played upon Portuguese territorial ambition in their three-way struggle. In 1811, royalists besieged in Montevideo by federalist and centralist insurgents appealed to the Portuguese government of Brazil to clear the province of “Jacobins.” The Portuguese eagerly complied, but were soon forced to withdraw by the British, who were determined to keep their Iberian allies from fighting each other. With the Portuguese gone, Montevideo soon fell, and with it the hopes of the royalists. But victory was not sweet for the insurgents. With no common enemy to hold them together, federalists and centralists began to fight over the shape of the new polity. In 1814, troops from Buenos Aires attacked those loyal to the federalist leader, José Artigas, and drove them out of the province. Desperate, Artigas sought Portuguese intervention against the porteños. Before this happened, however, Artigas rallied his forces and, supported by resurgent federalism across the region, regained control of the province. Faced with growing political opposition and a bleak military situation, the government of Buenos Aires in its turn resorted to foreign intervention. To eliminate Artigas and embroil Spain in an international conflict, the porteños turned to the

75 My attempt to distinguish between adventurers and insurgents is somewhat arbitrary, as it is based on my subjective assessment of the relative degree to which the desire for personal gain or the desire for independence motivated their actions. But it is very likely that both motivations—for profit and for liberty—coexisted in the minds and hearts of many of the principal actors in the drama of Latin American independence.
76 The following is based on John Street, Artigas and the Emancipation of Uruguay (Cambridge, 1959).
Portuguese. In 1816, their troops invaded and routed Artigas.\textsuperscript{77} Between 1811 and 1816, the three main factions struggling over Platine independence had each tried to unleash the ambition of a foreign power against their internecine rivals. In the domestic politics of Latin American independence, the local and the geopolitical were interwoven.

In other areas, international competition provided opportunities to the insurgents. In London and Washington, insurgent propagandists played on the rivalry between Britain and the United States to win public support.\textsuperscript{78} The most effective practitioner of this strategy in the United States was the Venezuelan agent Manuel Torres. Through his contacts with newspaper editors William Duane and Baptis Irvine, Torres injected an anti-British note into American press coverage of Latin American independence. He also wrote several pamphlets between 1816 and 1819 that pointed out “the efforts made by England . . . to obtain by means of commerce, the precious metals of the new world” and warned that “the intercourse of friendship and interest between the inhabitants of South and North America” was “absolutely necessary to their mutual safety.”\textsuperscript{79} A friend of Monroe and Adams, Torres also influenced American policy more directly. For example, he effectively dictated the instructions that Adams issued to the first American minister to Colombia.\textsuperscript{80} During the same period, insurgent representatives in London manipulated British fears of American penetration of Latin America. These efforts were led by the government of Buenos Aires, which employed a London firm, Hullet Brothers, to commission articles favorable to its cause. One typical piece published in the \textit{Morning Chronicle} warned that Latin America would be “lost to us . . . as soon as North American enterprize gets into full play. Is this not a question on which British ministers and merchants ought to ponder while it is yet time? . . . Is it not time to look across the Atlantic?”\textsuperscript{81} By stressing the rivalry between the United States and Britain, insurgent agents put pressure on both powers.

The insurgents also exploited Franco-British jealousies. We have already encountered one example of this in Pueyrredón’s manipulation of Le Moyne’s mission. Another can be seen in the machinations of General Mariano Renovales. In 1818, this Spanish veteran of the anti-Napoleonic struggle in the peninsula proposed to organize an expedition to liberate New Spain. Although based in England (where he simultaneously told his British interlocutors a different story), Renovales secretly contacted the French ambassador and offered to install a “French monarchy in Mexico.” Effusively praising France, “whose religion, customs, and spirit suit us better than any other,” Renovales convinced the ambassador that he desired “neither the republic nor the Bonapartes” and preferred “France to England.” In return for financial backing, he promised to grant the French a 50 percent tariff reduction on

\textsuperscript{77} As a result, Pueyrredón was denounced by his factional rivals as a “tool of the Portuguese.” Henry Marie Brackenridge, \textit{South America: A Letter on the Present State of That Country} (London, 1818), 55.

\textsuperscript{78} This strategy is described in great detail in Whitaker, \textit{The United States and the Independence of Latin America}, 141–188. Unless otherwise noted, this paragraph is based on Whitaker’s account.

\textsuperscript{79} Manuel Torres, \textit{An Exposition of the Commerce of Spanish America with Some Observations upon Its Importance to the United States} (Philadelphia, 1816), 14.

\textsuperscript{80} Manuel Torres to John Quincy Adams (Philadelphia, November 30, 1821), in \textit{Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States}, 2: 1212–1216; and John Quincy Adams to Richard C. Anderson (Washington, D.C., May 27, 1823), ibid., 1: 192–208.

\textsuperscript{81} Cited in \textit{Niles’ Weekly Register} 9, no. 10 (November 4, 1815): 170.
their exports to Mexico. This was music to the ears of the French, so eager were they to beat Britain in the race for Latin American markets. Talks between Renovales and the ambassador continued through the spring of 1818. But as the general’s demands grew more extravagant, the French foreign minister decided that “something in his conduct stank of the adventurer,” and the project was abandoned. This was an accurate assessment: between 1815 and his death in 1820, Renovales successively offered his service to the insurgency, Britain, France, and finally Spain. His story not only illustrates the interplay between geopolitics and the Latin American insurgency; it also demonstrates the difficulty of tracing clear lines between insurgents and adventurers, between revolutionaries and profiteers.

Between 1815 and 1820, the movement for Latin American independence was entangled with an international struggle over the fruits of Spanish imperial collapse. But while both the Western and the Eastern Question involved geopolitical competition over dying empires, the parallel between them is not exact. Unlike the Eastern Question, the Western Question was not perennial, nor did it provoke major armed conflict between the great powers. Moreover, Latin American independence never became the subject of international congresses or collective action. For these reasons, Paul Schroeder has concluded that Latin American independence was not a great concern of the great powers. I think that Schroeder is wrong to interpret absence from congress diplomacy as insignificance. First, the powers viewed the troubles of Latin America as an internal Spanish matter. Although he considered the Spanish American revolt one of the two most important issues of the day (the other was the occupation of France), the Austrian diplomat Friederich von Gentz did not think it a legitimate object of international involvement. There was simply “no analogy between the transactions of sovereigns and the question of the insurrection of an immense continent against its former government,” he wrote in early 1818 to the Russian foreign minister. Another reason why the Western Question was excluded from the post-Napoleonic congresses—Britain’s determination to make Latin America its exclusive preserve—underlines how seriously that power took the fate of Spanish America. Thanks to its naval supremacy, Britain could have single-handedly kept the Western Question off the table. But other factors also contributed to its exclusion. By refusing to grant concessions in return for European intervention, Spain

82 AAE, CP, Angleterre, 610, Marquis d’Osmond to Duke de Richelieu (London, April 14, May 12, and May 16, 1818); and Richelieu, Lettres du duc de Richelieu, 196–198. To complicate matters further, Renovales also had contact with the Bonapartists in the United States (including Lallemand), who, it was rumored, were planning to rescue Napoleon from St. Helena. AAE, Mémoires et Documents, Amérique, 34, Duke de Richelieu to Duke de Laval (Paris, February 7, 1818).
83 For an overview of Renovales’s career, see Franco, Política continental, 261–298.
84 On the other hand, every country (the United States, Portuguese Brazil, and Haiti) that shared a land border with Spanish America took advantage of the crisis to invade and annex contiguous Spanish territories. This suggests that geography goes a long way toward explaining why the Western Question was relatively peaceful and short-lived in contrast to the Eastern Question.
85 In his magisterial survey of European diplomatic history between 1763 and 1848, he devotes only nine pages to the subject. Schroeder, The Transformation of European Politics, 628–636.
scuttled the possibility of collective action by the powers. British possessiveness and Spanish intransigence suited France and Russia, which were thus freed from having to choose between ideological sympathy for Spain and hunger for Latin American trade. The Western Question was not addressed squarely in the great congresses of post-Napoleonic Europe because it was too sensitive to submit to their collective deliberations.

Silenced by tacit agreement of the powers, the Western Question was played out on a different level of diplomatic activity from that examined in traditional diplomatic histories. Acting through their ambassadors and consuls, the Atlantic powers jockeyed for position, spinning webs of intrigue designed to snare the spoils of Spanish imperial collapse and thwart the schemes of their rivals. Featuring consummate spymasters such as Onís and Hyde de Neuville, the European diplomatic corps not only implemented the unavowed policies of their governments, but also wove their own plots and counterplots. In their covert activities, they employed the services of the demimonde of spies, mercenaries, and privateers that had coalesced in the Americas after 1815. These adventurers included some of the most colorful characters of the age—the Lallemands and their train of Napoleonic exiles, the Lafitte brothers, Gregor MacGregor, and Commodore Aury with his slave-trading crew of Haitian pirates. It was through their good offices, rather than formal diplomatic channels, that the Western Question was pursued during its brief, but intense, lifespan. Just as the Eastern Question had its Western forerunner, the Great Game of central Asia had its earlier, Atlantic equivalent.

How important were these international machinations to ending Spanish rule? In the actual event, they contributed substantially to the outcome. British diplomacy defeated Spanish attempts to secure European intervention, effectively reducing Spanish options to unacceptable compromise or impossible repression. The desire of France and Russia for Latin American trade made it unlikely that, even absent British spoiling tactics, those countries would have helped to restore Spanish authority. The United States gave moral and material support to the insurgents—as well as a sanctuary from which to mount their attacks. Foreign adventurers, privateers, and mercenaries helped to ensure the military outcome, especially at sea. Perhaps other factors—the financial and military weakness of post-Napoleonic Spain, the distance between Spain and its American provinces, the vast territory and large populations over which it had to restore its authority—would have guaranteed the eventual independence of Latin America. But this is speculation. In fact, geopolitical forces and foreign involvement were integral to the struggle.

Viewed from this perspective, the wars of independence were more than just a civil war within the Spanish world. Geopolitics infused the contest, and in turn, turmoil within the Spanish world influenced international relations. By the early

87 Although relieved that they did not have to make a choice, Russian government officials none-theless remained deeply interested in the Latin American independence struggles. In instructions drafted in 1817 for his ambassador to Washington, Tsar Alexander I elevated the task of following “the extraordinary events which are shaking the American continent” to the same level of importance as pursuing “our relations . . . with the United States.” Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Russian Reproductions, Petrograd, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carton 7, no. 24, “Mémoire destiné à servir d'instruction au général-major baron Tuyll” (Washington, D.C., 1817).

88 An important article that brings both European and American aspects of Latin American independence into a single frame of analysis is Adrian J. Pearce, “Rescates and Anglo-Spanish Trade in the
1820s, however, the conditions that had made Spanish America the object of international competition began to change. Insurgent successes beginning with Bolívar’s victory at Boyacá (1819) and San Martín’s invasion of Peru (1820) made it unlikely that Spanish forces in America could prevail. The 1820 revolt of the Spanish expeditionary force awaiting embarkation at Cádiz eliminated the possibility of reinforcements. These developments encouraged the Atlantic powers to offer formal recognition. The United States did so first, in 1822, followed in 1825 by Britain. Although France and Russia still refrained, they harbored no illusions about the eventual outcome. In 1823, France assured Britain that it would not intervene in Spanish America, and Russia urged Spain to compromise. As a new order precipitated out of the vortex of the Western Question, the foreign adventurers who had moved across the stage of American affairs sought greener pastures—service in Ottoman, Egyptian, and Persian armies, the cause of Greek independence and Neapolitan revolution, and the defense of Spanish constitutionalism. In what had been Spanish America, new polities arose, fragmented, and fought, against the backdrop of what the United States, France, and Russia had feared—British economic domination. Taking the form of commercial dependence, free trade, and wage labor rather than mercantilism, territorial rule, and slavery, British hegemony inaugurated a new model of empire. Latin American independence had resulted in a fundamental reworking of Atlantic power relations—a geopolitical revolution that would haunt the American successor states to the old Spanish monarchy throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

Neither Latin American independence nor British commercial hegemony ended European involvement in the Americas. Indeed, the 1830s and 1840s saw a new wave of European interventions in Latin America, notably by the French in Mexico and Argentina. But increasingly, a new concern began to shift European perceptions of the Americas—the rising power of the United States. Already in the early 1800s, European statesmen had imagined a day when the United States, straddling the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, would become “too powerful for Europe.” By the 1830s, that day appeared imminent. The support of Britain and France for Texas independence, their joint pressure on behalf of Mexico during its war with the United States, disputes over possible canal sites in Central America, Anglo-French flirtation


89 Shortly thereafter, France effectively recognized Haitian independence, perhaps spurred on by the obvious difficulties of reestablishing French authority there in the context of an independent, republican Western Hemisphere.


93 The phrase was Napoleon’s, uttered in the context of discussions about the sale of Louisiana. François Barbé-Marbois, The History of Louisiana: Particularly of the Cession of That Colony to the United States of America (1830; repr., Baton Rouge, La., 1977), 312.
with the Confederacy, and French intervention in Mexico during the 1860s should all be seen in this light: as European efforts to block the expansion of the United States across North America, or, failing that, to create a counterweight to its power.94 The Western Question had burst the bounds of its original Atlantic context to pose the problem of the global distribution of power.

94 For an overview of these efforts, see David Pletcher, The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War (Columbia, Mo., 1974).

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