
Clifford W. Trow

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, Isloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.
“TIRED OF WAITING”:
SENATOR ALBERT B. FALL’S ALTERNATIVE
TO WOODROW WILSON’S MEXICAN POLICIES,
1920–1921

CLIFFORD W. TROW

On 10 August 1919, the Mexican newspaper El Universal asked a crucial question of a recently appointed Senate subcommittee to investigate Mexican affairs. Did the subcommittee members favor “armed intervention” as the best means of protecting foreign interests in Mexico? Reminding Chairman Albert B. Fall of New Mexico that El Universal had been unique among Mexican dailies in supporting the Allies during World War I, the newspaper asserted that because of the differences in strength between Mexico and the United States, armed intervention would constitute an invasion similar to that of Belgium by the Germans.1

After conferring with the full Committee on Foreign Relations, Senator Fall responded to El Universal. Neither he as chairman of the subcommittee nor his colleagues Frank B. Brandegee of Connecticut and Mark Smith of Arizona would reply individually. Instead, Fall asserted, the subcommittee would discharge its duties “without fear, favor, or prejudice” and would be “guided by the facts and circumstances as developed through an investigation,” which would be “most thorough and exhaustive.”2

Eight months later, as he was preparing his official report to the Senate with recommendations for a change in United States policy toward Mexico, Fall confided in his wife: “It is now agreed that the overthrow of Carranza was brought about by the activities of this committee. . . .” Emphasizing that his response to El Universal’s question about intervention had been interpreted in Mexico
by most of the political factions as meaning that Venustiano Carranza must "get out," Fall noted that the action of his subcommittee had broken the nerve of Carranza's followers. The Mexicans understood, Fall stressed, that the Congress was "tired of waiting" and intended to act.

Although he may have overstated the effects of his subcommittee's investigation in precipitating the overthrow of Carranza, Fall correctly assessed the sentiment of the dominant majority of the sixty-second Congress. They were so opposed to the "watchful waiting" approach of President Woodrow Wilson that they intended to stay in session until December to check the president's Mexican policies. Many of the members of the Republican-controlled Congress viewed the president's restraint as weakness and his reliance upon diplomacy rather than military force in Mexico to secure the protection of American lives and property as a weak and vacillating approach that prolonged turmoil in the southern republic.

By August 1919, when the Senate authorized the Fall subcommittee's investigation of Mexican affairs, many of Fall's colleagues from both parties had become convinced that the United States should straighten out Mexico by armed intervention. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Republican from Massachusetts, was such an "interventionist." Since 1914 Lodge had voiced his criticism of the Wilson administration's Mexican policies. When the new Congress convened in 1919, Lodge had been chosen by his Republican colleagues to be chairman of the influential Committee on Foreign Relations. It was Lodge who had appointed Fall to be chairman of the subcommittee investigating Mexican affairs. After the subcommittee had issued its "interim" report in December 1919, Lodge wrote to friends that the aim of the Fall subcommittee was to work for a "proper" solution to the Mexican problem, one that would make the "Cuban arrangement" with Mexico. On 22 December 1919, Lodge told Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson that he could not see any escape from intervention and the erection of a government in Mexico that the United States could sustain.

From the beginning of its investigation in September 1919 until May 1920, the Fall subcommittee worked closely with a large group of vested interests that had already organized a publicity campaign to swing public opinion behind a harsh policy toward Mexico. In
fact, the relationship was so close that it is impossible to separate the activities of the subcommittee from what was, in fact, an organized movement to force the Wilson administration to intervene in Mexico. Aided by a coalition of interests including the Association of Oil Producers in Mexico, the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico (NAPARIM), and a number of smaller investors represented in the membership of the Murray Hill group, the Fall subcommittee prepared a sensational case against the Mexican government of Venustiano Carranza. ⁶

Early in December 1919, Fall in effect tipped his hand, revealing his interventionist trumps. During the crisis with Mexico over the kidnapping of Consular Agent William O. Jenkins, Fall issued a special report on behalf of his subcommittee in which he announced that the Carranza government was spreading Bolshevik propaganda in the United States. Fall then introduced a concurrent resolution that upheld the State Department in making peremptory demands for the release of Jenkins. The resolution also called for the severance of diplomatic relations with Mexico.

As newspapers headlined the imminence of war with Mexico, President Wilson responded from his sick bed in disapproval of the Fall resolution. That disapproval and the release of Jenkins prompted the Foreign Relations Committee to let the resolution die, much to the annoyance of Fall and Lodge. As his subcommittee travelled to the Southwest early in 1920, Fall directed his attack not only at the Carranza regime, but also toward President Wilson, who was made to appear responsible for the Mexican situation. ⁷

In May 1920, however, the Mexican situation suddenly changed as a coup d’état replaced the Carranza government with a new provisional government under Adolfo de la Huerta. Gen. Álvaro Obregón, a participant in the coup, was generally regarded to be the certain victor in the Mexican election scheduled for September of that year. Huerta and Obregón tried to ease the tension by promising that the new Mexican government would protect American lives and property. The Mexican leaders also tried to reassure the big American oil companies that their property would not be expropriated, that Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 would not be interpreted retroactively. ⁸ Officials of the Association of Oil Producers in Mexico and NAPARIM were encouraged by
these pledges. Almost immediately NAPARIM began to consider the possibility of sending a large delegation to Mexico to discuss outstanding differences with the Mexican government.  

Fall opposed the project. Reflecting the viewpoint of the independent oil operators and of the smaller investors, Fall told Harold Walker, attorney for Edward L. Doheny, who was one of the largest American oil producers in Mexico, that it would be a mistake for the large companies to make special arrangements with the new Mexican government. He argued that the big companies had been able to keep operating, but 15,000 small American farmers had been driven out of Mexico. The issue should not be confused by Americans independently treating with the Mexican government, he said. Referring to the work of his committee and its forthcoming recommendations, Fall emphasized that the whole Mexican issue should be settled at once and settled right. With a rare optimism, Fall asserted that at last they were in a position to settle it right.  

In a letter to Doheny describing the long conversation, Walker indicated that Fall had been in close contact with Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby and that they were agreed that nothing in the way of recognition should be given to the new Mexican government until that government had shown by its actions that it would treat all Americans justly. Walker added that Fall was considering putting into his committee report "an idea of negotiating a treaty" but no treaty would be ratified by the Senate that failed to clear up all the points for all Americans and guaranteed their safety and respect for their interests. The United States government, Fall told Walker, is "our protector." Walker found Fall confident that either a satisfactory settlement would be made or an intervention would occur. Noting that Fall was bending all his efforts to the Mexican matter, Walker advised Doheny that Fall has been "our best friend and our best bet and I believe that his advice should be given great consideration."  

Undoubtedly because they believed that Fall spoke for the Republican-controlled Congress and that he had correctly reflected the sentiment within the State Department, the Association of Oil Producers in Mexico and its subsidiary propaganda organization, NAPARIM, decided to follow Fall's advice.  

Fall submitted his lengthy report with the testimonies of 257 witnesses and with his recommendations to the United States Sen-
ate on 20 May 1920. The recommendations called for a prolonged period of nonrecognition for the new government in Mexico while it demonstrated its ability to protect American lives and property. During the period of nonrecognition the United States would hold not only the Mexican government but all of the Mexican factions strictly accountable for any outrage or injustice to American life and property in Mexico.

After a period of stabilizing itself and of displaying its willingness to uphold the rules of international law, the new Mexican government could secure recognition by agreeing in a formal treaty to change sections of the Constitution of 1917, especially by providing exemptions for Americans from the constitution's most revolutionary provisions, i.e., from Articles 3, 27, 33, and 130. In addition, Mexico would have to agree to participate with the United States in constituting joint commissions to settle boundary and claims disputes. Should Mexico be unwilling to make such treaty agreements, Fall recommended that the United States should react vigorously by again warning the Mexican government that it must protect American life and by taking military action when the Mexican government failed to provide protection.

Reaction to the proposals of the Fall subcommittee was mixed. Mexicans of all factions were alarmed at what the recommendations, if implemented, would do to Mexican sovereignty. Certain segments of the American press and the more liberal community condemned the Fall approach as extreme. From the "hands up, your money or your life" description in the New Republic to the milder view of the New York Times that the new government deserved a chance to put its house in order before being met with such stringent demands, the press generally agreed with the New Republic as it admonished the Mexican government to put an end to the epoch of revolution if intervention were to be forestalled.

By spring of 1920, Fall had the requisite position and support to exert a powerful influence over Mexican affairs. No senator spoke in opposition to the Fall report and recommendations when they were submitted through the Committee on Foreign Relations to the Senate for acceptance. Joined by a solid majority party contingent headed by Lodge, the hard line senators, including many Democrats, were a powerful force in that house, while the sentiment in the lower house was probably of a similar tone.
Albert B. Fall. Courtesy of UNM Special Collections Department.
Although he did not attend the June convention, Fall was most influential in determining the plank on Mexico in the Republican Party’s platform. He prepared the plank to conform to the recommendations of his subcommittee. Not only did that convention accept Fall’s recommendations, but it also strengthened Fall’s influence by nominating his good friend and colleague on the Committee on Foreign Relations, Warren G. Harding, as the Republican candidate for president.20

Mexico was only one of a number of important issues that divided the candidates during the campaign of 1920. Fall advised Harding on Mexican matters, and his influence was evident as the Ohio senator condemned the Mexican policies of Woodrow Wilson as weak and vacillating. Democratic candidate Governor James Cox of Ohio took an opposite view. He opposed intervention by asserting that he would not send American troops into a “hornet’s nest” in order to enhance the interests of American property owners, especially those who had invested in oil lands.21

While the campaign proceeded toward a November victory for the Republicans, the Wilson administration and Senator Fall gave a great deal of attention to new developments in Mexico. Huerta’s provisional government made a concerted effort to gain recognition and to secure financial aid from the United States.

Fall carefully watched Mexican developments. At last he was in a position for his program to predominate. There were dangers, however. He had no confidence in Woodrow Wilson, even though he believed that the State Department approved his approach of nonrecognition. In addition, the disparate interests that he had assembled in his “interventionist” coalition were no longer in agreement as to what the best approach might be in dealing with the new Mexican government.22 At the moment when Fall’s optimism was the highest, some of these interests hoped to make separate arrangements with the Mexican government.

Fall’s concern was compounded when Fernando Iglesias Calderón, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, arrived at the State Department late in June. In the unofficial interviews that followed, Iglesias Calderón assured Under-Secretary of State Norman Davis that all responsible parties in his country desired peace with the United States and that a policy of friendship was necessary
for the salvation of Mexico. The Mexican ambassador added that Mexico would make reparation for damages done to Americans in Mexico and would provide them with protection. After receiving instructions from President Wilson that the Mexican situation "was too full of doubts" for immediate consideration of recognition, Davis indicated to Iglesias Calderón that the United States was desirous of encouraging peaceful developments but that recognition would occur when it was opportune.

While Iglesias Calderón was being received unofficially at the department, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby conferred with former Secretary of Interior Franklin Lane and his new employer, E. L. Doheny. According to Lane, the secretary of state hypnotized Doheny into thinking that he could perform miracles. Shortly thereafter Lane sent Colby a ten-page outline of a suggested treaty with Mexico. The friendly reception given to representatives of the Association of Oil Producers in Mexico led them to believe Fall's assertion that the State Department was supportive of his recommendations.

In the meantime, Fall responded to a request of Iglesias Calderón that they confer on Mexico. The conference was polite but to the point. Fall insisted that the recommendations of his subcommittee would be implemented as policy. Shocked to find that Fall had not moderated his position since the overthrow of Carranza, the Mexican asserted that his country would not humiliate itself by accepting a treaty based upon the Fall recommendations.

Fall replied that his recommendations were those of the United States government since the State Department had indicated its agreement. Iglesias Calderón refused to believe Fall. He asserted that Under-Secretary Davis had told him that the United States would never demand conditions that would give Americans a privileged position in Mexico.

Fall realized that the ruling factions in Mexico had not been convinced that his program would prevail. He sought to dispel illusions. Through his friend Myron Parker, the senator communicated directly with President-elect Obregón. Parker told Obregón that there would be no recognition until Mexico agreed to settle points in dispute. "So far as the Department of State is concerned," Parker said, "I can assure you, General, with full
knowledge and all truthfulness that before any treaty is entered into, a satisfactory arrangement must be entered into, and that agreement recorded in black and white."27

Mexico's quest for official recognition did not end with Fall's statements to Iglesias Calderón and Obregón. More determined than ever, Huerta attempted to secure the support of President Wilson by recruiting George Creel, former wartime head of the Committee on Public Information to act for Mexico in dealing with the administration. In September Creel obtained an interview with his friend, Woodrow Wilson.28 He told the president of his many conversations with representatives of the Mexican government and especially about their new attitude, which seemed quite reasonable. Creel then asked for permission to go to Mexico for Wilson, but unofficially and at his own expense, to convey his sentiments to the Mexican leader concerning an acceptable settlement prior to recognition. "We had the fullest understanding of the settlement desired," Creel wrote. What Wilson insisted upon, "and all that he did insist upon," were: first, Mexico's recognition of her obligations under international law with respect to the protection of life and property and with respect to the ascertainment and payment of just claims; and second, that Article 27 of the new constitution should not be given retroactive effect in the sense of confiscating duly acquired property rights.29

With Wilson's encouragement and Colby's assent, Creel journeyed to Mexico City early in October. He conferred with General Obregón, Minister of War Plutarco Elias Calles, and Provisional President Huerta. At every point he found agreement. When he returned to Washington in mid-October, he was accompanied by his friend Roberto V. Pesqueira, who was empowered to enter into formal understandings that would precede recognition.30

Although at home in New Mexico, Senator Fall stayed alert to these new developments. On 19 October, Fall's secretary, Charles Safford, wired from Washington that Creel and Pesqueira were on their way from Mexico to make a special appeal to President Wilson for immediate recognition of the Mexican government.31 Informed that the State Department was preparing two memoranda for the president's consideration in opposition to the special plea, Senator Fall sought to aid what Creel later described as "a spirit of mys-
terious opposition in the State Department." Fall immediately wired his office that he had learned from a Justice Department agent that Creel was employed by the Mexican government as a publicity agent and that his specific task was to obtain recognition. After consultations with Harold Walker of the Doheny interests and with others in the coalition of interests backing the Fall program, Fall's secretary decided that it would be advantageous to send Secretary Colby a copy of Fall's telegram.

Despite opposition in the State Department and a direct attack by the oil men, Creel's mission seemed assured of success when President Wilson expressed himself as satisfied with the results of Creel's conversations. In discussions with the president and with Secretaries Davis and Colby, Creel argued that recognition would be a vindication of the administration's Mexican policies, that Mexico would be able to build strongly before 4 March, and that the interventionist attitude of Harding "will be shown to the people in all of its shamelessness."

To facilitate the process and to meet the State Department's prescription, Creel drew up a protocol in which Mexico agreed to constitute a claims commission, to create an arbitration board to decide border questions, and to refrain from applying the provisions of Article 27 retroactively. Creel presented the protocol to Pesqueira with the explanation that when he signed, it bound his country absolutely. With full knowledge of the consequences, Pesqueira agreed to the terms of the protocol. Creel relayed news of the agreement to Colby. The secretary's hearty approval led Creel to believe that the whole matter was ready to go to the president.

On 29 October Colby announced to the press that he had received a letter from Pesqueira containing assurances of a friendly settlement of all points in dispute between the two nations. By letter Colby responded that Pesqueira's assurances afforded a basis upon which "the preliminaries of recognition could confidently proceed." As the nation's press resounded with predictions that Huerta's provisional government would be recognized immediately, Fall's friends moved into action.

Myron Parker visited the State Department the next day to ask if the department had not changed its attitude from requiring some arrangement in "black and white." Parker wrote Fall that depart-
ment members had denied this and had called his attention to the last line of the secretary’s letter in which, “reading between lines, it will be seen that a promise in writing will have to be made.”

Election day, 2 November 1920, with its Republican triumph, came and went without the administration’s recognition of the Mexican provisional government. Three days later, however, Charles Safford telegraphed Fall that the president was expected to extend recognition in a general statement in which he would declare that both countries had agreed to settle points in dispute by arbitration. Safford recommended that Fall get President-elect Harding to make a public statement that he favored the Fall program rather than immediate recognition. Safford also noted that efforts were being made to require that the understanding be made in specific terms along the lines of the Fall recommendations.

The efforts to which Safford referred were described by the Washington Times as the “monkey wrench in the wheels,” thrown by the Association of Oil Producers in Mexico. Shortly after Colby had indicated that recognition might soon be granted, attorneys for the association requested a hearing at the State Department to present their views on the Mexican settlement. Judge Charles C. Parker, heading the group, convinced department officials that the oil company lawyers should help him draft a memorandum containing their views of what an agreement with Mexico should contain. “We had your report before us all the time,” Walker later wrote to Fall, “and we tried to get into the letter everything you recommended.” Walker added that Colby had promised no recognition would be granted until after 1 January 1921.

Colby handed Creel a tentative draft of the Parker memorandum on 5 November. It was an insult to Mexico, Creel declared in shocked tones to Colby. Colby replied that the State Department did not agree with all the conditions stated in the memorandum. More important, however, Colby said that he had doubts about the sincerity of the Mexican government in the Pesqueira negotiations. From Colby’s attitude, Creel discerned that the negotiations would end in failure and that his own motives were suspect.

Creel explored the matter with Colby and discovered that the State Department had heard rumors that he was in the employ of either the Mexican government or of the oil companies. Creel
denied the rumors. Although the secretary said that he put little stock in such charges, Colby refused to give Creel any assurances about the future of the Pesqueira negotiations. Creel thought that he had been subjected to a “guerilla attack” within the department, and he was angry at Colby’s attitude.  

For two weeks the State Department made no visible effort to further the Pesqueira negotiations. Creel had expected that the negotiations would result in an exchange of informal notes between the two governments prior to the announcement of recognition. No such process occurred. On 10 November, Provisional President Huerta gave up on the Pesqueira mission. The Mexican leader announced that Pesqueira did not have authorization to sign anything for the Mexican government. Creel thought that Huerta had made his announcement because he was irritated at Colby’s delay and had become suspicious about the strained silence of the administration. Having already obtained Pesqueira’s assent to a protocol, Creel made a last effort to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion. He appealed over Colby’s head to President Wilson.  

Creel wrote a “heated” letter to Colby and sent a copy of it to Mrs. Wilson for the president to read. Creel recounted his involvement in the Pesqueira negotiations, and he reiterated that he had gone to Mexico at his expense and with the approval of Wilson and Colby. “I had made myself responsible for the institution of an orderly process that the State Department had publicly approved,” Creel asserted. Why had that process been interrupted? Why had enthusiasm died so suddenly? And why had he been subjected to a “guerilla attack”? Creel asked these questions just before he commented on the impossibility of Mexico accepting the Parker memorandum. Significantly, he added the following:

I know, just as you know, that there are selfish interests in the United States—rich, powerful, and unscrupulous—who do not want the Mexican question settled. They want a continuance of bitterness until the day when political conditions are ripe for armed intervention which will guarantee their dividends with American bayonets. They are telling you that it is best to let matters rest until Obregón’s inauguration, December 1, but when Obregón is President they will have other reasons to urge further delay.
Creel's letter stirred the president and the secretary of state to respond by letter and to meet with Creel at the White House. President Wilson backed Colby and Under-Secretary Davis in their contention that the Mexican government was acting in "ill faith" and that the only way to deal with Mexico was through "hard and fast and formal" agreements.45

On 25 November Colby brought the Pesqueira negotiations to a close. After remarking that the conversations about recognition had been pleasant, Colby suggested to Pesqueira that "as our fruitful discussions draw to a close that commissioners be promptly designated by both Mexico and the United States to formulate a treaty, embodying the agreements, which have been reached as the result of your successful mission."46 Creel was embittered over the failure of the Pesqueira mission. He later wrote Henry Morgenthau that Colby's letter had ended the matter. Creel added: "Why should the Mexican people bother with a treaty which would have to go to the Republican Senate?"47

Although the oil interests and Senator Fall thought that Secretary Colby was supportive of the Fall program for recognition of Mexico, the president and his secretary of state reluctantly backed away from the Pesqueira negotiations. Wilson and Colby agreed with Creel that there were "selfish interests" that wanted to dictate Mexican policies to their advantage. A good example of Wilson's prescience in the matter was the warning he gave to Under-Secretary Davis that "men like Doheny and others who are deeply involved in the oil intrigues" were suspect. "We cannot be too careful not to serve these predatory interests," Wilson emphasized, "because they intend the demoralization of our own politics and the control of Mexican politics."48

Wilson was not alone in this belief. Colby had written the president on 6 November that Doheny representatives had swarmed into the State Department in opposition to the Pesqueira mission. The secretary asserted that the Oil Producers Association was endeavoring to retain former Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory for the purpose of conferring with Wilson and that other men "who have been conspicuous in your [Wilson's] administration are said to be under retainer, and the number of persons whom I have reason to suspect of being employed to keep us under observation,
is almost too numerous for me to enumerate here." Colby advised the president that the dominant group of oil men wanted to keep the Mexican situation static until they could try their hand with the new administration. "Their purpose seems to be to dangle recognition and financial support in one hand, and with the other threaten intervention," Colby concluded.49

The administration turned away from the Pesqueira negotiations, not because, as Creel suspected and Fall's coalition believed, the State Department supported Fall's program, but because Wilson and Colby believed that the negotiations were premature. The Mexican government would be unable to keep its commitments, thus building a new case for intervention. The instability of the Mexican government was apparent, even at the time that negotiations seemed so favorable. On the one hand oil men told Colby that General Obregón did not want the provisional government recognized because he feared that Huerta would set aside the results of the September election and continue himself in power. On the other hand, Colby heard that the oil men wanted to postpone recognition until Obregon took office because they intended to make "a Díaz of Obregón."50

Because of the instability of the Mexican government evidenced in the rumors that he had heard, and because of additional rumors that Fall and Harding were about to meet in Texas to discuss the Mexican problem, Secretary Colby decided that the wisest course for the administration was to "mark time."51 During the interim, while the administration was marking time, the power and influence of Senator Fall was at its peak. Already his party controlled Congress, and Fall looked forward to Republican domination of the entire federal government within a few months.

Because they, too, were politically cognizant, the Mexican leaders sought to cultivate the next administration. While the Pesqueira mission was awaiting state department initiatives immediately following the November election, Mexico's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cutberto Hidalgo, sent a confidential agent to the United States to confer with Fall and Harding and to invite them to attend the inauguration of Obregón in early December.52

Although assured by a friend that General Obregón was enthusiastic about the project, Senator Fall hesitated.53 He did not want
to lessen the impact of his Mexican program by appearing to be friendly to the new regime. After conferring with the Mexican agent, however, Fall announced the invitation in a press release, and he arranged for the agent to confer with Harding.54 Fall’s press release had the effect of complicating Pesqueira’s relations with the State Department.55 When the Pesqueira mission responded by producing a telegram from Obregón denying that anyone was authorized to act for him, Fall had made his point. The “skittish” character of the Mexican government had been clearly demonstrated.56 It was further demonstrated later when Harding designated Fall to be his representative to the inauguration, only to have a Mexican consul on Pesqueira’s orders refuse to visé Fall’s passport.57

Fall was not overly disappointed at the results of his dealings with the new Mexican government. The publicity given to Pesqueira’s meddling had hurt his mission to the United States. Shortly after he had ordered Fall stopped at the border, Pesqueira received Colby’s letter that effectively ended his negotiations.58 Fall had not been enthusiastic about the trip from the first. He agreed with Walker who wrote that the senator’s trip to Mexico might result in lessening his influence because “Albert Fall at a distance is a more austere influence than Fall close at hand and affable.” Walker told Fall that Doheny had also received an invitation to the inauguration, but the petroleum association had advised him not to go because his attendance might “look like capitulation and result in stiffening Mexico in defiance of your report.”59

Although he was no longer fearful that the Wilson administration would counter the effects of his recommendations, Fall sought to guarantee that the incoming Harding regime would implement his program. His actions were twofold: first, he sought to shore up the coalition of interests that had in the past supported his program for Mexico; and second, he worked to gain commitments that his program would be followed from those who would influence foreign policy.

With the apparent return of law and order in Mexico under a government that proclaimed its friendship for the United States and promised to protect American lives and property, many Americans who had been enthusiastic backers of an interventionist policy
now became convinced that a speedy recognition of the new government in Mexico would be to their advantage. This was especially true of the so-called “border jobbers.” These Americans who lived along the Mexican border and who engaged in business activities with Mexicans had begun to clamor for recognition. Walker wrote to Fall to assure him that NAPARIM would counteract their activity by sending a paid propagandist to the border. Walker added that NAPARIM’s instructions to its agent Chester Crowell, a former editor of eight newspapers in the Southwest, were for him to interview his editor friends and “to put them straight” by emphasizing that good business conditions were merely temporary and that the Mexican constitution of 1917 had been inspired by men of Communist belief.60

NAPARIM and Fall were partially effective in blunting the demands of the border jobbers for recognition. Fall’s coalition was also concerned that Mexico’s new government might secure financial support in the United States from powerful banking interests. In December, Fall and representatives of the large oil companies succeeded in convincing two large banking concerns that it would be a mistake to lend money to the Huerta government.61

Greater than his concern over activities of the “border jobbers” or even over the intentions of the large banking houses was Fall’s fear that the oil companies might desert his program to secure their interests by separate dealings with the Mexican government. Álvaro Obregón compounded that fear when, in February 1921, he asserted that the demands of the Republican party in the United States on Mexico were “more extensive” than those that would satisfy the oil companies. Not only were the oil companies “anxious to come to an understanding with the new administration in Mexico,” Obregón asserted, but also if a basis for agreement could be arrived at, “they would use whatever influence they possess to have such an agreement accepted as a complete settlement.”62

If Fall was angry, and he was, other American investors in his coalition were furious at this clear indication that the large oil companies might be willing to settle separately with Mexico. Independent operator William F. Buckley was especially disturbed. Convinced that the large oil companies would desert the independent and smaller investors in Mexico to further their own in-
interests, Buckley and Paul Hudson of the Murray Hill group broke with NAPARIM to organize the American Association of Mexico, which was wedded to the Fall subcommittee's recommendations. Buckley later accused the oil companies of "playing with the hare and running with the hounds" as they were privately urging Washington not to recognize Obregón, while their agents in Mexico had led the Mexican government to infer that the oil companies were advocating recognition."

Although Doheny tried to reassure Fall of his continued support, the senator was not certain that Doheny could speak for all of the oil companies represented in NAPARIM. Earlier in January, after a conference with NAPARIM officials, Fall had sent a firm letter to that organization for general circulation among its membership. "So long as I have anything to do with the Mexican question," Fall had stressed, "no government will be recognized, with my consent, which government does not first enter into a written agreement. . . ." Fall added that he would oppose all private and separate attempts by individual groups to negotiate settlements.

Partially convinced by the fact that Fall had been selected to be a key member of Harding's original cabinet, the Association of Oil Producers in Mexico and NAPARIM publicly reaffirmed their support of the Fall program in early March 1921.

With his coalition of support somewhat fragmented but nonetheless again firmed up, Senator Fall turned his attention to convincing the new administration of which he was a part that his program for Mexico should be implemented. As early as January when the new Congress convened, Henry Lane Wilson, a partisan supporter of the Fall program, began to interview senators and almost everyone else identified with the incoming Harding administration. According to William F. Buckley, the consensus of those interviewed was in harmony with the Fall program.

In February the New York Times commented editorially on what it described as an "inspired Washington dispatch" in the Boston Transcript. According to the dispatch, Senator Fall was not only destined to be President Harding's secretary of interior, but he was also going to be the new president's prompter on Mexican policies. Noting that Fall's program for Mexico contained stringent conditions including constitutional changes and was accompanied by the
threat of military intervention, the *Times* concluded: "If Fall is installed as Harding's adviser, compromise will be more difficult."  

Fall was confident that his good friend Harding and he saw eye to eye on Mexican matters. Although he favored Elihu Root first as secretary of state, Fall was not dissatisfied with Harding's appointment of Charles Evans Hughes for that position, and he was quite pleased at the choice of Wilson's former ambassador to Mexico Henry P. Fletcher to be under-secretary. Fall had advised Hughes about Mexico during the presidential campaign of 1916. On the basis of that association Fall believed that Hughes would be favorable to a vigorous policy of protection of American interests in Mexico.

Although he probably had no commitment from Hughes, Senator Fall considered that Fletcher had endorsed his subcommittee's recommendations. The former ambassador had publicly and privately advised Secretary of State Colby to postpone recognition of Mexico until a treaty could be negotiated that would settle outstanding differences between the two countries. Fall was not displeased at newspaper speculation that he and Fletcher would be the experts who would call the shots in the new administration's Mexican policies.

The day before he left the Senate to join Harding's cabinet, Fall drafted the final report of his subcommittee in the form of a letter to Chairman Lodge of the Committee on Foreign Relations. In the report Fall recounted the major occurrences in Mexican affairs since the end of May 1920 when his subcommittee had submitted the findings and recommendations resulting from its investigations. Despite the changed circumstances in Mexico, Fall reiterated the recommendations of the subcommittee, and he called for their implementation.

So Fall seemed to have gotten his way on Mexico. Early in 1921 Fall told Thomas Lamont of the J. P. Morgan Company that in the last six months, the Mexican policies of the Wilson administration had been 100 percent good. After nearly eight years of attempting to influence Wilson's "watchful waiting" policies, Fall had been able to do so by getting the Republican-dominated Congress to act. And his program had predominated. Or so it seemed! Of course, Mexico had not signed in black and white. And there could be no use of
military force to make her sign anything, so long as Wilson was president. But Wilson's administration was ending! Fall was confident that Harding, Hughes, and Fletcher would soon be following his program. Mexico would submit to a treaty that would end its revolution, or the United States would intervene militarily.74

NOTES

1. The Albert B. Fall papers cited in this essay are in the Henry E. Huntington Library (HEH), San Marino, Calif. NMHR wishes to express its appreciation to Mrs. Valerie Franco of the HEH for her gracious assistance in providing complete citations to the materials from the HEH, and to the HEH for permission to quote from these documents. Professor Trow used microfilm copies at UNM before the materials were transferred to HEH. Telegram, Mexico City El Universal to Fall, 10 August 1919, Fall Papers, box 105, file 1, HEH. See also Clifford W. Trow, "Woodrow Wilson and the Mexican Interventionist Movement of 1919," Journal of American History 58 (June 1971): 46-72. This article indicates that Fall had given continuous expression to interventionist sentiment from 1913 to 1919, and he had been hostile to the Mexican Revolution from its inception.

2. Telegram, Fall to Mexico City El Universal, 11 August 1919, Fall Papers, box 105, file 1, HEH.

3. Fall to E. Fall, 12 May 1920, Fall Papers, box 7, file 2, HEH.

4. See Henry C. Lodge to George I. Jones, 6 December 1919; James H. Wilson to Lodge, 15 June 1920; Lodge to Forbes, 22 April 1920, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS), Boston. In August 1913, the press noted a phrase in a speech by Wilson in opposition to the Mexican government of Victoriano Huerta. From that time on, Wilson's Mexican policies were labeled "watchful waiting." Even though he authorized the Vera Cruz occupation and the punitive expedition against Pancho Villa, Woodrow Wilson opposed a thorough-going intervention into Mexico for the purpose of either acquiring territory or of rearranging or controlling Mexico's government. See Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War and Peace (Arlington Heights, Ill.: AHM Publishing, 1979), pp. 9-12.

5. Lodge to J. H. Wilson, 22 December 1919; Lodge to Lewis Warfield, 11 December 1919, Lodge Papers, MHS. Relevant also is Lodge to Henry P. Fletcher, 28 July 1917, Henry P. Fletcher Papers, box 4, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress (LC). See also William C. Widenor, Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 181-83. By 1919, more than 500 American lives had been lost in Mexico, and many American properties in Mexico had been destroyed or seized as the result of revolutionary activity. The Republican Senate in 1919 authorized
the Fall Committee to investigate "outrages" against Americans in Mexico and to suggest to the Congress a solution to the Mexican problem.


9. [Fall to Lodge, 2 March 1921], "Final Report of Sub-Committee to Investigate Mexican Affairs," Fall Papers, box 97, file 2, HEH.

10. H. Walker to E. L. Doheny, 27 May 1920, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH.

11. Walker to Doheny, 27 May 1920, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH. Fall and Doheny were later involved in the Tea Pot Dome Scandal. In explaining Doheny's loan to Fall of $100,000 delivered in "a little black bag," the oil man praised Fall and his subcommittee on Mexican affairs and said that their service had been worth more than all the attorneys on his staff. See New York Times, 2 February 1924.


13. Fall to Manuel Calero, 4 June 1920, Fall Papers, box 74, file 14, HEH.


15. "Final Report of Sub-Committee," Fall Papers, box 97, file 2, HEH.


17. Calero to Fall, 2 June 1920, Fall to Calero, 4 June 1920, Fall Papers, box 74, file 14, HEH. See also New York Times, 2 June 1920, and "What Shall be Done With Mexico?" New Republic 23 (9 June 1920): 78-79.

18. Trow, "Senator Albert B. Fall," pp. 256-69. See also Fall to H. D. Slater, 4 October 1920, Fall Papers, box 78, file 15, HEH; C. V. Safford to W. P. Hobby, 22 October 1920, Fall Papers, box 35, file 2, HEH.

19. Fall's influence was so dominant in April 1920 that he was able to block confirmation of Henry Morgenthau's nomination to succeed Fletcher as ambassador to Mexico. See telegrams, Lodge to Fall, 2 April 1920; Fall to Lodge, 2, 11 April 1920, Fall Papers, box 73, file 12, HEH. Also see Fall to Frank B. Brandegee, 12 April 1920, Fall Papers, box 73, file 12, HEH; Frank Polk to Morgenthau, 3 May 1920, and Gilbert Hitchcock to Morgenthau, 6 May 1920, Henry Morgenthau Papers, box 6, Manuscripts Division, LC.
20. *New York Times*, 9, 11 June 1920; Telegram, Fall to Brandegee, 9 June 1920, Fall Papers, box 73, file 12, HEH; Harvey S. New to Fall, 7 July 1920, Fall Papers, box 28, file 20, HEH.


22. “Final Report of Sub-Committee,” Fall Papers, box 97, file 2, HEH.


26. Iglesias Calderón to Myron Parker, 5 October 1920, Fall Papers, box 31, file 18, HEH.

27. Parker to Alvaro Obregón, 28 September 1920, Fall Papers, box 31, file 18, HEH.

28. G. Creel to E. B. Wilson, 17 September 1920, Wilson Papers, box 170, file 2, LC. See also Morgenthau to Wilson, 23 September 1920, Bainbridge Colby Papers, box 3B, Manuscript Division, LC. Morgenthau wrote the president that the new Mexican government was willing to anticipate any proper requirements the "you" and not the oil companies would make of it to secure recognition which, if granted, "would give you the chance to prevent the success of the mischief makers and Jingoes in our midst who want war."


30. Creel to Colby, 22 September 1920, Colby Papers, box 3B, LC; Colby to Wilson, 25 September 1920, Wilson Papers, box 170, file 2, LC. See also Creel to Morgenthau, 13 May 1921, Morgenthau Papers, box 6, LC.

31. Safford to Fall, 19 October 1920, Fall Papers, box 36, file 2, HEH.

32. Fall to Safford, 20 October 1920, Fall Papers, box 36, file 2, HEH.

33. Safford to Colby, 20 October 1920, Safford to Fall, 22 October 1920, Fall Papers, box 36, file 2, HEH. See also A. Mitchell Palmer to Wilson, 8 November 1920, Creel Papers, box 2, Manuscripts Division, LC.

34. Creel to Colby, 23 October 1920, Wilson Papers, box 170, file 2, LC.

35. Creel to Colby, 23 October 1920, Wilson Papers, box 170, file 2, LC; Creel to Morgenthau, 13 May 1921, Morgenthau Papers, box 6, LC.


37. Parker to Fall, 30 October 1920, Fall Papers, box 31, file 18, HEH.

38. Telegram, Safford to Fall, 5 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 36, file 2, HEH.


40. Walker to Fall, [?] November 1920, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH.
41. Creel to Colby, 12 November 1920, Wilson Papers, box 171, file 2, LC.
42. Creel to Colby, 12 November 1920, Wilson Papers, box 171, file 2, LC, and Creel, Rebel at Large, pp. 78–80.
43. Creel to Morgenthau, 13 May 1921, Morgenthau Papers, box 6, LC.
44. Creel to Colby, 12 November 1920, Wilson Papers, box 171, file 2, LC. For Colby's reply, see Colby to Creel, 17 November 1920; for Wilson's comments, see Wilson to Colby, 20 November 1920, Wilson Papers, box 171, file 2, LC.
45. Wilson to Colby, 20 November 1920, Wilson Papers, box 171, file 2, LC.
47. Creel to Morgenthau, 13 May 1921, Morgenthau Papers, box 6, LC. See also entry for 22 January 1921, Daniels Diary, Josephus Daniels Papers, Manuscripts Division, LC. Creel told Daniels that N. Davis in the State Department insisted on a treaty, thus leaving the matter in the hands of the Republican Senate. Creel also said Doheny wanted intervention and William McAdoo [the president's son-in-law] represented him.
48. Wilson to Davis, 23 November 1920, Wilson Papers, box 172, file 2, LC.
49. Colby to Wilson, 6 November 1920, Wilson Papers, box 171, file 2, LC.
50. Colby to Wilson, 6 November 1920, Wilson Papers, box 171, file 2, LC. See also Smith, The United States and Revolutionary Nationalism, pp. 183–85.
51. In February 1921, the Obregón government made another attempt to secure recognition from the Wilson Administration. Colby told a Mexican agent that Mexico should agree to a settlement by treaty as a condition of recognition. Obregón was unwilling to proceed in that manner. See Colby to Wilson, 13 February 1921, Wilson Papers, LC; Colby to John P. Withers, 8 February 1921, Colby Papers, LC.
52. C. M. Newman to Fall, 12 December 1920, Fall Papers, box 90, file 4, HEH.
53. Fall to C. N. Bassett, 10 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 96, file 9, HEH.
54. E. L. Torres to Fall, 16 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 96, file 9, HEH.
55. Press Bulletin, 19 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 96, file 9, HEH.
56. Telegram, Warren G. Harding to Obregón, 17 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 96, file 9, HEH.
57. Fall to Torres, 20 November 1920, telegram, Torres to Hidalgo, 20 November 1920, Hidalgo to Torres, 20 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 96, file 9, HEH.
58. Beeson to State Department, 29 November 1920, S.D. Files 812.11/135, NA, and clipping from the New York Herald, 21 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 96, file 9, HEH. See also Telegram, Hidalgo to Fall, 24 November 1920; Torres to Fall, 24 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 96, file 9, HEH. Fall to Hidalgo, 27 November 1920, Fall to William Hanson, 22 November 1920, Fall Papers, box 28, file 39, HEH. Fall regarded the whole episode as a "farcical row" between factions in the Mexican government, and he said the "matter has not annoyed me at all, except to further disgust me with any attempt to help Mexico."
59. Walker to Fall, November 1920, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH.
60. Walker to Fall, 17, 22 December 1920, and Memorandum for Chester A. Crowell, undated, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH.
61. Walker to Fall, 15 December 1920, and W. H. Field to Fall, 22 September 1920, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH.

62. Walker to A. H. Lideen, 24 February 1921, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH. See also Fall to Lodge, 21 March 1921, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH, for Fall's conclusion that British oil companies of Lord Cowdray were no longer cooperating with the American Association of Oil Producers but were pursuing their own line in seeking accommodation with the Mexican government. However, Field to Fall, 1 April 1921, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH, indicates that after a meeting of Lord Cowdray, the principal owner of English oil properties, and a Mr. Body in London, the British companies agreed to cooperate in any way Fall desired.

63. American Association of Mexico, Bulletin No. 1 and 7, 31 January, 27 September 1921; and Field to Fall, 3 January 1921, Fall Papers, box 80, file 12, HEH. See also E. J. Dillon, *Mexico on the Verge* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921), pp. 152-56.

64. Telegram, Doheny to Walker, 4 March 1921, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH.

65. Fall to Thomas F. Lee, 19 January 1921, Fall Papers. See also Lee to Fall, 20 January, Fall Papers, box 89, file 11, HEH.

66. Walker to Fall, 3 March 1921, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH.

67. William F. Buckley to William Dickson, 24 January 1921, Fall Papers, box 106, file 1, HEH.


69. Fall to Hayden Talbot, 14 April 1921, Fall Papers, box 38, file 2, HEH; Fall to Harding, 14 January 1921, Fall Papers, box 16, file 28, HEH. In his letter to Fall, the president-elect said, "I have always believed that you knew the situation as well as anyone within my acquaintance, and frankly, I am on guard whenever anybody else talks to me about matters relating to that country [Mexico]." (Harding to Fall, 14 January 1921).

70. *New York Times*, 27 July 1916; Fall to H. Bursum, 3 August 1916, Fall Papers, box 15, file 19, HEH.

71. Clipping, *Washington Herald*, 23 February 1921, Charles Evans Hughes Papers, box 169, Manuscripts Division, LC. See also Lodge to Harding, 23 February 1921, Lodge Papers, MHS; Fletcher to Secretary of State, 11 July 1920, Fletcher Papers, box 8, LC.

72. "Final Report of Sub-Committee," Fall Papers, box 97, file 2, HEH.

73. Smith, *The United States and Revolutionary Nationalism*, p. 188.

74. See memorandum of a conversation with Hughes, by Kearful, undated, Fall Papers, box 85, file 13, HEH. Kearful told the new secretary of state that while he had served as legal counselor for the Fall subcommittee, he and Fall had often discussed the solution to the Mexican problem and that short of taking over the country the only remedy was to establish a protectorate, for with a protectorate no revolution could proceed far because of the knowledge that it could never succeed. Hughes deserted Fall's program after trying for more than a year to get Mexico to agree to a treaty similar to Fall's recommendation. Mexico would not submit to such a treaty, and like Woodrow Wilson, the secretary of
state would not use force to compel submission. As he increasingly consolidated his position in the Harding administration, Secretary Hughes exhibited annoyance at Fall and Fletcher for attempting to interfere with his handling of Mexican affairs. See "Relations with Mexico," Beerits Memorandum, Hughes Papers, box 172, LC, and entries for 20 March, 3 June, 15 June 1921, and 27 March 1922, Anderson Diary, Charles P. Anderson Papers, Manuscripts Division, LC. See also Betty Glad, Charles Evans Hughes and the Illusions of Innocence: A Study in American Diplomacy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), p. 139; and Robert K. Murray, The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), pp. 106, 329. At Hughes's urging in 1923, the banking and big oil interests worked out an accommodation with the Obregón government, and the United States extended recognition without negotiating a formal treaty as Fall had recommended.