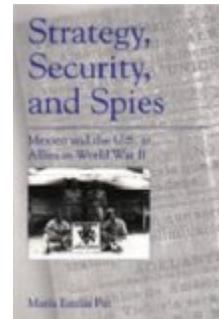


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Maria Emilia Paz. *Strategy, Security, and Spies: Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. xii + 264 pp. \$32.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-271-01666-5; \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-01665-8.

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The Monroe Doctrine of 1823, John (“Black Jack”) Pershing’s attempt to capture Francisco (“Pancho”) Villa, the infamous Zimmerman telegram of the First World War, and the Mexican government’s expropriation of Anglo-Dutch-American oil companies’ properties in 1938 are among the significant international events serving as precursors to the era documented in this volume. Likewise, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s concept of the Good Neighbor Policy, as well as the emerging threat of the Axis powers in Europe, northeast Africa, the Far East, and in Latin America, provide the dynamic historic backdrop for this compelling and unique analysis by Maria Emilia Paz.

As the author notes, her research focuses on the security relations between Mexico and the United States from 1940 through 1945 and is not intended to be a comprehensive account of bilateral interactions during the Second World War. In terms of security arrangements, it was a period of intra- and international military and diplomatic maneuverings, clandestine communications, propaganda, intelligence and counterintelligence operations, treason, sabotage, and other elements worthy of any film noir (*The Third Man*, for example). In the United States, the “war hysteria” of the early 1940s, the fall of France, the ongoing Battle of Britain, and a fear of Japanese attacks on American Pacific coast military and industrial targets set the psychological stage. As a sidebar (not discussed by Paz), this latter fear was, indeed, real. The Imperial Japanese Navy sent forty-nine separate submarine missions to America’s Pacific coast during the war, and a Richfield oil refinery at Goleta, California was shelled in early April 1942. In addition, the sinking of neutral and Allied merchantmen in the Gulf of Mexico by German U-boats provide us with context for

that era (see also the books authored by Gannon 1990 and Wiggins 1995).

By 1940, the United States had begun to change its strategic policies toward Latin America, and in particular to its nearest neighbor, Mexico, as a result of external events during the period 1936-1938—namely, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, the escalation of the Sino-Japanese War, Nazi Germany’s rearmament, and the “invasions” of Austria and Czechoslovakia. Until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Mexico’s attitude towards the United States on matters of hemispheric security was, as Paz states, “noncommittal,” and Mexico openly exported oil and other raw materials to both the United States and Japan. The “Day of Infamy” changed dramatically these relationships, particularly on political, economic, and military issues.

The author, Maria Emilia Paz, holds a doctorate from the London School of Economics (1985), was a Fulbright scholar at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (1985), served as a visiting scholar at Georgetown University (1987-1990), and prepared this volume with the aid of a grant from the MacArthur Foundation. Her dissertation focused on the government of Mexican President Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940). While in Mexico, she was affiliated with the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico’s Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales (UNAM-IIS), and she is currently an independent scholar. Paz’s Mexican research was conducted in the Archivo General de la Nacion (AGN, Mexico), Archivo Historico de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, and the Archivo de la Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional. In the United States, she utilized the National Archives and Records Administration’s (NARA) Diplomatic and Modern Military records, as well

as materials in the Manuscript Division and the Hispanic Division at the Library of Congress. Recently declassified files from the U.S. Army and Navy departments, Secretary of State, Secretary of War, Office of Strategic Services, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and National Security Agency are among the eighteen record groups that she consulted at NARA. Microfilms of captured Nazi German documents from the Reich Ministry of Economics, the German Foreign Office, and the Naval High Command were also reviewed, as were papers at the FDR Library, Yale University Library, and U.S. Army Military History Institute.

Strategy, Security, and Spies has an introductory essay, twelve chapters, an epilogue, and a useful index. In addition to voluminous numbers of primary documents in the records noted above, the volume has a bibliography of 162 books and articles; there are 961 footnotes (in the main to the archival sources), and sixteen figures. The chapters are topically rather than chronologically organized, and the focus of the book is on the pre-war and early years, 1940-1943. The author contends correctly that Mexican historians have largely ignored the 1940s for ideological reasons associated with the “end” of the Mexican Revolution (see Brenner’s 1943 classic *The Wind that Swept Mexico*). Paz also asserts that scholars of the history of the United States have neglected this era probably because the Second World War and events in Europe and the Far East are appealing to researchers.

In 1941, Latin America had a population of about 125 million, of which about 6.1 million were Italians or of Italian descent, approximately 1.5 million were German or of German descent, and 350,000 were Japanese. The greatest numbers of Italians and Germans resided in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, while the majority of the Japanese were in Brazil and Peru. However, by comparison, Mexico (second only to Brazil in total population) had about 20.1 million people in 1941, including about 6,000 Germans, 6,000 Japanese, and a few thousand Italians. Nonetheless, because of its proximity to the United States, Mexico played a key role in the Western Hemisphere Defense Plan, the military corollary to the Good Neighbor Policy.

Paz summarizes briefly the political, economic, and psychological parameters of that era, the concern of the United States about the defense of the Panama Canal, the fear of Nazi and Japanese penetration into Latin America, and the disposition of French and Dutch colonies and warships in the Western Hemisphere (see Farago [1971] for further details). The United States War Department’s RAINBOW military plans had been developed in

1919 and frequently revised since then, and they included “Orange,” devised to counter the Japanese, as well as “Green”—a concept calling for the occupation of Mexico by U.S. forces because of an unstable Mexican political system (pp. 47-48). Paz makes clear the heavy Japanese involvement in the Mexican oil industry from 1938-1941 (for an elaboration see Powell’s 1956 analysis and five chapters in Brown and Knight [1992]).

After December 7, 1941, a new phase opened on bilateral hemispheric defense resulting in the formation of the U.S.-Mexican Defense Command (modeled on the extant U.S.-Canadian plan). However this command remained weak because of a failure by Washington politicians and the U.S. military to recognize Mexican political exigencies. Among the issues, for example, was the proposed requirement that United States military personnel while in Mexico must wear civilian clothing rather than military uniforms. As Paz writes, “a certain historical myopia made it difficult for the United States to understand the resistance that Mexico felt to the idea of having uniformed men in its territory: Mexico was the only country in Latin America that had been invaded, fought a war, and lost territory to the United States. To this day [1997] that wound has not healed” (p. 225). There is an excellent, well-documented discussion of the significance of ex-President General Lazaro Cardenas’s efforts to preserve Mexican sovereignty versus the more conciliatory attempts undertaken by current President Manuel Avila Camacho to ally with the United States.

Chapter Five, “The Strategic Role of Mexican Minerals,” illuminates the importance of Mexican resources and details why Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United States vied for access to Mexico’s oil, mercury, antimony, tungsten, fluor spar, copper, vanadium, mica, quartz crystal, and platinum, as well as a dozen other minerals. Mexico’s expropriation of American oil companies’ properties and assets in Mexico without restitution remained a major issue and ultimately would pit the U.S. State and War departments against one another, the former defending the companies, demanding financial compensation, and a resumption of exploration rights; the latter was troubled about dwindling oil reserves in the democratic world as Nazi armies threatened Russian oil fields. Likewise, Mexico was a primary producer of mercury used in explosives. As a result, the State and War departments worked at cross-purposes against one another so that practically nothing was accomplished after three years of negotiations. As a sidebar, reparations were paid during the postwar period (see Powell [1956]).

Mexican relations with Japan began to deteriorate in July 1941 over issues of bribery, raw material smuggling, and espionage, while a Mexican-U.S. accord was finalized on November 19, 1941. Mexico, therefore, became a “reluctant ally.” German merchant vessels were interned in Mexican ports and German, Italian, and Japanese consulates were closed during the summer of 1941. The Pearl Harbor attack on December 7 caused Mexico to break diplomatic relations with Japan that same day, and with Germany and Italy four days later. Some Japanese officials were interned in Mexico and later transferred to the United States for repatriation. However, it was the sinking of two Mexican oil tankers (Potrero el Llano by U-564 on May 14, 1942, and the Faja de Oro by U-106 one week later) that resulted in Mexico’s declaring that a “state of war” existed between Mexico and the three Axis powers (see also Gannon [1990]).

Chapters Nine and Ten, “Axis Intelligence Activities in Mexico” and “U.S. Counterintelligence in Mexico,” provide extremely valuable syntheses of German and Japanese intelligence operations and espionage networks. Based on declassified primary documents, these chapters add immeasurably to earlier treatments. The Germans had military (Abwehr), Nazi party (NSDAP and SD), and foreign office operatives and espionage networks. We learn that the first microdots used in the field were prepared by Arnold Ruge and initially employed in Mexico to transmit information to the German High Command. In addition, the Germans sometimes transmitted intelligence from Japanese agents to Berlin. The Japanese army, navy, and foreign office had operatives, but their effort lacked sufficient personnel and had antiquated equipment in comparison to their European Axis partner. The role of MAGIC cryptographic intercepts of Japanese communications is also related. We are also informed that the Italian minister to Panama had obtained a copy of secret U.S. defense plans for the Panama Canal but was unable to transmit it to Berlin.

On the counterintelligence front, the jurisdictional rivalries between J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI and William (“Wild Bill”) Donovan’s OSS-COI’s, (Office of Strategic Services-Coordinator of Information—predecessor to the CIA) are assessed. Although the Western Hemisphere was supposedly closed to “Special Intelligence” OSS operations by a presidential directive of December 23, 1941, Donovan maintained field operatives in Latin America and also received intelligence from the U.S. Navy. Nonetheless, the OSS maintained a Latin American unit to assess intelligence data. Three OSS propaganda films, including the five-reel *El Grito de Guerra*, were made in Mexico by

Cdr. John Ford (USNR) to illustrate the Mexican war effort.

Paz concludes that the conflict between the OSS-COI and FBI “hampered successful coverage of the area” (p. 208), but the disputes between the U.S. War and State departments over oil reparations and the construction of airfields and roads in Mexico were not inconsequential. Because Allied victories in 1942 reduced Japanese threats to the eastern Pacific, the construction of airfields at Ixtepec and in Baja California were unilaterally and acrimoniously terminated. Paz blames both Mexican and U.S. officials for this failure and the resulting “near breakdown in diplomatic relations.” Unfortunately, there is a less complete account of the training of a Mexican air group (the 201st Fighter Squadron, the “Aguilas Aztecas”) that was dispatched to the Philippines on March 27, 1945—an act which gave Mexico a place at the peace table. However, in the main, Mexico remained aloof in military dealings with the United States, but the strategies learned during the war years are reflected in the nature of inter-American cooperation during the era of the Cold War as Mexico became a potential business partner with the U.S. In closing, Paz reminds us that “because of its closeness with the United States, Mexico will always occupy a very special place in the framework of U.S. national security. As Mexico found while collaborating with its neighbor in World War II, there is a leverage to be had here. It would do well not to forget it” (p. 244).

Strategy, Security, and Spies is a unique volume covering a rather specialized topic in greater depth or insight than many earlier treatises because Paz was able to consult newly available declassified documents in Mexico and the United States. Therefore, topics in books by Conn et al. (1960, 1964) and Rout and Bratzel (1986)—and the dissertations of Harrison (1976) and Santoro (1967)—are emended. Rout and Bratzel’s 1986 analysis of German espionage in Mexico from 1939-1946 (especially Chapter Three), also based upon archival documents, remains an essential source. Although Paz emphasizes the significance of Mexican mineral resources to the war effort, data on the impact of Mexican labor on factory and farm are not considered. The beginnings of the maquiladora complex (Mexican workers assembling products in border-area factories) may be traced to the wartime era.

For the geographically challenged, a map of Mexico and the adjacent United States would have been a valuable addition to the book. The black-and-white illustrations were not reproduced well but this problem may

originate with the original images. Likewise, it would be useful to understand the relative value of the Mexican peso versus the American dollar during the 1940s so that the reader might better grasp budgetary and bribery information (for example, on p. 142). There are a few typographical errors (mostly in footnotes or in references). The most glaring editorial faux pas is that the population of Latin America in 1941 was “approximately 124,887,494 million people” (p. 26, footnote 6). Nonetheless, these minor points do not diminish Paz’s outstanding research, documentation, and synthesis.

Maria Emilia Paz has written a compelling, informative, and scholarly assessment of a crucial period in Mexican-American relations. Her eloquent and meticulous analysis opens the door for further research on general and specialized topics. Scholars of Latin American studies; of military, diplomatic, or economic history; or of international relations or political science—or those whose interests encompass American culture, or are more focused, perhaps on espionage, propaganda, or submarines—will find significant, well-documented discussions based upon primary source materials. Latin America’s unique relationships with the United States during the Cold War are also placed into a clearer perspective by reading this volume.

Therefore, Paz has prepared a fair, balanced assessment of a unique period in the history of the political relationships between Mexico and the United States. Her study and evaluation of German and Japanese economic, military, and intelligence gathering operations is excellent; one wishes that the Italian components (albeit minor by comparison) were also documented. The volume is recommended not only to political scientists and students of popular culture, but also to scholars of diplomatic and military history as well as Latin American studies (especially H-NET subscribers to H-Diplo, H-German, H-Japan, H-LatAm, H-Pol, and H-War). This is precisely the kind of book that university presses should publish and I for one am pleased that the Penn State Press undertook the effort.

For those of us who grew up during (or recall through the historic record) the era of the Second World War, this impressive work helps to dispel the myth of hemispheric unity promulgated by Carmen Miranda, Crosby and Hope, and the cartoon propaganda created by Disney. In the latter instance, *The Three Caballeros* (1945) comes to mind: the “American” Donald Duck, a Brazilian parrot named Joe (Jose) Carioca, and Panchito, the Mexican rooster. Two of the three disappear from the

cartoon scene during the postwar period, but what does this say about hemispheric unity? Perhaps Jose and Panchito had served well their respective countries—the first ones to declare war against the Axis after the Pearl Harbor attack.

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