

U.S. Government's Reply to President Carranza's Letter of Complaint *Washington, June 20, 1916.*

The following passage was written by Secretary of State Robert Lansing in response to the letter of complaint written to the United States Government by Mexican President Venustiano Carranza.

Sir:

I have read your communication, which was delivered to me on May 22, 1916, under instructions of the Chief Executive of the de facto Government of Mexico, on the subject of the presence of American troops in Mexican territory, and I would be wanting in candour if I did not, before making answer to the allegations of fact and the conclusions reached by your Government, express the surprise and regret which have been caused this Government by the discourteous tone and temper of this last communication of the de facto Government of Mexico.

The Government of the United States has viewed with deep concern and increasing disappointment the progress of the revolution in Mexico.

Continuous bloodshed and disorders have marked its progress. For three years the Mexican Republic has been torn with civil strife; the lives of Americans and other aliens have been sacrificed; vast properties developed by American capital and enterprise have been destroyed or rendered non-productive; bandits have been permitted to roam at will through the territory contiguous to the United States and to seize, without punishment or without effective attempt at punishment, the property of Americans, while the lives of citizens of the United States, who ventured to remain in Mexican territory or to return there to protect their interests, have been taken, in some cases barbarously taken, and the murderers have neither been apprehended nor brought to justice.

It would be difficult to find in the annals of the history of Mexico conditions more deplorable than those which have existed there during these recent years of civil war.

It would be tedious to recount instance after instance, outrage after outrage, atrocity after atrocity, to illustrate the true nature and extent of the widespread conditions of lawlessness and violence which have prevailed.

During the past nine months in particular, the frontier of the United States along the lower Rio Grande has been thrown into a state of constant apprehension and turmoil because of frequent and sudden incursions into American territory and depredations and murders on American soil by Mexican bandits, who have taken the lives and destroyed the property of American citizens, sometimes carrying American citizens across the international boundary with the booty seized.

American garrisons have been attacked at night, American soldiers killed, and their equipment and horses stolen. American ranches have been raided, property stolen and destroyed, and American trains wrecked and plundered.

The attacks on Brownsville, Red House Ferry, Progreso Post Office, and Las Peladas, all occurring during September last, are typical. In these attacks on American territory, Carranzista

adherents and even Carranzista soldiers took part in the looting, burning, and killing.

Not only were these murders characterized by ruthless brutality, but uncivilized acts of mutilation were perpetrated. Representations were made to General Carranza, and he was emphatically requested to stop these reprehensible acts in a section which he has long claimed to be under the complete domination of his authority.

Notwithstanding these representations and the promise of General Nafarrete to prevent attacks along the international boundary, in the following month of October a passenger train was wrecked by bandits and several persons killed seven miles north of Brownsville, and an attack was made upon United States troops at the same place several days later.

Since these attacks, leaders of the bandits well known both to Mexican civil and military authorities, as well as to American officers, have been enjoying with impunity the liberty of the towns of Northern Mexico.

So far has the indifference of the de facto Government to these atrocities gone that some of these leaders, as I am advised, have received not only the protection of that Government, but encouragement and aid as well.

Depredations upon American persons and property within Mexican jurisdiction have been still more numerous.

This Government has repeatedly requested in the strongest terms that the de facto Government safeguard the lives and homes of American citizens and furnish the protection which international obligation imposes, to American interests in the northern States of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, Chihuahua, and Sonora, and also in the States to the south.

For example, on January 3rd, troops were requested to punish the bands of outlaws which looted the Cusi mining property, eighty miles west of Chihuahua, but no effective results came from this request.

During the following week the bandit, Villa, with his band of about 200 men, was operating without opposition between Rubio and Santa Ysabel, a fact well known to Carranzista authorities. Meanwhile a party of unfortunate Americans started by train from Chihuahua to visit the Cusi mines, after having received assurances from the Carranzista authorities in the State of Chihuahua that the country was safe and that a guard on the train was not necessary.

The Americans held passports or safe conducts issued by authorities of the de facto Government. On January 10th the train was stopped by Villa bandits, and eighteen of the American party were stripped of their clothing and shot in cold blood, in what is now known as the "Santa Ysabel massacre."

General Carranza stated to the agent of the Department of State that he had issued orders for the immediate pursuit, capture, and punishment of those responsible for this atrocious crime, and appealed to this Government and to the American people to consider the difficulties of according protection along the railroad where the massacre occurred.

Assurances were also given by Mr. Arredondo, presumably under instructions from the de facto Government, that the murderers would be brought to justice, and that steps would also be taken to remedy the lawless conditions existing in the State of Durango.

It is true that Villa, Castro, and Lopez were publicly declared to be outlaws and subject to apprehension and execution, but so far as known only a single man personally connected with this massacre has been brought to justice by Mexican authorities.

Within a month after this barbarous slaughter of inoffensive Americans, it was notorious that Villa was operating within twenty miles of Cusihuiriachic and publicly stated that his purpose was to destroy American lives and property.

Despite repeated and insistent demands that military protection should be furnished to Americans, Villa openly carried on his operations, constantly approaching closer and closer to the border.

He was not intercepted nor were his movements impeded by troops of the de facto Government and no effectual attempt was made to frustrate his hostile designs against Americans. In fact, as I am informed, while Villa and his band were slowly moving toward the American frontier in the neighbourhood of Columbus, N.M., not a single Mexican soldier was seen in this vicinity.

Yet the Mexican authorities were fully cognizant of his movements, for on March 6, as General Gavira publicly announced, he advised the American military authorities of the outlaw's approach to the border, so that they might be prepared to prevent him from crossing the boundary.

Villa's unhindered activities culminated in the unprovoked and cold-blooded attack upon American soldiers and citizens in the town of Columbus on the night of March 9th, the details of which do not need repetition here in order to refresh your memory with the heinousness of the crime.

After murdering, burning, and plundering, Villa and his bandits, fleeing south, passed within sight of the Carranzista military post at Casas Grandes, and no effort was made to stop him by the officers and garrison of the de facto Government stationed there.

In the face of these depredations, not only on American lives and property on Mexican soil, but on American soldiers, citizens, and homes on American territory, the perpetrators of which General Carranza was unable or possibly considered it inadvisable to apprehend and punish, the United States had no recourse other than to employ force to disperse the bands of Mexican outlaws who were with increasing boldness systematically raiding across the international boundary.

The marauders engaged in the attack on Columbus were driven back across the border by American cavalry, and subsequently, as soon as a sufficient force to cope with the band could be collected, were pursued into Mexico in an effort to capture or destroy them.

Without cooperation or assistance in the field on the part of the de facto Government, despite repeated requests by the United States, and without apparent recognition on its part of the desirability of putting an end to these systematic raids, or of punishing the chief perpetrators of the crimes committed, because they menaced the good relations of the two countries, American forces pursued the lawless bands as far as Parral, where the pursuit was halted by the hostility of Mexicans, presumed to be loyal to the de facto Government, who arrayed themselves on the side of outlawry and became in effect the protectors of Villa and his band.

In this manner and for these reasons have the American forces entered Mexican territory.

Knowing fully the circumstances set forth, the de facto Government cannot be blind to the necessity which compelled this Government to act, and yet it has seen fit to recite groundless sentiments of hostility toward the expedition and to impute to this Government ulterior motives for the continued presence of American troops on Mexican soil.

It is charged that these troops crossed the frontier without first obtaining the consent or permission of the de facto Government. Obviously, as immediate action alone could avail, there was no opportunity to reach an agreement (other than that of March 10th-13th, now repudiated by General Carranza) prior to the entrance of such an expedition into Mexico if the expedition was to be effective. Subsequent events and correspondence have demonstrated to the satisfaction of this Government that General Carranza would not have entered into any agreement providing for an effective plan for the capture and destruction of the Villa bands.

While the American troops were moving rapidly southward in pursuit of the raiders, it was the form and nature of the agreement that occupied the attention of General Carranza, rather than the practical object which it was to obtain-the number of limitations that could be imposed upon the American forces to impede their progress, rather than the obstacles that could be raised to prevent the escape of the outlaws.

It was General Carranza who suspended through your note of April 12th all discussions and negotiations for an agreement along the lines of the protocols between the United States and Mexico concluded during the period 1882-1896, under which the two countries had so successfully restored peace on their common boundary.

It may be mentioned here that, notwithstanding the statement in your note that "the American Government gave no answer to the note of April 12th," this note was replied to on April 14th, when the department instructed Mr. Rodgers by telegraph to deliver this Government's answer to General Carranza.

Shortly after this reply the conferences between Generals Scott, Funston, and Obregon began at El Paso, during which they signed on May 2nd a project of a memorandum ad referendum, regarding the withdrawal of American troops.

As an indication of the alleged bad faith of the American Government, you state that though General Scott declared in this memorandum that the destruction and dispersion of the Villa band "had been accomplished," yet American forces are not withdrawn from Mexico.

It is only necessary to read the memorandum, which is in the English language, to ascertain that this is clearly a misstatement, for the memorandum states that "the American punitive expeditionary forces have destroyed or dispersed many of the lawless elements and bandits ... or have driven them far into the interior of the Republic of Mexico," and, further, that the United States forces were then "carrying on a vigorous pursuit of such small numbers of bandits or lawless elements as may have escaped."

The context of your note gives the impression that the object of the expedition being admittedly accomplished, the United States had agreed in the memorandum to begin the withdrawal of its troops.

The memorandum shows, however, that it was not alone on account of partial dispersion of the bandits that it was decided to begin the withdrawal of American forces, but equally on account of the assurances of the Mexican Government that their forces were "at the present time being augmented and strengthened to such an extent that they will be able to prevent any disorders occurring in Mexico that would in any way endanger American territory," and that they would "continue to diligently pursue, capture, or destroy any lawless bands of bandits that may still exist or hereafter exist in the northern part of Mexico," and that it would "make a proper distribution of such of its forces as may be necessary to prevent the possibility of invasion of

American territory from Mexico."

It was because of these assurances and because of General Scott's confidence that they would be carried out that he said that American forces would be "gradually withdrawn."

It is to be noted that, while the American Government was willing to ratify this agreement, General Carranza refused to do so, as General Obregon stated, because, among other things, it imposed improper conditions upon Mexico.

Notwithstanding the assurances in the memorandum, it is well known that the forces of the de facto Government have not carried on a vigorous pursuit of the remaining bandits, and that no proper distribution of forces to prevent the invasion of American territory has been made.

I am reluctant to be forced to the conclusion which might be drawn from these circumstances that the de facto Government, in spite of the crimes committed and the sinister designs of Villa and his followers, did not and does not now intend or desire that these outlaws should be captured, destroyed, or dispersed by American troops or, at the request of this Government, by Mexican troops.

Source: Source Records of the Great War, Vol. IV, ed. Charles F. Horne, National Alumni 1923