General Rafael Benavides and the Texas-Mexico Border Crisis of 1877

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Shortly after midnight on the warm, muggy morning of August 12, 1877, eight fully armed men silently approached Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas, an isolated hamlet on the left bank of the Rio Grande, approximately one hundred miles upstream from Brownsville. All of the band were of Mexican descent, but of undetermined nationality. Some resided in Camargo, Tamaulipas, just across the river on the Mexican side, where, most likely, they had planned and launched the incursion. Under cover of darkness, sometime between one and two o’clock, the gang silently slipped into the center of town unnoticed by any of the still-slumbering residents of the overwhelmingly Mexican American community or the approximately three hundred United States soldiers stationed at the nearby Ringgold Barracks military post. When they reached the county jail, one of the intruders banged loudly on the gate and yelled to the two dozing guards inside that he had a prisoner in his custody and orders to turn him over for safekeeping. The instant one of the jailers unlocked the gate, the bogus lawman knocked the man to the ground, then shot and seriously wounded him. The other assailants pushed their way through the door, firing their weapons. They shot and killed the other guard and brutally pistol whipped and wounded an unidentified woman, probably the wife of one of the jailers. Roused by the disturbance, Starr County district attorney Noah Cox, who was sleeping in a room on the second floor of the building, rushed out to investigate. As soon as Cox emerged from his quar-

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ters, one of the assailants shot him with a revolver, seriously wounding the attorney and leaving him for dead.\(^1\)

In the meantime, other members of the raiding party efficiently carried out the principal objective of the assault. They unlocked the cell doors and liberated the notorious Segundo Garza, a man who delighted in bragging that he had murdered twenty-seven Americans and who now faced trial for yet another killing when the district court convened in October. Although Anglo-Texans considered Garza to be one of the most dangerous thugs on the lower border, he enjoyed great popularity among many Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The attackers also freed Rodolfo Espronceda, a well-known former Mexican military officer serving a sentence for stealing horses. During the melee, all the other prisoners escaped and had already disappeared into the night. Once they had broken the shackles binding Garza’s ankles, the raiders, along with Garza and Espronceda, fled upriver on foot. Eluding the pursuit of a detachment of cavalry sent out from Ringgold Barracks, the ten-man party reached a place called Rancheria, about seven miles upstream from Rio Grande City, where they crossed safely to the Mexican side.\(^2\)

The spectacular Rio Grande City raid was only the latest in a seemingly endless series of outrages that plagued residents on both sides of the international line. By the summer of 1877, long-simmering tensions along the United States-Mexico border in Texas strained relations between the two countries to the near-breaking point. For almost thirty years after the Mexican War, transborder incursions by marauding indigenous tribes, rustlers, horse thieves, bandits, smugglers, and organized gangs had occurred with increasing frequency and impunity. Miscreants organized on one side of the international boundary, traversed the Rio Grande to carry out their illegal activities, and then retreated across the river to sanctuaries beyond the reach of pursuing police or military authorities. Differences in language, religion, culture, and legal systems, as well as racial prejudice and discrimination, fostered interethnic antagonism between Anglo-Texans and people of Mexican descent and exacerbated the general lawlessness of the region. Many

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\(^1\) For accounts of the raid, see Weekly Ranchero (Brownsville, Tex.), Aug. 16, 1877; New York Herald, Aug. 28, 1877.

\(^2\) Later, Rafael Garza, Gregorio Garza, Zeferino Juárez, Rafael Treviño, Pedro Rodríguez, Brigido Ontiveros, Pedro Parra, and another known only as Obispo were identified as members of the band of assailants. Canales al Ministro de Relaciones, Matamoros, 24 agosto 1877, L-E-55, pp. 43–44 (Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México, México, D.F.; cited hereafter as AHSRE); and Juan (?) y Martín de Sánchez al Secretario de Relaciones, Ciudad Victoria, 28 enero 1878, L-E-55, pp. 272–272v., ibid.
Texans saw border turbulence as ample justification for extending United States control to what many considered its natural limits, by either annexing the northern tier of Mexican states or establishing a protectorate over them.\(^3\)

In 1872 the ongoing violence and complaints of private citizens and public officials in Texas had prompted the United States government to appoint a delegation headed by Thomas P. Robb to investigate border conditions. Focusing largely on cattle rustling and other robberies, the American commissioners stated that bandit forays originated south of the border and declared that Mexican officials, both military and civilian, were incompetent and corruptly complicit in the illegal activities. In 1873 the Mexican government responded with a more extensive investigation of its own. Commonly known as the Comisión Pesquisadora, the fact-finding committee examined Native American raids, as well as rustling and other acts of banditry, and insisted that incursions were launched from both sides of the border. The Mexican commissioners condemned the Robb report as insufficient and prejudicial and charged that the United States government was remiss in its obligations to prevent Native Americans from raiding into Mexico. Unfortunately, these studies did nothing to promote border security, international cooperation, or good will, and continuing incidents of violence along the line set the stage for armed conflict.\(^4\)

Problems at the national level in each country exacerbated the border difficulties. The disputed results of the election of 1876 clouded the


\(^4\) Robb Commission Report; Comisión Pesquisadora.
presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes, whose political foes in the opposition Democratic Party contemptuously dubbed him “His Fraudulency.” That same year, Gen. Porfirio Díaz refused to accept the reelection of Mexican president Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada and ousted him in the Revolution of Tuxtepec. After assuming the presidency in November, Díaz faced continued opposition from armed groups of Lerdo loyalists and other dissidents. Furthermore, the United States refused to recognize Díaz until he demonstrated that his regime was stable and responsible and he could pay the outstanding claims that Mexico owed American citizens. Both administrations saw the advantages of exploiting border problems to deflect public criticism and strengthen their respective regimes.5

During the spring of 1877, civil and military authorities in Texas reported that raiders from Mexico had committed new atrocities north of the border. Some complained that since Díaz had come to power, the level of hostility and lack of cooperation had increased on the Mexican side. Convinced that Mexico was unable or unwilling to check the depredations, on June 1, 1877, Secretary of War George W. McCrary informed Gen. William T. Sherman, commander of the Army of the United States, that although President Hayes wished to cooperate with Mexico, the “invasion” of United States territory by “thieves and robbers . . . should no longer be endured.” He ordered Sherman to advise Brig. Gen. Edward O. C. Ord, commander of the Military Department of Texas, that when his men were in pursuit of marauders, he could use his own discretion “to follow them across the Rio Grande . . . overtake and punish them as well as retake stolen property.”6

Porfirio Díaz considered the order of June 1 an insult to Mexico and a violation of existing treaties between the two countries. In response, on June 18, 1877, he instructed Gen. Juan Ogazón, secretary of war, to order Gen. Gerónimo Treviño, commander in chief of the Division of the North, to position his men along the frontier, prevent lawbreakers from escaping across the border, and deliver captured criminals to the proper authorities in accordance with the Extradition Treaty of December 11, 1861. Ogazón advised Treviño to cooperate fully with

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6 See, for example, W. R. Shaffer to Assistant Adjutant General, Department of Texas, Ft. Clark, Tex., Mar. 9, 1877, Mexican Border Troubles, 4–5; E. O. C. Ord to Assistant Adjutant General, Military Division of Missouri, San Antonio, Tex., Apr. 3, 1877, ibid., 9–10; Geo. W. McCrary to Gen. W. T. Sherman, Washington, June 1, 1877, ibid., 99–100 (quotations).
United States military authorities, but he was to “repel force with force” if an armed intrusion into Mexican territory occurred.\(^7\)

Two days before alerting Treviño, Díaz had commissioned forty-eight-year-old Brig. Gen. Rafael Benavides to conduct a personal inspection of the northern frontier, determine the causes of “the state of anxiety and alarm” existing in that region, and submit a report recommending measures “to end depredations and establish peace and order on both sides of the border.” Virtually ignored in studies of United States–Mexico border troubles, Benavides was instrumental in easing the immediate crisis of 1877 and preventing armed conflict between the two nations. Equally important, the report he submitted at the end of his mission provided the Díaz administration with an insightful analysis of the history, the myriad causes, and the complexities of the problems along the Texas-Mexico border. Benavides not only offered a series of cogent recommendations for restructuring frontier military organization and strategies to secure the frontier, but his report also foreshadowed a number of diplomatic, economic, and technological initiatives that ultimately pacified the border region and fostered improved relations between the two countries during Porfirio Díaz’s thirty-four-year regime.\(^8\)

Rafael Benavides was a distinguished, professionally trained veteran of Mexico’s many domestic and international wars, an accomplished scholar, and world traveler. A fronterizo himself, Benavides was born in Soto la Marina, Tamaulipas, in 1829. At the age of fourteen, he entered the newly reformed Colegio Militar (National Military Academy) in the Mexican capital, where he pursued a rigorous program of training in the three arms—infantry, cavalry, and artillery—as well as mathematics, theoretical and applied mechanics, physics, chemistry, artillery and fortifications, civil and hydraulic engineering, geodesics, drawing, design, French, and English. The outbreak of war with the United States in May

\(^7\) Ogazón al General de División G. Treviño, México, 18 junio 1877, in Memoria Presentada al Congreso de la Unión por el Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Guerra y Marina de la República Mexicana, Pedro Ogazón, Compendio de Diciembre de 1876 a 30 de Noviembre de 1877 (México, D.F.: Tipografía de Gonzalo A. Esteva, 1878), 5–7.

\(^8\) “Benavides, Rafael, Gral.—Su comisión confidencial para vigilar e informar movimientos en la Frontera con Estados Unidos de A.,” Año de 1877, Expediente 11-19-20, 113 pp. (AHSRE). This file contains a handwritten copy of the report that Benavides submitted to the secretary of war at the conclusion of his mission. The Mexican government never published the report, and I have been unable to find the original document or its accompanying maps in the Archivo Histórico de la Defensa Nacional, the Archivo General de la Nación, or any other repository. The document consulted in this study is a manuscript copy of the report that Secretary of War Gen. Juan Ogazón sent to Ignacio L. Vallarta, secretary of foreign relations, and is cited hereafter as the Benavides Report. A Spanish version of the complete text of the report may be found in Michael M. Smith, “Comisionado en la frontera del norte: El informe del general Rafael Benavides, 1877,” Provincias Internas, Año V, Segunda Época, Núm. 4 (2008), 65–86, 81 (1st quotation), 82–111, 112 (2nd quotation), 113–132.
1846 abbreviated his original three-year course of study, and upon graduation in December 1846, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the infantry. In April 1847, Benavides saw his first battlefield action against Gen. Winfield Scott's Army of Occupation at Cerro Gordo, where he was taken prisoner. After his release, he returned to Mexico City. In August, he again fought Scott's forces at the battle of Padierna (Contreras) and was captured a second time. While imprisoned at Tacubaya along with more than eight hundred Mexican captives, he refused an offer of freedom in return for a promise to lay down his arms and fight no more. He soon made a spectacular escape, joined Gen. Juan Álvarez's Army of the South, and on September 8 fought the American forces for the last time at the bloody battle of Molino del Rey. A week later, the victorious United States army took the Mexican capital and concluded the war.  

In March 1854, now-Captain Benavides joined the Revolution of Ayutla that drove dictatorial Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna from power for the last time. During the insurrection, he served on the staff of Juan Álvarez’s Ejército Restaurador (Army of Restoration) and campaigned in Jalisco, Colima, Guerrero, and Michoacán, where his exploits soon catapulted him to the rank of colonel. At the conclusion of the conflict in July 1855, Benavides requested and received reassignment to the northern frontier. For the next two and a half years, he served first as commanding general of Tamaulipas and then as commanding general of the District of the North and Line of the Bravo, headquartered in Matamoros.  

Like most senior federal officers, in December 1857 Benavides adhered to the Plan of Tacubaya, which denounced the liberal Constitution of 1857, in part because it abrogated the military’s traditional privileges and immunities. He then joined the Conservative revolt.

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against the Liberal government of President Benito Juárez. During the subsequent three-year War of the Reform, Benavides served on the general staff of the Division of the East. In September 1860, Conservative president Miguel Miramón promoted him to the rank of brigadier general in recognition of his valorous service during the battle of Tlacolula in Oaxaca. In December 1860, after the Liberal victory in the battle of Calpulalpan northeast of Mexico City ended the civil war, Juárez dismissed him from the army. For the next year, however, Benavides participated in a sporadic guerrilla insurgency against the Liberal government before finally seeking exile in Cuba with other high-ranking Conservative officers.11

Following the French invasion of Mexico in the Spring of 1862, Benavides sought to return to his homeland and offered his sword in defense of the republic against the army of Napoleon III. In June 1863, after some reluctance, President Juárez reinstated the “reactionary” general. Initially, Benavides received command of the First Division of the Army of Operations, but he later transferred to Gen. Porfirio Díaz’s Army of the East. During the war against the French-imposed Emperor Maximilian von Hapsburg, Benavides held a number of important positions, including those of governor and military commander of Oaxaca and, later, of Veracruz. Once called “my best general” by Díaz, he distinguished himself in the capture of the city of Taxco in Guerrero; the battle of Tlacotalpan in Veracruz, where he sustained a severe wound to his right arm; and, most significantly, as the commanding officer of the grueling 106-day siege of the city of Veracruz. On June 27, 1867, when Benavides accepted the surrender of the port and its harbor fortress of San Juan de Ulúa, he proudly claimed victory in the final battle of the war against Maximilian and the Second Empire.12

After spending nearly a year and a half in Mexico City recuperating


from his wounds and a persistent tropical fever contracted during the long siege of Veracruz, Benavides requested and received an unlimited leave to travel abroad and recover his health. He first journeyed to Europe, where he was an eyewitness to several major battles of the Franco-Prussian War, and later settled in New York City. During a seven-year residence abroad, Benavides gathered materials to write original works or to translate from English, French, and German numerous studies treating military organization, training, tactics, technology, and history. Published under the auspices of the Mexican Ministry of War, his books were distributed to high-ranking military chiefs and deposited in the library of the Colegio Militar, where they served as required reading for young cadets.\footnote{13}

In March 1874, President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada chose Benavides as Mexico's first ambassador to the German Empire. Shortly after his appointment, however, the imperial government became aware of several articles in a Mexico City German-language newspaper quoting passages from Benavides's translated work, El último de los Napoleones (The Last of the Napoleons), that were sharply critical of the Kaiser, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck, and German militarism. Although the opinions expressed in the book were not his own, Benavides became a persona non grata in Germany. Advised of this turn of events only after he reached Paris on his way to Berlin, Benavides traveled on to Italy and then returned to the United States.\footnote{14}

Apparently, Benavides was still residing in New York City two years later when Porfirio Díaz ousted Lerdo. Despite his high personal regard for the ex-president, in March 1877 Benavides returned to Mexico City and swore allegiance to the new administration. Three months later, President Díaz, obviously believing that his former companion-in-arms possessed the background, temperament, and skills necessary to con-

\footnote{13} Rafael Benavides al Presidente de la República, México, 24 diciembre 1868, Tomo I, 136 (AHDN, Cancelados). The original works of this prolific writer include Práctica de la guerra en pequeño para servir de norma a los pueblos débiles invadidos por el extranjero (1871), Compendio de la fortificación práctica (1871), La Prusia militar (1871), Práctica del tirador (1874), and Tratado de campamentos y marchas (1874). Among his translations from French, English, and German are La guerra franco-prusiana (1871), El último de los Napoleones (1872), El generalato (1873), Moral militar (1873), Las instituciones militares de Francia (1873), La Academia Militar de West Point (1873), and Las guerrillas consideradas con referencia a las leyes y usos de la guerra (1873).

\footnote{14} R. Benavides al Ministro de Relaciones, New York, 16 mayo 1874, “Rafael Benavides. Su expediente personal, 1874,” L-E-1208, p. 34 (AHSRE); Vorwärts, México, D.F., 22 enero, 29 enero, and 4 febrero 1874; A. Núñez Ortega a José María Lafagra, Berlin, 22 mayo 1874, “Rafael Benavides, Su expediente personal, 1874,” L-E-1208 (AHSRE). The original work, Le dernier des Napoleons, dedicated to Archduke Maximilian von Hapsburg of Austria, is attributed to French Comte Émile de Kérautry, who was the aide-de-camp of Marshal Achille François Bazaine in Mexico during the era of the French Intervention and Second Empire.
tribute to a resolution of the growing international crisis, entrusted to Benavides the important mission on the Texas-Mexico border.15

Sailing from Veracruz on June 20, Benavides traveled first to New York, where he arranged for the purchase of a shipment of arms, and then to Washington, where he consulted with Díaz’s representative, José María Mata, regarding details of his assignment and procedures for communicating with the legation during his inspection of the border. He then proceeded to San Antonio, where from August 2 through 4 he held a series of meetings with Gen. Edward O. C. Ord. They discussed a variety of matters, including the distribution and composition of garrisons along the frontier, the organization of security forces to prevent marauding and the escape of criminals, and procedures to ensure closer cooperation between Mexican and United States military personnel. Contrary to common Mexican depictions of Ord as hostile and heavy-handed, Benavides found him to be discrete, courteous, and accommodating. The American general agreed with Benavides that attacks originated on both sides of the line and that the only way to establish law and order was for both nations to cooperate and prevent criminals from finding asylum on either side of the border. Satisfied that he had established a good working relationship with Ord, on August 6 Benavides left San Antonio for Matamoros, via Galveston, New Orleans, and Brownsville.16

On August 12, Gen. Servando Canales, Benavides’s kinsman and general-in-chief of the Line of the Bravo, met him at Point Isabel. Shortly before their departure for Matamoros, they received a dispatch from authorities in Camargo reporting the Rio Grande City affair. The event significantly complicated Benavides’s mission and further inflamed the already heated passions along the border. Col. William Redwood Price, post commander of Ringgold Barracks, had pursued the culprits to Ranchería on the Rio Grande, then threatened to follow them into Mexico. His actions provoked an angry response from Mexican authorities across the river in Camargo, who vowed to repel any intrusion. Military units from Mier, Guerrero, and elsewhere on the Mexican side rushed to support Camargo and defend other points along the line. Meanwhile, Governor Richard B. Hubbard of Texas, expressing his outrage to President Hayes, demanded the immediate apprehension and extradition of the escaped prisoners and all members of the raiding party. According to Benavides, Hubbard then issued “a whole series of

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15 Rafael Benavides, Protesta, México, 15 marzo 1877, Tomo I, 160 (AHDN, Cancelados).
16 Benavides Report, 14–16. The positive and conciliatory posture of the two men was reflected in newspaper accounts of their meeting. See, for example, the New York Herald, n.d., clipping in L-E-68(2) (AHSRE).
orders, precisely those most well-calculated to provoke a war.” Soon rumors spread that the governor had authorized Lt. Lee Hall of the Texas Rangers to cross the river at Rio Grande City and capture the culprits. Others stories circulated that a body of 25,000 irregulars was being organized in Texas to invade Mexico.  

In the days that followed, Benavides aggressively moved to coordinate efforts on the Mexican side to apprehend the assailants and escaped prisoners, restrain the inflammatory rhetoric of Mexican and United States authorities, and defuse an increasingly explosive situation. As tensions mounted, Canales even suggested that Benavides take personal command of his troops, but Benavides declined. Within days, Mexican units captured two of the assailants, Pablo Parra and Brígido Ontiveros, near Camargo and the escaped horse thief, Rodolfo Espronceda, near Guerrero. A military detachment escorted the three to Matamoros, where local authorities held them pending a ruling on their final disposition. Meanwhile, Benavides continued to press for the apprehension of the remaining parties; he offered a $2,000 reward for their capture and dismissed two captains for a lack of zeal in carrying out their duties. He sent telegraphic and written reports, newspaper clippings, and other materials to Mexican officials in Washington and Mexico City; personally consulted with Ord and other United States military commanders; kept in touch with Governor Hubbard; and worked closely with Hubbard’s extradition agent, John R. Russell, to see that all culprits, regardless of their nationality, were captured and turned over to Texas authorities.

Despite the obstructionism of political and judicial officials in Tamaulipas, who vehemently opposed the extradition of any Mexican citizen involved in the incident, Benavides’s adept handling of the affair earned praise from United States authorities and accolades in the American press for his “judicious and energetic action.” On August 29, mindful of the criticism that such a decision would generate in Mexico,

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but in agreement with Benavides’s recommendation, Díaz ordered the extradition of the three men held in Matamoros, all of whom claimed to be Mexican citizens. The continued legal wrangling of judicial authorities in Matamoros delayed implementation of the order until September 12, when they finally surrendered Espronceda, Parra, and Ontiveros.19

The Rio Grande City incident forced Benavides to alter the nature and scope of his mission. He justified taking such an active role in seeking a resolution of the crisis by explaining that since he was familiar with the English language and already enjoyed a good relationship with General Ord, his assistance in such a “sensitive affair” could be very useful. Employing Matamoros as a base of operations, he collected information from military commanders and civil officials in Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Chihuahua; private individuals knowledgeable about border affairs; and items in the Texas and national press. This data, combined with his own considerable personal experience along the line and materials drawn from the Comisión Pesquisadora, provided the basis for the final report he submitted to the secretary of war on September 10, 1877.20

After a brief account of his journey to the United States, consultations in New York and Washington, initial discussions with Ord, and the Rio Grande City incident, Benavides began his report with an historical overview of the general conditions on the Texas-Mexico border. He explained that the history of mutual depredations and ill-feeling between Texans and Mexicans dated to the time that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo “mutilated” Mexico by taking more than one-half of its national territory, “including the flourishing province of Texas.” For Mexican residents of the region, it was a tale of “misfortune and devastation . . . passed down from father to son.” He noted that after the establishment of peace, Anglo settlers in Texas felt insecure in the face of resentful and hostile Mexicans, who now found themselves and their property “at the mercy of another race with different laws, customs, language, and religion . . . who imposed . . . a system calculated in advance to strip them of their land and force them to emigrate.” Then, a combination of Anglo settlers, “a swarm of greedy fortune-hunters” from the southern states, and veterans of the recent war who had received land grants in return for their service began an “inhumane hunting of


Mexicans.” This “ferocious persecution,” the lack of protection by authorities “who . . . encouraged the usurpation,” and a “patriotic desire to retain their citizenship” caused many Mexicans to migrate to the right bank of the Rio Grande in a movement Benavides characterized as “comparable only to that of the heroic Alsatian people after the Franco-Prussian War.” Mexicans, he lamented, were forced to surrender their homes and property to “insatiable thieves,” and “in their native land, now abandoned forever, they left behind the revered bones of a father . . . a wife . . . a mother or . . . a cruelly murdered child.” Benavides recalled that twenty years earlier, when he held political and military command of the Line of the Bravo, Mexicans’ hatred of the new owners of the lost territory was intense. But now he sensed that “rather than diminishing, [the hatred] has grown even stronger.”

He went on to relate that after thoroughly plundering the lands of dispossessed Mexicans, the armed bands, operating with complete impunity in the vast, open ranges of Texas, began to pillage the property of Anglo settlers. To protect themselves, the imperiled ranchers and farmers organized “vigilance committees” and, applying the “Lynch Law,” hanged captured evildoers on the spot. Pursued “relentlessly and without quarter” by the vigilantes, brigands sought refuge on the banks of the Rio Grande. Here, in certain places hidden away in the bends and twists of the river and dense underbrush, they established their favorite points of assembly and planning, from which they now launched raids into Mexican territory.

He noted that in earlier times, the State of Tamaulipas, “the place where my own parents were born,” was famous for the abundance of its livestock of all kinds, far surpassing that across the river in Texas. The residents of the riverside towns, “rich and poor alike,” were hard-working and honest people who enjoyed a level of prosperity “sufficient to keep them from succumbing to the temptation of thievery.” He reported that a generation earlier, there were no depredations, “or they were so insignificant that scarcely anyone noticed.” Since then, however, cattle rustling and other outrages had become commonplace on both sides of the border. He insisted, however, that the “fundamental cause always lay in Texas,” where “American speculators in cahoots with the marauders abetted the traffic in plunder.”

The general admitted, nevertheless, that the “corruption had spread like a cancer” to Mexican riverside settlements because of the “criminal

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21 Benavides Report, 20–21v.
22 Benavides Report, 21v.
23 Benavides Report, 21–22v.
negligence” and “criminal complicity” of local authorities. As a consequence, the “pernicious contagion of systematic thiev-ery” on the left bank, spurred by the lust for illegal profits, had led to the formation of equally pernicious Mexican gangs. These groups rustled cattle in Texas and then disposed of the animals by selling them to slaughterhouses in Mexican border towns or to unsavory livestock dealers located farther inland. These activities, he explained, constituted the principal source of the hostility and “aggressive spirit” that had existed between Mexicans and Americans since the loss of Texas. The mutual animosity had intensified as a consequence of “appalling assaults against civilization and the laws of men” and had finally “degenerated into the present state of demoralization” that characterized the riverine population on both sides of the Río Grande.24

Benavides then turned his attention to Native American tribes who carried out transborder raids in the adjacent frontier areas. Reflecting the contemptuous attitude toward indigenous peoples common to fron-te-ri-zos on both sides of the border, Benavides identified several “perni-cious” tribes as the most troublesome. These groups of “half-civilized sav-ages” included the “incorrigible Lipans, the most uncivilized and fiercest by nature; the Mescaleros; and the Kickapoos,” none of whom, he said, “knew any other way of life but raiding.” He noted that the three tribes acted independently at times, allied with one another on other occasions, and even collaborated with non-Indians, who took control of the stolen herds and moved them to interior towns in Coahuila. He also believed that a band of Comanches living on a reservation on the Río Escondido branch of the Pecos River in the United States often joined these raiding parties as well.25

Benavides explained that the Indians raided monthly, always during the full moon, and indiscriminately targeted ranchers in Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Texas. The bands launched their assaults from the vast Coahuilcan desert, an area bounded by the great horseshoe bend of the Río Grande between the second and fourth degrees west longitude and above the twenty-ninth parallel. This desolate, unexplored region of roughly ten thousand square miles was unknown “except to the savages who take refuge there [and] perhaps some of the marauders from both sides of the border who seek them as allies.” It was a barren land “sliced by precipices and bristling with inaccessible peaks [and] completely lacking in water.” From here the raiders emerged either to drive back to

Coahuila the animals they had stolen in Texas or to move to Texas those they had taken from ranges in Coahuila and Nuevo León. Their movements, he noted, were very quick. They never employed a greater number of men than the operation required, and they passed from one country to the other in the most remote and secluded places. Returning from a raid, they never followed the same trail as the one they had taken on their departure: “Thus, for example, having crossed the river at a certain spot, on their return they re-cross at a point 100 or 150 miles above or below it.” Then they took the rustled animals to such Coahuilan towns as San Fernando de Rosas, Remolino, San Juan de Sabinas, and El Nacimiento, where they enjoyed the protection of local authorities and found agents who traded provisions and weapons for the stolen goods.26

Several other factors had encouraged lawlessness along the border. Benavides identified the first and foremost of these as the “reprehensible tolerance” of local officials who had the duty to suppress and punish wrongdoing but in whose very presence “the shameful outrages were planned and carried out.” Next he blamed the controversial caudillo, Juan Nepomuceno “Cheno” Cortina, “a sinister character” who had kept the border in a constant state of chaos for nearly two decades. He related that in 1859 Cortina had attacked and temporarily seized control of Brownsville. Then, in open rebellion against Texas authorities, he waged a “war of extermination” in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr Counties. Defeated by a force of United States regulars under Maj. Samuel P. Heintzelman in 1860, Cortina fled to Mexico, where, “in plain sight of the authorities,” he organized a small army and proceeded to sow “the destructive seed of pillage and rustling” along a once-peaceful border. In Benavides’s opinion, the “demoralization that [had] wrought such havoc on the border” and the problems that had constantly arisen between Mexico and the United States derived to a great extent from the atrocities committee by “this wretched man.”27

26 Benavides Report, 23v–24, 39v.
27 Benavides Report, 24v–25 (quotations). A generally sympathetic but balanced view more typical of recent historiographical interpretations of the controversial character is Jerry Thompson’s excellent study, Cortina: Defending the Mexican Name in Texas (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007). This work demonstrates that Cortina was a much more complex figure than Benavides’s uniformly negative depiction suggests. Thompson convincingly argues that in the post-1848 period the very prejudices, injustices, and outrages suffered by Mexicans in Texas that Benavides himself decrees pushed Cortina to become an “audacious revolutionary.” More than just “a ruthless desperado who raided Brownsville in 1859 and instigated a bloody border war,” for over two decades this charismatic personality was a hero and symbol of resistance to many Tejanos and Mexicanos in the border region. The author states that Cortina was undoubtedly “a ‘social bandit’ in his early struggle for equality and justice” who later “became a rugged, fearless, and at times ruthless frontier caudillo, an authoritarian warlord with shifting and complex allegiances.” Cortina’s activities had a sharply negative impact on the problems and issues with which Benavides was dealing, and his ongoing duel for dominance in Tamaulipas with Benavides’s
Benavides identified “impunity” as another major cause of border strife. He charged that local officials encouraged banditry by failing to punish criminals who sought refuge in their communities. He attributed their inaction to simple negligence, fear of reprisals, and, often, complicity in the illicit activities. He asserted that Texas authorities always ignored Mexicans’ requests for help in recovering stolen animals, which were often sold in public markets or openly delivered to those who hired the thieves. Benavides said that he had also made a special effort to investigate Texans’ compliance with the provisions of the extradition treaty, but he had not discovered a single instance in which they had honored the accord and surrendered the guilty parties. Equally condemnable, however, was the fact that when given the opportunity, Mexican officials responded in exactly the same manner. “This deplorable mutual antagonism,” he lamented, “results in a state of affairs that only aggravates the problem and encourages bandits by providing them impunity wherever they take refuge.” Differences in language, customs, and legal procedures in the two countries further exacerbated the contentious issue.\(^{28}\)

Benavides stated that the international conflicts and civil wars that both nations had suffered during the previous three decades had a deleterious effect on border conditions. He noted that during the war with Mexico, the United States army drafted into service a considerable number of immigrants and “adventurers” who settled in Texas after their discharge from the service. He declared that many of these “coarse men of diverse nationalities and habits, now accustomed to life in the field and the fortunes of war,” organized bands of thugs in Texas and waged a “war of extermination and dispossession against Mexicans.” “Here,” Benavides affirmed, “is the origin of armed brigandage on the border.” He continued that the United States Civil War forced the removal of federal troops stationed along the American line. The resulting “neglect” of the Lipans, Mescaleros, and Kickapoos allowed them to flee their reservations, emigrate to Mexico, and become so troublesome in Coahuila and elsewhere. During the wars of the French Intervention and Second Empire, many young Mexican *fronterizos* volunteered to join the “improvised battalions

relative, Gen. Servando Canales, must have colored the Mexican general’s perspective of the man. Thus, although Díaz and Benavides, who were concerned with national interests and international relations, might have considered the border chieftain a “wretched” and “sinister character,” Cortina’s “life and struggle remains enshrined in Mexican-American popular culture as symbolic of resistance to oppression and intolerance” (pp. 249–254, quotations). Another fine work by the same author is *Juan Cortina and the Texas-Mexico Frontier, 1839–1877*, Southwestern Studies, Monograph 99 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1994).

and squadrons” that fought to defend Mexican sovereignty. When the six-year struggle ended in 1867, the government discharged these mass-based popular forces, “expecting them to resume their former industrious way of life.” Many did so; but others kept their weapons, maintained their organization, and, led by men such as “Cheno” Cortina, proceeded to victimize the border region of both countries.29

Finally, Benavides emphasized the role that topography and the “capricious course of the Río Bravo” had played in fostering rustling and banditry all along the line between Texas and the Mexican states of Coahuila and Tamaulipas. Here ranchers exploited as common grazing ground vast “uninhabited expanses of land so immense that it was impossible not only to see where they ended but even to ride across them in a single day or two.” He declared that “ordinarily, the rancher who has been robbed does not even realize what has happened until weeks later, when, while riding across his land . . . he notices the absence of a certain number of animals.” Furthermore, he added, “the bends and twists . . . of the river, the swamps, the dense woods in some stretches, the labyrinth of paths known only to smugglers and highwaymen, and the scrub lands with almost inaccessible hiding places” not only protected rustlers, bandits, and contrabandists, but they prevented civil and military authorities from pursuing them as well.30

Taking all of these factors into consideration, Benavides then offered a wide-ranging series of recommendations that he believed would establish a level of order and security on the northern frontier sufficient to protect the lives and property of its residents. Most of his suggestions were of a military character, calling for significant reinforcement, reorganization, redistribution, and recomposition of Mexican armed forces in the north. First, he proposed the division of the frontier region into four military districts. To the east, in Tamaulipas, the First, or Río Bravo, District would have its headquarters in Camargo, with subordinate units posted to Matamoros, Reynosa, Mier, Guerrero, and Nuevo Laredo, and a mobile detachment based in Las Cruces. The Second, or Nuevo León, District would be centered in Cerralvo, with subordinate units to monitor the “savage tribes” at such places as the commander in chief would later designate. The Third, or Coahuila District, headquartered in Piedras Negras, would have dependant units deployed in Lampazos, San Fernando de Rosas, and Monclova Viejo. Additional mobile detachments based in El Nacimiento, Pico Etéreo, La Babia, and El Remolino would keep native tribes and their trails under constant surveillance. The west-

29 Benavides Report, 19, 26-26v.
30 Benavides Report, 26v-27.
ernmost Fourth, or Chihuahua, District would have its center in the old Presidio del Norte, subordinate units in Patos and Paso del Norte (Ciudad Juárez), and a mobile observation post in El Carrizo.\textsuperscript{31}

Benavides recommended that on a peace footing, the forces assigned to each district be distributed in an essentially similar pattern, “keeping in mind that any decrease in the size of the contingent would jeopardize security, always . . . its principal objective.” Using the Río Bravo District as an example, he suggested that the forces posted to the headquarters at Camargo include one infantry battalion, a cavalry squadron, and a campaign artillery battery. The fort at Matamoros would receive the same number of infantry and cavalry but only a half-battery of artillery. Each of the other garrisons in the Río Bravo District would have a half-battalion of infantry and a half-squadron of cavalry. The Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Chihuahua districts would be manned more or less in the same proportion, with any variation in troop strength determined by the conditions and needs of each locality. Rotation of troops within the respective districts would take place every three months; a general replacement would occur every year.\textsuperscript{32}

Benavides also proposed the equipping of each district with a detachment of 150 guardias rurales (federal rural police). Members of this special force, created during the Juárez administration a decade earlier, would be selected on the basis of their practical knowledge of the terrain, their “good conduct,” and their “proven honesty.” They would serve for at least one year, with an option to reenlist. The district cadre of rurales, subdivided into squadrons of twenty-five men each, would operate only in combination with garrison regulars for reconnaissance missions, guide service, or similar duties. At the same time, they could familiarize troops of the line with the lay of the land and other local conditions.\textsuperscript{33}

Collectively, the forces of these four military districts would comprise the Army of the North, led by a division general from a central command post established in either Monterrey or Saltillo. Here, a mixed division would be held as a rapid response unit for deployment whenever and wherever it was needed. A general staff of artillery and another of engineers would complete the cadre attached to the general headquarters, which would also house the administrative offices, health service, armory, ammunition dump, storehouses, and repair shops. The central

\textsuperscript{31} Benavides Report, 32–32v.

\textsuperscript{32} Benavides Report, 32–32v.

\textsuperscript{33} Benavides Report, 32v–33.
command post would also include a postal service and telegraphic department.34

Benavides reminded the secretary of war that the Mexican army customarily stationed a disproportionate number of soldiers on bases in and around the national capital. Endemic political instability since independence caused Mexican leaders to concentrate forces in the center in order to defend their regimes. He complained, however, that these troops typically idled away their time, constantly pestered the government with groundless complaints, and depleted an already overburdened national treasury. Their lack of patriotism and professionalism often led them to join the recurrent political intrigues, rebellions, and coups d’etat that constantly plagued the republic. Benavides proposed the reassignment of these forces to active duty on the frontier, where they could participate in “the war against the savages.” In this manner, they would hone their martial skills and develop the traditional military virtues of loyalty, honor, sacrifice, and attachment to colors so lacking in soldiers who lived in the city “exposed to every temptation.” He also recommended the summary dismissal from the army of any officer who refused a transfer to the north. Benavides suggested, furthermore, that the army require recent graduates of the Colegio Militar to serve on the frontier, following the examples of France and England, who posted their young officers to colonies in Algiers and India, and the United States, where West Point graduates manned garrisons scattered all along its vast western line, “almost always fighting the rebellious tribes.” “It is for that reason,” Benavides observed admiringly, “that the American officer coming out of West Point is so well trained in all respects . . . as devoted to duty as he is attached to the service,” and, notably, “always indifferent to political affairs.”35

Benavides further recommended the creation of a contingent called the Fijos de la Frontera (fixed frontier troops) to defend the Line of the Río Bravo. This body would consist of four infantry battalions, two artillery batteries, and two esquadrones maniobreros (mounted tactical squadrons)—cavalry units of approximately 120 men specially trained in the use of portable firearms and all tactical operations of a light order. He argued that the creation of this integrated force would save the expense of frequent garrison relief and significantly reduce endemic problems such as desertion and illness due to fatigue and drastic changes in temperature. Troops in this body would be relieved by men

34 Benavides Report, 32v–33v.
drawn from a new base established at the Army of the North’s general headquarters. To maintain adequate troop levels in the ranks of this force, he suggested the incorporation of “deserters, slackers, and young lawbreakers that local authorities had sentenced to military service as a means of punishment.” Since maintaining effective discipline among personnel of this type would require a cadre of hard-nosed sergeants, Benavides proposed the creation of a special school in which carefully chosen cadets would follow a two-and-a-half-year program of full-time training in all subjects appropriate to the ranks of private through second lieutenant. Upon graduation, they would receive the rank of first or second sergeant and posting to a unit on the Line of the Bravo.36

Benavides suggested that in addition to their normal duties of constructing fortifications and building roads, the section of engineers attached to the general headquarters should conduct a series of geodesic studies of the still uncharted frontier. Such information would be invaluable not only for Mexico but also for the scientific community at large. He noted, for example, that the only data available regarding the vast, unexplored Coahuilán desert was the scant information obtained from former Indian captives. These individuals, however, were “incompetent and incapable of providing even a remotely accurate idea of the true geological conditions of that stretch of territory.” An accurate survey of the region could determine its true size, structure, and position and prepare the way for further settlement and economic development.37

Given the unsettled conditions in the region, Benavides recommended that the president immediately declare the existence of “a state of war” in the proposed Río Bravo and Coahuila military districts. The drastic action was necessary in the Río Bravo District because of its strategic military importance and the fact that it was the place where the worst criminals and a majority of the rustlers found “a haven of crime, demoralization, and corruption” and established their bases of operation. He continued that not only was the Coahuila District overrun with rustlers, but it was also the region “most infested by savage tribes.” Commanders of these districts, therefore, should receive extraordinary authority to impose summary punishment in all cases of kidnapping, rustling, robbery, the purchase or sale of stolen livestock, armed assault, and murder. He also suggested that the Mexican government advise United States officials when it had declared a state of war in any part the border and invite the Americans to do the same on their side.38

37 Benavides Report, 38.
38 Benavides Report, 32v–33.
To contend with the persistent menace of Indian raids, Benavides proposed that the Mexican government declare the “savage” tribes “homeless and stateless vagabonds.” Admitting that he was not sufficiently knowledgeable to suggest a “humanitarian policy . . . capable of improving their condition and attracting them to the habits and pleasures of civilized life,” he did remind the secretary of war that all of the “humane and generous” efforts that the government of Coahuila had made in the past to “release the Lipans from their nomadic life” had failed. Such experiments, he said, served only to demonstrate the tribe’s “natural ingratitude and treachery.” Abandoning their formerly “lenient policy” in the early 1840s, Coahuilan authorities “finally resolved to exterminate the tribe.” They commissioned Juan Zuazua to make a “horrid example” of the Lipans, and the young Indian fighter and his men nearly wiped out the tribe. This extreme measure, however, failed to produce “the desired effect.” In fact, Benavides contended, since then the Lipans had increased in number. Their depredations had multiplied, spurring angry complaints from Texans and nearly provoking a full-scale invasion by United States military forces. Benavides advised his superiors to launch “a relentless, energetic, and incessant pursuit of this merciless tribe” and authorize persons who caught them in the act of pillaging, rustling, or selling stolen animals to take “whatever action they deemed most appropriate for dealing with people who refuse to behave in a civilized manner.” In the war against the Lipans, he continued, the Mexican army ought to employ Kickapoos or Mescaleros, “preferably the former,” as auxiliaries, much as the United States had used Cheyennes, Cherokees, and Choctaws against the “formerly unconquerable Sioux.”

In his discussion of nonmilitary matters, Benavides declared that the Rio Grande City incident clearly demonstrated the “complete inadequacy” of the extradition treaty of 1861. He believed that it was imperative either to negotiate a new agreement or amend the existing document to make it more adaptable to the unsettled conditions on the Texas-Mexico border. In his opinion, the issues of citizenship and petitions for extradition demanded immediate attention. Article VI of the treaty stipulated that neither government was obligated to extradite its own citizens, and officials on both sides of the border were reluctant to surrender one of their own. The fact that many accused criminals had dubious or unestablished citizenship complicated the issue, perverted justice, and impeded international cooperation.

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59 Benavides Report, 33, 35–36. For a brief biographical sketch of Zuazua, see Diccionario Porrúa, Tomo IV, 3863.

40 The text of this agreement may be found in “Treaty Between the United States of America and the
Benavides noted that the question of citizenship particularly affected Mexicans. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established the Rio Grande as the new international boundary in 1848, Mexicans had to choose between remaining in Texas and becoming United States citizens or moving across the river and retaining their Mexican nationality. Benavides pointed out that areas of Texas adjacent to the Rio Grande, particularly the small towns and hamlets, were inhabited primarily by natives of Mexico or people of Mexican descent who had never formally declared their preference regarding citizenship. Many, in fact, saw no need or advantage to do so, believing that their place of residence, even if it were only temporary, determined their nationality. Indeed, many fronterizos casually, and legally, moved from one side of the river to the other to join relatives, find work, and set up residence. If they committed crimes or “other acts of disobedience,” they assumed that they could legitimately evade judicial action merely by re-crossing to the other side. It was the responsibility of the nation requesting extradition to prove that the accused was, in fact, one of its own citizens, something that under the circumstances was virtually impossible to do.41

In Benavides’s opinion, the two nations must establish specific and mutually acceptable guidelines for acknowledging or refusing to recognize claims of citizenship. He suggested, however, that there was a simpler solution to the problem, one that would make the question of nationality completely irrelevant. Benavides proposed that the authorities and the laws of the locality where a crime was committed be considered as legitimate and competent in the matter. The accused, regardless of nationality, would then fall under the jurisdiction of these officials for trial and punishment.42

Benavides also proposed modifications in Article II of the treaty regarding the submission of petitions of extradition, the responsibility for which usually rested with state authorities. A change was necessary, he affirmed, because neither Mexican nor American state officials were able to ignore “certain influences” that undermined their compliance with the law. Such influences included the climate of mutual hostility existing between Mexicans and Texans and the prevalent fear that “the scourge of banditry inspired in local police and juridical officials.”

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42 Benavides Report, 29v.
Benavides believed that the president of Mexico should appoint an ad hoc commissioner each time a demand for extradition arose. An exception to this procedure, however, could be made if a state of war existed in the military district where the case occurred. In this instance, the commander in chief of the Army of the North would serve as the official representative of the Mexican government, or, in the interest of the swift administration of justice, he could delegate his authority to the respective military district chief. On the other hand, Benavides advised that Mexico ensure that the president of the United States not have the power to entrust his authority in extradition cases to the governor of Texas, who, in such instances, typically deferred to a local officer. Benavides asserted that the "hostile actions" of Governor Richard B. Hubbard and the local pressures brought to bear "in the most dangerous and calculated way to create problems or humiliate Mexico" following the Rio Grande City incident clearly demonstrated the prudence of such a provision.43

Turning to another matter, Benavides charged that the Mexican Zona Libre (Free Trade Zone) played an important role in fostering interethnic strife and lawlessness in the lower Rio Grande area. In 1858 the Mexican government created a narrow strip along the border in Tamaulipas into which merchants could import products duty-free, as long as the merchandise remained within the defined boundaries. Intended to revive moribund commerce in far northeastern Mexico, the Zona Libre soon became the center of a flourishing international trade in contraband goods. Many unscrupulous Texas merchants relocated to the Mexican side and eagerly joined in the illicit traffic. Such action, Benavides averred, had immediately provoked a "fatal decline" in legitimate commercial activity on the Texas side and created a markedly "hostile and querulous sentiment" among ruined Texas businessmen, who, in order to recoup their losses, now turned rustling into a lucrative binational enterprise. He claimed that some of these same "greedy men" were cynically exploiting the Rio Grande City incident to provoke a war, pressure the United States government into mobilizing its forces, and give them an opportunity to sign lucrative contracts with the army to supply the troops. Benavides condemned the Zona Libre as a "terrible idea, tied to a failed policy"; it benefitted only a few to the detriment of the great majority of the people and the national treasuries of both countries. "It is not," he concluded, "the kind of policy that should guide

43 Benavides Report, 30, 33–33v (quotations). Benavides also shared his criticism of the treaty with a reporter upon his return to New York. See New York Herald, Sept. 29, 1877.
the laws of neighbors seeking to strengthen their ties and protect their mutual interests.\textsuperscript{44}

Benavides also insisted that national security interests demanded that the Mexican government give immediate attention to the creation of a system of rapid communication and transportation along the border and throughout the northern frontier. He noted that the telegraph line that ran from Matamoros to Monterrey veered off in Mier toward Cerralvo and Cadereita, completely bypassing the key military positions of Guerrero and Nuevo Laredo. Authorities in Nuevo Laredo had to use the telegraph line on the American side to communicate with Matamoros, something that was neither desirable nor feasible during an emergency. He declared that it was imperative to provide independent telegraphic service to Guerrero and Nuevo Laredo, as well as a line connecting Piedras Negras with Saltillo via Monclova and the territory most subject to Indian raids. It was also necessary, he said, to build a network of telegraph lines that would establish communication among the border states, with the general headquarters of the Army of the North, and, ultimately, with the central government in Mexico City.\textsuperscript{45}

Benavides concluded his series of recommendations by emphasizing that the attraction of foreign investment and the construction of a railway system were vital to the economic development of the north, the promotion of international understanding and cooperation, and the enhancement of border security. He proposed the extension of a rail line from San Antonio to Laredo, Eagle Pass, or El Paso that would then cross through Chihuahua and Durango and continue on to a Mexican port on the Pacific. Not only would this route establish the shortest line of communication to the West Coast, but it would also stimulate the growth of commerce, provide employment for Mexican citizens, and advertise to the rest of the world the vast riches of the Mexican north. He believed that these natural resources, together with the region’s favorable health and nutritional conditions, were all that was necessary to attract the capital and labor required to develop mining and other enterprises that in the long run would “pour forth wealth and happiness” and “fulfill the bright promise of the northern states of the republic.” The collaboration between foreign capital and Mexican labor, he averred, would reconcile many interests then in conflict, draw the border populations closer together through personal contact and mutu-

\textsuperscript{44} Benavides Report, 18–18v, 31 (quotations). A good study of the Free Trade Zone is Samuel E. Bell and James M. Smallwood, \textit{The Zona Libre, 1855–1905: A Problem in American Diplomacy}, Southwestern Studies, Monograph 69 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1982).

\textsuperscript{45} Benavides Report, 38–38v.
al interests, and improve conditions all along the Río Bravo del Norte.46

After submitting his report, Benavides remained temporarily in San Antonio as a representative of the secretary of foreign relations to monitor the situation, strengthen his relationship with Gen. Edward O. C. Ord, and discourage the violation of Mexican territory by United States armed forces, particularly the Texas Rangers. He then returned to New York, where he received a commission to provide the secretary of war with information concerning the tools and production techniques used in the manufacture of arms and ammunition and to continue his study of United States military organization, training, and weaponry. Except for brief, periodic visits to Mexico City, for the next thirty-four years Benavides remained in New York, where he had married an American woman. In 1878 he unsuccessfully sought appointment as consul general of Mexico in New York City, and on several occasions he requested promotion to the rank of division general. Because guidelines in the reformed army regulations strictly limited the number of such officers and favored advancement of those holding field commands, his petitions were denied. He finally returned to Mexico in September 1911, after the revolution headed by Francisco I. Madero drove Porfirio Díaz from power. In February 1912, after sixty-six years of service, fifty-two at the rank of brigadier general, Benavides retired from the army. Twenty days later, the eighty-three-year-old soldier died in Mexico City.47

While Benavides’s mission did not resolve the problems afflicting the Texas-Mexico border in the early days of the Díaz regime, his presence provided a moderating influence that minimized the potentially disastrous effects of the Río Grande City affair and facilitated its resolution by diplomatic rather than military means. Benavides’s discretion, personal charm and sophistication, obvious cosmopolitanism, and international perspective gained from years of residence abroad served him well in his dealings with United States officials and with the American press. The public image of the graying, prematurely aged Mexican officer and “distinguished gentleman” contrasted sharply with the portrayal of the typical Mexican officer on the border as a “low, intriguing demagogue . . . [and]

46 Benavides Report, 30v–32. He expressed similar ideas in the article appearing in the *New York Herald* on September 29, 1877.

military highwayman,” who behaved in a manner no better than one could expect from “a degenerate mongrel race.” Benavides’s main objective had been to discourage Ord from sending his regulars across the international boundary and to prevent the movement of Texas Rangers into Mexican territory. In this instance he succeeded, although on several subsequent occasions, United States military units disregarded Mexican objections and pursued Indian raiders across the line. Benavides’s report, however, does make it clear that he and Ord agreed that the border was a violent place where both Mexican and American renegades committed unspeakable outrages. Perhaps the reciprocal agreement signed in 1882 permitting federal troops of either country to cross the line when they were in hot pursuit of hostile Indians had its origins in the cooperative spirit evident in their San Antonio meetings and their acknowledgment that only joint action could restrain such activities.48

Benavides’s portrayal of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina as a trouble-making hombre funesto coincided with Porfirio Díaz’s own adverse opinion of the border chieftain. It certainly reinforced the Mexican president’s earlier decision, taken in February 1877, to remove this “sinister” and “wretched” character from the scene, lock him away in a Mexico City prison, and prevent him from further aggravating Texas-Mexico relations. Benavides’s recommendations regarding the extradition treaty and the Zona Libre, however, received no immediate attention. A new extradition agreement negotiated in 1899 made no fundamental changes in the provisions relating to citizenship or the designation of extradition officers in the border states. In 1884 the Mexican government actually extended the Zona Libre all the way to the Pacific. The strip, however, remained a topic of heated debate for many years, and in 1905 Benavides’s position was ultimately, if much belatedly, vindicated when Díaz finally abolished the controversial concession.49

The Mexican general’s report provided a blueprint for strengthening frontier defenses along the Texas-Mexico border that reflected his professional training, extensive battlefield experience, and familiarity with the latest advances in military organization, command, training, tactics, and technology. His recommendations regarding the number and com-

49 Thompson, Cortina, 235–247. “Extradition,” [Treaty signed at Mexico on Feb. 2, 1899], in Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States, Vol. 9, pp. 903–905. One notable change regarding extradition, reflecting Benavides’s suggestion and Díaz’s action in the Rio Grande City affair, pertained to Article II of the old treaty. While the stipulation that neither country was required to extradite its own citizens remained, a proviso was added authorizing the chief executive of each country to order their delivery if such action was deemed proper.
position of federal forces on the frontier; the requirement that federal officers, particularly recent graduates of the Colegio Militar, earn their spurs in the north; the expansion of the corps of *guardias rurales* in the border states; and the improvement of the training of noncommissioned officers all anticipated thoroughgoing military reforms enacted during the initial decade of the Díaz regime.50

Many of Benavides’s proposals clearly presaged later Porfirian policies regarding foreign investment and technological advances, particularly those concerning railroads, telegraphic communications, mining, and the scientific survey of the national domain. The initiation of these programs during the following decade helped lay the foundations for the prolonged period of political stability and economic expansion so characteristic of the Díaz era. Those advances, combined with even more spectacular concomitant developments north of the Rio Grande in Texas, largely resolved many of the contentious issues that had plagued the Texas-Mexico border for decades and had brought the two nations to the brink of armed conflict in the late 1870s.51

50 See the “Ordenanza General para la Organización del Ejército” (Documento 46), *Memoria que el Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Guerra y Marina, General de División Gerónimo Treviño presenta al Congreso de la Unión en 31 de Mayo de 1881, y Comprende del 1º de Diciembre de 1877 á la expresada fecha; lleva más un apéndice hasta el mes de Diciembre del mismo Año de 1881* (México: Tipografía Gonzalo A. Esteva, 1881), 380–683.

51 The effective settlement and enormous development of railroads, communications, mining, timber, and other resources in the Mexican north during the *Porfiriato*, particularly by United States capitalists and colonizers, is discussed in great detail in John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 73–207.