

THE WAR OF THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE (1864-1870):  
A HISTORICAL CASE STUDY ON THE CAUSES  
OF REGIONAL CONFLICT

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by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

THE WAR OF THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE (1864-1870): A HISTORICAL CASE STUDY ON THE CAUSES OF REGIONAL CONFLICT, Mr. Kenneth C. Ferris, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, 117 pages.

The War of the Triple Alliance, fought from 1864 to 1870 between Paraguay and the Triple Alliance of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, was a Latin American regional war that spiraled out of control to become one of the bloodiest international confrontations in the Western Hemisphere. Expanding beyond the ability of the combatants to manage it, the war nearly devastated all the actors, particularly Paraguay, whose people suffered inconceivable casualties and privations.

This thesis examines the War of the Triple Alliance as a historical case study to determine the complex causes and catalysts behind this nineteenth century regional conflict. The case study presents the *casus belli* of each of the primary actors, and infers that balance of power perceptions may have exacerbated the root causes of war. The thesis argues that this little-known and misunderstood war holds unexploited lessons toward modern-day applications in comprehending regional conflict.

To the memory of my Grandmother

Emma M. Ferris

December 8, 1911 – October 30, 1993

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The War of the Triple Alliance, fought from 1864 to 1870 between Paraguay and the Triple Alliance of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, was a relatively unknown Latin American regional war that spiraled out of control to become a total war, and one of the bloodiest international confrontations in the Western Hemisphere. Expanding beyond the ability of the combatants to manage it, the war nearly devastated all the actors, particularly Paraguay, whose people suffered horrendous casualties and privations.

What caused the War of the Triple Alliance and what decisions and forces caused it to expand, and drift so far out of control? At the time of the war, Latin American nations knew about the balance of power model of equilibrium,<sup>1</sup> and its development in Napoleonic Europe. Assuming Latin American leaders and actors on this regional stage behaved logically, were aware of *casus belli*,<sup>2</sup> or the primary causes of warfare, and regarded the balance of power model of equilibrium as a political tool toward assuring regional peace and stability, what went wrong? These leading questions provide the context for the primary research question for this thesis: “Using the War of the Triple

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<sup>1</sup>The balance of power model of equilibrium (shortened to “balance of power model” in the thesis) is a concept of political equilibrium in European strategic thought after the Congress of Vienna (1815). Its roots are in Greek and Machiavellian thought, and the diplomatic agreements from the Congress of Vienna asserted that no single country in a region should be more powerful than, nor exercise more military might, than the combined strength of the remaining countries of that region. The desire at the time of the Congress of Vienna was to ensure political stability and avoid another Napoleonic hegemony in Europe.

<sup>2</sup>*Casus belli*, or causes of war are attributed to the Greek historian, Thucydides. They are fear, honor, and interest (Thucydides and Crawley, 2004).

Alliance as a historical case study, what were the causes of this regional conflict, and can the analysis apply to modern regional conflicts?”

As a case study, the War of the Triple Alliance reveals examples of some of the classic elements of discord: aggressive imperialism, proxy war and exportation of civil conflict, meddling from external countries, forceful nationalism, latent colonialism, ideological disparity and the unpredictable character of an absolute dictator. Whereas regional wars normally result from one or two clearly identified primary causes, the War of the Triple Alliance is interesting because all of these elements appear collectively as a complex set of causes with no apparent primary catalyst. The War of the Triple Alliance can provide additional lessons in qualities of leadership and the perils of applying perceptions of a balance of power model of equilibrium to a region lacking political maturity. This thesis suggests that there are military, political, and strategic lessons to learn from this unknown war.

Modern conflicts in such regions as the Balkans, the Middle East and areas throughout much of Africa appear to share characteristics with the War of the Triple Alliance particularly the tendency toward expanding to the point of intractability. In fairness, there are issues of regional warfare today that the combatants of the War of the Triple Alliance did not have to address: ethnic and tribal concerns, and radical ethno-religious ideology. However, a case study of the historical applications (or misapplications) of the War of the Triple Alliance may provide relevant examples to modern countries, and the forces that drive them to war by presenting lessons from a little-known war from the past. *Casus belli* and perceptions of the balance of power model of equilibrium provide the general construct for understanding the causes of this

war. One assumes that these constructs still hold true today among actors who possess sensitivities to the perceived strength of their neighbors.

Framing the primary question in the context of a historical background and political synopsis of the events leading to the War of the Triple Alliance sets the stage for a closer examination of the geopolitical scene, its actors, and the incidents that resulted in warfare. A review of the primary question introduces secondary questions that focus on specific actions and effects of the war, and guides the organization of the case study. The significance of this thesis topic forges a link between the historical case study and current regional conflicts.

### Background and Context

Although it is virtually unknown to almost all modern North Americans and Europeans, the War of the Triple Alliance was the costliest, most protracted conflict in Latin American history. Like the American Civil War (1860-1865), and perhaps the Crimean War (1853-1856) before it, the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) became a total war; and in terms of combat casualties, it approached American Civil War figures for deaths in single battles and campaigns.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the sieges and trench warfare, the tactical ineptitude of military leadership, and the war's effects on human suffering, starvation and disease presaged the horrors of World War I (Wilson 2004). The conflict arguably left Paraguay the most war-prostrated nation in modern memory. The Triple

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<sup>3</sup>Federal and Confederate deaths at Gettysburg numbered 46,000 men in three days of fighting. The Battle of Antietam produced 23,000 casualties in 12 hours. By contrast, casualties from allied and Paraguayan sides at the Battle of Tuyutí (24 May 1866) numbered 17,000 men in four and one-half hours of fighting (Williams 2000, 59-64).

Alliance victors fared little better: Uruguay's Colorado party<sup>4</sup>--sponsored by Argentina and protected by Brazil--continued on, weakening and dividing the country for decades. Brazil foundered economically for years after continuing the war past 1867 simply to rid the region of Francisco Solano López. The Brazilian system of slavery imploded, signaling radical social change, and the demise of her imperial government. After years of prior civil war, the Argentine Republic gained a new sense of unity and nationalism after the war with Paraguay (Whigham 2004), only to suffer political torment over the war many Argentines felt their country could have avoided and possibly prevented.

As is the case for most wars, the conflict is a study in diplomatic and military catastrophe, and points to how one of South America's many internecine struggles and territorial conflicts could turn into a disastrous international war. The cause for the war centered on the geopolitical vulnerabilities of Uruguay, but one of the catalysts for the war was Mariscal (Field Marshal) Francisco Solano López, the dictator of Paraguay. López did what now in hindsight appears to be the unthinkable: he led his prosperous, relatively modern and self-contained nation into a suicidal war with powerful Brazil and Argentina. At the time, López undertook this act in the belief that he could win; but to ineptly conduct the war and to take it to its final act of pathos remains literally beyond comprehension after reckoning the final toll of lost humanity.

Perceptions about the balance of power in South America at the time gave López a reasonable excuse for his actions. In the mid-nineteenth century, Brazil was flexing her muscles and assimilating territory at a frightening pace. In the Argentine Republic, the

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<sup>4</sup>The Colorado Party refers to the "red" party of Uruguay. Colorados supported large business interests in Montevideo, and sympathized with the Argentine Unitarian party, which advocated a united nation with powerful central rule from Buenos Aires.

capital city and province of Buenos Aires, locked in a power struggle with outlying provinces for national control, still considered Paraguay a buffer state under Platine<sup>5</sup> purview (Williams 1972). Both situations chafed the dictator's sense of persecution to the point of paranoia. Powerfully affected by political exposure to a balance of power model of equilibrium during an earlier visit to Europe, López adopted this notion to his politics of dictatorship in Paraguay, and with it came heightened mistrust of his neighbors.

The balance of power model or the perception of it, effectively describes the reason of interest, but goes beyond it to suggest perhaps if a nation (in this case, Brazil) becomes too powerful, then its national interest could define itself through aggression simply for its own sake. Examples throughout the ages of imperial warfare of this type include the Persian Empire, the Mongols, and the Huns, to name a few.

All of Thucydides' reasons for war exist interchangeably; however, Argentina's primary reason for war was probably more honor-based as she sought to regain her glory days of vice regal influence on the Rio de la Plata. Control of the Mar del Plata, the wide estuary of the Río de la Plata river system that opened the interior of the South American continent was vital for regaining Argentina's prior geographic domination of the region extending from Peru to Tierra del Fuego. Control of the Plata meant snatching Uruguay

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<sup>5</sup>Plate / Plata / Platine: Plate and Plata are proper nouns describing the River Plate (English) / Río de la Plata (Spanish) river system and estuary proper. Plata also refers to the land region around the Río de la Plata river system and estuary. Platine is an adjective that describes the collective provinces and countries in the Río de la Plata region, and the actions and activities they influence on one another. More specifically, Platine can also refer to the river provinces of Argentina and the city and province of Buenos Aires. Example: "Platine economy and politics concentrated on freedom of commercial navigation up the tributaries of the Río de la Plata; all goodwill hinged upon Argentina to honor her resolution to assure freedom of the rivers."

on the other side of the estuary, and pulling Paraguay back into the Platine sphere of control. Paraguay may have gained independence from Spain in 1811, but because of old Argentine vice regal designs, she fought--figuratively--for independence from Buenos Aires. Argentina officially recognized Paraguay's independence on 4 June 1856 (Office of the Geographer, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 1979).

Paraguay's primary reason for war was fear of her two powerful neighbors, and only the constant bickering between Brazil and Argentina kept their political interests in their smaller neighbor in check. Paraguay's notice of intrusive Argentine activity in Uruguay was alarming enough, but López's perception of the balance of power became a test in reality when Brazil moved to influence a civil war that was underway in Uruguay. López viewed Brazil's actions toward Uruguay as confirmation of her territorial appetite, and he felt that Brazil wanted to dismantle Uruguay and bring the "Banda Oriental" province back under Brazilian control. With Uruguay at risk from Brazil's predations, no small nation in South America would be safe. López declared war on Brazil, and eventually moved his army eastward to assist the Blanco party<sup>6</sup> in Uruguay in maintaining national integrity against the opposing Brazil-sponsored Colorado party.

López requested a crossing into the Misiones province of Argentina in an attempt to reach Uruguay before the Brazilians. Buenos Aires viewed this as an aggressive act and declared war on Paraguay. The final irony came when the Blanco party fell in Uruguay and the new Colorado government in Montevideo declared war against

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<sup>6</sup>Blanco party refers to the "white" party of Uruguay. Blancos were conservative and protectionist in politics, and answered to interests of the rural people in the agricultural provinces. The Blancos sympathized with the Argentine Federalist party, which advocated equality under an Argentine federation of provinces with decentralized control.



Paraguay; a bleak preview of the unpredictable and disastrous course the war would take in the future. Given such strenuous pulling at the seams of the balance of power, one wonders if adroit diplomacy would have worked at all; too many of Thucydides' reasons for warfare were unleashed for sensible political restraint to contain.

The original Machiavellian construct of the balance of power model may have lost its authority of articulation after the experience of the First World War and its fallen dominos of treaties. However, one may argue that the model appears to retain its applicability today in coalitions and alliances, and deserves a review. Samuel Huntington, the distinguished Harvard political scientist, stated that future conflicts will be cultural, not shaped by states, but by peoples; therefore, one may argue that future conflicts could simply arise from the changing and unequal distribution of regional power influenced by cultural and ethno-religious catalysts (Huntington 1993). Religious disparities, such as power dynamics between Sunni and Shiite in Iraq, or ethno-religious strife in Africa and the Balkans are modern examples.

By using the historical case study, and applying the causes of war and balance of power perceptions to the conflict, one can acquire a better understanding of regional conflict resulting from unequal power distribution. The practical goal of such an understanding is to identify, manage and/or prevent conflict in regions of instability; for where these occur there are greater degrees of human suffering, and a greater chance that the conflict would expand to the point of intractability. In the end, by managing regional conflict, the international community may promote the discourse of nations, religions, and ethnic groups in ways other than war.

### Primary Research Question

“Using the War of the Triple Alliance as a historical case study, what were the causes of this regional conflict, and can the analysis apply to modern regional conflicts?” Originally, the primary research question set out to study the War of the Triple Alliance, and whether *casus belli* and the balance of power model of equilibrium properly explain the causes and conduct of that particular war. This model changed in favor of using the war as a case study to frame the war and the models together, as cause and effect, not examining them separately. Further, the original primary question asked “what” lessons one could learn from the war for modern conflicts, and “how” one could apply them. It soon became beyond the scope of this thesis to identify lessons and their use; the primary question thus focuses on the historical case study, and suggests that the case study correlation is useful by examining lessons from this little-known war.

### Secondary Research Questions

Referring to Thucydides’ *casus belli*, the reasons for conducting warfare, what appear to be the overarching causes (fear, honor, interest) for each actor in the War of the Triple Alliance? Earlier in this chapter, the suspected causes of war for Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina identified fear, interest, and honor, respectively. Each of these reasons or causes tended to depend on a different interpretation of the regional balance of power by each of the leaders involved. Meanwhile, Uruguay, the prize sought by Brazil and Argentina, and the cause championed by Paraguay, suffered under a tedious and lethal civil war, and initially wanted no fight with her neighbors. Eventually, interests now shared with Brazil after the Colorado Party seized rule in Montevideo took Uruguay to the battlefield against its old ally.

Great Britain and the United States, though not combatants in the war, had national interests that proved meddlesome and tended to tip the balance of power toward one or another of the actors. When the Confederate States of America placed Great Britain under a trade embargo, she could not obtain quality cotton for her mills. Britain looked toward Brazil and especially Paraguay as providers for the long staple cotton their mills required, since distance and logistics affected Indian and Egyptian deliveries (Whigham 1984). Paraguay offered stiff negotiation terms to trade prompting Great Britain to exert undue economic influence in the region. In the interim, the United States was fighting a civil war in 1864. Concerned about European interests in South America, and too preoccupied by the civil war, the United States could not fully appreciate the genuine regional threat confronting her neighbors to the south.

Why did the Triple Alliance of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay nearly destroy itself conducting the war longer than the original motivations warranted? It did not take long for Uruguay to lose its effectiveness in the war, and the country became a minor actor after 1866 (Kraay and Whigham 2004). Argentina met with Paraguay that same year to discuss a separate peace, only to have López negotiate and later reject the terms in total to buy time to prepare a better defense against the alliance at the fortress of Humaita<sup>7</sup> (Pollard 2006). By September 1866, Argentina faced a new threat of civil war with her provinces, and pulled the majority of her troops from the war. Brazil fought on,

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<sup>7</sup>The remains of the fortress of Humaita are near the junction of the Paraguay and Paraná Rivers in Paraguay. (See map, page 40). Located on high ground near a strategic bend in the Paraguay River, and protected from ground attack by surrounding swampland and marsh, the fortress commanded the defense of both rivers. Considered one of the best natural defensive sites in the world at the time, military tacticians termed Humaita “the Sebastapol of the South” (Wilson 2004, 55).

claiming that their war was against López, not the nation or people of Paraguay (Strossen and Prince 2008) which suggests that they may have viewed him as the singular reason for their participation in the war.

What prevented Brazil's assimilation of Paraguay after winning the war? When Brazilian troops killed López in 1870, Brazil immediately ended the war. Two reasons could explain why Brazil and her allies granted survival to what remained of Paraguay: first, as the victor and occupier of Paraguay, Brazil prevented Argentine troops from garrisoning Paraguayan territory, and in doing so, effectively maintained a buffer against her old Spanish foe. Second, the world was watching the war and particularly the sufferings of Paraguay with keen interest. Rutherford B. Hayes, President of the United States, negotiated a generous settlement for Paraguay, and in relinquishing certain rights to the victor, Brazil may have gained a sense of moral high ground.

### Significance

Latin American affairs have recently thrust themselves into international attention. The media paints Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez as the central figure in a clear bid for regional hegemony. News of the dismissals of U.S. Ambassadors in Bolivia and Venezuela, the basing of Russian bombers on Venezuelan soil and the machinations of Chávez in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Paraguay signifies an apparent change in the distribution of power in Central and South America. (In Paraguay, Chávez courted newly elected liberal President Fernando Lugo toward support of Venezuelan politics in what he, Chávez termed the new "socialism of the 21st century") (Bridges 2008)

If the historical case study of the War of the Triple Alliance is applicable for current regional affairs, one may apply it to explain why some nations in Latin America

are conducting their domestic affairs and exercising their regional influence in ways that appear diplomatically counter-productive and bent towards conflict. One could interpret Chávez's actions, for example as Thucydides' *casus belli* of interest--a desire to create a pan-Hispanic entity, not unlike Nasser's goal of a pan-Arab union centered in Egypt in 1956. The risk of a new power paradigm in Latin America could increase instability for the Western Hemisphere, and could very well signal the demise of the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

Another context in which this model may be at work is in Africa, where every territorial dispute, every civil disturbance, and every change in government has the potential to explode into international conflict that taxes the abilities of deliberate diplomatic action. Here, the ebb and flow of cultural and tribal differences, resource scarcity, and unequal economic distribution provide *casus bellum* and the balance of power among nations. If the power paradigm shifts in favor of any one tribal or regional power, there is a chance of misuse of that power simply for the aim of seeing it used in the name of tribal or cultural differences against weaker nations or areas. The international community does not want to see a repeat of Somalia or Rwanda, though Darfur has already reached a point of expanding conflict, driving human suffering into neighboring countries.

In both examples, Latin America and Africa, the case study would not be a solution to regional conflict, or the possibility of conflict. Rather, it may serve as a barometer to determine the likelihood of a potential regional conflict, or the scope of a conflict currently underway, and would facilitate the assessment of each country's power

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<sup>8</sup>One could question the legitimacy of the Monroe Doctrine today: is it still effective, or does it denigrate the countries of Latin America?

in the areas of diplomatic, informational, military and economic affairs. Thus, external mediators or peacekeepers could apply increasing levels of appropriate responses to the disruptive parties, and could direct instruments of national power to promote regional security in areas of rising instability. If the historical case study of the War of the Triple Alliance is suitable for use, one must exercise care in suggesting any external mediator for peacekeeping or conflict resolution in a particular region.

### Conclusion

This chapter framed the primary question and thesis statement around the historical backdrop and events leading up to the War of the Triple Alliance. This opening narrative provided a case study examining the constructs of *casus belli* and the balance of power model of equilibrium, and determined its use in modern conflict identification and resolution. This chapter posed the primary question, and introduced secondary questions that focus on specific actions and results from the war. Finally, a short discussion of the topical significance of this thesis formed a link between causes and perceptions of the past and possible modern use. This chapter sets the stage for an accounting of the research, analysis and conclusions in subsequent chapters.

The next chapter will focus on a review of the literature on the War of the Triple Alliance. This review will be topical, ordering the discussion according to the primary and secondary research questions. It will summarize and compare authoritative works written on the war; and identify patterns or discover gaps of knowledge. In addition, the literature review in chapter 2 will inform the reader and researcher, and provide a foundation for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the literature review, ordering the sources in a topical fashion, as they relate to the primary and secondary research questions. The review aims to inform the reader and researcher and provide a foundation for further research by summarizing and comparing authoritative works written; and connecting patterns and exposing gaps in existing knowledge, particularly in the historical case study. Because the War of the Triple Alliance is a little-known conflict, it is important to be aware that scholarly sources vary widely in its treatment. However, each advances a unique perspective on the war, and if one processes the readings with regard to the limitations outlined in the next chapter on research methodology, he or she can present the research with confidence. An astute researcher will sense that information about the war seems to be relatively one-sided, and that the majority of sources deal with the war in a “Paraguayan-centric” fashion. Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil do not share Paraguay’s ties between national identity and collective purpose in regards to the war and its history,<sup>9</sup> therefore, there tends to be a paucity of detailed sources on the war beyond the broadest treatments by the former Alliance members.

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<sup>9</sup>Paraguay’s first dictator, Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia closed the country to the outside world and literally ran the country under a one-man rule. For the next forty years, the Paraguayan people developed a distinct sense of fraternal nationalism born of isolation and self-reliance that appeared to be lacking in Imperial Brazil, and the torn nations of Argentina and Uruguay (see Appendix).

### Recommended Preliminary Reviews

Two works of historical fiction are included in the reference list, and while not useful as academic sources, the books are superb “first reads” to provide a commentary on the events and times of the war, and to examine the idealization of the central figures--the human context--that helps to flesh out historical details. Ms. Lily Tuck, the modern author of *The News from Paraguay* (2004), gives the researcher a particularly clear vision of Paraguay’s darkening social and political settings before the war, and builds a sense of premonition for the destruction to come; a sense not lost on the people of Paraguay after the declaration of war. On the other hand, the 1938 author of *Woman on Horseback*, Mr. William Barrett, delivers a relatively accurate account of some of the political brinksmanship at play in the months before the war, and paints López as a national leader reacting, rather than acting in the unfolding regional drama. Barrett is less kind in his treatment of the dictator than Tuck, reflecting the perceptions of his day on “The Paraguayan War”.

Charles B. Mansfield, the author of *Paraguay, Brazil and the Plate: Letters Written in 1852-1853* (1856) provides insight on the general Rio de la Plata region prior to the war. Mansfield can make no predictive view of the coming war, of course; but he affords the researcher a physical and cultural view of the geographic area in a time of rapid political change. Mansfield was one of the first Europeans allowed into Paraguay in 1852, and his book is excellent at correctly portraying the people of the region not as inhabitants of four distinct countries; but as analogous peoples of the Misiones/Plata region, separated only by colonial and political principles, and in the case of Brazil, by language and imperial ideology. This portrayal precedes the general observations and



representations of William Barrett, previously noted, and Pelham Horton Box, author of *Origins of the Paraguayan War* (1927). Understanding the commonalities, which make these regional actors distinct from others in South America, is helpful in appreciating the “familial” conduct of a limited regional war that becomes unmanageable.

The start and conduct of the War of the Triple Alliance is the theme in *Latin America's Total War* (2004), by University of Sunderland Professor of History Dr. Peter H. Wilson. The same theme appears in *Seven Eventful Days in Paraguay: Reconnoitering the Archaeology of the War of the Triple Alliance* (2006), by Dr. Tony Pollard, internationally known for his academic specialty in battlefield archaeology. Both authors paint a less than flattering picture of Francisco Solano López, but overall, they present careful details on how the war begins and unfolds. Wilson provides a regional chronology of events stretching from 1810 to 1942, which lays out the important events and people leading up to the war and the consequences afterwards. Pollard experiences the war through the mind of the archaeologist, connecting the physical, tangible artifacts of the historical scene to his writer's sense of historiography. His commentary on what is essentially an archaeological paper is worthy of a pure historical treatise on the war, and his descriptive narratives make the battlefield come alive.

### The Balance of Power

Two substantial sources discuss the balance of power model of equilibrium as it applies to Latin American politics of the nineteenth century. Miami University professor Harris Gaylord Warren termed the balance of power the “equilibrium-survival thesis” (1962, 4) as it applied to the viewpoint of López toward his neighbors. Harris claims that López was not reckless in his interpretation, but instead keenly understood the balance of

power, and Paraguay's role in maintaining it simply as a right of smaller countries for self-determination. It is possible this political view extended to Uruguay, and may explain why López seemed reluctant to interfere in what he thought was simply an internal affair of his small neighbor, respectful of its right to non-intervention. Warren posits that López simply regarded the balance of power as the maintenance of stability between Brazil and Argentina, and their mutual respect for sovereignty of their neighbors. López's efforts to act as mediator in regional disputes, particularly between Argentina and Brazil may support Warren's argument.

A wider description of the balance of power model comes from Dr. Diego Abente, professor of Sociology and Politics at Universidad Católica, in Paraguay. Dr. Abente is a former senator and government official in Paraguay who has developed three complimentary theories to explain the War of the Triple Alliance: (1) balance of power, (2) power transition, and (3) imperialism. Abente claims that the balance of power is wider in scope, involving British imperialism (with the Alliance as proxy) and Latin American nationalism (Paraguay) (1987, 47). Dr. Abente bases his balance of power theory on the European state of affairs after Napoleon following the Congress of Vienna. In short, Abente suggests that the balance of power was working (López had acted as successful mediator for regional conflicts before), but Paraguay's economic and military strength was the cause of a regional power transition (a country "powerful but dissatisfied" (1987, 47)), and Great Britain had imperial interests in the region, incompatible with stability. Add the Uruguayan civil war, and the factor of Argentina's provinces, and the stability of the balance of power model crumbles.

## Broad Causes of the War

The causes and later conduct of the war in scholarly sources tend toward three broad categorizations: (1) the perceived disruption of the regional balance of power (previously detailed), (2) the likelihood of US and British intervention, and (3) the activities of the regional leaders, particularly López. Though neatly presented here, research suggests that these three causes may all have been present at the same time. For ease of identifying this thesis in a spectrum with other source positions, refer to Figure 1, Research Continuum on the War of the Triple Alliance.

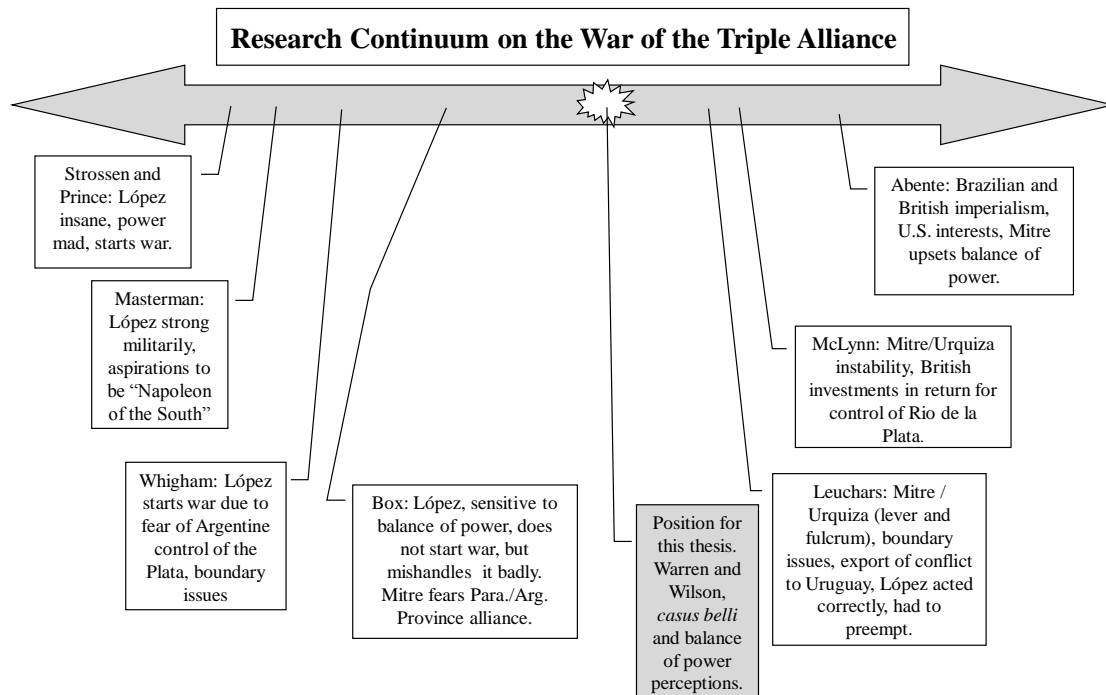


Figure 1. Research Continuum on the War of the Triple Alliance  
*Source:* Created by author.

Generally, the positions most fraught with inaccuracies tend to regard López as the sole figure for the cause and destruction of the war. Authors Ed Strossen and Michael Prince, the 2008 writers of *Stupid Wars: A Citizen's Guide to Botched Putsches, Failed Coups, Inane Invasions and Ridiculous Revolutions* go long on the generalized history, but come up short by excessively blaming the Paraguayan dictator. The authors suggest that López acted upon the wishes of his mistress in his decisions on international affairs (Strossen and Prince 2008). *Stupid Wars* is not an academic book; it serves solely as an example of what appears to be a modern historiographic trend: undue focus on the powerful central figure of the Paraguayan dictator when considering the War of the Triple Alliance.

George F. Masterman, a British physician who actually knew López (and could be considered a primary source), wrote *Seven Eventful Years in Paraguay* in 1856. Masterman would likely agree in part with Strossen and Prince: the Mariscal, though sensitive to international affairs and a desire for stability, saw himself as the Napoleon of South America, and if he could not receive legitimacy and respect from his neighbors, he was not beyond tyrannical acts to secure them. Masterman admits that after the war, many scholars berated him, and perhaps justly so; however, one cannot deny that he had front row seats to the spectacle of the war, particularly when López became mentally unhinged at the end.

University of Georgia history professor Thomas L. Whigham and University of Bristol lecturer of history, Dr. Pelham Horton Box consider causes of the war other than López, and address other actors and outside issues in detail. Whigham wrote *The Paraguayan War: Causes and Early Conduct* in 2002 and co-wrote *I Die with My*

*Country: Perspectives on the Paraguayan War 1864-1870* with Hendrick Kraay. Dr. Whigham is a prolific writer, and widely regarded as the North American expert on the War of the Triple Alliance. Dr. Box wrote *Origins of the Paraguayan War* as part of a doctoral thesis in 1927 and he is the first North American scholar to examine the war. His thesis is the best source for understanding the war's politics and causes. In fact, the actual conflict gets minimal treatment in the last chapter; it is clear that Box was interested in the years before the war and the events leading up to the first shot. For that reason, and for the intent of his writing, Box's work stands close to this thesis in a historical position on the war. Box and Whigham both lay the primary cause of the war on the perceived disruption of the balance of power due to Argentina's perceived wish to control the Rio de la Plata. Both see López behaving sensibly, but reacting in fear and mishandling the course of the war, and Box highlights Argentine President Bartolomé Mitre's equal fears of an alliance between breakaway Argentine provinces and Paraguay.

On the other end of the spectrum, Dr. Diego Abente, and British historian F. J. McLynn consider Mitre to blame for the actions leading to war, because of Mitre's foreign policy that sought to eliminate hostile governments and gain control of the Rio de la Plata. Dr. Abente's 1987 article on explanatory models based on the balance of power agrees with McLynn's account "Consequences for Argentina of the War of the Triple Alliance 1865-1870," by stating that British economic imperialism in seeking new cotton markets and self-serving U.S. political and economic interests in Latin America exacerbated the causes behind the upset balance. Both authors lay the catalyst of the war on Mitre and the Argentine provincial leader, Justo José de Urquiza, for exporting their civil conflict to Uruguay, itself locked in a civil war at the time and courting British trade

overtures. McLynn deems Urquiza the worst offender in equilibrium as the provincial leader wavers back and forth with the shifting pre-war perceptions of power.

Dr. Chris Leuchars, British Professor of history, comes as close to the interpretation of this thesis on the other end of the continuum on page 17. Leuchars writes in his book, *To the Bitter End: Paraguay and the War of the Triple Alliance* that if Mitre is the lever in upending this war, Urquiza is the fulcrum (2002, 71). While not as analytical as Whigham, Box or Abente, Dr. Leuchars impartially examines each of the causes of war mentioned in this chapter. Leuchars competently treats López by assuming that he had to act preemptively against his more powerful neighbors, an action that could bear examination in a modern day hypothesis. Leuchars (and to a degree, Box) served as references for this work, especially for information on the major actors, the geography and the sequence of events before and during the war.

This thesis tends to agree most closely with the models of Dr. Harris Gaylord Warren and Dr. Peter H. Wilson. Warren's inclusion of the balance of power model of equilibrium into the narrative of the war supports the assumption behind this thesis, and explores the idea that the equilibrium model is not a tangible thing, but a perception that through the roles adopted by the actors, affects history. The concise reporting of the war by Wilson, and the accompanying timeline to a sensibly presented article makes it valuable.

### Why and How the War Got Out of Control

The true tragedy of the War of the Triple Alliance is not that it began, but that it continued far past the point of what it was intended to resolve. Understanding why and how the war became unmanageable is a key point in using the war as a case study. Dr.

Chris Leuchers postulates that in early 1868, López was still in a defensive position at the fortress of Humaita, and could see that despite the suffering of his people, there were weaknesses in his enemies. Though backed against the wall, Francisco Solano López may have felt that the allies could not last and doubled his efforts at fortifying Humaita. By 1868, López likely felt his hunch was correct when the Argentines and Uruguayans no longer posed a significant threat. Though they had suffered losses in major battles, the Paraguayans were not certain that they had lost the war (Leuchars 2002, 235).

Leuchars continues with Brazil's reasoning: the assertion that López, left unchecked, was simply too dangerous. From the Brazilian leader's perspective, the war must continue because if the Paraguayan dictator continued to control his country and command his army, the entire war to this point would have been a conflict without justification (Leuchars 2002, 215). It is clear that the Brazilians laid the blame for the war directly upon López. In a curious turn of perception, the most powerful country in South America feared its neighboring dictator, and called for his death in the name of regional stability. For Brazil, ridding South America of López carried the same political necessity as the capture and death of Saddam Hussein in Iraq during the Second Gulf War.

Dr. Pelham Horton Box defines the conflict around the unique views of Emperor Dom Pedro II and Francisco Solano López, and a larger political controversy in the world at the time: slavery. Dom Pedro II asserted that Brazil must liberate Paraguay from its tyrannical dictator. López countered that Paraguay could never give up and sacrifice free people to the last civilized country on earth that held slaves (Box 1927).

Finally, Box agrees with contemporary writer and University of Chicago history professor Michael Geyer, who writes in the book: *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (1986) that Paraguay and Brazil behaved like typical eighteenth century nations--measuring their sense of worth and rank on the world's stage on their ability to sustain horrifying casualties in war. Doctors Williamson Murray, Professor Emeritus at Ohio State University, and MacGregor Knox, Professor of International History at the London School of Economics support Box and Geyer in their book: *The Dynamics of Military Revolution: 1300-2050* (2001). They apply a First World War perspective to the War of the Triple Alliance. They believe that eventually the combatants conclude that there can be no brokered peace; it must be only "total victory, or total defeat" (Murray and Knox 2001, 176).

#### War's End and U.S. Mediation

Equally important to comprehending the catastrophe of the War of the Triple Alliance is to understand its ending and the role that the United States played in securing a constructive settlement for Paraguay. Diego Abente claims that by carrying the war to its tragic end--the death of López--Brazil could then occupy the beaten country, and in doing so, keep Argentine interests out (Abente 1987, 65). Brazil kept its promise to a watching world; though occupying Paraguay for several years, they preserved Paraguayan national integrity. Chris Leuchars agrees, stating that Brazil now saw a Paraguay without López as an ally and a buffer against an Argentina on the prowl for Paraguayan territory (Leuchars 2002, 234).

Leuchars concurs with Duke University Professor Harold F. Peterson, when in 1932, Peterson pointed to the Monroe Doctrine as the primary reason the United States



entered into peace mediation between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. In doing so, the U.S. edged out offers from France, and more importantly, Great Britain in negotiating the peace (Leuchars 2002). Peterson continues by writing in “Efforts of the United States to Mediate in the Paraguayan War” (1932) that inept U.S. ministers may not have had altruistic motives in brokering the peace, favoring instead the possibility of economic gain or political ambitions. Suspicions about U.S. motives by Brazil and Argentina (Peterson 1932, 17) made mediation nearly impossible until 1878 when U.S. President Rutherford B. Hayes successfully negotiated terms in favor of Paraguay.

### War Dead

Differences in census counts on Paraguayan war dead routinely emerge in academic writings. One of many examples is “The Paraguayan Rosetta Stone: New Insights into the Demographics of the Paraguayan War, 1864-1870” (1999). Doctors Thomas L. Whigham and Barbara Potthast, Professors of History at the University of Georgia and University of Cologne, respectively, contend that Paraguayan loss of life in the range of seventy percent are correct, based upon a “lost” census only recently revealed. The subsequent rebuttal, “Strong Reservations about ‘New Insights into the Demographics of the Paraguayan War’” (2002), by University of Nijmegen professor Jan Kleinpenning argues that based upon census figures in 1873 and 1910, Whigham and Potthast’s formula cannot be correct for generally accepted three percent growth rates in Paraguay. The “Rosetta Stone” numbers of around 120,000 Paraguayans remaining after the war could not create--at three percent growth--a validated census count of 283,000 to 333,000 in Paraguay in 1910. The generally accepted--though unreliable--death toll for

Paraguay is around 220,000 due to battle deaths, disease and starvation (Kleinpenning 2002).

Regardless of the numbers, Paraguayan war dead in this case are important data to consider when assessing the magnitude of catastrophe following the war, and in addressing the perplexing question of why Brazil--the last Allied combatant to continue the war--did not simply overrun Paraguay once López was killed. Paraguayan history attests to the scale of human suffering due to the war. On the other hand, there is often little mention in any historical volume or journal article of the estimated more than 100,000 war dead (Pollard 2008) sacrificed by the Triple Alliance nations--a number which is also subject to academic argument and speculation.

#### Possible Current Applications of Balance of Power Models

Dr. Christine Gray, Professor of International Law at St. John's University wrote *International Law and the Use of Force* (2004), addressing modern international law. One may read his case studies on pre-emptive actions and on peacekeeping operations with the War of the Triple Alliance in mind. Gray's treatment of international law serves to understand how the balance of power model applies to today's regional tensions and hostilities. Of particular note is Gray's theory that future international and regional peacekeeping elements (United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and Economic Community of West African States, for example) may increasingly use humanitarian justification for military force to overcome the sovereign rights of regional actors in conflict who resist outside intervention.

An informative book for understanding modern regional affairs and conflict in Africa is *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (Meredith 2006).

While an examination of African regional affairs is outside of the scope of this thesis, a cursory reading of this work by Oxford Research Fellow and author Martin Meredith is worthwhile as a way of correlating the actions of modern “at risk” nations to the interests and behaviors of the actors of the War of the Triple Alliance. A researcher can compare past events to situations unfolding today in unstable regions and apply an understanding of *casus belli* and the balance of power model consistently to them.

### Other Reviews and Recommendations

The author wrote a short essay titled “Creating a Past: The Manufacturing of a National History in Paraguay” (Ferris 2007), for a Latin America Affairs graduate course at Washington University in St. Louis. The paper addressed how Alfredo Stroessner, the dictator of Paraguay from 1954 to 1989, subjected Paraguayan history--and the War of the Triple Alliance--to a revisionist application, largely to legitimize his dictatorial regime. The essay is in the appendix of this thesis.

In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Haitian scholar and Johns Hopkins University anthropologist Dr. Michel-Rolph Trouillot provides additional insight into history’s manipulation and silencing, and was a significant influence in shaping arguments in the essay “Creating a Past,” in the appendix. The review of this book is particularly useful in understanding cultural distance,<sup>10</sup> and in providing utility in sorting through Paraguayan historical inaccuracies in academic research.

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<sup>10</sup>Cultural distance describes how North Americans, not of Hispanic origins, see and understand Hispanic people and cultures. For example, early on in the author’s study of Paraguayan history, a strong sense of cultural distance prevented the ability to understand how one could view Francisco Solano López as a national hero to the Paraguayan people. The

Historical maps of Paraguay are helpful for understanding geopolitical views of the war. The U.S. Library of Congress and the U.S. National Archives are valuable sources, as well as the Biblioteca Nacional del Paraguay (National Library of Paraguay, in Asunción). The Paraguayan military's Dirección Servicio Geográfico Militar (DSGM) produces historical map replicas that are worth the effort and cost to obtain; an interested scholar may contact the U.S. Embassy in Asunción and request assistance in securing and paying for the maps. Another source is the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). NGA has a map co-production program through its partnership with DSGM in Paraguay and can assist a researcher with procuring DSGM maps as well.

#### Literary and Academic Interpretation

Many good academic books and treatises exist on the war, but because the war is either unknown or misunderstood, some writers appear to take the opportunity to advance their personal view of Paraguayan history in their works.

In the worst case, Authors Ed Strossen and Michael Prince (previously discussed) provide an example of a generalized, though reasonably well researched chapter of the War of the Triple Alliance in their book. Strossen and Prince then pepper the story with casual innuendo simply to support the overall topic of that book: *Stupid Wars (2008)*. In addressing the War of the Triple Alliance, there must be a sense of academic

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author's early research painted a picture of an arrogant, cruel, megalomaniacal national leader who lost a war that killed half of his country's population and resulted in significant territorial losses for Paraguay. The recognition of cultural distance helps the author understand that López was simply reacting to events of his day, based upon the information he knew and the wisdom and quality of leadership he possessed. By addressing cultural distance in this research, the author hopes to make better sense of the scale and waste of this war, and understand the fears and the realities that initiated it.

responsibility behind the research; once a researcher discovers and delves into accounts of the war, the story that unfolds is tragic, yet arresting in a way that transcends most military history, and one must exercise care in its interpretation.

López is usually the central figure in research, and with good reason: he is the quintessential “banana republic” dictator. López was cruel, mercurial, and arrogant. He was a leader who styled himself as the “Napoleon of the South,” and for all his fears of his powerful neighbors, it is fair to say that López had territorial and economic ambitions of his own--which may explain how Paraguay came to have the largest standing army in South America at the outset of the war. One book that places López as the central, dramatic figure behind the cause of the war is a work by Lehigh University Professor James Schofield Saeger, titled: *Francisco Solano López and the Ruination of Paraguay: Honor and Egocentrism*. The title is damning and unfair. López's personality certainly suggested insanity, especially later in the war, but not to a level to which Saeger could justly lay the lion's share of the blame at the feet of the dictator.

So intriguing is López (and his Irish mistress, Elisa Lynch) that alternative biographies and works of historical fiction have sprouted up to capitalize on the drama of the war and its times. One such novel is *Letters from Paraguay*, by author Lily Tuck. Here the central figure is Elisa Lynch and her relationship before and during the war with López. The setting of Paraguay and the war is accurate. The novel provides a degree of humanity behind the sterile facts of history. While the tale of López and Lynch belong in a romance novel, Tuck gives López an uncharacteristic degree of sympathetic treatment that leads an astute reader to consider the effect of events and times on López's personality, not the other way around.

On the opposite end of the scale, there is the prevalent Paraguayan version of history. Here, one must guard against gratuitous Paraguayan patriotism in many research sources. Paraguayans revere López as a national hero, and the people of Paraguay considered the war the crucible from which the country emerged with its national sense of meaning and purpose. To the Paraguayan, the outcome of the war is secondary to the fact that Paraguay suffered horrendously, but with honor, and did not capitulate.

Paraguayan scholarly writings and historical maps are sometimes blatantly inaccurate in depicting war dead, territorial losses, and describing the degree of human suffering. A famed observation that 90 percent of the adult males between the ages of 15 and 65 died *in battle* is false, but not by much. Current scholars posit that up to 70 percent of the males died due to battle deaths *and* the combined effects of starvation and disease (Whigham and Potthast 1999). One may forgive Paraguayan writers for such breaches of truth. The Alfredo Stroessner regime (1954-1989) dictated a revisionist history of Paraguay that used López and the war as tools for building nationalism. Before Stroessner, many simply considered the War of the Triple Alliance a dark period in Paraguay's history, but today the sense of national meaning and purpose inculcated by Stroessner's version of history continues in school textbooks and the popular press.

### Conclusions

This chapter discussed the available literature on the subject, ordering the sources in a topical fashion to inform the reader, and providing a foundation for further research by summarizing and comparing authoritative works, connecting patterns and exposing gaps in the extant knowledge. The War of the Triple Alliance has not been widely studied; therefore, it is important to be aware that scholarly sources vary widely in their

treatment. The next chapter presents the thesis research methodology and outlines the terms and criteria applied to the evidence.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature review in chapter 2 described the qualitative research conducted to answer the primary question: “Using the War of the Triple Alliance as a historical case study, what were the causes of this regional conflict, and can the analysis apply to modern regional conflicts?” Responding to the primary question, the literature review addressed secondary questions by topic, comparing several key points: (1) the general causes of war (the *casus belli*), and balance of power perceptions, (2) a deliberate account of the actors, regional history and political environment of the four war combatants and the events leading up to war and, (3) why the war went on longer than its limited intent warranted, and how it finally ended. The literature review provided a comparative framework for trends in research, identifying various schools of thought, and establishing the credibility of a wide variety of sources.

This chapter will present the thesis research methodology and will explain the findings and analysis of the available literature. It will outline the criteria (e.g. assumptions, limitations, and others) applied to the evidence and focus the reader on substantiating data and facts that are important, particularly in the analysis of the war. Chapter 3 will also carefully examine the tendency towards a revisionist version of the history surrounding the war, or its outright silencing in some cases. The thesis appendix contains a treatise about revision and silencing, particularly in Paraguay’s view of the war.

To be fair and objective in the study of the causes of this war, the examination of each combatant country used Thucydides’ *casus belli* construct in each case. An



examination of the roles of outside actors, particularly the United States and Great Britain revealed third party actions that may have served as a secondary causes leading to war. The conduct and course of the war remained relegated to a broad overview. A deeper account of the war itself, the generals (particularly Mariscal Francisco Solano López) and the battles are outside the scope of this thesis; the thesis only addresses the events leading up to war, and its aftermath.

The analysis of the balance of power model of equilibrium proceeded in two ways: (1) an examination of its roles as a primary catalyst, with *casus belli* for the War of the Triple Alliance, and (2) its role in modern regional affairs, with comparisons and applications to modern Latin American nations. The analysis focused on national differences of ideology, nationalism, martial aggressiveness and certain cultural differences as causes for regional war, and did not address ethno-religious or tribal elements. The cultural differences between Paraguay and her alliance neighbors was not as great, nor as volatile in comparison to the differences between other nations.

Research indicates that the balance of power model of equilibrium could apply to virtually any regional conflict--ideological or ethnic, imperialistic or religious--whenever a nation becomes too powerful in respect to its neighbors. Though the nature of the regional war could be markedly different, the causes and catalysts that bring combatant nations to battle can be similar in each case. Despite the broad applicability of the model, the scope narrowed only on issues of Latin American regional affairs.

### Assumptions

The primary assumption states that the leader who creates a regional imbalance is doing so to exercise action in his/her power against other regional actors with bellicose

intentions in mind. A leader may be volatile, aggressive, unpredictable and difficult to work with diplomatically, though not necessarily on the scale of Francisco Solano López. (Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, and Hugo Chávez come to mind). One could rightfully accuse Francisco Solano López of insanity and megalomania, yet if one thoughtfully examines potential *casus belli* and balance of power perceptions, the causes for war could be broken down into sane, practical reasons.

### Limitations

The qualitative study of this particular piece of history is fraught with attempts at silencing and inaccuracies that make academic analysis particularly difficult.

Archaeologist Tony Pollard states the challenges of analysis well in *Seven Eventful Days in Paraguay: Reconnoitering the Archaeology of the War of the Triple Alliance* where he writes:

The War of the Triple Alliance has produced a body of documentary literature, of both primary and secondary sources, which is notable for its level of internal contradictions, variations, inconsistencies, and plain inaccuracies. Nowhere else in the annals of military history has the present author come across such diversity of opinion and belief. (Pollard 2008, 322)

Pollard's experience, not as an historian, but as an archaeologist, tells of the frustration a writer encounters when researching the war. As noted before in the literature review, the appendix contains a previously written essay addressing how some Paraguayan governments have used the War of the Triple Alliance as a tool of revisionist history to encourage nationalistic pride. On the opposite end of the spectrum, one may note that Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay call the war the "The Paraguayan War," indicating that Paraguay's neighbors view the history of the war in an entirely different way.

As previously described, a North American sense of distance from the Latin American culture and personal biases may be obstacles to a clear understanding. Paradoxically however, being an “outsider” to the culture may provide greater objectivity by a realization that one must limit assumptions in research. The aim is neutrality in presenting the research to the reader, allowing him or her to judge the personalities, the events, and the outcomes of the history presented. Cultural distance is an issue for other North American and European writers as well.

Manipulation or outright silencing of Paraguayan history is the overarching limitation surrounding research on the War of the Triple Alliance. The sense of cultural distance, Paraguayan patriotism and national pride, and romantic works centered on the personality of López, instead of the war, were all factors considered in interpreting the available evidence.

Difficulties obtaining documents and source material from the Paraguayan National Library were common; scanned materials from bound books and resource documents are rare and books required a laborious process of checking and scanning by a sponsor researcher. Policies restricting resource material checkout, and the unreliability of the postal system in South America made access to inter-library loans impossible. Nearly all of the older, primary sources came from American university library loans.

### Delimitations

The focus of research on one regional conflict in an area of the world understood avoided the temptation to unnecessarily compare and contrast the war in a wider arena. This decision acknowledged that conclusions from a lesson or a model describing the causes of war for modern use should not draw upon the data from one war alone.

This thesis will focus more on the war, and less on López as the central character in it. López certainly did his part to bring Paraguay to ruin, but the assumption is that events, times and conditions drove Paraguay and the Triple Alliance to war more than the inexplicable actions of the leaders of each combatant country. One cannot fully describe the war without López; however, this thesis aims to focus more on the balance of power as the foundational catalyst for the war. The War of the Triple Alliance, not López, is the case study.

### Conclusion

This chapter presented the thesis research methodology and outlined the terms and criteria applied to the evidence, focusing the reader on analysis assumptions, limitations and delimitations. The next chapter, covering the thesis analysis, will present the causes and conduct of the War of the Triple Alliance, and the perceptions that the balance of power model of equilibrium factored into the political scene, before and during the war. Chapter 4 will prepare the reader for an assessment of the modern applications of the balance of power in recommendations presented in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

The purpose of chapter 4 is to examine the war in order to understand how it began and developed, and how it exceeded the initial aims of limited warfare to grow into an international conflict; the war will become a regional and historical case study. Chapter 4 analyzes the primary and secondary questions presented on pages seven through ten in chapter 1, and will address them, beginning with the secondary questions, and concluding with the primary question in chapter 5. Throughout the chapter, supporting illustrations and tables provide synopses and background information that will help the reader grasp the complex historical dates, actors and events in the War of the Triple Alliance. Table 1, Timeline of Río de la Plata Regional Events sets the stage with the key historical events leading up to Paraguay's declaration of war on Brazil in 1864.

#### Secondary Question #1

Referring to Thucydides' *casus belli*, the reasons for warfare, what appears to be the overarching causes (fear, honor, interest) in each actor in the War of the Triple Alliance? The roots of South American conflict began with Spanish and Portuguese versions of cultural ideology and colonial grandeur, nationhood and empire; “. . . war [in 1864] was not a discrete entity, but a continuation of instability since the colonies” (Leuchars 2002, 21). By 1830, the four national actors had achieved independence: Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina from Spain, Brazil from Portugal. As neighbors, they initially set out on markedly different paths. Uruguay struggled with *Colorado* and *Blanco* politics, teetering on and off toward civil war. Argentina had similar struggles

between ideas of a loose federation and a centralized republic, the disparity was made more complex by Porteño<sup>11</sup> desires to resurrect the huge vice-regal colonial Spanish territory under a Platine Republic. Brazil, with her huge territory, burgeoning population, and distinct Portuguese culture, set a course on imperialism that concerned her Spanish neighbors. Finally, Paraguay embarked on a policy of isolationism and developed a sense of national being, centered upon the rule of vicious dictatorships (Warren 1962).

Table 1. Timeline of Río de la Plata Regional Events

<b>TIMELINE</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ 1811: Paraguayan independence</li> <li>✘ 1816: Argentine independence</li> <li>✘ 1822: Brazilian independence</li> <li>✘ 1826: Argentina becomes a confederation</li> <li>✘ 1828: Great Britain mediates Argentine and Brazilian recognition of Uruguayan independence</li> <li>✘ 1835: Start of <i>Blanco/Colorado</i> civil war in Uruguay</li> <li>✘ 1850: Argentine provinces begin revolt</li> <li>✘ 1851: Blanco government in Uruguay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ 1856: Argentine recognition of Paraguayan independence</li> <li>✘ 1859: Argentine confederation and Buenos Aires unitarians form truce under Paraguayan mediation</li> <li>✘ 1860: Mitre establishes Argentine Republic with help from Flores – then Uruguayan <i>Colorado</i> leader</li> <li>✘ 1862: López takes power</li> <li>✘ 1863: Mitre backs Flores’ revolt against Uruguayan <i>Blancos</i></li> <li>✘ 1864: Brazil invades in support of Flores; Paraguay attacks Brazil</li> </ul>

Source: Peter H. Wilson, “Latin America’s Total War,” *History Today* 54, no. 5 (May 2004): 54.

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<sup>11</sup>Porteño is the term used to describe a resident of the city, or more specifically, the province of, Buenos Aires. For this thesis, a Porteño is a supporter of the Colorado and Unitarian parties of Uruguay and Argentina, respectively.

The paths that each country took in articulating their national being had much to do with how they viewed their neighbors and boundaries, and how they conducted regional politics. The maps in Figures 2 and 3 are telling indicators of each country's self-perception of its place in the world. The map on the left in Figure 2, Bolivia or Upper Peru; Chili [sic] and the United Provinces of South America or La Plata, is Argentina's version of the region around 1831. The "United Provinces" included Chile, Peru and Bolivia, all independent by 1825; but note that the Uruguayan side of the Mar del Plata--Uruguay, independent by 1828--is included in this questionable collection of "provinces." Strangely, Paraguay appears to be beyond the boundaries of Argentine influence on this map in 1831, but it belies the fact that Argentina refused to recognize Paraguayan independence *from Argentina* until 1856 (Wilson 2004, 54). The map clearly shows that Argentina harbored a powerful desire to rebuild the glory of colonial power with the capital at Buenos Aires and this geographical and political view continued until civil war in the late 1850s threatened the survival of the nation.

The map on the right in Figure 2, Brazil and Paraguay, represents the geopolitical view of Brazil around 1828. Three particular details stand out: Uruguay and the north side of the Mar del Plata was, not surprisingly, under the purview of the Emperor; in addition, Brazilian territory extended into the Argentine provinces to the west of Uruguay; and surprisingly, Brazil recognized Paraguay is an independent country with substantial borders (these borders were later a source of conflict between them). The map reflects the imperialistic aims of Brazil, but provides a unique argument for this thesis: unlike Argentina, Brazil appeared to respect the territorial integrity of Paraguay early on. This is an important observation in the analysis, because it partially absolves

Brazil of what some accusers would claim: that Brazil was the instigator of war by picking a fight with Paraguay prior to 1864.

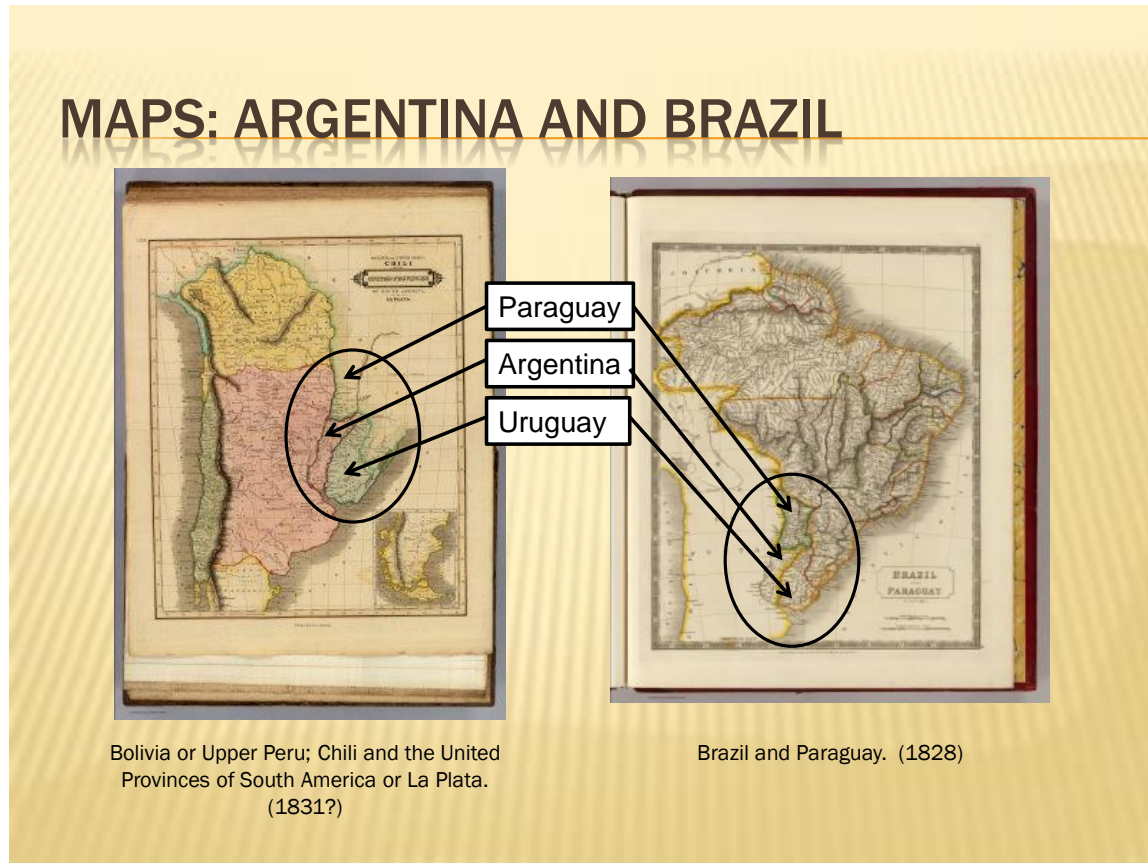


Figure 2. View of the Region: Argentina and Brazil (circa 1830)  
*Sources:* No Author, *Bolivia or Upper Peru; Chili [sic] and the United Provinces of South America or La Plata* (Edinburgh: D. Lizars, 1831?). Sidney Hall, *Brazil and Paraguay* (Paternoster Row, London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1828).

Turning to Figure 3, View of the Region (Paraguay) shows Paraguay's regional notion of itself and its neighbors just prior to the war. The map justly represents Brazil and Argentina, with territorial boundaries more or less accurately portrayed. It recognized Bolivia to the west, as well as Uruguay, clearly represented as an independent nation between Brazil and Argentina. By its map, Paraguay made it clear in 1864 where



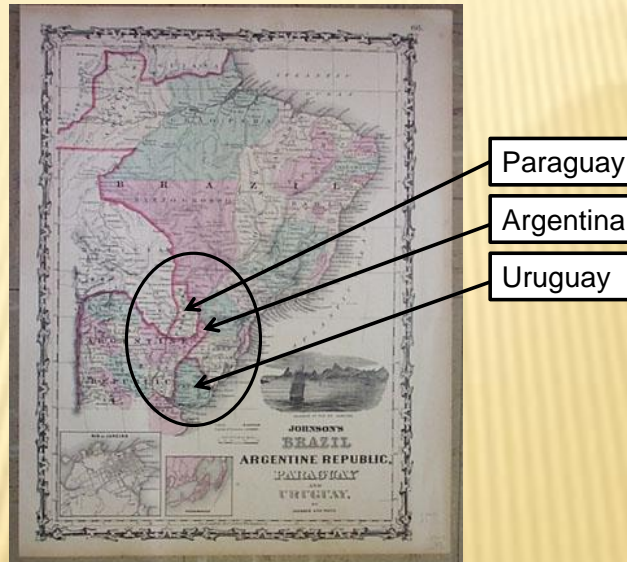
its policies stood on Uruguay, and how Uruguay, free from any outside constraints, could assure free commerce on the Río Plata.

Figures 4 and 5 provide generalized maps of the locations and primary actors in the region prior to the war. Figure 4, Countries of the Plata Region at Onset of War, presents the region with attention to the provinces of Argentina: Entre Ríos, Corrientes and Misiones; and the provinces of Brazil: Mato Grosso and Río Grande del Sur. These provinces play key roles in understanding the geopolitical environment before and during the war. Figure 5, Regional Actors at Onset of War, superimposes the primary actors on the Figure 4 map in order to underscore the political thought and actions of each actor in regards to their geopolitical location in the region. The shaded names of Mitre, Flores and Dom Pedro II represent the leaders of what would eventually become the Triple Alliance. By contrast, the names of López, Berro and Urquiza represent the leaders who, until 1865, were sympathetic to the sovereignty of Uruguay, and the rights of self-determination of the northern Argentine provinces, and shared a common distrust of the motives of their two powerful neighbors.

Table 2, Political Landscape in 1864 (Argentina and Uruguay), and Table 3, Political Landscape in 1864 (Paraguay and Brazil), present a generalized picture of Platine political views and concerns for each of the four countries just before the war began. The tables provide a synopsis of the causes, events, actors and geopolitical issues that sets the stage for the coming war, and intend to supplement the maps and timeline presented earlier as background material. A detailed analysis of secondary question #1 now begins, with treatment of each country in turn, beginning with Argentina. Table 4, Historical Reasons for War (Argentina), offers a thumbnail sketch of Argentina's reasons

for war, and what went wrong; in particular, what went wrong to either drag the country into war, or allowed the war to grow out of control. Each country analyzed will have a similar thumbnail sketch.

## MAP: PARAGUAY



Johnson's Brazil, Argentine Republic, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Figure 3. View of the Region: Paraguay (circa 1864)

Source: No Author, *Johnson's Brazil, Argentine Republic, Paraguay and Uruguay* (New York: Johnson and Ward, 1864).

Honor appears to be the *casus belli* for war in Argentina. Buenos Aires desired the old days of vice-regal glory, but faced considerable difficulty simply remaining united to her outer provinces. The fight between Federalists in the provinces, and metropolitan Unitarians in Buenos Aires sufficiently unbalanced the region enough to lay

the groundwork for the coming war.<sup>12</sup> Dr. George F. Masterman, a British physician in Paraguay during the war, was astute in his observation of regional stability when he commented about the political nature of the “republics” of the region in his book, *Seven Eventful Years in Paraguay*.

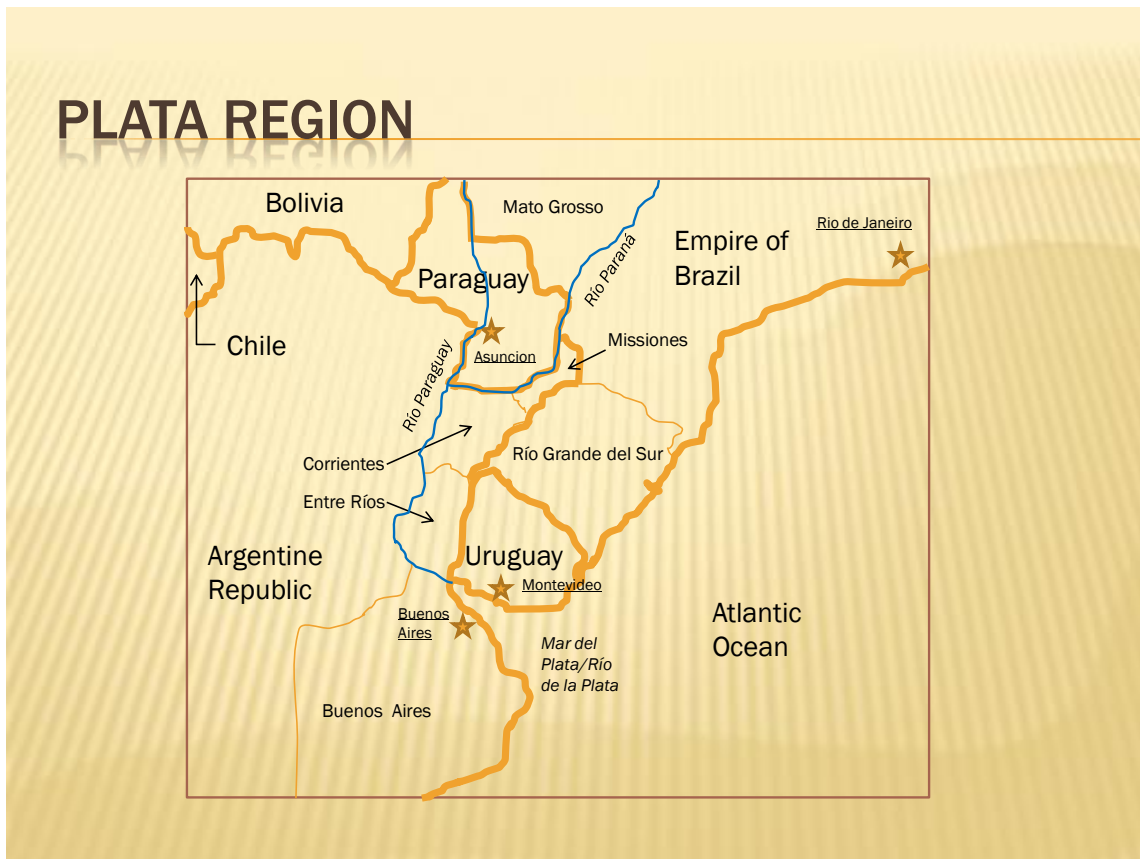


Figure 4. Countries of the Plata Region at the Onset of War  
 Source: Created by author.

<sup>12</sup>The Federalists in the provinces of Argentina preferred loose confederation, and stressed landholder’s rights and trade preferences free from the control of Buenos Aires. They corresponded closely with the Blanco party in Uruguay, and felt closely allied politically with the Paraguayans. At varying times, the Federalists favored independence from the Argentine Republic and control from Buenos Aires. The Unitarians in the province and city of Buenos Aires opposed confederation, instead, preferring a stronger centralized republic with strict trade and commodity control and expansionist goals. The Unitarians favored the colonial idea of expansion to the original vice-regal boundaries of the old Platine republic. The Unitarians corresponded closely with the Colorado party in Uruguay.

Masterman's quote, intended to paint the situation with a broad brush, aptly describes Argentina:

I have alluded to the disturbed condition of the republics of the Plate; indeed, their normal state may be said to be that of revolution, and for the reason, perhaps, that they are always talking about liberty, patriotism, and progress, without understanding the first, possessing the second, and indebted for the third to aliens, who advance them in spite of themselves. (Masterman 1869, 92)



Figure 5. Regional Actors at Onset of War  
*Source:* Created by author.

The largest share of blame for the War of the Triple Alliance belongs to Argentina for three significant reasons: (1) civil conflicts between Unitarians and Federalists unbalanced the region, setting the course for the war, (2) the exportation of the civil

conflict to Uruguay in the hopes that Argentina could gain control of the north side of the Mar del Plata through a fallen government, and (3) Buenos Aires sought destabilizing European economic and political influences in the region.

Table 2. Political Landscape in 1864 (Argentina and Uruguay)

ARGENTINE REPUBLIC	URUGUAY (BANDA ORIENTAL)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Goal of old, vice-regal Spanish Platine Republic</li> <li>✗ Brazilian (Portuguese) expansion – Uruguay buffer to protect Mar del Plata</li> <li>✗ Federals vs. Unitarians               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Urquiza vs. Mitre</li> <li>+ Confederation vs. Centralist</li> <li>+ Provinces vs. Buenos Aires</li> <li>+ <i>Caudillos</i> vs. <i>Porteños</i></li> <li>+ Blancos vs. Colorados (Uruguay)</li> </ul> </li> <li>✗ Concerns about López, Brazil</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Independent state – small nation concerned about larger neighbors</li> <li>✗ “Neutral party” to the war</li> <li>✗ Blancos vs. Colorados               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Berro vs. Flores</li> <li>+ Berro backed by López and Urquiza</li> <li>+ Flores backed by Mitre and Don Pedro II</li> </ul> </li> <li>✗ Primary catalyst for war</li> </ul>

**POLITICAL LANDSCAPE 1864**

Source: Created by author.

Between 1852 and 1861, the Argentine Confederation and Buenos Aires grappled over political control of the country, with Buenos Aires seceding from the confederation in 1859. For Bartolomé Mitre, head of the Unitarian party in Buenos Aires, control of the Plata was a way to hold sway over the confederated provinces, and as well, influence

independent Paraguay. The Federalist provinces of the Argentine Confederation, under Justo José de Urquiza, gained the sympathies of Paraguay, Bolivia, and Chile; three countries that saw Urquiza's provinces as an amenable option to Buenos Aires' regional aspirations (McLynn, 1980). In the heat of Argentine civil war, Paraguay's dictator, Carlos Antonio López, sent his son Francisco Solano to mediate successfully between Mitre and Urquiza (Leuchars, 2002).

Table 3. Political Landscape in 1864: (Paraguay and Brazil)

PARAGUAY	EMPIRE OF BRAZIL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Independent state – small nation concerned about larger neighbors</li> <li>✘ Prosperous, nationalistic, strong military... and landlocked</li> <li>✘ Reliant on open river for trade</li> <li>✘ Blanco / Federal sympathies</li> <li>✘ López: secondary catalyst               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Obsessive concern over balance of power and unpredictable behavior toward neighbors</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Large, aggressive <i>Portuguese empire</i> with imperialistic desires</li> <li>✘ Annex “Banda Oriental” to control Mar del Plata, and trade to Mato Grosso</li> <li>✘ Brazilian landowners in Uruguay</li> <li>✘ Buffer against Argentina</li> <li>✘ Paraguayans freed of tyranny</li> <li>✘ Nation of slaveholders</li> </ul>

**POLITICAL LANDSCAPE 1864**

Source: Created by author.

The confederation lasted until 1861, when Buenos Aires won the Battle of Pavón and formed the Argentine Republic. Urquiza escaped to the province of Entre Rios to carry on his political fight (Whigham 2004).

On 27 August 1862, Mitre assumed his role as elected President of the Republic, unifying Argentina under Unitarian control in Buenos Aires. Mitre's backing of Colorado politics in Uruguay laid the cornerstone of the coming war by assuming an attitude of immediate hostility toward the Blanco government across the Mar del Plata (Box 1927, 81-82). Since Mitre wanted to control his unruly provinces by full domination over the Plata, it made sense to him to support the Colorados in the Uruguayan civil war. Venancio Flores, the Colorado leader, and prior President of Uruguay, was willing to collaborate with Mitre to gain control of the country again. Flores saw a benefactor, Mitre saw a subtle means to gain a province, and control of the Plata.

One could argue that Mitre sought legitimacy by supporting European interests in the Plata. With control of the South American interior through the Río de la Plata system Mitre reasoned that a perception of economic stability may bring increased European trade--just what Argentina needed for further expansion. Mitre's encouragement of European, and specifically British interests in Argentine overtures made regional neighbors nervous, and fueled volatile geopolitical conditions in 1864.

The reasons for war in Uruguay (Table 5) were a mix between civil interest and *regional disinterest*. Uruguay was so preoccupied with Blanco/Colorado civil war that the regional activities of her neighbors largely fell to a position of low priority, with the exception of Brazil's assertive behavior. President Bernardo Berro struggled to maintain



Blanco control in Montevideo, and by the time war came, many Uruguayans “. . . saw the conflict as another episode in the long partisan struggle between Blancos and Colorados” (Whigham and Kraay 2004, 17). If Uruguay had an interest, it was simply the desire for sovereignty and the freedom to conclude her own civil peace.

Table 4. Historical Reasons for War (Argentina)

ARGENTINA	WHAT WENT WRONG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Honor – fading power in the region. Fear of Brazil and the military might of Paraguay.</li> <li>✘ Refusal until 1856 to recognize Paraguay as a nation, and non-acceptance of Uruguay</li> <li>✘ Control of the Mar del Plata</li> <li>✘ Border disputes and free river navigation issues with Paraguay</li> <li>✘ Federalists vs. Unitarians</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Divisive politics – civil war and the continued threat of civil war took Argentina out of the equation after 1866</li> <li>✘ Openly supporting Flores in Uruguay – made Uruguay the catalyst for the war</li> <li>✘ Argentina united after Paraguay declared war</li> </ul>

**HISTORICAL REASONS FOR WAR**

Source: Created by author.

Urquiza’s federated Argentine provinces fit well into the Uruguayan model for *casus belli*, and are included with Uruguay rather than Argentina for that reason. Berro and Urquiza focused on their independence, and both viewed Paraguay as a stabilizing



ally against their respective antagonists. The strategic importance of Uruguay’s location at the mouth of the Río Plata was not lost on the three leaders, but the immediate matter of political survival for Urquiza’s provinces and Berro’s Uruguay took precedence. From the start, Paraguay, the Provinces, and Uruguay shared political alliances as a way to cope with the aggressions of Argentina and Flores’ Colorados, though Paraguay viewed the events through a larger regional lens.

Table 5. Historical Reasons for War (Uruguay)

URUGUAY	WHAT WENT WRONG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Strategic location at the mouth of the Río Plata.</li> <li>✘ Desire for independence, yet party control, left actors (Flores and Berro) to the highest bidder</li> <li>✘ Argentina’s prior civil war politics bled over into Uruguay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Civil war brought outside actors into the fight</li> <li>✘ Brazil supported Uruguayan independence more than Argentina, so Flores requested Brazilian aid</li> <li>✘ Paraguay came into war at Brazil’s entrance into Uruguay</li> <li>✘ The “wild card” that brought an unwanted actor (López) into the mix</li> </ul>

**HISTORICAL REASONS FOR WAR**

Source: Created by author.

In chapter 2, Dr. Chris Leuchars comments, “if Mitre is the lever in upending this war, Urquiza is the fulcrum,” and Leuchars levels the blame on both men for exporting their civil conflict to Uruguay; for in doing so, they laid the basis for the war. However, one man is equally culpable for lighting the match to the bomb: Venancio Flores. Had Flores possessed the diplomatic aplomb to negotiate a peace with Montevideo, the War of the Triple Alliance may never have taken place. Flores controlled the countryside, and Berro’s metropolitan hold was weakening. Flores may have sensed that Mitre had other objectives in mind besides the support of an independent Blanco Uruguay, leading him to invite Brazil into Uruguay to assist in his conquest of the capital. Pelham Horton Box vividly narrates the fall of the first domino:

Venancio Flores had tied his unhappy country to the war-chariot of Brazil. The Republic could now only escape civil war at the price of foreign war. The fact that his political enemies had madly allied themselves to Paraguay does not acquit Flores of the responsibility of plunging distracted Uruguay into a foreign war in a quarrel not her own.” (Box 1927, 227)

Thucydides’ *casus belli* of interest links Brazil (Table 6) to Uruguay. Brazil had long held interests in the “Banda Oriental” (Uruguay) as a buffer and a possible extension of her rich Río Grande del Sur province<sup>13</sup>. For years, Brazilian ranchers had crossed from Río Grande del Sur into Uruguay to settle the rich land and graze cattle. Estimates in 1864, claimed that 15 percent of the population in Uruguay comprised Brazilian ranchers and their hires, and they owned and worked nearly 30 percent of Uruguayan property (Box 1927, 27). Though Brazil had well-known imperial ambitions in the region, one can argue that Río de Janeiro did not necessarily sponsor the tide of settlers

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<sup>13</sup>The borders of Portuguese Brazil and the rest of Spanish South America were not clearly defined, and explain why Brazil continually had boundary disputes with nearly all her neighbors.

into Uruguay, but rather they were encouraged by an independent-acting provincial government in Río Grande del Sur. Brazil's Emperor Dom Pedro II viewed closer control of Uruguay from his capital as a way to prevent the provincial leaders of Río Grande del Sur from contemplating ideas of independence.

On a broader scale, Dom Pedro also had Mitre's designs on Uruguay to consider. Porteño control of Uruguay and both sides of the Mar del Plata was out of the question. Brazil's rich Mato Grosso province, north of Paraguay, relied on freedom of navigation up the Plata river system--freedom that Mitre would tightly control if he dominated access to the sea. While Mitre wanted Uruguay--with Flores' help--included as another province in the Argentine Republic, Dom Pedro favored an independent Uruguay closely allied with Brazilian interests to assure access to the Plata interior, and to provide a buffer against Buenos Aires. Regarding the causes and conduct of the war, the assumption is that the blame falls on Brazil as an initiator, due to her imperial aggression before 1864. This is not true in the regional case, and a one can argue a strong defense for the moderating behavior of Brazil prior to the war.

First, the fact that Paraguay and Uruguay existed at all in the shadow of such an overpowering imperial nation as Brazil, both before and after the war, lends some credence to Dom Pedro's sense of restraint in dealings with his two smaller neighbors. Resentful border disputes dragged on between the countries, it is true; but Brazil favored the existence of buffer states against the Argentine Republic, while Porteño designs for these states regressed to being almost colonial in nature. As attested by the maps earlier in this chapter, it was Brazil that early recognized Paraguay as an independent nation from Spain *and from Argentina*. Second, since the Mato Grosso lay upriver from

Paraguay and the Argentine Provinces, one could expect that the Empire of Brazil would secure access to its province by assuring equal access for the Caudillos<sup>14</sup> and the Paraguayans as well. All, it seems, had a common rival in the Argentine Republic, and while Urquiza's provinces and López's Paraguay wished unconditional Uruguayan independence, Dom Pedro viewed that same independence first and foremost as one beneficial to the interests of his country.

Table 6. Historical Reasons for War (Brazil)

BRAZIL	WHAT WENT WRONG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Wanted <u>shared</u> control of the Mar del Plata, and willing to support Uruguayan Colorados to create a Brazil-friendly state.</li> <li>✘ Extreme distrust of López – viewed as a tyrannical dictator and a threat to the region</li> <li>✘ Willing to have two buffer states between Brazil and Argentina</li> <li>✘ Imperialistic designs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ No solution on Brazil/Paraguay boundary disputes</li> <li>✘ British meddling over cotton production – made Paraguay nervous</li> <li>✘ Should have been more reassuring on imperialistic designs</li> <li>✘ Supported the wrong party in Uruguay – bad diplomacy</li> </ul>

**HISTORICAL REASONS FOR WAR**

Source: Created by author.

<sup>14</sup>Caudillo(s) describes a large landowner, or leader (strongman) of the exterior provinces of Argentina. For this thesis, a Caudillo is a supporter of the Blanco and Federalist parties of Uruguay and Argentina, respectively, and supports loose confederation under the Argentine Republic.

With Venancio Flores as the catalyst, Brazil's interests led to war when on 20 February 1865 it invaded and defeated Blanco forces in Uruguay, and installed Flores' Colorado party in Montevideo (Strossen and Prince 2008, 71). The Empire now had an Uruguayan government friendly to her interests, and a buffer against the Argentine Republic. By this time, the threat of war was coming from Paraguay, and Flores felt he had to make his move. By inviting Brazil's aid Flores excluded Argentina's further influence and in doing so, would assure his unhindered leadership of independent Uruguay. Paraguay had already declared war on Brazil by this time, and the Paraguayan army was readying to move, which would add another destabilizing force in Uruguay-- something Mitre did not desire if he wanted to negotiate Flores back under the Argentine banner. Thus, Mitre gave tacit consent of the Brazilian invasion, and on 1 May 1865, signed the Treaty of the Triple Alliance with Brazil and Uruguay, declaring war on Paraguay (Box 1927, 146). Brazil's only blame in the origin of the war was a decision forced upon it by Flores to support his cause for independence, or to contend in the future with a puppet government answerable to Buenos Aires. Flores arguably played Brazil and Argentina off on one another by capitalizing on the Paraguayan threat.

Historians nearly all agree that fear provided the driving reason for war, the *casus belli*, for Paraguay (Table 7). However, many scholars attribute irrationality, particularly from Mariscal Francisco Solano López, as a reaction to this fear. The Paraguayan dictator certainly viewed Argentine and Brazilian actions in the region in general and in Uruguay in particular as threatening, perhaps more so than other leaders. This thesis however, would argue that in the events leading up to the war, López reacted as rationally as his limited diplomatic abilities could allow. During a trip abroad in 1853 as an envoy

for his father, Francisco Solano López learned of the balance of power model of equilibrium, originating from the Congress of Vienna (1815) which governed international politics on the continent. The model held that regional powers should assure that no one country gains more power than the combined powers of its smaller neighbors by coalition or alliance--a reaction to the predations of Napoleon's France.

López returned to Paraguay, and took the balance of power model to heart. There was a twist to his application of the model, however; while smaller European powers considered themselves as combined forces for larger states to reckon with, López viewed the model as equilibrium between his two powerful neighbors, rather than Paraguay being a power of equal stature. It could be that he recognized the absolute disparity of national strength between his two neighbors and his landlocked country, and adapted his model accordingly. "López believed that the peace and the liberty of the Plata area were based on equilibrium of forces between Brazil and Argentina; key to every Paraguayan policy" (Warren 1962, 4). In short: for López, exercising the balance of power in the Plata meant managing his two larger neighbors, not necessarily allying with his smaller counterparts to fend them off.

Two facts support López's policy of "equilibrium management." The first is his successful negotiations between Buenos Aires and the Argentine Confederation in 1859; temporarily suspending their civil war (Leuchars 2002). Three years before he became Paraguay's dictator, López recognized the instability that the civil war in Argentina brought to the region. Regardless of his political attitude toward his southern neighbor, López worked in earnest to assure stability for all in the region. The second supporting fact is López's treatment of Uruguay during her civil war. Historians accuse the Mariscal

of purposely delaying Paraguayan mediation between Blancos and Colorados in Uruguay to the point where Flores committed his desperate act. An alternative explanation could be that López waited in order to serve notice to Argentina, Brazil and Europe that interference of any kind in Uruguay (including Paraguayan offers of mediation) was a violation of a free and independent sovereign nation conducting its own civil action.

Table 7. Historical Reasons for War (Paraguay)

PARAGUAY	WHAT WENT WRONG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ López, and his perceptions about balance of power (Mexico, Caribbean, etc.)</li> <li>✗ Chance to exercise influence and gain world respect for protecting small nations – the best possible motives gone wrong</li> <li>✗ People inculcated in despotic rule – homogenous, nationalistic, politically ignorant, sacrificed all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Viewed as unpredictable tyrant</li> <li>✗ Poor military leadership, poorer diplomacy</li> <li>✗ Regional ambitions (?)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Attacked Mato Grosso instead of moving to Uruguay's aid</li> <li>+ Argentina's crossing (permission) and alienated provinces by attacking Corrientes</li> <li>+ Uruguay falls to Flores before Paraguayan arrival – new enemy.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**HISTORICAL REASONS FOR WAR**

Source: Created by author.

Paraguayans would later remind the world that there was never an instance of their country compromising the sovereignty of Uruguay until Brazil compromised it first, and

that “Brazil’s [perceived] threats of invasion and Argentina’s support of Flores ran counter to international law protecting sovereignty” (Leuchars 2002, 29).

There was, however, a weakness in Mariscal Francisco Solano López in the way that he advanced his cause for regional equilibrium. The Paraguayan dictator was supremely arrogant and, based upon his prior successes at influence and mediation in the region, carried a self-image of exaggerated importance. He compared himself to Napoleon and Alexander the Great (Strossen and Prince 2008, 64), failing to recognize that while nations had sovereign rights, their leaders also had rights to disagree with him on the matter of his importance. And so when Paraguay declared to the world “. . . that the independence of the Uruguayan state is the condition of her own, as it is the essential condition of the political balance of power of the continent in which she is situated” (Box 1927, 171), there was more to the pronouncement. López was asserting his importance as much as he was defending his neighbor.

Dr. Chris Leuchars pardons the dictator by stating the he [López] simply wanted Paraguay’s voice heard, and was “not undertaking a war of conquest, but merely informing other powers that Paraguay was prepared to stand up for itself” (2002, 34). Dr. Carlos Abente adds “a disparity existed between Paraguay’s assessment of its real power versus the power that other regional actors were willing to recognize” (1987, 63). Finally, the U.S. Ambassador to López’s Paraguay, Charles Washburn agrees, but added this ominous comment:

López had avowed that his object in [later] interfering in the affairs of the neighboring countries was to maintain the balance of power, and prevent the larger states from absorbing the smaller ones. His assumption of the character of arbiter, whose dictum other nations must respect, caused great mirth and ridicule, at the time, in both Río de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. But Paraguay, small as it



was, and insignificant as it was commercially, had a standing army, well drilled and well armed, larger than all the neighboring states, and it could become a formidable enemy or a powerful ally (1871, 529).

Washburn lived in Paraguay nearly to the end of the war, and worked at the dictator's side. His quote above provides a glimpse into López's regional view: issues of sovereignty were of vital importance in Plata regional affairs, but he would interpret and defend them, and he possessed a modern army to assure that other leaders listened.

While López feared his two more powerful neighbors and their motives, he completely missed how his arrogance, his one-man rule over Paraguay, and his standing army shook up his vaunted balance of power.

Brazil's influence over Uruguay on one bank of the Río de la Plata was Argentina's fear and concern. Argentina on both banks was Brazil's worry. The absolute terror of Paraguay was either scenario occurring. López had the best of nationalistic intentions, but a skewed sense of the threats and his reaction to them. Abente agrees:

a disparity often exists between the perception of equilibrium or threat and the actual state of equilibrium or threat. Hence, one could hypothesize that the combination of a highly impressionistic and distorted reading of power relations and a faulty perception of threat moved Lopez to act. (1987, 60)

The Paraguayan leader's perception--faulty or not--led him to view Argentina as the immediate threat, an observation this thesis supports: "[regarding] military preparations of Paraguay in 1864 is the fact, much obscured by the later sequence of events, that the general mobilization was at first directed against Argentina and not Brazil" (Box 1927, 210).

Mariscal López clearly saw the regional balance of power in the Plata, and correctly sensed its "tipping point" of instability. He feared Mitre's vice regal colonial aspirations, and the exportation of war to Uruguay. Like everyone else, he simply feared

Brazil for being so large, so imperialistic, and so Portuguese. His motives were rational, and his aim for peace for its own sake, righteous. However, López ranks just behind Mitre and Flores as the chief instigators to the war, because of his arrogant insistence for respect as a regional powerbroker. In the end, his neighbors began to view him as a saber-rattling tyrant with hidden regional ambitions of his own. In short, López allied everyone against him and drove them all to war, confirming *their* fears about him. Mitre and Urquiza put the train to war in motion by exporting their civil war to Uruguay, and Flores set the direction of the track by inviting a Brazilian invasion into Uruguay; but López assured that there was no turning back.

While not directly active in the causes or conduct of the War of the Triple Alliance, Great Britain and the United States (Table 8) each had interests in the area that complicated events, and influenced *casus belli* for the four combatants. The United States and Confederate States continued the bloody agony of the American Civil War in 1864; enforcing the Monroe Doctrine had become a secondary matter in Washington. While her interests remained focused in the hemisphere, the United States, occupied with her war and reconstruction in its aftermath could not fully address rising European interest in Latin America. Of all Latin American leaders, Mariscal López was most fearful of Continental interference; but he was not alone: the governments of Bolivia, Peru, and Chile stood beside the Paraguayan dictator with a shared sense of fear and unease (McLynn 1980). It is well that they should have been anxious, for there were sufficient overt European interventions to convince: the Second French Republic's endeavor to conquer Mexico from 1861 to 1866; Spain's actions in the Dominican Restoration War of 1863; and the Spanish naval bombardments of Valparaiso, Chile, and

Callao, Peru in 1866. These actions were disturbing enough to López and his well-disposed neighbors. In addition, Mitre took advantage of the situation by quietly supporting Spain's activities, even allowing her warships to coal and re-supply before setting out for Valparaiso and Callao (La Rioja 2004). Mitre's goal of colonial empire through outside assistance was clear.

While Spain and France acted openly and aggressively, Great Britain furthered her interests--with Mitre's tacit approval--in the Plata region. Using economics and trade, rather than warships and bayonets, Britain's activities tended to destabilize the region because of her associations with Argentina and Brazil. Britain's interest in the Plata is clear if one studies a nineteenth century world map. Victorian England controlled and sustained colonies around the world by holding key real estate at Singapore, India, Gibraltar, the Falklands, and South Africa to gain vital economic control over the South American interior meant a stake in the Mar del Plata. Britain was not entertaining the creation of a colony in South America, but was willing to play Brazil and Argentina against each other to obtain an economic advantage.

Dr. Peter Wilson appears to accuse Britain more than she deserves when he states: "the three allied governments were allegedly surrogates for British capitalists who wished to open Paraguay as the continent's last unexploited market and the only country with no substantial external debt" (2004, 58). It is uncertain whether Britain could actually get the three allies to agree on such a grand act, but Wilson reveals some truth regarding Britain's interests in Paraguay. In 1861, the Confederate States of America stopped shipments of cotton to British textile mills in the hopes of pressuring Great Britain into support for the southern cause. Though suffering from widespread unemployment in the

mills Britain chose to remain neutral, and went looking for other supplies of high-quality long staple cotton. British India had the best quality, but shipping costs around Africa were excessive (the Suez Canal would not open until 1869). Egypt produced quality cotton, but Britain’s demand far exceeded her production capabilities. Thus, British interests could have turned to Paraguay.

Table 8. Outside Influences (U.S. and Great Britain)

GREAT BRITAIN, UNITED STATES	WHAT WENT WRONG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Great Britain               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Cotton production</li> <li>+ Allied with Brazilian interests in Latin America</li> </ul> </li> <li>✘ United States               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ 1864 – Civil War</li> <li>+ Monroe Doctrine – matter of convenience</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Great Britain               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Openly meddling in regional politics and economy</li> <li>+ Itself an imperial nation</li> <li>+ “Played off nations before</li> </ul> </li> <li>✘ United States               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Little attention – Civil War</li> <li>+ Poor example – Uruguay and Paraguay noticed!</li> <li>+ Abysmal diplomatic presence in Paraguay (Charles Washburn)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**OUTSIDE INFLUENCES**

Source: Created by author.

Earlier, when López learned of Britain’s interests in long staple cotton, he was galvanized. During his 1853 visit to Europe, he had visited British textile mills, and

struck by the scale of their production, immediately conceptualized the potential value of his raw goods. Not only would he offer cotton, but beef and timber (Whigham 1994). British capitalists saw how Paraguayans set to work developing their cotton industry; by 1862, the country could sustain a stable supply of quality long staple cotton, and Britain sorely needed it. With a valuable commodity, relative ease of shipping and stable production, and no pressures due to foreign debt, Paraguay could afford to negotiate favorable economic terms of trade. The problem: López had assumed dictatorship of Paraguay, and the British were uncertain if they could work with him; terms of trade appeared to be uncomfortably within the whims of just one man.

As Wilson's previous quote suggests, one may infer that Britain planted the seed of Brazil's detestation of Paraguayan dictatorship in the hope that the Empire would someday help overthrow López. History does not provide an account of any such action; however, Britain was very concerned with access to Paraguayan markets, and needed the assurance of open river navigation. While Britain was politically and diplomatically quiet, her economic message was clear on control of the Plata: the British Empire supported Mitre's goal of gaining Uruguay. Over a period of three years, until Argentina's withdrawal from the war, Britain contributed over 10 million pounds--nearly a quarter of Argentina's cost of the war--to help Flores during the civil war in Uruguay, and to carry Argentina's war to Paraguay (McLynn 1984, 90-91).

The destabilizing actions of Britain fed the concerns and fears of Latin American countries beyond the Plata, played a secondary role of driving the allies toward war with Paraguay, and in so doing, drove Francisco Solano López into unreasonable responses. While Mitre, Flores, and López each can take their share of the blame for the road to war,

“British ambitions, diplomatic strategies, and military expertise, as much or more than the patriotic zeal of South American post-colonial leaders, were initially intrinsic to international conflict” (Nunn 2004, 293).

### Secondary Question #2

Why did the Triple Alliance of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay nearly destroy themselves conducting the war longer than necessary? Upon analysis, it becomes obvious that Paraguay is missing in the question, for its destruction was complete after the war. There is no slight intended; the question remains as submitted: why, by 1866, did the Triple Alliance continue against a beaten Paraguay? Why and how did the character of the war change, growing beyond the capacity of the combatants to control it, and ending in such tragedy? Three explanations present themselves: diplomatic and military blunders by López in the early phases of the war, the political worldviews of López and Dom Pedro II in the late phases of the war, and the nineteenth century mindset of recklessly sacrificing soldiers to the needs of the nation in time of war.

Mariscal Francisco Solano López was not eager to carry his nation to war, but he insisted that Paraguay’s diplomatic voice in the Plata region carry its due respect. Branded by some historians as a megalomaniac, the Paraguayan dictator showed remarkable restraint in the events leading up to war. It all changed when he warned Brazil of the consequences of crossing into Uruguay to aid Venancio Flores. When Brazilian troops traversed the border into Uruguay in late 1864, López, driven by his balance of power obsession, began to behave in ways that appeared irrational and unpredictable to the other antagonists. A month before López declared war on Brazil, the Paraguayan river gunboat *Tacuari* seized the Brazilian steamer *Marques de Olinda*, as

she carried arms and supplies to Mato Grosso. In what amounted to an act of piracy, López set the course of Latin American sympathies against him. However, the Mariscal knew that if war came, it would come by the river; allowing arms to travel upriver to the Mato Grosso could open a second front at his back door.

Once he declared war on Brazil in December 1864, López attacked the Mato Grosso, easily overpowering Brazilian troops in a series of short, sharp battles, and subjugating the entire province (Wilson 2004). López had his reasons. The first was to defeat a Brazilian force at his rear; future enemy forces would have to come up the river to attack Paraguay, for there was no overland route to Mato Grosso from the rest of Brazil. The second was to draw the attention of Brazil away from Uruguay by an attack on her territory; a military move designed to invoke a political reality. By losing the Mato Grosso, Brazil no longer had a need for her influence in Uruguay or the Mar del Plata. The Paraguayan field marshal displayed genius, but failed to take into account the reaction of his enemies, who began to see him as an usurper, rather than the liberator he claimed to be.

López confirmed their notions when he swung his army southeast toward Río Grande del Sur, on his way to Uruguay. Here, the Paraguayan commander-in-chief made his worst political blunder, the mistake that puts him in dubious company with Mitre and Flores for the cause of the war: at the border of Misiones he requested permission from Mitre to cross his army through Argentine sovereign territory to reach Uruguay. Mitre, no friend of López, refused. In one grand political gaffe, the Mariscal alienated his potential ally, Justo José de Urquiza in the province of Entre Ríos by not asking *his* permission to cross, as Urquiza considered the provinces as the remnants of the old

Argentine Confederation, still contesting Porteño government (Wilson 2004). López could have simply crossed Misiones, and made the formal apology later, as:

public opinion in Argentina had turned against Brazil, and the Paraguayan declaration of war was applauded except in Buenos Aires. Had the Paraguayan forces marched across the disputed and largely uninhabited territory of Misiones, López could have maintained that he was not prejudicing Argentine claims, and he would have had the support of Urquiza. (Box 1927, 51)

In the end, López drove Urquiza to ally with Mitre when he declared war on Argentina in March 1865, sending his troops into the province of Corrientes. “Urquiza and Mitre were appalled . . . Brazil would think Argentina complicit with Paraguay, and the fight would be conducted on Argentine territory” (Box 1927, 256). In addition, the now allied Argentine leaders suspected López of ulterior motives based upon his timing of the attack: nearly a month had passed between Flores’ overthrow of the Uruguayan government and Paraguay’s declaration of war on Argentina. The very man who professed sovereign rights of non-intervention to all was now crossing and attacking a neutral country to return Blanco party rule in Uruguay. López simply had no choice then but to act preemptively, since one of his two worst-case scenarios had already occurred: Brazilian and Argentine control of the Plata. Uruguay had fallen; he must have been certain Paraguay was next. Nonetheless; Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay (now under Flores) united in the Triple Alliance on 1 May 1865 (Wilson 2004), and carried the offensive, driving Paraguay back to her river fortress of Humaita for two and a half long years of siege and trench warfare. The conflict would continue to spiral out of control.

By 1867, only two combatants remained in the war: Paraguay and Brazil. Uruguay had long ceased to be of any use in the war, fielding smaller and smaller units, and consuming itself in the continuing civil conflict. Mitre pulled his troops and his



leadership out of the war in February 1867 to sort out problems in the nearly bankrupt Argentine republic: the elections of 1868 were approaching, and a growing public disaffection with the war created the danger again of provincial secession (Leuchars 2002, 163). The two countries with party quarrels that essentially evolved into international war were leaving the conflict in much worse shape than they began. Much of what remained of any viable reason for war hinged upon the perceptions of the two leaders: López and Dom Pedro II.

Mariscal López was the son of a dictator, raised and educated in Paraguay. Groomed early on for future dictatorship, and inculcated with the belief that the country of Paraguay was his estate, he behaved “as if all the nation were [sic] his personal property to be played with or discarded according to whim” (Smith 2004, 163). Smith and Whigham perhaps overstate the selfish motives of a young man, but the fact is that López led a people inured to the harsh realities of absolute dictatorial power since the reign of Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia. López viewed his dictatorship as one of fatherly care for his people, but the legacy of Francia handicapped his regional views, for “Dr. Francia had created a nation, but he had not taught it that other nations existed and had rights” (Box 28). Coming out of isolation, the Paraguayan leader struggled with his arrogance in applying the proper arts of diplomacy.

In 1853, López visited France, Prussia, Italy, Spain, and Great Britain. The highlight of his stay was an audience with Napoleon III, his hero and role model, with



Figure 6. Mariscal Francisco Solano Lopez

*Source:* Pereira de Araújo, João Hermes. "Paraguay, from war to peace." *Peace Missions: Brazilian Diplomacy in International Conflicts*. January 27, 2006.

[http://www2.mre.gov.br/missoes\\_paz/ing/capitulo2.html](http://www2.mre.gov.br/missoes_paz/ing/capitulo2.html) (accessed April 20, 2009).

whom he developed a distant, but polite friendship over the next few years (Box 181).

Exposure to the most recent European political ideas of the Balance of Power Model of Equilibrium, founded from the Congress of Vienna left an indelible impression on López and his political views regarding his small country (Abente 1987, 49). This political model the Mariscal applied to events leading up to and into the war. The trip to Europe, while it reinforced many political ideas in López, did not necessarily enlighten him or change his fearful perceptions of his neighbors. In fact, after the war began, Francisco Solano carried two ideals to obsession: his belief that he was the Napoleon of South America, thus inflating his self importance in the war and the events leading up to it; and his mirroring of the overarching fear of his people by 1867: conquest by Brazil.

Whigham describes that fear as the driving force behind why the Paraguayan people

refused to surrender, and followed their “Napoleon” into three years of butchery against Brazil: “the explanation hinges on the Paraguayan’s belief that their community, their wives, their children, and everything they held dear faced imminent destruction at allied hands. Their extermination as a people seemed a real possibility, and they therefore resisted to the bitter end” (2004, 192).

Brazil’s Dom Pedro II was, in comparison, more educated, more progressive in many ways, and more widely traveled than López (Historical Text Archive 2003). Though he performed his role as Emperor creditably, his reign appeared to be a reluctant one. Religion and teaching were his passions; and languages and travel the vehicles by which he realized them.



Figure 7. Dom Pedro II

*Source:* Pereira de Araújo, João Hermes. “Paraguay, from War to Peace.” Peace Missions: Brazilian Diplomacy in International Conflicts. January 27, 2006. [http://www2.mre.gov.br/missoes\\_paz/ing/capitulo2.html](http://www2.mre.gov.br/missoes_paz/ing/capitulo2.html) (accessed April 20, 2009).

Dom Pedro spoke Hebrew, and Arabic, and could read Sanskrit (Biblioteca Virtual de Paraguay), and he visited the United States in his travels. A strong progressive mindset colored Dom Pedro's regional perceptions, which naturally would clash with the stricter, more reactionary perceptions of López. So powerful were these perceptions for each man that the war continued because of them, even after any other reason for war had ceased to exist. With control of the Plata decided, Paraguay contained and on the defensive, and her army destroyed, any genuine reason for continued conflict seemed absurd. Yet the war raged on.

The ideological heart of the conflict between Brazil and Paraguay after 1867 was arguably the sovereign rights of the people, taking center stage between the two leaders. Slavery and tyrannical rule were the issues. Already established in this thesis is the Brazilian explanation that the final course of the war was against López, not the Paraguayan people. Dom Pedro was not alone in subscribing to the perception that the Paraguayan people fought on because of the fear of tyranny under López. To the Brazilian leader, the Paraguayan dictator was arguably the regional equivalent of Saddam Hussein: unpredictable, and proven in his aggressive behavior after the campaigns at Mato Grosso and Corrientes. Dom Pedro believed that he was liberating the region of a mad dictator, and more importantly, liberating a suffering Paraguayan people of tyranny.

On the other hand, Whigham takes the side of López when he writes, "Pedro II believed slavery and monarchy fully compatible with a liberal, progressive state" (Huner 2007, 678). Francisco Solano López and the Paraguayans fought on because of their distaste for slavery--a distaste shared by the rest of the civilized world. To the Mariscal's perceptions, Brazil's reasons for "liberation" appeared a weak excuse for continuing the

war, and a thinly veiled pretense for conquest, considering slavery was legal in the Empire. The Dictator dug in his heels because he believed that the rights of free Paraguayans were not the determination of a foreign Emperor who accepted the practice of slavery. By fighting on, the Paraguayan people were exercising the right of a free people who decided on their own definition of independence: to follow López in saving their country and their lives (Barrett 1938).

Thus, the war limped on under the conflicting perceptions of the leaders of Brazil and Paraguay. A final observation can help explain the unnecessary carnage and duration of the war to lengths beyond reasonable ends: the nineteenth century belief in sacrifices of manhood to what could be termed the “altar of the nations.” From the wars of Napoleon to World War I, a nation’s legitimacy in war was a direct correlation to the war dead she presented--and these “modern” wars produced staggering losses. So accepted was the social idea of sacrifice in war that it was not until the end of 1918 that:

casualty lists that a later generation was to find so horrifying were considered by contemporaries not an indication of military incompetence, but a measure of national resolve, of fitness to rank as a Great Power. (Craig 1986, 522)

The theory continues when Pelham Horton Box applies it directly to Paraguay, since he considered López, in his rising sense of madness and desperation, to blame for continuing the war at this point:

[It was] a policy of Hubris . . . not based on an exact appraisal of the national interests, but on a purely romantic, one might say Fascist, estimate of the national worth, the national power, the important position that so worthy a nation ought to occupy--the importance estimated in terms of the fear and deference of neighbors. The decision to call [and continue] a general mobilization was made on the fiasco of a diplomatic attempt to vindicate that purely imaginary position of importance. (Box 1927, 211)

Finally, George F. Masterman, who was in Paraguay during the war, impugned the overall quality of leadership of the combatant countries, claiming that it was the “wretched mismanagement of the allied generals alone which prolonged the war. We sometimes thought that it was done intentionally, in order to make it one of utter extermination” (1869, 103). His observation supports the idea that war dead, not leadership prowess qualified the cause, and could have kept Brazil and Paraguay in the fight beyond limited warfare.

### Secondary Question #3

What prevented Brazil’s assimilation of Paraguay after winning the war? When Brazilian troops killed Francisco Solano López on the banks of the Río Aquidibán on 1 March 1870 (Strauss 1978, 21), Brazil honored her promise to end the war. Dom Pedro ordered Imperial troops to occupy Asunción, and Paraguay began the process of creating a provisional government after the Preliminary Peace Protocol of 20 June 1870 (Pereira de Araújo 2006). Overall, Dom Pedro exercised political moderation and constraint in his dealings with war-prostrated Paraguay when Brazil could have simply redrawn the map at will, and included Paraguay as another province on the Plata River system.

At war’s end, Dom Pedro immediately recognized the value of keeping Paraguay as a buffer nation between Brazil and Argentina. Mitre’s neo-colonial Platine aspirations began to come clear after the war when he demanded portions of southern Paraguay and the entire western Gran Chaco region. In essence, this would allow him to control the river to the Mato Grosso, now back under Brazilian sovereignty. Conflicts over Paraguayan boundaries, and treaty agreements after the war, pulled Brazil and Argentina to the threshold of another war during the 1870s (Strauss 1978, 21). Much of what

agitated Mitre was a bilateral peace agreement crafted between Brazil and Paraguay guaranteeing the continued existence of Paraguay as a sovereign nation. The original treaty of the Triple Alliance stated that the allied nations would negotiate as a group on war reparations and boundary issues, and that no ally would forge a separate agreement with Paraguay. Argentina was left out of any post-conflict agreements when Brazil made its separate peace in 1872 (Strauss 1978, 21), and Uruguay followed suit in 1874 (Strauss 1978, 29). Civil war in the Argentine Republic kept Mitre from responding, though diplomatic relations between Montevideo and Buenos Aires ended, and the Uruguayan government allied itself to Brazil (Strauss 1978, 29), probably reacting to perceived potential Argentine predations on Paraguay.

To the pleasure of Brazil, Mitre lost the 1874 election, but the new president, Nicolás Avellaneda was even more fervent in his nationalistic desire to control the Plata (Strauss 1978, 30). Over the next two years, Paraguay and Brazil rejected several Argentine treaty offers calling for the concession of Paraguayan territory and navigation rights on the Río Paraguay while saber rattling continued from Buenos Aires. By 1876, the region was wearying of posturing for war. The last Brazilian troops left Paraguay and Argentina agreed to outside mediation offers from the United States and Great Britain. Finally, in 1878, the delegation from Paraguay and Argentina selected U.S. President Rutherford B. Hayes to be the arbiter over the dispute. President Hayes ruled in favor of Paraguay (Strossen and Prince 2008, 79), and Argentina accepted the determination. Brazil had succeeded in preserving Paraguay and denying Argentina the expropriation of further territory.

Regarding U.S. interests, Duke University Professor Harold F. Peterson argues that, “the United States was led to offer its mediation and its ministers were led to undiplomatic insistence [to Brazil and Argentina] upon its acceptance” (Peterson 1932, 4). As early as 1866, Secretary of State William H. Seward agreed with his ministers in Latin America that despite the desire in Washington to uphold non-interference in the region, the U.S. must get involved to preserve the Monroe Doctrine; although the real reason smacked of “interests in commercial possibilities” in the Plata (Peterson 1932, 5). By 1868, the U.S. Minister to Brazil, J. Watson Webb, in an effort to bring Brazil to negotiations, trumped the prior careless and undiplomatic behavior of his counterparts, Alexander Asboth and Charles Washburn, U.S. Ministers to Argentina and Paraguay, respectively, when he “fully absolved Brazil from all blame for the starting of the war” (Peterson 1932, 16).

While this statement did not engender positive responses from Argentina and Uruguay and it did not bring Dom Pedro to peace talks, it likely gave the Empire a cause for future political benevolence with her smaller neighbor. A war-exhausted world was watching. The past twenty years had produced three modern, total wars on three continents: the Crimean War,<sup>15</sup> the American Civil War, and the War of the Triple Alliance while a fourth, the Franco-Prussian War was getting underway in 1870. Paraguay gained public sympathy for the suffering and stoicism of its people over six years of fighting, starvation and disease (Strauss 1978, 23). For many nations, the blame

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<sup>15</sup>This thesis considers the Crimean War a total war rather than simply a large war in the sense that it was the first truly modern war with staggering casualties; a harbinger of technological changes that future total wars would embrace with such devastating results. In addition, the proximity in time of the Crimean War to the other wars lends a similarity to the size and nature of these regional or civil conflicts.



was particularly acrimonious toward the allied combatants for carrying a war far beyond even nineteenth century sensibilities. The proportionally staggering loss of humanity and the total destruction of Paraguay exceeded modern comparison. One could assume that after the war, Dom Pedro sought to distance Brazil from the scorn of the world by altruistic treatment of conquered Paraguay, thus gaining higher moral ground.

### Conclusion

This chapter presents a historical case study of the War of the Triple Alliance and posits three important questions: (1) What were the reasons for warfare, the *casus belli* for each combatant country? (2) Why did the allies nearly destroy themselves by waging an intractable war beyond the point of apparent sensibility? (3) Once beaten, how and why did Paraguay survive as a nation when prostrated before the allied victors? Examining the root causes and conduct of the War of the Triple Alliance produces some useful insights on common elements of regional war, and the rationale of national leaders when they consider this particular instrument of national power. When faced with the choice to conduct warfare, leaders tend or try to make sensible decisions in their country's best interests, and choose to undertake limited war designed to satisfy those interests. However, these sensible decisions are subject to rather selfish perceptions, and Thucydides' *casus belli* can begin to devolve into selfish or personalized motives for war. When a war--like the War of the Triple Alliance--becomes uncontrollable, the basis for war inexplicably becomes a slave to perception, and reason is subject to selfish motive or response.

Mitre, Dom Pedro, Flores, Berro, Urquiza, and López had perceptions about the motives of their counterparts, and balance of power in the region. Their actions and

responses to the war indicate selfish perceptions that eventually moved the conflict from limited scope to total war; and the war's end brought these self-seeking causes for war into the light. In the end it is the most controversial character in the war--and the one who dies the most spectacularly--who is unable to explain his version of the story or explain his actions. Without Francisco Solano López's story, one may never fully understand his fears and motivations, and thus, never completely understand the war itself. By losing the war, and his life, he lost “. . . the victor's privilege of explaining the meaning of the war's outcome” (Baker 2006, 161).

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first three chapters presented an introductory background on the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870), established primary and secondary research questions, and provided a literature review and research methodology to support and explain the case study analysis of the causes of this particular regional war. Chapter 4 used the secondary questions to analyze the case study with two constructs in mind: Thucydides' *casus belli* or reasons for war for each combatant, and the supposed perceptions of the balance of power model of equilibrium in the minds of each of the leaders. The chapter also examined possibilities behind why the war exceeded its original limited scope, and how, after almost total destruction, Paraguay survived at all as a nation.

Chapter 5 will answer the primary research question and relate the outcomes of the case study to a set of modern examples, specifically suggesting the application of the case study to potential hotspots in four border regions in South America and suggesting inferences for practice to regions outside of Latin America. The chapter relates how this analysis fits into the current literature on regional warfare in general, and into the War of the Triple Alliance in particular; and concludes by suggesting topics for further research.

#### Conclusions

“Using the War of the Triple Alliance as a historical case study, what were the causes of this regional conflict, and can the analysis apply to modern regional conflicts?” The primary research question seeks to draw lessons from a little-known Latin American war, originally limited in intent, which grew out of control to become one of the bloodier

international wars of the century. The case study of the War of the Triple Alliance reveals examples of some of the classic elements of discord: aggressive imperialism, proxy war and exportation of civil conflict, meddling from external countries, forceful nationalism, latent colonialism, ideological disparity and the unpredictable character of an absolute dictator. Where regional wars normally result from one or two clearly identified primary causes, the War of the Triple Alliance is interesting because all of these elements appear collectively as a complex set of causes with no apparent primary catalyst. Arguably, one of the difficulties in comprehending the war is determining a single hypothetical root cause from the differing research available.

Beyond the consideration of the elements of discord, the War of the Triple Alliance offers a purely historical perspective that examines the application of Thucydides' *casus belli* and the concept of the balance of power model of equilibrium perceived by the actors. While not singular defining factors behind the war, these tools help to bring this little known war to light, and provide a template for applying possible models for the second part of the primary research question: “. . . can the analysis apply to modern regional conflicts?”

Figure 8, Potential Regional Hotspots in South America, presents four possible locations for modern regional conflict in South America. Each location focuses on the boundaries of three countries where wide varieties of political conflict simmer below the surface. New conflict catalysts to these modern case studies are issues of drugs and terrorism. While not unique to modern conflict, drugs and terrorism are something that the War of the Triple Alliance did not have to address. Regardless, one can draw parallels between the historic case study, and modern examinations of these hotspots.

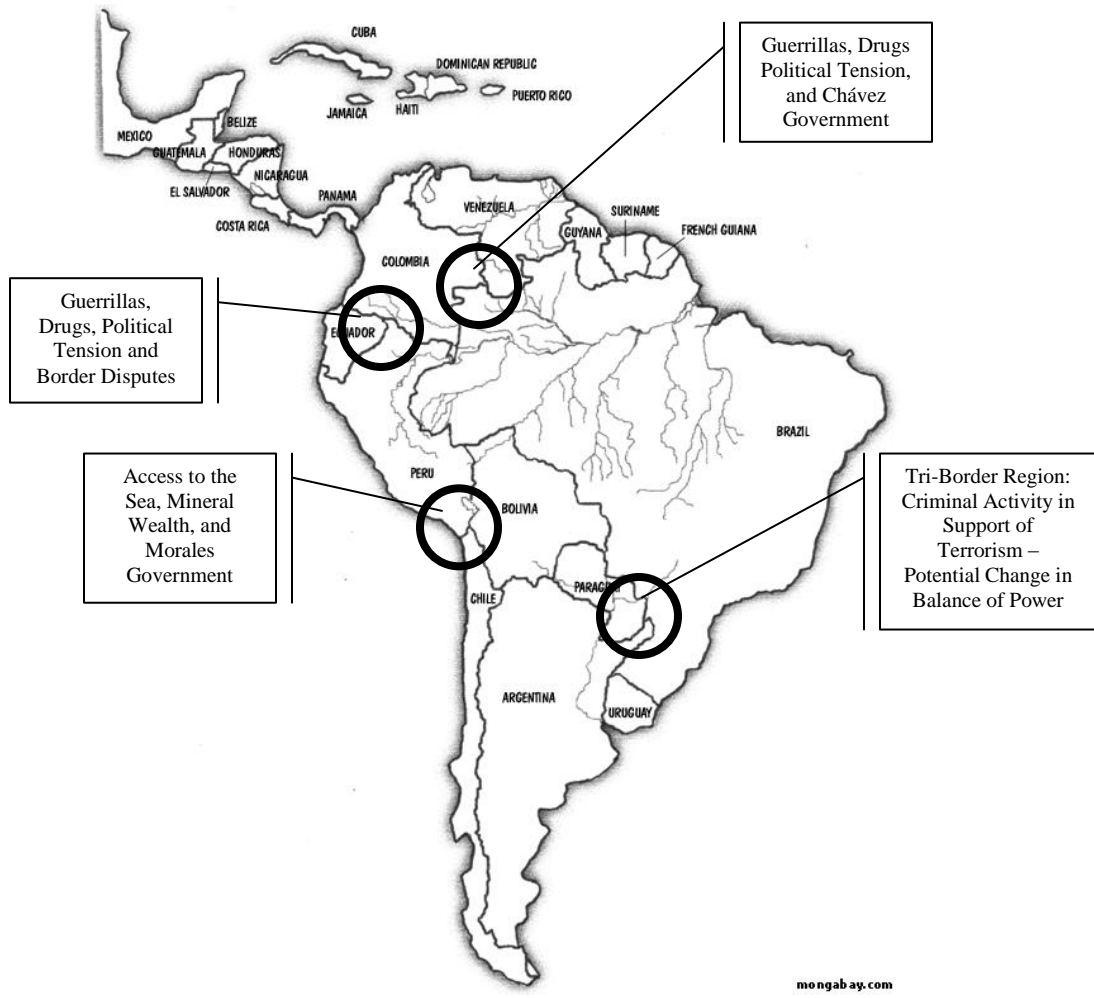


Figure 8. Potential Regional Hotspots in South America

Source: Background map of South America: <http://mongabay.org//images/neotropical.gif>, superimposed images by author.

Colombia-Venezuela-Brazil: here, the Hugo Chávez government in Venezuela has realized some success in attracting governments from Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, and to a degree, Paraguay to his Pan-Hispanic socialist aspirations. However, some of Chávez’s immediate neighbors appear to consider him with guarded measure. His anti-U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, past use of Venezuelan oil as an economic weapon, and insistence on reciprocal trade agreements vice regional or global economic participation

make him an unpredictable partner in regional affairs, particularly with South American governments that continue strong partnerships with the United States. Chávez's nationalization of Venezuelan businesses, restructuring of the government, and exportation of his Marxist-Bolivarian ideology to other Latin American countries reads in many ways like Mitre's Argentine Republic of 1864.

Colombia's Fuerzas Armadas Revolución de Colombia (FARC) guerrillas have no historic analogy to the War of the Triple Alliance, but there can be no argument that their drug trafficking and terrorist activities compromise regional stability. Labeled terrorists by the government of Colombia, the FARC has enjoyed some levels of recognition from Chávez, who deems them a legitimate army based upon shared Marxist-Leninist political views. Though it is not a clear fit, the support of the FARC by Chávez could equate to Mitre's backing of Flores in Uruguay, with the modern intent to weaken the Colombian government.

Finally, the boundary between Colombia and the state of Amazonas, one of the most thinly populated states in Brazil, is the site of much of the region's cocaine smuggling and transshipment from FARC elements. In addition, Brazil and the Chávez government have strengthened their diplomatic and economic ties to include the key support of Brazil in helping usher Venezuela into the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR).<sup>16</sup> In this case, the government of Colombia could view Brazil and Venezuela as giving tacit approval to FARC activities within its borders, and collaborating under an economic bloc to thwart Colombian interests. If one incorporates

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<sup>16</sup>Colombia is an associate member of MERCOSUR. Associate members do not have full voting rights, nor do they enjoy full market access. Venezuela gained membership in December 2005.

MERCOSUR and the FARC under a balance of power model as a cause for regional conflict, then one might view the government of Colombia as a modern counterpart of López and his sensitivities toward Brazil and Argentina before the war.

Colombia-Ecuador-Peru: since 2003, the FARC in Colombia have collaborated with the Shining Path, a Maoist guerrilla organization in Peru. Capitalizing on easy border transit between Colombia and Peru, and operating within large areas of lightly populated and ungoverned spaces in northern Peru, the guerrillas engage in drug cultivation and narco-trafficking. The sum effect is destabilization and regional political tension, and the pendulum swings both ways. In Colombia, regional tensions increased when legitimate governments appeared to have little control over guerrilla and terrorist activities within their borders, while on the other end of the spectrum, the Alberto Fujimori government overreacted to the guerrilla/terrorist threat in Peru by imposing an authoritarian regime that eventually led to Fujimori's imprisonment for extreme human rights violations. Both situations do equal damage to regional security between states; however, to the measures of instability between states one could add another sinister element: the alliance of regional terrorist organizations acting across state and political boundaries. The pan-regional activities of organized guerrillas and terrorists equate roughly to Argentina's destabilizing export of revolution to Uruguay, though today, the modern terrorist organization is a stateless entity.

The re-election of Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa could re-ignite past border disputes between Peru and Ecuador. Accusations of Correa being a Chávez puppet triggered some concerns from neighboring countries, particularly regarding his rapid centralization of power at a time when Ecuador appeared to enjoy political stability. In

this case, the border dispute could be the catalyst; the real *casus belli* would be the ideological exportation of Marxism to Ecuador, using guerilla organizations in Colombia and Peru to the greatest destabilizing effect. The implication regarding another border dispute between Peru and Ecuador, possibly manipulated from afar (Chávez), and complicated by the presence of guerrilla elements, is that the region (and the world) would see the destruction of a widely held belief that democracies will not fight one another. The Colombia-Peru-Ecuador scenario posits three major actors in a possible conflict: Chávez/Correa Marxist leadership allied with united guerrilla and terrorism elements against the democratic leadership of Peru and Colombia--both with the potential for instability.

Peru-Bolivia-Chile: this scenario could well hold the greatest potential for actual conflict. The boundary conflicts, particularly between Chile and Bolivia, and the socialist movement of Bolivian President Juan Evo Morales hold significant comparisons to the political landscape prior to the War of the Triple Alliance. Like the Colombia-Ecuador-Peru scenario, the Bolivian President shares the same affinity with Ecuador's Correa for the Marxist ideology of Hugo Chávez. In this case, mineral wealth, particularly in Bolivia, replaces drugs and terrorism as the element of subversion, not because Peru or Chile covet these natural resources, but because the resources are under the control of the poorest and arguably the most radically led country in South America.

Similar to the issue of Paraguay's access to the Río Plata prior to the War of the Triple Alliance, Bolivia wants to regain the access to the Pacific Ocean lost in the War of



the Pacific.<sup>17</sup> There are political parallels between the Bolivian socialist Morales and the Paraguayan dictator López, when one regards the growing despotic behavior of Morales--considered the most ardent puppet of Chávez. Considering that a previous war took place--fought and never quite resolved properly--over access to the sea and control of important mineral regions, there is a historical precedent for placing access to the sea high on Morales' list of Chávez-supported ideological interests. While it may be tempting to compare Morales to López due to politics or geographic realities, another War of the Pacific could potentially erupt due to Morales behaving more like Venancio Flores in Uruguay; in effect, drawing any combatant into the scenario, and sacrificing regional stability simply to realize one ideological goal.

Paraguay-Argentina-Brazil (the Tri-Border Region): there is true lawlessness on the open borders of this triple frontier. A new, twenty-first century version of the balance of power model of equilibrium is currently at play in this region. The Hamas and Hezbollah are active on the tri-border, not as guerrillas or terrorists as in Colombia or Peru, but as support structures for terrorism and organized international criminal activities. Operating behind the scenes, there appears on the surface to be no direct threats to regional governments; however, the growing power of these criminal elements over the law, and the enormous flow of cash in black marketing and drug and arms trafficking bring a new instability scenario to the fore. Paraguay is the weak link. As a country arguably still in the third world, corrupt and impoverished Paraguay becomes

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<sup>17</sup>The War of the Pacific (1879 to 1883) pitted Chile against the combined forces of Peru and Bolivia in a dispute over territorial control of mineral rich regions of the Andes Mountains and the Atacama Desert. Chile won the war, and took control of these regions, leaving Bolivia a truly landlocked country. This war was the second largest war in South America after the War of the Triple Alliance in terms of combatants and war dead.

more susceptible to the money and control over the law that Hamas and Hezbollah control.

Here, there is stateless, criminal activity, which alters the regional balance of power through potential coercion of corrupt or inefficient democracies (Paraguay, Colombia); connections with socialist leadership (Chávez, Correa, Morales); collaboration with guerrilla organizations (Colombia, Peru), and ties to larger, more menacing terrorist organizations in the Middle East. The simple presence of this criminal element brings the possibility of the involvement of several outside entities with ideological and political agendas into the regional scene--much like the actors before the War of the Triple Alliance. The only difference is the modern countenance of crime and terrorism as stateless actors to regional disorder.

### Recommendations

As a historical case study, the War of the Triple Alliance is a remarkable account of the complex causes of regional conflict in South America in the nineteenth century, and how the objective of limited war mishandled by the combatants, became total interstate war. The case study and analysis of this thesis lays the groundwork for three recommended further courses of action available to a researcher

First, the concepts of *casus belli* and the balance of power model of equilibrium have some utility in describing possible political perceptions and actions/reactions of the combatant leaders in the War of the Triple Alliance. However, the strength of these concepts in the overall pageant of nineteenth century total warfare cannot draw from the actions and events of one war in South America. To build a credible concept model, a researcher may consider exploring four significant modern total wars from the mid

nineteenth century: The Crimean War, The American Civil War, the War of the Triple Alliance, and the Franco-Prussian War. The wars consisted of fighting on three different continents within an eighteen-year time span; with no combatant of one war involved in the other wars. The analysis for this course of action should ascertain if there is commonality of *casus belli* root causes for war and balance of power perceptions in these wars--the prediction being that it is so, and that the analysis can apply to modern regional conflict.

Second, once fortified through the analysis of several contemporaneous total wars, a researcher could expand *casus belli* and the balance of power concepts to apply them to modern regional conflicts, or toward predicting conflict in regions of instability. Previously illustrated in Figure 8, the conclusions from this case study suggests modern parallels in South American regional affairs, and highlights potential reasons and perceptions that could be catalysts toward regional hostilities leading to conflict. Applying this analysis to regional hotspots in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and Southeast Asia would require research on the modern political landscape, and a grasp of the capabilities of national power available to each country.<sup>18</sup>

One challenge to applying nineteenth century warfare as a case study for modern regional conflict is the general paucity of the modern elements of non-state actors and ethno-religious strife in the historical context. A recommended reading is a graduate

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<sup>18</sup>It could also address the instruments of international power, particularly through the United Nations. In many cases, the UN or regional treaty organizations establish a balance of power within a regional construct, and apply power in ways meant to prevent war--sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

thesis by Command and General Staff College student Major Sanusi Aliyu<sup>19</sup> titled, “Religious-based Violence and National Security in Nigeria: A Case Study of Kaduna State and the Taliban Activities in Borno State” (2009). The thesis is a good starting point for understanding terrorism and ethno-religious violence in regional conflict, and may provide perspective in adding the motivations of non-state actors toward war, and the effect of ethnic and religious regional extremism in a balance of power scenario.

Finally, to a student interested in military history, the wider scope of the War of the Triple Alliance is a subject worthy of additional research. Researchers, writers and academic authorities who cover the conflict form a compact worldwide fraternity; thus, a thoughtful and cogent intellectual assessment of any facet of this regional struggle will provide a significant contribution to the overall body of knowledge regarding the war. Furthermore, because the War of the Triple Alliance is truly an unknown war in the minds of North American and European military audiences, there are unexploited lessons learned from the conflict that may be valuable for the modern day historian.

In preparing the literature review in chapter 2, it became clear that there was a dearth of information on two distinct topics within the larger context of the war. First, Dr. Thomas L. Whigham touches briefly on the outcome and effects of the war on the four combatants in “The Paraguayan War: A Catalyst for Nationalism in South America” (2004). A directed research paper could go farther to examine the political and military effects that Latin America’s “total” war discharged on South America as a whole.

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<sup>19</sup>Major Sanusi Aliyu, an international officer from Nigeria, is a graduate of the 2009-01 class of the United States Army Command and General Staff College. Major Aliyu wrote his Master of Military Art and Science thesis concurrently with this thesis, and agreed to allow the use of his thesis as a suggested contemporary case study.

Second, the battle carnage in the War of the Triple Alliance is, in several writings, attributed for want of sound military leadership; yet no scholar to date appears to define the qualities of nineteenth century leadership that were lacking, and the moral application for today's military leader. Given the attention that the U.S. military currently dedicates to effective combat leadership at all levels, leadership case studies from this conflict may be worth further examination.

## APPENDIX

In December 2007, the author wrote an essay for a Latin American Affairs graduate class at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Beginning on the next page, the essay highlights how the national history of a country--in this case, Paraguay--can be altered or distorted to suit changing social or political needs. The paper is included as an appendix to further explain and reinforce the caution that the reader and future researchers must guard against what would seem to be gratuitous patriotism and gross inaccuracies in Latin American source material. Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner re-interpreted his country's history in the 1950s to support his regime, while Brazil and Argentina each regarded their respective histories of the war through the lenses of their past. For this reason, the author reminds the reader and researcher that these inaccuracies are not deliberate, nor do they represent careless academic research on the part of the Paraguayan authors.

**Creating a Past:  
The Manufacturing of a National History in Paraguay**

*“A nation’s image of its past helps to determine its conduct through continuing history”*  
- Harris Gaylord Warren

To the purposeful visitor of Paraguay - for few casual tourists find themselves enjoying the country's natural charms and provincial hospitality - there is a historical paradox: how does an isolated, backward country with a trying past find a sense of national consciousness upon which to hang its collective sense of purpose? How can a foreigner understand the significance of themes of brutal dictatorships and bloody conflicts in Paraguayan history?<sup>20</sup> This paper will examine how history is manufactured for the purpose of nation building, using two key Paraguayan actors and their associated historical events as explanations: Dr. Jose' Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia and Paraguayan Independence of 1811, and Mariscal (Field Marshall) Francisco Solano López and the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870).

In Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, Michel-Rolph Trouillot explains how narrators can trivialize or erase facts to produce a desired view of history. The events and the actors contained within the history are altered through precise narratives in such a way as to influence collective memories.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Trouillot's silencing of history, this paper explores how history can be *created* for the purpose of

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<sup>20</sup>An introspective question I've asked myself during the research and writing of this paper. As research progressed, my North American sense of “Latinidad” was routinely challenged as I grappled with the seeming inconsistencies of Paraguayan history.

<sup>21</sup>Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 25.

unifying a nation under the most arduous and tenuous political circumstances, and through catastrophic wars and atrocious dictatorships.

While events are the significant history markers in this paper, the actors associated with these events are the icons that live on in Paraguayan history. In this case, the names of Francia and López are extended into the public consciousness of Paraguayans to represent the hinge points of their country's history, imbuing them with contemporary meaning.

### **Francia and Independence**

The Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru, and of Rio de la Plata after 1776, included Paraguay--once the splendid jewel of Spanish America--now an isolated, neglected outpost and buffer zone against Portuguese Brazil. By 1810, Paraguayans were realizing a sense of ethnic and national character making them distinct from the ruling class in Buenos Aires. On May 25, 1810, the Porteños overthrew the Spanish viceroy, declaring independence from Spain.<sup>22</sup> Paraguay, still supporting the crown, found itself a vassal of Buenos Aires and chafing under oppressive local rule. Following successful military actions in southern Paraguay against the Porteños, the Paraguayans discerned that power lay with them, and no longer with the waning influence of the Spanish crown. Paraguay declared independence from Spain on May 15, 1811.<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Jose Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia was part of a ruling junta that took power after the ink dried. Over the next several years, Francia consolidated his power, so that

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<sup>22</sup>“Paraguay National History,” *Aeroflight: Countries of the World*, (2007): 5, <http://www.aeroflight.co.uk/waf/americas/paraguay/Paraguayan-national-history.htm>

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 6.



by 1816, he had absolute dictatorial powers for life. While northern countries in South America were locked in a struggle for independence from Spain, Francia keenly discerned that Paraguay's issue of independence was different. Spain hardly contested Paraguay's will, considering it to be an extension of Argentina. In a political move rivaling May 15, 1811, Francia skillfully outfoxed diplomats from Buenos Aires to produce the Treaty of October 11, 1811--which established Argentine recognition of Paraguayan independence.<sup>24</sup> The act served as a historical precedent by announcing not only metropolitan, but regional independence; and had the additional benefit of serving notice of "natural rights of self-determination" to a belligerent Portuguese Brazil.<sup>25</sup>

Francia then began the task of nation building by doing the most draconian thing imaginable to a new country--closing the doors to trade and diplomatic communication. For over thirty years, Francia ruled with an iron fist, vigorously attacking the old European order; particularly the social elite and the Catholic Church. His despotism was so complete that upon a visit in 1852--twelve years after Francia's death--British adventurer Charles Mansfield termed Paraguay, ". . . the inland Japan" in comparison to the isolation of Japan at that time.<sup>26</sup> To the outsider, the rule of Francia seems capricious and senseless, yet the social upheaval that he wrought forged a national identity apart from world affairs. Francia is revered in Paraguayan history as a man who "single handedly succeeded in building a strong, prosperous, secure and independent nation [*with*

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>John Hoyt Williams, "Paraguayan Isolation under Dr. Francia: A Re-evaluation," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 52, no. 1 (1972): 103.

<sup>26</sup>Charles B. Mansfield, *Paraguay, Brazil and the Plate: Letters Written in 1852-1853*, (London: Cambridge, 1856), v.

*no European or regional manipulations]* (brackets and italics mine) at a time when Paraguay's existence as a distinct country seemed unlikely."<sup>27</sup>

Despite his cruel regime and isolationist stance, Francia brought progress to the young nation: iron foundries, textile and cement industries, agricultural improvements (particularly cotton cultivation), and limited trade.<sup>28</sup> He invited some of Europe's gifted technological minds to Paraguay,<sup>29</sup> recognized Brazil's independence in 1821 to head off Argentine threats, and granted political asylum to slaves and refugees from other countries.<sup>30</sup>

Arguably, it required an absolute tyrant to drag Paraguay into viable nationhood, yet Paraguayans recognize Francia with a sort of naïve affection as their greatest national leader. Paraguayan history reflects more on Francia's good works in the name of the Republic, than his frighteningly tyrannical rule.

### **López and the War of the Triple Alliance**

Mariscal Francisco Solano López, by contrast to Francia, is considered Paraguay's greatest national *hero*. Cruel and arrogant, he regarded himself as the "Napoleon of the South" and was a megalomaniac, building the largest standing army in South America during his dictatorship from 1862 to 1870. In a move that appears to be suicidal insanity, López initiated the War of the Triple Alliance, against the allied powers

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<sup>27</sup>"Enciclopedia Escolar de la Historia del Paraguay," *Revista ABC Color*, February 13, 2000, vol. 6.

<sup>28</sup>Williams, "Paraguayan Isolation," 107.

<sup>29</sup>However, he would not let them leave, much to their shock and the diplomatic objections of their home countries.

<sup>30</sup>"Paraguay National History," 8.

of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay from 1864 to 1870. The war was the largest and longest conflict in Latin American history, and resulted in the near annihilation of Paraguay as a nation. Of 550,000 Paraguayans, over 200,000 died of combat deaths, disease, and starvation--including nearly ninety percent of the male population between the ages of 15 and 65.<sup>31</sup> At the Battle of Tuyuti--the Latin American Waterloo--11,000 Paraguayan soldiers lay dead after only three hours of battle.<sup>32</sup> Nearly half of Paraguay's territory was lost during the war.<sup>33</sup>

By 1866, the war had gone badly enough for Paraguay that López offered all he could to the Allies to broker peace at the Conference of Yataity Corá. Argentina deferred further action, but Brazil dashed any chances of peace by announcing that the war was not against Paraguay, but against the predations of López.<sup>34</sup> Brazil would continue the war until López was killed or deposed. López was finally captured and killed by Brazilian soldiers at Cerro Corá in 1870, bringing the war to a close. It is in this setting of almost inconceivable national extermination that Paraguay views its "crucible"--its finest hour.

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<sup>31</sup>Scholars now believe that both of these figures are slightly inflated; however, they are widely regarded in Paraguayan history as accurate, serving to reinforce how Paraguayans suffered, yet persevered--a quality respected by the people of Paraguay.

<sup>32</sup>"Enciclopedia" *ABC Color*, March 12 and 18, 2000, vol. 11 and 12.

<sup>33</sup>An accurate figure is around 65 percent of territory lost. Historical maps printed as late as 1999 by the Paraguayan military shows over 100 percent loss of territory, again reinforcing Paraguay's suffering and humiliation during and after the war--a bit of historical silencing in its own right.

<sup>34</sup>Diego Abente, "The War of the Triple Alliance: Three Explanatory Models," *Latin American Research Review* 22, no. 2 (1987): 64.

Casual students of Latin American history could easily brand López as the single point of failure in the near-total destruction of his country, and wonder how he can be regarded with such reverence.<sup>35</sup> Lily Tuck provides a significant alternative picture of López in her historical fiction The News from Paraguay which draws its work from independent scholarly writing. In Tuck's novel, López is a more purposeful, conscientious dictator who was sensitive to ideological struggles with powerful neighbors, and the clandestine acts of British imperialism in the region. Tuck did her homework well. López spent time in Europe in 1853, buying arms and securing the affections of a mistress, Elisa Lynch. More importantly, López began to assimilate Europe's model of conflict management: the Balance of Power Theory, which asserted that no nation should accumulate power to the extent that all other nations put together could suffer coercion.<sup>36</sup>

By 1862, when López assumed control of Paraguay, his sensitivities to Rio de la Plata equilibrium became an obsession. Argentina coveted her old days of viceregal glory, and Brazil--worrisome to all--kept consuming more and more territory. Peace and self determination of the region hinged upon a stasis of force between the two major powers.<sup>37</sup> An additional catalyst was added by the American Civil War when the Confederate States, hoping to press European intervention, halted shipments of cotton.

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<sup>35</sup>For many years, I certainly did.

<sup>36</sup>The Balance of Power Theory was forged following Napoleon's defeat in 1816, and was Europe's model for equilibrium until 1914, and the start of the Great War. Abente, "Triple Alliance," 49.

<sup>37</sup>Harris Gaylord Warren, "The Paraguayan Image of the War of the Triple Alliance," *The Americas*, 19, no. 1 (1962): 4.

Since Paraguay was an [unreliable] exporter of long staple cotton, Britain began a clandestine plot to keep her textile mills running by using Brazil and Argentina as proxy aggressors toward that end.<sup>38</sup> British imperial designs, Argentina's new refusal to recognize Paraguayan independence, and Brazil's march on the Banda Oriental (Uruguay) finally prompted López to take action.

The Mariscal gave warning to Brazil that occupying the Banda Oriental would disrupt Platine equilibrium and would be cause for war. Tuck's historical novel features not a power mad dictator, but a champion of the protective rights of small nations against larger, aggressive ones. An inexorable chain of events followed: Brazil occupied Uruguay, Paraguay marched into Argentine lands to attack Brazil, Argentina declared war on Paraguay; and in an ironic twist of fate the new Colorado government of Uruguay supported Brazilian occupation, and declared war on Paraguay. López was left to defend only Paraguay and his Balance of Power ideology.<sup>39</sup>

Paraguayans would agree with Tuck, and may not be far off the mark with their view of their national history. Globalization and regional political ambitions probably were as much to blame for the Triple Alliance War as ambitions of the "Napoleon of the South". Following the war, worldwide sympathy for the stricken nation prompted Brazil to return self-rule to the Paraguayans, though Brazil likely did this to maintain the

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<sup>38</sup>Thomas Whigham, "Paraguay and the World Cotton Market: The 'Crisis' of the 1860's," *Agricultural History*, 68, no. 3 (1994): 4, 5.

<sup>39</sup>Warren, "Paraguayan Image," 14.

convenient buffer state with Argentina, as both countries rattled sabers over territorial gains from the war.<sup>40</sup>

The Paraguayan people see López - and by extension, themselves - as noble protectors of the weak, who will fight and suffer to the end.<sup>41</sup> Like Francia, the Mariscal was quite probably the worst possible example of a national hero, particularly to anyone with little understanding of Paraguayan history. However Trouillot states that “The distribution of historical power does not necessarily replicate the inequalities lived by the actors.”<sup>42</sup> So what is the point? The point is “to establish moral authority”<sup>43</sup> in history by using actors--flawed as they may be--as symbols of that significant history which reinforces a collective sense of national purpose.

### **Symbols, Icons and Signposts**

*“The bigger the material mass [of history], the more it entraps us, we become a part of it.”*

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot

Having secured Francia and López as historical icons, Paraguayans have reinforced their sense of history in symbolic ways both typical and unusual. One can begin with their national anthem, a complex score that commences, dirge-like then steps lively for the chorus. The anthem stresses the creation of the Paraguayan *Republic* - first

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<sup>40</sup>Norman T. Strauss, “Brazil after the Paraguayan War: Six Years of Conflict, 1870-6,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 10, no. 1 (1978): 23.

<sup>41</sup>Marta Ojeda, personal communication, November 2, 2007.

<sup>42</sup>Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 47.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 13.

of its kind in South America - and tells the story of oppressive *regional* bonds broken while Europe and the world “salute with applause”. Nowhere in the anthem does it state that the “republic” was in name only while dictators held sway.

A country’s currency, and what is printed on it, is a good indicator of what is viewed as culturally and historically important by the people. Paraguayan money (the Guaraní) is filled with images of war generals, productive farm scenes, cityscapes and transportation. However, on the most-often used notes, one finds iconic images of López and Francia, but also symbols: the signing of Paraguayan independence, the Pantheon de los Heroes, Humaita, the Paraguayan soldier, and the Paraguayan woman. Each symbol carries marked historic significance.

Independence was signed at La Casa de la Independencia, equivalent to Independence Hall in Philadelphia. López is interred at Pantheon de los Heroes, equal in status to Arlington National Cemetery. Humaita corresponds collectively to Gettysburg, Flanders, and the *Arizona* Memorial as a battle site of national significance for Paraguayans. A battered brick and stone structure still stands at Humaita, where Paraguayan soldiers endured a horrific siege against the Allies. Conversely, there is a symbolic place not shown on Paraguayan currency, Cerro Corá, the location where López met his demise by the Brazilians. While important in the Paraguayan psyche, the location lost its historic substance when López was disinterred<sup>44</sup> and reburied at the Pantheon de los Heroes in Asunción. There, his significance as national hero could be better secured.

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<sup>44</sup>In Tuck’s book, López was buried where he fell by Elisa Lynch. She buried him with her bare hands. The team that disinterred López found him buried in a shallow grave at the exact spot where he was said to have fallen at the Rio Aquidaban.

An interesting observation which fortifies the icon--symbol correlation in Paraguayan history is that in each of the place “symbols” listed above, one finds an image--usually a statue of Francia, López, or both--associated with the location, emphasizing the importance and historic value to the Paraguayan. Francia was not at la Casa de la Independencia on the night of signing, nor was López at Humaita during the war; **(Author’s note: research after this paper proved this statement incorrect. López was, in fact leading his troops for several months from Humaita)** yet collectively all of these locations are imbued with, and derive their sense of historic power from the images of the dictators.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from symbolic locations, and independent of the two iconic dictators, two figures stand as symbolic testimony of the figurative existence of Paraguay: the soldier and the woman. The Paraguayan soldier is portrayed, showing a young, relatively modern soldier. He is not the soldier of the Triple Alliance who fought and suffered a century before, and despite his visionary gaze, and his inferred fighting skill, there is no quality of leadership in his bearing. That quality, it is assumed, is best left to history’s great leaders. The soldier represents the common Paraguayan man who provides simple service and sacrifice to his country, but with a modern flavor that honors the soldier of today who serves compulsory duty to the nation.

Finally, there is the image of the Paraguayan woman: attractive, strong and determined... and provincial. She is dressed in the fashion of the *campesina*, and strikes a simple, yet alluring pose that belies the truth behind the role that women played in Paraguayan history--particularly during the war, and for generations afterward. Like the

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<sup>45</sup>Marta Ojeda, personal communication, November 2, 2007.



soldier, the woman is of modest social status and *mestizo* blood, underpinning the social, cultural and ethnic simplicity of the Paraguayan people, which in their eyes sets them apart from their South American neighbors. The Paraguayan woman has been a central theme in her national history, and deserves closer examination because she is the one symbolic figure that stands nearly on equal eminence with the iconic figures of Francia and López.<sup>46</sup>

Paraguayan women kept the farms operating, made the uniforms, made and transported war materiel, nursed in hospitals, raised the children, and fought and suffered alongside their men during the war. After the war, when few men were left to carry on the basic roles of farming, commerce, and government, women stepped in to fill the void. Women took on roles of education, commercial and political leadership uncommon for their day and particularly unusual in Latin American countries at the time. Quite literally, the Paraguayan woman rebuilt one of the most war-prostrated countries in modern memory. In doing so, Paraguayan women began to perceive themselves as influential citizens of their nation beyond their social status and gender.<sup>47</sup> It was the development of a new national consciousness, not overlooked by the watching world. “While women in Colombia, Mexico, and other parts of Latin America largely were ‘forgotten heroines’, Paraguayan women received wide coverage in war newspapers.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Marta Ojeda, personal communication, October 17, 2007.

<sup>47</sup>Barbara J. Ganson, “Following Their Children into Battle: Women at War in Paraguay, 1864-1870,” *The Americas*, 46, no. 3 (1990): 336.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 358.

Because of its women, Paraguayan national history includes an accessible and common symbol for the sacrifices made to the “altar of the nation”;<sup>49</sup> an identity for all Paraguayans to embrace. The national identity contains symbols in Paraguayan women and the modern Paraguayan soldier that provides a direct link to the greatest icons of the past, for where Francia and López were, so there were the soldier and the Paraguayan woman. Today in Paraguay, women--especially mothers and elderly women--are regarded with particular tenderness and respect far departed from the usual *machismo* cultures of Latin America. This inculcated sense of collective identity could very well be the most passionate and powerful vehicle of national purpose for Paraguay.

When citizens of a nation surround themselves with vivid, potent, identifiable icons and symbols, they become a part of the national history represented therein. However, one last topic bears examination, the *signpost*, a sense of history *borrowed* to complement the historical uniqueness of a nation. A helpful example of a signpost would be the fall of the Berlin Wall. Though the wall fell in Germany, America gained a sense of historic validation from the event because it confirmed what America has come to represent: democratic freedom for all. Like the U.S., Paraguay has signposts that help to define its history and sense of national purpose.

At the termination of the War of the Triple Alliance in 1870, Brazilian troops occupied Paraguay for several years. Talks stalled over war reparations, territorial gains of the Allies, and the future military power of Paraguay. In 1876, U.S. President Rutherford B. Hayes stepped in as a conciliator to achieve a treaty protecting Paraguayan

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 360.

interests and territory to the best possible effect.<sup>50</sup> Because the treaty gave Paraguay much more than expected after the war, and because it was brokered by the president of a rising democratic power in the hemisphere, President Hayes, ironically one of the least remembered presidents in the U.S., is remembered well in Paraguayan history.

An article from the December 8, 2007 edition of *ABC Digital Online* (Asunción) provides a “postscript” signpost for Paraguay’s history: a May 2007 Buenos Aires newspaper article from *La Nación* reported the creation of an Argentine Armored Artillery group titled “Grupo Artillería Mariscal Francisco Solano López”. President-Elect Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner defended the action, saying that it: “honors the great patriot, and those Paraguayans who have fallen in the bloody and senseless War of the Triple Alliance--a war that Argentine President Mitre could have avoided by declaring neutrality in 1864.” While the Argentine President and military may be ready to declare a symbolic end to the war, the December 8 *ABC Digital* article reports that *Porteño* public sentiment has been largely negative over the act, saying it would be equivalent to naming a French or Polish military unit the “Hitler Regiment”.<sup>51</sup> The *ABC* article added that the major Uruguayan newspaper (also titled *La Nación*) supports Argentine political recognition of war culpability of the Allies, citing Brazil’s attack on Uruguay--with British endorsement--as the act that precluded the “triple betrayal” of Latin America. While the public battle may continue, an historic signpost is being planted by former enemies favoring Paraguay’s view of the war and its causes.

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<sup>50</sup>Marta Ojeda, personal communication, November 2, 2007.

<sup>51</sup>“De homenajes y de oprobios,” *ABC Digital*, December 8, 2007, <http://www.abc.com.py>.

## **Stroessner and Revisionist History**

When General Alfredo Stroessner took power in Paraguay in 1954, Paraguay's martial history, and the subjugation of its social aristocracy under Francia left the military officer corps and the Roman Catholic Church as the only vestiges of a social and economic elite left in the country.<sup>52</sup> Stroessner was careful to balance his control of the military and the Paraguayan populace by making the Colorado party a significant part of his regime. The Colorado party was employed to create a revisionist version of Paraguayan history that appealed to the nationalistic sense of the military and the people. Drawing upon select pieces of history, Stroessner created an alternate view that supported his regime, and purported to grant him the status of "Benevolent Dictator".<sup>53</sup> He was far from it. As an anti-communist, Stroessner was an ally of the U.S., which cast a casual eye to his corruption and human rights abuses. For students, particularly those attending university, it was a dangerous time.<sup>54</sup> Personal interpretation of Paraguayan national history was risky. The Stroessner regime capitalized on the traditional collective memories of Paraguayan icons, symbols and signposts; yet it did so in such a way so as to

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<sup>52</sup>U.S. Library of Congress, "The Stroessner Regime," *Country Studies: Paraguay*, <http://countrystudies.us/paraguay/55.htm>.

<sup>53</sup>Marta Ojeda, personal communication, October 5, 2007.

<sup>54</sup>Marta Ojeda attended Universidad Catolica in Asunción from 1986 to 1990, obtaining a Master's Degree in Civil Engineering--one of few women studying the profession at the time. The Stroessner government actively encouraged and supported women in educational roles typically pursued by men--honoring the historic Paraguayan symbolism afforded to women since the War of the Triple Alliance; yet these students, male and female, had to exercise great care in their interpretation of that same history, should it differ with the regime's official doctrine. Marta Ojeda, personal communication, October 5, 2007.

keep the military and the populace politically naïve, culturally separate, and socially malleable, according to Colorado party mandates.<sup>55</sup>

In 1989, democratic rule came to Paraguay and with it the challenges of political adaptation for the people. Inculcated in despotic rule for over a generation, the Paraguayan people now have to confront their past in a new way to properly understand a free political system. While their collective understanding of Paraguay's national past still defines who they are and what makes them unique, the people of Paraguay will have to identify with that past in a slightly different way to move forward as a nation. The irony is that "being Paraguayan" today may be as difficult for some Paraguayans to understand as it is for foreigners.

## **Conclusion**

Paraguay's history is permeated with details, events, and actors that are almost incomprehensible to an outsider. That the country has survived at all through grueling circumstances underscores the historic élan of its people, and the sense of national identity that they have forged through a uniquely "created" saga. In this study, the dictators Francia and López are the actors in historic events they created or were part of; *yet it is not about the dictators, but rather about the events that they represent, and how*

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<sup>55</sup>While creating a past that drew upon the finest icons and symbols of Paraguayan history, Stroessner also conducted acts of silencing. One such act was to bury the name of Mariscal José Félix Estigarribia--hero of the Chaco War against Bolivia (1930 – 1935). Estigarribia later served as Paraguay's Minister to the U.S. and as Paraguayan President from 1939 to 1940, when he was killed in a plane crash. Young, handsome and dynamic, Estigarribia was loved by the people, and treasured after death. Estigarribia's contribution to Paraguayan history was silenced because he was a Liberal, and Liberal political thought was crushed under the conservative Colorado regime of Stroessner. The result is a hero who could have stood with López as a martial icon, but was instead relegated to a footnote in Paraguay's collective history. Marta Ojeda, personal communication, October 5, 2007.

*accessible and applicable that representation is to the modern Paraguayan that is important.* Overcoming *Latinidad* confusion and prejudices to focus more clearly on these events and the icons, symbols and signposts that represent them may help to better understand what it means to be a Paraguayan.

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Marta Victorina Ojeda Egusquiza (nee Ferris)--born, raised and educated in Paraguay.

Living under Stroessner regime: October 5, 2007.

Revisionist history in Paraguay: October 5, 2007.

Women’s contribution during and after the Triple Alliance War: October 17, 2007.

Sense of Paraguayan history: November 2, 2007.

Iconic placement of Francia and López in public space: November 2, 2007.

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