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Douglas W. Richmond*

Yucatan's Struggle for Sovereignty during the Mexican - U.S. Conflict, 1836-1848

The Yucatecan elite's major concern at the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Mexico was the acceptance of state sovereignty within the Mexican union. The national government was usually unwilling to do so unless Yucatán would support its leaders, or unless the republic was threatened with defeat by the United States. The struggle for sovereignty was complicated by fierce factional struggle among the Yucatecan elites representing Mérida and Campeche, which were determined to maintain commercial privileges and their lucrative trade with Mexico and the United States. At the same time, the white oligarchy resisted major changes in the socioeconomic order. During the U.S.-Mexican conflict Yucatecan leaders distrusted Mexico City, but were more concerned about national destinies than is commonly understood.

Yucatán's differences with Mexico evolved during the colonial period. Geographical restrictions and the presence of a small Spanish elite juxtaposed upon the largest Indian group in Mexico forced the Spanish to become less restrictive. The Maya retained more of their cultural heritage and pre-Hispanic institutions than other Mexican Indians. Spanish rule was relatively mild until the final decades of the eighteenth century, when the Bourbon reformers attacked Maya autonomy by means of fiscal and legal centralization. Because of the rising cost and demand for food, authorities permitted hacendados to convert the free peasants into *lunero* peons in the western areas including Mérida. Although formally subject to viceregal authority since the conquest, the Yucatecan elites in fact enjoyed an autonomous defensive military system established in order to defend them from pirate attacks.[1]

Yucatán's regional distinctiveness became even more pronounced in the 1820s. Reluctant to support the independence movement, Yucatán joined Mexico as a state in 1824 only on the basis of unconditional federalism. But the Liberals and Conservatives angered the Yucatecans. Liberals such as José María Luis Mora did away with protectionist measures which had enabled Campeche and other ports to establish flourishing shipbuilding industries by the 1830s. Yucatecans had never had to pay the acabala sales tax during colonial times, but under the Liberals they were forced to do so. On the other hand, the Conservatives also alienated Yucatecans by forcing them to pay the arancel tax at the same rate as the rest of Mexico, whereas previously they had been obliged to pay at only 60% of the customs tariffs rate imposed on other states. Yucatecan planters disliked this blow to their tobacco production.[2] For this reason, sovereignty in the form of strong autonomy was popular among the upper class. In addition to the fiscal policies of the early republic, the elites also reacted strongly against political centralism, so that Santa Anna's dictatorship had little appeal in the state. Moreover, the campaign against Texas was quite unpopular,

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[1]Nancy M. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton, 1984), is an outstanding overview. For economic change, see Robert Patch, "Agrarian Change in Eighteenth-Century Yucatán", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 65 (1985), pp. 39-49. See also Miguel Civeira Taboada, *Yucatecos en la sociedad mexicana de geografía y estadística desde 1833 a 1862* (México, 1964), pp. 23-24

[2]John G. Chapman, "Yucatecan Secessionism, 1830-1843" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1967), pp. 15-20; Mary W. Williams, "Secessionist Diplomacy of Yucatán", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 9 (1929), p. 132.

since Yucatán ended up paying 17 percent of Mexico's cost for the war in Texas. As many as 2,500 Yucatecan soldiers were sent off to Texas, some of whom took part in the battle at the Alamo.[3]

Exasperated by foreign war and convinced that elite civilian government was superior to the chaos of the caudillos in Mexico, Yucatecan leaders revolted in May, 1839 and by June, 1840 had defeated the centralist forces in Campeche. Either outright independence or strong autonomy became ever more appealing as the Yucatecans wrote an ultra-liberal state constitution in 1841. Santa Anna persuaded Andrés Quintana Roo, a well-known Yucatecan poet and political writer, to act as his agent in order to negotiate an agreement with the Yucatecan leadership. Both sides consented to an accord on December 29, 1841. The agreement stipulated that the peninsula could remain under its current laws, enjoy favorable tariff rates as well as free transit of its goods, maintain autonomous military privileges, and elect two representatives to Santa Anna's provisional junta. Although the Yucatecan congress ratified the agreement and Santa Anna decided to reject it, provincial reaction to this *acuerdo* was unfavorable. Therefore the national government refused to seat the Yucatecan representatives until Mérida severed relations with Texas. Determined to rule all of Mexico as an authoritarian centralist, Santa Ana decided to dispatch a large Mexican army to Yucatán. But the Yucatecan upper class was united on the basis of sovereignty and routed Santa Anna's forces, who surrendered outside Mérida without much of a fight.[4]

Santa Anna's failure to impose centralist restrictions upon Yucatán enabled its leaders to secure the critically important *convenios* of December 14, 1843. With his prestige temporarily eclipsed, Santa Anna departed for his Veracruz hacienda and left a weak interim president, Valentín Canalizo, in charge of the government. But even though he was part of the Santa Anna regime, Valentín Gómez Farías supported Yucatecan aspirations for sovereignty. Gómez Farías persuaded Yucatecan leaders to discuss their need for autonomy with the national government as long as both sides could agree to support federalism. Himself a dedicated liberal, Gómez Farías sympathized with calls for regional self-rule. By means of a June 7, 1843 decree, the Yucatecan government commissioned three talented, hard-headed negotiators to obtain their demands, and their discussions with the national government produced the *convenios*.[5]

Similar in content to the agreement negotiated earlier by Quintana Roo, the December, 1843 *convenios* were precisely what the Yucatecans wanted. Yucatán would enjoy complete autonomy in the naming of local officials, was exempted from federal taxes in case of war, and did not have to supply soldiers to the national army. Should international conflict arise, however, Yucatán would have to make available to the central government all her naval forces and port facilities. More importantly, Yucatán could determine levels of customs duties, and her goods would enjoy unlimited access to Mexican ports, subject to local taxes. Naturally, incoming Mexican goods were not to be discouraged. In return for recognizing Santa Anna's regime, therefore, Yucatán obtained her autonomy, an odd contradiction that would bedevil the state's continual struggle for sovereignty.[6]

Once the *convenios* became law, both sides felt they had gained advantages. Santa Anna was eager to reunite Yucatán with Mexico as conflict with the United States threatened. He was also satisfied that Yucatán disavowed its "national flag" and adopted the

[3]Howard F. Cline, "Regionalism and Society in Yucatán, 1825-1847", in *Related Studies in Early Nineteenth Century Yucatecan Social History* (Chicago, 1950), p. 67; Albino Acereto, *Evolución histórica de las relaciones políticas entre México y Yucatán* (Mexico City, 1907), p. 69; Nelson Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatan* (Stanford, 1964), p. 27.

[4]Chapman, "Yucatecan Secession", pp. 21-69; John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, 2 vols. (London, 1843), vol. I, p. 82; Acereto, *Evolución histórica*, pp. 73-75; Reed, *Caste War of Yucatan*, pp. 27-32.

[5]Ramón Osorio y Carvajal, *Yucatán en las luchas libertarias de México* (Puebla, 1972), pp. 153-54; Civeira Taboada, *Yucatecos en la sociedad mexicana*, p. 32

[6]Juan Francisco Molina Solis, *Historia de Yucatán desde la independencia de España hasta la época actual*, 2 vols. (Mérida, 1921-27), vol. I, pp. 236-38; Osorio y Carvajal, *Yucatán en las luchas libertarias de México*, pp. 160-61.

institutional names and forms used by other states. For example, Yucatán established a centralized Asamblea (legislature) that replaced the congress, so that seven men became the lawmakers. Santa Anna also was allowed to select the new governor from a list of candidates proposed by the Yucatecan Asamblea. His choice of an old, neutral leader seemed to satisfy both sides. In general, Santa Anna favored the Campeche faction of the Yucatecan elites over the Mérida group. But in allowing the Yucatecans to establish tariff rates and use the resulting revenues as they desired, Santa Anna mollified Mérida as well as Campeche. And for all parties, the *convenios* temporarily quieted the popular compaign for Yucatecan independence.[7]

An attempt by Santa Anna to restrict Yucatecan commerce a year later revived the appeal of complete separation from Mexico. Santa Anna suddenly decreed on February 21, 1844 that only a certified number of articles could be exported duty-free from Yucatán to the rest of Mexico, but the list excluded major Yucatecan products such as maize, sugar, and tobacco. Himself a gulf coast hacendado, Santa Anna seems to have been responding with this measure to the appeals of other east coast hacendados to restrict Yucatecan products. Gulf coast weavers and spinners also wanted to restrict the entry of Yucatecan textiles.[8] The decree definitely created adverse conditions for Yucatecan commerce.[9] To make matters worse, Santa Anna refused to consider Yucatecan petitions to rescind the trade decree and appointed a new governor for Yucatán who took possession of his post on June 2, 1844.[10]

Throughout the remainder of 1844 and all of 1845, the Mexico City governments and Yucatán could not reach agreement over how to resolve the autonomy dispute. The new regime of José Joaquín de Herrera was willing to cancel the February, 1844 trade decree, but neither Herrera or the national congress would accept the *convenios*. But the Mariano Paredes revolt in January, 1845 changed matters since Paredes was backed by Spanish royalists who strongly favored centralism. Distressed that Paredes would not repeal the 1844 commerce decree, Miguel Barbachano seized power in Mérida when Santa Anna's governor refused to sign the Yucatecan legislature's program for independence. After Barbachano recalled Yucatán's representatives from Mexico City, Paredes agreed to informal discussions about implementing the *convenios*. Although Barbachano offered to recognize the Paredes regime and bring Yucatán back into the Mexican union if Mexico City would withdraw the 1844 trade restrictions, little happened because Paredes was too busy balancing federalist appeals and royalist plots to satisfy Yucatán or the rest of Mexico. To force a decision, Barbachano's legislature in July, 1845 reaffirmed Yucatán's desire to remain independent. But on December 14 of that year, the Mexican congress formally repudiated the *convenios*.[11]

The decision of the Mexican Cámara de Diputados moved the Yucatecan lawmakers simultaneously to decree the peninsula's independence and withdraw recognition of the national government only two weeks later. The Barbachano regime had separated from Mexico precisely over the issue of the *convenios*, and not in order to avoid the danger of war with the United States.[12] Yucatán was unhappy with Mexico City but genuinely desired to return to the republic when Mexico could accept the *convenios*. When Paredes returned to power early in 1846, the Mexican government recognized the *convenios*, but the executive did not. Moreover, the February, 1844 trade law stayed in force. Paredes immediately began

[7]Juan Suárez y Navarro, *Informe sobre las causas y carácter de los frecuentes cambios políticos ocurridos en el estado de Yucatán* (Mexico City, 1861), p. 9; Chapman, "Yucatecan Secession", p. 72; Cline, "Regionalism and Society in Yucatán, 1825-1847", pp. 73, 74, 617.

[8]Cline, "Regionalism and Society in Mexico, 1825-1847", p. 74; Molina Solís, *Historia de Yucatán*, pp. 242-43.

[9]Acerato, *Evolución histórica*, p. 83.

[10]Osorio y Carvajal, *Yucatán en las luchas libertarias*, p. 162.

[11]Cline, "Regionalism and Society in Mexico, 1825-1847", pp. 619-20; Miguel Soto, "The Monarchist Conspiracy and the Mexican War", in Douglas W. Richmond, ed., *Essays on the Mexican War* (College Station, 1986), pp. 66-84; Molina Solís, *Historia de Yucatán*, pp. 244-47; Acereto, *Evolución histórica*, p. 83.

[12]For a dissenting view, see Suárez y Navarro, *Informe sobre las causas y carácter*, pp. 10, 57-59. There is great disagreement among Yucatecan historians on this issue.

negotiating for Yucatán's return, but such a clumsy negotiating posture was a feeble position from which to deal with the Yucatecan upper class, which was losing commercial revenue.[13] Paredes continued to assume an ambivalent position that the Yucatecans considered hostile, reportedly informing Barbachano that he would support the *convenios*, yet insisting that the national congress would have to ratify them. But if Mexico City legislators refused, Paredes warned, Yucatán would have to exercise considerable prudence and respect the national government. As a *congreso extraordinario* prepared to meet in Mérida, the Yucatecans debated whether absolute or temporary separation should be the course to follow.[14]

Mexican appeals for reunion on the basis of pure patriotism failed. Paredes dispatched Colonel Juan Crisóstomo Cano to Mérida in order to discuss Yucatecan re-entry, but Cano insisted that prior to signing any treaty, Yucatán must send 300 artillerymen to Veracruz, and, if possible, an infantry battalion as well. Although well received at first, Cano brushed aside political concessions and tried tow hip up support for the conflict with the United States. Cano's mission collapsed when Barbachano insisted on the end of the 1844 trade decree and reinstatement of the *convenios*. To worsen matters, Cano foolishly requested that the Yucatecans revoke the convocation of the *congreso extraordinario*.[15]

Barbachano reviewed Yucatán's grievances in an address to the congressmen on the day following their formal installation. He noted that Mexico City's March 7 reply to Yucatán's position was unsatisfactory and created "inevitable discord". Barbachano pointed out that article 16 of the *convenios* mandated that the December, 1843 agreement was "inalterable" and not subject to later discussion or political circumstances. The governor also announced that relations with the Mexican government had deteriorated to the point that Yucatecan negotiators in Mexico City had requested their passports when discussions ended. The congressmen indicated their support by electing Barbachano as provisional governor during a secret session held the same day.[16]

As war broke out between Mexico and the United States, the legislators reiterated that the abrogation of the *convenios* had ruled out adhesion to Mexico. In view of the central government's instability and the Yucatecan legislature's desire to maintain Yucatán's security, the body decreed that it would arrange internal and international matters as it deemed appropriate. But, it insisted, "as a new testimony to the spirit of nationalism", it was willing to reunite with Mexico if the state's needs were recognized.[17] As proof of its determination to maintain Yucatecan autonomy but eventually rejoin Mexico through negotiations, the Asamblea appointed an official agent during a secret session. The legislative commission defined its agent's primary mandate as clarifying Yucatán's relationship with Mexico.[18] On May 12, 1846 the legislators received from the Paredes government a reply to their March 14 note, but once again the president's position regarding the *convenios* and the February, 1844 trade restrictions was unacceptable.[19]

Although stung by yet another rejection of their demands, the Yucatecans appointed a new agent to discuss the *convenios* in Mexico City. This diplomat reiterated that independence would probably be the inevitable outcome of the current situation. If that were the case, then the Yucatecan *comisiones locales* would ultimately make the decision, while congress would establish a new administrative structure if the local governments opted for independence. But if the Mexican government were publicly to declare its true sentiments in a positive manner, then this process could be short-circuited. Mexico, however, would

[13]Molina Solís, *Historia de Yucatán*, p. 248; Williams, "Secessionist Diplomacy of Yucatan", p. 134.
[14]*Diario de la Marina*, March 15, 1846.
[15]Osorio y Carvajal, *Yucatán en las luchas libertarias*, pp. 163-64; Molina Solís, *Historia de Yucatán*, p. 251.
[16]Yucatecan Documents (hereafter cited as YD), Sesiones del Congreso (hereafter cited as SC), Special Collections, Library of the University of Texas at Arlington, Roll, 37, vol. 13, frames 4-10, address dated April 23, 1846.
[17]YD/SC, Roll 29, vol. 16, frames 13-14.
[18]YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frames 3-4.
[19]YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frame 6.

have to proclaim its protection of Yucatán's political structure in line with the principles of a "republican, popular, and representative government".[20] Although the negotiator held out the hope that differences could possibly be reconciled, the Yucatecans were making it clear that they preferred a federalist regime in Mexico City.

The Yucatecan legislators defined their position in a June decree as concern for Mexico's fate in its struggle against the United States surfaced. Joaquín Castellanos successfully proposed that Yucatán resign itself to whatever fate befell Mexico during the war with the United States, that domestic issues be put aside temporarily, and that Yucatán not provide aid to the United States. The Castellanos motion also proclaimed that Yucatán would "at the same time support the war on the peninsula (of Yucatán) against them (the United States) if necessary". Nevertheless, he concluded by warning that involvement in the war could lead to very serious circumstances, complicating the Yucatecan position even more.[21] Despite their sympathetic concern for Mexico, the congressmen insisted that the *convenios* be accepted and that Yucatán remain free of all commitments to the republic. Meanwhile, congress would establish a new administration and rejoin Mexico in case a mutually satisfactory arrangement could be made.[22]

After prolonged debate, the Yucatecan deputies demanded their sovereignty without direct reference to the war. Once again, the legislators manifested their dissatisfaction with Mexico's response to their March 7 demands relating to the convenios. Article two reiterated Yucatán's independence while article three stated that Yucatán would return to Mexico and "comply with all its duties" if the *convenios* were accepted. Article four announced that a *ley orgánica* would define Yucatán's new government. The last provision of the decree stipulated that all civil, military, and ecclesiastical autorities swear an oath of allegiance to the preceding articles.[23] By ruling out the writing of a new constitution and pledging to fulfill her duties if Mexico would approve the *convenios*, Yucatán sought to establish what amounted to temporary independence. And the motion to support the war should Yucatán decide to resist U.S. forces held out the possibility that Mexico could count upon Yucatecan assistance.

Less than two months later, Yucatán began to take notice of conciliatory gestures from its former nemesis, Santa Ana. Exiled in Cuba, Santa Anna engineered his return to power by promising to reimpose the federalist constitution of 1824. Also attractive to Yucatán was Santa Anna's opposition to a monarchical government. Going further, in March, 1846 Santa Anna reportedly backed the return of Yucatán by sanctioning the *convenios*. He admitted that his February 21, 1844 order was a mistake, but attributed its promulgation to his enemies, who supposedly used it to turn the rest of Mexico against him.[24] Such pro-Yucatecan sentiments made a substantial impact in Havana, where much of Mérida's commerce arrived.

Once again Santa Anna tricked Yucatecans into supporting him in return for his promise to respect their autonomy. After his revolt broke out in Guadalajara on May 20, 1846 Santa Anna left Havana and met with Barbachano in the port of Sisal. There Santa Anna agreed to support the *convenios* in return for Yucatecan backing for his cause. By means of Decree 37, the Yucatecan legislators supported Barbachano's deal in August. Proponents of the decree argued that Santa Anna was offering much more than Paredes. After heated debate, Yucatán's legislature decided to back a president who had once betrayed it while the nation was experiencing a difficult war.[25] Rather than independence, Yucatán had now accepted a federalist autonomy with tacit recognition of a limited role in

[20]YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frames 6-7.
[21]YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frame 8, sessions of June 3, 1846.
[22]YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frame 9, sessions of June 6, 1846.
[23]YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frames 52-53; Acereto, *Evolución histórica*, pp. 83-84.
[24]Williams, "Secessionist Diplomacy of Yucatán", p. 134; *Amigo del Pueblo*, March 10, 1846.
[25]Osorio y Carvajal, *Yucatán en las luchas libertarias de México*, p. 164; YD/SC, Roll 29, vol. 16, frames 17-18, contains Decree 37. Also see YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frames 20-22; YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frame 84.

the war with the United States. Santa Anna and Barbachano quickly formalized their agreement. On September 24, 1846 the Mexican government decreed that Yucatán was officially "revindicated", and ended the hated February, 1844 trade restrictions. That, along with the declaration that the *convenios* were once again law, meant that Yucatán was reincorporated. The declaration noted that Yucatecan officials, both public and private, had carried out tough negotiations, and the peninsula's congressmen received a call to rejoin the national congress as Mexico reestablished a federalist system. A day later, Barbachano accepted these conditions with a request that he be reconfirmed as governor of Yucatán.[26] The Yucatecan congress declared Yucatán's reincorporation into Mexico on November 2, 1846.[27]

Meanwhile, the Yucatecan elite established economic policies clearly designed to enhance their power. Despite its traditional demands for free trade, the legislature levied a wide variety of new customs charges upon incoming trade and vessels from Mexico, voting down an August 21, 1846 motion to exclude all Mexican imports from taxes, and two months later imposed a 10 percent duty upon all imported cotton.[28] The Yucatecan legislature also enacted wasteful as well as self-serving tax privileges. While the rest of Mexico was levying stiff taxes upon local churches to fight the war, Yucatán allowed foreigners to import on a duty-free basis items used to adorn their churches.[29] Landowners received exemption from the *contribución personal* tax in May, 1846 while petitions permitting influential citizens to avoid tariff charges became routine.[30]

Simultaneously, the government weakened itself by means of arbitrary policies that alienated rural laborers and peasants. Particularly distasteful was the *fagina* (forced labor) legislation obliging villagers to build public roads. When rural citizens requested exemption from these duties, the legislature typically refused.[31] Moreover, land policies allowed plantation owners to expand at the expense of the villages. *Jefes políticos* were conferred jurisdiction in conflicts between villagers claiming land that hacendados desired to obtain, and the *jefes políticos* could recommend new boundary changes affecting any village. The ostensible goal of this law as to provide "subsistence" lands for villagers, though in actuality the hacendados often influenced the *jefes políticos* for their own benefit.[32] In addition, the villages lost their fiscal independence when the Yucatecan legislators abolished the *cuentas de arbitrios* (tax agencias). But as food became scarce --maize prices had quadrupled since 1813-- congress exempted villagers from payment of the *arrendamiento* tax in August, 1846.[33]

Constant intervention by Mérida in Campeche resulted in widespread dissatisfaction with the Yucatecan legislature. Grievances in Campeche had many causes. The legislators in Mérida had always insisted that they were federalists, but they tightened their control over Campeche in 1846. In May of that year, congress ruled that the Campeche *fondo común* (treasury) revenues would have to be sent to the state treasury rather than to the Campeche ayuntamiento. Mérida also regulated health conditions in Campeche's port and raised import duties, which irritated the merchants since most of their trade focused upon Mexican gulf ports, while Mérida prided itself upon commercial links to New Orleans, Havana, and New York. Campeche had to seek approval from the state capital to pay for a lighting system in the barrio of San Roman, while nearby Carmen appealed for 16 pesos a month to maintain vaccination facilities. Mérida also "revised" Carmen's budget in August, 1846.[34] By amending

[26] *Siglo Diez y Nueve*, no. 819, October (?), 1846; Molina Solís, *Historia de Yucatán*, p. 252; *La Patria*, September 20, 1846.
[27] YD/SC, vol. 13, frames 138-141 contain the official reincorporation decisions enacted by the Yucatecan legislature.
[28] *La Patria*, April 26, 1846; YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frame 82; YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 13, frame 137.
[29] YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frame 59; from session of July 7, 1846.
[30] Pertinent examples are YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frame 20 and YD/SC, Roll 29, vol. 16, frame 16.
[31] The *fagina* problem is described in YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frames 61-62, 101 and YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 13, frame 113.
[32] For land policy, see YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frames 72, 89-90, 94-95; Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatan*, pp. 8-11, 41-49.
[33] YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13 frames 82, 84 mention the *cuentas de arbitrios*. The end of the arrendamiento tax is related in YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frames 79-81; and YD/SC, Roll 29, vol. 16, frame 16.
[34] YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frames 23-28, 35-36, 75-76; Moisés González Navarro, *Raza y tierra; la guerra de castas y el henequén* (Mexico City, 1970), p. 50.

Carmen's fiscal affairs to suit its tastes, the Mérida congress served notice that its notion of autonomy was quite contradictory. The Yucatecan congressmen were unabashedly liberal in terms of the demands they set for the peninsula in relation to Mexico City. But the Mérida deputies were determined to control Yucatán's local affairs with an iron fist.

The agreement between Santa Anna and Barbachano finally motivated defiance from Domingo Barret, the *jefe superior político* of Campeche, and the local ruling class, who demanded that the state legislature revoke its support for Santa Anna's Plan de Guadalajara. Campeche leaders also agitated for the restoration of Yucatán's 1842 constitution, because they were distrustful of Santa Anna and concerned about their own autonomy. Campeche disavowed the *ley orgánica* written in Mérida and proclaimed in September. Practically a new constitution in itself, the document was actually fairly centralist in that it mandated a strong executive and enumerated obligations and duties expected of each citizen.[35] Finally, the Barbachano faction began discharging followers of Santiago Méndez, Campeche's departure from the gentlemanly atmosphere of internal Yucatecan politics.[36]

The first phase of a Campeche revolt began on October 25, 1846 when its leaders demanded reestablishment of the 1841 constitution, reduction of taxes, and the return of *campechanos* to public office. The executive of the state government was quite angry as well as confused with this turn of events but merely requested the legislators to discover and describe Campeche's political direction. The state government, concerned about smaller revolts in the rest of Yucatán, considered the Campeche uprising a serious revolt and formulated extraordinary powers for the government to crush it. The legislators proposed that the government should have wide powers to re-establish order and to enhance its revenues from throughout the peninsula.[37] Barbachano contained but could not crush the Campeche rebels. On December 8, 1846 groups in Campeche revolted successfully. The movement gained the support of many Indians who were attracted by Campeche's continued call for tax reductions. The Campeche leaders protested bitterly against Barbachano's November, 1846 reincorporation into Mexico since the national congress had not ratified the *convenios* or revoked the February, 1844 trade decrees. Fearful of Santa Anna's centralist tendencies, the leaders in the port city of Campeche once again demanded restoration of the 1841 constitution.[38]

Perhaps more importantly, Campeche wanted to clarify that Yucatán would remain unconditionally neutral during the war with the United States. Campeche merchants feared their fleet would be seized or destroyed by U.S. forces during the war. The feeling persisted in Campeche that Mexico could not possibly win against the Untied States and that local exports would be adversely affected by U.S. blockades of Mexican ports. Furthermore, many feared that if the United States invaded Yucatán, Mexico could not aid the peninsula. Although *campechanos* shared Mérida's conviction that the *convenios* had to be honored, they insisted that Yucatán declare its neutrality during the war in order to gain economic advantages. Therefore, the December revolt attracted more local support than the earlier insurrection because Barret and other Campeche leaders opposed Yucatán's reincorporation into Mexico.[39]

Barbachano's efforts to rally the peninsula behind him against the Campeche revolt on the basis of patriotic support for Mexico failed. The state government's official periodical claimed that Yucatán was proving its loyalty in the war, refuting suggestions to the contrary. It also referred to the Campeche revolt as "vandalism" and linked it to the resurgence of

[35]*La Patria*, Oct. 8, 1846. The *ley orgánica* is outlined in González Navarro, *Raza y tierra*, p. 72; YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frame 23; YD/SC, Roll 29, vol. 16, frames 19-26; and YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frame 99.

[36]YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frames 23-24.

[37]Cline, "Regionalism and Society in Yucatán", p. 622; YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frames 26-27.

[38]Suárez y Navarro, *Informe sobre las causas y carácter*, pp. 10, 18; Molina Solis, *Historia de Yucatán*, pp. 254-59.

[39]Cline, "Regionalism and Society in Yucatán", pp. 621, 624; Acereto, *Evolución histórica de las relaciones políticas*, pp. 85-88.

caudillos. Along similar lines, Barbachano impuned the rebel proclamations as unaptriotic and claimed that the Campeche revolt threatened the *convenios*. But these patriotic calls to arms failed because mass opinion opposed further bloodshed and because most Yucatecans were embittered by the deceitfulness of the Mexican government. Barbachano's position deteriorated further when he labeled as traitors those who would not take up arms against the rebels; his military support melted away and Mérida surrendered to Barret's victorious Campeche forces in January, 1847.[40]

Campeche's desire for a specific understanding with the United States proved contagious. As early as March, 1846 Yucatán's official periodical voiced widespread fears about the effect of the U.S. navy upon Mexican ports. When war broke out, sentiment for annexation to the United States appeared on the western coast of Yucatán.[41] As if to justify *campechano* anxiety, a U.S. warship sailed into Campeche on June 4. The U.S. navy had given its commander specific orders to salute the Yucatecan flag with a barrage from his 21 guns, and the captain demanded to know Yucatán's intentions during the war. Campeche took no direct action, referring the affair to Mérida, where Méndez and six other legislators proposed that the United States be informed that Yucatán had separated from Mexico, reassumed its sovereignty, and that congress was deciding the peninsula's future. A second proposed action by the legislature was more controversial, since it consisted of informing the U.S. commander that if Yucatán changed its policy toward the war, "...lo pondrá lealmente en conocimiento del Gobierno de Estados Unidos, para corresponder a la muestra de cortesía que acaba de recibir". The first proposition passed easily, but the second carried, only after modification, by the close vote of nine to eight. The revised version stated that the U.S. request for Yucatán's position on the war amounted to acknowledgement that Yucatán was separated from Mexico, albeit on a temporary basis. Nevertheless, the statement maintained, Yucatecans were reunited with each other by means of their legislators, who were deliberating the peninsula's future.[42] Mérida disapproved of conciliatory gestures to the United States and wanted to emphasize that congressional power should decide matters such as war and peace.

For many reasons, the United States pressured Yucatán as part of its war strategy. The Secretary of the Navy wanted to gain the sympathies of Chiapas and Tabasco. At one point, the State Department considered seizing the isthmus of Tehuantepec partially in order to support any group in Yucatán that would maintain the state's separation from Mexico.[43] Because the United States also respected its flag, Yucatán was able to send supplies to Mexico. As an ally of Santa Anna, Barbachano was committed to helping Mexico against the United States. The Spanish captain of the *Manuelita* left Campeche on July 13, 1846 and reported that despite Barbachano's neutrality, the governor was sending troops, war material, and provisions on board Mexican ships flying the Yucatecan flag.[44] As a result of Barbachano's reunification with Mexico, U.S. warships had blockaded the island of Carmen and the port of Laguna, one of Yucatán's most important ports, which thus suffered an interdiction of trade with the rest of Mexico.[45] Seizing gulf ports was undoubtedly a key part of the U.S. strategy to attack Veracruz.

The Barret government responded by trying to gain U.S. recognition of Yucatán's sovereignty along with trade concessions at Carmen and other ports. Barret tried to end

[40]*Siglo Diez y Nueve*, October 8, December 19 and 24, 1846; Molina Solis, *Historia de Yucatán*, pp. 260-267.

[41]*Siglo Diez y Nueve*, March 26, 1846; *La Patria*, May 21, 1846.

[42]Quoted in YD/SC, Roll 38, vol. 14, frames 9-11; *La Patria*, June 28, 1846. Based upon naval logbooks, Francis Joseph Manno's article, "Yucatán en la guerra entre México y Estados Unidos", *Revista de la Universidad de Yucatán*, 5 (July-August, 1963), pp. 51-72, is a useful source for military and diplomatic policy of the United States; pp. 52-54 describe the June 4 incident in Campeche.

[43]C.H. Gibbon to James Buchanan, U.S. Secretary of State, July 22, 1846, *Correspondence of the United States Department of State, Miscellaneous Letters, July 1 to December 30, 1846* (Washington, D.C., Federal Records Center), Microcopy 179, Roll 111, frames 89-90.

[44]*La Patria*, July 30, 1846.

[45]Williams, "Secessionist Diplomacy of Yucatán", p. 135.

the U.S. occupation of Carmen and Laguna by requesting of David Connor, commander of the U.S. fleet in Veracruz, that Yucatán be excepted from blockades or any other hostilities directed toward Mexico. Connor was accommodating and replied that Yucatán would not suffer any hostile action as long as Barret did not permit Yucatán to participate in the war or send contraband to Mexico. In response, Barret ordered tight restrictions on contraband to Mexico from Campeche and Carmen, but public reaction in Mérida to these discussions was so negative that Barret moved his headquarters to Campeche.[46]

Yucatán's first direct contact with the United States occurred when Barret dispatched José Rovira to Washington, D.C. as the peninsula's official representative, traveling by means of a safe-conduct pass provided by Connor. The United States was receiving an easy person to deal with, since Rovira and been educated there and favored Yucatán's annexation by the Polk government. Although Polk leaned toward acquiring Yucatán, Secretary of State James Buchanan correctly believed that congress would never approve the idea and informed Rovira that it was out of the question. Rovira's mission was not ultimately very successful. Buchanan agreed to respect Yucatán's neutrality only if the Barret faction could demonstrate its stability. At least Rovira received a promise that U.S. trade would be maintained with Campeche and the rest of Yucatán, but his complaint that Veracruz and Tampico did not have to pay trade duties while Carmen and Laguna did resulted in no immediate change. The United States maintained full control of Carmen and imposed heavy tariffs.[47]

Despite these and subsequent concessions from the United States, the Barret government became weaker. After Rovira left, the United States officially recognized Yucatecan neutrality, modified its coastal blockade of Yucatán, and permitted trade between Campeche and Sisal. When Perry succeeded Connor as fleet commander, he appointed two naval officers and commissioners to deal with the Yucatecan government. Carmen enjoyed a reduced tariff and limited trade, though U.S. occupation continued. Barret was not only willing to compromise on international matters, but attempted to broaden his base of support by convening another *congreso extraordinario* in May, 1847. Despite efforts to cut taxes while avoiding an impending deficit and still implementing the 1841 constitution, the legislators accomplished little. Méndez won the gubernatorial elections in July, 1847.[48]

The climax of Yucatán's quest for sovereignty occured under the leadership of Méndez. The new governor dispatched his son-in-law, Justo Sierra O'Reilly, to the United States to secure an end to its occupation of Carmen and to urge Washington to propose restraints upon possible Mexican reprisals against Yucatán. Sierra convinced the United States to abolish duties on goods in vessels plying between Carmen and the Yucatecan ports, but the outbreak of the caste war altered his strategy considerably. The fear of an Indian victory and wholesale slaughter of the remaining whites motivated Sierra to seek aid from any quarter to end the caste war. Barbachano still continued to believe that Yucatán should support Mexico, but once his Indian supporters redefined the revolt as a racial conflict and gained the upper hand, Sierra pleaded for U.S. assitance to put down the revolt. Meanwhile, Méndez requested 2,000 Mexican troops, but Mexico was still fighting the United States. Since neither Yucatán nor Mexico could agree on trade concessions, Mexican troops never arrived.[49]

[46]Molina Solis, *Historia de Yucatán*, p. 276; Osorio y Carvajal, *Yucatán en las luchas libertarias*, p. 178; Manno, "Yucatán en la guerra entre México y Estados Unidos", p. 56.

[47]Molina Solis, *Historia de Yucatán*, pp. 276-77; Marvin Alisky, "The Relations of the State of Yucatán and the Federal Government of Mexico, 1823-1978", in Edward H. Moseley and Edward D. Terry, eds., *Yucatán: A World Apart* (University, Alabama, 1980), p. 249; Williams, "Secessionist Diplomacy of Yucatán", pp. 135-136.

[48]Cline, "Regionalism and Society in Yucatán", pp. 627-639, is the most accurate description of the Barret era.

[49]Justo Sierra O'Reilly, *Diario de nuestro viaje a los Estados Unidos* (Mexico City, 1938); Williams, "Secessionist Diplomacy of Yucatán", p. 137; Cline, "Regionalism and Society in Mexico", pp. 639-40. Molina Solis, *Historia de Yucatán*, pp. 48-50, describes Méndez's overtures to Mexico.

As the white elite faced disaster early in 1848, Méndez dramatically offered to trade Yucatecan sovereignty in return for foreign assistance in crushing the Indian revolt. Méndez offered Yucatán to Spain, Britain, and the United States on March 25, and coincidentally, Sierra also offered Yucatán to the United States on April 3, before he received word of Méndez's incredible overture. Fortunately, Méndez had earlier commissioned Barbachano to arrange a peace treaty with the Indians, but he realized that once it was in force his position as governor would be untenable. Therefore Méndez also resigned on March 25 to allow Barbachano to become governor.[50]

Meanwhile, Polk urged congress to accept Sierra's offer. An eager expansionist, Polk, proposed sending U.S. troops to the Yucatán to avoid further bloodshed, restrain European influence, and occupy a region that seemed to be headed by willing collaborators. Angry that newspapers and congressmen in the United States interpreted the caste war as an uprising of the oppressed majority, Sierra feared that the Treaty of Guadalupe would allow Mexico to terrorize the Yucatán in vengeance. Isolated and embarrassed at having received no official instructions from his government, Sierra was watching in dismay as the U.S. congress voted against Polk's Yucatecan proposal when word reached the United States of a peace treaty arranged by Barbachano with the Indians. Although he felt guilty about attempting to negotiate a separate deal with the United States while Mexico had suffered a humiliating defeat, Sierra concluded that white immigration to Yucatán was the peninsula's only salvation.[51]

It fell upon Barbachano to end the caste war and reunite Yucatán to Mexico permanently. On April 18, 1848 he withdrew the Méndez offers of sovereignty to foreign powers and dispatched negotiators to Mexico City with confidential instructions. Mexico's army only numbered about 5,000 soldiers and U.S. troops still occupied the capital. But the national government did send 15,000 dollars along with rifles and ammunition, since the military situation in the Yucatán was actually worsening. By now, the Yucatecan military and ayuntamientos had made it clear to Barbachano that reincorporation was paramount, and reunion occurred on August 17, 1848 when Mexico recognized Yucatán as sovereign in terms of internal administration but subject to the national constitution. Fiscal problems were actually solved later, but the federal government assumed control of Yucatecan customs duties in return for its aid in crushing the caste war revolt.[52] Yucatán had lost its autonomy after the war with the United States, but preserved its socioeconomic system as a result.

In conclusion, Yucatan's experience during the Mexican war points out the overall lack of national unity at the time. Public reluctance to support the war was noticeably strong in the periphery. The states of Chiapas and Tabasco considered uniting with Guatemala, while in Coahuila the powerful Sánchez Navarro family provided supplies and equipment to the U.S. forces. The northern states had been worn down by Indian wars and factional strife. In Sonora, as in Yucatán, reluctance to support the government also centered on objections to high tariff duties. The port of Guaymas suffered from weak transportation links and, like the Campeche ports, engaged in lively contraband that resulted in its occupation by U.S. forces. Moreover, the caste war that developed in the Sierra Gorda was even more serious a problem for Mexico than the Maya revolt in Yucatán.[53]

[50]Molina Solis, *Historia de Yucatán*, pp. 67-93; Acereto, *Evolución histórica de las relaciones políticas*, pp. 89-91.

[51]Sierra, *Diario de nuestro viaje*, pp. 333-50; Williams, "Secessionist Diplomacy of Yucatán", pp. 138-141.

[52]Molina Solis, *Historia de Yucatán*, pp. 95-162; Acereto, *Evolución histórica*, p. 92; Civeira Taboada, *Yucatecos en la sociedad mexicana*, p. 33.

[53]Lack of national unity is emphasized in Gene Brack, *Mexico Views Manifest Destiny* (Albuquerque, 1975), p. 171; Charles H. Harris, III, *A Mexican Family Empire: The Latifundio of the Sánchez Navarros, 1765-1867* (Austin, 1975), pp. 285-89; Stuart F. Voss, *On the Periphery of Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Sonora and Sinaloa, 1810-1877* (Tucson, 1982), pp. 108-110; Paul Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Lincoln, 1981), pp. 28-30; Manno, "Yucatán en la guerra entre México y Estados Unidos", p. 60

There are many indications that Yucatán harbored no animosity toward the rest of Mexico. U.S. naval officers reported that despite Yucatán's deepening ties with the State Department, hostility to Mexico in the peninsula had not increased after the war began. The legislature regularly analyzed communication from as far away as New Mexico, and correspondended cordially with Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Sonora, Michoacán, Sinaloa, and Zacatecas. Although bad relations existed with the national government, the Yucatecan legislature went out of its way to assure Veracruz that it would always enjoy good relations with Yucatán.[54] Yucatán had little hostility for individual state governments, but felt deep resentment against the federal government in Mexico City.

If Yucatán was unique, it was undoubtedly in her courtship of the United States. Offering her sovereignty was an extreme move that might have become permanent, and had U.S. forces entered Yucatán, they might have been tempted to remain as long as possible.[55] There is also no doubt that the blockade of Yucatecan ports damaged Mexican interests as well. At least one Mexican citizen directed a claim to the Yucatecan legislature for sums seized by a U.S. naval captain who deposited the Mexican's funds in the Sisal custom house.[56]

Despite the elite's reluctance to enter the war, many Yucatecans participated notably. A little known fact of the Mexican War is the contributions made by Yucatecans to the war effort. Several Yucatecans fought at the battle of Angostura, where Santiago Blanco was promoted to general for leading two successful attacks against U.S. forces. Another *yucateco* prepared the defenses of Chapultepec against the North Americans, and was killed there on September 13, 1847.[57]

All factors taken together, it appears that despite some desire to aid the Mexican republic against the United States, Yucatán was primarily motivated to protect its socioeconomic system. Yucatán's separation was really transitory, but not many wanted to fight the United States outside the peninsula. Moreover, Yucatán's planters and merchants desired some form of domestic order to keep the Maya in check. Not only did the national government fail to provide stability of this sort, but it consistently established tariff policies demaging to Yucatecan commerce. In many ways, Yucatán resembled the Old South or Catalonia in terms of its desire to avoid national regulation while enjoying free trade. Convinced that progress was as indigenous to its soil as limestone, Yucatán enjoyed a cultural renaissance and avoided religious conflict. But the Yucatecan elite's exploitation of the masses and its inability to avoid sectarian regional disputes paralleled development in much of Mexico during the period of the war with the United States.

[54]YD/SC, Roll 37, vol. 13, frames 8, 13, 46, 73-74; Manno, "Yucatán en la guerra entre México y Estados Unidos", p. 62.

[55]Donathan C. Oliff, *Reforma Mexico and the United States: A Search for Alternatives to Annexation, 1845-1861* (University, Alabama, 1981), pp. 12-13. Oliff notes that the post-war Herrera government also requested U.S. troops for use in Yucatán.

[56]YD/SC, Roll 24, vol. 7, frames 15-16.

[57]Civeira Taboada, *Yucatecos en la sociedad mexicana*, pp. 36, 45; Osorio y Carvajal, *Yucatán en las luchas libertarias de México*, pp. 195-198.