

## **Paths and Visions of the American and Chilean Positions on World War I (1914-1918)**

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### **Abstract**

*This research examines the paths, visions, and positions adopted by the United States and Chilean governments in light of the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918) and the division of the world into warring camps. It analyzes how both nations adopted similar positions towards the war at its outset, driven by the desire to achieve economic gains and organize their views according to changing events. However, this stance underwent significant changes after the United States entered the war in 1917. Unlike the United States, Chile abstained from supporting the American position and its commitment to neutrality between the support of Germany and the Axis Powers. Some Chilean leaders were convinced of Germany's victory, while others sought to preserve their economic gains and stability during the last years of World War I.*

**Keywords:** *United States of America, Chile, World War I, neutrality.*

### **Introduction**

As soon as the First World War broke out in Europe, its dark shadows extended over the rest of the continents and countries in the world, with the Americas and their nations being no exception to its impacts and consequences. However, the fear of the American nations, including the United States of America and its ally, the Republic of Chile, from the war effects, and their desire to benefit from its course, led them to declare neutrality in 1914. When the United States declared its position initially, followed by Chile later, those twins stood together, driven by several motivations, factors, and reasons, the most prominent of which were reaffirming and framing diplomatic relations with the United States. They also wished to maintain commercial and economic ties with the warring nations in order to achieve economic growth and prosperity. However, this harmony didn't last long, especially after the outlines of the war became clear and its tide shifted in favor of the Axis powers at the expense of the Allies, who had strong financial and economic ties with the United States. Consequently, the latter decided to enter the war in 1917, waiting for its ally Chile to follow suit. However, this was a departure from the situation in 1914, as Chile refused to comply with the United States' position and decided to maintain its neutrality in the war for several reasons. The first reason was the emergence of a new trend in Chile, supportive of Germany, did not hesitate to display its emotional preference for the German cause. This movement affirmed that Germany represents traditional cultural values and it has come under attack by the forces of materialistic capitalism unleashed by the French Revolution, and supported by new powers, including the United States. Representing this trend was Gonzalo Bulnes, who best exemplified his love for Germany and its civilization when he served as a diplomat in the country during the 1890s. He was one of President Juan Luis's most influential

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advisors. The second reason: Economic gains, meaning the economic and social well-being that Chile achieved through its decision of neutrality, in addition to the fact that Chile did not have any dispute or conflict with any of the warring countries. These were the most important and strongest reasons for Chile's commitment to remain neutral until the end of the war, despite its ally, the United States, entering the war. Evidence of this preference is that the increased demand for nitrates for war purposes (such as ammunition and explosives manufacturing) led to a global increase in prices.

Elevating the level of diplomatic representation between the two countries means that the United States of America and the Republic of Chile have succeeded in establishing strong and friendly relations at the diplomatic level. This was reinforced by the issuance of an order by the American President, William Howard Taft, appointing Henry Prather Fletcher as his government's ambassador to Chile in 1914. With this appointment, he became the first ambassador of the United States to Chile. Similarly, Chile reciprocated when Eduardo Suarez Mujica, who had been serving as Chile's envoy in Washington, was promoted to the rank of ambassador in the same year.

Those relationships that were being tested locally and regionally (at the level of the Latin American continent) were on the verge of being tested globally since August 1914 when the First World War erupted in Europe. Latin American newspapers described it figuratively or metaphorically as "the thunderstorm" to emphasize its significance and expected repercussions. Observers predicted the inevitability of the unexpected and dangerous effects of the war, not only in Europe but also worldwide due to interconnected structures.<sup>(2)</sup> Experts stressed that the war unfolding in Europe was undoubtedly a global conflict that could not be avoided.

The war placed Latin American countries, especially Chile, in a difficult position due to the fact that the interests of the warring nations were not confined to Europe alone but had a global scope. Despite Latin American countries having no specific political commitments or ties to the allied or axis powers, they had a high percentage of European immigrants and sought to prevent racial disturbances. Consequently, there was neither a necessity nor a desire for them to get involved in the war. Additionally, Latin American countries tried to maintain vital economic relations with the warring European nations for as long as possible. Therefore, North and South American countries (Latin America) decided to follow their traditional diplomatic policy and declared neutrality, steering clear of European entanglements (the war).

Based on the aforementioned, the United States of America declared its neutrality according to the declaration made by President Woodrow Wilson on August 4, 1904. The statement read: "While there is a regrettable state of war between Austria and Hungary, Germany and Russia, and Germany and France, and since the United States is on friendly terms with the conflicting powers, and as there are citizens of all the mentioned belligerents residing within the territories and states of the United States engaging in trade and other activities... it is our honest duty to declare neutrality, and it is the duty of the neutral government not to permit its waters subject to it to be used for the purposes of war."

As soon as the United States declared its neutrality in the war, the Latin American countries followed its path, attempting to distance themselves from its aftermath. Chile was at the forefront of those countries when it declared its neutrality on September 17, 1914.

Upon careful examination of the above decision, one will realize that there are several reasons and driving forces behind Chile's decision mentioned above. One of the most prominent reasons is to reaffirm and frame the diplomatic relations it shares with the



United States. Additionally, it is driven by the desire to maintain commercial and economic ties with warring nations to achieve growth and economic prosperity for itself.

This is what actually happened: It was known back then that the majority of nitrate mines (rock salt) and deposits were concentrated in the Atacama Desert due to its dry desert climate, which provided ideal conditions for the formation of natural nitrate deposits. This made Chile hold about 80% of the world's production. With the outbreak of World War I, the demand for nitrates increased as they became a crucial material for manufacturing explosives and ammunition. As a result, the war and its developments brought significant changes to the global nitrate markets in terms of supply and demand. Before the war, the use of nitrates was limited to the agricultural sector (in the production of chemical fertilizers) and the manufacturing of washing powders. However, after the war, all of Chile's nitrate production started to be consumed in the production of explosives and for military purposes. Great Britain increased its import of nitrates from Chile from 50,000 tons in 1914 to 1,860,000 tons in 1917. With the increased exports of nitrate from Chile to meet the demand, this led to significant development and prosperity in Chile.

In order to keep up with the increasing demand for nitrates, the Chilean Congress passed Law No. (2918) in January 1915, which provided government loans to Chilean and American companies operating in nitrate production to support their increased output. Remarkably, the United States was one of the largest importers of nitrates from Chile due to the rising production of weapons and ammunition that its companies sold to warring nations.

And on a related note, Chile's copper production increased, reaching its peak in 1915, where Chilean and American companies produced about 52,000 tons. Most of it was exported to the United States for use in technology and American industries.

The increasing importance of nitrates in the production of ammunition and explosives, coupled with the rising demand from allied countries, made Chilean ships carrying these materials and their transportation routes a target for German forces. The German fleet's presence off the coast of Chile disrupted the transportation of Chilean nitrates, imposing a naval blockade on its shores. However, the British fleet successfully broke the blockade, destroyed the German fleet, and sank their ships in the Battle of the Falkland Islands. Afterward, Chilean nitrate exports resumed under the protection of the British naval forces. The British fleet's actions can be attributed to the fact that both countries were at war, and Britain stood to gain significantly if the German fleet succeeded in cutting off nitrate supplies to Europe.

After the attack on Chilean nitrate cargo ships, the Chilean government, led by Ramón Barros Luco, issued Decree No. 6364 on December 30, 1914, to be implemented from January 1, 1915. The decree stated the following:

First: The following is prohibited for warring nations:

- 1- Establishing a wireless telegraph station or any other device on the territories of a neutral state for the purpose of communicating with the belligerent forces on land or at sea.
- 2- Using any facility of this kind, which was established before the war, on the territories of a neutral state for purely military purposes.

Secondly, neutral states must observe the following commitments, particularly by companies and individuals under their jurisdiction who possess telegraph, telephone, or wireless telegraphy apparatus:



1-The authorities of the republic shall authorize the dismantling of telegraph, radio, or telephone apparatus that is unauthorized for public service.

2-Telegraph, cable, or radio telegraphy companies, whether government-owned or private, shall not accept any communications or messages in code or ciphers in the future.

3-Correspondences sent by accredited diplomatic agents in the Republic are exempted from this rule.

In conclusion, only written communications in clear language and in the languages of German, Spanish, French, English, Italian, and Portuguese, which do not contain notifications concerning the status, movements, and operations of ships of belligerent states, will be accepted.

The hazards outlined in Chilean Government Decree No. 6364 have sparked numerous objections from American companies and institutions operating in Chile. They have submitted their grievances to Ambassador Flynncher Shakine, expressing concern over the severe impact on their businesses. They urge him to use his government's influence to amend the regulations, citing the following points:

1-The inability of steamship captains to provide advice on vessel movements through wireless communication will lead to serious problems for cargo owners and shippers. It will be impossible to prepare for loading or unloading, which will result in imposing delay fines and wasting time, effort, and money.

2- Nitrate exports will be irregular, and since nitrate production is in demand, it is necessary to exchange cables (wireless communications) between loading ports and Valparaiso regarding the quantities shipped and the amount of money and fees to be paid to the government.

3- It is not possible to maintain the necessary confidentiality between companies and commercial institutions that compete with each other concerning prices.

The American ambassador, Fletcher, did nothing but send a telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to examine and study it in light of its impact on legitimate American trade, hoping that American companies would be exempted, considering them as neutral entities with another neutral state.

While the decree and its regulations were still under study and review at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Flinscher sent a telegram to the latter on the twelfth of January, stating that he would make efforts to exempt neutral countries from its provisions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to his telegram on the thirteenth of February, saying, "The Ministry agrees with your efforts to submit repeated declarations aimed at amending the decree."

On the fourteenth of March in 1915, the German forces once again violated Chile's neutrality and sovereignty when the warship Dresden penetrated Chilean territorial waters. However, the British fleet intercepted and sank it off the Juan Fernandez Islands.

Unlike the conflicts and fighting that took place among European countries, the Latin American countries presented an image of unity and harmony, starting with declaring their neutrality and culminating in the signing of peace treaties. Chile, despite the tensions and contradictions the world was going through, became a part of this. On the 14th of May, Chile's Foreign Minister Alejandro Lira met with his Brazilian counterpart Lauro Muller and Argentina's Jose Luis Murature in the capital of the latter country, Buenos Aires. They signed the ABC Pact of alliance between Argentina, Brazil, and Chile under American guardianship. This pact strengthened their unity and laid the foundation for peaceful policies in their international relations. It served as a means of cooperation between the three countries, making them the most powerful republics in the Southern Cone. In the opening statement of the charter, it was pointed out that "any



disputes among the three countries will be resolved through diplomatic means." Furthermore, the signatories recommended the establishment of a permanent elite composed of representatives from the three nations, based in Montevideo, Uruguay, tasked with finding appropriate solutions to any issues between them (the Southern Cone).

The signing of the alliance pact was the last act of Ramón Barros Luco's government during the course of the war and its events. On the 23rd of December 1915, the Chilean Parliament elected the candidate of the Liberal Alliance and leader of the Democratic Party, lawyer Juan Luis Sanfuentes, as the President of Chile. His first action after forming the government was to solidify the framework of cooperation and peace between Chile and the United States of America. Thus, his government, represented by its ambassador in Washington, Eduardo Suárez Mujica, and the United States government, represented by its Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, signed the General Peace Treaty, also known as the treaty for the settlement of disputes that arise between the United States of America and Chile.

Where the representatives signed it in Washington on the twenty-second of January. It stated, "As the President of the United States of America and the President of the Republic of Chile desire a peaceful settlement of any future difficulties between the two countries in the most effective manner and to preserve peace and friendly relations between them, they have decided to enter into a special treaty for this purpose." The treaty stipulated the following:

Article 1: The contracting parties agree that all disputes that may arise in the future between them shall, upon the failure of diplomatic methods to settle them, be submitted for investigation by an international committee to be constituted as provided in the following article. They also agree not to declare war or commence hostile actions during this investigation.

Article 2: The International Committee is composed of five members who are appointed as follows:

Each government appoints two members, one of them being a national of that government. The fifth member is selected through mutual agreement between the two governments and assumes the role of the president. Each contracting party has the right to dismiss any member they choose at any time before the investigation begins. Either of the two governments can withdraw their approval of the fifth member; in this case, a new fifth member is appointed within thirty days, or if no member is selected, the appointment is made by the President of the Swiss Confederation. The committee is formed within four months of the exchange of ratifications of the treaty. The expenses of the committee are shared equally by the governments, and the committee determines the country in which its meetings will be held.

Article 3: The contracting parties agree to provide the committee with all the necessary means and facilitations to commence the investigation, with the understanding that the committee's report shall be completed within one year from the date on which the investigation commenced.

Article 4: Once the committee's report is in the possession of both governments, a six-month period will be provided to renew negotiations in order to reach a settlement to the dispute (difficulty) in light of the committee's report's findings. In case the two governments fail to reach an amicable settlement during this new period, the dispute will be referred to the Permanent Court of Justice established in The Hague) Den Haag(.

Article 5: This treaty shall be ratified by the two governments after obtaining the approval of the legislative (constitutional) authorities of both countries, and the ratifications shall be exchanged in Washington. The signing of the treaty by the two states was a



confirmation of establishing the foundations of friendship and close relations between them in the context of the course of war and its consequences.

That relationship, which was based on balanced and equal foundations and was not influenced by the variables created by the war after 1917, especially after the United States entered the war on April 2nd, the day it declared war on Germany in response to the sinking of seven American merchant ships by German submarines. Despite Chile initially aligning itself with the United States, following the signing of the peace treaty, when the United States declared its war announcement and entered the conflict, President Juan Luis' government chose to maintain neutrality and did not align itself with either side internationally.

And perhaps a questioner might ask, what are the justifications for Chile's commitment to neutrality despite its ally, the United States, officially entering the war? To answer this question, we can attribute it to several reasons, including: A new trend has emerged in Chile in support of Germany, which did not hesitate to show its emotional preference for the German cause. This movement reaffirms that Germany embodies traditional cultural values and is under attack from the forces of materialistic capitalism unleashed by the French Revolution and championed by new powers, including the United States. Representing this trend most eloquently is Gonzalo Bulnes, who liked Germany and its civilization during the 1890s when he served as a diplomat there, representing his country. He was one of President Juan Luis's most influential advisors. In addition to that, and due to emotional and pragmatic considerations, some Chilean military leaders, especially in decision-making circles and centers, were strongly supportive of Germany, including General Emil Korner, the Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Army, who is considered the true founder and spiritual father of the Chilean Army. It was his professionalism that kept the Chilean government's military officials distant from pro-German sentiments and prevented them from being swayed towards an absolute conviction of Germany's victory, as predicted by Colonel Jorge Ahumada. Given these circumstances, it was not surprising, as described by the author, that "there are many Germanophiles in Chile, just like a crow's nest."

Despite the growing sympathy towards Germany in the dreamy circles in Chile, the economic and social gains achieved by Chile through its decision of neutrality remain. Additionally, Chile was not involved in any disputes or conflicts with any of the warring nations, making it the most significant and compelling reason for Chile's commitment to its neutrality until the end of the war, despite its ally, the United States, entering the war. Evidence of this preference is the increased demand for nitrate for war purposes, such as ammunition and explosives, which led to a global price hike. In 1918, Chile's production reached approximately 2,969,000 tons, priced at 12.75 Chilean per quintal.

In the face of the developments mentioned earlier, while some neighboring countries in Latin America, which support the United States' policy and respect its desires, hurried to sever their relations with Germany and Axis countries, such as Peru and Bolivia, enemies of the Pacific War, Chile remained extremely concerned that their cooperation with the United States during the war would lead to supporting the regional aspirations of Peru and Bolivia at that time. Therefore, the Chilean government attempted to justify its neutrality to the United States. Some government officials convened and crafted a message on September 18th to President Wilson on the occasion of his victory in the presidential elections for the second term. In this message, they announced a formula for peace and indirectly assured him that Chilean neutrality was never intended as an opposition to the United States. President Wilson quickly seized the opportunity to indicate that he was not satisfied with the message. In response to the advancements made by some neighboring countries, the President later directed some words towards Beiran Mathieu when he received him as the new Chilean ambassador to Washington after the end of the war and the allies' victory, specifically in November. He said, "The triumphant



result of the war now confirms that no state can dare to seek only to maximize itself at the expense of others."

And from the foregoing, we can conclude that the war that began and led to a convergence in views and positions between the United States and Chile, culminating in the declaration of neutrality, has ended and resulted in a difference and an accusation of opportunism, even if indirectly, by the United States towards Chile. The question raised here is whether this difference will have an impact on the relations between the two countries during the post-war period.

### **Conclusion:**

The research discusses one of the most developed relationships between economically advanced United States of America and the country trying to replicate what the United States achieved, which is Chile. From this, we can draw the following conclusions:

1- World War I involved allied nations, some of which had no direct connection or concern with the war's causes. Many countries were dragged into the war without prior warning simply because they were allied with another country. However, both the United States and Chile managed to initially stay out of it by declaring neutrality.

2-The neutrality declared by the United States and Chile was carefully considered at the outset. For the United States, it was purely an economic gain, while Chile sought to avoid the pitfalls of European countries that were looking for a reason or pretext to intervene in Latin American affairs. Chile believed that entering the war would easily provide such a reason for European intervention, in addition to the economic benefits it could gain from the war. Therefore, when the United States' economic interests were affected by the war, they declared their entry into it. On the other hand, despite Chile's inclination towards Germany, it did not follow its ally's path and did not declare its stance on the matter.

3-Chile did not clearly state its position or follow the United States regarding its entry into the war. Instead, Chile dealt with the situation diplomatically, despite the stance of other Latin American countries that stood with the United States in entering the war. Chile sought its own interests and tried to avoid the war, aiming to come out of it with the greatest number of friendly nations. However, for some countries, neutrality meant abandonment, leading to strained relations after the end of the war.

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