Opposition and Dominance in the Mexican Presidential Elections of 1940:
The Challenge of Almazanismo

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The presidential election of 1940 was a defining moment in the development of the Mexican political system. The 1930s had seen a shift away from the conservative policies of Plutarco Elías Calles, especially evident in the oil and agrarian expropriations of the Lázaro Cárdenas administration. The move to the Left by Cárdenas was opposed in the 1940 election by a varied reaction from elements of the Right. Although the main electoral opposition was fielded by Juan Andreu Almazán, presidential aspirations were exhibited by several other military officers (Joaquín Amaro, Bonifacio Salinas, Manuel Perez Treviño), a complement to heavy influence brought to bear by private citizens (Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama, Manuel Gomez Morín, Emilio Madero). Of some interest, too, was the quixotic presidential bid of Dr. Fandila Peña. Armed rebellion was viewed as a constant threat by the Mexican government and United States observers. Almazán led a campaign that emphasized the disastrous economic, diplomatic and political consequences resulting from the Cárdenas policies. He argued against the perpetuation of the dominant Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) in power. On July 7, 1940, the presidential election was held with a high voter turnout across the country. Official returns gave Almazán far fewer votes than PRM candidate Manuel Ávila Camacho. Popular calls for rebellion against this allegedly fraudulent vote count were legion, but Almazán chose instead to leave the country. He went first to Cuba, to rendezvous with US diplomats at the Havana Conference, on his way to the Baltimore-Washington DC area where he seemingly intended to press his connections with the Roosevelt administration. When negotiations failed and US Vice-President Henry Wallace attended the inauguration of Ávila Camacho on December 1, 1940, the electoral challenge of almazanismo passed into history.

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Monterrey has beautiful girls, and it looked like every damn one of them gathered on the balconies of the fairway and threw flowers, confetti, and kisses at Almazán. And as candidate of the higher-class Mexicans, he put on a good show. If left up to the pretty girls of Mexico, Almazán would win in a walk.¹

The United States has always played a role in twentieth century Mexican politics, and this was no less the case during the 1930s and into the 1940s. Size, proximity, and economic interest forced the U.S. to engage its southern neighbor ambiguously and sporadically. The

decision of the Cárdenas administration to expropriate the holdings of foreign oil companies on March 18, 1938, was a watershed in U.S.-Mexican relations. The ensuing diplomatic battle for compensation of these claims, coupled with the ongoing dispute over agrarian expropriation claims, drove a wedge further between the two nations. Many historians have written extensively about such conflict and it is not the intent of this essay to retread this ground. Rather, this essay will outline the domestic political challenges that Mexico’s dominant party faced in the election of 1940 and demonstrate how the major opposition groups of 1940 shaped the political landscape.

The Cárdenas administration had deeper worries than the U.S. in 1940. Within Mexico, elements of the Right had formed several groups of important size and influence to challenge the reformist agenda of the President. From land reform to the rolling back of religious power, Cárdenas succeeded in alienating and angering sizeable domestic constituencies during his administration. This paper will analyze seven key groups in opposition to cardenista programs through their linkages to the presidential campaign of General Juan Andreu Almazán in 1940. Almazanismo was the single most important political force in Mexico in 1939-1940, aside from Cárdenas himself. The development of the Almazán campaign, his alliances with the main groups of the Right, and his defeat by the electoral machinery of the dominant party are all key developments in the political history of Mexico between Obregón’s death in 1928 and the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939.

Why was Almazán such a powerful political force in 1940? How did he threaten the political status quo? This paper argues that it was Almazán’s position at the head of conservative forces in Mexico, either explicitly or implicitly, that fueled his campaign. The political project of the PRM, guided by Cárdenas, could not risk derailment by almazanism. The continuing threat of conservative groups in Mexican politics, echoes of the Cristero revolt and the Cedillo rebellion, allowed Almazán to amass enormous political influence and force the PRM into a more conservative political stance than the Cárdenas track record to 1937 would have suggested. Thus, while Almazán was denied the electoral victory he likely attained in 1940 and earned the lasting enmity of conservative groups throughout Mexico for eschewing ‘revolution’

to protect that victory, he should be credited by historians as an important shaping force on the infant PRM and its successor Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). His efforts in the campaign of 1940 accelerated the pendulum swing in Mexican politics back to the right, a process visible in the administrations of Manuel Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán.

This paper does not examine the presidential campaign of Almazán directly. Rather, it attempts to analyze the connections that almazanismo developed and maintained with several of the most important groups of the Mexican Right during the 1940 election. There are two groups, loosely, but not arbitrarily, defined: the ‘disorganized’ Right and the ‘organized’ Right. Among the disorganized Right are included the Monterrey industrialists, the Army, and the railroad workers. They are categorized here as ‘disorganized’ owing to their lack of clear leadership, disparate political goals, and sporadic activity in favor of particular candidates. The organized Right included the Dorados, the Unión Nacional Sinarquista (UNS), the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), and Joaquín Amaro’s Partido Revolucionario Anti-Comunista (PRAC). They are classed ‘organized’ owing to their strong central leadership, clear political goals, and general unity in supporting particular candidates or political ends. It is hoped that this scheme will give structure to a process that was often confusing, always contentious, yet never clearly resolved.

In tandem with this format, the essay relies primarily on intelligence reports of the Mexican Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS) and the US Department of State and Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The aim of this approach is to underline the fundamentally fractious nature of Mexican politics in a time of rending transition. Indeed, while intelligible, the modern reader cannot be lulled into the belief that the outcome of the defiantly contradictory, fiercely competitive, and pervasively violent presidential election of 1940 was ever a foregone conclusion.

The natural power center for Almazán’s campaign was in the state of Nuevo León, especially in its industrial and financial center Monterrey. In July 1939, Almazán’s support had not grown beyond “independent elements”, while Ávila Camacho was essentially controlling the “revolutionary sectors”. But, it was his connections to the “intereses empresariales del norte de

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Almazán’s success as a businessman and military commander in Nuevo León made him an easy target for his critics. One argued that Chipinque, Almazán’s hilltop compound, was “a cabaret for the rich built with the sweat of soldiers” and, more, “a fortress where all Monterrey knew that Almazán has arsenals of weapons and ammunition, laid away to confront the Cárdenas regime.” The criticism extended to Acapulco, which Almazán was also said to own, and where he allegedly maintained vast stockpiles of weapons and supplies for the coming conflagration in which he would “destroy everything the Revolution has achieved.” President Cárdenas himself received letters from concerned citizens complaining about the “lucro escandaloso” that Almazán enjoyed through his military position and his “tiendas de raya” on military bases.

Not least among the charges leveled at Almazán for his Monterrey connections were the alleged donations of money of the local industrialists. Almazán was reputed to have strong financial support from the industrial magnates of Monterrey. In April 1939, reports circulated that the industrial elite of the city had offered Almazán eight million pesos to support his candidacy. Allied to Monterrey businessmen were U.S. business interests, most often through Texas connections, a fact that proved powerful in the battle for the appearance of U.S. support. “[U.S. Vice-President John Nance] Garner himself has made no move towards the Almazán elements, but some of the big Garner supporters in Texas are also big Almazán sympathizers.”

Almazán derived a generous lifestyle from government concessions and construction contracts. One of his most visible projects was the new military city at Monterrey that was built to house the 7th Military Zone command structure, headed by Almazán himself since 1926. This installation was one of the finest in all of Mexico, and Almazán reaped substantial profit

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6 AGN-DGIPS, Box 185, 2.1/311.1/2, Vol.3. Report to DGIPS, Monterrey, Jun.25, 1939.
7 Archivo Histórico de la Secretaria de Defensa Nacional (AHSDN), Cancelados. General de División Juan Andrew Almazán. E. Vargas to Lázaro Cárdenas, Jun.22, 1937. Irapuato, Gto. ‘Tiendas de raya’ were ‘company stores’ that were notorious for high prices and predatory lending during the Porfiriato.
8 AGN-DGIPS, Box 187, 2.1/311.1/5, Vol.1. Draft report from Inspector Rincón C. to DGIPS, Mexico City, Mar.24 [?], 1939.
from its construction. As one reporter put it in 1939: “The busy general is always building something; sometimes for himself, sometimes for the government, sometimes for his men, sometimes for the tourist, sometimes for all four at once.” Even his own supporters saw cause for concern about Almazán’s reliability in case of rebellion since he “had too much wealth invested in the Republic, which would be lost in case of defeat.”

Almazán relied upon his long experience in the Army and the personal allegiances he had formed during his years of service. Deference to his military reputation was evident in April 1939 when he offered his resignation from active duty as Commander of the 7th Military Zone to the Secretary of Defense. The Secretary responded that he could stay on until July, the last date before the one year period mandated between active military duty and an election began. No mention was made of the fact that Miguel Henríquez Guzmán, a close collaborator of Cárdenas, would take command of the 7th Military Zone in an effort to neutralize any inherent advantages Almazán might derive from his local connections. Despite this official antagonism, smaller favors were still granted even in the heat of the campaign: the federal government paid for several of Almazán’s horses to be transported by train to Mexico City after he resigned from his military command to run for president.

Almazán depended upon the support of fellow Army officers in his political endeavors. As early as March 1939, he was utilizing his connections to the military leadership in Nuevo León to advance his candidacy. This activism extended to having officers and staff go out in the early morning, in civilian dress, to take down propaganda of opponent Bonifacio Salinas and replace it with that of Almazán. One campaign insider claimed that Almazán had the support of “all of the principal Generals.” In Toluca, the local Almazánista committee was directed by Generals Juan de la Fuente Parres, José Gomez, and Antonio Goycoolea, along with several

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15 SD-CF. 812.00/30927. Daniels to Secretary of State, Feb.2, 1940.
18 AHSDN, Cancelados. General de División Juan Andrew Almazán. Almazán to SDN, Oct.3, 1939, DF, f.1307; Acuerdo, Francisco I. Urquizo (Jefe del Estado Mayor, SDN) to Intendente General, Oct.4, 1939, DF, f.1306.
lower-ranking military officers.\(^{21}\) Indeed, it was reported that while Cárdenas effectively controlled most top-ranking Army officers, Almazán had developed a strong loyalty among the lower-ranking members of the Army.\(^{22}\) There were complaints of open political action among officers of the 7\(^{th}\) Military Zone along with requests for their replacement with other “impartial” leaders.\(^{23}\) Carlos Eguía, Commander of the 29\(^{th}\) Reserve Corps, was asked by Almazán personally to propagandize among local ejidatarios. His refusal earned “constant hostility” from Almazán’s command.\(^{24}\) Other reports of abuse of power for political ends by Almazán and his staff abounded.\(^{25}\)

The political activity of elements within the Army sparked debate about the propriety and wisdom of continuing the tradition of military participation in elections. This debate could become the basis for a critique of the emerging dominance of the PRM electoral machinery. One group defended its position that the PRM was anachronistic and should ‘disappear’, thus:

Para que la democracia viva en México, es indispensable que muera el P.R.M…Si se quiere hacer del P.R.M. un partido único, resulta totalitario, antidecocrático y violatorio de la Constitución. Y si coexiste con otros partidos populares e independientes es ilegal, inusto y atentatorio a los derechos de los demás, otorgarle los privilegios de un partido oficial. Por eso pedimos al Presidente Cárdenas que se le prive de este último carácter…El Ejército debe estar fuera del P.R.M. Cuando ya se había conquistado el principio de que el Ejército, como Institución Nacional, debía estar al márgen de la política militante poniendo fin a nuestra funesta era pretoriana de asonadas, motines, pronunciamientos y cuartelazos, el P.R.M. inyecta en él de nuevo el virus de la política. Las consecuencias están a la vista: El Ejército es hoy una caldera en donde hierve la pasión política.\(^{26}\)

The realization that the military was now being utilized to prop up PRM claims to democratic processes was an important one. This is especially true given the backgrounds of the major political players in the 1940 presidential election. All were high-ranking military officers, had served during the Revolution, and had cultivated strong ties to different parts of the institution

\(^{22}\) State Department Confidential Files (SD-CF). 812.00/30906, “Résume of Conditions in Mexico during December, 1939.” Jan.15, 1940.
\(^{23}\) AHSDN, Cancelados. General de División Juan Andrew Almazán. Juan Enriquez Rodríguez (President del Bloque de Diputados, N.L.) to SDN, Feb.15, 1939, Monterrey. f.1169.
\(^{24}\) AHSDN, Cancelados. General de División Juan Andrew Almazán. Juan Enriquez Rodríguez (President del Bloque de Diputados, N.L.) to SDN, Mar.14, 1939, Monterrey. f.1182.
\(^{25}\) AHSDN, Cancelados. General de División Juan Andrew Almazán. Enrique Olán S. (Secretary General de la Federacion Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos, Villahermosa) to SDN, Mar.30, 1939, Villahermosa. f.1196; Arsenio Jimenez F. (Secretary General, CTM, Villahermosa) to SDN, Mar.30, 1939, Villahermosa. f.1200;
\(^{26}\) *La Prensa*, Jul.5, 1940. Full-page advertisement by the ‘Juventudes Revolucionarias’. 
via their career paths in the Army: Ávila Camacho as administrator and paymaster, Almazán as a field commander and entrepreneur, Amaro as a field commander and reformer of military education. The opposition to this arrangement did not center on the political aspirations of the military officers. Rather, the linking of these military aspirations to the political project of the leaders of the PRM sparked wide and deep reactions in the politically active population.

The support of officers within the United States Army was an important, if somewhat symbolic, aspect of Almazán’s military profile. The head of the Army division in San Antonio in 1939 was reported to summer in Almazán’s home at Chipinque where he was treated “splendidly.”

The perception of a close relationship with members of the US military, professional though they may have been, was a sobering prospect to Mexican officials apprehensive about an armed response to electoral results.

Almazanismo took different forms and attracted different followers throughout the country. In Guadalajara, there were ejidos that kept their support for Almazanismo close to the vest for fear of being punished or losing their lands. In the same area, it was estimated that 80% of workers in the CTM, especially railroadmen, supported Almazán, as well as an estimated 90% of Catholics and most women. The Partido Veracruzano del Trabajo supported Almazán’s campaign, and Orizaba was “one of the regions where almazanismo is the most rooted.” In Matamoros, Almazán could count on the support of “independent elements” and a large part of the “popular sector”.

But it was the support of railroad workers that gave Almazán the most strength and legitimacy in his attack on the cardenista powerbase within organized labor, especially the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM). A government agent argued this tacitly when he described how Almazánistas were making propaganda “dentro de sus mismos elementos” by agitating in train stations. This activism was echoed by passengers around León,

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28 AGN-DGIPS, Box 30, Exp.4, 2.1/062.2(72)/2, f.41. Memo from Insp. Manuel Alemán Pérez to DGIPS, Guadalajara, Apr.28, 1940.
29 AGN-DGIPS, Box 30, Exp.4, 2.1/062.2(72)/2, f.41-42. Memo from Insp. Manuel Alemán Pérez to DGIPS, Guadalajara, Apr.28, 1940.
30 AGN-DGIPS, Box 30, Exp.4, 2.1/062.2(72)/2, f.49-52. Memo from Insp. 7 to DGIPS, Orizaba, May 14, 1940.
31 AGN-DGIPS, Box 185, 2.1/311.1/2, Vol.3. Report from Inspector Reina to DGIPS, Matamoros, May 31, 1939.
33 AGN-DGIPS, Box 184, 2.1/311.1/2, Vol.2. Report from Inspector 7 to DGIPS, Mexico City, Feb.23, 1939.
Guanajuato, who put up pro-Almazán propaganda in the train cars themselves. There were critics who charged Almazán with treating the railroad workers roughly in the past, a fact they would not forget, but it was unclear how much of his tenure at the head of the Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas (SCOP) would come back to haunt him. In fact, one group lauded the “elevada civilización” of Almazán, referring to his defense of railroad workers and their jobs after the “gran batalla de Jiménez”, which ended the Escobar rebellion, in 1929. Three thousand members of the railroad local in Chihuahua city supported Almazán by the end of 1939, even as other urban groups demonstrated a marked indifference. In Monterrey, Almazán had very strong support among the railroad workers, even though Ávila Camacho maintained nearly unanimous support from the CTM and Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) unions as well as the “official machinery of the State [of Nuevo León].” Ávila Camacho’s support may have been double-edged, as Daniels observed: “[i]t caused the conservative elements in Mexico to turn against the General and offered an opportunity for General Almazán to secure a large following.”

The Dorados were concerned with the alleged ‘communist’ leanings of the Cárdenas administration. They maintained ties to Amaro, praising him for his aid in the battle against communism. The magazine Hoy went so far as to suggest that Amaro planned to install Dorados leader Nicolás Rodríguez in his Cabinet if his presidential bid was successful, which Amaro was careful not to deny outright. The Dorados hitched their electoral wagon to Amaro’s star, arguing that “he is the only man in Mexico that has identified with us and, despite the fear of the majority, has given the best help to our cause.”

The Dorados also maintained a bucolic view of Mexico’s past and future. Dorados propaganda emphasized that members of the group, in contrast with the “caudillos de banqueta y
patriotas de ocasión, know how to cultivate the land, ride a horse, handle weapons, sleep in the fields and drink water from the wells.”

It was a movement based on xenophobia and extreme nationalism, as well as an abiding anti-Semitism. The Dorados also viewed the use of violence as a political means with a certain nostalgia, locating them clearly outside the national mainstream.

In the end, the Dorados were not the most potent force on the organized Right in Mexico in 1940, the US surveillance of Nicolás Rodríguez in Texas notwithstanding. “The UNS, with its emphasis on peasant support and its cautious infiltration of labor unions, proved to be better fitted to Mexican conditions.”

The Unión Nacional Sinarquista (UNS) organization was recognized as superior by their rivals in the Dorados movement who commented: “So complete is their organization that their command structure is secret, no one knows its true Chiefs and it already has 150,000 men, that enjoys the sympathy and economic support of large sectors of society both here and abroad.”

Public marches were a key occasion to demonstrate the size of Sinarquista influence, one example being the 10,000 strong group that walked into Querétaro’s center despite a police ban in 1939. By 1943, Sinarquista membership was estimated at 300,000 in Mexico, with another 2,000 members in the United States.

The Sinarquista movement was organized along rigid hierarchical lines and was reckoned to have fascist tendencies. Although the links between Almazán and the Sinarquista base in “traditional intransigent Mexican ultra-reaction” were weak, they shared a common tie to the Spanish Falange movement. The OSS believed that the common appearance and language of

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45 SD-CF. 812.00/30901, Bursley to Duggan, Dec.19, 1939.
the Spanish Falangistas allowed them to pass as Mexicans and funnel money, intelligence, and training to the Sinarquistas, even after Pearl Harbor.  

More studied historical analysis disputes the view of the UNS as a pawn of international Fascism. Ortoll calls it “a Mexican movement that essentially responded to the national situation prior to the war” and “a sui generis nationalistic movement that reflected its particular time and place.” Eschewing the label of political or electoral party, Sinarquistas described themselves as “a civic movement which seeks the restoration in Mexico of the Christian Social Order destroyed by anarchy.”

It was not coincidental that the Sinarquistas were able to attract many Cristeros and wield influence in traditional Cristero regions. The determination of the Mexican Catholic bishops to regain their influence in politics had created a strategy to infiltrate Catholic organizations and subvert their original goals. Since 1934, Jesuits had begun infiltrating Catholic organizations in Mexico. “The only means available for the bishops to keep Catholics under control was to use the Jesuits as an intelligence arm.” One of these organizations was the secret ‘Las Legiones’, which the Jesuits transformed into the overt Sinarquista movement.

Almazán drew support from conservative and Catholic elements in Mexico. In Iguala, Guerrero, his campaign rally was attended by both “disaffected” citizens and a “great quantity of old nuns.” The majority of Chiapan smallholders and clerics favored the Almazán campaign, perhaps an indication of the continuing dominance of the clergy in the state or the echo of ties to Alberto Pineda. Wider opinion in Chiapas portrayed the almazanista campaign as a front for “Sinarquistas and Reactionaries”. The pattern was much the same in Pachuca, where the Partido Laborista, middle class, small merchants and non-agrarista peasants supported

56 Ortoll, p.171.
57 AGN-DGIPS, Box 185, 2.1/311.1/2, Vol.4. Report from Inspector 20 to DGIPS, Iguala, Jul.12, 1939.
58 DGIPS, Box 185, 2.1/311.1/2, Vol.5. Report from Inspector Pérez to DGIPS, Mapastepec, Nov.18, 1939; AGN-DGIPS, Box 185, 2.1/311.1/2, Vol.5. Report from Inspector Pérez to DGIPS, Tonalá, Nov.21,1939; AGN-DGIPS, Box 185, 2.1/311.1/2, Vol.5. Report from Inspector Pérez to DGIPS, Las Casas, Nov.28, 1939.
59 AGN-DGIPS, Box 30, Exp.4, 2.1/062.2/72(2)/2, f.3. Memo from Insp. Thivol to DGIPS, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Apr.5, 1940.
60 The Partido Laborista was an affiliate of the Confederación Regional del Obrero Mexicano (CROM).
Almazán. In the state of Colima, the reverse held true, and almazanismo was weak “above all because there is not the high number of religious folk that exist in other places.”

Sinarquismo was strong along the US-Mexico border as well, especially in ports of entry. This influence, closely mirroring Almazán’s own among border agents, gave an important appearance of danger should civil war erupt and the importation of arms from the US become necessary, as in the rebellions of 1923 and 1929.

Allied to the Catholic thrust of Almazán’s campaign was a decided effort to involve Mexican women in the political equation. Pro-Almazán activists in Saltillo argued that the women of Coahuila represented the “guarantee of the progress of the nation”, as well as the hopes of all Mexican women to enjoy and exercise the political and civil rights they deserved.

Any discussion of the links between the Sinarquistas and almazanismo must acknowledge the UNS ban on electoral activity by its membership, and its refusal to support any candidate in the 1940 presidential election. The UNS national committee declared on July 4, 1940, that the “farce of Democratic skirmishes is not worth the shedding of a single drop of Mexican blood.”

Like the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), the UNS derived their ideology of action from a belief in the power of the individual. Though they derided the value of elections in the contemporary Mexican system, they were neither anarchic nor absolutist. Rather, they viewed the future of Mexico in terms of a new civic activity/activism.

Without taking part in partisan politics and without aspiring to public office, we shall work to the end that municipal councils shall be chosen by the citizens of the towns instead of being chosen by the state governments as has been the case in the past. In this way we shall cooperate in the establishment of a democratic regime which has never existed, and shall contribute to the overthrow of ‘caciquismo.’

The emphasis on local action in lieu of coordinated electoral activity and national goals marked a central breaking point between the UNS (and PAN) and the Almazán campaign. While members

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61 AGN-DGIPS, Box 185, 2.1/311.1/2, Vol.6. Report from Inspector 5 to DGIPS, Pachuca, Jan.11, 1940.
63 Department of State Confidential Files. 812.00/30906, “Resumé of Conditions in Mexico during December, 1939.” Jan.15, 1940.
65 El Siglo de Torreon, Apr.7, 1939. “Llamado de Saltillo”
of the UNS were encouraged to fulfill their civic duties, there was not a concerted effort to turn out the vote for particular candidates. This precluded any formal offer of electoral support by the UNS as an organization, although individual members could, and very likely did, vote for conservative candidates. The Sinarquistas were mainly anti-Cardenas, if not explicitly pro-Almazán. The latent conservatism of Almazán found a useful echo in the activist language of Sinarquismo’s faithful.

Likewise, the Sinarquista view of democracy and civic participation was founded in an autochthonous tradition. “In this connection, the Sinarquistas have developed an entirely original thesis: real democracy in America stems from the Spanish conqueror of Mexico, Hernán Cortés.”68 They argued that since Cortés founded Veracruz on the sovereign authority of his compatriots, he created a Spanish democratic tradition that the Sinarquistas were sworn to revitalize. This line of reasoning does not appear to be unique to the UNS. Indeed, in March 1940, Joaquín Amaro declared to Hoy magazine, “Creo en Juan Diego, señor Valadés, pero también creo en Hernán Cortés.”69 The fact that both the UNS and Amaro were attempting to defend a distinctly Mexican democratic tradition is significant.

Manuel Gomez Morín was widely viewed as a spokesman and leading intellectual of the conservative movement in Mexico and the PAN was considered “the clerical party of Mexico.”70 Orators at the PAN convention in Tampico synthesized the complaints of many on the Right, describing a nation subjected to “a revolution bloody and cruel in its youth, degenerated in its maturity into a political racket [and] a democracy prostituted to the breeding of political ‘hold-up men’.”71 His articles and opinions were printed in the Sinarquista magazine Orden, though he was not affiliated with the UNS.72

The PAN did not present a forceful picture when it was founded. “It is a party to be watched, but cannot be considered more than a nuisance to the Administration.”73 The PAN was unique among the movements and groups discussed in this essay in that it formally supported Almazán’s candidacy in the presidential election of 1940. None of the other groups were organized or overtly political enough to present such unified endorsement. The PAN

70 SD-CF. 812.00/30927. Daniels to Secretary of State, Feb.2, 1940.
71 SD-CF. 812.00/30894, Collins to Secretary of State, Tampico, Jan.11, 1940.
73 SD-CF. 812.00/30927. Daniels to Secretary of State, Feb.2, 1940.
membership voted to endorse Almazán over the objections of Gomez Morín during their national conference in Mexico City.74

Joaquín Amaro played an important role in the election of 1940. Not least was his position as a link to the old political leaders of the past, including Saturnino Cedillo, Calles and Pérez Treviño. He was alleged to have met with cedillista Pedro H. Fuentes in Laredo in December 1938, although this was later refuted. He was further linked to the efforts of Pérez Treviño and the Dorados to influence the election, these groups allegedly both meeting with and funding Amaro.75

Amaro’s campaign was centered on a keen opposition to the Cárdenas policies that were leading Mexico towards an “inevitable disaster”.76 In Querétaro, Amaro challenged the emerging electoral machinery of the PRM: “el peligro mayor para el porvenir inmediato de nuestra Patria estriba en que el régimen pretende perpetuarse por medio de la imposición.”77 He was philosophical about the level of civic participation in Mexico, echoing PAN and UNS platforms, arguing that the death of the “civic spirit” was the fault of not the people but “los hombres que nos dedicamos a estos trabajos políticos sin el debido tacto y comprensión de él.”78 But he was not blinded by ideology, in a conventional sense, stating that “El político es hombre de acción no de ideas.”79 Amaro was “fighting for the existence of a national government, strong in substance, respected morally, aloof from dishonorable compromises, and safe from the danger of coups and uprisings.”80

Almazán and Amaro shared important strategic goals in the election of 1940, centered principally on the removal of cardenista officials from power. Amaro argued that “el desarrollo de esta campaña nos está llevando a la definición de situaciones, y oportunamente solo quedarán dos bandos: imposición oficial y oposición democrática.”81 When Almazán’s political party, the Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Nacional (PRUN) was formed in 1940, US Ambassador
Josephus Daniels immediately pondered whether it would join forces with the Partido Revolucionario Anti-Comunista (PRAC) and, by extension, Amaro. A few days later, the US Embassy presumed that Amaro and Rafael Sánchez Tapia would submerge their campaigns in the wave of almazanismo. The ongoing State Department obsession with potential Mexican upheaval prompted Daniels to blithely opine that once Almazán returned from a campaign trip “his position will be known with regard to the possibilities of carrying on a revolution.”

The ideological and political links between Almazán and the old callista ranks were numerous, and manifested themselves in the attempted fusion of the Almazán and Amaro candidacies. In Campeche, holdover callista (and thereby amarista) bureaucrats expressed optimism that Almazán would “continue protecting them” if he should win, a belief that spurred some of them to actively support his candidacy.

When the union of the opposition groups became imminent in January 1940, even elements within the Interior Ministry recognized that “a united front of all the opposition parties will result in a strong electoral force…[and] General Almazán had a great deal more sympathy among the public than did General Ávila Camacho.” The Cárdenas administration also worried that the perceived strength of the unified opposition “will result in the addition of many new followers.” The PAN was viewed as a potentially serious swing factor in the election of 1940, if only the main opposition candidates (Almazán and Amaro) could resolve their differences and mount a united campaign.

Almazán and Amaro were also reported to have formed a military compact for the overthrow of the PRM government should Ávila Camacho win the election. Under this agreement, Almazán would operate in the north and Amaro in the center, directing from Michoacán. Almazán considered the dispersal of his troops to various regions under loyal commanders to be to his benefit “since in this way they could serve him better than if they were concentrated in any one military zone.” Other reports from within the Army pointed to a solo

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82 SD-CF. 812.00/30898, Daniels to Secretary of State, Jan.10, 1940.
83 SD-CF. 812.00/30906, “Resumé of Conditions in Mexico during December, 1939.” Jan.15, 1940.
84 SD-CF. 812.00/30927. Daniels to Secretary of State, Feb.2, 1940.
86 SD-CF. Gibson, Memorandum of Conversation with Ricardo Rubio (SEGOB), Jan.12, 1940.
87 SD-CF. 812.00/30906, “Resumé of Conditions in Mexico during December, 1939.” Jan.15, 1940.
88 SD-CF. 812.00/30899, Daniels to Secretary of State, Jan.10, 1940.
89 AJA. Campaña Política, 1939-1940. File 020200, Documentos Confidenciales. Huétamo, Michoacan, April 8, 1940.
campaign by Amaro since “Almazán can’t and won’t turn the trick.”91 The U.S. consul in Nuevo Laredo reported rumors that 80% of the Army supported Amaro and that “Amaro was considered to be a stronger man than Almazán.”92

This potential unification of the Almazán and Amaro campaigns was frustrated by what was perceived as Almazán’s timidity in criticizing the Cárdenas administration.

Afterward, into 1940, Amaro weighed his own electoral campaign in a clear political calculus: would his campaign strengthen or weaken the chances of defeating the cardenista group.94

The political strength of almazanismo quickly dissipated following the election of 1940. Almazán’s vagabond path from Mexico to Cuba to Baltimore to New York, and back again, did little to inspire confidence in his followers, including the ill-fated General Andrés Zarzosa who was killed in an apparent rebellion in Monterrey. “[E]very day the Almazán leaders remain out of the country the General’s strength is diminishing.”95

Following the defeats of 1940, the almazanistas pursued numerous different strategies. Some sought the protection of the ascendant political group surrounding Manuel Ávila Camacho. Others attended the court of Miguel Alemán, already constructing his power within the Interior Ministry. Some, like Almazán himself, retired more or less quietly to private life, content in their still considerable wealth and social standing if not in their popular image. A US reporter wondered in 1939: “Almazán must have had good reasons to get off his gravy train and sit himself on top of this dump of dynamite that could explode into a civil war.”96 Yet the available evidence indicates that Almazán was never fully weaned from government contracts. It was reported even before the election that a quiescent Almazán in defeat “would be given the

91 SD-CF. Unnumbered memo, Bursley to Duggan, Jan.22, 1940.
92 SD-CF. 812.00/30904, Wormuth to Secretary of State, Nuevo Laredo, Jan.19, 1940.
94 AJA. Campaña Política, 1939-1940, File 020200, Entrevistas. Interview with José C. Valadéz for Hoy magazine, March 1940.
95 SD-CF, Blocker to Secretary of State, Sept.12, 1940, Ciudad Juárez.
contract of building the highway from Cd. Juárez to Mexico City and from thence to the Guatemalan border."97

The long-lived enthusiasm for the cause of almazanismo could take on a pathetic sheen. In the PRUN offices at Bucareli 12, demand for printed portraits of Almazán remained high into the summer of 1941, despite a 3 peso pricetag.98 In another incident, an agent wrote that “siempre los mismos y en número reducido, concurren a este lugar, como si fueran a un sagrario a contemplar la figura de Almazán.”99 The nearly religious imagery is not accidental in this case, especially given the deep Catholic ties of the Almazán group and the PAN, and the pious goals of the organizations rallying followers. Almazán was in some way a savior denied to the Mexican conservative wave, not in religious terms, but in a political (even ideological) sense.

Yet, the conservative forces of the 1940 electoral season did not disappear after inauguration day. As late as 1942, candidates to Congress from Durango were writing letters to Amaro asking for his support in their campaigns.100 The fact that the Ávila Camacho administration took up many of the professed goals of the Sinarquistas attests to the cognizance of the dominant elite of the power of the forces on the Right, and the need to address their grievances.101

The United States could not help but preserve a keen interest in the Sinarquista movement after the 1940 campaign. With active units residing on US soil, the OSS reported in 1943 that “the UNS encourages Mexicans in the United States to resist assimilation and is laying the groundwork for an irredentist movement.”102 This threat was in addition to the “inevitable[e] attempt to overthrow the…friendly and allied Mexican government” that would result in “a long and disastrous civil war to which the United States could not remain indifferent.”103 The concerns of the US were linked to World War II as well. “The once obscure movement has

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97 Record Group 84. Mexico City Consulate, Confidential Records, Box 6. Wormuth to Secretary of State, May 22, 1940, Nuevo Laredo.
98 AGN-DGIPS, Box 23, Exp.1, 2.1/061.7(725.1)/2. Memo from Inspector 12 to DGIPS, Mexico City, June 18, 1941.
99 AGN-DGIPS, Box 23, Exp.1, 2.1/061.7(725.1)/2, f.59. Memo from Inspector 1 to DGIPS, Mexico City. Mar.1, 1942.
grown to such proportions that it might conceivably affect the stability of the Mexican government and its ability to discharge its international commitments.”

Among the devoted PAN members and dedicated conservatives linked to the Almazán challenge, there was a continuation of the goals that had fueled almazanismo in the first place. The report from Acapulco was that “se suponen que los partidos oposicionistas tiendan a formar una unión de Partidos con el objeto de que en un momento dado se forme un solo frente.” News from Guerrero positing a unification of the main opposition parties, PAN and the Sinarquistas, tended to support this contention. Yet, without a clear and finite goal (like an election), whether such a unified conservative front could have been formed, prospered or even survived is unclear.

The almazanista campaign of 1940 produced a modicum of hope within the citizenry it represented. Almazán himself became a symbol of the nascent opposition to the growing dominance and arrogance of the PRM and its leaders. A broadside from 1941 reveals one of Almazán’s popular images, in this case the Armageddonist judge, presumably on a pale horse.

If Almazán died, his name would hardly be a memory. But Almazán alive, is a traveling prosecutor, who awaits the opportune moment to begin his relentless and judicious inspection. It is better to wait for that to happen. For at the end of the day we already have too many heroes and martyrs, apostles and redeemers on the Revolutionary Calendar.

Further, almazanismo demonstrated the power and size of the constituency on the Right that the PRM could no longer ignore.

Ávila Camacho, however, has declared himself as favoring conservatism and has declared that his policies will be anti-communistic, anti-Nazi, and anti-Fascist, to meet the demands of the people and to counter his opponent, Almazán. He has declared himself as a good Catholic and pro-American, with a definite program of cooperation with the United States. This has drawn to him a large following of conservatives who otherwise would have helped Almazán. It has lost him the more radical votes.

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105 AGN-DGIPS, Box 23, Exp.1, 2.1/061.7(725.1)/2, f.40. Memo from Inspector 53 to DGIPS, Acapulco, Nov.3, 1941.
106 AGN-DGIPS, Box 23, Exp.1, 2.1/061.7(725.1)/2. Memo from Inspector 53 to DGIPS, Iguala, Nov.1, 1941.
107 AGN-DGIPS, Box 23, Exp.1, 2.1/061.7(725.1)/2, f.44. Broadside, Rodríguez de la Vega. [1941].
108 Record Group 165 (RG165), Military Intelligence Division (MID). Roscoe Gaither to ACS, G-2, War Department. Oct.10, 1940.
The turn of Ávila Camacho to the Right following the election essentially appeased the Catholic, conservative and business elements that had found hope in *almazanismo*.

As this paper has argued, Almazán’s ability to ride the conservative wave in the election of 1940 intensified the pressure of his campaign on the PRM. As Cárdenas sought to build a more consolidated and encompassing party, there was little room for stringent electoral opposition, especially from within the highest ranks of the Army. The challenge of *almazanismo*, then, was the threat that a conservative coalition, under the leadership of military stalwarts with revolutionary credentials, could construct a viable political alternative to the PRM. This would have spelled doom to Cárdenas and all of the politicians attached to his political project. That Almazán was defeated, *almazanismo* contained, and the demands of the Right appropriated by the Ávila Camacho and Alemán administrations demonstrates the political savvy of the PRM leadership and the indirect power of opposition politics in Mexico.

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109 RG165, MID. Daniels to Secretary of State, 812.00/31492. Oct.9, 1940.