

The Apache Pacification Policy/Pacification by Dependency: Apaches Mansos (Tame) Julia Benites Torres

Apaches first raided Spanish-occupied Sonora in the late Seventeenth Century. To counter these early Apache thrusts, Spain built a chain of armed garrisons called “presidios.” By 1760, Spain had twenty-three presidios in the frontier regions of Spanish occupied Sonora and Chihuahua.

During the first decade after establishing the Royal Post at San Agustín del Tucson, Spanish officials in charge of the Frontier Provinces of New Spain actively pursued a policy of Apache extermination. They strove to break the military might of the hostile Apache bands. They sent frequent armed parties into Apache territory to waste Apache manpower in troop engagements and to destroy Apache crops and settlements in a scorched-earth attrition strategy. In response, Apaches adapted their warfare and social organizations. They became highly skilled horsemen whose mobility helped them elude presidio troops. Warfare would replace subsistence farming hunting as their economic base.

The Royal Post of San Agustín del Tucson was apparently too weak to participate very effectively in this probing of southern Apacheland during 1782. Captain Pedro Allande y Saabedra fought a purely defensive war. The Tucson post’s weakness and forward position in relation to other frontier garrisons may have helped to attract all-out Apache assaults.

Genocide Fails: New Apache Pacification Policy

In 1786, King Charles III’s new Viceroy of New Spain Bernardo de Gálvez concluded Spain’s military could not defeat the Apaches. Gálvez enunciated a new concept of Spanish-Apache relations when he proposed duping the Apaches into cultural suicide by adopting firearms and firewater, substances that the Apaches could only get from Hispanic settlers. He planned to encourage dependency and degeneracy through interaction with the Spaniards, rendering the Apaches into harmless if unproductive wards of the state.

Prior to this, the Apaches were unable to negotiate peace treaties with Spain. Now they were subjected to constant pressure, even by friendly Pimas and Opatas, to make such treaties. As long as the treaties were observed, the Apaches were to be treated kindly, though closely watched. This “kindness” entailed furnishing them with supplies and intoxicating liquors and encouraging the formation of settlements near the presidios. In other words, they were encouraged to depend as much as possible on Spanish “friendship” for the gratification of their needs. Having found warfare easier than hunting and subsistence farming, they were now made to dread war for fear of cutting off sure supplies.

The Galvez policy worked. Peace was not won gloriously on the battlefield but purchased. By 1786 the Spaniards were willing to secure peace at any price. In 1787 the leather-jacketed Spanish took to the field in concerted action, pressing the Indian enemy until he asked for peace. Some Apaches were settled in Establecimientos del Paz – where they were corrupted. Galvez’s new Indian policy remained fundamental throughout the remainder of the Spanish period: hostiles often concluded peace treaties in order to obtain, through trade and subsidy, the food, horses, guns and ornaments they craved. While they could break their pacts with the Spaniards whenever it suited them, they were nevertheless weakened by internal division and induced to destroy themselves.

Galvez’ Goal: Division and Dependency

Galvez treated peacekeepers with preference, giving them defective firearms, strong liquor, and such other commodities as would render them militarily and economically dependent. This was a highly sophisticated, brutal and deceptive policy of divide-and-conquer, of peace by purchase, of studied debilitation of those who accepted peace of extermination of those who rejected it.

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