

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

BRITISH NON-INTERVENTION DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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Contents

<i>Illustrations</i>	1
<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Chapter One</i>	
O Money, Where Art Thou?	
British economic interest in remaining neutral throughout the American Civil War.	9
<i>Chapter Two</i>	
Britain Divided	
Role of British public opinion and political structure in encouraging non-intervention.	21
<i>Chapter Three</i>	
This Scepter'd Isle.	
Foreign policy considerations and non-intervention.	37
<i>Chapter Four</i>	
Those Haughty British, those Damn'd Republicans.	
Antebellum tradition of Anglo-American diplomacy.	49
<i>Chapter Five</i>	
Britain and the Slave-owners' Rebellion.	
Case studies for non-intervention: the <i>Trent</i> affair, Parliamentary debate and Cabinet discussions.	68
<i>Conclusion</i>	90
<i>Bibliography</i>	94

Illustrations

<i>Lord John Russell, British Foreign Secretary</i>	12
<i>Punch on the prospect of Indian Cotton</i>	15
<i>Punch on Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation</i>	29
<i>Southern Slavery Illustrated</i>	32
<i>Lord Palmerston, British Prime Minister</i>	44
<i>Lord Lyons, British Minister to America</i>	76
<i>Punch on Russian-American Relations</i>	87

Introduction

On 8 November 1861, Captain Wilkes of the USSC *San Jacinto* boarded the British steamer, *Trent*, and removed two Confederate envoys, Messrs. Mason and Slidell, taking them as prisoners back to America. Misinterpreting naval law, Wilkes committed an outrageous *faux pas*, and despite receiving the backing of the American public for his 'heroic' act, was quickly at the centre of an international incident.¹ Once news of the affair reached Britain on November 27, the knee-jerk reaction of much of the British press was to call for war to avenge this dastardly insult to national honour.² However, the response of diplomats and politicians on both sides of the Atlantic was markedly different, reflecting a genuine desire for peace. Lying on his deathbed, the last official act of Albert, the British Prince Consort, was to re-draft the ultimatum for the release of the prisoners that was being sent to America. Despite being violently ill with typhoid fever, Albert believed that Anglo-American peace was important enough that the ultimatum should avoid brusque rhetoric and instead be couched in an expression of hope that the Union government would disavow the actions of Wilkes.³ Citing numerous contextual economic, political and military reasons for avoiding any form of conflict with America, the British Cabinet quickly acceded to Prince Albert's suggestions, sending a firm but conciliatory note to America on December 1.⁴ The Federals were thus given the chance to excuse themselves from blame and escape a potential conflict by doing nothing more

¹ For instance, a public banquet was held in his honour by Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts; Martin Duberman, *Charles Francis Adams, 1807-1886* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 279. This banquet is also described in the papers of Lord Lyons; Lyons to Russell, 3 December 1861, PRO 30/22/35.

² *Reynold's Weekly*, 1 and 8 December 1861; *Southampton Times*, 30 December 1861; and *Leeds Times*, 30 November 1861.

³ 'Prince Albert Memorandum,' 1 December 1861, in Theodore Martin, *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort* (New York: D. Appleton & co., 1875-80), pp. 349-50.

⁴ The final draft of the letter can then be seen in Russell to Lyons, 1 December 1861, in Lord Newton, ed., *Lord Lyons: A Record of British Diplomacy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), pp. 61-63. Newton's work is a compilation of Lyons' records, reprinted in their entirety.

than returning Mason and Slidell, and it was quickly taken. Goodwill was then reciprocated by prompt accession to the slave-trade treaty that Britain had been trying to arrange for the past four decades.⁵ The willingness to compromise demonstrated during the *Trent* affair encapsulates why Britain would never intervene in the American Civil War.

Between the outbreak of America's Civil War in 1861 and Abraham Lincoln's enforcement of emancipation in 1863, the possibility that Britain would intervene was simultaneously the Federals' greatest fear and the secessionists' most fervent hope. Any British action – whether intervention, formal recognition of Confederate independence, or an attempt to force an armistice – would inevitably have boosted Confederate morale and increased the likelihood of the Union's disintegration.

Historians cite numerous factors that might have compelled Britain to intervene in America's war. Many in Britain viewed the American preference for democracy as a foolish exercise in governance – a disorderly 'mob rule' that was finally being challenged by the more chivalrous and aristocratic Southern gentlemen.⁶ Meanwhile, Lincoln's assertion that his main objective was to preserve the Union 'with or without slavery' destroyed the Union's moral high ground.⁷ Britain also retained substantial economic interest in the Confederacy. The Union blockade of the South cut off British access to the Confederate cotton supply, employing almost one fifth of working adults in that country. Similarly, the Union's institution of the protectionist Morrill Tariff on

⁵*Treaty between United States and Great Britain for the Suppression of the Slave Trade*, 7 April 1862, in 'The Avalon Online Project: Documents in Law History and Diplomacy,' <<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/>>. Also known as the Lyons-Seward Treaty.

⁶ See for instance, Hugh Dubrulle, 'Military Legacy of the Civil War: the British Inheritance,' *Civil War History*, 49, no. 2 (June, 2003), pp. 160-73.

⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, 22 August 1862, in Abraham Lincoln, *The Writings of Abraham Lincoln: 1862-1863*, Arthur Lapsley, ed. (New York: Lamb Publishing Company, 1906), p. 123.

imports led to growing British frustration with the Union's long-term trade policy. Scholars have assumed that one or all of these factors might have encouraged Britain to abandon their non-interventionist position.

Nonetheless, the British decision to maintain strict neutrality from start to finish was always a foregone conclusion. There was no romantic tipping point that hinged on the whims and actions of individuals such as Secretary of State William Seward, President Lincoln, or their British counterparts Earl Russell and Lord Palmerston. Rather, British decision-making was contingent on a range of foreign and domestic policy restrictions and traditions, as well as demonstrably cautious decision-making processes in Cabinet and Parliament.

Historiography on British intervention tends to focus solely on events taking place during the American Civil War. Historians such as Howard Jones and Dean Mahin have scrutinised various points during the conflict when intervention seemed a distinct possibility. Consequently, there is a vast body of work analysing the *Trent* crisis. Likewise, attention has focussed on Parliamentary debates relating to breaking the Union naval blockade or recognising the Confederacy in mid-1862, and on Cabinet discussions on mediation from September to November 1862. Within the scope of these studies, debate continues regarding the extent to which Britain was ever likely to intervene in American affairs.⁸

The scholarship in this field tends to be divided, with some focusing on American events, and others concentrating on British decision-making. Most historians of the United States confine themselves to questions relating to the internal dynamics and

⁸ It is important to note that some historians, such as Phillip Myers, do interpret the diplomatic record as showing that intervention could never happen. Although this perspective is the same as the one taken in this thesis, such works are rare and still adopt the same analytical framework as traditional historiography. See, for instance, Phillip Myers, *Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2008).

outcomes of the Civil War. They question the effectiveness of Confederate and Union attempts to sway British policy, the likely consequences of British intervention, or the views of the Confederate and Union governments and citizens on diplomatic questions. Confined to a narrow time-frame and a domestic perspective, their studies tend to obscure the reciprocal British perspective and context.⁹ By contrast, scholars who work on British foreign policy – including John Clarke and E.D. Steele – touch only tangentially on American events, focusing instead on Britain’s colonial and European concerns.¹⁰ Consequently, minimal work has been done to place Anglo-American interactions into a genuine transatlantic context that incorporates both the American political milieu, and the broader concerns of the British government.

This polarisation of scholarship has resulted in one permeating assumption: that there was a distinct possibility the British might intervene. Existing historiography is thus concerned with asking why they did not. Yet, an equally pertinent question to ask is why they would ever have considered doing so in the first place. If we adopt a transnational focus that takes into account a much longer history of Anglo-American relations, then it is possible to see that it was never in the British economic, social, political or foreign policy interest, nor part of Britain’s *modus operandi*, to intervene in a conflict such as the American Civil War.

Chapter One looks at the question of British economic interest, and whether the British felt these interests would have been best served by intervening in the American conflict. By comparing the value of Britain’s economic relationship with the Northern

⁹ This applies to works such as Howard Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Dean Mahin, *One War at a Time: the International Dimensions of the American Civil War* (Washington D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000); and Amanda Foreman, *A World On Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2010).

¹⁰ John Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782-1865* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989); Paul Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century, 1814-80* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1975); and E.D. Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism, 1855-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

states with British dependency on Confederate cotton, it becomes clear intervention would not have been economically prudent. The importance of cotton was mitigated by existing oversupply in Britain, as well as the failed Confederate attempt to blackmail Britain by destroying their own cotton crop. Meanwhile, the Union states had proven stable trading partners whose value only increased during the war due to British crop failures.

Chapter Two considers British public opinion and governmental structure to argue that the British political and social milieu was uncondusive to any policy of intervention. Numerous historians have already studied the nature of British public opinion in relation to the Civil War, coming to the conclusion that the support the Confederacy received from workers, the middle class and press in Britain, was matched by an equally vocal pro-Union faction. This chapter takes such analysis a step further by connecting public opinion to decision-making, looking at how politicians and diplomats took into account the divided character of public opinion in order to decide that neutrality was the policy least likely to offend the largest proportion of the population. A similar examination is then applied to British governance, which in the 1850s and 1860s depended on coalitions joining disparate interest groups ranging from Peelites to Radicals. The key consequence of such fragmentation was the difficulty and risk that quickly became associated with serious foreign policy decisions. Cautious inactivity, rather than intervention, was the policy most likely to keep Lord Palmerston in government.

Shifting from domestic limitations to foreign policy, Chapter Three looks at Britain's global concerns at the time of the Civil War and the decade preceding it. A counterfactual analysis of Britain's focus on colonial and Continental issues leads to the conclusion that Britain was distracted from the American conflict and was militarily

overstretched. From this point, the correspondence of British Cabinet members, diplomats and military leaders shows that they understood Canada was defenceless, and feared that any war with the Union would quickly lead to its loss. This empire-wide perspective – typically neglected by Civil War historians – is crucial for understanding the broad context in which British officials operated by mid-century.

Chapter Four then moves from the contextual reasons why Britain wanted to maintain neutrality during the Civil War, to the specifics of the Anglo-American relationship in the thirty years preceding the Civil War. Using diplomatic correspondence and international treaties to study the rhetoric Britain and America adopted when faced with the possibility of conflict, Chapter Four is a study of transatlantic diplomacy. Despite the occasional bluster and aggressive language used by both nations, there was an underlying desire for peace and both parties compromised, giving the other the opportunity to maintain national honour at all times. By the time the Civil War broke out, British policy-makers had decades of experience in managing disputes about the Canadian border and the slave-trade. This extensive history of negotiations was crucial in shaping British interpretations and responses to the Union during the war.

Finally, Chapter Five takes the form of a holistic summary of all the above reasons why Britain wanted to avoid intervention, applying them to key moments when historians have suggested Britain was on the threshold of abandoning neutrality. The *Trent* affair, parliamentary debate about the Union blockade and recognition of the Confederacy, and the Cabinet discussion of mediation are points at which intervention seemed likely. However, Cabinet and Parliamentary records, as well as the personal papers and letters of individuals such as Prime Minister Palmerston, Foreign Secretary Russell, the Secretary of State for War Sir George Cornwall Lewis, and the British

Minister to the United States, Lord Lyons, reveal that there was never going to be a rash decision to intervene.¹¹ The *Trent* crisis was solved in the same manner as previous Anglo-American crises, while Parliamentary and Cabinet debates regarding intervention or mediation quickly petered out as a result of the domestic and foreign practicalities of such action. Despite the occasional preference of individuals for decisively interfering in the American conflict, such individuals never had sole control of British decision-making processes, and were quickly overruled by a dissenting majority.

Ultimately, interventionist policy was contrary to British economic, political, social and foreign policy interests, and that these interests dominated British thinking to an extent that neutrality was the only possible outcome for Britain during the Civil War.

¹¹ Throughout this thesis archival material from the British Library, British National Archives and Oxford's Bodleian Library will be used. British Library sources will be referenced with the tag *BL*, while the Bodleian Library takes the abbreviation *Bodl. Oxf.* All other notations taking the form PRO (Domestic Records of the Public Records Office), CO (Colonial Office), ADM (Records of the Admiralty), WO (War Office), or FO (Foreign Office) are based on research from the British National Archives.

Chapter One

O Money, Where Art Thou?

At the heart of the close relationship that developed between America and Britain in the antebellum period was trade. In America, Britain saw the potential for substantial profits, new markets and access to vital resources, such as cotton, that could fuel Britain's industrial growth. America, in turn, saw Britain as a source of funding for its developing industries, as well as a market for goods such as cotton and grains. Between the 1814 Treaty of Ghent and the outbreak of the American Civil War, the United States shipped half its exports to Britain, while receiving from them forty percent of its trade imports. For Britain, America was easily the biggest trading partner for both imports and exports during the same period.¹

One of the most divisive questions relating to British intervention in the American Civil War was whether such an action was in Britain's economic interests. Britain was a mercantile power, dependant on trade to fuel its growth and stability, and America had a long tradition of trading with Britain. However, the fratricidal American conflict put this relationship at risk. The Southern states supplied Britain with the cotton on which its enormous manufacturing industry relied and the Union blockade of the Confederate coastline threatened this. Indeed, extensive research has been undertaken by historians such as David Surdam and Sven Beckert in mapping the importance of Confederate cotton to the British Empire, and the extent to which the Union blockade triggered a cotton shortfall in Britain during the war.²

¹ Jay Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 3-4; and Jim Potter, 'Atlantic Economy, 1815-1860: The USA and the Industrial Revolution in Britain,' in L.S. Pressnell, ed., *Studies in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Athlone Press, 1960), p. 239.

² See for instance the works of, David Surdam, *Northern Naval Superiority and the Economics of The American Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Sven Beckert, 'Emancipation and Empire:

This chapter builds on this economic historiography and applies it to the study of the British policy approach to the American conflict. Two main questions need to be addressed. First, how important was Confederate cotton to Britain and could the need for cotton trigger intervention? Second, was intervention worth jeopardising Britain's economic relationship with the Northern states? In the case of cotton, Britain had a tradition of dependence on Southern cotton, but within the Civil War context, its impact was limited by a pre-existing oversupply. If anything, the Confederacy's attempt to blackmail Britain by withholding cotton consolidated Britain's desire to remain aloof. Meanwhile, the Union had proven a stable trading partner over an extended period of time, and the relationship was only flourishing as a result of Britain's need for wheat and the opportunity for capital investment in the Northern market. Moreover, maintaining a neutral position throughout the war also provided arms manufacturers the chance to profit from the skyrocketing requests for weapons and materiel. If British policy-makers considered only economic interests, they would, and indeed did, conclude that intervention in America was bad business.

The most important item traded between America and Britain in the antebellum period was cotton. In 1830 Britain was already importing 263,961,000 pounds of cotton, 77 percent of which came from America. By 1860, this figure had risen to 1,390,939,000 pounds and 88 percent respectively.³ Cotton formed the basis of Britain's textile industry, which directly and indirectly sustained one-fifth of the British population.⁴

Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War,' *American Historical Review*, 109, no. 5 (Dec., 2004), pp. 1405-38; and Gene Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009).

³ Dattel, *Cotton and Race*, p. 37.

⁴ This figure is based on *The Economist*, 21 May 1853 estimate, which assumes every worker had three dependents. A more recent estimate by historian Douglas Ball, *Financial Failure and Confederate Defeat* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 66 suggests a slightly lower figure of 16.6 percent.

Indeed, historian Eric Hobsbawm writes that ‘no industry could compare in importance with cotton in this first phase of British industrialization’ from the end of the eighteenth century into the middle of the nineteenth.⁵ When the Civil War broke out, the greatest incentive for Britain to break the Union blockade seemed to be the need to guarantee the supply of Southern cotton. However, although the importance of cotton to Britain’s economic wellbeing should not be underestimated, during the Civil War it would not bring about British intervention. Britain maintained her neutrality because the Confederacy’s attempt to blackmail Britain by destroying their own cotton crop only served to anger the British; the cotton famine never reached the levels of deprivation initially predicted; and intervention would not necessarily restore the supply of cotton.

The three most fateful words uttered by the Confederate leadership were ‘Cotton is King.’⁶ King Cotton was a policy of economic blackmail; by withholding cotton, the Confederacy hoped to place the British in a position so desperate that they would break the Union blockade in order to renew the cotton supply. ‘The cards are in our hands! And we intend to play them out to the bankruptcy of every cotton factory in Great Britain ... or the acknowledgement of our independence,’ crowed the *Charlestown Mercury*.⁷ So confident was Jefferson Davis in the power of King Cotton that he authorised the destruction of Southern cotton stocks in order to prevent the Union from capturing and re-selling them to Britain.⁸

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: from 1750 to the present day* (New York: New Press, 1999), p. 46.

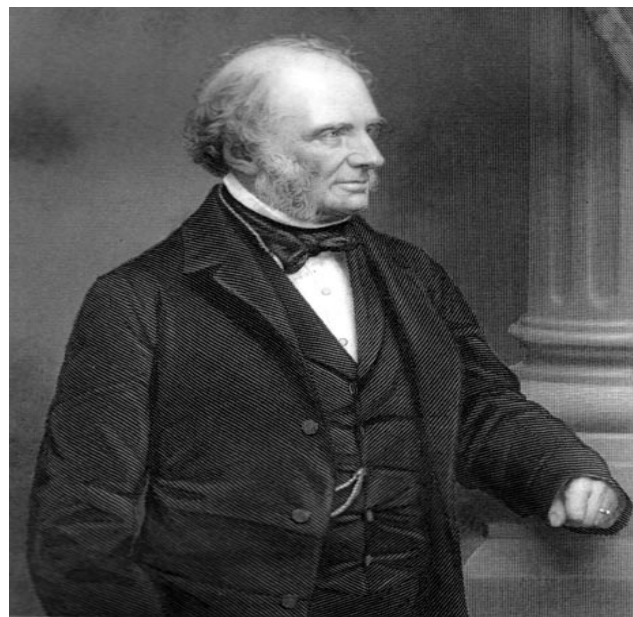
⁶ This term was first popularized in 1858 by South Carolina Senator James Hammond when he stated that: ‘No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king!’ See James Hammond, *Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina* (New York: J.F. Trow & Co., 1866), pp. 311-12.

⁷ *Charlestown Mercury*, 4 June 1861. The memoirs of Mrs. Davis suggest that President Davis and his Cabinet thought likewise, looking to recognition as an ‘assumed fact,’ believing that the English cotton market would compel this. Mrs Davis cited in Frank Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 19.

⁸ This is discussed in Hon. W. Stuart to Russell, 23 June 1862, PRO 30/22/36. See also Mountague Bernard, *A Historical Account of the Neutrality of Great Britain during the American Civil War* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1870), pp. 286-87. Bernard, a well known British international jurist who also lectured

However, King Cotton backfired – badly. The presumptuousness of attempting to blackmail Britain stirred righteous anger against the Confederacy rather than prompting a desire to intervene in the Civil War. In a letter to the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Austen Layard, in September 1861, Russell wrote: ‘I wonder that the South do not see that our recognition *because* they keep cotton from us would be ignominious beyond measure.’⁹ Indeed, the general British response to the Confederacy’s cotton blackmail was to take offence, as seen by the *Economist’s* outrage that the Confederates thought British honour could be bought with threats and promises of cheaper cotton.¹⁰ The South withholding cotton would not bring about British intervention.

Lord John Russell, British Foreign Secretary (Courtesy of The Abraham Lincoln Museum, Harrogate, Tennessee)



Moreover, Britain was by no means as badly served by the cotton shortage as the Confederacy hoped. As the Civil War began, Britain actually had a large cotton surplus. According to historian Eugene Brady and economist Gavin Wright, if British factories

on the Civil War in its aftermath, estimates approximately one million bales of cotton had been destroyed by August 1862.

⁹ Russell to Layard, 17 September 1861, cited in Myers, *Caution and Cooperation*, p. 191. Russell maintained this anger towards the Confederacy over this point; in Russell to Cowley, 19 April 1862, PRO 30/22/105, he states his belief that the Confederacy and not the Union blockade was causing Britain’s cotton shortage.

¹⁰ *Economist*, 26 January 1861, cited in Duncan Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), p. 51. A similar point is made in *The Times*, 21 October 1861.

had continued to import Southern cotton at the pre-war rate, the oversupply might have caused a price-crash and financial collapse.¹¹ The *Glasgow Herald*, for instance, pointed out that in the long-term the cotton shortage was beneficial because it reduced cotton stockpiles.¹² Ironically, the Union blockade of Confederate cotton might well have saved the British textile industry.

The existing oversupply of cotton in Britain in 1861 also helped nullify the impact of the destruction of the American cotton trade, demonstrating the fallacy of King Cotton. With enough cotton to operate at close to full capacity until the summer of 1862, and the real peak of the crisis hitting in December 1862, the severity of the Southern cotton shortfall was delayed.¹³ Many British textile firms actually made large profits during the Civil War due to the spike in cotton prices that allowed them to take advantage of altered supply-and-demand patterns.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the wool and linen industries found the cotton shortage a boon to their business. Between 1862 and 1864, the linen industry realised £14,500,000 more in profits than over an equivalent period before the war, as well as employing an extra 100,000 people.¹⁵ The wool

¹¹ See Eugene Brady, 'A Reconsideration of the Lancashire "Cotton Famine,"' *Agricultural History*, 37, no. 3 (Jul., 1863), pp. 156-62; and Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), pp. 95-97.

It must however be noted that there is debate on this point, with David Surdam, *Northern Naval Superiority and the Economics of The American Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), arguing that there was substantial oversupply of cotton in Britain, but that if not for the Civil War, British demand would still have sustainably increased to keep up with Southern supply.

¹² *Glasgow Herald*, 28 February 1862.

¹³ Surdam, *Northern Naval Superiority*, p. 139; Beckert, 'Emancipation and Empire,' p. 1410.

¹⁴ See R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), p. 95 for some individual examples of support for the Union, such as manufacturers Joshua Lord and Joseph Redman. Dattel, *Cotton and Race*, pp. 172-73, describes mill owners sitting in Parliament and standing against intervention because they were sitting on large surpluses of raw cotton. A Confederate agent in Britain, Edwin de Leon, came to the same conclusion, believing that many mill owners supported the Union because the cotton shortage maintained prices at an artificial high. Edwin de Leon, *Secret History of Diplomacy Abroad*, William Davis, ed. (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005), p. 132.

¹⁵ John Watts, *The Facts of the Cotton Famine* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1866), pp. 384-90. See also Surdam, *Northern Naval Superiority*, p. 136 for an assessment of the extent to which wool and linen were able to cover for the shortfall in cotton manufacturing.

industry received a fifty percent increase in sales and exports, driven by over 50,000 extra employees.¹⁶

This is not to dismiss the devastation of the eventual cotton crisis. By July 1862, 80,000 textile workers were unemployed, a further 370,000 were on half time, and 278 mills in Manchester had been completely closed.¹⁷ By Christmas, there were 500,000 people relying on charity from the Poor Law Guardians.¹⁸ However, because the point of crisis was postponed, economic pressure to intervene did not coincide with many of the dramatic Confederate victories near the start of the war, or with the *Trent* affair that threatened to drive Britain and America apart. Furthermore, the initial oversupply provided time for the expansion of non-American cotton production. By 1862, India had increased its cotton exports by fifty percent on antebellum figures, to 395 million pounds, reaching 473 million pounds the following year. Even greater growth was seen in countries such as Egypt and Brazil, which began to fill the void of American cotton.¹⁹ By mid-1863, the cotton famine was breaking, demonstrating Britain's ability to maintain a generally stable economy despite the blockade on Confederate cotton.

¹⁶ Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, p. 553. Owsley approximates that between 50,000 and 100,000 new jobs were created.

¹⁷ *Economist*, 5 July 1862.

¹⁸ The number of Britons relying on cotton in the antebellum period was approximately ten times lower. See Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, pp. 145-46. Owsley relies on the annual reports of the *Poor Law Board* for his figures.

¹⁹ These figures are taken from Beckert, 'Emancipation and Empire,' pp. 1413-15. See Surdam, *Northern Naval Superiority*, pp.142-46 for further detail, including the development of a cotton industry in China.

The possibility of acquiring Indian cotton to overcome the shortage (*Punch*, 16 November 1861)



Besides, intervention would not, in and of itself, have guaranteed the resumption of the cotton trade. Earl Granville, Lord President of the Council, argued that any attempt to renew cotton supply would hurt Britain economically, since there would be no immediate impact except for the loss of trade with the North.²⁰ Similarly, Lord Lyons, the Minister to America, made clear that the rapid restoration of Confederate cotton was unlikely regardless of British actions.²¹ Confederate cotton was important to Britain, but intervention for the sole purpose of restoring this trade was always economically unnecessary.

²⁰ Granville to Russell, 27 October 1862, PRO 30/29/18.

²¹ Lyons to Russell, 9 June 1862, in Newton, ed., *Lord Lyons*, p. 88.

An accurate assessment of the situation was actually provided in August 1862 by French lawyer and author Edouard Laboulaye, 'Effects of Intervention,' in Belle Sideman and Lillian Friedman, eds., *Europe Looks at the War, an Anthology* (New York: Orion Press, 1960), pp. 165-66. He argued that for both Britain and France, intervention would only undermine European neutrality and relations with the Union, without immediately restoring the flow of cotton.

Britain's antebellum reliance on Southern cotton may have been the most publicised aspect of the Anglo-American relationship, but Britain was also heavily reliant on trade with the Northern states. Union wheat was a key British import, while the American need for capital provided a fertile market for British investment. Moreover, unlike Britain's tempestuous relationship with the Southern states, economic relations with the North had proven stable and prosperous. With peace the best way to maintain this mutually beneficial connection and given the opportunity to sell arms to both parties, neutrality clearly suited Britain.

In the antebellum period, Britain had increasingly come to depend on imported grain. Following the repeal of England's protectionist Corn Laws in 1846, improvements in transport and communications technology, and the country's spiralling population, the financial viability of long-distance grain export from the northern states of America to Britain increased substantially.²² This reliance on Union wheat had reached its pinnacle when the Civil War broke out. With repeated crop failures in 1860, 1861, and 1862, Britain was importing forty percent of its wheat supply from America and was entirely dependent on this supply to feed its people.²³ The only thing worse than unemployment due to a lack of cotton was starvation, a fact corroborated by *The Economist*:

'Without such [wheat] importations our people could not exist at all. If we could not subsist our people without foreign aid in 1847, we certainly cannot subsist them in 1862.'²⁴

²² Morton Rothstein, 'Multinationals in the Grain Trade, 1850-1914,' *Business and Economic History*, 12 (1983), p. 87; Potter, 'Atlantic Economy,' pp. 249-51; Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 4; and Phillip Shaw Paludan, *A People's Contest: The Union & Civil War, 1861-1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), p. 35.

²³ See William Dana, ed., *The Merchants Magazine and Commercial Review*, vol. 49 (New York: William B. Dana Publisher and Proprietor, 1863), pp. 404-406 for figures on wheat. Amos Khasigian, 'Economic Factors and British Neutrality, 1861-1865,' *The Historian*, 25, no. 4 (1962), p. 460.

²⁴ *Economist*, 25 October 1862.

The argument that wheat was at least as important as cotton was further re-enforced by Radical MP Richard Cobden, who pointed out that 'you get an article even more important than your cotton from America – your food ... if that food had not been brought from America, all the money in Lombard-street could not have purchased it elsewhere.'²⁵ Why would Britain intervene in the Civil War if intervention had the potential to alienate the Union and end the vital grain trade?

The other important aspect of Britain's economic relationship with the Northern states was their suitability as a market for the investment of capital and their reliability as trading partners. One of the key reasons for the explosive American growth in the early parts of the nineteenth century was British financing, with most of the \$130 million extended in loans to America in the 1830s coming from British banks to fund investment in railroads and canals.²⁶ An 1839 British investors' manual argued that the diversified capitalist states of Northern America were ripe for investment.²⁷ This is not to say there was no investment in the Southern states; British banks like Baring Brothers invested millions at a time in developing cotton farming, with a loan of \$7 million being floated to Louisiana in 1831.²⁸ However, following the 1837 financial crisis, the Northern states were seen as far more reputable than their Southern counterparts.

In the 1830s, the willingness of numerous American states to take out large loans from British sources left them in a hyper-extended position when the Bank of England decided to raise interest rates due to a shortfall in gold reserves.²⁹ This led to British

²⁵ Richard Cobden, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy*, John Bright and J.E.T. Rogers, eds. (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 457, speaking in Manchester on 25 October 1862.

²⁶ Dattel, *Cotton and Race*, pp. 63-64.

²⁷ The investors' manual being Alexander Trotter's, *Observation on the Financial Position and Credit of Such of the States of the North American Union as Have Contracted Public Debts*, as cited in Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 71.

²⁸ Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 69-70.

²⁹ Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 24-25.

investment banks such as Brown, Shipley and Co., and George Wildes and Co. calling in their American loans, causing a banking crisis in America.³⁰ A double-dip recession meant that between 1837 and 1839 state debts rose by more than forty percent, and British investors began to halt investment in American securities.³¹ By 1842 eight states, including Pennsylvania, Louisiana and Mississippi, had defaulted on their debts, leading to outrage amongst British creditors.³² With the Federal government unwilling to impinge on states' rights and guarantee these debts, the indebted Southern states refused to repay the British.³³ Instead, Governor Alexander McNutt of Mississippi attacked the Rothschilds' 'blood of Judas and Shylock' and the foreign creditors' conspiracy to 'mortgage our cotton fields and make serfs of our children.'³⁴ In contrast, the northern states soon 'repaid in order to maintain their access to international markets,' argues historian William English, allowing them to finance future investment in infrastructure.³⁵ By the 1850s, their faithfulness was rewarded by the renewed confidence of British banks as levels of investment soared to previously unheard of heights, while the Southern states were shunned by foreign creditors.³⁶ As a result of the close-knit economic relationship between Britain and the northern states, when the Civil War did break out, Britain continued to offer them loans, while the Confederacy

³⁰ Frank Thistlewaite, *America and the Atlantic Community: Anglo-American Aspects, 1790-1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 18.

The situation was further exacerbated by President Andrew Jackson's unwillingness to create a central American banking authority, and the sharp drop in cotton prices in March 1837 that hampered access to foreign exchange. See Ralph Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949), pp. 219-21.

³¹ Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 25.

³² British Poet Laureate William Wordsworth even penned a critique of the morality of Americans, and Pennsylvanians in particular as a result of their choice to default on debts; William Wordsworth, 'To the Pennsylvanians,' (1845), in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 6, (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1849), p. 209.

³³ See Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 27.

³⁴ Alexander McNutt quoted in A Member of the Boston Bar, *An Account of the Origin of the Mississippi Doctrine of Repudiation* (Boston, 1842).

³⁵ William English, 'Understanding the Costs of Sovereign Default: American State Debts in the 1840s,' *American Economic Review*, 86, no. 1 (Mar., 1996), pp. 259-60.

³⁶ Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 58 and 78.

found it near impossible to have funds floated – particularly given their willingness to destroy their own cotton crop.³⁷ The Union states' successes in building a rapport with Britain as markets for investment provided a strong economic disincentive for rash interventionist action which might destroy the carefully built and mutually beneficial transatlantic financial system

Of course, Britain and the Union were not without their economic squabbles. The Union's protectionist policies in the antebellum period angered many Britons. The Federals' choice to adopt the Morrill Tariff (an import duty to protect America's growing industrial sector) stuck like a thorn in Britain's side. Several British newspapers were angry in their denunciations, with *The Times* claiming hyperbolically in September 1862 that the Tariff was a weapon aimed at ruining Britain's economy.³⁸ Speaking to New York banker August Belmont, Palmerston proclaimed that 'we do not like slavery, but we dislike your Morrill tariff,' demonstrating British frustration with protectionist economics.³⁹

Yet, despite the restrictiveness of the Morrill Tariff, the abandonment of neutrality still made no sense. It was only through neutrality that Britain could stand to profit from both Federals and Confederates by selling arms. One of the most significant counterbalances to the shortfall in cotton production was the fact that North and South quickly came to depend on Britain for weapons and materiel. Between 1861 and 1864 the Union and Confederacy imported at least \$100,000,000 worth of war supplies,

³⁷ Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 137.

³⁸ *Times*, 9 May 1861 and 6 September 1862; *Saturday Review*, 9 March 1861; and the *Burnley Advertiser*, 27 September 1862.

³⁹ Palmerston to Belmont in 1861, cited in Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, p. 62. A similar point was made by Russell in a letter to Everett in July 1861. See Frank Merli, *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy 1861-1865* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 22. Indeed, even Radical MP and pro-Union stalwart John Bright called protectionism 'stupid and unpatriotic.' See Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, p. 62.

including \$25,000,000 worth of small arms and \$10,000,000 worth of powder.⁴⁰ In fact, total British exports actually rose from £164 million in 1860 to £240 million in 1864. The Civil War was a boon to all these sectors of the British economy. Intervention, which could end this trade and the economically beneficial relationship with the Union, was to be avoided at all costs.

Britain's economic situation and prospects thus demanded that the nation avoid intervening in the American Civil War. Cotton was an immensely important resource for the British, but was available in abundance at the outbreak of the war. The Confederacy's attempt to use cotton as leverage only served to push Britain towards maintaining neutrality. Nor was there any guarantee that intervention would have secured the desired cotton. Far more certain was the adverse economic impact that such a course would have: imperilling a raft of financially lucrative and economically vital partnerships with the Union and threatening British access to Northern grains.

⁴⁰ By 1862, Britain had exported 150,000 small arms to the Union. See Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, pp. 553-54. The figures in Owsley are based on estimates published by the *Economist* during the war. See also, Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 104.

Chapter Two

Britain Divided.

'A house divided against itself cannot stand.'¹ These were Lincoln's words, but they are equally applicable to the state of public opinion and governance in mid-nineteenth century Britain. Much has been written about British public opinion during the Civil War, with a growing consensus that the public was thoroughly divided on the issue of intervention. Taking advantage of this conclusion, this chapter contextualises the power of public opinion in British politics to show that fragmented popular feeling encouraged the British leadership to maintain a non-interventionist position. Meanwhile, the British political structure at this time was equally limited, depending on a system of weak coalitions and minority governments. Such a political milieu did not encourage any decision-making, let alone a courageous choice to intervene in a fratricidal conflict with potentially global implications.

British public opinion sits awkwardly in discussions of whether Britain was likely to intervene in the American Civil War. Scholars such as D.P. Crook and Kinley Brauer mention it in a rather simplistic manner – either dismissing its importance, or drawing on samples of pro-Confederate sentiment to argue that Britain was on the threshold of intervention in 1862.² Others, like Duncan Campbell and R.J.M. Blackett, have

¹ Abraham Lincoln, 'House Divided' Speech, Project Gutenberg, *eBook Collection*, EBSCOhost, viewed 21 August 2011.

² Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 8, 16 and 54; and D.P. Crook, *Diplomacy during the American Civil War* (New York: Wiley, 1975), p. 60, argue that public opinion pushed Britain towards intervention. Kinley Brauer, 'The Slavery Problem in the Diplomacy of the American Civil War', *Pacific Historical Review*, 46, no. 3 (August 1977), pp. 447, 457-59, argues that the British Cabinet outright ignored public opinion. Mary Ellison, *Support for Secession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 28-32; and Joseph Herson, 'British Sympathies in the American Civil War: A Reconsideration', *Journal of Southern History*, 33,

undertaken valuable studies of the differences in the beliefs of the working class, middle class and press, before coming to the conclusion that public opinion was thoroughly fragmented between those who supported the Union, the Confederacy or simply preferred to remain aloof.³ Unfortunately, this approach fails to overtly connect public opinion to British decision-making. However, by combining this research with a contextual understanding of the power of British public opinion in this period, it becomes clear that although public pressure was never going to be the decisive factor in whether Britain intervened, its divided nature ultimately provided another reason for British decision-makers to maintain neutrality.

What was 'public opinion' in mid-nineteenth century Britain? Whereas American democratic traditions had created a public that held significant political sway, British citizens were far more liable to be ignored by those in power. The Great Reform Act of 1832 had expanded the franchise to approximately one in seven men, and even closed some of the loopholes that allowed for rigged elections, yet control still usually remained in the hands of the elites.⁴ Moreover, for members of the working class, it was even harder to gain political attention from those in power, who tended to ignore the poor unless they were starving or rioting.⁵

no. 3 (August 1967), p. 362, take the line that there was strong pro-Confederate feeling, but that it ultimately had no effect on decision-making.

³ See Blackett, *Divided Hearts*; R.J.M. Blackett, 'The Transatlantic Address to Lincoln: Birmingham and the American Civil War', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 3, no. 3 (Autumn 2002), pp. 29-52; and Campbell, *English Public Opinion*.

⁴ K. T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 31-55; Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973), pp. 314-36; John Phillips and Charles Wetherell, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England,' 100, no. 2 (Apr., 1995), pp. 411-36; and John Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English Electoral Behaviour, 1818-1841* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁵ For instance, the Chartist Movement which attempted to peacefully secure further electoral reform in 1842 was summarily rejected despite having gathered a petition with more than three million signatures. See Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), which also provides a more general summary of the role of working class opinion in British politics.

Nevertheless, for all its limitations, British public opinion was still highly relevant to government decisions about the American Civil War. Looking first at working-class opinion, it is clear that the British elite did keep an eye on how wage labourers viewed the war. With the cotton trade threatened by the Union blockade, some politicians expressed anxiety over the possibility that rising unemployment and starvation might trigger pro-Confederate rioting. A memorandum drafted for the Cabinet by Chancellor of the Exchequer William Gladstone in October 1862, for instance, highlighted the fear that extended hardship in Lancashire could trigger an outbreak of violence – a sentiment which echoed the earlier thoughts of Palmerston.⁶

However, if the British leadership feared that they might have to intervene in the American Civil War to appease an embattled working class, they were quickly disabused of this belief by the strong surge of pro-Union support amongst the workers. Certainly, there were those workers and working-class newspapers that condemned the Union and encouraged British intervention, but there was an even more vocal majority who firmly defended the Union and approved of British neutrality. For every editorial praising the Confederate effort in popular and widespread working class journals such as the *British Miner*, *Weekly Budget*, and *Bee-Hive*, there were similar endorsements for the Union cause in *Fraser's Magazine* and *Workman's Advocate*.⁷ Although many British workers relied on Southern cotton for their jobs, siding with the Confederacy would have meant supporting a slave state and admitting the failure of the democratic state

⁶ William Gladstone, 'Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer,' 25 October 1862, in *Great Britain: Foreign Policy and The Span of Empire 1689-1971*, vol. 1, in Joel Weiner, ed. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1972), p. 484.

See Gladstone to Palmerston, 25 September 1862, in Henry Palmerston, *The Palmerston Papers: Gladstone and Palmerston, 1851-1865*, Phillip Guedalla, ed. (London: Gollancz, 1928), pp. 233-36.

⁷ The *British Miner*, *Bee-Hive* and *Weekly Budget* were three of the notable workers' papers that chose to support the Confederacy. See Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, pp. 194-215; and Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 150; as well as George Cotham, 'George Potter and the "Bee-Hive" Newspaper,' (Ph.D. dissertation, London: University College, 1956), pp. 5-74 for further detail on the *Bee-Hive*.

Blackett, 'Transatlantic Address to Lincoln', pp. 32-34, 41-43; and Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, pp. 198-206, discuss pro-Union working class literature.

and right to universal male suffrage.⁸ Consequently, workers in Leeds, Liverpool and Bradford sent in petitions throughout the war supporting the Union.⁹ Even in towns reliant on cotton, such as Ashton and Stalybridge where 148 out of 188 mills ran below capacity, 21 pro-Union meetings were held between 1862 and 1865, as opposed to thirteen in favour of the Confederacy.¹⁰ One particularly telling incident revealing the pro-Union bias of British workers happened in July 1862. Several pro-Confederate figures announced an open-air meeting in the cotton-starved city of Blackburn in order to win support for a motion by John Hopwood, the M.P. for Clitheroe, to recognise the Confederacy. Much to the organisers' chagrin, the meeting was quickly flooded by pro-Union workers, who resolved the very opposite and enjoined the Confederacy to peacefully rejoin the Union.¹¹ On balance, widespread pro-Union sentiment amongst the workers meant that they would not riot in support of breaking the Union blockade of Confederate cotton, making the British leadership's choice to maintain neutrality even easier.

Any chance of starvation or affray was further minimised by the generosity of Union benefactors to the British workers. Even before the arrival of Union supply ships *George Griswold* in February 1863 and *Achilles* a month later, bearing gifts of flour, meat and rice for destitute Liverpool workers, American financier George Peabody had donated £150,000 to construct housing for the poor in London.¹² Throughout the war Union sources donated \$2.6 million to the workers of Britain.¹³ Furthermore, aside from

⁸ For further detail on why many workers supported the Union, see Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, pp. 119, 156-60 and 172-75; Philip Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), pp. 35-45; and Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment, and Reform: Popular Radicalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 74.

⁹ Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 172.

¹⁰ Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 172.

¹¹ Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 125.

¹² See Dattel, *Cotton and Race*, p. 174; Foner, *British Labor*, pp. 49-50; and Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 103.

¹³ Dattel, *Cotton and Race*, p. 174.

the obvious practical benefits of such donations, they provided valuable public relations victories. Usually critical of the Union, *Reynold's Newspaper* accepted the *Griswold* as a 'republican gift to a starving and aristocratic-ridden people [that] has no equal in anything recorded of the generosity of princes.'¹⁴ A meeting organised in Manchester on 24 February to give thanks to the Union more than filled to capacity a 2,000-person hall, and proceeded to pass resolutions of support for the Union, democracy, and the crew of the *Griswold*.¹⁵ Peabody's donations received similar positive coverage in *The Times*, a welcome bonus in the aftermath of the *Trent* crisis.¹⁶ Far from turning against the Union, many British workers were grateful, if not supportive of it. Combined with the fact that the effects of the cotton shortage were delayed and minimised by the initial surplus, there was simply no need for the Cabinet to intervene in the American Civil War on behalf of the working class.

The ability of workers to encourage Britain to maintain neutrality during the American Civil War paled in comparison to the reach of the middle classes and press. Both these groups already played an increasingly significant role in political discourse. Throughout the 1850s Palmerston constantly courted the approval of the press and professionals, maintaining a close relationship the editor of *The Times*, John Delane, and giving regular speeches to crowds in places like Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool.¹⁷ The press in particular had helped shape foreign policy with its negative reporting of

There was also a large private charity push within Britain that also helped avoid the complete deprivation of the working classes. The Mansion House in London raised £528,904 during the war, though again, a significant proportion of this came from American sources. See Owsley, *King Cotton*, pp. 145-49.

¹⁴*Reynold's Weekly*, 15 February 1863.

¹⁵Foner, *British Labor*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁶*Times*, 11 July 1862.

¹⁷*History of the Times: The Tradition Established 1841-1884*, vol. 2 (London: Times, 1935-52), chp. 16 for Palmerston's relationship with Delane.

See Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, pp. 8 and 24-25, for Palmerston's attempts to woo the middle class. In particular, during the Leeds speech in 1860, Palmerston openly acknowledged the power of middle class opinion in shaping policy.

Britain's performance during the Crimean War.¹⁸ *The Times'* special correspondent William H. Russell's dispatches made clear to the British public the ineptitude of the campaign and its disastrous sanitary consequences. Russell's Christmas Day editorial in 1854 evoked the sick imagery of slaughter:

The dead are frightful to look upon – emaciated to the last degree, with faces and heads swollen and discoloured, the drops of blood stealing down from nose to ear...while the living, soon to follow them, dig their graves.¹⁹

The Times' critique was soon being discussed in the Commons and was quickly supplemented by the coverage of other papers, such as the *Daily News*, and amplified by the advent of photography in the *Illustrated London News*.²⁰ Shocked by such depictions, the M.P. for Sheffield, John Roebuck, called for an investigation into British military practices – a motion that was passed 305 votes to 148 in the House of Commons and triggered the collapse of the Aberdeen government.²¹ The potential of the press and

¹⁸ For further details on the role of the press and public opinion in shaping the course of the Crimean War see Stefanie Markovits, 'Rushing into Print: "Participatory Journalism" During the Crimean War,' *Victorian Studies*, 50, no. 4 (Summer 2008), pp. 559-86; Olive Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics during the Crimean War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1967), pp. 70-94; Kingsley Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), pp. 146-151; Olive Anderson, 'Cabinet Government and the Crimean War', *English Historical Review*, 79, no. 312 (July 1964), pp. 548-61; and Ann Saab, 'Foreign Affairs and New Tories: Disraeli, *The Press*, and the Crimean War,' *International History Review*, 19, no. 2 (May, 1997), pp. 286-311.

¹⁹ *Times*, 25 December 1854.

See William Howard Russell, *Russell's Despatches from the Crimea 1854-1856*, Nicolas Bentley, ed. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1966) for a compilation of Russell's articles during the Crimean War with some commentary on their impact.

²⁰ 29 January 1855, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 3rd ser., vol. 136 (1855), cols. 1119-21. The *Hansard* parliamentary debates have been sourced from < <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>>. The abbreviation (H.C.) will be used for (Commons), and *Parl. Deb.* for *Parliamentary Debates*.

The Daily News, 2 January 1855 demanded to know whether the British government could have done more to avoid the soldiers' suffering.

Illustrated London News, 10 November 1855 provides an example of the power of Roger Fenton's prints on the public imagination. The Crimean War saw the first widespread use of photography in journalism. See also Mary Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2002), pp. 99-104.

²¹ 29 January 1855, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 136 (1855), cols. 1230 and 1234.

So shaking was the fallout from the Crimea crisis, that Cabinet itself was re-structured, with the Secretary of State for War and Colonies split, the former merging with the secretary of War. See Lawrence Adamczyk, 'The Crimean War and its Effects on Perceptions of British Foreign Policy,' *Potomac Review*, no. 26-27 (1984-85), p. 54.

middle class to influence foreign policy was clearly established by the dawn of the Civil War.

During the Civil War itself, the press and middle class proved entirely divided on the issue of British intervention. Some wholeheartedly supported the Union, while others genuinely believed that Britain should intervene in the war on the South's behalf. However, there were also those papers and people who professed neutrality on the issue, or believed that despite the inevitability of Confederate victory, it was in Britain's best interests to remain apart from the conflict. It was this very fragmentation of middle class and press opinion that encouraged British non-intervention, since by avoiding consciously and openly siding with either Confederacy or Union, the British government could avoid isolating or angering anyone.

Amongst the middle class and press, many either preferred the Union, or, believing that Union and Confederacy were equally morally culpable, considered a policy of aloof neutrality preferable. For instance, major newspapers such as the *Morning Star* and *Daily News* consistently published articles favourable to the Union while criticising the slave-holding dependency of the Confederacy.²² Dissenting denominations supported the Union, with 335 ministers in the Union Emancipation Society (UES) and London Emancipation Society (LES) as opposed to 100 in the Southern Independence Association (SIA).²³ Societies like the UES also gained

²² For instance see *Morning Star*, 30 October 1861; and *Daily News*, 10 October 1861. Particularly recognisable in the latter paper were the letters of Harriet Martineau, who submitted tri-weekly editorials condemning slavery and the Confederacy. Some biographical information can be seen in Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Linda Peterson, ed. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2007).

For further detail on the positions of various papers see Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, pp. 143-55; and although slightly dated, the still valuable Ephraim Douglass Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), pp. 46-55 and 126-128.

A general summary of the positions of the various British newspapers can also be seen in Alfred Grant, *The American Civil War and the British Press* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2000).

²³ Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, pp. 104-7.

significant support from Radicals and members of pre-existing Abolitionist Societies.²⁴ As has been noted, there were even manufacturers, such as Joshua Lord and Joseph Redman, who took pro-North positions.²⁵ Finally, as Blackett's in-depth study of public opinion in Birmingham shows, some cities tended towards disinterested neutrality, seeing little to like from either the Union or the Confederacy, and not wishing to be dragged into the middle of such a conflict.²⁶ These segments of the middle class and press would be inestimably offended if Britain decided to intervene in the American conflict.

Of course, there were also many in Britain who supported the Confederacy and wanted Britain to intervene. One of the most prominent publications supporting British intervention was *The Index*, a paper established by Confederate agent Henry Hotze and supported by industrialist James Spence. Writing in support of the Confederacy, *The Index* quickly picked up a middle class following and regularly called for intervention.²⁷ Others supported intervention out of a humanitarian belief that Lincoln's initial proclamation of emancipation in September 1862 would trigger a bloody, servile war.²⁸ Some members of the middle class and press even convinced themselves that abolition was more likely under an independent Confederacy indebted to Britain. Articles in the *Preston Chronicle* and *Manchester Courier* demonstrate a belief that only with the enlistment of 'Negroes' into the Confederate Army would emancipation truly occur, and

²⁴ Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, pp. 96-102. Blackett also makes the interesting point that allegiances to either the North or the South tended to fall among family and acquaintance lines. Personal connections to the war were important, and when one member of a particular family or social network supported Union or Confederacy, the rest tended to follow.

See also Dubrulle, 'Military Legacy of the Civil War,' pp. 172-76.

²⁵ This has previously been discussed in Chapter One in relation to the profits made by many in the textile industry. See Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 95; and Dattel, *Cotton and Race*, pp. 172-73.

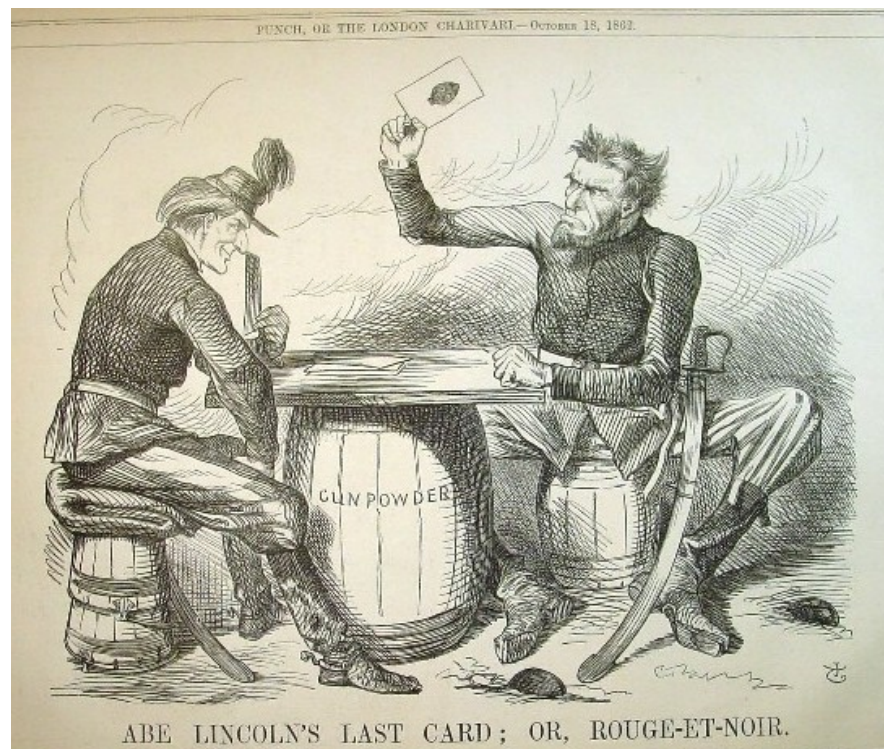
²⁶ Blackett, 'Transatlantic Address to Lincoln,' pp. 29-52.

²⁷ Ewan, 'Emancipation Proclamation and British Public Opinion,' pp. 9-11. James Spence was the leading supporter of the Confederacy in Britain and was also well known for his letters in *The Times* under the pseudonym 'S.'

²⁸ See Christopher Ewan, 'The Emancipation Proclamation and British Public Opinion,' *Historian*, 67, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 1-3, 15-16; and Lorimer, 'Role of Anti-Slavery Sentiment,' pp. 407-410 for further detail on anti-Lincoln feeling regarding the Emancipation Proclamation.

even notable abolitionists, such as the members of the British Anti-Slavery Society, supported pro-Southern intervention.²⁹

An initial British reaction to Lincoln's decision to emancipate the slaves (*Punch*, 18 October 1862)



Although there was some open support for British intervention, others preferred Confederate victory, but refused to suggest that Britain abandon neutrality. *The Times*, the leading British newspaper and the stalwart of middle class opinion, firmly advocated neutrality, despite publicising its desire for Confederate victory.³⁰ Even when it attacked Lincoln over the suspension of *habeas corpus* and the arrests of British citizens, or stinging criticism of General Benjamin Butler's humanity after he issued his

²⁹ See the *Preston Chronicle*, 19 September 1863 and *Manchester Courier*, 12 September 1863, for demonstrations of the belief that Negro enlistment would result in emancipation.

See Douglas Lorimer, 'The Role of Anti-Slavery Sentiment in English Reactions to the American Civil War', *Historical Journal*, 19, no. 2 (June 1976), pp. 412-23; and Herson, 'British Sympathies in the American Civil War,' pp. 359-61 for abolitionist sentiments.

As an addendum, it is interesting to note the similarities with British belief that the South might reform slavery with certain Southern writings, such as the diary of Mrs. Jones (cited in Robert Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 1244) where she claims Southern victory will result in slave reform. However, it is my feeling that this was highly unlikely; the fact remains that James Spence was censored by the Confederacy in 1863 for his anti-slavery proclamations (in support of the South). See Lorimer, 'Role of Anti-Slavery Sentiment', p. 410.

³⁰ The importance of *The Times* is discussed in Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, pp. 143-49; and particularly in Martin Crawford, *The Anglo-American Crisis of the Mid-Nineteenth Century: the Times and America, 1850-1862* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

proclamation against Southern women in New Orleans, *The Times* wrote against intervention.³¹ During the *Trent* affair in particular, *The Times* approached the issue ‘with that coolness and calmness which its importance requires,’ calling for the maintenance of peaceful Anglo-American relations amidst all the hullabaloo of war.³² Similar sentiments were echoed throughout the war by the *Illustrated London Times*, *Saturday Review* and the *Economist*.³³ Even *Punch*, despite its sympathy for the Southern cause, professed its belief in neutrality due to the relative moral culpability of the two warring sides, with the short poem:

...Yankee Doodle is the Pot;
Southerner the Kettle:
Equal morally, if not
Men of equal mettle.³⁴

While there may have been substantial middle class and press pro-Confederate feeling, this often did not correlate with a belief in intervention.

British middle class and press opinion were entirely divided, and it was this fragmentation which encouraged the British government to maintain neutrality as an operation in fence-sitting and inoffensiveness. A genuinely significant proportion of the British population openly supported the Union and would turn against the government if intervention occurred. More importantly, the one thing that unified British workers,

³¹ See *Times*, 5 November 1861 and 18 February 1862, for specific criticisms of Lincoln’s suspension of *habeas corpus* and arrests of British citizens. For a general discussion of British anger with the suspension of certain civil liberties see; Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, p. 106; Eugene Berwanger, *The British Foreign Service and the American Civil War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1994), pp. 53-58; and Donald Bellows, ‘A Study of British Conservative Reaction to the American Civil War,’ *Journal of Southern History*, 51, no. 4 (Nov., 1985), pp. 513-14.

On 15 May 1862, General Butler declared that: ‘when any female shall by mere gesture or movement insult, or show contempt for any officers or soldiers of the United States, she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman about town plying her avocation.’ Taken from, Benjamin Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler During the Period of the Civil War*, Jesse Marshall, ed. (Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1917), p. 490. See *Times*, 13 June 1862, for its vitriolic attack on Butler’s proclamation.

³² *Times*, January 9, 14 1862.

³³ *Illustrated London News*, 14 December 1861. For analysis of the *Saturday Review* and *Economist* see Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, pp. 130-31.

³⁴ *Punch*, 17 August 1861.

professionals, press, and elite was abolition.³⁵ With the Union unwilling to countenance any form of intervention, any British action would have been favourable to the Confederacy.³⁶ Thus, as well as risking Anglo-American trade and peace, Britain would effectively be condoning slavery. Regardless of whether the British thought the Federals were soft on abolition, to openly ally Britain with the South and with slavery would be antithetical to everything Britain had professed to stand for over the previous decades. Even Britain's leaders, Palmerston and Russell included, had been vocal in their support of abolition, and to intervene would be to make social and political pariahs of themselves.³⁷ In letters to Russell, Palmerston actually professed a belief that a substantive portion of British public opinion would turn strongly against him if he supported the South.³⁸ In sum, the Unionist working classes and divided middle class

³⁵ The importance of abolition to the British is discussed in Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1975); Van Gosse, "'As a Nation, the English are our Friends': The Emergence of African American Politics in the British Atlantic World, 1772-1861," *American Historical Review*, 113, no. 4 (Oct., 2008), pp. 1003-1028; Chaim Kaufmann and Robert Pape, 'Explaining Costly International Moral Action: Britain's Sixty-Year Campaign against the Atlantic Slave Trade,' *International Organisation*, 53, no. 4 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 631-68; and Seymour Drescher, 'Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade,' *Past and Present*, no. 143 (May, 1994), pp. 136-66.

³⁶ The Union's unwillingness to consider British intervention can be seen in the reports of Ambassador Lyons; Lyons to Bunch, 5 July 1861, 'Correspondence relative to Overtures to Contending Parties in United States, on Principles of Maritime Law laid down by Congress of Paris in 1856,' *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* (henceforth *HCPP*), p. 13; 1862(2911) LXII.531, sourced from < <http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk/home.do>>; and Lyons to Russell, 8 April, 24 and 28 November 1862, PRO 30/22/36.

³⁷ For instance, Gladstone comments on Palmerston's abolitionist fervour in Gladstone to Argyll, 6 June 1860, in William Ewart Gladstone, *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. 6, M.R.D. Foot, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 494. See also Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 40.

Russell's belief in ending the slave trade is shown in the following parliamentary speech; 19 March 1850, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 109 (1850), cols. 1173-83.

Another notable abolitionist figure in Cabinet was the Duke of Argyll, who attacked the moral underpinnings of Southern slavery: Duke of Argyll, speech to tenantry, October 1861, in George Douglas, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, vol. 2, Dowager Duchess of Argyll, ed. (London: John Murray, 1906), pp. 174-75.

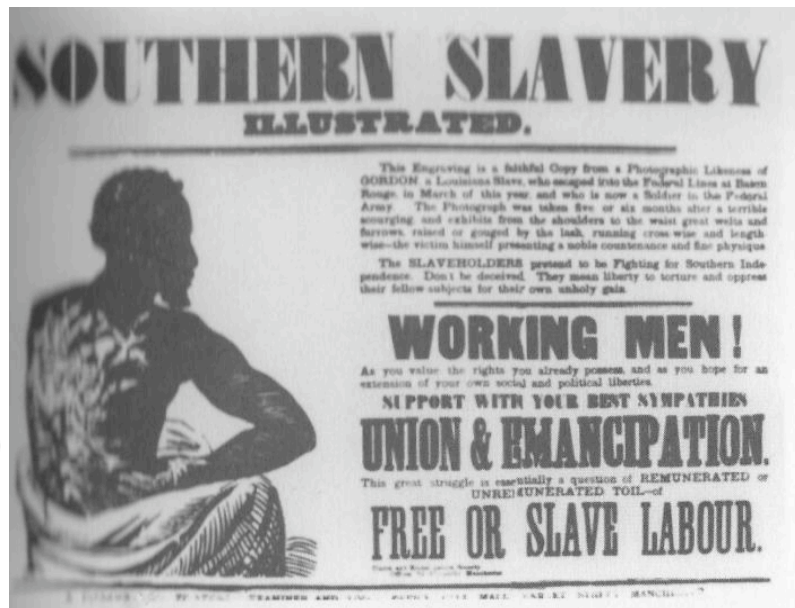
For a more general summary of politicians' approaches to slavery see; Kaufmann, 'Britain's Sixty-Year Campaign,' pp. 657-61; and Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Modernization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 62-64.

³⁸ Palmerston to Russell, 2 November 1862, PRO 30/22/14D.

For instance, the *London Herald* argued that England would never intervene despite anger over the Morrill Tariff because it would trigger too large a conflict and result in England siding with a slave power. *London Herald*, reprinted verbatim in the *New York Times*, 9 November 1861.

were strong advocates for staying neutral; however detached British politicians might have been from their public, staying out of the war was the safest political option.

A common poster of a flagellated slave used at pro-Union meetings, illustrating the brutality of slavery (Courtesy of John Rylands Library, Manchester)



Even if the public had not been so fragmented, British politicians would still have found it near impossible to make the decision to intervene. A divided Parliament and a divided Cabinet were always going to put a damper on any policy as aggressive and controversial as intervention. In Parliament, the ruling party relied on coalition support, and any misstep could have led to a fatal vote of no-confidence. During the Civil War this was a distinct possibility if an interventionist policy was undertaken without the support of the Houses, since key Tories had come out in favour of neutrality. Meanwhile, Palmerston's guarantee that all members of Cabinet would have a say in important foreign policy decisions placed a further block on decisive action, since the full spectrum of a coalition Cabinet, including Radicals like Milner Gibson, would have to be convinced of the importance of intervention.

Between 1832 and 1867, all but one of nine elected parliaments dismissed a government during their course. In the 1850s, each of these collapses was predicated by the attempt to implement contentious foreign policy – only Palmerston's 1859 ministry,

the government that did not intervene in the American conflict, survived.³⁹ Lord Aberdeen's Prime Ministership collapsed in 1855 following John Roebuck's motion to investigate British military practices during the Crimean War.⁴⁰ Palmerston, his replacement, then felt the bitter sting of foreign policy rejection and loss of office after failing to pass a divisive Conspiracy to Murder Bill that made it illegal to plot a murder in Britain of someone abroad. The January 1858 Orsini assassination attempt on Napoleon III had been prepared in England and Palmerston attempted to smooth over relations by enacting legislation to punish such actions. However, an unusual coalition of Radicals and Tories playing on nationalistic fervour led an amendment criticising British deference to France being passed by nineteen votes.⁴¹ Without the support of the Commons, Palmerston promptly resigned. Finally, the Derby ministry which replaced Palmerston's Whig-Radical-Peelite coalition only had a minority share in Parliament, leading to a 323 to 310 vote-of-no-confidence on 10 June 1859 as tensions rose regarding Italian independence.⁴² By the time Palmerston returned for his second stint as Prime Minister, controversial foreign policy had been clearly established as a dangerous field to dabble in.

Part of the reason that bold foreign policy direction was difficult to impose in Parliament was that the House of Commons was completely divided. In 1846, the Tories split over the Corn Laws, leaving a large Conservative block, and the fewer, but equally

³⁹ Adrian Brett, 'The Enduring Importance of Foreign Policy Dominance in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Politics,' in William Mulligan and Brendan Simms, eds., *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History 1660-2000* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 154.

⁴⁰ 29 January 1855, *Parl. Deb. (H.C.)*, 3rd ser., 136 (1855), cols. 1230 and 1234.

⁴¹ See Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 12; and Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp 159-60; and Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (London: Longmans, 1967), p. 206, for further details about the vote and the Orsini Crisis.

⁴² Brett, 'Enduring Importance of Foreign Policy Dominance,' p. 154; and Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 87.

influential Peelites.⁴³ The rise of the Radicals and the Manchester School under John Cobden and John Bright further diluted the traditional political dichotomy.⁴⁴ In 1852 for instance, there were 330 Conservatives as opposed to 324 Liberals, but the former figure included approximately 45 Peelites who were perfectly willing to form a coalition with the opposition.⁴⁵ As the decade passed, the Liberal majority increased, but included a Radical element unafraid of opposing party leadership, as well as tensions between the supporters of the two great Whigs of the mid-nineteenth century, Palmerston and Russell.⁴⁶ So obvious was the fractious relationship between Russell and Palmerston that even the Confederate agent Edwin de Leon quickly picked up on it.⁴⁷ Moreover, Liberal rule was only secured by the Conservative preference for ‘masterful inactivity’ during this period.⁴⁸ Still weakened by the 1846 split, Derby and the Conservatives preferred to bide their time until they could govern with a real majority in the Commons.⁴⁹ The state of affairs was well described by Palmerston:

Our House of Commons strength is great as to the ability which sits on the Treasury Bench, but small as to the Balance of votes which followed us into the lobby and a small number going over or staying away might at any time leave us in a minority.⁵⁰

⁴³ The Peelites, despite their fewer numbers, contained many of the leading politicians, including Robert Peel himself, as well as Lord Aberdeen, William Gladstone and the Duke of Newcastle.

⁴⁴ Believing as they did in an almost universal non-interventionist position for Britain. See Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), pp. 10-13; and also Anthony Howe, ‘Radicalism, Free Trade, and Foreign Policy in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain,’ in *Primacy of British Foreign Policy*, pp. 167-81.

⁴⁵ Taken from F.W.S. Craig, ed., *British Electoral Facts, 1832-1987* (Hampshire: Parliamentary Research Services, 1989). The estimation of the number of Peelites (who were an ambiguous grouping rather than an official party), comes from Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 370.

⁴⁶ Palmerston’s coalition was described by Lord Clarendon as a ‘bundle of sticks,’ dependant on his leadership, but still on the brink of falling apart. Lord Clarendon to Lord Granville, 21 October 1865, in Edmond Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville George Leveson Gower: Second Earl of Granville, K.G., 1815-1891* (London: Longmans, Green, 1905), p. 487.

⁴⁷ De Leon, *Secret History of Confederate Diplomacy*, p. 63. In the earlier Orsini debate which cost Palmerston his first run as Prime Minister, Russell was one of those who voted against him, as mentioned in Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 206.

⁴⁸ Edward Stanley (Earl of Derby), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869*, J.R. Vincent, ed. (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 44 and 92.

⁴⁹ Saab, ‘Foreign Affairs and New Tories,’ pp. 304-5; and Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 212.

⁵⁰ Palmerston to Russell, 29 December 1859, cited in Merli, *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy*, p. 24.

The fragmentation of the major parties, combined with the cumbersome nature of parliamentary procedure, meant that passing legislation became increasingly difficult. Historian Asa Briggs argues that British politics were 'in a state of truce, of arrested development.'⁵¹ British governance certainly found itself in an unusual limbo with all sides fearing action as a predictor of defeat.

A passive atmosphere enveloped Parliament during the American Civil War period. Although Palmerston's wartime ministry was the only one during this period to maintain any real longevity, his Liberal coalition was still bound tightly by the same restrictions as before. With key Tories such as Benjamin Disraeli and Lord Derby taking the position that Britain should maintain its neutrality, any decision to intervene would lack not only widespread public backing, but also the support of the opposition. When Palmerston asked Lord Clarendon to consult Derby as to the Conservative position, Clarendon reported that Derby believed there could be no possible benefit to intervention.⁵² Disraeli consistently took a similar position in expressing his hope that neutrality would continue.⁵³ Indeed, even when private members' bills were introduced proposing breaking the blockade or recognising the Confederacy, the Conservatives were just as quick to end debate as Palmerston's governing faction was.⁵⁴ The British political situation during this period was not conducive to intervention, and any decision to do so could have proven fatal for Palmerston – he knew this, hence his constant fear of 'Dizzy [Disraeli] & Derby tumbling us over such a topic.'⁵⁵

⁵¹ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 91.

⁵² Clarendon to Palmerston, 19 October 1862, quoted in Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 152. This report was then circulated; see Clarendon to Russell, 19 October 1862, PRO 30/22/14.

⁵³ See Mahin, *One War at a Time*, pp. 123 and 189.

⁵⁴ For a brief summary of the motions brought by these figures, see Myers, *Caution and Cooperation*, pp. 57-58, 93 and 209. The motions will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

⁵⁵ Palmerston to Lewis, 2 December 1861, cited in Norman Ferris, *The Trent Affair: a Diplomatic Crisis* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), p. 64.

Palmerston also had to deal with a mish-mash Cabinet, which further restricted rash interventionist policy, or indeed any policy whatsoever. When he came to power in 1859, Palmerston promised that key foreign policy decisions would be made by the entire Cabinet.⁵⁶ With two Radicals, six Peelites and eight Whigs, decision-making was always going to be difficult, if not impossible, and this proved no different with the question of intervention.⁵⁷ Although the Cabinet deliberations regarding intervention will be more thoroughly explored in the final chapter, with the kaleidoscope of opinions in Cabinet, the structural limitations with implementing foreign policy are evident.

During the Civil War, the interaction between the political and social situations in Britain played an important part in shaping British decision-making on the question of intervention. Developing an increasing role in political discourse, public opinion was so fragmented throughout the war that the British leadership had no choice but to maintain a position that offended as few as possible. Intervention was a policy that contravened Britain's traditional abolitionist position, would have angered the workers, and was opposed by the majority of the press and middle class as impractical and dangerous. Similar divisions were present in governance, which also suffered from the structural limitations of coalition rule. With dabbling in risky foreign policy one of the fastest ways to receive a vote of no confidence, inaction on the issue of intervention became the stablest option available in both Cabinet and Parliament.

⁵⁶ The promise is detailed in Newcastle to Palmerston, 15 June 1859, cited in F. Darrell Munsell, *The Unfortunate Duke: Henry Pelham, Fifth Duke of Newcastle, 1811-1864* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), p. 236.

⁵⁷ Particularly because the two Radicals, Milner Gibson and Charles Pelham Villiers, were never going to stand for intervention, it being contrary to their general beliefs on foreign policy; see Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 210; and Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, pp. 108-9 and 300.

Chapter Three

This Scepter'd Isle.

To examine Britain's interaction with the American Civil War without first establishing Britain's broader foreign policy concerns is to miss the wood for the trees. Any potential British decision to intervene must be viewed in the context of a complex web of British overseas entanglements, traditions and limitations. This reality has not received as much historiographical attention as it deserves, with Civil War historians such as Howard Jones and Dean Mahin failing to adopt and adapt the conclusions of numerous British foreign policy histories to their studies of British intervention in the American conflict. Accordingly, this chapter applies existing historiography and additional archival research to understanding how the nature of Britain's foreign policy provided a significant caveat against Britain entangling itself in American problems. After all, America was not Britain's only concern at this time.

Observing British foreign policy during this period raises two important counterfactual arguments against British intervention. Perennial imperial and Continental concerns distracted the British government from devoting its fullest attention to America, while Britain's actual dealings with other European powers revealed a general unwillingness to intervene forcefully in others' affairs. Moreover, Britain's involvement in conflicts around the world, combined with Gladstone's attempt to cut down on military spending, left Britain's armed forces overstretched. British foreign office records and letters reveal a distinct awareness of this military incapacity, which left Britain unable to defend Canada in the case of war, let alone intervene effectively in the American Civil War.

By the middle of the nineteenth century Britain was well and truly an imperial power, whose most pertinent concern was the maintenance of her colonial empire as a means to economic prosperity and prestige. Colonies offered the raw materials that made Britain the 'workshop of the world,' offered markets for the finished goods, and potential locations for the investment of capital. They also reflected British strength, and the worldwide reach and power of her navy.¹ The smooth running of such an empire was a mammoth and distracting task at the best of times, and the 1850s and 1860s were by no means the most settled in Britain's history. Conflicts throughout the colonies tempered any foreign policy adventurism, with serious rebellions to deal with in New Zealand and India alongside the festering sore that was British rule in Ireland. The importance of India can be measured by the extraordinary reaction to the Indian Mutiny in 1858, which saw almost the entirety of the British press core and political establishment pre-occupied with regaining control there.² New Zealand, despite its seemingly miniscule importance in the grand scale of things, took up a disproportionate amount of attention during the Maori Wars, with regular references in House of Commons debates, and the doubling of the military garrison between 1860 and 1865.³ Meanwhile, Ireland was still struggling with religious conflict and tenancy issues, and

¹ A succinct history of the importance of the Empire to Britain is provided in Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially pp. 86-123. Other useful summaries are; Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 153-66; and A.G. Hopkins and P.J. Cain, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850-1945,' *Economic History Review*, 40, no. 1 (Feb., 1987), pp. 1-26.

² See Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century*, pp. 134-45; Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny: 1857* (London: Viking, 2002).

³ For instance, see 17 July 1860, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 159 (1860), cols. 2035-36; 21 August 1860, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 160 (1860), cols. 1639-49; and 12 April 1861, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 162 (1861), cols. 530-40.

With regards the doubling of the garrison, see Daniel Thorp, 'New Zealand and the American Civil War,' *Pacific Historical Review*, 80, no. 1 (Feb., 2011), p. 101. For a generalised history of the Maori Wars see James Belich, *The Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict: the Maori, the British, and the New Zealand Wars* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

detained fifteen percent of the British army to keep the peace.⁴ Britain's pre-occupation with empire by no means precluded an American action, but more pressing concerns clearly weighted on policy-makers' minds.

The logical extension of Britain's concern with Empire was fear for Canada's fate if Britain did intervene in the American Civil War. Canada offered prestige, potential resources and an important outpost for trans-Atlantic trade.⁵ Indeed, Britain valued Canada so highly that they made incredible concessions regarding self-rule in the aftermath of the 1837-38 Rebellion, even to the extent of compensating rebels who suffered losses.⁶ Since any direct British involvement in America would inevitably benefit the Confederacy, the British genuinely feared that intervention might result in the Union turning its considerable armies against Canada. Writing to the Gladstone in December 1861, the Duke of Argyll bemoaned that 'war with America is such a calamity that we must do all we can to avoid it. It involves not only ourselves, but all our North American colonies.'⁷

The fear of losing Canada was in no way soothed by responses from across the Atlantic. Americans had long assumed that Canada would eventually join America, and the American-Canadian border was a constant source of tension in Anglo-American

⁴ See Sean Connolly, ed., *Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 28 for military figures. The importance Britain placed on its military presence in Ireland is discussed in Virginia Crossman, 'The Army and Law and Order in the Nineteenth Century,' in Keith Jeffery and Thomas Bartlett, eds., *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 358-79.

⁵ Two relevant histories of British rule in Canada are Hugh Aitken and W.T. Easterbrook, *Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); and Philip Buckner, ed., *Canada and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). In the latter work, particularly see the chapters by Douglas McCalla and J.M. Bumsted.

⁶ This acknowledgement can be seen in Gladstone's 'Our Colonies' speech at Chester, 12 November 1855, which can be found in its entirety in Paul Knaplund, *Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Policy* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966), pp. 185-227.

Compensation was paid out as part of the 1848 *Canada Rebellion Losses Bill*. See Philip Girard, 'Liberty, Order, and Pluralism: The Canadian Experience,' in Jack Greene, ed., *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberty Overseas 1600-1900*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 177-80.

⁷ See Argyll to Gladstone, 10 December 1861, in Douglas, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, pp. 177-78. The belief that the Union would invade Canada if Britain intervened in the Civil War was further outlined by Edmund Head, the Governor General of Canada. See Head to Newcastle, 26 April 1861, cited in Brian Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union*, vol. 1 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), p. 65.

relations.⁸ Moreover, Secretary of State Seward and much of the Union press were incessant in their claims that any British attempt to intervene could have serious consequences for Canada. The *New York Herald* was practically rabid in its calls for re-directing the conflict towards Britain and Canada.⁹ In May 1861, Ambassador Lyons sent letters to Russell and Edmund Head, the Governor General of Canada, warning that Seward was considering annexation of Canada as compensation for any loss of the South, revealing both Federal designs on Canada, and British fears of the potential consequences of interference.¹⁰ Given the value Britain placed on its empire, risking Canada over intervention in a distant conflict was not something that appealed to the British leadership.

Overall, Britain's imperial concerns act as a contingent factor as to why Britain would not have sought to intervene in the American Civil War. With ongoing colonial distractions throughout the world, and the possibility of losing Canada in any Anglo-American conflict, Britain's empire hindered intervention, rather than providing a well of strength to draw on.

The other key consideration for Britain during the American Civil War was Europe. It is too simplistic to argue, as some historians do, that Britain would not intervene in the

⁸ Anglo-American relations with regards to Canada are discussed in greater detail in the following Chapter, but intermediate and relevant details can be seen in Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Re-interpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1963); and Donald Rakestraw and Howard Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1997) for the specifically American perspective, but also Robin Winks, *Canada and the United States: The Civil War Years* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press); and Kenneth Stevens, *Border Diplomacy: The Caroline and McLeod Affairs in Anglo-American Relations 1837-1842* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989).

⁹ See the *New York Herald*, 9 February 1861, and also later during the *Trent* affair, 17-19 November 1861. For a broader summary of the *Herald's* and other Union newspapers' impacts during the war see Winks, *Canada and the United States*; and Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, pp. 35-38.

¹⁰ See Lyons to Russell, 21 May 1861; and Lyons to Head, 22 May 1861, in Newton, ed., *Lord Lyons*, pp. 41 and 39-40 respectively.

One of Seward's first actions as Secretary of State had actually been to draft the highly contentious 'Dispatch No. 10,' a belligerent note threatening Britain with war if it even considered intervention. The note was, however, toned down by Lincoln before being sent. See Winks, *Canada and the United States*, pp. 34 and 47-47.

American Civil War because Continental relations were deemed far more important than some distant American conflict.¹¹ However, Britain's interaction with various Continental crises and nations must still be taken into account as part of the overall collage of reasons why an interventionist policy regarding America was eminently impractical for Britain.

Britain's pre-occupation with Europe in foreign policy and diplomacy was a natural consequence of the Continent's proximity and a Euro-centric perspective on the relative importance of different states. Historians such as Brian Holden Read have noted Britain's obsession with attempting to maintain a balance of power in Europe at this time.¹² Although the late 1850s and early 1860s were by no means the most violent years in European history, they were still full of problematic issues requiring at least part of Britain's attention. The most important of these, the growing power of France under Napoleon III, was a constant concern. As historian Charles Hamilton points out, a fierce naval rivalry had developed between the two nations in the late 1850s, and Britain allocated significant resources and political focus to building more ironclads than France.¹³ While France proved supportive during the American Civil War, in a letter to Russell, Palmerston stated that 'if we are engaged in a War on the other side of the Atlantic...he [Napoleon] will think himself free from our interference.'¹⁴

¹¹ For instance, John Kutolowski, 'The Effect of the Polish Insurrection of 1863 on American Civil War Diplomacy,' *The Historian*, 27, no. 4 (Aug., 1965), pp. 565-66, argues this of the Polish rebellion. Wilbur Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy, 1841-1861* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 1-2 and 8, argues that Britain's preoccupation with France predominated foreign policy thought. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power*, pp. 406-7, argues this more generally.

¹² See Brian Read, 'Power, Sovereignty, and the Great Republic: Anglo-American Diplomatic Relations in the Era of the Civil War,' *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 14, no. 2 (2003), pp. 48-49; Max Silberschmidt, *The United States and Europe: Rivals and Partners* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 62; Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 409-10; and Jonathan Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 186-88, for analysis with regards how important Europe and the balance of power there was to Britain, in comparison to American affairs.

¹³ C.I. Hamilton, *Anglo-French Naval Rivalry 1840-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 280-281 and 293; and Jones, *American Problem in British Diplomacy*, pp. 194-98, for further discussion of the naval rivalry. Russell's concerns about the naval arms race can also be seen in Russell to Cobden, 2 April 1861, FO 519/199.

¹⁴ Palmerston to Russell, 30 December 1861, FO 519/199.

Palmerston's fear of French meddling formed an important caveat in considerations of intervention, and French power-plays in Egypt and Mexico proved correct Palmerston's need to maintain a watchful eye on the French.¹⁵

France was not Britain's only Continental concern. Italian re-unification, growing Prussian and Austrian designs on Schleswig-Holstein and Poland's rebellion against Russia were just some of the many distractions that Britain's leaders dealt with at the time of the American Civil War.¹⁶ In July 1863, for instance, there was almost no discussion of the Civil War in the House of Commons, with most debate instead focussing on what position Britain should take in relation to the Polish rebellion.¹⁷ Disturbances demanding British time and attention abounded at this time, with American issues being only one – and not always the most pressing – issue at hand.

Much can also be learnt from the way Britain dealt with Continental crises. Clearly, Britain chose *not* to intervene in most foreign affairs at this time. This lack of appetite for intervention hints at a general British preference for avoiding conflict and must be considered as relevant context for British neutrality during the American Civil War. Three case studies are demonstrative of this reality; the Greek succession, the Polish rebellion against Russia, and the Austro-Prussian invasion of Schleswig-Holstein.

When in December 1862, the Greeks attempted to appoint the Queen's second son, Prince Alfred as their king, the British reaction reflected a desire to avoid entanglements in power struggles outside their empire. Although Alfred was nominated

¹⁵ See Kenneth Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 346-48 for British anger with France's involvement with the Suez Canal project.

See Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, p. 279, for a summary of Britain's relief that France failed to establish Mexico as a client state.

¹⁶ Some of the better summaries of British foreign policy in Europe during this period are Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century*; Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*; and Bourne, *Foreign Policy of Victorian England*.

¹⁷ See 1 July to 28 July 1863, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 171 (1863). There is further analysis of this prioritisation of the Polish developments in A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1814-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 133-41.

with overwhelming support in the Greek National Assembly, Russell pointed out that support for such a claim could lead to European tensions.¹⁸ Indeed, British policy-makers were so eager to avoid direct intervention that they offered Greece the Ionian Islands in return for them choosing a different constitutional monarch.¹⁹

The 1863 Polish rebellion against Russia was slightly more complex, since many in Britain actually supported the idea of an independent Polish state. Again, this did not prevent Britain from taking a non-interventionist position. *The Times*, for instance, argued that the British belief in liberalism required a measure of support for the Polish independence movement.²⁰ Likewise, debate in the Commons suggested strong support for the idea of a free Poland. However, both Parliament and Cabinet also tacitly accepted that Britain could not and should not intervene, since doing so would undermine the balance in Europe and cause more problems than intervention might solve.²¹

The final key instance in which Britain had both opportunity and motive to intervene came during the 1863-64 Schleswig-Holstein crisis, when Austria and Prussia were threatening to claim the Danish Duchies.²² In this case, Palmerston even told the Commons that anyone threatening the 'integrity' of Denmark 'would find in the result, that it would not be Denmark alone with which they would have to contend.'²³

¹⁸ See Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 171-73, for Alfred as the choice of the Greeks. 5 February 1863, *Parl. Deb.* (Lords), 3rd ser., 169 (1863), cols. 8-64 for Russell's explanation of Britain's position.

¹⁹ 5 February 1863, *Parl. Deb.* (Lords), 3rd ser., 169 (1863), cols. 8-64. Ultimately, Prince William of Denmark was chosen as an acceptable candidate.

²⁰ *Times*, 29 January and 12 February 1863.

A further summary of the gathering of public opinion behind the Polish cause can be seen in; Rachel Reid, 'The Franco-Italian War, Syria and Poland, 1859-1863,' in G.P. Gooch and A.W. Ward, eds., *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy 1783-1919*, vol. 2 (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), p. 459.

²¹ 20 July 1863, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 172 (1863), cols. 1058-136. See also; Reid, 'Franco-Italian War, Syria and Poland,' pp. 456-64; Taylor, *Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 133-41; and Kutolowski, 'Effect of the Polish Insurrection of 1863 on American Civil War Diplomacy,' pp. 560-77.

²² See L.D. Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1932); and Keith Sandiford, *Great Britain and the Schleswig-Holstein Question, 1848-64: A Study in Diplomacy, Politics and Public Opinion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975) for background on the Schleswig-Holstein issue.

²³ Palmerston, 23 July 1863, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 172 (1863), col. 1252.

Moreover, much of the British press was pro-Danish, with *The Times* eagerly cheering the Danish on.²⁴ Yet when push came to shove and Austria and Prussia invaded, Britain did nothing. Palmerston encouraged Denmark to concede, and promptly washed his hands of the matter.²⁵ Russell similarly backed off defending the Duchy, changing tack to argue that Britain would only intervene if Copenhagen itself were threatened.²⁶



Lord Palmerston, British Prime Minister (Courtesy Historical Portraits Image Library)

If Britain demonstrated a preference for remaining aloof in European cases, then surely intervention was even less likely in a distant and violent conflict where Britain had much to lose from siding with either combatant. It might not be true to say that Britain would never have intervened in America because it had not done so on the Continent, but it does suggest there was a precedent for non-intervention, and that a very convincing case would have been needed to bring about British action.

Pre-occupation with colonies and Continent aside, there was a far more practical reason why intervention in the American Civil War was logistically almost impossible. Between

²⁴ See for instance, *Times*, 26 December 1863.

²⁵ Steefel, *Schleswig-Holstein Question*, pp. 203-43; and Sandiford, *Great Britain and the Schleswig-Holstein Question*, p. 109.

²⁶ Russell's minutes from Cabinet, 25 June 1864, in Harold Temperley and Lillian Penson, eds., *Foundations of British Foreign Policy from Pitt to Salisbury* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 276. Temperley's work is a compilation of British foreign policy materials in their entirety.

colonial conflicts and wars in the Crimea and China, the British military had become increasingly overstretched by the 1860s. Furthermore, in Britain there was growing popular and parliamentary sentiment against increasing military spending and its corollary – debilitating taxes. Consequently, the size of the British force in North America and the West Indies was actually falling in the period leading up to the Civil War. Britain had neither the military capacity to intervene effectively, nor the men and ships to defend Canada if war with the Union did break out as a result of intervention. Foreign policy records and letters shows that Britain’s overstretch was at the forefront of governmental concerns and acted as an important check to any policy of intervention.

In the years preceding the American Civil War Britain began to lose its omnipresent aura as a series of confrontations, small and large, stretched military strength to its very breaking point. It all started with the Crimean War; around 98,000 British troops had been raised or diverted to fight against Russia, at the cost of approximately 25,000 dead and a bill of £50 million.²⁷ Breaking out soon after, the Second Opium War to secure Chinese trade was on a smaller scale, but still saw a dramatic rise in the number of English troops and ships stationed in that region: increasing from 16 ships and 3360 men in September 1856, to 63 ships and 7464 men in June 1860.²⁸ Meanwhile, 40,000 British troops were stationed in India before the Mutiny in 1857, but 70,000 remained to keep the peace throughout the 1860s.²⁹ The Maori Wars of the 1860s meant that the number of troops stationed in New Zealand

²⁷ Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, p. 269; and Winfried Baumgart, *The Crimean War 1853-1856* (London: Hodder Headline Group, 1999), p. 78.

²⁸ D. Bonner-Smith, *The Second China War 1856-1860* (London: Printed for the Navy Records Society, 1954), p. xxii. These numbers do not even include the 11,000 men sent with Lieutenant-General Sir James Hope Grant to finally quell the Chinese in 1860; see Ian Herson, *The Savage Empire: Forgotten Wars of the 19th Century* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2000), pp. 128-31.

²⁹ Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 246; and also Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 195-96, for a discussion of the attention Britain paid to re-organising the military structure in India after the Mutiny.

doubled from 6,000 to 12,000 between 1860 and 1865.³⁰ Ireland, even when peaceful, required a regular garrison of approximately 26,000.³¹ By 1861, in other words, international military engagements meant that Britain did not even have a force ready for the adequate defence of Britain, much less another war.³² Involvement in America's Civil War would have been unlikely at best with so many troops detailed elsewhere.

Problems of military overstretch were further exacerbated by a desire to cut spending. The fiscally ruinous Crimean War had resulted in substantial tax rises that Palmerston and Lewis already felt the need to address in the 1857 budget.³³ In order to reduce the income tax by half, significant cuts were made to military spending as part of a new foreign policy plan based on avoiding overseas adventurism when it did not directly encroach on British interests.³⁴ These savings were quickly overturned by the need to fund a military presence in India and revitalise the navy with ironclads, but the statement of intent was clear.³⁵ From the Tory Disraeli to the Whig Gladstone and the Manchester School Radicals, a fiscally frugal mood prevailed, making Parliament unwilling to sustain exorbitant domestic taxation programs for the sake of bloated foreign commitments. Hesitancy about foreign adventurism was clearly seen by the failure to update fortifications or renew garrisons in Canada and the delays in diverting

³⁰ See Thorp, 'New Zealand and the American Civil War,' p. 101; and Lewis to Browne, 26 July 1860, in Joel Wiener, ed., *Foreign Policy and Span of Empire 1689-1971*, vol. 4 (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1972), pp. 2791-92. In 1861 alone, 1,000 troops were transferred to New Zealand from India: see Denis Fairfax, 'British Army and Royal Navy Medical Reports and the Second New Zealand War 1860-1866,' *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 88 (2010), pp. 152-56.

³¹ Connolly, *Oxford Companion to Irish History*, p. 28.

³² Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 246.

³³ Anderson, *A Liberal State at War*, pp. 190-248; and Olive Anderson, 'Loans versus Taxes: British Financial Policy in the Crimean War,' *Economic History Review*, 16, no. 2 (1963), pp. 314-27, for a summary of the costs incurred in fighting the Crimean War, and the extent to which this hampered future British budgets.

³⁴ Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, pp. 72-73.

³⁵ Defence expenditure actually rose by £8.4 million between 1859 and 1862, but this was due to the need to re-equip the British navy, rather than expand the military. See Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p. 185.

troops to New Zealand during the Maori Wars.³⁶ By the outbreak of the American Civil War, British politicians were well aware of the limitations of military spending and the consequent restrictions on the use of military force for interventionist policy.

The key consequence of military overstretch in relation to potential British intervention in the American Civil War was that there were no longer enough troops or ships to defend Canada, let alone impose the British will upon the Federals. Britain's involvement in conflicts such as the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny had left its North American forces terribly threadbare. From 25 ships in January 1857, the size of Britain's combined North American and West Indian combined fleet fell to a mere 17 ships in February 1861.³⁷ As a point of comparison, the Union navy contained 264 ships in the same year.³⁸ Of course, Britain's fleet overall was superior to the Union's in both size and quality, but these ships were tied up throughout the Empire, and as has been demonstrated, there was little money to rapidly expand the navy.³⁹ The First Lord of the Admiralty, the Duke of Somerset, admitted the impossibility of transferring ships cheaply and quickly to the American coast.⁴⁰ How could Britain consider breaking the Union blockade, if it did not have enough ships in the Atlantic to guarantee success?

³⁶ The argument that British foreign policy was becoming less adventurous and willing to spend on the expansion of the military is made in Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, pp. 266-67; Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp. 185-88; Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 222; and Brettell, 'Enduring Importance of Foreign Policy Dominance,' pp. 155 and 161-62.

For a summary of the Manchester School's belief that foreign policy should be non-interventionist see Porter, *Critics of Empire*, pp. 10-13.

For the delay in properly equipping the Canadian defences see 'Report of the Commissioners appointed to consider the Defences of Canada, 1862,' pp. 26-27, WO 33/11; and Williams to CO, 23 June 1861, CO 42/627. For the delays in sending troops to New Zealand and the financial justification for this see Lewis to Browne, 26 July 1860, in Wiener, *Foreign Policy and Span of Empire*, vol. 4, pp. 2791-92.

³⁷ See ADM 8/136 and ADM 8/140 respectively.

³⁸ Regis Courtemanche, *No Need of Glory: the British Navy in American Waters, 1860-1864* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977), p. 59.

³⁹ Courtemanche, *No Need of Glory*, p. 59.

As a measure of the overstretch problem the British Atlantic anti-slavery naval squadron, the closest potential re-enforcements, fell below 80 guns in strength for the first time in fifteen years in the late 1850s; see H.G. Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations 1814-1862* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1933), p. 130.

⁴⁰ Somerset to Russell, 19 and 26 July 1861, PRO 30/22/24.

The situation was even more dire in Canada, which the British leadership admitted could not be successfully defending in case of conflict. Aside from the impracticality of defending a border that extended over 1500 miles, Canadian forces were shorthanded and underprepared for conflict. Only 5000 British troops remained there in 1861, plus a similar number of poorly trained Canadian militia.⁴¹ Parliamentary debate in May 1861 acknowledged that Canada was undermanned, and the Duke of Argyll and Governor Head declaimed that conflict with the Union must be avoided at all costs in order to preserve Canada.⁴² Even after the *Trent* affair and growing tensions between Britain and the Union made it both clear and urgent that Canada needed reinforcement, it was still difficult to take action. Admiral Alexander Milne argued that transport large amounts of materiel or men could not be transported during winter.⁴³ Their North American asset was as fragile as it was precious, and British policy-makers were not willing to risk it.

Intervention in the American Civil War was neither in line with Britain's foreign policy tradition nor the international situation. With a fixation on the colonies and the Continent, and with significant distractions in each of these areas, Britain's attention to America was only ever going to be fragmented. Moreover, these distractions were so substantial that dealing with them left Britain impossibly undermanned and completely unprepared for intervention in the American conflict.

⁴¹ Williams to CO, 23 June 1861, CO 42/630; and Head to Newcastle, 29 June 1861, no. 43, CO 42/627.

⁴² 17 May 1861, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 163 (1861), col. 2194.

See also, Argyll to Gladstone, 10 December 1861, in Douglas, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, pp. 177-78; and Head to Newcastle, 26 April 1861, cited in Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union*, vol. 1, p. 65.

A similar complaint was made in late November 1861 by Major General Hasting Doyls, the command of the Maritime Provinces; see Courtemanche, *No Need of Glory*, p. 43.

⁴³ Admiral Milne was the Commander-in-Chief of the North American and West Indies Fleet. See 'Milne Memorandum,' March 1864, in Courtemanche, *No Need of Glory*, p. 45. The same point was made by the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Duke of Somerset; Somerset to Newcastle, 17 October 1861, ADM 1/5766.

Chapter Four

Those Haughty British, those Damn'd Republicans.

Given the preceding evidence about how improbable Britain's intervention in America's war would have been, it is worth asking why so many scholars have written books based on the opposite assumption. One reason for this is the extraordinarily tense nature of diplomatic exchanges between the two nations in the first years of the Civil War. Judging solely by the angry words and insults swapped back and forth – in diplomatic dispatches, official correspondence, and newspaper commentary – one might be forgiven for assuming that war was just around the corner. But, as this chapter reveals, such bluster was nothing new. Since the 1830s, Britain and America had established a tradition of diplomacy and conflict resolution that was applied on numerous occasions. When dealing with the slave trade and American-Canadian disputes, as well as smaller crises including the Enlistment and San Juan Crises of 1855-56, Britain and America followed a process of diplomatic bluster and compromise. Each nation postured for the sake of honour at first, either to satisfy the public or to present a firm front, but moved to a conciliatory position before conflict ever broke out. This ritualised diplomatic rhetoric and relationship formed the basis of Anglo-American relations during the Civil War, but far from encouraging intervention, it informed Britain's maintenance of a non-interventionist position. While most historians have leapt straight into the Civil War, this chapter contextualises pre-war diplomacy before more fully applying this knowledge to transatlantic Civil War crises in the final chapter.

The relationship between Canada and America was always going to be an obvious sticking point between the Americans and British. For the British, Canada was an

important part of its empire, providing a foothold in North America. For the Americans, the Monroe Doctrine and the idea of Manifest Destiny demanded northward expansion, rejected European interference in the Americas and viewed an American takeover of Canada as ultimately inevitable.¹ The stand-off was not aided by the vague 1814 Treaty of Ghent which established no clear boundary, resulting in regular border disputes.² It should never be imagined that Britain and America always enjoyed the friendly relationship of the twentieth century – in the aftermath of the War of 1812 a third Anglo-American war was seen on both sides of the Atlantic as a distinct possibility.

The most significant period of Anglo-American tension over Canada occurred between 1837 and 1842, when several small crises combined into a serious disagreement between Britain and America. The Canadian rebellion began as an internal issue in 1837, but soon took on an international aspect when the rebels received support and succour across the border in America. An officially sanctioned Canadian raid, led to the boarding and burning of the *Caroline*, a ship suspected of supplying the Canadian rebels, on 29 December 1837. Unfortunately, in doing so the Canadian troops crossed into American territory. Nearly three years later, in September 1840, one of the organisers of the raid, Alexander McLeod, was arrested in New York for the destruction of the *Caroline* which had led to at least one death, and put on trial with

¹ Although the phrase ‘Manifest Destiny’ only came into common parlance in journalist John O’Sullivan’s tract, ‘Annexation,’ *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 17, no. 1 (July-Aug., 1845), pp. 5-10, the notion itself had been well established in American (and in particular Democratic) thought. See Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, pp. 24-60; and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, for further details. The Monroe Doctrine was announced by President Monroe in 1823; see President Monroe to Congress, *Monroe Doctrine*, 2 December 1823, in Avalon Project. Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 218-219; and Howard Jones, ‘The “Caroline” Affair,’ *The Historian*, 38, no. 3 (May 1976), pp. 485-86; Jones, *American Problem in British Diplomacy*, pp. 71-73; and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, provide further background on this policy.

² *Treaty of Ghent*, 24 December 1814, in Avalon Project, which was used as a supplement to the arrangements of the 1783 Treaty of Peace which created the United States, but failed to establish clear territorial definitions. See ‘Article 2,’ *The Definitive Treaty of Peace*, 30 September 1783, in Avalon Project.

the possibility of the death penalty.³ Meanwhile, on the Aroostook River border, the inability to come to a concrete agreement on geography and demarcation left New Brunswick and Maine lumbermen engaging in a series of clashes.⁴ At each point, Britain and America seemed a little bit closer to conflict, and at times the diplomatic rhetoric used was certainly aggressive, yet ultimately both nations made every effort to compromise and achieve a peaceful resolution, establishing a precedent for transatlantic relations during the Civil War.

When Colonel Allan MacNab and Captain Andrew Drew sunk the *Caroline* in 1837, they returned to Canada as heroes, but the situation quickly soured with the realisation that they had crossed into America to do so. The inflammatory rhetoric of newspapers like the *New York Herald* – which happily proclaimed the inevitability of war and the ‘silent, sullen, settled determination for vengeance’ among the young men of New York – might not have been reflective of official governmental views, but still hinted at the seriousness of the crisis.⁵ Meanwhile, the British were becoming increasingly frustrated with America’s inability to prevent its citizens from interfering in Canadian matters. When Secretary of State John Forsyth, in a note to the British Minister in Washington, Henry Fox, called the *Caroline* raid an ‘extraordinary outrage’ that would ‘necessarily form the subject of a demand for redress,’ the Governor of Canada, George Arthur, responded by questioning America’s role in stirring up trouble in Canada.⁶

³ For a summary of the events of that night, see Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, pp. 13-16; and Jones, ‘The “Caroline” Affair,’ pp. 485-92. These works also deal with these crises more broadly.

⁴ ‘Article 2,’ *Definitive Treaty of Peace*, 30 September 1783, established a vague border, but was repeatedly altered by confusion over geography and continued border clashes. See also, Francis Carroll, ‘The Passionate Canadians: The Historical Debate about the Eastern-Canadian Border,’ *New England Quarterly*, 70, no. 1 (Mar., 1997), pp. 84-86 for a brief history of Aroostook border problems.

⁵ *New York Herald*, 5 and 8 January 1838.

⁶ Forsyth to Fox, 5 January 1838, cited in Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, p. 19.

However, from the start, there was also a general desire to solve the *Caroline* issue peacefully, or at least sweep it under the carpet. In January 1838, President Van Buren called for reparations, but he also attempted to crack down on Americans crossing the border, helped pass a stronger neutrality bill that promised American non-intervention in the Canadian insurrection, and sent Palmerston a note expressing regret about the state of transatlantic relations and calling for a peaceful resolution.⁷ Convinced of Van Buren's sincerity, Fox proceeded to work hard towards peace, with Britain slowly moving towards taking responsibility for the raid.⁸

The British were increasingly willing to accept fault for the *Caroline* raid, but they failed to do so quickly enough. Consequently, when Alexander McLeod was arrested in September 1840, he fell under New York jurisdiction and was not protected by British admission of the raid being a public international act, rather than a private crime.⁹ Moreover, because of the separation of state and federal rights, the American government was unable to simply release McLeod, while the British acknowledgement of the *Caroline* raid as an act of state in December 1840 came too late to prevent the trial going ahead.¹⁰ An awkward moment ensued. Britain refused to accept that nothing could be done to free McLeod, and both Houses of Parliament made the potential

Arthur to Colborne, 13 March 1838, in George Arthur, *The Arthur Papers, being the Canadian Papers, mainly Confidential, Private, and Demi-Official of Sir George Arthur*, vol. 1, Charles Sanderson, ed. (Toronto: Toronto Public Library, 1943-1959), pp. 61-62.

⁷ The call for reparations was made to the House of Representatives on 8 January 1838. See *Congressional Globe*, 25th Cong., 2nd sess., 8 January 1838, 82-83.

The passing of the neutrality bill occurred on 9 January 1838. See *Congressional Globe*, 25th Cong., 2nd sess., 9 January 1838, 88, 103, 119 and 184.

Van Buren to Palmerston, 16 May 1838, cited in Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, p. 35.

⁸ Fox to Palmerston, 20 April and 10 August 1838, FO 115/69. Jones, 'The "Caroline" Affair,' pp. 495-98, argues that negotiations proceeded slowly, but in a conciliatory fashion.

⁹ The difference between a public and private offence being the culpability of the individuals involved. See Jones, 'The "Caroline" Affair,' pp. 497-99.

¹⁰ Further detail on the distinction between state and federal rights in this case can be seen in Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, pp. 74-80.

See Fox to Forsyth, 13 December 1840, cited in Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, p. 75, for Britain's admission of culpability.

execution of McLeod a point of national honour that would require retribution.¹¹ Britain also began to increase the number of troops in Canada, raising their force from 2,000 to 10,000 regulars by 1841, and attempting to recruit and train 21,000 further volunteers.¹²

Nonetheless, fears for war were seriously misplaced. In an attempt to soothe British anger, America ignored the fact that Britain had too many ships on the Great Lakes, in violation of the Rush-Bagot treaty.¹³ Seward, at this time Governor of New York, promised to pardon McLeod regardless of the trial outcome.¹⁴ In an attempt to prevent another 'McLeod case' from occurring, President Tyler also moved to introduce legislation which would allow the Federal Government to intervene in states' affairs in questions of foreign policy.¹⁵ Meanwhile, despite British consternation about the upcoming McLeod trial, Britain was also trying to prevent the conflict from escalating, releasing James Grogan, an instigator in the Canadian rebellion who had been kidnapped from American soil, and offering whatever compensation required to settle the issue.¹⁶ These actions showed just how willing both nations were to ease tensions. By the time the case against McLeod collapsed in September 1841, Anglo-American relations were approaching normalcy.

The final crisis relating to Canada during this period was the bloodless Aroostook War regarding the placement of the Maine-New Brunswick border. This was

¹¹ 8 and 9 February 1841, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 56 (1841), cols. 367-74 and 456-59; and 8 February 1841, *Parl. Deb.* (Lords), 3rd ser., 56 (1841), cols. 364-66.

¹² Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power*, pp. 78-79.

¹³ The Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 stipulated the ratios of British and American naval forces on the Great Lakes. See *Rush-Bagot Proclamation*, 28 April 1817, in Avalon Project. For America's concession on this issue see Webster to Seward, 21 September 1841, in Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, pp. 133-34.

¹⁴ Seward to Crittenden, 31 May 1841, in William Seward, *The Works of William H. Seward*, vol. 2, George Baker, ed. (New York: Redfield, 1853), pp. 586-88.

¹⁵ This bill, the Remedial Justice Act, was eventually passed in August 1842. *Congressional Globe*, 27th Cong., 2nd sess., August 1842, pt. 1, 891-92.

¹⁶ Aberdeen to Fox, 20 October 1841, FO 115/76; and Aberdeen to Fox, 3 November 1841, FO 115/75.

an important region for the lumber industry and a series of citizen skirmishes ensued in an attempt to claim it.¹⁷ There was certainly a degree of bluster on both sides; the House Committee on Foreign Affairs authorised Van Buren to resist British aggression on 28 February 1839, while Palmerston claimed that further incident could trigger a British response.¹⁸ But once again, both nations also made immediate attempts to resolve the issue, demonstrating that such bluster was part of a process of appearing firm. On 27 February 1839, Fox and Forsyth signed a memorandum that would see militia from New Brunswick and Maine retreat voluntarily and any captured officers released, while both nations were to cooperate in preventing further transgressions and deciding where the border would ultimately be.¹⁹ Further compromise in terms of the division of the disputed territory was successfully arranged in talks between General Winfield Scott and the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, John Harvey. This agreement in particular eased tensions since it involved the cooperation of the aggrieved Maine and New Brunswick parties, and it formed the basis for later negotiations on the border issue.²⁰

The ultimate conclusion of the American-Canadian-British crises of 1837 to 1841 came with the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842, which showed the extent to which both American and British diplomats were willing to compromise in an attempt to resolve existing tensions. As a prelude to the signing of the treaty, the British envoy, Lord Ashburton, accepted the 'inviolable character' of America's territory and expressed

¹⁷ A study of the Aroostook War itself can be seen in Howard Jones, 'Anglophobia and the Aroostook War,' *New England Quarterly*, 48, no. 4 (Dec., 1975), pp. 519-39.

¹⁸ See *Congressional Globe*, 25th Cong., 3rd sess., 28 February 1839, 229 and 232 for the powers given to Van Buren.

Palmerston to Fox, 1 May 1839, cited in Jones, 'Anglophobia and the Aroostook War,' p. 532.

¹⁹ Memo by Fox and Forsyth, 27 February 1839, FO 5/331.

²⁰ The Scott-Harvey agreement was ratified in March 1839. See Jones, 'Anglophobia and the Aroostook War,' pp. 535-36.

regret over the entire *Caroline* affair.²¹ Secretary of State, Daniel Webster, in turn waived the need for compensation to be paid and let slide the fact that Britain did not properly apologise.²² In order to facilitate a final conclusion to the Aroostook problem, Webster also hired journalists to write articles in New England newspapers urging compromise, while personally lobbying Maine and Massachusetts representatives to the same end.²³ The Webster-Ashburton Treaty conscientiously addressed all points of border-tension, with Articles One to Seven precisely detailing the American-Canadian border in the North-East.²⁴ Overall, the Webster-Ashburton Treaty was a fitting conclusion to a series of negotiations enacted in good faith and re-enforced the desire of both nations to come to a mutually agreeable compromise.

The precedent established by the peaceful resolution of the 1837-41 Canadian crises quickly began to define transatlantic diplomacy, whereby initial bluster reflected an acceptance of the need to appease nationalistic sentiment and appear firm, while the ensuing compromise demonstrated just how determined both nations were to maintain a settled relationship. For instance, when Polk became President in 1844 he came to power on a platform that included claiming Oregon Country up to the parallel 54°40' north.²⁵ Given that American territory traditionally extended to the 49th parallel, this was an aggressive claim, affirmed by Polk's assessment that 'the only way to treat John Bull was to look him straight in the eye.'²⁶ Such brinkmanship triggered patriotic outbursts on both sides of the Atlantic. The *Illinois State Register* declared on 9 May

²¹ Ashburton to Webster, 28 July 1842, cited in Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, p. 165.

²² Webster to Ashburton, 6 August 1842, cited in Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, p. 166. See also, Jones, 'The "Caroline" Affair,' pp. 499-501.

²³ Carroll, 'The Passionate Canadians,' pp. 86-87.

²⁴ 'Articles 1-7,' *Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 9 August 1842, in Avalon Project.

²⁵ Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, pp. 31-32 and 63.

²⁶ David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation; Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), p. 328.

See also, Sam Hynes, *James K. Polk and the Expansionist Impulse* (Arlington: University of Texas, 1997), p. 118 for a summary of Polk's approach.

1845 that ‘nothing would please the people of the entire West half so well as a war with England!’²⁷ The London *Spectator* countered with accusations of American lust for power and the territory of its neighbours, a poignant critique given America’s ongoing entanglements with Texas and Mexico.²⁸ However, with the threat of conflict gathering some momentum, and Polk having gained the reputation for aggressive leadership that he desired, both nations quickly slipped back into the rhetoric of peace.²⁹ When a vote on 54°40’ was put to the Senate in 1846, only 14 out of 55 senators voted for the measure.³⁰ Instead, the Oregon Treaty was signed by Secretary of State James Buchanan and British envoy Richard Pakenham, re-confirming the 49th parallel as the most appropriate territorial boundary and granting British ships free passage along the Columbia River.³¹ As with the earlier Canadian crises, the Oregon dispute was easily settled once America and Britain accepted that both wanted peace was desired were willing to compromise.

During the Civil War itself, the final resolution of the *Trent* affair, in which America conceded a point of honour and Britain was magnanimous, holds direct parallels with these Canadian crises. Defensive re-enforcements, angry newspapers and an eventually peaceful settlement in which both nations maintained some honour became common aspects of Anglo-American diplomacy before and during the Civil War. Although these similarities will be discussed at length in the following chapter, they are worth noting in advance, as a measure of how a tradition of conciliatory diplomacy

²⁷ *Illinois State Register*, 9 May 1845. The Midwest in particular was pro-war with Britain during this period. See Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, pp. 37-38.

²⁸ *Spectator*, 2 August 1845.

²⁹ An assessment of Polk’s personality comes through in Hynes, *Polk and the Expansionist Impulse*, pp. 134-38 and 192-95; and Pletcher, *Diplomacy of Annexation*, pp. 590-93.

³⁰ *Senate Journal*, 29th Cong., 1st sess., 1846, 555.

³¹ *Treaty with Britain, in Regards to Limits Westward of the Rocky Mountains*, 15 June 1846, in Avalon Project.

came to be established between Britain and America, which helped maintain peace even when certain voices screamed for war.

Anglo-American disputes regarding Canada were ultimately diffused, despite initial fears of war and proclamations of anger, as both America and Britain revealed a willingness to find peaceful solutions. Yet, the Canadian border problem was a traditional territorial dispute. How would the two nations react if tensions touched on more ideological and moral issues? The handling of the debate regarding the slave-trade and the right-of-search at sea showed that even in more complex disputes, Britain and America made every effort to conclude negotiations on a conciliatory note and avoid conflict. Although relations became very heated during the 1840 and 1858 right-of-search crises, the permanent undercurrent of tension relating to the slave trade in antebellum Anglo-American relations was always carefully managed– even when occasionally aggressive rhetoric suggested otherwise.

Both Britain and America had abolished the slave trade by 1808, and in the Treaty of Ghent both agreed that the trade was ‘irreconcilable with the principles of justice and humanity.’³² However, from this point of agreement policies diverged rapidly. The British preferred an active crusade against the slave trade to merely legislating against its existence, claiming that the issue was one of morality. Indeed, historian Chaim Kaufmann argues that there was a strong humanitarian element to the British position on the slave trade, and in latter times both Palmerston and Russell were certainly fervent in their hatred of slavery.³³ Accordingly, after the Napoleonic Wars

³² America abolished the slave trade with the 1807 *Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves*, while Britain followed suit with the 1807 *Slave Trade Act*.

‘Article 10,’ *Treaty of Ghent*, 24 December 1814.

³³ Kaufmann, ‘Britain’s Sixty-Year Campaign,’ pp. 639-40. The same claim is made by Gosse, ‘Emergence of African American Politics,’ pp. 1003-1028, who summarises the British position on the slave trade issue.

Britain did all it could to enact treaties with all major nations to ensure reciprocal rights-of-search and mixed courts for the trial of slavers. In 1814 and 1817, Portugal and Spain were bribed into accepting such a treaty, and by the 1841 Quintuple Treaty America was the only significant nation outside the British mutual search treaty system.³⁴

On the other hand, America saw the British position on the slave trade as cynical posturing, and as an attempt to retain naval control of the Atlantic. After all, the reciprocity of the right-of-search agreements was effectively a myth given that few, if any, slavers used the British flag. Consequently, America feared that Britain would use such a treaty to harass America's mercantile fleet.³⁵ American politician and jurist William Lawrence summarised America's problem with Britain's aggressive approach to the slave trade when he claimed that Britain was using slavery as a mask for imperialism and to quell American growth.³⁶ For the American government, the issue was not slavery and morality, but the indelible maritime rights of nations, and America feared that a right-of-search treaty might begin the slippery slope back to British impressment.³⁷ Lawrence also made the claim that Britain was actually profiting from its actions through the confiscation of property and indenture of slaves.³⁸ Although the

Gladstone comments on Palmerston's abolitionist fervour in Gladstone to Argyll, 6 June 1860, in Gladstone, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. 6, p. 494. See also Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 40. Meanwhile, Russell's belief in ending the slave trade is shown in the following parliamentary speech; 19 March 1850, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 109 (1850), cols. 1173-83.

³⁴ Bernard Nelson, 'The Slave Trade as a Factor in British Foreign Policy 1815-1862,' *The Journal of Negro History*, 27, no. 2 (Apr., 1942), pp. 196-200; and Arthur Corwin, *Spain and the Abolition of Slavery in Cuba 1817-1880* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1967), pp. 28-32 for Portugal and Spain respectively. For the Quintuple Treaty, signed on 20 December 1841, see *British and Foreign State Papers 1841-1842*, vol. xxx (London: James Ridgeway & Sons, 1858), pp. 269-98.

See Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 187-90; and Miers, *Ending of the Slave Trade*, pp. 14-15 for more details on the British treaty agreements.

³⁵ See Miers, *Ending of the Slave Trade*, p. 13

³⁶ William Lawrence, *Visitation and Search* (Boston: Little Brown, 1858), pp. 16-17.

³⁷ Impressment had been particularly prevalent during the Napoleonic Wars; see Nelson, 'Slave Trade as a Factor in British Foreign Policy,' p. 203; and George Brooke Jr., 'The Role of the United States in the Suppression of the African Slave Trade,' *American Neptune*, 21, no. 1 (Jan., 1961), p. 31.

³⁸ Lawrence, *Visitation and Search*, p. 166.

latter argument is tenuous, there is little doubt that Britain had ulterior motives. In every British treaty with African chiefs after 1840, for instance, alongside the suppression of the slave trade, Britain included a clause stating that:

The subjects of the Queen of England may always trade freely with the people of (*insert land here*) ... and the Chiefs of (*insert land here*) pledge themselves to show no favours and give no privilege to the ships and traders of other countries, which they do not show to those of England.³⁹

Accordingly, the American government protested against any British attempts to search ships flying the American flag, and avoided signing any mutual search treaties, claiming that to do so would be to void America's maritime neutrality.

While proclaiming the offensiveness of Britain's right-of-search policy, America actually did very little to stop the slave trade. Consequently, the American flag, whether flown legitimately or otherwise, became a haven for slavers. By the 1840s, the United States still refused to allocate ships to patrol for slavers who benefited from America's neutrality.⁴⁰ Even the American governor of Moravia, Thomas Buchanan, admitted that 'the chief obstacle to the very active measures pursued by the British government for the suppression of the slave-trade on the coast, is the American flag.'⁴¹ Until the presidency of Lincoln no slaver suffered the death penalty.⁴² The stage was set for conflict, with both the British and Americans believing that they were in the right.

The threat of conflict remained omnipresent because the British Navy and government tended to ignore the fact that they had no legal grounds to search suspected American slavers. Attempting to find a loophole through which to continue their searches, the British devised the principle of right-of-visit as an alternative to the

³⁹ Text of treaty taken from Warren Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 6.

⁴⁰ Brooke Jr., 'United States in the Suppression of the African Slave Trade,' p. 30.

⁴¹ Andrew Foote, *Africa and the American Flag* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854), p. 152.

⁴² Brooke Jr., 'United States in the Suppression of the African Slave Trade,' p. 29.

right-of-search. This meant that British cruisers could inspect any ship to check if it was flying false colours, rather than checking in greater detail for illegal activity such as slave-trading.⁴³ Under this principle, Britain intensified its patrols between 1837 and 1841.⁴⁴ Palmerston, then Foreign Secretary, claimed that a preliminary right-of-search agreement had been reached in March 1840 between Commander Tucker of Britain's *Wolverene* and Lt. John Paine of America's *Grampus*.⁴⁵ However, this agreement had never been sanctioned by the American government and the United States maintained its stringent objections to right-of-search and visit. The American Minister to Britain, Andrew Stevenson, wrote to Palmerston, demanding the cessation of Britain's boarding policy.⁴⁶ By 1841, President Tyler made clear his feelings on the issue in his address to Congress, stating that he saw no difference between the right-of-search and right-of-visit, and that if Britain detained any legitimately American ship they would be liable for damages.⁴⁷ When discussing the right-of-search, a report by South Carolina Congressman Francis Pickens accused Britons of global imperialism, attacked their 'grasping spirit,' and claimed that 'war with its effects will be precipitated upon with much more rapidity than formerly.'⁴⁸ Combined with the ongoing situation regarding the Canadian border and the fact that the British had chosen to manumit the escaped

⁴³ William Mathieson, *Great Britain and the Slave Trade, 1839-1865* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1929), p. 69; and Nelson, 'Slave Trade as a Factor in British Foreign Policy,' p. 205.

⁴⁴ Brooke Jr., 'United States in the Suppression of the African Slave Trade,' pp. 31-32.

⁴⁵ Palmerston to Fox, 17 June 1840, in *British and Foreign State Papers 1840-1841*, vol. xxix (London: James Ridgeway & Sons, 1857), pp. 622-24.

⁴⁶ Stevenson to Palmerston, 14 August 1840, in *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. xxx, pp. 1133-35.

⁴⁷ *House Journal*, 27th Cong., 2nd sess., 1841, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁸ Francis Pickens' 13 February 1841 report as chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, cited in Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, pp. 83-86.

In a similar vein, General Cass called for war if Britain continued to search American ships: Cass to Webster, 3 October 1842, in Daniel Webster, *The Diplomatic and Official Papers of Daniel Webster* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1848), p. 190.

slaves from the American vessel the *Creole* in November 1841, a major crisis seemed to be brewing, with disagreement about the slave trade at the heart of it.⁴⁹

Yet, as with the Canadian territorial disputes, righteous anger turned out to be an attempt to establish a better bargaining position in the inevitable and peaceful negotiations that followed. Accordingly, a substantial part of the Webster-Ashburton talks focussed on settling the issue of the slave trade, with the two parties eventually coming to a compromise of sorts. Britain would have no right at all to board any ship showing an American flag, while America promised to toughen its position on the slave trade and maintain a permanent and sizable naval contingent on the West African coast.⁵⁰ Britain also agreed to pay compensation for any seizures of slaves before the 1833 British slavery abolition act, but avoided reparations for actions after this point.⁵¹ Moreover, the rhetoric in Britain also changed; in the House of Lords the Earl of Powis proclaimed the importance of Anglo-American peace, while the Marquess of Lansdowne accepted (grudgingly) the American position on right-of-search.⁵² A potentially dangerous conflict was once again averted through the willingness of both parties to compromise before the situation truly escalated, and the initial bluster was shown to just be a form of diplomatic rhetoric.

The divisive issue of slavery did not recede as a factor in Anglo-American relations, despite these compromises. After initial success in reducing the slave trade, America allocated fewer and fewer resources to its African Squadron, and by the 1850s

⁴⁹ In November 1841, the slaves on board the *Creole* mutinied and sailed the ship to the British Bahamas. Here they were manumitted, causing an international incident as America demanded the return of the slaves. See Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, pp. 71-96.

⁵⁰ 'Article 8,' *Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 9 August 1842.

⁵¹ Lawrence, *Visitation and Search*, p. 67.

⁵² 2 February 1843, *Parl. Deb. (Lords)*, 3rd ser., 66 (1843), cols. 6-62. A similar point was made by Lord Brougham, 16 February 1843, *Parl. Deb. (Lords)*, 3rd ser., 66 (1843), col. 695.

the number of slaves shipped across the Atlantic was rising again.⁵³ Moreover, most slavers were using the immunity of the American flag to prevent obstruction from the more officious British navy.⁵⁴ As in the 1830s, the British response was to search American ships, and for just a moment in 1858 it seemed like war might erupt between Britain and America. However, with *The Times* preaching calm, and politicians and diplomats in both nations demanding peace, the result, once again, was compromise.

In October 1857, Commander Wise of the *Vesuvius* captured the American vessel, *Bremen*, which was at the time flying an American flag. The same month, Commander Hunt of the *Alecto* searched and captured the *Louis McLane*, towing it to a British court in Sierra Leone. In March of the following year, the British cruiser, *Styx*, fired upon and boarded the *N.B. Borden*, while in May Commander Hunt struck again, taking control of the *Caroline*. In each case the British captains claimed that the captured vessels were slave traders seeking the protection of the American flag, and that the captured crews voluntarily removed the American flag and either handed over their papers or threw them overboard.⁵⁵ Lord Napier, the British Minister to the United States, claimed that the boarded captains had confirmed their guilt by lowering the American flag, providing false papers or throwing their papers overboard –though in the case of the *Caroline*, it was embarrassingly discovered that she only carried hides and ivory.⁵⁶ Lord Napier also accused America of allowing the slave trade under the protection of its flag.⁵⁷

⁵³ In the 1850s, the slave trade renewed its growth, despite the collapse of the Brazilian trade in the late 1840s. See Klein, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 190-91.

⁵⁴ This use is discussed more fully in Miers, *Ending of the Slave Trade*, pp. 19-20; and W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States, 1638-1870* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1898), pp. 134-35, 49.

⁵⁵ See Napier to Cass, 16 April 1858, 'Correspondence with the United States' government on the question of right of visit,' *HCPP*, p. 12; 1858(2446) XXXIX.365; and Boston to Cass, with an attachment from James Brightman of the *N.B. Borden*, 22 April 1858, in *Senate Exec. Doc.*, 35th cong., 1st sess., 1858, 59; and Richard Coxe, *The Present State of the African Slave Trade* (Washington: L. Towers, 1858), pp. 16-22.

⁵⁶ Napier to Cass, 16 April 1858, 'Question of right of visit,' *HCPP*, p. 12.
For the second part see Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ Napier to Malmesbury, 19 April 1858, *HCPP*, 2446.

Meanwhile, the Americans were outraged at this breach of the sanctity of their flag and neutrality. General Lewis Cass, the Secretary of State, rejected Britain's jurisdiction over vessels flying the American flag, even if they were suspected of being slave traders, since America had not agreed to a mutual right-of-search pact with Britain.⁵⁸ George Dallas, the American Minister to Britain re-iterated the sanctity of American ships and called for an inquiry into British actions and for hefty restitution.⁵⁹

Tempers on both sides of the Atlantic were quickly exploited by sensationalist journalism. The *Saturday Review* in Britain claimed that America preyed on the 'fears of the weak' and supported slavery.⁶⁰ The *New York Herald*, supported by the *New York Times* and *Charlestown Mercury*, responded by asserting that 'compromise will not save us from dishonour,' and accused the British of hating the freedom Americans possessed.⁶¹ America and Britain seemed to be making the right-of-search a point of honour.

Nonetheless, common sense ultimately prevailed as aggressive rhetoric was revealed to be a negotiating tactic, rather than a genuine threat of war. *The Times*, for instance, maintained its reputation for sensible action within the confines of British interests by taking the stance that while America's position was morally reprehensible, Britain was acting illegally and not helping the situation.⁶² By June 1858, the Earl of

Don Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery*, Ward McAfee, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), is a valuable study of America's official blind eye towards participation in the slave trade.

⁵⁸ See Cass to Napier, 10 April 1858, 'Question of right of visit,' *HCPP*, pp. 3-10; Cass to Napier, 4 May 1858, and Cass to Dallas, 18 May 1858, in *Senate Exec. Doc.*, 35th Cong., 1st sess., 1858, 59.

There is also discussion as to how genuine (in terms of morality) the British desire to completely eradicate the slave-trade war, something which is discussed in Gosse, 'Emergence of African American Politics,' pp. 1003-1028. This issue will be further referenced later in this chapter.

⁵⁹ Dallas to Malmesbury, 3 June 1858, 'Question of right of visit,' *HCPP*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ *Saturday Review*, 12 June 1858.

⁶¹ *New York Herald*, 20 September 1859.

See also, *New York Times*, 20 and 29 May 1858; and *Charlestown Mercury*, 25 May 1858.

⁶² *Times*, 3 June 1858. See also Richard Fulton, 'The London "Times" and the Anglo-American Boarding Dispute of 1858,' *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 17, no. 2 (1993), p. 137 for a more detailed assessment of the *Times*' role during this crisis.

Malmesbury, as Foreign Secretary, accepted the immunity of American vessels in a letter to Dallas, before announcing an inquiry into the actions of the *Styx* and eventually arranging damages.⁶³ Having established the legitimacy of their central claims, the Americans became equally conciliatory. Cass thanked the British government for settling the issue peaceably and Napier acknowledged that the Americans were allowing the British to escape from the issue with their honour intact.⁶⁴ Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the 1858 right-of-search crisis, the American government did increase its attempts to prevent slavers from using the American flag to protect their trade.⁶⁵ Between 1859 and 1860 twelve slaving vessels were captured by the Americans, with 3,119 Africans freed – a substantial improvement on the nineteen ships captured in the previous fourteen years.⁶⁶ The consequence of this crisis was not war but peace, and in the next chapter close parallels will be drawn between the resolution of this crisis and the 1862 agreement of a right-of-search treaty in the aftermath of the American misdemeanour in the *Trent* affair.

The slave trade and Canadian border were the two biggest and most divisive issues in Anglo-American relations in the lead up to the Civil War, but they were by no means the only crises to be resolved in this bluster-and-compromise fashion. Rather, a pattern of diplomatic rhetoric and conflict resolution developed. For instance, when America concluded a commercial treaty with Persia and was considering a military alliance in 1856, Palmerston reacted quickly and angrily.⁶⁷ Writing to Lord Clarendon, the Foreign

⁶³ Malmesbury to Dallas, 3 and 7 June 1858, 'Question of right of visit,' *HCPP*, pp. 21 and 25-26.

⁶⁴ Cass to Dallas, 30 June 1858, 'Question of right of visit,' *HCPP*, p. 34; and Napier to Malmesbury, 7 June 1858, 'Question of right of visit,' *HCPP*, p. 30.

⁶⁵ Taken from Du Bois, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, p. 187.

⁶⁶ See Du Bois, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, p. 187; Klein, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, p. 191; and Brooke Jr., 'United States in the Suppression of the African Slave Trade,' p. 39.

⁶⁷ Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 290-91.

Secretary, he stated that 'if the United States wish for secure relations of Peace with England they will refuse the engagement proposed by Persia.'⁶⁸ Britain was at war with Persia and a military treaty between America and Persia was seen as intolerable interference. Faced with such a firm response, the American government restricted itself to economic dealings, with Britain's blessing.⁶⁹

A similar situation developed during the simultaneous Enlistment and San Juan crises of 1854-56. On 13 July 1854, the American sloop, the *Cayene*, bombed the British settlement of Greytown at the mouth of the San Juan River, in a disproportionate response to earlier Anglo-American hostilities in the region.⁷⁰ The British were outraged, but the American Secretary of State, William Marcy, supported the actions of the *Cayene's* captain.⁷¹ With Britain engaged in the Crimean War, little was made of this event at first, but this changed in 1855 when Britain decided to recruit troops from America to fight in the Crimean War. In a belligerent mood due to a lack of settlement over the San Juan issue, Britain not only recruited British citizens living in America, but tried to encourage Americans to cross into Nova Scotia to enlist in a newly created foreign legion, offering a bounty of \$30 and good pay to any volunteers.⁷² Palmerston stood by this recruitment process, claiming that 'for all acts so done, the British government which gave those instructions [was] quite ready and fully prepared to be responsible.'⁷³ However, the 1818 American Neutrality Act prevented the recruitment

⁶⁸ Palmerston to Clarendon, 27 May 1856, B.M. Add. 48580.

⁶⁹ Hayes, *The Nineteenth Century*, pp. 290-91.

⁷⁰ J.B. Conacher, 'British Policy in the Anglo-American Enlistment Crisis of 1855-56,' *American Philosophical Society*, 136, no. 4 (Dec., 1992), pp. 533-34.

⁷¹ Ivor Spencer, *The Victor and the Spoils: A Life of William L. Marcy* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1959), pp. 311-13.

⁷² Conacher, 'Anglo-American Enlistment Crisis,' pp. 537-41.

⁷³ Palmerston to Clarendon, 24 September 1855, Bodleian Library, Oxford (Bodl. Oxf.), MSS. Clar. c31/517-21 (Clarendon Papers). Palmerston also suggested that two battalions be sent to Canada as a sign of British commitment to its recruitment policies.

of American residents, and there was a justifiable outcry, Marcy in particular demanding immediate satisfaction.⁷⁴

Yet despite the growing tensions, both nations ultimately compromised to achieve the desired peaceful outcome. James Buchanan, as Minister to Great Britain, demonstrated that he would do anything to avoid conflict, to which Clarendon responded that he was willing to discharge every soldier recruited in America and pay for their passage home.⁷⁵ By 30 April 1856, Clarendon was writing to Dallas to apologise if the British representatives in America had, contrary to their intentions, infringed upon any American laws, and explaining that the Foreign Legion had been discontinued immediately.⁷⁶ With Britain acknowledging some guilt and accepting that the British envoy to America, John Crampton, had to be relieved of his position, a degree of normalcy resumed and negotiations began to resolve the Greytown bombing.⁷⁷ As with the other Anglo-American crises, the Enlistment and San Juan problems began with bluster, but ended with the acknowledgement that both America and Britain were willing to compromise to maintain peace.

The developing tradition of Anglo-American relations in the antebellum period was one of superficial outrage followed by a willingness to negotiate and compromise. Whether it was a moral debate over the slave trade or territorial disputes in Canada, the initial reactions of the British and American governments and peoples were usually to cry foul and complain of ill-treatment, even going as far as to threaten war if their counterparts

⁷⁴ *The Neutrality Law*, 20 April 1818, reprinted in the *New York Times*, 8 June 1866. Spencer, *Life of William Marcy*, p. 352.

⁷⁵ Buchanan to Marcy, 9 November 1855, in James Buchanan, *The Works of James Buchanan*, vol. 9, J.B. Moore, ed. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), pp. 449-57.

⁷⁶ Clarendon to Dallas, 30 April 1856, 'Papers relating to recruiting in the United States,' *HCPP*, pp. 258-60; 1856 (2108) LX.351.

⁷⁷ Conacher, 'Anglo-American Enlistment Crisis,' pp. 569-72.

did not cease and desist. However, each time, bravado turned to conciliation. Too many interests were at stake for the dogs of war to be slipped, and both Britain and America were keenly aware of it. As occurred during the 1858 right-of-search crisis, and as with the proposed 1856 American-Persian alliance, if there was genuine fault, an in-principle apology would be offered by the guilty party and accepted graciously by the victim. If, on the other hand, both Britain and America felt strongly about an issue, such as the Canadian border, then a compromise ensued and peace was maintained.

A pattern of Anglo-American conflict resolution did not make it inevitable that America and Britain would react in the same manner during the American Civil War, but it does mean that a standardised approach to diplomacy had evolved to guide actions in future crises. The foregoing demonstration that a pattern of conflict resolution existed provides a new interpretative paradigm for the diplomacy of the Civil War. The bellicose claims on both sides of the Atlantic are to be interpreted not as a sign that Britain was on the brink of intervention, but rather as a repeat of the ritualised rhetoric that had become traditional in discussions between Britain and America. As will be demonstrated in the final chapter, each of the transatlantic crises of the Civil War were indeed resolved in a timely and conciliatory fashion as precedent dictated.

Chapter Five

Britain and the Slave-owners' Rebellion.

Thus far this paper has highlighted the importance of looking at context in understanding why Britain was never going to intervene in the American Civil War. The long-standing Anglo-American economic and diplomatic relationship provided an incentive for maintaining peace with the Union. British foreign policy distractions and military overstretch were good reasons to avoid getting entangled in a distant war. The absence of public pressure for intervention and the structural weakness of coalition government during this period meant that neutrality was the policy most likely to appease the British public and Parliament. Governmental records and personal papers have been used to show that these factors were actively considered and acknowledged by the British leadership and not just the retrospective justifications of historians.

Nonetheless, historians such as Howard Jones and Dean Mahin have avoided the issue of context, instead arguing that Britain was on the brink of intervention by isolating particular moments in the war during which the Anglo-American relationship seemed fragile. In particular, they have focussed on the *Trent* affair; the push by some Parliamentarians to break the Union blockade or recognise the Confederacy; and the Cabinet discussions regarding mediation following Confederate military success and the announcement of emancipation in the autumn 1862.¹ After all, it was always possible that the British would abandon rationality, practicality and self-interest if they felt their national pride had been unforgivably damaged by American insults, or if they believed a humanitarian proposal of mediation could successfully prevent the escalation of an increasingly violent war. Yet although this reading of the British position incorporates

¹ For instance, see Jones, *Union in Peril*; Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*; and Mahin, *One War at a Time*.

all the necessary parliamentary papers, Cabinet memoranda and diplomatic tracts, it fails to account for the contextual and structural factors behind British neutrality.

Accordingly, this final chapter uses the contextual understanding established in the previous chapters both to re-interpret traditional readings of the key moments in the British decision-making process, and to bring to light further evidence of a non-interventionist reading of the British foreign policy perspective. It argues that the *Trent* crisis should be examined through the lens of traditions of Anglo-American diplomacy, the ultimately conflicted nature of public opinion, British military overstretch and the governmental fear of making snap foreign policy decisions. Similarly, parliamentary motions for intervention were unlikely to succeed because of the same governmental hesitancy and limitations, as well as the generally impractical, hyper-aggressive and unsupported nature of these proposals. Finally, the Cabinet discussions for mediation were flawed due to the divided Cabinet, European foreign policy concerns, and the potential for escalation due to the Union's refusal to accept outside interference. Britain was never going to abandon neutrality because the contextual problems with intervention held as true during moments of crisis and tension as they did when things were going well.

When Captain Wilkes of the *San Jacinto* boarded the *Trent* on 8 November 1861 and arrested Confederate envoys James Mason and John Slidell, he triggered a transatlantic crisis. Bound by international law to take the *Trent* back to the nearest American prize court for adjudication having confiscated 'contraband', Wilkes instead allowed the *Trent* to continue back to Britain.² This oversight on Wilkes' part meant that although he was

² For an assessment of the legal ramifications of Wilkes' act, and how he should have proceeded, see Ferris, *Trent Affair*, pp. 44-53.

initially cheered as a hero upon returning to America, he had also committed an illegal action, which many in Britain perceived as a slight to national honour.

The *Trent* affair was the crisis most likely to provoke a shift in the British attitude to the American Civil War. The *Trent* affair presented a moment when all considerations of rational self-interest might have been thrown to the wind for the sake of national pride. The most likely reason for Anglo-American relations to break down was not a slowly and carefully considered policy decision, but a nationalistic outburst in defence of honour. Accordingly, the two bases for the interpretation that *Trent* almost led to British intervention are that there was a widespread clamour for war on both sides of the Atlantic; and that actions and diplomacy on both sides of the Atlantic suggested that the dispute was escalating due to a desire for war. Nonetheless, while war might well have broken out if Lincoln and his Cabinet refused to release Mason and Slidell, this hypothetical ignores the serious diplomatic efforts of both the Federals and British to settle the issue peacefully. A re-examination of the *Trent* affair in terms of Anglo-American diplomatic traditions, as well as British foreign and domestic policy restraints shows why British intervention over the boarding of the *Trent* was never likely.

When news of the *Trent* affair broke, it triggered public outrage and certainly seemed to anticipate war. Coming soon after Seward's threats to invade Canada, the removal of Mason and Slidell from the *Trent* provoked a popular outburst of anger in Britain. The first news the British had of the affair came from Commander Williams, the agent in charge of mail and dispatches aboard the *Trent*, who portrayed Captain Wilkes in a negative light, accusing the Americans of piracy and inhumanity.³ Consequently,

³ The *Trent* returned to Britain on 25 November 1861, and news had yet to arrive of the incident because the transatlantic cables were working poorly. See Williams to Captain Patey, 9 November 1861 (written on board the *Trent*), 'Correspondence respecting Seizure of Messrs. Mason, Slidell, McFarland and Eustis from Royal

many of the newspapers ran editorials calling for war and claiming that the British flag and honour had been tarnished; *Reynold's Weekly* and the *Southampton and Leeds Times* not least among them.⁴ British poet Matthew Arnold described the situation as 'warlike. I myself think that it has become indispensable to give the Americans a *moral lesson*, and fervently hope that it will be given to them,' implying prevalent support for conflict.⁵ Indeed, historian Howard Jones asserts that *Trent* brought Britain and the Union to the brink of war, citing an unnamed American in England stating that; 'the people are frantic with rage, and were the country polled, I fear 999 men out of a thousand would declare for immediate war.'⁶ Nor were tempers cooler on the American side of the Atlantic, with Captain Wilkes being fêted as the toast of the town for his capture of Mason and Slidell. The *New York Times* proclaimed that the 'whole country now rings with applause of his bold action.'⁷ Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts gave Wilkes a public banquet.⁸ Taking things further, as always, the *New York Herald* vilified the British for carrying Confederate passengers and called for the repeal of the American-Canadian reciprocity treaty.⁹ In both the Union and Britain there seemed to be a vociferous chorus pushing for war as the best way to resolve the question of honour that had developed over the *Trent* affair.

To focus on examples of popular outrage, particularly in Britain, however, is to ignore the complexity of public opinion and the nature of its relationship with the

Mail Packet Trent, by Commander of United States Ship San Jacinto,' *HCPP*, pp. 1-2; 1862 (2913) LXII.607; and Memorandum: Williams to Admiralty, 27 November 1861, 'Correspondence respecting Seizure,' *HCPP*, p. 5.

⁴*Reynold's Weekly*, 1 and 8 December 1861; *Southampton Times*, 30 December 1861; and *Leeds Times*, 30 November 1861.

For a summary of the negative British reaction to the *Trent* affair see Ferris, *Trent Affair*, pp. 54-69.

⁵ Matthew Arnold to his mother, 18 December 1861, in Matthew Arnold, *Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-1888*, G.W.E. Russell, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1901), p. 182

⁶ Jones, *Union in Peril*, pp. 83-84.

⁷*New York Times*, 17 November 1861.

⁸ Duberman, *Charles Francis Adams*, p. 279. The banquet is also described in the papers of Lord Lyons; Lyons to Russell, 3 December 1861, PRO 30/22/35.

⁹*New York Herald*, 25 November 1861.

formulation of foreign policy. It is all very well to cite the *Leeds Times'* anger at the Union and calling for intervention, or the fear of Charles Francis Adams – the United States' Minister to Britain – that the British hated Americans.¹⁰ But this outrage was puffed up by hyperbole. *The Times*, the leading British paper, maintained a 'calm and collected' approach to the crisis in calling for peaceful resolution of the issue.¹¹ In this position *The Times* was supported by a variety of papers ranging from the *Illustrated London News* to the *Wesleyan Methodist Times*.¹² Moreover, due to the still limited power of public opinion, the British Cabinet and Foreign Office were perfectly capable of ignoring a brief wave of pro-war pressure. MP Richard Cobden wrote to Charles Sumner, the chairman of the American Senate Committee on foreign relations, to explain that public feeling had to be distinguished from the opinions of government.¹³ Meanwhile, the Conservative Party's reaction to the crisis was muted, refusing to take advantage of the crisis to try to force Palmerston's coalition government into a corner.¹⁴ With public opinion divided over the *Trent* affair and the Conservative Party opposed to intervention, British policy-makers were not going to abandon neutrality on behalf of a short-lived pro-war movement.

The more substantial argument for *Trent* being a serious moment of crisis in Anglo-American relations focuses on actions and writings on both sides of the Atlantic that hint at a genuine willingness, if not desire, to resolve the dispute through war. The immediate response of Union Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles to Wilkes' boarding

¹⁰ See *Leeds Times*, 30 November 1861; and Duberman, *Charles Francis Adams*, pp. 279-80 respectively.

¹¹ *Times*, 9 and 14 January 1862. Earlier articles took the same line on the crisis; *Times*, 28 and 30 November, and 4 December 1861.

¹² *Illustrated London News*, 14 December 1861; and *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* from January 1862, cited and analysed in Myers, *Caution and Cooperation*, p. 65.

See Grant, *American Civil War and the British Press*, pp. 67-75 for a further summary of press approaches to the *Trent* affair (with particular emphasis on the role of *The Times*).

¹³ Cobden to Sumner, 29 November and 6, 12 and 19 December 1861 in John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, vol. 2 (London: T.F. Unwin, 1896), pp. 390-93.

¹⁴ For analysis of the Conservative Party's actions during the *Trent* affair see Bellows, 'British Conservative Reaction to the American Civil War,' pp. 516-20; and Ferris, *Trent Affair*, pp. 44-59.

of the *Trent* was to write a letter praising his decision-making and intelligence.¹⁵ More important in terms of the possibility of British intervention, Russell and some other MPs such as J.M. Cobbett and Lord Fermoy were initially extremely severe in their response to the *Trent* crisis. Cobbett, at a speech in Oldham town hall, pushed for immediate intervention, believing it would also solve the growing cotton shortfall.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the original ultimatum drafted by Russell calling for the release of Mason and Slidell was provocative and aggressive.¹⁷ Likewise, in the aftermath of the boarding of the *Trent*, Britain began to reinforce Canada, as if preparing for armed struggle. As a direct response to the *Trent* affair, by the start of 1862 there were 42 ships of 1279-guns strength in the North American and West Indies fleet, up from 17 ships and 209 guns a year earlier.¹⁸ In early December 1861, Britain dispatched additional troops to Canada, 11,175 soldiers arriving by the end of summer.¹⁹ Contingencies were even developed for Admiral Milne to break the Union blockade in the case of war.²⁰ Looking only at troop movements and initial anger, it truly seemed as though war beckoned.

The reality of the situation was entirely different, as Anglo-American diplomacy once again fell into an established pattern and rhetoric of diplomacy. Military reinforcements were sent, but they were primarily defensive and only served as a deterrent. Writing to Lord Lyons, Russell instructed the British Ambassador to America to make clear to the Federals that Canadian re-enforcement was part of a process of

¹⁵ Welles to Wilkes, 30 November 1861, quoted in Mahin, *One War at a Time*, p. 63.

¹⁶ Cobbett's views were reported in *Reynold's Weekly*, 15 December 1861.

Fermoy's similar, but slightly tamer views can be seen in *Spectator*, 7 December 1861.

¹⁷ Russell's original draft was in effect an angry letter demanding the release of the prisoners of war; Russell to Lyons, 30 November 1861, 'Correspondence respecting Seizure,' *HCPP*, p. 3.

¹⁸ See the naval reports in ADM 8/140 and ADM 8/141.

¹⁹ The de Grey Memorandum, 8 December 1861, cited in Kenneth Bourne, 'British Preparations for War with the North, 1861-1862,' *English Historical Review*, 76, no. 301 (Oct., 1961), p. 614, details the decision to transfer troops to Canada.

The number of re-enforcements sent is detailed in 17 December 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), col. 396.

²⁰ Duke of Somerset to Milne, 15 December 1861, cited in Courtemanche, *No Need of Glory*, p. 56.

guaranteeing peace from a position of strength.²¹ Lyons similarly claimed that *si vis pacem* was a prudent policy to follow.²² Moreover, even as re-enforcements were sent, the British acknowledged that Canada would still be lost if war actually broke out. It has already been demonstrated in Chapter Four that Canada would be impossible to supply during winter; while even if the re-enforcements did arrive, Lyons feared that these troops would not serve as anything more than a slight obstacle to a massive Union army.²³ With Canada an important part of the British Empire, troops sent there should be seen more as deterrents than precursors to conflict.

Alongside the reality of the military situation, every effort was made by both Britain and America to ensure a peaceful resolution to the *Trent* affair. Certainly bluster and nationalistic posturing were elements of the communication between the nations, but to focus on these limited examples is to miss the bigger picture; it has already been shown that in earlier Anglo-American disputes bluster only marked the opening gambit and in a conciliatory diplomatic process. The Duke of Newcastle, for instance, understood that Seward's statements were not threats, but diplomatic tactics, noting that the 'hyper-American policy of bully and bluster,' was part of the broader attempt to gain advantage during negotiations.²⁴ Consequently, Russell's initial ultimatum was immediately toned down by the rest of Cabinet and Prince Albert – a reflection of

²¹ The letter was sent via Lord Cowley, the Ambassador to France; Russell to Lord Cowley, 1 and 2 December 1861, PRO 30/22/105; and John Russell, *Recollections and Suggestions 1813-1873* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1875), pp. 275-76.

This point and the importance of deterrence was later clarified in Russell to Lewis, 24 March 1863, in John Russell, *The Later Correspondence of Lord John Russell, 1840-1878*, vol. 2, G.P. Gooch, ed. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1925), p. 333.

²² 'If you want peace, prepare for war.' See Lyons to Head, 22 May 1861, in Newton, ed., *Lord Lyons*, pp. 39-40.

²³ The inability to properly re-enforce Canada during the *Trent* affair has already been discussed in Chapter Four.

See specifically Lyons to Russell, 3 and 27 December 1861, PRO 30/22/35.

²⁴ Newcastle to Head, 5 June 1861, cited in Munsell, *Unfortunate Duke*, pp. 259-60.

existing checks on rash foreign policy decisions.²⁵ Russell himself attached a note suggesting that Lyons delay the presentation of the ultimatum by a further two days.²⁶ Similarly, in an attempt to give the Federals the best possible chance to react peaceably to Britain's demands, Lyons gave Seward an early preview of Russell's note and further moderated its tone.²⁷ On both sides of the Atlantic, bluster was quickly shown to be but the surface layer of a deeply conciliatory relationship in the tradition of earlier compromises between Britain and America. As the crisis continued, the Duke of Argyll repeatedly professed his desire to settle the *Trent* affair at all costs, claiming that 'war with America is such a calamity that we must do all we can to avoid it. It involves not only ourselves, but all our North American colonies.'²⁸ The Union leadership was equally willing to compromise. Despite his initially aggressive rhetoric, Seward made it clear that he wanted to avoid war at all costs and repeatedly assured Lyons of this fact.²⁹ Lincoln himself admitted that he never wanted war with Britain.³⁰ Finally, when it came to Cabinet discussions as to whether Mason and Slidell should be released, the answer was a resounding yes, with Attorney-General Edward Bates acknowledging that the

²⁵ The original draft of the letter can be seen in Russell to Lyons, 30 November 1861, 'Correspondence respecting Seizure,' *HCPP*, p. 3.

For the recommendations made by Prince Albert, see 'Prince Albert Memorandum,' 1 December 1861, in Martin, *The Prince Consort*, pp. 349-50. Albert included an expression of hope for reconciliation and allowed an easy way for the Union to excuse itself by simply releasing the prisoners.

The role of the Cabinet and Albert is also discussed in Martin, *The Prince Consort*, pp. 349-53.

The final draft of the letter can then be seen in Russell to Lyons, 1 December 1861, in Newton, ed., *Lord Lyons*, pp. 61-62.

²⁶ Russell to Lyons, 1 December 1861, in Newton, ed., *Lord Lyons*, pp. 62-63.

²⁷ Lyons records his granting of a sneak-preview of the ultimatum to Seward in Lyons to Russell, 19 December 1861, in Newton, ed., *Lord Lyons*, pp. 65-67.

Lyons also stated that he moderated the note further to ease Union concerns with being humiliated; Lyons to Russell, 27 December 1861, PRO 30/22/35.

²⁸ Argyll to Gladstone, 10 December 1861; and Argyll to Motley, 8 January 1862, in Douglas, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, pp. 177-82

²⁹ Lyons to Russell, 3 February 1862, PRO 30/22/29; and Lyons to Russell, 7 February 1862, PRO 30/22/36. Seward also told Mercier, the French Minister to America, that he wanted to avoid war with Britain at all costs. See Mercier to Thouvenel, 23 December 1861, cited in Ferris, *Trent Affair*, p. 131.

³⁰ Lincoln acknowledged that Wilkes had breached the very rights of neutrality that America had often used against Britain in discussion with a journalist on November 16. See Foreman, *World on Fire*, p. 178.

Lincoln then made the same claim in an interview with some Canadian soldiers fighting in the Union army in December 1861, just as the *Trent* affair was escalating. See Winks, *Canada and the United States*, p. 97.

Union could not afford a war and should settle the issue with ‘as much honour and pride as possible.’³¹ Just as Britain had taken a step back during the *Caroline* affair and the 1858 right-of-search crisis, and America had done during the Oregon dispute, both nations were willing to accept the error, save face, and move forward peacefully.



Lord Lyons, British Minister to America (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

The conciliatory attitude of both nations went beyond the release of the Confederate envoys, with Britain and the Union taking further steps to solidify their relationship and avoid conflict. Britain willingly accepted the release of the prisoners without any further discussion, accepting Seward’s justification that the release of the Confederate pair was on a technicality and that the Union was being magnanimous in freeing them.³² *The Times* even bemoaned that Britain had had to stand on principle to

³¹ Edward Bates, *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866*, Howard Beale, ed. (Washington D.C.: 1933) as vol. IV of the *Annual Report* of the American Historical Association, 1930, p. 215.

For further insight into the decision-making of the Union Cabinet over this issue see Salmon P. Chase, *Inside Lincoln’s Cabinet: the Civil War Diaries of Salmon P. Chase*, David Donald, ed. (New York: Longmans, 1954), p. 55; and Ferris, *Trent Affair*, pp. 168-92.

³² Seward attempted to exculpate the Union of blame can be seen in an enclosed letter from Seward to Lyons, 26 December 1861, in Lyons to Russell, 27 December 1861, ‘Correspondence respecting Seizure,’ *HCPP*, pp. 19-20.

Russell even claimed he was happy with Seward’s conduct; Russell to Napier, 10 January 1862, ‘Correspondence respecting Seizure,’ *HCPP*, p. 27; and Russell to Lyons, 22 February 1862, PRO 30/22/96.

save such 'worthless booty' – the Confederate commissioners.³³ Meanwhile, the Americans showed their commitment to peace by finally accepting the British position on the right-of-search in the Lyons-Seward Treaty. British ships would finally be able to legally search American ships suspected of carrying slaves and take them in for judgement in front of mixed Anglo-American courts.³⁴ The reciprocal British appreciation for this agreement was then made clear in letters and parliamentary speeches; Lord Brougham gave thanks for the Union's attitude in the House of Lords, and Lyons expressed similar feelings in his ambassadorial dispatches.³⁵ This concession not only helped Britain move towards ending the slave trade completely, but also demonstrated progress from earlier Anglo-American discussions regarding right-of-search, such as the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842. Indeed, by the time the *Trent* affair was settled, Britain and the Union were closer than ever, with Russell writing to Lyons in March to praise the state of Anglo-American relations.³⁶ Interventionist sentiment had been nothing more than a yelp of patriotic anger, incapable of truly shaping Anglo-American diplomacy.

The second realistic push for intervention in Britain came in Parliament with several motions proposing to break the Union blockade or recognise the Confederacy. Leaving aside MP John Roebuck's failed attempt to vote for recognition of the Confederacy in mid-1863, the key attempts to intervene in the American conflict through the Houses of Parliament came in a series of debates from March to July 1862.³⁷ In particular, MPs

³³ *Times*, 11 January 1862.

³⁴ *Treaty for the Suppression of the Slave Trade*, 7 April 1862.

³⁵ Lord Brougham, 30 May 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (Lords), 3rd ser., 167 (1862), cols. 536-37.

Lyons to Russell, 8 April 1862, PRO 30/22/36.

³⁶ Russell to Lyons, 1 March 1862, PRO 30/22/96.

³⁷ Roebuck, the Conservative MP for Sheffield proposed recognition of the Confederacy in May 1863.

However, he gained minimal support from the Conservatives, or anyone else, and eventually withdrew his call

William Gregory and William Lindsay proved firm adherents of Britain taking a stand on the American Civil War in support of the Confederacy. However, to argue that the beliefs and proposals of these and other individuals represented some sort of growing consensus on the issue of intervention is to wilfully ignore just how thoroughly any motions suggesting the abandonment of neutrality were dismissed by the majority of Parliament.

The first motion in favour of rejecting the validity of the Union blockade was proposed by William Gregory on 7 March 1862. Arguing that Southern secession was effectively a *fait accompli* at this point, Gregory also went on to discuss the numerous holes in the Union blockade.³⁸ There was, apparently, no Union naval presence around North Carolina and Florida in August 1861, while the letters of Consul Bunch of Charlestown were cited to argue that the blockade found it impossible to prevent access to Southern ports.³⁹ Gaining support from George Bentwick, the pro-Confederate faction further emphasised Britain's reliance on cotton, and the potential benefits of dismissing the Union blockade.⁴⁰

Unfortunately for Messrs. Bentwick and Gregory, this first attempt to meddle in the American Civil War was rejected in a manner which foreshadowed the failings of future efforts. Before anyone from Cabinet even addressed the issue, the Member for Bradford, William Forster, took the debate to the pro-Confederate faction. Arguing first that the blockade was effective by the standards of international law and that Gregory's statistics were both exaggerated and did not account for the increasing success of the

for a vote on the issue. Indeed, as has been established, by 1863 there was almost no chance of Britain intervening in the American conflict. See, for instance, Mahin, *One War at a Time*, pp. 190-91.

³⁸ Gregory, 7 March 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), cols. 1158-81.

³⁹ Gregory, 7 March 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), cols. 1173-76.

⁴⁰ Bentwick, 7 March 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), cols. 1181-87.

Supporting speeches were also made by William Lindsay and Sir James Fergusson. See *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), cols. 1197-1200 and 1204-9, for Fergusson and Lindsay respectively.

blockade, Forster proceeded to call for the maintenance of a non-interventionist stance in the contextually relevant terms already expounded upon by this thesis.⁴¹ The cotton shortage was not at crisis-level, and neither mill-owners nor workers in places like Lancashire were complaining. Moreover, Forster argued, any intervention in the war might not only trigger an unaffordable conflict with the Union, but would also involve siding with a slave power. These consequences contravened Britain's immediate interests and foreign policy preference for avoiding intervention in the affairs of sovereign nations.⁴² Supported in this position by Solicitor-General Roundell Palmer, and MPs Monkton Milnes and Lord Robert Cecil, the result was the quick dismissal of the pro-Confederate motion.⁴³ When the issue was brought up again three days later in the House of Lords, Russell was equally effective at quashing it, stating that intervention would be destructive to both British and American interests.⁴⁴ In a report to the Queen on the issue, Palmerston presented his satisfaction at the maintenance of the status quo, fearing that any abandonment of neutrality could bring about war and would be a departure from Britain's traditional non-interventionist approach.⁴⁵ The treatment of the first Parliamentary push for intervention showed a group of pro-Confederate individuals not reflective of general Parliamentary opinion or the British foreign policy context.

The second set of Parliamentary motions began in June and sought either to recognise the Confederacy or to mediate the conflict with a view to establishing Southern independence. Again the push was led by William Lindsay, who had spent the

⁴¹ Forster, 7 March 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), cols. 1187-94.

⁴² Forster, 7 March 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), cols. 1194-1200.

⁴³ 7 March 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), cols. 1200-4, 1209-25 and 1225-29, for Milne, Palmer and Cecil respectively.

⁴⁴ 10 March 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (Lords), 3rd ser., 165 (1862), cols. 1237-43.

⁴⁵ Palmerston to Queen, 7 March 1862, in George Buckle, ed., *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd ser. (New York: Longmans, 1926), pp. 22-23.

previous months in France trying to single-handedly, and unofficially, negotiate French support for an interventionist policy.⁴⁶ On 20 June 1862 Lindsay submitted a motion to the Commons recommending British recognition of the Confederacy.⁴⁷ When this proposal was postponed and then abandoned due to a lack of Parliamentary support – in itself a reflection of the difficulty to pass decisive and risky foreign policy through the Commons – Lindsay proceeded to spend July calling instead for mediation favourable to the Southerners.⁴⁸

Historians Howard Jones and Frank Owsley argue that this third Parliamentary proposal brought Britain particularly close to intervention. Jones claims that ‘recognition of the Confederacy seemed a certainty,’ and that if recognition was not forthcoming, then mediation would be.⁴⁹ There are some grounds for such a belief. Parliamentary debate was far more contentious than it previously had been when pro-Confederate motions were quickly dismissed.⁵⁰ Rumour also had it that General McClellan’s army had surrendered outside Richmond and that Confederate victory was imminent.⁵¹ Moreover, a few weeks earlier there had been a wave of anger directed towards the Union as a result of General Butler’s allegedly despotic and inhuman treatment of the women of New Orleans.⁵² In the Commons, Palmerston described Butler’s proclamation equating Southern women to prostitutes as an ‘epithet infamous,’

⁴⁶ Lindsay spent much of April 1862 in Paris, attempting to convince Napoleon III to act in recognition of the Confederacy. See Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, pp. 133-38 for further details of these negotiations, which ultimately failed.

⁴⁷ Lindsay, 20 June 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 167 (1862), col. 810.

⁴⁸ Beginning with 18 July 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 168 (1862), cols. 511-78.

⁴⁹ Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, p. 170.

⁵⁰ Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, pp. 170-171; and Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, pp. 313-15, correctly identify that the 18 July 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 168 (1862), cols. 511-78, received a greater degree of pro-Confederate support than had previously occurred, with Lindsay gaining vocal backing from figures like Lord Adolphus Vane Tempest, William Gregory, Seymour Fitzgerald, John Hopwood and James Whiteside.

⁵¹ Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, pp. 170-172; Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, pp. 313-14; as well as Mahin, *One War at a Time*, p. 125. This is referenced in 18 July 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 168 (1862), cols. 500 and 503-505, with questions to this effect by Algernon Egerton and William Lindsay.

⁵² This argument can be seen in Mahin, *One War at a Time*, p. 124; Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, pp. 296-97; and Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, pp. 148-49.

and gained vocal support in his disgust from William Gregory and John Walsh.⁵³ In such circumstances, argue some historians, Britain truly was on the threshold of intervention.

Such a reading of the Parliamentary situation fails to take into account the many contextual reasons why the motion ultimately was rejected. For instance, although there was greater pro-Confederate support during debate, the Commons was still entirely divided. Numerous MPs, including William Forster and Peter Taylor, argued against Lindsay's proposal, citing the undesirability of supporting a slave state, and the fact that mediation would trigger a transatlantic war.⁵⁴ Indeed, just because a motion was being debated, did not mean that previous reasons for avoiding intervention were any less relevant in reducing the probability of intervention. MPs Charles Adderley and Arthur Mills re-iterated the fact that Canada could not be defended in case of conflict and would be lost.⁵⁵ Annoyance with the Confederate policy of destroying cotton was still being evinced at this time.⁵⁶ Mediation was, in essence, still impractical.

The fragmentation of Parliament, along with the fear of an Anglo-American war, clearly weighed on Palmerston's mind, and at the end of a long night's debate he rose to proclaim his assessment of the situation. Calling for Lindsay's motion to be dismissed, Palmerston pointed out the scale of the American Civil War and the dangers of being dragged into such a conflict, and noted that Britain's maintenance of neutrality had thus far proved to be a successful policy. This position is entirely consistent with Palmerston's informal meeting with Confederate envoy Edwin de Leon the week before, when Palmerston stated that as long as the Union's will remained firm Britain would

⁵³ See 13 June 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 167 (1862), cols. 611-17. Palmerston attacked the 'epithet infamous' as a slur on the Anglo-Saxon race.

⁵⁴ 18 July 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 168 (1862), cols. 522-27 and 534-39 for the statements of Taylor and Forster respectively.

⁵⁵ 25 July 1862, *Parl. Deb.* (H.C.), 3rd ser., 168 (1862), cols. 843-51.

⁵⁶ Hon. W. Stuart to Russell, 23 June 1862, PRO 30/22/36.

not intervene, even if the Confederates captured Washington.⁵⁷ Moreover, in a reflection of the problems with passing any substantial foreign policy through the Commons, Palmerston concluded by stating that any decision on intervention should ultimately be left to Cabinet.⁵⁸ The Cabinet at this time was, however, clearly against any form of intervention. Aside from Palmerston's statement in the Commons, Russell himself had recently dismissed any prospect of mediation in the House of Lords, while the Confederate 'ministers' to Britain were still unrecognised as official envoys and met with only informally.⁵⁹ Mediation was being discussed, but that does not mean that Britain was any closer to acting on such a suggestion.

The final occasions on which historians have argued that intervention beckoned was during autumn 1862, when a series of Cabinet meetings and proclamations by key individuals such as Gladstone and Russell created the veneer of abandoning neutrality in favour of a mediated peace. The reasons why intervention became more appealing to some at this time are simple. The continued perseverance of the Confederate military – even after a series of setbacks including the loss of New Orleans – led to an almost unanimous belief in Britain that the Union would not be able to overcome the South. Particularly in the aftermath of Confederate victory at Second Bull's Run, Russell and

⁵⁷ De Leon, *Secret History of Confederate Diplomacy*, pp. 114-16.

Palmerston made a similar point in a letter to Russell, in which he stated that offering mediation 'would be like offering to make it up between Sayers and Heenan [two prominent pugilists] after the Third Round.' See Palmerston to Russell, 13 June 1862, in Temperley, ed., *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, p. 294.

⁵⁸ 18 July 1862, *Parl. Deb. (H.C.)*, 3rd ser., 168 (1862), 569-77.

⁵⁹ 13 June 1862, *Parl. Deb. (Lords)*, 3rd ser., 167 (1862), cols. 534-35.

With regards the treatment of Confederate envoys, one example of how they were viewed as unofficial is in Mason's meeting with Russell in February; Mason offered to read his credentials and present papers, but Russell informed him that this was unnecessary given that no relations existed between Confederacy and Britain, and that Mason was only a private citizen. See Charles Hubbard, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), p. 74.

Palmerston agreed that the stalemate might last indefinitely.⁶⁰ Lincoln's proclamation of intent to emancipate the slaves led to a genuine, humanitarian fear in Britain of a bloody, servile war.⁶¹ Finally, the slowly building cotton famine was beginning to emerge as a serious problem, which only a mediated and peaceful end to the American conflict might solve.⁶² The combination of these reasons pushed part of the Cabinet towards considering intervention.

Looking at the correspondence of Earl Russell, William Gladstone, and to a lesser extent Lord Palmerston, some historians have suggested that the above combination of factors genuinely brought Britain to the brink of offering mediation.⁶³ On September 14 Palmerston did suggest mediation might be forthcoming, while Russell, believing that the Union had shown no capacity to subdue the Confederacy, proposed that the issue be considered at a Cabinet meeting on October 23 or 30.⁶⁴ Similarly, a speech from Gladstone at Newcastle on October 7, claiming that Jefferson Davis had built an army and made a nation, and that the South was accordingly deserving of recognition, seemed to reflect momentum in favour of intervention.⁶⁵ Indeed, soon after, both Gladstone and Russell issued memoranda to this effect; Russell's claiming that ending the violence would be humane, that the Emancipation Proclamation would trigger a servile war, and that Britain had a duty to interfere; and Gladstone's stating that it was a good time to

⁶⁰ Palmerston to Russell, 14 September 1862, quoted in its entirety in Sideman, ed., *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, pp. 174-75. Russell to Gladstone, 11 September 1862, in Hubbard, *Burden of Confederate Diplomacy*, p. 114.

⁶¹ This point has already been discussed in Chapter Two. See Ewan, 'Emancipation Proclamation and British Public Opinion', pp. 1-3, 15-16; and Lorimer, 'Role of Anti-Slavery Sentiment', pp. 407-410.

⁶² See Gladstone's memorandum fearing that riots in Lancashire were inevitable; Gladstone, 'Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer,' 25 October 1862, in Wiener, *Foreign Policy and The Span of Empire*, vol. 1, p. 484.

⁶³ This argument is run in Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*; Jones, *Union in Peril*; Crook, *Diplomacy during the American Civil War*; Mahin, *One War at a Time*; and Kinley Brauer, 'British Mediation and the American Civil War: A Reconsideration,' *Journal of Southern History*, 38, no. 1 (Feb., 1972), pp. 49-64.

⁶⁴ Palmerston to Russell, 14 September 1862, quoted in its entirety in Sideman, ed., *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, pp. 174-75. Russell to Palmerston, 17 September 1862, in Spencer Walpole, *The Life of Lord John Russell*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), p. 360.

⁶⁵ Transcript of this speech can be seen in John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, vol. 2, bk. 5 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), pp. 77-80.

take action given the setbacks to both Union and Confederacy, and the growing fear of starvation in Lancashire.⁶⁶ In light of these statements, it would seem as though mediation was becoming inevitable.

As important as Russell and Gladstone were, they were not, however, the Cabinet and they did not have sole control over a decision as significant as intervention. Palmerston had promised in 1859 that the entire Cabinet would make major foreign policy decisions, and most of the Cabinet was actually against mediation.⁶⁷ Earl Granville, Lord President of the Council, took a particularly strong stand, telling Russell in September 1862 that the policy of neutrality had thus far proven successful and gained support from the British people and Parliament, and that mediation would never be accepted by the Union.⁶⁸ Having read this statement, Palmerston became increasingly ambivalent with regard to intervention, hoping to let battlefield events decide British actions.⁶⁹ Moreover, Granville was supported in his position by the Duke of Argyll, Milner Gibson, George Grey and George Cornwall Lewis. Responding to Gladstone's speech and Russell's memorandum, Lewis attacked the case for mediation in a speech at Hereford on October 14 and in a memo circulated to Cabinet colleagues three days later; claiming not only that the Confederacy had not established a *de facto* state, but that to intervene was to risk Canada, trade with the North and public opinion in Britain.⁷⁰ Nor could Russell count on the support of the opposition. The leader of the opposition, the Earl of Derby, declared that mediation was liable to cause a transatlantic

⁶⁶ 'Russell Memorandum,' 13 October 1862, FO 5/865.

⁶⁷ 'Gladstone Memorandum,' 25 October 1862, in Wiener, *Foreign Policy and The Span of Empire*, vol. 1, pp. 481-84.

⁶⁸ Newcastle to Palmerston, 15 June 1859, in Munsell, *Unfortunate Duke*, p. 236.

⁶⁹ Granville to Russell, 20 September 1862, PRO 30/22/25.

⁷⁰ Palmerston to Russell, 2 October 1862, in Sideman, ed., *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, pp. 177-79.

⁷¹ Lewis Memorandum, 17 October 1862, BL, Add. MSS. 44595 (Gladstone Papers). For details on the Hereford speech see Morley, *Life of William Gladstone*, vol. 2, bk. 5, pp. 80-81.

war, and that the Conservatives would therefore stand against such a policy.⁷¹ Accordingly, Palmerston called off the Cabinet meeting on October 22. An informal meeting was still held the next day, but it was made clear there that there was no chance of mediation.⁷²

The failure of initial attempts to mediate did not mean that the spectre of Cabinet-organised intervention had passed entirely. With the issue seemingly buried, on November 1, Napoleon III came through with a proposal for a joint offer of mediation. Russell and Gladstone remained supportive of such a move, but this motion was dismissed even more efficiently. In an acknowledgement of the importance of slavery and public opinion in acting as checks on intervention, Palmerston wrote to Russell on November 2 to say that British public opinion would not stand for any policy that condoned slavery.⁷³ Consequently, when the French proposal was finally discussed in Cabinet on November 11, it was rejected without even going to a formal vote.⁷⁴

Moving beyond the simple to-and-fro of Cabinet correspondence, it becomes clear that the push for mediation was not simply rejected, but never even came close to succeeding. The two main reasons for this are that mediation was not viable in terms of the status of the war, nor Britain's position in Europe.

It had long been clear that any proposal of mediation would have to have a reasonable guarantee of being accepted by both the Union and Confederacy – otherwise the offer would simply trigger a violent response. As early as December 1860, Russell had written that 'Lord Palmerston & I think it would be unsafe for us to mediate in

⁷¹ The message was passed through to Russell via Clarendon; Clarendon to Russell, 19 October 1862, PRO 30/22/14.

⁷² Palmerston to Russell, 22 October 1862, PRO 30/22/14.

⁷³ Palmerston to Russell, 2 November 1862, PRO 30/22/14D.

⁷⁴ A description of the events of that Cabinet meeting is provided in Argyll's later recollections; Argyll to Granville, 7 April 1887, in Temperley, ed., *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, pp. 298-99.

American affairs unless we were called upon by both parties to do so.⁷⁵ Closer to the October and November Cabinet meetings both Granville and Palmerston re-iterated this belief, with Granville arguing that mediation was futile since it was likely to be ‘refused by one or both belligerents.’⁷⁶ Indeed, it was clear that the Union would never accept any proposal that would lead to Confederate independence. In an earlier letter to Russell, Ambassador Lyons pointed out that ‘not one man in ten thousand in the North would contemplate the independence of the Confederates as a possibility’ under any circumstances.⁷⁷ Seward had even given Ambassador Adams instructions to reject any European offer of intervention and return home immediately afterwards.⁷⁸ In the context of the Union’s continued perseverance and self-belief in October and November 1862, an offer of mediation simply did not make sense, and despite the moves of individuals towards intervention, the reality of the situation was ultimately acknowledged.

Alongside the Union’s continued and firm rejection of any outside interference, the events of the war themselves did not encourage an offer of mediation at this time. Russell and Palmerston claimed that if the Union suffered a serious defeat in September or October 1862, then intervention should be considered; and historians such as Howard Jones and Dean Mahin have relied on such statements to argue that mediation was plausible.⁷⁹ However, this argument is grounded in a hypothetical that is impossible to substantiate. In reality, the Federals were successful at Antietam, and Palmerston made clear that in this case his preferred choice of action was to wait and maintain

⁷⁵ Russell to Baring, 21 December 1860, PRO 30/22/97.

⁷⁶ Granville to Russell, 20 September 1862, PRO 30/22/25; and Palmerston to Russell, 2 October 1862, in Sideman, ed., *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, pp. 177-79.

⁷⁷ Lyons to Russell, 25 March 1862, PRO 30/22/36. The same point was made in a report after the Cabinet discussions had ended; Lyons to Russell, 24 November 1862.

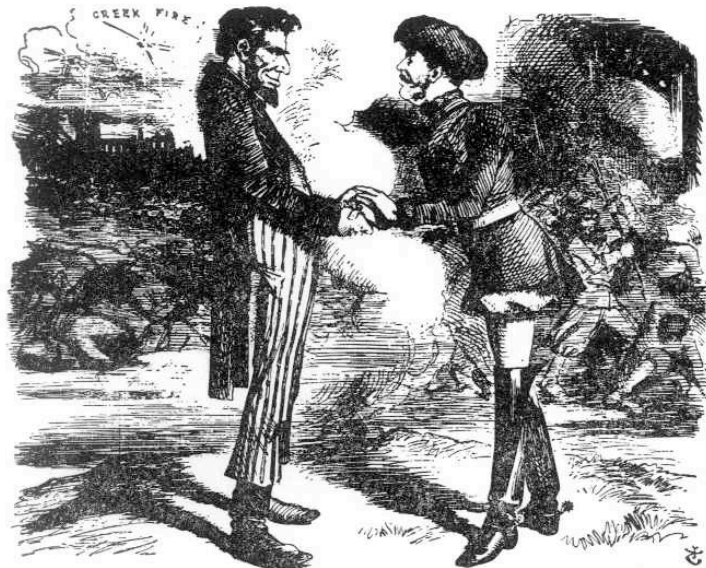
⁷⁸ Adams to Seward, 17 October 1862, cited in Mahin, *One War at a Time*, p. 130.

⁷⁹ See Jones, *Union in Peril*, pp. 164-69; and Mahin, *One War at a Time*, pp. 127-28.

neutrality.⁸⁰ With the military situation still unresolved, there was not even that incentive for intervention.

The final reason why mediation was impossible was that it relied upon European support. As early as 23 September, Palmerston insisted that France and Russia should be consulted before any decision was made.⁸¹ Even Gladstone accepted that Russia was a 'vital element' to any offer of mediation.⁸² Only with European backing might the Union be willing to even consider cooperating. Such support was not forthcoming. During the main period of consideration of mediation before October 23, the French, despite their later enthusiasm, were distinctly uninterested in aiding a British proposal.

British anger at the close relationship between Russia and the Union (*Punch*, 24 October 1863)



EXTREMES MEET.

Abs.

Imperial son of Nicholas the Great,
We air in the same fix, I calculate,
You with your Poles, with Southern rebels I,
Who spurn my rule and my revenge defy.

Alex.

Vengeance is mine, old man; see where it falls.
Behold yon hearths laid waste, and ruined walls,
Yon gibbets, where the struggling patriot hangs,
Whilst my brave myrmidons enjoy his pangs.

The French Foreign Minister Edouard Thouvenel instead suggested that any offer of mediation be delayed until after the American elections later that year.⁸³ Russia was not going to support any offer at all. Whereas Britain and Russia had recently been enemies

⁸⁰ Palmerston to Russell, 14 September 1862, in Sideman, ed., *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, pp. 174-75; and Palmerston to Russell, 23 September 1862, PRO 30/22/14D.

⁸¹ Palmerston to Russell, 23 September 1862, PRO 30/22/14D.

⁸² 'Gladstone Memorandum,' 25 October 1862, in Wiener, *Foreign Policy and The Span of Empire*, vol. 1, pp. 481-84.

⁸³ Cowley to Russell, 18 September 1862, PRO 30/22/14.

during the Crimean War, America was one of the few countries to consistently maintain a friendly relationship with Russia.⁸⁴ The position of the Russian Vice-Chancellor, Prince Gortchakov, was that even though the war was increasingly and depressingly violent, Russia would reject any plan for interference and support the indivisibility of the American Union.⁸⁵ The British leadership was clearly aware of this sentiment. In November Lord Lyons wrote to Russell stating that Russia was never going to agree to a British proposal; and that without Russia any such proposal would be futile.⁸⁶ Without the firm support of either Russia or France, it was simply impossible for Britain to properly gather sufficient moral and political force for mediation, making the pursuit of such a policy pointless.

Looking closely at three specific case studies – the *Trent* affair, parliamentary debate regarding recognition of the Confederacy and breaking the blockade, and the Cabinet discussions concerning mediation – it becomes clear that even when Anglo-American relations were rockier than normal, or when individuals brought up the idea of intervention, Britain remained immovable in her neutrality. The British leadership would never intervene in these cases because of Britain's contextual limitations, concerns, and traditions. The existing diplomatic pattern of bluster and conciliation provides a framework for understanding the correspondence during the *Trent* crisis, demonstrating that the rhetoric used was actually remarkably peaceable and geared towards compromise. Moreover, engaging in a conflict with the Federals at this time was considered eminently impractical, given Britain's military overstretch, inability to

⁸⁴ Russia was also trying to negotiate the sale of her Alaska territories to America before and during the war, a process that required friendly relations with the Union. For a summary of Russian-American relations at this time see Nikolay Bolkhovitinov, 'The Crimean War and the Emergence of Proposals for the Sale of Russian America, 1853-1861,' *Pacific Historical Review*, 59, no. 1 (Feb., 1990), pp. 15-49.

⁸⁵ Gortchakov to Taylor, October 1862, in Sideman, ed., *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, pp. 184-85.

⁸⁶ Lyons to Russell, 18 November 1862, PRO 30/22/36.

defend Canada and the opposition of the Conservatives. Some in Parliament or Cabinet called for mediation or recognition, but they were never reflective of a broader consensus. The outspoken nature of such proposals, combined with the potential economic and public opinion backlash to any decision that could trigger a war with America meant that the Cabinet and Parliamentary discussions never moved beyond a preliminary stage, despite the publicity and historiographical attention these interventionist considerations have received. Put simply, intervention was clearly understood to be against the British interest.

Conclusion

In the years leading up to the American Civil War, Anglo-American relations were, despite the occasional dispute, defined by the desire of both nations to maintain peace and build upon a flourishing and mutually beneficial economic relationship. As such, it is almost strange that so much scholarship should argue that Britain was on the threshold of intervention during the Civil War. Stranger still is that historians have come to this conclusion without properly incorporating a contextual understanding of the British economy, governmental structure, foreign policy concerns or transatlantic diplomacy before and during the war. By focussing on specific events during the American conflict, historians have limited their access to supplementary evidence, and have stuck to a tradition of diplomatic historiography that fails to account properly for British interests, traditions and restrictions.

This is not to suggest that there is an absence of work on topics such as British foreign policy, public opinion and political discourse in the mid-nineteenth century. Rather, histories written in these fields have not been applied to the study of British neutrality during the American Civil War. This thesis incorporates the distinct historiographies so as to create a more holistic approach to the question of British intervention.

Clearly, there was a cornucopia of reasons why intervention in the American Civil War was not in the British interest. British policy-makers and diplomats clearly believed that intervention was highly likely to bring about conflict with the Federals,

unless the Federals themselves asked for it. From this basic assumption, intervention made minimal economic, political, social, military or foreign policy sense.

Historians have argued that British dependence on Confederate cotton nearly dragged Britain into the war. This was certainly the belief of the Confederates, yet such hopes were ultimately in vain. The surfeit of cotton in Britain at the start of the war, combined with the Confederate policy of destroying cotton in a bid to force British intervention, meant that the cotton shortage was relatively unimportant, especially when the workers who depended on cotton tended to side with the Union. Equally significant, Britain's tradition of stable and profitable commercial partnership with the Northern states, and the opportunity to profit by remaining neutral and selling arms to both belligerents, meant that intervention was not in the British economic interest.

The British social and political milieu was similarly unconducive to the abandonment of a neutral approach to the American Civil War. When studying public opinion during the period 1850s and 1860s, it is important to acknowledge that neither the middle class and press, nor the working class, held the sway that they later would. However, British Cabinet and Parliamentarians still paid close attention to the popular mood, and in the case of the American conflict, the only constant was disunity. With public opinion thoroughly divided and hatred of slavery the only common ground, British inaction was the policy least likely to offend anyone. The same principle applied at the political level. With coalition government the norm since the Peelite split of 1846, caution was the only way for a government to survive, given that all but one in the past decade had come to grief over a divisive foreign policy proposal – that one ministry being the Palmerston government which did not intervene in the American Civil War!

British military and foreign policy concerns pointed in the same direction. Intervention was nearly impossible from a military and logistical point of view, and

would endanger other important foreign policy interests. As a result of involvement in a series of other conflicts, Britain was militarily stretched to its limit by the time the Civil War broke out. Politicians, colonial governors, military commanders and diplomats all commented on the impossibility of re-directing troops and ships to the Atlantic. Moreover, if war did break out with the Union, Canada was practically indefensible, and Britain in the 1850s and 1860s was highly concerned with maintaining control of its still profitable and strategically significant empire. But, even without colonial and military distractions, the foremost concern for Britain in terms of foreign policy was not America, but the Continent – the home of Britain’s French rivals and the site for Britain’s pursuit of a non-interventionist policy in numerous other conflicts and crises. Britain’s military and foreign policy situation during the Civil War was simply not capable of stretching to incorporate involvement in another conflict – let alone one across the Atlantic.

Finally, there was the tradition of transatlantic diplomacy. Anglo-American ties during the thirty years preceding the Civil War were built on repeated compromise and on acknowledgement by both nations that conflict was not in the interest of either side. Although blustering rhetoric was common, it did not reflect the intentions of American and British leaders and diplomats. After initial posturing, each antebellum crisis was solved in a conciliatory fashion, with both sides making efforts to ensure any concession given was an act of friendship, rather than bullying.

It is in the tradition of such compromise, and the context of British interests that Britain’s relationship with the Union during the Civil War should thus be interpreted. Historians have highlighted the *Trent* affair in late 1861, Parliamentary debate regarding the breaking of the Union blockade or recognising the Confederacy in mid-1862, and the Cabinet discussions about offering mediation in autumn 1862 as

instances when Britain was on the threshold of intervention. However, in each of these cases, a broader understanding of the British and Anglo-American context shows just how far from the truth such a claim is. The *Trent* affair was resolved in an almost identical fashion to earlier 'crises.' Initial anger quickly faded, and Britain demonstrated a magnanimity borne of a desire to ensure peaceful relations for the sake of trade and not being drawn into a war that could cost it Canada. Meanwhile, both the Parliamentary and Cabinet proposals for intervention proved to be driven by individuals, and not reflective of a genuine interventionist desire. With the public and Conservative opposition mostly against intervention, Lord Lyons, the Minister to America, emphasising the futility of mediation, and with Canada always at risk, the British leadership had every reason to maintain neutrality.

In conclusion, the question of British intervention in the American Civil War is a complex one, but one that has scope for re-interpretation. Studying the key moments in the British decision-making process is important, but only as part of a broader understanding of the British social, political, economic, and foreign policy milieu before and during the war. It is only within such a context that it truly becomes evident that intervention was never going to occur – it was not in Britain's interest, and it was not how Britain approached her relationship with America.

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