

2010

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Roundtable Review

www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables

Volume XI, No. 36 (2010)

26 July 2010

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

Roundtable Web/Production Editor: George Fujii

Howard Jones. *Blue & Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations.* 432 pp. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8078-3349-0 (cloth, \$30.00).

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-36.pdf>

Contents

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge	2
Review by Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, San Diego State University	5
Review by Robert E. May, Purdue University	9
Review by Jay Sexton, Yale University	14
Review by Chris Tudda, Office of the Historian, Department of State	18
Author's Response by Howard Jones, University of Alabama.....	22

Copyright © 2010 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

Howard Jones has continued to enhance the field of the diplomacy of the Civil War with a steady stream of studies that explore significant issues on the international dimensions of America's Civil War.¹ *Blue & Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* is not just a re-working of his earlier works. Jones has expanded his research in primary records on both sides of the Atlantic and extended his assessment of leaders and their deliberations. On the U.S. side the focus is on President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of State William Seward, and U.S. officials in London and Paris and their counterparts on the Confederate side. British officials led by Prime Minister Lord Palmerston and Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell and French officials under Napoleon III receive thorough evaluation by Jones as he retains a focus on statecraft and the critical maneuvering of Washington to prevent European intervention in the Civil War and Richmond's desire to obtain European recognition and assistance in the Confederate's quest for independence.

As Jay Sexton notes, Jones advances the central argument that the "decision of the British and French to maintain a policy of neutrality throughout the war was a result of hard-headed diplomatic realism" in which any benefits that might be acquired through intervention were outweighed by the risks of war with the Union side. (2) Jones criticizes the Confederate leaders for a lack of realism on how to obtain European assistance, most notably by withholding its most valuable trade item, cotton, rather than using cotton to negotiate for loans and assistance from London and Paris. Lincoln and Seward, on the other hand, receive more credit for their diplomacy of affirming that any European intervention would have serious repercussions but at the same time exhibiting sufficient flexibility to manage issues such as the *Trent* crisis. Elizabeth Cobbs-Hoffman and Chris Tudda join with the other reviewers in crediting Jones with an even-handed approach in developing the perspectives of both the North and the South as they defended their claims to be the true and legitimate heirs of the Founding Fathers and the American Revolution with the institution of slavery as a central, underlying issue despite the denials of both sides. With Lincoln asserting in 1863 that the war was about maintaining the Union and not slavery and President Jefferson Davis affirming that the South was fighting for the right of self-government, it is not a surprise, as Jones argues, that European leaders lacked much certainty about the likely results of the conflict that hindsight provides to historians.

The sense of contingency that Jones restores to the conflict and its impact on issues such as Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation represents, according to Robert May and Tudda, one of Jones' most important contributions. Jones, for example, emphasizes British consideration of steps leading to intervention after the Union defeat at the second battle of Bull Run in September 1862. The reviewers also point to Jones' revisionist assessment of the relationship between the battle of Antietam in September 1862 and Lincoln's

¹ For Jones' earlier books, see *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (1992) and *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union & Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War* (1999).

subsequent proclamation. Contrary to the standard interpretation advanced in most texts and classroom lectures that Union success in stopping the Confederate invasion of Maryland at Antietam followed by Lincoln's proclamation ended the prospect of European intervention, Jones suggests that in the short run both events had the opposite effect. European concerns about the human costs of the conflict and skepticism about Lincoln's political motives on emancipation joined with fears of a destructive attack by emancipated blacks on whites and an ensuing race war in the South to prompt increased consideration of intervention in the British Cabinet with support from Napoleon III in Paris.

The reviewers do suggest that there are issues that Jones does not focus upon which provide room for further studies. Tudda, for example, welcomes the inclusion of French policy in the study and the analysis of Napoleon III's support for European intervention as part of his larger desire to revive the French empire in the Western Hemisphere with Mexico as a starting point. As Tudda notes, however, the absence of French documents in the study leads to a depiction of the "French point of view from American, Confederate, and British records," and leaves unanswered the question of whether French officials engaged in a debate on intervention similar to what took place in the British cabinet on the prospects and perils of intervention. Tudda also notes Jones' suggestions about Russian attitudes toward the war and European intervention and the desirability of studies that explore Russian, Austrian and German records as well as American calculations about their positions on the major issues. May raises a similar point about the absence of Latin America, with the exception of French designs on Mexico, especially since Confederate foreign agents were posted in the Central American-Caribbean region, and Washington had to deal with sustained concerns from that region about Lincoln's idea of colonizing freed slaves in that region. Sexton suggests broadening the perspective on British decision making from a "mixture of humanitarian, economic and political considerations" to an examination of the British empire, or "British world-system", and evaluations of the important place of the U.S. in this system: "in most years, it was Britain's most important trading partner, largest recipient of investment capital, and most popular destination for migrants." (3-4) British leaders, as Sexton notes, "kept one eye on Britain's imperial system," including the prospect of a Union offensive against Canada if London joined with Napoleon III for an intervention into the civil war.

Participants:

Howard Jones is University Research Professor of History at the University of Alabama and the author of numerous books, including *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (1992), *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union and Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War* (1999), and *Blue and Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (2010). He is currently writing a book tentatively entitled, "Into the Heart of Darkness: My Lai."

Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman is the Dwight Stanford Professor of American Foreign Relations at San Diego State University. In 2010-2011 she will be a W. Glenn Campbell and Rita Ricardo-Campbell National Fellow and William C. Bark National Fellow at the Hoover

Institution. Her first novel, *Broken Promises* (previously titled *In the Lion's Den*), is forthcoming from Random House in honor of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War.

Robert E. May is Professor of History at Purdue University. He is the author of *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (paper ed.; University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (paper ed.; University Press of Florida, 2002). He has also written a number of articles touching on Civil War diplomatic issues, including "A Different Destiny: Abraham Lincoln and the Principles of U.S. Foreign Relations," *Lincoln Lore* (Fall 2007): 10-17.

Jay Sexton is University Lecturer and Tutorial Fellow at Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford. He researches the American and British imperial systems. He is the author of *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873* as well as two studies to be published in 2011 *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in America* and (co-edited with Richard Carwardine) *The Global Lincoln*.

Chris Tudda is a Historian in the Declassification and Publishing Division in the Office of the Historian, Department of State, where he declassifies manuscripts for the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series and co-produces the Office's internet-only publications. He earned a B.A. from the University of Vermont in 1987 and the Ph.D. from American University in 2002. He is the author of *The Truth is our Weapon: The Rhetorical Diplomacy of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles* (2006). His most recent publication is "A Messiah that will Never Come: British Reconciliation Efforts, American Independence, and Revolutionary War Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 32 (November 2008). He is currently writing a history of Nixon's opening to China and a reassessment of American revolutionary diplomacy.

Is it possible that the Civil War has finally entered history?

One year shy of the sesquicentennial of America's greatest tragedy, Howard Jones has written a deft, compassionate account that shows it may now be possible to understand this event without choosing sides. *Blue and Grey Diplomacy* achieves the highest goal of history: to illuminate the past impartially and on its own terms, while making manifest the wisdom gained from its study.

Blue and Grey Diplomacy tackles perhaps the most common, devilish problem in modern foreign relations. In the 1860s, the great powers of Europe confronted the vexed question of whether or not they ought to intervene in a civil war so bloody that it killed thousands in a day—day after day, month after month, year after year. The conflict was far away, but it ravaged a people upon whom Europeans depended for the chief raw material of the age, and with whom they had deep cultural bonds. The slaughter alone seemed to compel “Christian men” to put an end to it, argued the editors of the *London Morning Herald*. The collateral economic damage to surrounding nations was reason enough in the view of others.

Without reference to the twentieth- and twenty-first century experiences of the United States, Jones nonetheless makes plain that while “the temptation to intervene in another country's domestic affairs” can be nigh irresistible (as we have found), it is fraught with danger. In civil wars, it is almost impossible to understand the emotional as well as political issues as intimately as the contending parties and thus “render a fair, informed verdict that satisfies all sides” (p. 324). Outside force may be the ultimate arbiter, but it brings new complications. One of these is the threat of war against the very people one hopes to help. Indeed, as Jones shows so well, “Involvement in another country's affairs always guaranteed complex problems, the most important being the chances of causing a war with either or both antagonists” (p. 270).

From the shelling of Fort Sumter to the surrender at Appomattox, Confederate envoys begged Britain and France for recognition of their country's independence. Howard Jones of the University of Alabama chronicles their earnest attempts to win the same foreign acknowledgment of self-determination that the rebellious Thirteen Colonies achieved in 1778, after two years of open war against Great Britain. From the European point of view, which had evolved considerably over the nineteenth century and shifted towards greater support for nationalism, the Confederacy had perfect claim to precisely that recognition—if they could establish de facto control over their borders. Few doubted that the Confederates States could and would do this by repelling the invasion. As Chancellor of the Exchequer William Ewart Gladstone expressed it, the outcome was certain “in the opinion of the whole world except one of the parties” (p. 208). But—and the devil is always in the details—for how long would the Confederacy have to defend its territory before the rest of “the world” compelled the North to stop its “aggression?”

Howard Jones is at his best in evoking with absolute even-handedness the aspirations of both sides. He shows why the conflict—like other tragic feuds—was not resolvable short of violence. North and South both legitimately claimed to be fighting on behalf of the Republican Spirit of 1776 and 1789. The South fought for Jeffersonian self-determination, and the North for Hamiltonian federalism. Presidents Davis and Lincoln both saw themselves as the true defenders of “government of, for, and by the people.” Thus, observes Jones, “Both sets of arguments were morally and legally defensible and thereby right, making the two opposing leaders’ positions irreconcilable.” Combined with the “vendettalike infighting that often comes in a familial contest,” massive bloodletting was practically assured, and would continue until one side exhausted the other, *unless* one of the great powers intervened first (p. 11).

Jones does not ignore the fact that the Jeffersonian camp, so to speak, also fought in defense of slavery. This irony should not be surprising. Not only did Jefferson Davis hold slaves, but so did the original Jefferson. As innumerable historians of the Early Republic have shown, the Founders were well aware that they had fobbed off the most explosive issue of their generation onto a later one in the interest of cobbling together the disparate Thirteen Colonies under a so-called General Government. Some of the most ardent Federalists, like James Madison, later rued giving the central government as much power as they had, partly because of what the government might do with its prerogatives. Slavery was woven into the nation, and those threads could be plucked only by a higher authority or by a great rending of the nation’s fabric.

Outside observers saw this, but President Lincoln confused the issue for foreigners by insisting that the war was over “union,” not slavery. Under these conditions Europeans could hardly help but sympathize with the South, forced to stay in an unhappy marriage simply to honor stale vows. To many, the North seemed brutish, hanging onto the Confederacy out of spite, pride, or “ambition” (p. 229). Worse, to English and Continental liberals who increasingly debated the morality of imperialism, the North seemed bent on “empire” at the expense of the colonized South (p. 221).

Until Antietam.

Blue and Grey Diplomacy shows that Lincoln’s decision to bring slavery front and center as the *casus belli* fundamentally altered the perspective of Britain, which set European trends for policy towards the American conflict (much as, today, many nations look before acting to see what the U.S. will do in a crisis). Lincoln used the questionable 1862 victory at Antietam, which staggered both sides and left 6,000 men dead in an afternoon, to announce the tepidly-worded, but politically-explosive Emancipation Proclamation. Jones argues that its most immediate effect was to alarm Europeans, many of whom scorned the Proclamation as a cheap, cynical ploy to curry foreign favor: cheap because it cost Lincoln nothing to abolish slavery in territories over which he had no control while retaining it in the loyal states; and cynical because the Proclamation might well incite a murderous race war in the South under the guise of helping blacks. The London *Times* predicted that the Proclamation would earn Lincoln a place in history’s “catalogue of monsters” and “wholesale assassins and butchers” (p. 232). In October 1862, after Antietam and Lincoln’s

resulting Proclamation, Britain came closer than at any other point to intervening in ways that would rescue the Confederacy. “The unparalleled toll of casualties in a single day’s fighting confirmed the necessity for civilized nations to intercede” (p. 224), says Jones, countering the traditional historiographical assumption that the Proclamation promptly saved the day for Union diplomacy.

But Jones acknowledges that in the long run it did just that. Optimists triumphed over naysayers as Europeans gradually came to accept Lincoln’s commitment as sincere. *Blue and Grey Diplomacy* shows that reformers in Britain had been convinced from the beginning that the war was about “slavery from the top to the bottom, and slavery in the middle, and slavery all the way through” (p. 227). Even Karl Marx, writing from exile in London, proclaimed his faith in the American President as a visionary who had inspired a “world-transforming...revolutionary movement” against the “slave oligarchy” (p. 209).

Jones follows the intricate steps and missteps of Confederate, Union, British, French, and occasionally Russian diplomats and leaders. The story is a dramatic one and he tells it well. Perhaps the most interesting device Jones uses to sustain suspense in this old tale is verbatim dialogue. At times the book has almost the pacing of a novel, with quick verbal sparring. For example, in the back-and-forth between Confederate representative Edwin DeLeon and British Prime Minister Palmerston, Jones uses dialogue to evoke what it must have been like in those gilded European parlors where the future of the United States hung in the balance—where Confederate audacity and Union desperation came butt up against the subtle blend of duplicity and concern that marked European attitudes and strategies. By following the intense conversation, rather than merely summarizing it, Jones illuminates the arts of persuasion and impresses the reader with how near a thing it was that the U.S. survived this mortal peril intact.

One of the book’s greatest strengths is also perhaps its only weakness. Whether teaching or writing about foreign relations, scholars must recount multiple national histories in enough detail to accurately render the motivations, needs, and personalities of a cast of thousands. Howard Jones does this beautifully, plumbing all sides to the conflict in pellucid prose. However, it does make for close reading on occasion, of a sort that in places might daunt all but scholars and Civil War buffs. For example, *Blue and Grey Diplomacy* deftly exposes the guile of Napoleon III, who tried to use the Civil War as a diversion to draw attention and opprobrium away from French colonization of Mexico. This is inherently important and interesting, but following the compound, circuitous tale eventually becomes somewhat tedious. By the end, a reader is ready for the Union to do what Napoleon never thought it could and end the war by winning.

Howard Jones has written an insightful, masterly account that will set the standard for the next 150 years of Civil War studies. Above all, he has demonstrated without a doubt that some of the greatest, most consequential battles of America’s worst conflict were fought with words. France, England, and Russia had the power to redirect the American ship of state between 1861 and 1865. They equipped the Confederacy with the supplies—and hope of foreign recognition—that kept the fire burning for four terrible years. But Union representatives were ultimately more persuasive and adept than Confederate ones. The

result was that European governments mostly stayed their hands, choosing restraint over activism, and the Union was spared. The quintessential faded Southern belle Blanche DuBois famously remarked, "I depend upon the kindness of strangers." As Howard Jones shows in this poignant tale, she was not the only American to do so.

Review by Robert E. May, Purdue University

The accomplished United States (U.S.) diplomatic historian Howard Jones, already the author of *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (1992) and *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union & Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War* (1999), revisits Confederate-Union relations with France and Britain in this engrossing work. He does so, he explains in his prefatory remarks, to give readers a genuinely Trans-Atlantic, as compared to ethnocentric, perspective of how wartime foreign relations evolved, within a “narrative style” illuminating that key events “occurred in neither an orderly nor a predictable manner, but in a chaotic and concurrent fashion” (7). Jones reminds that the international context of the war remains far less generally known than its military history, a circumstance that probably has much to say about how Civil War memory was constructed. In two thousand pages of postwar reflections, ex-Confederate president Jefferson Davis devoted a mere dozen pages to foreign affairs. No wonder scholarship followed the politicians to the battlefields.

Ever a meticulous researcher and tenacious narrator, Jones keeps focused on the crucial concerns defining Union and Confederate relations with the two primary European powers—especially declarations of neutrality, the Union blockade and European cotton shortages, the *Trent* affair, British and French shipbuilding for the Confederates, France’s intervention in Mexico, and the Lincoln administration’s evolving policies on slavery. Unlike Phillip E. Meyers, who argues in *Caution & Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations* (2008) that an Anglo-American rapprochement before 1861 made Britain’s refusal to intervene in the Civil War virtually predetermined, Jones renders considerable contingency to Civil War diplomacy, arguing that British intercession was indeed possible, especially following news in September 1862 of the Union’s recent defeat at the Second Bull Run. At this time, Britain considered “several policy changes, all pointing to intervention” (240). Had Britain done so, Napoleon III’s France would have gone along: Napoleon by “mid-July 1862 . . . had become Europe’s most ardent supporter of intervention” (164) and French policy from the beginning was to follow Britain’s lead (though Napoleon toyed with intervening unilaterally several times). Jones presents British foreign minister Lord John Russell as the most important of several figures in the British government leaning toward intervention through the war’s early going. Others, including Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, favored intervention, but only if the circumstances seemed promising and a consensus emerged as to what exact form British intervention should take. Although the Union-hating John A. Roebuck, influenced by a Canadian upbringing in the wake of the War of 1812, moved in Parliament on 30 June 1863 for recognition of the Confederacy, his motion amounted to a lost cause and was easily quashed. By then, the Confederacy’s hopes rested on Napoleon, who was inclined towards intervention mostly as a means of repressing international republican forces and enabling French control of Mexico and an eventual isthmian canal, but also because the war’s cotton shortage impinged more on France than England.

Jones’s most arresting argument, elaborated here but a thread through his earlier works—the Jones thesis—is that contrary to popular belief, the Union’s success in repelling the

Confederate invasion of Maryland at the battle of Antietam in September 1862 and Lincoln's subsequent Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation actually increased rather than lessened the likelihood of European intervention in the war for the short run. This was partly because of genuine humanitarian concerns over the human cost of fratricidal warfare in North America, which seemed sure, now, to continue. It was also partly because of widespread unease with Lincoln's motives, since his administration had initially resisted pressures to identify the Union cause with abolitionism. Mostly, though, it derived from fears that Lincoln's sudden freeing of slaves might trigger black rebellion. As the *Times* of London put it, Lincoln would likely leave office "amid horrible massacres of white women and children, to be followed by the extermination of the black race in the South" (quoted on 232). Ironically, Lincoln and Seward implemented emancipation thinking that it would immediately help Union relations with Britain and France at a critical juncture in the war.

At the risk of simplifying Jones's highly nuanced, detailed account, I would summarize *Blue & Gray Diplomacy's* other main arguments, all of which are substantiated with very thorough and convincing documentation, as follows. First, the reactions of the major powers to the American war foremost reflected national interest and considerations about the European balance-of-power, and had relatively little to do with either the slavery question or public opinion. Jones shows, in this regard, that Russian policy cast a "shadowy" (4) restraint upon countervailing forces nudging England and France towards involvement. Relatively immune to King Cotton diplomacy, Russia ruled out proposed tripartite intervention initiatives. Throughout the book, Jones interprets Russian policy as more genuinely sympathetic to the Union than much of the literature would suggest. Second, although European declarations of neutrality infuriated Union leaders, they actually operated in the Union's favor. Third, intervention foundered on the quandary of means. Would the European powers, if they could agree, arbitrate, mediate, enforce an armistice to enable Union-Confederate negotiations, or what? Fourth, that Union statecraft trumped Confederate diplomacy, and that Union Secretary of State William H. Seward's threats of war against European powers recognizing the Confederacy were effective in the war's early stages, when they were most needed. Jones follows the lead of other scholars such as Charles M. Hubbard (*The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy* [1998]) and Emory M. Thomas (*The Confederate Nation* [1979]) in presenting most Confederate diplomatists as parochial and inept, and their policies delusional. Confederate leaders in Richmond and agents abroad never comprehended the pragmatic underpinnings of European policy. Absurdly, Confederates threatened to embargo cotton and initiated partial embargoes, when they should have been leveraging cotton sales for loans. Some Confederate congressmen even thought that offers to negotiate a copyright agreement for literature might make a difference in British policy. Most important, few Confederates comprehended their nation's conundrum: European countries only intended to help them if it appeared that the Confederate cause was successful and independence secured; to do that, the Confederacy needed victory on the battlefield; and if they won in the field, they would little require a European rescue.

From Jones's perspective, in fact, few major players in Civil War diplomacy are clear-eyed. European advocates of mediation like Russell failed to comprehend that such intervention was hopeless, given Union insistence on reunion and Confederate insistence on

independence. What was there to mediate? Napoleon foolishly thought that the Lincoln administration would accommodate itself to Maximilian's régime in Mexico if he resisted the temptation to recognize the Confederacy. Lincoln and Seward get high marks overall, though they failed to comprehend how much British neutrality conformed to international law and played into Union hands (by putting constraints on private British citizens wishing to aid the Confederacy) and misinterpreted the *Alabama's* escape from British shores as evidence of pro-Confederate policies. As in *Union in Peril*, British Secretary for War George Cornwall Lewis emerges the most perspicacious exception to Jones's rule of the fog of diplomacy. Lewis instinctively comprehended how foolish and dangerous it would be to intervene diplomatically in America's civil strife. His brilliantly articulated case prevailed in British cabinet discussions in November 1862.

In one important area, Jones's arguments contradict each other. Several times, Jones implies that Confederate diplomacy problematically prioritized formal recognition from the European powers, when Confederate leaders should have aggressively cut deals abroad in pursuit of military alliances. Confederate minister to Great Britain James Mason and Confederate minister France John Slidell both made the "perplexing assertion" to Russell and Napoleon, respectively, that the Confederacy only wished "simple recognition—'no aid from, nor intervention by, foreign Powers'" (190). To Jones, such assertions are revelatory of the Confederates' "dreamlike" mentality, their bizarre thinking that "being 'right' guaranteed victory" (190). No wonder Napoleon and Great Britain's minister in Washington, Richard B. Lyons, both expressed surprise at the naïveté such statements exposed. Confederates would have had a better chance at European assistance had they offered the European powers something tangible in return for recognition. Belatedly, Confederate leaders realized this towards the end of the war, when they authorized a diplomatic agent to offer emancipation of the slaves for foreign recognition. Yet, Jones also suggests that recognition "might have tipped the scales in the Confederacy's favor" had it occurred during the war's first eighteen months, because it would have facilitated challenges to the Union's blockade, foreign loans, and alliances (321), and that the Union had just cause to threaten war over the threat. I suspect the ambiguity is Jones's way of handling a question that most of us who write on Civil War diplomacy find it safest to evade: would a British-Confederate or Anglo-French-Confederate alliance actually have carried the day. If success was self-evident, it is hard to understand why British leaders were as paranoid as they were about the threats of Union ironclads and losing Canada if they intervened in the conflict. Yet, given how Confederate armies held out for four years without significant outside help, it is difficult to argue that an alliance would not have prevailed. Perhaps wisely, Jones avoids definitively pronouncing on the inevitability of Confederate defeat.

Jones offers, here, an exemplary study of Anglo-French-Union-Confederate relations, a chronologically-organized masterpiece of diplomacy unfolding almost day by day simultaneously in four capitals, with fascinating dissections of governmental discourse and public opinion. Jones's command of manuscripts, newspapers, and printed primary sources on both sides of the Atlantic is impeccable. So is his mastery of relevant international law and the historiography of Civil War diplomacy. The result is less a work that breaks new ground than one that more patiently cultivates familiar terrain. For instance, I compared

Jones's discussion of Confederate minister John Slidell's discussions with Napoleon on 28 October 1862 with how he handled the same meeting in *Union in Peril*. The new treatment is about one third longer, with much more detail on the give-and-take. Patience renders fresh insight. In *Union in Peril*, discussing Charles Wilkes and the *Trent* affair, Jones simply said that Wilkes might have built a legal case for the vessel carrying contraband had he thoroughly searched the *Trent* and discovered that its commander had hidden a Confederate mail pouch from Union inspection. In *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, citing the nineteenth-century theorist Henry Wheaton, Jones makes an extended case that Confederates Mason and Slidell actually represented contraband and were just as liable to seizure as military personnel on neutral ships, since their intent "was to convince the world's two leading neutral nations to recognize the Confederacy and thereby facilitate its efforts to destroy the Union" (108).

We are unlikely ever to get a better account of what I would call mainstream Civil War diplomatic issues, but *Blue & Gray Diplomacy* lacks the comprehensiveness of its subtitle: *A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations*. Regarding some matters, it holds back. Myers's *Caution & Cooperation* offers a more thorough analysis of the Anglo-American (anti-slave trade) Treaty of 1862, for example. Most obviously, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy* slights Union and Confederate relations with European powers other than England, France, and Russia, and overlooks diplomacy in other parts of the world, especially Latin America (other than for negotiations respecting the European intervention in Mexico). None of the Central American countries merit an index entry, as if all U.S. diplomacy with that region ground to a halt after Fort Sumter and no diplomats from the warring powers were stationed there. Yet, Thomas Schoonover points out that about half of all Confederate foreign agents were assigned to posts in the Central American-Caribbean area. Jones says little about the reactions of Central American republics, or even British Honduras, to Lincoln's colonization scheme, though it triggered substantial diplomatic discourse. There were so many protests reaching Washington that Seward, the same month as the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, had to reassure all five independent governments there that the Union would not proceed with colonization schemes on their soil. In 1862, a governor in Mexican Chihuahua gave a Confederate army colonel permission to purchase supplies there in negotiations that the colonel construed as constituting official recognition of the Confederacy by a foreign entity. Jones not only fails to discuss these discussions, but hardly touches upon Union negotiations with the representative in Washington of Benito Juárez's Liberal, anti-French régime in Mexico.¹

Finally, I wish Jones had done just a bit more probing in relation to Britain's initial dismay about Union emancipation policies. Jones suggests (121-22) that preserving British rule in places like Ireland and India lurked behind the paranoia in London, but the quotations he musters suggest, instead, that British leaders fretted mostly about Southern white men,

¹ Thomas Schoonover, "Napoleon Is Coming! Maximilian Is Coming? The International History of the Civil War in the Caribbean Basin," in *The Union, the Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim*, ed. Robert May (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1995), 112; Mary Chapman, "The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby to Guatemala, 1861-1864," *Pacific Historical Review* 24 (August 1955): 278; Donald Frazier, *Blood & Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 146.

women, and children falling victim to laborers they had whipped than that the Empire might fall. Rhetoric, in other words, does not match logic. How could British leaders be so silent on something so obvious?

Jones's sensitive and gracefully written account of what matters most in Civil War diplomacy is a must read. No scholar of Civil War diplomacy matches Jones in meticulously explaining the complex issues of neutrality and deconstructing the myth that British leaders and British foreign opinion favored the Confederacy. Hopefully his persuasive research and reflections will not only make it into college classrooms and onto the shelves of scholars but also take the reading public beyond the battlefield.

Review by Jay Sexton, Yale University

I remember reading Howard Jones' *Union in Peril* as a first-year grad student planning to write a dissertation on the threat of British intervention in the U.S. Civil War. After one reading of that impressive book, I beat a hasty retreat and decided to change the focus of my research. Fortunately, Jones' earlier triumph has not deterred him from returning to the issue of foreign intervention in this important addition to North Carolina Press's 'The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era' series.

The subject matter of Jones' new study is the diplomacy of the Union and the Confederacy that aimed, respectively, to prevent or entice foreign intervention in the Civil War. Though not referred to in the title, Jones also pays much attention to the statecraft of the British and French. The book is based upon primary materials on both sides of the Atlantic and, drawing from earlier work for *Union in Peril*, is particularly strong on the British side. It incorporates recent scholarship, as well as the old classics of E.D. Adams and Frank Owsley. Readers looking for an analysis of the war's broader social, political and economic impact abroad, however, should look elsewhere. Apart from a few brief discussions, there is little on the highly debated issue of British and French public opinion. The focus is almost exclusively on statesmen in Washington, Richmond, London and Paris. There is very little on other Europeans and Latin Americans (though the French intervention in Mexico features prominently in the book, Jones does not give much space to Mexicans themselves). There is also no discussion of relations with Native Americans, though the Confederacy scored one of its rare diplomatic successes in negotiating treaties with Southern Indians (particularly the Cherokee followers of Stand Watie). In short, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy* is a traditional diplomatic history that focuses primarily on the high diplomacy of 1861-2 when the threat of British and/or French intervention loomed largest. The last chapter takes the story through 1865.

None of this is to say that Jones should apologize for the focus of his book. *Blue and Gray Diplomacy* is an important addition to our understanding of Civil War diplomacy. The strengths of this book are many. Most broadly, its narrative structure allows Jones to make clear the contingent, vacillating and, at times, haphazard nature of the war's diplomacy. He shows in great detail how foreign governments often misunderstood events playing out in America; how they never appreciated the complex political and constitutional constraints under which American statesmen operated; how their policy of neutrality could never satisfy both the North and the South; and how they viewed American affairs through the lens of their own ambitions and anxieties. In Jones' capable hands, the connection between events on the battlefield and the diplomacy in the courts of the Old World is made clear. Battlefield victories could be interpreted in a number of ways across the Atlantic. The Union victory at Antietam, for example, actually emboldened British proponents of intervention, who feared that it would lead Northerners to commit further resources and manpower to what appeared to be a hopeless cause.

Jones does a similarly good job of integrating Lincoln's emancipation policy with wartime diplomacy. He demonstrates that diplomatic considerations factored into Lincoln's move

toward emancipation, though once again the result was not initially as intended. Many British observers feared that the Emancipation Proclamation was a desperate call for slave insurrection, a viewpoint that furthered the humanitarian argument for intervention (though in the long term, Jones argues that emancipation turned most Britons against intervention). The book also ably demonstrates how the French intervention in Mexico emboldened Napoleon during his many flirtations with the Confederacy. Indeed, Jones makes clear that British and French diplomacy toward the Americans cannot be understood without taking into consideration their dealings on the Mexican question.

The central argument of the book is one that I find entirely convincing: the decision of the British and French to maintain a policy of neutrality throughout the war was the result of hard-headed diplomatic realism. As Jones puts it, 'recognition of the Confederacy did not offer anything so vital to their interests that it outweighed the risk of war with the Union' (p. 316). This triumph of realism is partly explained by the diplomacy of the American belligerents. Jones joins other historians in emphasizing the foundational flaws of 'King Cotton diplomacy,' as well as the shortcomings of the South's individual statesmen and emissaries. The Confederacy poorly played what was at best a mediocre hand. Conversely, Jones highlights the soundness of Union diplomacy, which was marked by a curious blend of obstinacy and flexibility. On the one hand, Union statesmen made it crystal clear to foreign powers that any active move of intervention or recognition of the Confederacy would be interpreted as a hostile act. Seward exploited his reputation in Britain as a wild Anglophobe who just might be crazy enough to commit the United States to a second war. Yet Union diplomacy was not all bluster and sabre rattling. Lincoln served as a moderating influence at crucial moments – toning down Seward's bellicose instructions to Charles Francis Adams and, along with his cabinet, acquiescing to the release of Mason and Slidell during the *Trent* crisis. It was this adaptability and accommodation to specific contingencies that was lacking in the rigid 'King Cotton' strategy.

Though Jones devotes much space to Union and Confederate diplomacy, the heart of the book revolves around his discussion of the dynamics within the British cabinet. He shows how a mixture of humanitarian, economic and political considerations led Foreign Secretary Russell and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gladstone to embrace diplomatic intervention by October 1862. Prime Minister Palmerston flirted with intervention at the same time. It is here that Jones introduces the reader in full to Secretary for War George Cornwall Lewis, the hero of the story who demolished the arguments for intervention put forward by Russell. Lewis emphasized the volatility of the American situation; he argued that intervention would create more problems than it would resolve; he emphasised the practical difficulties in attempting to moderate peace in America; he argued that intervention should not precede the important Union elections of 1862. Lewis emphasized costs and benefits, not moral or ideological issues. When Russell latched on to an offer from Napoleon III for joint intervention a month later, Lewis batted it down again with similar arguments.

Jones provides the best account we have of *how* and *when* the Palmerston cabinet decided not to intervene in the American Civil War. Yet, apart from detailing the specific arguments of Lewis, the book does not entirely establish *why* the British chose to maintain neutrality.

The narrow focus of the study, though in some regards its strength, is a limitation here, for answering the *why* question surely requires examination of the larger structures, contexts and traditions in which British statesmen operated. A context that does feature prominently in the book – and one for which Jones should be applauded – is the importance of international law to British statecraft. Legal considerations were never far from the minds of British statesmen. Policy was crafted to adhere to legal codes, which usually led toward the maintenance of neutrality, though Jones shows how a particular reading of international law could be used as justification for intervention.

But many other larger structures could receive more emphasis than they do in *Blue and Gray Diplomacy*. The economic bonds of the Atlantic economy, for instance, are clearly an important background context here, even if Lewis did not emphasize them in his memos. Similarly, the depth of British anti-slavery could be given more prominence even though it too is absent from the specific deliberations within the Palmerston cabinet concerning intervention. To be fair, Jones gives space to British anti-slavery, demonstrating that the place of slavery in the war was deeply misunderstood in Britain. Indeed, he shows how such misunderstandings could lead sincere anti-slavery men into the interventionist camp – some in Britain even contended that an independent Confederacy would abolish the peculiar institution quicker than a reunified United States. To be sure, this uncertainty reflected an understandable misperception in Britain of the relationship between the cause of the Union and emancipation. But it also stemmed from a tradition of ambivalence regarding the forms that British anti-slavery should take. The relationship between anti-slavery sentiments (which were universally shared by mid-Victorian statesmen) and specific anti-slavery policies was always unclear and contested. British statesmen agreed that they should deploy their power against the illegal international slave trade (and thus leapt at the chance to sign the 1862 Seward-Lyons Treaty), but there was great disagreement regarding whether the British state should more proactively promote abolition within slaveholding states. Given this context, it is not surprising that anti-slavery sentiments could lead to differing policy recommendations, but ultimately worked in the North's favour.¹

The larger interests and traditions of the British Empire are also important to addressing the question of why Britain did not intervene in the American Civil War. Historians recently have emphasised the dynamism and interconnectivity of the Empire. It was not simply an orthodox empire, John Darwin argues in a new book, but a larger 'British world-system' which fused its disparate component parts (its formal stronghold in South Asia, its so-called 'white settler colonies' in Canada, South Africa and Australasia, and its global commercial and financial system).² The United States occupied an important place in this

¹ Richard Huzzey's recent scholarship highlights the moderate thinking of mainstream British anti-slavery, which generally aimed to promote in America the gradualism of British emancipation. Richard Huzzey, "'A Nation of Abolitionists?'" Aspects of the Politics and Culture of British Anti-Slavery, c.1834-73,' Oxford D.Phil., 2009.

² John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

nineteenth century British world-system, even if it was no longer a formal member of the Empire. In most years it was Britain's most important trading partner, largest recipient of investment capital and most popular destination for migrants. No British statesman wanted to war with the United States after 1815. Time after time, the proud architects of the British world system proved willing to swallow bitter pills served up to them by jingoistic Yankee statesmen in order to avoid such a conflict.³

More work needs to be done on how the United States fit into the nineteenth century British world-system. Historians (including myself) too often have approached issues such as British intervention in the Civil War in the bilateral context of Anglo-American relations. Indeed, one of the great strengths of Jones' book is how he places the story in the context of Anglo-French-Mexican, as well as Anglo-American, relations. Yet the focus may need to be broader still, for it is clear that British statesmen approached the American problem with their larger world-system in mind. There is a wonderful quote in the book in which Palmerston asserts that no one 'with half an Eye in his Head, or half an Idea in his Brain could fail to perceive what a lowering of the Position of England in the world would follow the Conquest of our North American provinces by the north americans, especially after the Bulls Run Races' (p. 67). Here the concern is specific: Palmerston feared that a war with the Union would result in the humiliating loss of Canada delivered by the very troops notorious for a disorderly retreat back to Washington after the first battle of Bull Run. But the quote reveals a larger point, as well: even as Palmerston looked at events in America, he kept one eye on Britain's imperial system (both its tangible holdings and, just as important to the maintenance of the Empire, how it was perceived by peoples the world over).

The Palmerston cabinet's deliberations on intervention in the Civil War, in other words, might well be understood not only in relation to Britain's post-1815 American policy, but also in terms of the mid-century refinement of British imperial strategy, particularly within the settler colonies in Canada and Australasia. It is interesting to consider the similarities, for instance, between Britain's non-intervention in America and its coetaneous strategy of imperial devolution in the settler colonies, such as that of the 1867 British North American Act. To be sure, there were differences in the specifics in these policies, not least in the sense that the settler colonies remained formal members of the Empire. But the aim of non-intervention in America and imperial devolution was similar: to keep these profitable English-speaking regions embedded within the larger British world-system.

None of this is to detract from Jones excellent study. It is surely the sign of a good book that, in answering the questions it poses, it raises larger ones in their place. *Blue and Gray Diplomacy* is an important addition to our understanding of Civil War foreign relations. It deserves the high marks that it will no doubt receive.

³ This context is most recently examined and linked to wartime diplomacy in Phillip Myers, *Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2008).

The Civil War, as anyone who walks into their local bookstore or does a keyword search for the term on Google, Amazon, or Barnes and Noble's websites knows, is by far the most studied U.S. historical event. Each year, hundreds of books--fiction and non-fiction--are published that examine the causes of the war, seminal battles such as Antietam, Gettysburg, and both battles at Bull Run, the political and societal implications of the war, race, and other subjects. A number of historians have won Pulitzer Prizes for their studies, while biographies of Abraham Lincoln, various Union and Confederate generals, and other worthies fly off the shelves.² Twenty years ago, 40 million Americans watched Ken Burns's stunning documentary *The Civil War* on PBS, and it remains the network's most popular series. Shelby Foote, Michael Shaara, and Newt Gingrich have written best-selling novels about the War. *Gettysburg*, the big-screen version of Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Killer Angels*, aired on the TNT network in 1994 and garnered 23 million viewers, a record audience for cable television at the time. Websites devoted to the war developed by professionals and amateurs alike sprout up seemingly weekly.

Despite all of this public and scholarly interest, books and articles about Civil War diplomacy are few and far-between. Indeed, if not for Howard Jones, the field might lie fallow.³ Jones's latest examination of the diplomacy of the war, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy*, is a finely-written, very well-researched, and important work about how diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic tried and failed to gain or prevent European intervention in the war. Indeed, as Jones convincingly demonstrates, had the Confederacy managed to achieve only official recognition, let alone direct military aid, from the European powers, the war might have ended differently.

¹ Note: The views presented here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State or the United States Government. I would like to thank my colleague Kristin L. Ahlberg for her helpful comments and suggestions.

² See, for example, David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977); James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982); Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); William Freehling's 2-volume *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991 and 2007); and Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008) to name but a few. The editor of the website *Civil War News* (<http://www.civilwarnews.com>) told me that it alone reviews at least 200 books per year.

³ Jones has written two previous monographs, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* ((Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992) and *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union and Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1999), and wrote the introduction for the reprinted version of Frank L. Owsley's classic account of Confederate diplomacy, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the United States* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999, originally published in 1959).

Jones explains that a number of important issues influenced the diplomacy of the war. In addition to economic and security issues, in particular the “integrated Atlantic network” of commercial relations, especially the cotton trade, the moral issues of slavery and the massive destruction in human and material terms compelled the European powers to consider mediation or direct intervention. (p. 2). An ideological debate within North America also influenced foreign relations. The Union and Confederacy argued over which had properly inherited the mantle of the Founding Fathers—or who best represented the ideals of liberty and freedom.⁴ Both sides, therefore, had very different ideas about foreign involvement. The North considered the conflict a domestic insurrection and viewed *any* intervention by the European powers, including “neutrality,” as a *casus belli* because it implied recognition of the Confederacy as a separate nation. The South, of course, depended on the fact that the states had seceded in order to garner all the perquisites of recognition under international law, including arms shipments, the building of naval warships for the Confederacy in European shipyards, and challenging the legality of the Union blockade of Southern ports. These conflicting interpretations subsequently dictated the behavior of Union and Confederate diplomats during the war. Union Secretary of State William Seward reacted so angrily to the idea of British recognition of the Confederacy, Jones shows, that he repeatedly threatened to go to war with England, which only served to fuel the possibility of British intervention. Confederate leaders, at the same time, overestimated the importance of the cotton supply vis-à-vis British and French behavior and consistently misinterpreted London and Paris’s willingness to intervene. Jones also demonstrates that Confederate President Jefferson Davis exhibited little interest in diplomacy and left not only the details but the strategy to his emissaries.

The standard narrative of the international reaction to the war is that the British in particular, but also the French, considered intervention at numerous times during the conflict, mainly because the enormous casualties of this “modern war” had become painfully obvious. Indeed, the British sources that Jones skillfully mines demonstrate that powerful members of the Palmerston Ministry such as Chancellor of the Exchequer William Gladstone and Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell were appalled by the violence and feared a spillover of the ferocity of the war to other nations. But once President Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation, so the traditional narrative follows, the Europeans recognized the moral imperative of the Union’s cause and backed off from all but a *pro forma* relationship with the Confederacy.

Not surprisingly, the reality was much more complicated. And it is in the debate over British intervention that Jones provides two important contributions to the historiography of Civil War diplomacy. First, Cabinet meetings and Parliamentary debates actually illustrate that the British said that intervention would be decided on who prevailed on the battlefield, not on whether the slaves were freed or not. So ironically, the people who

⁴ David Hendrickson’s *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2009) develops this discussion of who had the right to claim to be the true heirs of the Revolution and the Constitution in much greater detail. Otherwise, however, Hendrickson does not examine the diplomacy of the Civil War.

condemned the violence and destruction of the war and believed they had a moral obligation to intervene predicated intervention on the continuation of violence and destruction. Prime Minister Palmerston, meanwhile, took a wait-and-see attitude and merely postponed intervention. Second, Jones demonstrates that President Lincoln incorrectly gauged the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation on British behavior. While he expected the announcement to discourage British intervention, British documents show that the Proclamation actually *emboldened* interventionist sentiment in Britain, as leaders such as Gladstone believed that the president had issued it for “cynical” rather than “moral” reasons and feared that the Proclamation would lead to slave rebellions, thus increasing bloodshed and necessitating intervention. (pp. 213, 231)

That the British did not intervene in the summer of 1862 can be credited to the British Minister of War, George Lewis, who, in a long memorandum, successfully convinced the majority of the Ministry that any form of British intervention, including simple recognition, would lead to a war between Britain and the Union that the former could not afford. Lewis also asserted that the Confederacy had still not won enough military victories—Antietam had been inconclusive—to demonstrate its independence as required under international law. Palmerston, however, continued his “postponement” strategy until the winter and spring of 1863, *after* the Proclamation took effect, when popular support for the Union and its anti-slavery stance, especially from labor unions, became too obvious to ignore. The Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg cemented the British decision to stay out of the war.

French interest in the war, meanwhile, was much more insidious. Confederate diplomats such as John Slidell continued to believe that Paris would aid their cause, but they underestimated Napoleon III’s larger motives. The French leader believed that Confederate independence could help him implement his so-called “Grand Design.” Napoleon III wanted to revive the French empire by returning to the New World and establishing a beachhead in Mexico, 60 years after his uncle had sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States and essentially abandoned the hemisphere. However, he refused to intervene in the Civil War on his own, continually deferred to the British, and repeatedly called for joint intervention. This stance angered both the Union and the Confederacy. Seward in particular shifted his focus from the British to the French and warned Paris that if it recognized the Confederacy and moved into Mexico it would mean war. In yet another irony, the South, meanwhile, began to wonder whether French recognition of their independence could ultimately lead to a French attack on their new country once Napoleon gained control of Mexico.

If *Blue and Gray Diplomacy* has any weaknesses, it is that Jones does not cite any French documents. The reader only gets to see the French point of view from American, Confederate, and British records. Although his explanation of Napoleon III’s diplomacy is likely correct, I would have liked to see whether or not the French Cabinet debated the efficacy of intervention as well as the Grand Design in general. Did other French officials worry about widening the war by siding openly with the Confederacy? Did any encourage Napoleon to strike out on his own and unilaterally recognize the Confederacy rather than wait for the British to decide? Did any French officials warn Napoleon of the consequences

of a French takeover of Mexico? Did the French press debate the pros and cons of intervention as the British press did?

His work also points to more gaps in the historiography of the diplomacy of the Civil War and opportunities for other scholars. Jones tantalizingly, but only fleetingly, points out that at various times the British and the French wanted to bring Russia into their interventionist coalition, but the Russians refused because of their friendship with the Union and their lingering mistrust of London and Paris from the Crimean War. Other than a brief description of how the Union characterized the visits of the Russian fleets to New York and San Francisco in the fall of 1863 as Russian support for its cause, Jones does not examine whether Lincoln and Seward recognized this mistrust and tried to woo the Russians during the two years *before* the visit.⁵ It would also be illuminating to see how (and/or whether) the Union and Confederacy courted the Austrian and Prussian governments, and how (and/or whether) the former reacted to the installation of Maximilian as Emperor of Mexico in its discussions with the Americans. There is an opportunity here for diplomatic historians to look at the Russian, Austrian, and German records and broaden our understanding of American diplomacy with these other important European powers.

These quibbles notwithstanding, I heartily recommend Howard Jones's *Blue and Gray Diplomacy* and hope that this work sparks more analysis of the diplomacy of the most wrenching conflict in U.S. history. Diplomatic historians should take this opportunity to increase the number of Civil War books published each year just as we have contributed to the growing understanding of the Revolution and the wars of the twentieth century.

⁵ It has been 80 years since a scholarly article on Russian-U.S. relations during the war and nearly 20 years since a book on U.S.-Russian relations in the 18th and 19th centuries have been published. See E.A. Adamov, "Russia and the United States at the Time of the Civil War," *Journal of Modern History* 2 (December 1930) and Norman Saul, *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763-1867* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1991).

Author's Response by Howard Jones, University of Alabama

It is a distinct pleasure to thank the reviewers -- Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, Robert E. May, Jay Sexton, and Chris Tudda -- for their kind remarks about my book. I was especially gratified by Cobbs Hoffman, a novelist as well as a historian, who praises my use of contemporary dialogue to convey a flavor of the times, writing that, "At times the book has almost the pacing of a novel, with quick verbal sparring."¹ Particularly satisfying was the readers' agreement that I had presented an evenhanded account of one of the most complex and hotly disputed eras in history. Furthermore, they found my central arguments convincing: At two pivotal points in the war, Britain in the fall of 1862 and France in the following year came close to extending recognition to the Confederacy; the Europeans' reaction to the Civil War, which repulsed them by its atrocities and encouraged intervention as a means for ending the bloodshed and for stemming the growing collateral damage that threatened neutrals and the entire Atlantic economy, rested on realistic considerations rather than moral sentiment, and that the battle of Antietam and the Emancipation Proclamation initially *encouraged* British (and French) intervention until it eventually became clear that a Union victory in the war assured the end of slavery. Cobbs Hoffman notes the chief intellectual root of the war, an issue that still resonates today in political and governmental circles: "The South fought for Jeffersonian self-determination, and the North for Hamiltonian federalism." Both antagonists regarded themselves as the chief protectors of "government of, for, and by the people," making their differences irreconcilable once the former demanded independence and the latter determined to preserve the union. My only regret in looking over the reviews of my four colleagues is that I cannot incorporate their thoughts into the work and thus improve it. One major consolation is that many of their ideas will become part of my classroom lectures on the Civil War.

All four readers nonetheless raise excellent questions about several matters. Cobbs Hoffman reiterates one of the dangers in becoming so close to a research topic -- that of becoming overly detailed, with the French question as a prime example. May, Sexton, and Tudda assert that some subjects needed greater attention.

They have without question raised an issue fundamental to a historian's work. How much detail is too much? Which topics deserve more (or less) space? May argues that I could have included a deeper analysis of the Anglo-American Treaty of 1862. As Philip E. Myers emphasizes, the antislavery treaty constituted a major step against the international slave trade. The same holds true, May continues, regarding Union and Confederate relations with Latin America, as Thomas Schoonover shows in his work on the Caribbean area. Sexton notes that a thorough study of diplomacy during the Civil War should include "an analysis of the war's broader social, political and economic impact abroad," as well as the position of

¹See Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *In the Lion's Den: A Novel of the Civil War*. Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2009. Random House will publish a new edition in the spring of 2011 to coincide with the sesquicentennial of the Civil War—and Union minister Charles Francis Adams' mission to London.

the United States within the "nineteenth century British world-system."² He refers to two recently published studies by John Darwin and James Belich that, had they been available at the time of my research, would have enriched my arguments on why the British did not intervene in the war.³ Such a broad approach to the diplomacy of this era, Sexton insists, should also highlight the role of other Europeans and Latin Americans, along with relations with Native Americans. And, finally, Tudda notes topics in need of further examination: the Lincoln administration's dealings with the Russians before their fleets visited New York and San Francisco in late 1863; Union and Confederate efforts to win the favor of the Austrian, Prussian, and other continental governments; and a close perusal of French documents to determine the impact of Paris officials on Napoleon's policies.

One of the biggest challenges to any historian is to select the information that best promotes the central themes of a book without violating objectivity and thoroughness. My close reading of a host of primary and secondary materials makes clear that the most sensitive issue in foreign affairs during the Civil War, for *both* North and South, was outside intervention. All other international disputes pale in comparison with the threat that either British or French (or both) involvement in the American war would have posed to the republic, whether divided or united in the war and afterward. Both the British and the French were worried about the collateral effects on the Atlantic economy of a prolonged American conflict. Humanitarians in both European countries felt a moral obligation to end a horrific war that had led to unparalleled bloodshed. The Palmerston ministry in London was concerned about empire, fearing that an imperialist Union government might quash the Confederacy's aspiration for self determination and then turn its sights on Canada along with the vast markets of Latin America. Emperor Napoleon III in France had his own imperial designs, hoping to use Mexico as a wedge for re-establishing French influence in the New World and thereby redressing the international balance of power. All these factors and more combined to put pressure on the British government (followed by the French) to mediate an end to the war, particularly after the Union had suffered its second devastating defeat at Bull Run in August 1862.

Unfortunately for the Confederacy, and therefore fortunately for the Union, General Robert E. Lee decided to follow his victory at Second Bull Run with a thrust northward into Maryland. By no means could he have known that the Palmerston ministry had all but decided to offer a mediation resting on a southern separation that meant recognition of the Confederacy as a nation. At the last moment, the prime minister opted to wait for expected additional southern victories that would at last convince the Union that southern independence was a *fait accompli*.

² Thomas Schoonover, "Napoleon Is Coming! Maximilian Is Coming? The International History of the Civil War in the Caribbean Basin," in *The Union, the Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim*, ed. Robert E. May (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1995), 101-30.

³ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

The result was a chance meeting of two great armies in the horrendous battle of Antietam, which provided President Abraham Lincoln the victory he needed (however narrow) to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.⁴ Lincoln justified his move against slavery on several grounds, including his effort to block foreign intervention in the war. Yet his decision almost backfired, heightening the chances for intervention by infuriating the British (and the French) as a cheap attempt to snatch victory from defeat by stirring up slave rebellions that could easily explode in a race war knowing no territorial boundaries. Such a disaster would further embitter the American antagonists, prolonging the war and making an outside intervention the obligation of Christian nations as well as an action protecting the interests of those mercantile groups wishing to preserve the Atlantic commercial world.

It was no coincidence that the London ministry soon *after* Antietam and the Emancipation Proclamation yielded to popular pressure to make a formal decision on whether to intervene in the American war. By an overwhelming vote, the British cabinet in November 1862 voted against intervention, not because an independent Confederacy would become a slaveholding republic, but primarily because of the certainty of war with the Union so masterfully argued in a long essay written by Secretary for War George Cornwall Lewis and aimed at his colleagues and the prime minister. Admittedly, British intervention in the American war could have promoted their long-standing goal of containing U.S. expansion both north and south. But more important, the potential gains from such a move did not outweigh its certain costs. Antietam and the Emancipation Proclamation ultimately convinced Britain and other nations not to intervene because a Union victory necessarily meant the death of slavery, but for a delicate moment the Lincoln administration's revolutionary policy almost had the opposite effect. Again fortunately for the Union (and perhaps also for the Confederacy, for who is to know what a British intervention might have cost that fledgling state in the long run?), the Palmerston ministry made a decision based primarily on realistic interests, not on either slavery or public opinion, and not related to longtime imperial instincts except to avert a war with the Union that would have endangered the empire.

And the British did not pose the only foreign threat to the United States. Napoleon III, ever the loose cannon in Europe, had linked the future of Mexico to his imperial goals on the continent and in the world. As nephew of his illustrious predecessor, the junior Napoleon sought to carry out a program hitherto a century-long failure -- that of restoring French power in the New World after the disastrous Treaty of Paris ending the French and Indian War in 1763. Napoleon III's formal notice came when he installed Austrian Archduke Maximilian as emperor of Mexico during its own civil war, thereby imposing French control over a monarchy that would stem the growth of republicanism in Latin America, discourage the certain southward expansion of the postwar United States, lure European emigrants to Mexico as a cheap workforce, and secure that puppet government's vast mineral resources as an economic base for a dramatic surge of French commerce in the Atlantic that would help to create a new balance of power in the world. Essential to

⁴See James M. McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Napoleon's program was French recognition of the Confederacy in exchange for its serving as a buffer state against Union expansion after the war.

What Napoleon wanted, however, was far more than either the Union or the Confederacy itself could have allowed. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill argued during the Second World War that the democracies had to ally with Communist Russia to defeat Hitler's Germany -- that sometimes in history one has to walk with the devil to get to the other side. The Confederacy surely realized that Napoleon's dreams contained in his so-called Grand Design for the Americas extended even farther than his admitted intention to construct a 2,000-mile-long northern border of Mexico from the Gulf of Mexico to the Baja of California. His ministers had had the audacity (at his bidding, of course) to inquire of the Richmond government in Virginia whether it would object to French acquisition of Texas. In fact, his imperial vision included the Louisiana as vaguely defined in 1803, thereby making the United States of the 1860s not only much smaller with the loss of the antebellum South but also pinched within a redrawn western boundary following the Mississippi River. Confederate leaders were aware of Napoleon's ambitions but appeared willing to walk with him in an effort to achieve their primary objective of recognition and hence independence. Only then would they deal with the certain threat to their new slave republic.

With intervention as what I consider to be the major threat to the republic, my work focused on the three main players in this story: Richmond, Washington, and London -- but with all three capitals' leaders carefully watching Paris and, to a lesser degree, Moscow. French and Russian policies did not matter as much as the decisions made in London; in fact, British policy was the key to gauging French and Russian reaction to the war. Thus, as I point out early in the book, this is state history, written from the top. Public opinion, slavery, and imperial interests were considerations in the Palmerston ministry's deliberations, but none of these issues was the prime determinant in the intervention question; more decisive was the British national interest, which dictated a continuation of neutrality. Napoleon, of course, was sorely tempted to intervene on his own but finally realized that a certain Union victory just as certainly meant a war with the Union if he refused to withdraw French military forces from Mexico. Russia had made clear from the outset of the American war that it would do nothing to alienate the Union; the Anglo-French victory over Russia in the Crimean War of the mid-1850s had left an indelible mark on its memory, now magnified in importance by its amicable relations with the United States as the only nation to make its good offices available to the St. Petersburg government in an effort to end the Old World conflict.

For the French part of the story, I relied on a number of first-rate works that show Napoleon's taking the lead in French foreign policymaking efforts, and often without consulting his advisers. Several historians have scoured the French historical records to analyze Napoleon's role in these events, allowing me to piece together a story based on their findings as well as from the contemporary observations of French, Russian, and American dignitaries, both inside the United States and in their home countries. Based on existing studies that show Napoleon's propensity to act on his own and often without revealing all his motives, I suspect that in comparison with the far-reaching discussions in

British governing circles, there was no equivalent debate within the French cabinet or among members of the National Assembly (and perhaps not even in private conversations) over the question of intervention in the American war and the establishment of Napoleon's Grand Design in America. More important, however, Napoleon adhered to his self-imposed constraint of following the British lead in recognition and therefore encouraged the Union and the Confederacy to keep their focus on England. French, Russian, and, to some extent, Spanish, Austrian, and Prussian diplomacy, became ancillary to the decisions made in London. British, Union, and Confederate diplomacy provided the vital heart of the interventionist question and hence received central attention in my research.

This is not to say that French diplomatic involvement was unimportant; had Napoleon taken the initiative (as he threatened to do on several occasions), he could have turned the course of the war and of the United States itself, both North and South. Frank L. Owsley's classic study of King Cotton Diplomacy rested on the first extensive use of British and French archival materials but was openly pro-Confederate and heavily economic in orientation while never showing any awareness of Napoleon's threat to a postwar Confederacy. Lynn M. Case and Warren F. Spencer include extensive quotes from the historical record in their lengthy, in-depth analysis of Franco-American relations during the Civil War, but they likewise fail to note the seriousness of the French danger to both North and South. The French peril to the American republic becomes clear from the writing of Alfred J. Hanna and Kathryn A. Hanna, who demonstrate Napoleon's challenge to North America by focusing on his Grand Design for the Americas in their multi-archival work. Nancy N. Barker discusses Napoleon's Mexican adventure in a series of articles, along with a well-researched book that takes the story to the first year of the American Civil War. George M. Blackburn and W. Reed West have analyzed French public opinion about the American conflict, showing that the emperor did not ignore the press.⁵ Yet the French people, like many of their governing officials, were not aware of the full scope of their emperor's imperial ambitions and therefore did not grapple with the numerous aspects of the interventionist issue. Napoleon's imperial reach exceeded his grasp and, confronting a certain war with a reunited Union, wisely called his military forces home. All these works on France during the American Civil War have combined to provide a fairly cohesive and remarkably harmonious summation of these events.

⁵Frank L. Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959; Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009); Lynn M. Case and Warren F. Spencer, *The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); Alfred J. Hanna and Kathryn A. Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico: American Triumph over Monarchy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971); Nancy N. Barker, "France, Austria, and the Mexican Venture, 1861-1864," *French Historical Studies* 3 (Fall 1963): 224-45; Nancy N. Barker, "The French Legation in Mexico: Nexus of Interventionists," *French Historical Studies* 8 (Spring 1974): 409-26; Nancy N. Barker, "Monarchy in Mexico: Harebrained Scheme or Well-considered Prospect?" *Journal of Modern History* 48 (March 1976): 51-68; Nancy N. Barker, *The French Experience in Mexico, 1821-1861: A History of Constant Misunderstanding* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); George M. Blackburn, *French Newspaper Opinion on the American Civil War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997); W. Reed West, *Contemporary French Opinion on the American Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1924).

Part of the reason for calling for a more broadly scoped book, I suspect, is attributable to its subtitle, which suggests no parameters to the topics included except that they deal with Union and Confederate foreign relations. Such an all-encompassing approach would have blurred my attempt to focus on the interventionist threat to the American republic -- both North and South -- that doubtless would have affected the course of U.S. history. This is not to say that the various topics suggested by May, Sexton, and Tudda are unimportant; indeed, these matters deserve closer study on their own merits. If my work points to areas in need of further research, it has met one of its most important objectives. As is the case with most if not all subjects in history, the more one learns, the more one realizes how much remains to be learned.

The American Civil War still teaches us a great deal about ourselves. Indeed, civil wars have not changed much over time in that they have always guaranteed unexpected problems for those nations willing to take the treacherous path of intervention. Even the proclaimed innocence of neutrality carries inherent dangers to both the outside nation and the parties at war. The British came to realize that no matter how sincere their efforts to maintain neutrality and thereby remain clear of the American conflict, any of their actions could alienate one or both of the belligerents. And we must remember that neutrality was (and is) a two-edged sword: Lord John Russell as British foreign secretary was a staunch interventionist who repeatedly demonstrated a maxim in statecraft -- that international law meant what the implementing nation wanted it to mean in any given situation. He pronounced the Union's obvious paper blockade as effective because to challenge its legitimacy was not in Britain's best interests. He also knew from his reading of the Swiss theorist on international law, Emmerich de Vattel, that neutrality provided a means for staying out of the American war as well as barging into it if the fighting endangered the welfare of neutral nations. Yet as carefully as he studied these baffling transatlantic events, he joined countless other contemporaries in never understanding them. This reality should not be surprising. In all fairness to him and others observing the American conflict from afar, no one should have expected them to grasp the political and emotional sentiments of such a terrible war. How can outside nations know more about the issues than the peoples locked in mortal combat? How can an intervening nation (or nations) prepare for myriad contingencies and complexities? How can interventionist leaders hope to devise a solution to problems that the American antagonists had found irreconcilable, so visceral that they prevented any hope for compromise and forced them to resort to the final solution?

The Palmerston ministry came face to face with these realities and, realizing its only arbitral card was military force, feared war with the Union and wisely decided against intervention.

Copyright © 2010 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.
