
The American Civil War in the European Spotlight: Confederate Fumbles in France and Remorse in Russia

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The legacy of the American Civil War is surrounded by controversy and debate, even 154 years later. Debates focus on military campaigns and strategies, political turmoil leading up to and following the war, and the economic consequences of a nation in upheaval. Yet the argument without end surrounding the Civil War excludes, in any real detail, the international aspect of the conflict. As part of its survival plan, the Confederate States of America sought formal recognition and aid from Europe to cement its claims to nationhood. Confederate President Jefferson Davis sent diplomats to Europe in order to secure this diplomatic aid. He and his state department knew the importance of the mission. However, Davis' background in military and domestic politics led him to focus on those aspects of the Confederacy, rather than the dozens of commissioners sent out to conduct diplomacy. This lack of attention from Davis and the constant rotation of secretaries of state in Richmond led to an ineffective foreign policy that hindered commissioners in the field and doomed the confederate diplomatic strategy.

The two main targets in Europe were France and England. They were the two major powers in Europe during the 1860s and the most capable of assisting the Confederacy in securing independence. However, the Confederates also had commissioners in a multitude of other European nations fighting for "the Cause." Belgium, Spain, Russia, and the Holy See were all contacted by the Confederates during the war. Robert Toombs, the first Confederate secretary of state, wanted to cast a wide net in order to increase the likelihood of recognition from abroad. This was a good strategy in theory. However, it stretched the already inadequate Confederate resources to their limits.

On July 24, 1861, Robert Hunter was confirmed as the new Confederate secretary of state to replace Toombs. One month later, Hunter appointed John Slidell as the Confederate commissioner to France. Slidell was praised by both Davis and Hunter. In a rousing endorsement of Slidell and his mission, Davis wrote, "for the purpose of stabling friendly relations between the Confederate States and the Empire of France, and reposing special trust and confidence in the integrity of prudence, and abilities of the Hon. John Slidell, I have appointed him special commissioner of the Confederate States to the Empire of France."¹ Along with this general letter intended for French Foreign Office officials, Davis sent a personal note to the French Emperor Napoleon III. Davis described Slidell as "one of our most intelligent, esteemed, and worthy citizens."² Davis hoped Slidell would cultivate friendly relations with the French Emperor and the foreign minister, Édouard Antoine de Thouvenel. The new secretary of state also penned a strong endorsement of Slidell in his letter

¹ Jefferson Davis to all who shall see, August 24, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 112-113.

² Jefferson Davis to Napoleon III, August 24, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 114.

accompanying the commissioner's credentials. Hunter echoed Davis, crediting Slidell as "animated by a desire to unite and bind together our respective countries by friendly ties and has appointed the Hon. John Slidell, one of our most esteemed and trustworthy citizens, as special commissioner of the Confederate States to the Government of France."³ Both Hunter and Davis looked to the French for support against the Union, and they believed Slidell to be the man who could accomplish this goal.

Before Slidell had the chance to arrive in Paris, the Union delegation was already well established, or so they thought. The American minister in France was Charles J. Faulkner. He was born in Virginia and appointed by President James Buchanan to be the United States Minister to France in 1860; he served in that role until 1861. Faulkner was a pro-southern advocate and a supporter of secession. He worked to delay Union support in France. But quickly his confederate sympathies caught up with Faulkner. When he resigned his commission in 1861 and pledged his allegiance to the Confederate States of America, he became an enemy to the United States. Upon his return to Washington, he was arrested on charges that included "the successful efforts to procure arms for the rebels and the fact that he was going home to assume command of a regiment of rebels who had elected him colonel."⁴ The arrest of Faulkner "caused great excitement here [the Union]. Among Union men it is regarded with the highest favor, as indicating the final determination of the Government to prevent any further collusion between the rebels of the South and of the loyal States."⁵ To William Seward, the secretary of state in the Lincoln cabinet, the affair was deeply disturbing. Faulkner managed to make a deal with an arms manufacturer in France to help supply the Confederates. This damaged the reputation of the Union in the court of Napoleon III. Seward quickly found a replacement for Faulkner.

He found William Dayton from New Jersey. Seward regarded Dayton's task as "a very important foreign mission at a moment when our domestic affairs have reached a crisis."⁶ The nation had boiled over into a civil war because of, according to Dayton, "plethora and abundance." He went on to say, during a speech in Paris, that the Confederacy amounted to an "outbreak of a restless and excitable people who complain substantially of nothing."⁷ Dayton saw the rebellion like a parent sees a spoiled child throwing a tantrum, unnecessary and for no good reason. Southerners had nothing to complain about, according to Dayton, and, since they did not get their way entirely, they were rebelling. That was not a justification, in Dayton's view, of the South leaving the Union and starting a civil war. Dayton saw the Constitution "not as compact between states, to be broken, with or without cause, at the option of any, but it is a *nation*, treated with as such, recognized as such, by every civilized power on the face of the earth."⁸ This was a very strong and committed interpretation of the Constitution. Unlike his predecessor Faulkner, Dayton was an adamant Unionist. Seward and Lincoln trusted him to do his job and support the federal government back in Washington, D.C.

Dayton's instructions came in a rambling letter from William Seward dated April 22, 1861. Despite the length of the letter, Seward made clear to Dayton his charge: the French must not support the Confederate States of America under any circumstances. Seward implored Dayton to convince the emperor of all the good qualities and amazing things the United States has been able to

³ Hunter to French Minister of Foreign Affairs, August 24, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 113.

⁴ "Arrest of C. J. Faulkner of Virginia, Late Minister to France," *New York Times*, August 13, 1861.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Seward to Dayton, April 22, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: France*, Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 195.

⁷ "The American Meeting at Paris," *New York Times*, June 14, 1861.

⁸ *Ibid.*

accomplish in its short lifespan. The United States “has risen from insignificance to be the second in the world. Leaving out of view unimportant local instances of conflict, we have only had two foreign wars... and not one human life has hitherto been forfeited for disloyalty to the government.”⁹ Seward attempted to evoke American stability and prosperity. His viewpoint was obviously biased, but also heartfelt. He was baffled, he told Dayton, as to why the South would leave this great and prosperous Union and give up their rights in the Constitution. Seward reminded both Dayton and Napoleon III that “many nations have taken [the Constitution] as a model.” France especially, Seward stated, was “built on the same broad foundation with that of this federal republic.”¹⁰ The United States’ goal was only to prevent France from recognizing the Confederacy or intervening in any way. Lincoln “neither expects nor desires any intervention, or even any favor, from the government of France, or any other, in this emergency.”¹¹ Lincoln and Seward wanted Dayton to maintain the status quo antebellum with France, nothing more. Lincoln and the Union army would crush the rebellion without the support of France or any other power; the American Civil War was just that, a conflict that would be contained within America. The United States did not need any help solving its internal affairs. This was a bold claim by Lincoln, and something of a gamble. It shut the door on any possible help from a potentially sympathetic France, or any European power, in the future, should the United States need it to quell the rebellion.

France’s leader at the time of the Civil War was Napoleon III. He dreamed of restoring the French Empire to what it was under Napoleon back in the early 1800s. He also dreamed of expanding his holdings in the New World. French foreign minister Édouard Thouvenel was a good indication of how the French public felt about the Civil War in America and the Confederate States of America. He detested slavery, but like most of his countrymen, he was more concerned with Italian unification on his nation’s border and not troubled with the Union in turmoil thousands of miles away across the Atlantic Ocean.¹² This attitude made Slidell’s job that much more difficult. Another strike against Slidell was the French press. It attacked slavery, praised free labor in the North, and questioned secession.¹³ However supportive the French press was of the North, France, at the time, was not a democracy with freedom of the press. An imperial dictator ruled over the country with his own newspapers and “official” news outlets. This imperial press was pro-Southern.¹⁴ Napoleon III was also friends with Slidell and his fellow confederate commissioners. This close relationship formed at the very arrival of Slidell and his entourage. One of Slidell’s associates, Edwin Leon, proclaimed that the French Emperor was “in the house next to my hotel.”¹⁵ This close proximity offered Confederate diplomats easier access to the Emperor and his ministers. Slidell had almost constant access to French officials. This was in stark contrast to his counterpart in England, James Mason, who rarely met with English officials in either a formal or informal fashion.¹⁶ Slidell had the ear of the emperor and his ministers, but so did Dayton. Both men secured numerous appointments with Napoleon III or his ministers during the war. The success or failure of either diplomatic mission came down to personal skill and the emperor’s desire to listen to either side.

⁹ Seward to Dayton, April 22, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: France*, Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 196.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 200.

¹² *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 302.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Lynn Marshall Case and Warren F. Spencer, *The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 40-41.

¹⁵ Leon to Benjamin, July 30, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. II, IV (Washington: G.P.O., 1900), 25.

¹⁶ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 283.

A prominent meeting between Slidell and the emperor took place on October 28, 1862. Slidell aimed to push Napoleon III towards recognition yet again. The Emperor “had no scruples in declaring that his sympathies were entirely with the South,” but, he worried that “if he acted alone, England, instead of following his example, would endeavor to embroil with the United States and that French commerce would be destroyed.”¹⁷ This was an important meeting because it transparently showed the emperor’s personal support for the Confederacy. Despite the support of the French emperor, Slidell and the Confederacy had to either convince Napoleon III to act alone or James Mason and Slidell had to convince both England and France to work together. In an effort to further push the emperor away from the English question, Slidell informed him that the recognition of the Confederacy would not mean war with the Union. Slidell and the Confederacy only “asked for recognition, satisfied that the moral effect of such a step... would exercise a controlling influence.”¹⁸ Slidell floated the notion that the North, after hearing of French, and possibly of English, recognition of the Confederacy would come to the table and negotiate an armistice and eventual peace agreement. However, in the event of war with the United States, Slidell attempted to put the emperor at ease. The American navy “would be swept from the ocean and all their principle ports efficiently blockaded by a moiety of his [French] marine,” Slidell claimed.¹⁹ He played down the power of the Union’s industry and military. He was confident the Union would exhaust itself by staying in the war. The Union’s “energies and resources were already taxed to their utmost by the war,” and the Lincoln administration, “still had sense enough not to seek a quarrel with the first power in the world.”²⁰ The Union, according to Slidell, was hardly able to stay in the war against the Confederates, let alone fight a multifront war with European superpowers. The emperor proposed that France, England, and Russia mediate between the North and South. Napoleon III suggested the mediation could be urged “on the high grounds of humanity and the interests of the whole civilized world. If it be refused by the North, it will afford good reason for recognition and perhaps for more active intervention.”²¹ This mediation never occurred. France, England, and Russia could not agree on the terms and the Union would have never accepted the meditation even if it had occurred.

Slidell and the Confederate diplomatic mission in France was quickly falling apart. By the end of 1862, the window for recognition was closing. Military campaigns in the West were dominated by Union armies, and, in the eastern theater, the balance of power was starting to shift. Slidell and his team did their best. However, the military reality on the ground was not helping their case. Despite setbacks, Slidell did manage to negotiate a loan with Messrs. Emile Erlanger & Co. They conducted business with the Confederacy in the form of cotton bonds and channeled French money into the Southern railroads. Slidell was approached by the company while in Paris. The agents, he claimed, representing Messrs. Emile Erlanger & Co. “presented themselves to me [Slidell] without any suggestions on my part of a desire to borrow money for the Confederate States.”²² The Confederate States and France shared a strong business partnership due to the South’s cotton contribution to the commercial sector of France and it generated French businesses. The loan was \$15,000,000 repayable in gold or cotton bonds. This loan was one of Slidell’s biggest accomplishments in Paris. To Slidell, the advance represented “financial recognition of our [Confederate] independence, emanating from a class proverbially cautious and little given to be

¹⁷ Slidell to Benjamin, October 28, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 575.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 575.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 575.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 575.

²¹ *Ibid*, 575.

²² Slidell to Benjamin, October 28, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 568.

influenced by sentiment or sympathy.”²³ It proved to Slidell that France recognized the Confederate States of America as a sovereign, independent nation. The wealthy class of French society did not hand out loans on the good graces of their hearts. They believed in those whom they financed, and the Confederates, especially Slidell, saw that as proof of their legal existence in the world of nations. However, Slidell’s assumption that a loan was a pathway to legitimizing the existence of the Confederacy in the eyes of the world was misguided.

Confederate efforts in France were extensive and well calculated. Slidell knew his mission and the objectives he was supposed to accomplish during his trip. Slidell had numerous unofficial meetings with Emperor Napoleon III that were friendly and cordial. The Emperor favored the Confederate States and the breakup of the Union. However, Slidell could not convince the French ruler to act on his personal convictions. It seemed as if the Confederates were in a position in France to best the Union and acquire a friend. However, the Emperor would not act without English support. Slidell and his delegation could not manage to sway a friendly, sympathetic government to support their cause. Dayton and the Union managed to outmaneuver Slidell and undermine Confederate diplomatic operations in France.

Another important minor power in Europe was Russia. Under the rule of Czar Alexander II and on the fringes of Europe, Russia just emerged from the Crimean War in 1856. It lost to an alliance between France, England, and the Ottoman Empire. It was a humiliating defeat for Russia and the czar. France and England succeeded in propping up the Ottoman Empire, which was in decline. The West needed a counterweight to Russian expansion, and the Ottomans were strategically located to provide that balance to the rising Russian power. After the war, Russia was diplomatically isolated from the rest of Europe. Its alliances with Austria and others were dismantled, and Russia was left to fend for itself. Russia received little to no help in the years following the war. It was clear that France and England had other priorities. This diplomatic isolation and hostility towards England and France played a role in foreign relations during the American Civil War.

With England and France leaning towards the Confederacy initially, Russia went in the opposite direction. Russia sought support from the United States—her one potential ally. In the years leading up to the Civil War, Russian Minister Plenipotentiary to the United States Eduard de Stoeckl did his best to charm Washington, D.C. He first came to the United States in 1841 as an attaché from the Russian government. He was then promoted after the death of Alexander Bodisco in 1854.²⁴ Stoeckl managed to keep warm, friendly relations with the United States during the Crimean War, and he hoped to achieve the same success during the American Civil War. Stoeckl enjoyed entertaining guests. Although very sociable, he was also observant and tactical. Because he rubbed elbows with so many representatives in Washington, he was well aware of the sectional crisis brewing in the United States; it deeply concerned Stoeckl. His knowledge of the crisis led him to keep the Russian government well informed as well. This vital information was crucial to the decisions made by top Russian officials in St. Petersburg. An intact Union provided a counterweight to England and France. The Russians needed a strong United States.²⁵

The United States sent Cassius Clay, a Kentucky native with strong ambitions to end slavery, to Russia to fight for the Union cause. Clay was born on October 19, 1810 in Madison County, Kentucky.²⁶ His was a family rich in history, lineage, and wealth. His father was one of the largest

²³ Slidell to Benjamin, March 21, 1863, in in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 721.

²⁴ Albert Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1952), 15.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 54.

²⁶ Cassius Clay, *The Life of Cassius Marcellus Clay: Memoirs, Writings, and Speeches*. (New York: J. Fletcher Brennan & Co. 1886),

slave owners in the state of Kentucky, but Clay “began to study the system, or, rather, began to feel its wrongs.”²⁷ Clay’s exposure to slavery and the brutality that accompanied the system never left him in adulthood. The images of plantations and the slaves who worked the fields and in homes helped Clay mold and shape his antislavery position later in life. However, early life for Clay revolved around his father, Green Clay. His wealth, power, and influence opened many doors for Cassius and his brothers. Clay’s father encouraged Cassius to acquire as much education as he could. So, in 1827, he enrolled in the Jesuit College of St. Joseph in Bardstown, Kentucky.²⁸ Clay was a good student in college. He was smart, diligent, and persistent—all great qualities for a diplomat. In a twist of irony, however, Clay struggled the most with his French studies, the diplomatic language used in Europe. Later he moved to New England, where people lived in prosperity on soil that was of the poorest of quality compared to the South. He came to understand the power of markets and mobility in the creating of wealth.

Clay returned to Kentucky a changed man. He saw progress in New England and wanted the same for his home state of Kentucky. He saw potential for Kentucky to rise above the need for slavery and diversify and industrialize its economy. Clay foresaw himself as the lead advocate for the rebirth of Kentucky’s economy. He aligned himself with non-slaveholders in Kentucky. Clay envisioned a robust and diversified economy much in the way Henry Clay had with his American System. In 1834, Clay was elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives. He served three terms and was voted out due to his growing calls for abolition in Kentucky.²⁹ When war broke out with Mexico in 1846, Clay joined the 1st Kentucky Calvary, or the “Old Infantry” company. Clay served as their captain after bribing the commanding officer Captain James Jackson to step down.³⁰ Clay went off to war in staunch opposition to it. An extreme Whig, Clay was in the minority who opposed President Polk’s declaration of war from the very beginning. Like many Whigs, Clay believed President Polk used the Mexican American War as a means to expand slavery into the western territories.

In 1854, a new political party entered the scene, the Republican Party. Clay joined immediately. The Free-Soil Party had paved the way for a party to oppose slavery. He fought for but did not secure, the nomination in 1856 for president. That went to John C. Frémont. The Republican Party won in the 1860 election, and Abraham Lincoln took notice of Clay’s history of opposing slavery, his “conversion” from a slaveholder to a man screaming for abolition, and his persistence. Despite those positive qualities, Lincoln found Clay too aggressive for a prominent cabinet position. The Union was hanging in the balance, and Lincoln feared Clay might push it over the edge.³¹ William Seward, a friend of Clay, offered him a position in the State Department. Seward nominated Clay Minister to Russia. Clay was appointed on March 28, 1861, by Lincoln.

Clay’s mission to Russia was simple and direct: maintain the current friendly relations with the Russian Emperor and prevent the Confederate States from swaying the Russian government towards recognition. As usual, Seward provided his diplomats with specific directions, essentially talking points to get the diplomacy off to a strong start. These points gave the Union diplomats an edge because they were well crafted and thought through in great detail. Clay’s talking points were no exception. Seward reminded Clay, “Russia, like the United States, is an improving and expanding empire. Its track is eastward, while that of the United States is westward. The two nations, therefore,

²⁷ Ibid, 25.

²⁸ David, Smiley, *Lion of White Hall* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 11.

²⁹ Ibid, 50.

³⁰ Ibid, 116.

³¹ Ibid, 169.

never come into rivalry or conflict.”³² The United States had no reason to quarrel with Russia. The two nations stood on opposite ends of the globe and left one another to their own devices. The Russians were not players in the Atlantic trade, like the English or the French. The United States did not need to worry about the Russians interfering. Seward wanted Clay to broach a wide range of topics while in Russia as well. The primary goal was dealing with the Confederacy. However, the Union still had other pressing matters. Clay was instructed to “inquire whether the sluggish course of commerce between the two nations cannot be quickened, and its volume increased.”³³ Seward also thought ahead to the relations between the two countries after the war. He was concerned over the issue of free travel between the two nations. The United States allowed Russians to “cross this western continent without once being required to exhibit a passport. Why will not Russia extend the same hospitality to us?”³⁴ This freedom to travel was an extension of the equality of man principle to which Seward, Clay, and other fervent abolitionists remained deeply committed. Seward and Clay warned the Russian czar that if the United States were to be broken into two republics, “the equilibrium of nations, maintained by this republic, on the one side, against the European system on the other continent, would be lost, and the struggles of nations in that system for dominion in this hemisphere and on the high seas...would be renewed. The progress of freedom...would be arrested, and the hopes of humanity...would be disappointed and indefinitely postponed.”³⁵ Seward obviously had an American bias and overstated the importance of the United States, at the time, in the global system. However, the point was to prove to the czar and the Russian government that they needed the United States as one united nation to stop the western Europeans from dominating the globe and starting further wars. At the end of the letter, in clear and direct language, Seward explained that the United States “refrains from all intervention whatever in their political affairs; and it expects the same just and generous forbearance in return.”³⁶ The United States desired to conduct its affairs with Russia as if the Civil War was not raging. The United States drafted the Monroe Doctrine to keep European powers out of the western hemisphere and followed a policy of non-interventionism. The fact that the United States was engulfed in a civil war, according to Lincoln and Seward, did not change that policy. This demand was strategically placed at the end of the letter as a point of emphasis and to draw the attention of the reader.

On July 14, 1861, Clay met with the Russian Emperor, Alexander II. The czar was very receptive and friendly with the American delegation. Clay remarked how the Emperor “had hopes of the perpetuity of the friendship between the two nations now, that in addition to all former ties we were bound together by a common sympathy in the common cause of emancipation.”³⁷ Alexander II issued his own version of the Emancipation Proclamation in March 1861 that freed all the serfs in Russia, and the emperor viewed the Civil War in terms of slavery versus abolition. The Union’s goal of abolition came much later in the conflict. Nonetheless, the emperor saw his interests and ideals aligned with the Union, rather than the Confederacy. Clay’s mission in 1861 was a breeze compared to his counterparts in England or France. He worked with a very sympathetic government from the outset of the war. The Russians understood that the United States was a vital ally against

³² Seward to Clay, May 6, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Russia*. Vol. I (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 293.

³³ *Ibid*, 293.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 293.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 296.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 296-297.

³⁷ Clay to Seward, June 21, 1861, in United States Department of State. *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the Commencement of the Second Session of the Thirty-seventh Congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Russia*. Vol. I (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 305.

the French and the British. Russia and the emperor understood that a strong United States could stand up against the threat of western European aggression and economic dominance.

The Union diplomats in Russia had no Confederate diplomatic competition in 1861. Clay had the ear and full attention of the Russian government, and the emperor was all ears. He was happy to hear the Union delegation speak. Soon, he and Clay developed a personal relationship alongside of their working relationship. Davis had focused all his attention on France and England for diplomatic support. He sent Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar II of Georgia and Mississippi to represent the Confederate interests in Russia. On November 19, 1862, Lamar was appointed Special Commissioner to Russia. Benjamin sent Lamar a letter detailing his nomination and mission in Russia. The Civil War raged for one year before any Confederate commissioner was nominated to head up relations with the Russian government. Benjamin warned Lamar that “our offers to enter into amicable relations with the great powers of Europe, whose proximity caused them to be first visited by our commissioners, naturally created some hesitation in approaching his Imperial Majesty Alexander II.”³⁸ The Confederate government had sent their best diplomats to the French and English courts right after the war began. Russia was geographically and politically insignificant when compared with England or France, based on the Confederate diplomatic goals. Lamar left for Russia in 1863. He arrived in London a few weeks later and awaited further instructions from Benjamin. Those instructions never came from Richmond. What did come was a notice that “the Senate failed to ratify my [Lamar] nomination as commissioner to Russia.” Adding, “the President desires that I consider the official information of the fact as terminating my mission.”³⁹ The Confederate mission to Russia never made it to St. Petersburg or even to mainland Europe. Lamar met with Mason and Slidell while in London. He was briefed on the status of their missions. However, his own mission was not seen as important in 1863. The Russians were far away and in the pocket of Clay and the Union.

The Russians had military as well as political reasons to support the Union. Since the United States was so friendly with the government of Alexander II, the emperor decided to send two fleets, one to San Francisco and one to New York in 1863. The Americans saw this as proof of Russian support for the Union and a step towards intervention. In truth, the Russians needed somewhere remote to hide their navy in the event of a war with England or France. In New York, the fleet arrived in September 1863. *The New York Times* noted the “Russian frigate *Osliba*, which has lain at anchor in our harbor for several days past, and has been an object of so much interest to our citizens, is about to be reinforced by a fleet of four or five vessels of the same nationality.”⁴⁰ The Russian fleet generated much excitement. It reassured Union leaders that they had outside support for the war, even if it was in Russia’s strategic interest to dock its fleet in American ports.

The missions in France and Russia demonstrate the struggle of the Confederate diplomats. France used the Civil War as an opportunity to attempt to restore a European monarchy on the throne of a weak Mexico. The Confederates could not convince France to join the war because they were planning their own with Mexico. Although sympathetic to the Confederate cause, Napoleon III had his own ambitions, and Slidell was not able to reign him in. This was a major diplomatic failure for the Confederacy. France had been an early supporter of the independence of the Confederacy, more so than England. The failure to obtain recognition from France left England as the only option. The Confederates shot themselves in the foot with their “tunnel vision” diplomacy with England and France. The Confederate State Department and Davis were so concerned about the

³⁸ Benjamin to Lamar, November 19, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 606.

³⁹ Lamar to Benjamin, July 22, 1863, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 848.

⁴⁰ “A Russian Fleet Coming into our Harbor: Their Arrival,” *New York Times*, September 24, 1863.

English and the French that they ignored many potential friends. Russia supported the Union from the outset. However, Davis and the Confederates failed even to send an envoy to Alexander II. The Confederates needed support from wherever they could find it, and their inability to engage Russia shows how focused—fixated in fact—they were on France and England. Davis and confederate officials remained far too concentrated on events at home and unimaginative about the potential for diplomacy abroad. The loss of a diplomatic front proved an important component to the Confederacy's eventual defeat.