

International Relations of the Confederate States of America

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Abstract

International relations have been a major aspect of almost all countries. Such was the case for the Confederate States of America as they needed foreign recognition to secure their hope of becoming their own country after breaking away from the United States of America. To achieve this, the Confederate government approached Great Britain in hopes of securing diplomatic relations, foreign recognition, and an ally in the American Civil War. On one hand, foreign relations with the Confederate States of America seemed positive due to Confederate cotton. However, the British government ultimately decided that it would be too costly for them to enter into such a position. Ultimately, Great Britain's recognition of the Confederate States of America would have sparked a nationwide famine from the loss of United States wheat, the decline of their international image due to them supporting a country that has institutionalized slavery, and the unrest of the British population due to there being an anti-war consensus after the Crimean War. Thus, the British government decided to keep their relations with the United States rather than formally recognizing or making treaties with the Confederate States of America.

Methodology

- Introductory knowledge gained through Dr. Kent Dollar's Civil War and Reconstruction class
- Examination of *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Army*
- Examination of correspondence between William H. Seward and Charles Francis Adams Sr.
- General search of the topic of Confederate International Relations on Tennessee Tech University's website for secondary sources

Why the Confederacy Needed Allies

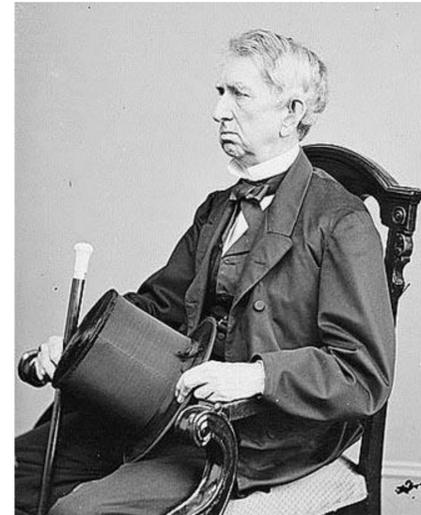
- The sale of cotton to England was vital for the survival of the failing Confederate economy
- The South had little to no industrial power to create weapons and supplies that were needed for their armies
- By obtaining allies, the Confederacy would transform from a rebellion to a sovereign power that had declared war on the United States of America

How Consequences of Allying with the Confederacy Heavily Outweighed the Benefits

- Going to war with the United States of America significantly overshadowed any benefit the Confederacy could offer Great Britain and France
- The British people were hesitant of anything that would lead to war so soon after the Crimean War
- The Trent Affair of 1861 proved that Great Britain valued their peace over the trade deals offered by the Confederacy
- The triple Confederate defeats at Antietam, Corinth, and Perryville in the Fall of 1862 prove to Great Britain and France that they will not need to force peace in the United States
- While Great Britain valued the cotton they received from the South to support their textile industry, they valued the wheat they received from the North more
- Great Britain ultimately found other sources of cotton in Egypt and India
- Great Britain abolished slavery in 1834, and alliances with a nation so rooted in slavery would tarnish their international reputation



USS San Jacinto stops RMS Trent. Public Domain



Photograph of William H. Seward
Library of Congress



Charles Francis Adams by William Morris Hunt, 1867.



1888 Depiction of The Battle of Antietam
Bill of Rights Institute

“ You may even assure them promptly in that case that if they determine to recognize, they may at the same time prepare to entire into alliance with the enemies of this Republic.”

(William Seward to Charles Adams, April 10, 1861)

Conclusion

While Great Britain and the Confederacy may have had minor dealings with each other throughout the war, it was just not feasible for Great Britain to take the risk of formally recognizing the Confederacy for the small rewards the Confederacy offered. Great Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and then it abolished slavery in its colonies in 1833, so if they would have recognized and created treaties with the Confederacy, then all that progress would be overshadowed in the eyes of the world. Great Britain also could not go to war again so soon after the Crimean War. Later in the Civil War, when Great Britain along with France almost intervned to force peace, the Confederacy began to decline, so there was no longer a need for intervention. Lastly, Great Britain needed the Union's wheat to feed its people more than cotton.

Altogether, the Confederacy only offered the benefit of cotton and the money made from producing war materials for the Confederacy in exchange for recognition. So, by not recognizing the Confederacy, Great Britain would avoid war, keep a good international reputation, and continue to get the wheat they desperately needed. The reason that Great Britain never formally recognized the Confederacy was because the negatives that would have happened after recognition far outweighed the positives of staying neutral.

References

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- Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1959.
- James Morton Callahan. *The Diplomatic History of the Southern Confederacy*, (Springfield, Massachusetts: The Walden Press, 1957.