

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Paul Pecquet du Bellet and the French diplomatic effort in the Confederacy

September 6, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

The Confederacy — what a weirdly polarized phenomenon for the denizens of the American nation, a nation which many still vainly hope is not just a proposition. On one side, you have people who just want to read a fine hagiography of Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee, fly a battle flag to show their pride, and admire an honorable monument as they sit at a park bench. On the other side, you have people who want to topple all these monuments, torch all the flags, and burn “I HAVE A DREAM” onto the forehead of every normie with an accent, or else *The Nazis Will Rise Again* if they do not. (There’s also a third side of honest adherents to the Old South legacy, but they are politically irrelevant.)

It is understandable that the CSA is such a captivating image. The *lost cause* of an America before the first 8 amendments of the Bill of Rights were incorporated into state constitutions. An America when the Constitution was just the Articles of Confederation++. An America where the mudsill (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Henry_Hammond#Pro-slavery) knew its place... kind of.

I am not a neo-Confederate, though.

“What are you, Nigel? A congenital Roundhead?”

No. But a Confederacy consisting only of Henry Hotzes (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Hotze), who can write well, is hardly something that will *Rise Again*. That is all we have as of now.

“Are you, then, a paleo-Confederate?”

Paleo-Confederacy — that sounds like something worth nullifying a federal import tariff over. But no, one must go deeper.

I am a paleo-Franco-Confederate.

“What is a paleo-Franco-Confederate, Nigel?”

A paleo-Franco-Confederate... well, let me illustrate.

Suppose you are a foreign biologist, specializing in ichthyology and herpetology, knowing the ins and outs of fish and reptiles, you work for the Smithsonian and you're a graduate of Georgetown. You go back to the land of *La Marseillaise* but soon enough all your connections back to America are in a tumult when secession turns into protracted war.

You thus set out on a mission and head for the Confederate States to pen a memoir dedicated to none other than the Emperor of the French himself. You have to really be on point and come up with a persuasive case for intervention. What to say?

It is quite clear what needs to be said.

It needs to be said that the Confederacy has damn good postal service (<https://archive.org/stream/lestatsconfdrda00gira#page/40/mode/2up>):

The various offices of the Post Office are full and operate with all the regularity which such a service is capable of in the present state of things. The postage stamps currently in use in the interior of the country are the following: 20 cents, 10 cents and 2 cents. The simple tax, for a letter weighing half an ounce, is 10 cents; newspapers and other printed matter, 2 cents per half an ounce also. Any fraction added to half an ounce is taxed equal to half an ounce, either for letters or for printed matter. [...] There is every reason to believe that, after the restoration of peace, there will be a diminution of the present tax, if not returning purely and simply to the first tax. It will also be the moment to deal with the foreign tax, which hitherto would have been a dead letter in the portfolio of this department.

Until the days of Secession, the United States postal system was burdening the treasury with an annual deficit of about \$300,000. The Constitution of Confederate States stipulates that the Post Office shall be obliged to balance its expenditure with its revenue. Under the administration of the Director-General of the Posts, Mr. Reagan, not only the expenses of this department were covered by the receipts, but there was also a surplus of receipts at the end of the fiscal year of 1863.

Lysander Spooner would have been proud, no doubt. The "Mr. Reagan" in question is John Henninger Reagan, by the way.

As noble as resisting the constitutionally mandated postal monopoly may be, the Emperor would not go with it. He would certainly go out of his way to "deliver the Italian states from Austrian domination" (in Count Persigny's words, the loyal Bonapartist), and would gladly assist Piedmont in dismembering Lombardy from Austria, but hopes for the Cavaliers dismembering themselves from Yankeedom were dashed.

On June 16th, 1862, the impromptu Confederate diplomat John Slidell would secure a meeting with Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, and report the following regarding his comments:

That he had committed a great error, which he now deeply regretted ; that France should never have respected the [naval] blockade ; that the European powers should have recognized us last summer, when our ports were in our possession, and when we were menacing Washington ; ... that the difficulty was to find the way to give effect to his sympathies ; that he had always desired to preserve the most friendly relations with England, and that in so grave a matter he had not been willing to act without her cooperation; that he had several times intimated his wish for action in our behalf, but had met with no favorable response ; and that, besides, England had a deeper interest in the question than France that she "wished him to draw the chestnuts from the fire" for her benefit.

But, Louis-Napoleon's Mexican Expedition aside, given his refusal to strike without English cooperation, the ultimate inaction of the Palmerston-Russell cabinet would seal the fate of this diplomatic ordeal. The Emperor's scheming with Count Cavour a few years prior must have exhausted him.

But that's not all the cause of paleo-Franco-Confederacy had to offer.

Paul Pecquet du Bellet, a Louisiana Creole, worked as an attorney, moved in and out of Louisiana and France, until he met his true calling (besides acting as agent for the Franco-Texan Land Company, but that was later) in Confederate diplomacy. Publishing in various French newspapers and at one point helping Caleb Huse (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caleb_Huse), procure arms — the CSA's belligerent status being of assistance here.

He put out several monographs and pamphlets, but we will examine three of them, being sufficient to propound the Lost Cause.

To start with: *La révolution américaine dévoilée* (The American Revolution Unveiled) [1861].

The legal argument is fairly conventional — the Constitution as a compact of sovereign states delegating only those powers expressly defined in the compact.

However, he tries to bolster support by bringing up Washington's Farewell Address, particularly his criticism of the party spirit (24): "It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which find a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions. Thus the policy and the will of one country are subjected to the policy and will of another."

Further, of constitutional limits (26): "It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution, in those intrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism."

Much more interestingly, Pecquet du Bellet tries to drop the ball on Abe Lincoln himself, by reminding of a speech that Lincoln gave on January 12, 1848 (<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-war-with-mexico-speech-in-the-united-states-house-of-representatives/>) regarding the Texas-Mexico border and the ensuing Mexican-American War, statements of which clearly sanctioned the right to revolution:

I propose to state my understanding of the true rule for ascertaining the boundary between Texas and Mexico. It is, that wherever Texas was exercising jurisdiction was hers; and wherever Mexico was exercising jurisdiction, was hers; and that whatever separated the actual exercise of jurisdiction of the one from that of the other, was the true boundary between them. If, as is probably true, Texas was exercising jurisdiction along the western bank of the Nueces, and Mexico was exercising it along the eastern bank of the Rio Grande, then neither river was the boundary; but the uninhabited country between the two was. **The extent of our territory in that region depended, not on any treaty-fixed boundary, (for no treaty had attempted it,) but on revolution. Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable, a most sacred right—a right which, we hope and believe, is to liberate the world. Nor is this right confined to cases in which the whole people of an existing government may choose to exercise it. Any portion of such people that can may revolutionize, and make their own of so much of the territory as they inhabit. More than this, a majority of any portion of such people may revolutionize, putting down a minority, intermingled with, or near about them, who may oppose their movement.** Such minority was precisely the case of the Tories of our own Revolution. It is a quality of revolutions not to go by old lines, or old laws; but to break up both, and make new ones. As to the country now in question, we bought it of France in 1803, and sold it to Spain in 1819, according to the President's statements. After this, all Mexico, including Texas, revolutionized against Spain; and still later, Texas revolutionized against Mexico. In my view, just so far as she carried her revolution, by obtaining the actual, willing or unwilling, submission of the people, so far the country was hers, and no farther.

Regarding slavery, he brings up the peaceful resolution through compensated emancipation that England and France pursued, and the fact that there were four slaveholding states in the Union itself (Kentucky, Delaware, Missouri, Maryland), plus the District of Columbia. Indeed, D.C. itself was the only territory in the USA which met a non-violent resolution.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/District_of_Columbia_Compensated_Emancipation_Act).

A plausible hypothesis at the time, Pecquet du Bellet comments that (<https://books.google.com/books?id=NNxSAAAcAAJ&pg=PA15>) the fate of the negro may have ended similarly to that of the Indian during westward expansion: "The black delivered from bondage becomes, in the north where he has sought refuge and bread, an outcast exposed to hunger, misery, and complete destitution. Every day, however, the poor negro, deceived, tired, exhausted, exhausted, turns his pleading glances towards the house of his former master, assured that there he will find help. They shuddered as they thought of the unfortunate fate reserved for three millions of people of every age and sex of the black race who find their subsistence in the South if they were suddenly freed and had to ask for the free work recommended to them by the North, feeding their family. The result is easy to foresee: the North, finding in the South a milder climate and a more generous soil, would soon pour into these better-off regions the overflow of its population, which becomes denser day by day, hunting as necessary and repressing the black population which left to itself, will perish by hunger or misery."

As he points out, the Confederate States Constitution largely reaffirmed the legal content of the Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves passed in 1808.

That, furthermore, before this act was passed (<https://books.google.com/books?id=NNxSAAAcAAJ&pg=PA17>):

We would like to take here this account, which shows the unprejudiced minds of the real feelings of the North, but it does not seem out of place to say what part it took in the slave trade before its abolition. Charleston during the last four years of the slave trade tells us that of the thirty-nine thousand seventy-five slaves imported into the port of Charleston from January 1, 1801, to January 1, 1808, it was imported by English, French, or Northern Citizens, thirty-five thousand five hundred and thirty-two slaves; and by the citizens of the South, three thousand five hundred and forty-three only.

What, then, is the cause for all this ruckus?

Simple: *The Puritans did it.*

He speaks of the exorbitant Puritan pretension to “establish morality and to examine the religion of the whole world; a pretension which, from the beginning of the sect puritating, caused the fall of a king’s head, and which, in our days, has produced all agitations, the disorders, all the evils that desolate the United States.”

True enough, Massachusetts Bay *was* the first colony to formally permit slavery (see provision 91 of the Massachusetts Body of Liberties (<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/masslib.html>)).

Death to apostates and blasphemers, fines for working on the Sabbath, the franchise restricted to those of the Puritan faith — he lists it all.

Now, the most interesting argument of all, and we will revisit it in greater depth from another pamphlet, is the economic one. The economic interpretation of the American Civil War has been around for a long time, most notably that of Charles and Mary Beard, but since the ascendancy of neoabolitionist historiography in the past half-century or so, it has become quite taboo to approach the topic from this angle. But Pecquet du Bellet capably foreshadows much of it:

At the time of the War of 1812 with the English, there rose in all parts of New England small manufactures which, at peace, demanded from the Congress protective rights which enabled them to fight against the skilled industrialists of France and of England, and who would assure to the United States a national industry in case a new war broke out.

Although it cost the South much of an economic policy so contrary to the spirit of the Constitution itself, it yielded to the North in memory of the common allegiances they had just endured and the triumph they had got. The proposed [Tariff of 1816] was voted. The merchants of Boston and several other towns of the North, emboldened by this first success, and seeing in the creation of manufactures a favorable position, threw into it the capital which commerce had accumulated in their hands before the war. They gave the support of their numbers and wealth, the demands of which, growing with the erection of new branches of industry, demanded increasingly protective duties; this state of affairs continued until 1828.

We know the compromise [tariff] of 1833, which put an end to this crisis, and we know that the resentment of the North, far from subsiding with time, found new elements in the legitimate attitude of the South. The election of M. Lincoln at length tore the veil, and the Southern States, renouncing a struggle henceforth unnecessary, withdrew from the Union.

It was for the North an event of the highest gravity, from the point of view of its mercantile interests, for it lost the clearest and most definite source of the profits which it had collected over the South for many years. If we are to believe the official statistics reported by Mr. T. Butler King, the North found to earn annually on the south, in passenger expenses, 250 million francs; on interest, brokerage and commission 266 million, plus 25 per cent, out of a total of 1446 million in native manufactured goods imported into the South; on the freight of imports of European origin, 210 million, etc. Why, it is worth the trouble!

The clairvoyant minds had for a long time foreseen that the ever-increasing industry of the northern states would one day succeed in sacrificing everything in order to close the gates of the Union to any foreign competition, and that their capital would not come before any means without sacrifice, danger of absorbing the entire production of the country and monopolizing its trade. These forecasts are only too real.

It is interesting, indeed, how the same people who are generally prone to making arguments about economic and profiteering motivations of actors they dislike, suddenly eschew this line of thought entirely when it comes to the Civil War.

At the end, Pecquet du Bellet gives an apt summary of the economic motives for a French intervention:

Admirably prepared by its canals and railway networks, by its new commercial legislation in harmony with that which has just been enshrined in the Constitution of the Confederate States, France can without difficulty make a continental Liverpool or Havre, the central repository of all the products of the Confederate States, to spawn on its territory the main commercial transit route to meet the manufacturing needs of the major part of the continent, to constitute the intermediary of exchanges between the South, Algeria, and Italy, and thus to realize the profits which the commerce of New York has hitherto received.

“To obtain this brilliant result,” he continues, the following measures are to be pursued:

1. To reduce the price of transport on the railways;
2. To admit cotton free of duty;
3. To create the prompt establishment of a direct league of steamers between France and the Confederate States.

Not a bad strategy for a realist foreign policy, all things considered.

Now, Pecquet du Bellet would elaborate on this economic interpretation in another pamphlet written during the same year (1861), *Le Blocus Américain*.

It is a legalistic and political-economic argument against the Union blockade against the CSA declared by Lincoln on April 1861.

Owing to the combination of economic integration and the inequality of production, both in terms of natural reserves and of capital stock, freedom of maritime commerce has become an imperative.

To what extent, then, are the rights of sovereign belligerents to thwart the commercial activity of other sovereign belligerents with neutral actors, limited in any way by the law of nations?

Pecquet du Bellet bases his case primarily on the Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law, passed in 1856 as one of the provisions of the peace treaty signed at the Paris Congress that ended the Crimean War. He also cites the opinion of Vattel: "Vattel even thinks that a neutral nation can lend money to one of the belligerents, without the other having to complain of a violation of neutrality; his complaint would be grounded only if the lender did not demand interest, or if the loan was obviously made to the other belligerent to put it in the event of an attack."

He cites two legal precedents in U.S. diplomatic history, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between The United States and France (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fr1788-1.asp) (1778) and the Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between His Majesty the King of Prussia, and the United States of America (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/prus1785.asp) (1785).

In the Prussian treaty, art.13 is remarkably liberal when dealing with contraband — allowing for compensation of any wares that are held:

And in the same case of one of the contracting parties being engaged in war with any other power, to prevent all the difficulties & misunderstandings that usually arise respecting the merchandise heretofore called contraband, such as arms, ammunition & military stores of every kind, no such articles carried in the vessels, or by the subjects or citizens of one of the parties to the enemies of the other, shall be deemed contraband, so as to induce confiscation or condemnation and a loss of property to individuals. Nevertheless, it shall be lawful to stop such vessels & articles, and to detain them for such length of time as the captors may think necessary to prevent the inconvenience or damage that might ensue from their proceeding, paying however a reasonable compensation for the loss such arrest shall occasion to the proprietors: And it shall further be allowed to use in the service of the captors, the whole or any part of the military stores so detained, paying the owners the full value of the same, to be ascertained by the current price at the place of its destination. But in the case supposed, of a vessel stopped for articles heretofore deemed contraband, if the master of the vessel stopped will deliver out the goods supposed to be of contraband nature, he shall be admitted to do it, and the vessel shall not in that case be carried into any port, nor further detained, but shall be allowed to proceed on her voyage.

In the French treaty, art.26 expressly lists what is considered contraband, being limited to weaponry. Cloths, tin, iron, copper, gold, silver, most foods, etc. are clearly exempt from the definition.

“In law, no one can declare a blocked place where there are no fortifications, where the enemy does not live, and where there are no ships of war,” citing Virginia law.

“In the case of the United States it is not a question of a civil war, properly so called, in the quarrel which divides them: it is the disunion, the rupture of a federation freely consented by sovereign States, having never alienated their independence, each governed by a separate government, and having accepted the federal bond only under strict restrictions and reservations.”

Hence he considers it a nation-to-nation war rather than a civil war in a more conventional sense.

Pecquet du Bellet then goes on to cite a memorandum written by the French Minister of Commerce in response to an inquiry by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Le Havre regarding the CSA. In it, among other things, the fourth article of the 1856 Declaration of Paris is reaffirmed to be decisive: “Blockades, in order to be binding, must be effective — that is to say, maintained by a force sufficient really to prevent access to the coast of the enemy.”

For French merchants trading with the Confederacy, then, three questions are relevant:

1. Is one of the belligerents employing the enemy with the means which directly affect the peoples who are foreign to the struggle?;
2. Would the freedom of navigation claimed by the neutrals render absolutely ineffective the legitimate military operations between the belligerents?;
3. Is the Federal Navy of sufficient force to give the blockade of the ports of the Confederate States efficacy, an essential condition for its validity?

To the first question, the answer is an emphatic yes, and Pecquet du Bellet cites the industrial statistics of the blockade’s consequences:

In 1859, the Lyonnais factory produced an end product worth nearly 640 million francs, of which three quarters were delivered for export — about 500 million. In this figure, the United States represents 138 million and the other American states 40 million. which, for America, amounts to 178 million francs, nearly two-fifths of total exports.

This is one of the industries directly affected, one can not deny, by the American blockade.

What are the results of this disastrous measure? “The crisis that weighs on our main industry,” says the *Courrier de Lyon*, has naturally led to an increase in the pawning operations of the Mont-de-Péte in Lyon. From 1 January to 30 June last, loans numbered to 114,003, amounting to 1 million 860,807 francs, resulting in an evaluation for the whole year of 228,006 liabilities and 3 million 721,614 francs in advanced silver, these figures are enormous and exceed those of the most calamitous years.”

The United States takes annually for 36 million francs of ribbons at Saint-Etienne, and for 11 millions at Basle. “The ribbon industry occupies at St-Mienne and in its department 300 manufacturers, 10,000 heads of labor, 12,000 ribbon workers, 35,000 to 10,000 other workers. If one considers that fashion in France does not at present adopt ornaments in ribbons, one can appreciate how much the American crisis weighs more heavily on the market, since its market usually absorbs one third of Saint-Etienne’s production.

Is that not a direct attack? Would the deprivation of an object of luxury suffered by the States of the South as a result of the interruption of commercial relations be seriously attacked by the resulting distress for the French worker deprived of work?

“The export of wines and spirits to the United States has become almost nil; of 25,189 hectoliters of wine, and 3,962 hertoliters of [hard] alcohol, for the month of September 1860 it fell to 2,966 hectoliters of wine and to the minimum figure of 172 hectoliters of alcohol for September 1861.”

It would, unfortunately, be too easy to carry on this distressing calculation, and to calculate, up to the last cent, the enormous number of losses inflicted on French industry by the unjustifiable measure which gives it access to the ports of the South.

The effects on raw materials, obviously with cotton at the forefront, are by no means less stark. He quotes from an English trade journal and other sources to conclude that: “The news from the cotton manufacturing districts in England is showing an increasing slowdown and a great deal of concern for the future. The price of the raw material is now about one shilling a pound, about twice as much as it was twelve months ago. The uncertainty about what can be drawn from the next crop in America is increasing. Without believing in exaggerated predictions, we may say that the cotton factories in England. are very much struck, and that almost all factories in the United Kingdom are now working only at a loss.”

This is confirmed by retrospective economic history. The effects of the blockade were the driver behind the Lancashire cotton famine (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lancashire_Cotton_Famine), of 1861-1865.

The drop in bread prices and the abundance of cheap cotton had been quite conducive (<https://books.google.com/books?id=AB5cAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA19>) to the welfare of the English workingman: “Formerly the workman had only one garment, some coarse cotton cloth for his sundays and festivals: now, when he goes out, he has clothes of finer cloth; often his wife wears a silk dress; many

small luxuries in his household indicate that his taste is illuminated; what is more, it is his desire to learn, which is reflected in his eagerness to go to courses, and to frequent the libraries which are open to him."

Nor can supplies from India, Egypt and Algeria be sufficient to replenish this glut, neither in the French or English cases.

As to the question of whether European trade will render the military operations of the North against the South ineffective, being that the goods are not contraband and that the spillover effects will likely affect Northern supplies also, the answer is difficult. He notes the low number of warships deployed at the time.

Which leads to the third, final, and in some ways most important question — its efficacy.

Pecquet du Bellet has to juggle between continental economic interests and Northern military objectives here.

Reports of blockade runners abound. Ships sailing from ships of Saint John, New Brunswick, the Bermuda Islands, Barbados, and Halifax to Southern ports are plentiful. In August of 1861, 900k francs worth of customs duties were collected at Charleston and Wilmington ports. English schooners loaded with rice and ammunition had entered Key West b/w 9 and 10 September.

So, he calls upon the Emperor, upon the basis of precedents set in the Crimean War, to take up the cause and become the protector of free commerce.

To no avail.

Troops stationed in blockade service would certainly earn a buck (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_blockade#Blockade_service), however.

Finally, his letter to the French legislature, *Amerique du Nord, lettre au corps legislatif* (1864) is a synthesis of the arguments in the last two pamphlets.

By now, the French-backed Second Mexican Empire with Maximilian I Habsburg as head was in force, adding another layer (<https://books.google.com/books?id=oaFcAAAACAAJ&pg=PA15>) of foreign policy tension and material interest. Radical Republicans like H. Winter Davis were calling for blood: "When we have crushed the rebellion, we shall settle our accounts with France; it will be necessary to punish its perfidious neutrality. It has sinned against the Monroe doctrine, it has invaded Mexico. Our regiments will take possession of the palaces of the Montezumas and drive them away from Napoleon."

So they did, with Louis-Napoleon withdrawing his forces by 1866, leaving Maximilian I to the firing squads a year later.

Le temps détruit tout. Particularly the cause of legitimism, and so too the principle of "self-determination" evades those insufficiently righteous.

Pecquet du Bellet would go on to earn a comfortable living, but so much for the paleo-Franco-Confederate cause. This is my tribute to it.

This entry was posted in Historical insights, Political economy. Bookmark the permalink.

3 thoughts on “Paul Pecquet du Bellet and the French diplomatic effort in the Confederacy”

1. Pingback: [Paul Pecquet du Bellet and the French diplomatic effort in the Confederacy | Reaction Times](#)

2. marcusmontisursinensis says:

[September 11, 2017 at 7:10 pm](#)

I liked all of your last three posts (American Monarchism, Barlow, Pecquet du Bellet), but this one is my favorite. Pleasure to read, very informative.

A pity indeed that there is no discussion under any of them. Go on, we keep reading. Maybe, a more controversial post should intertwine with those more informative.

[Reply](#)

o [Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur](#) says:

[September 11, 2017 at 10:49 pm](#)

I'll have more polemical (indeed, quite controversial) stuff later down the road, but that will take a while as I have plenty of more “dry” subjects to get through, as well as literary reviews of some classical counterrevolutionary writers. I'll try and see if I can get something to fan the flames with soon, though. Perhaps if Social Matter publishes something that pushes my buttons again.

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