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British Mediation and the American Civil War: A Reconsideration

By Kinley J. Brauer

During the fall of 1862 Great Britain seriously considered intervening in the American Civil War. Union defeats in northern Virginia and a Confederate advance toward Washington, coupled with growing domestic economic problems created by the cotton famine, led Lord Palmerston, the prime minister, and Lord John Russell, the foreign secretary, to propose to the Cabinet that Britain in conjunction with other European powers offer mediation to the Americans. After nearly three months of discussion, however, the proposal was put aside, and Britain decided to maintain its policy of cautious neutrality in the American war.

Historians have long sought to explain why the British government ultimately rejected intervention. Most early scholars emphasized popular support for the North, divisions and personal rivalries in the Cabinet, and British doubt that the Washington government would entertain an offer of mediation as the reasons for Britain's "retreat."1 Since the publication of Ephraim D. Adams's Great Britain and the American Civil War in 1925 and especially Frank L. Owsley's King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America in 1931, it has been argued that the northern victory at Antietam frustrated the mediation scheme by convincing Lord Palmerston that the southern cause was hopeless.2 This interpretation has been


2 See Adams, Great Britain and the American Civil War (2 vols., London and

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adopted by authors of major diplomatic history textbooks and accepted, albeit with reservations, by other scholars of the period.\(^3\)

The notion that Antietam determined the fate of the mediation scheme of 1862 is based upon two questionable assumptions. First, it assumes that the British expected that the looming Battle of Antietam would be a turning point in the war. The fact is that within the British Cabinet only Palmerston—and he only momentarily—thought in terms of a sweeping southern victory. Before the battle occurred, Palmerston and the rest of the Cabinet, including Russell and William E. Gladstone, the powerful chancellor of the exchequer, expected at most that there would be a serious northern military defeat but not one causing northern capitulation. Similarly, after news of the southern repulse reached London, no member of the Cabinet believed that the North was about to conquer the South. The Battle of Antietam rather reinforced the conviction that neither side would win the war on the field.\(^4\) Adherence throughout the controversy to this view

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\(^4\) See, for example, Russell to William Stuart, July 19, August 8, 1862, Russell Papers, Public Record Office 30/22/35 (London); Duke of Argyll to Palmerston, September 2, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/AR/25 (by permission of the Trustees of Broadlands Archives, presently housed in the Historical Manuscripts Commission, London); John Morley, The Life of William Ewart Gladstone (3 vols. in 2, New York, 1911), II, 81; Herbert E. Maxwell, The Life and Letters of George
of the futility of the war explains why the Cabinet was able to consider mediation at all. Clearly, expectation of a final victory for either side would have worked against consideration of a mediation scheme rather than for it.

The second assumption is that Palmerston had the ability to marshal Cabinet support for mediation. The coalition nature of Palmerston's ministry, the strong Cabinet rivalries, the Palmerston-Gladstone feud, the quasi-independence of Gladstone and Russell, and the power of the Conservatives in Parliament are all well known. Palmerston faced great political danger in proposing a policy which would have divided the Cabinet, and within the Cabinet the Duke of Argyll, Thomas Milner-Gibson, Sir George Grey, and Charles Pelham Villiers were northern sympathizers who could be counted on to oppose any policy hostile to the North. In addition, George Cornewall Lewis, Lord Granville, and the Duke of Newcastle consistently opposed changing British policy toward America. Since only Gladstone, Russell, and Lord Westbury were sympathetic to mediation, Palmerston had to move with exceptional caution. To gain support for mediation, he needed more than southern victories. Palmerston had to be able to convince the Cabinet that the North was in a mood to receive the British proposal.

Concern in the Cabinet over the mood and receptiveness of northerners to a British mediation offer was crucial during the entire consideration of the question. Palmerston and Russell expected that President Lincoln, Secretary of State William H. Seward, and the Radicals would remain intransigent in their absolute opposition to European mediation even in the face of continued Confederate military victories. But they also believed


In late October William Stuart, British chargé d'affaires in Washington, wrote Russell that Lincoln and the cabinet could be expected to reject a mediation offer and that it was "to the public, and not to the government that we must look, if we intend to proffer our services in the interest of peace." Stuart to Russell, October 26, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/36. Among the early historians, Rhodes and Bancroft were virtually alone in considering the importance of the American response, and both rested their interpretations heavily on British fear of Seward's reaction to a mediation proposal. Rhodes stated explicitly that "the change of opinion of Palmerston and Russell . . . was not caused by the victory of Anti-tam . . . ." Due to the lack of available material, neither historian could fully de-
that in such a situation northern war-weariness and pressure for peace would increase the political power of Republican moderates and Peace Democrats, who in combination would be able to reduce the influence of the Radicals and force Lincoln and Seward against their personal inclinations to accept a mediation proposal. Throughout the fall of 1862 Cabinet members attempted to gauge American public opinion and measure its political effect. The military situation was important only as one element in shaping that judgment. Palmerston alone seems to have been primarily impressed with the military developments and to have fluctuated in his views toward the chances of successful mediation; the rest of the Cabinet remained constant to one position both before and after Antietam.7

Serious British consideration of mediation began shortly after news arrived that George B. McClellan's Peninsula campaign had failed.8 Until that time Union armies had been generally successful in carrying the war to the South. Although British leaders were convinced that the North could not conquer the South militarily, they believed that high northern morale and continued penetration of Confederate territory might lead the South to sue for peace. McClellan's failure caused a reversal of this reasoning. By August it appeared that Confederate morale was high, and there was no reason to expect southern capitulation. Conversely, McClellan's retreat, Stonewall Jackson's victory at Second Bull Run, Robert E. Lee's invasion of Maryland, and the threat to Washington suggested that northern morale might be deteriorating. Since the British did not believe that the South had the ability to conquer the North and were well aware of the determination of the Lincoln government to continue the war, it appeared that a stalemate had been reached.9

The existence of a political and military stalemate created both new opportunities and grave dangers for the British. Early
in 1862 Lord Lyons, British minister to the United States, warned Russell that if the North did not achieve a great victory before the “sickly season,” by June or July, popular discontent with the war would force the North to concede defeat and American politics would be in turmoil. Republican radicals and moderates, he wrote, would become openly hostile, and both might attempt to provoke a war with Britain, the former to remain in power and the latter to justify giving up the domestic struggle and to enable them to seize power. In order to forestall such a situation, Lyons, always cautious and never an advocate of interference, suggested that in the absence of a major northern victory, Britain and France seriously consider intervening before the moderates turned against Britain. Intervention at the proper time would strengthen American peace elements, help drive the Radicals from power, hasten the end of the war, and tie a growing segment of American opinion to Britain. The question of mediation was thus tied fundamentally to the American political situation from the very beginning.

The subject of mediation arose several times in Parliament during the summer of 1862. When William S. Lindsay and other southern sympathizers attempted to commit the Cabinet to interference, both Palmerston and Russell firmly insisted that the Cabinet must retain complete freedom on the issue, and both clearly expressed their positions on the question. Russell on June 13 attempted to spike rumors in the House of Lords that mediation was under consideration and especially noted that “the present time would be most inopportune for such attempt at mediation” in view of the bitterness between the North and South. A premature offer of mediation, he added, could frustrate successful mediation at a later time. Palmerston on June 30 underscored this position in the House of Commons, arguing that the Cabinet would act only when it appeared “that such a step would be attended with success.” If and when American passions cooled “and a fair opening appear[ed] for any step which might be likely to meet with the acquiescence of the two parties,” the Cabinet would promptly and gladly act.

10 Lyons to Russell, January 14, February 7, 11, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/36. In June Lyons returned to Britain on leave for reasons of health. William Stuart assumed Lyons’s responsibilities until his return in November.


12 Ibid., 1214 (June 30, 1862).
to Gladstone, at a Cabinet meeting on August 2 it was decided "that nothing will be done until both parties are desirous of it." 18

Within a few days Russell began to think that an opportunity for mediation might arise in the autumn. On July 1 William Stuart, British chargé d'affaires in Washington, wrote of McClellan's difficulties in Virginia and of the optimism of Henri Mercier, French minister to the United States, that mediation would be welcomed in the North. Stuart himself wanted to wait for some great military disaster. Since the northerners were then still confident, he wrote, "it would perhaps be better for us to wait for some signs of exhaustion." Later in the month Stuart reported that Mercier, in reevaluating the northern temper, had suggested that "perhaps by October the change [in public opinion] may be sufficiently great for a joint mediation to have some chance to be listened to." Despite Lyons's renewed opposition to interference—he was then in England—the mention of October appealed to Palmerston and Russell. It conformed to Lyons's earlier suggestion that Britain act sometime between July and the elections in November. On August 6 Russell suggested calling a Cabinet meeting in October to decide the matter. 14

Between August 6 and September 13 news from America indicated it was impossible to judge the state of the northern mind or the chances that a mediation proposal would have. The Duke of Argyll wrote Gladstone and Palmerston that while he himself believed that the North could not conquer the South, letters from America made it clear that "whatever may be our opinion of the prospects of 'the North' that they do not yet, at least, feel any approach to such exhaustion as will lead them to admit of mediation . . . ." 15 Stuart, too, wrote Russell that "it will require further reverses before any offer of mediation would be listened to with patience," and Lord Clarendon, at this time a confidant of several Cabinet members, agreed in early September that there appeared "to be absolutely no basis for mediation with parties being animated by the fiercest passions, each demanding what the other will not concede." 16

14 Stuart to Russell, July 1, 21, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/36; Russell to Palmerston, August 6, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/RU/721; see also Duberman, Adams, 294.
15 Argyll to Gladstone, August 6, 26, 1862, Gladstone Papers, Add. Ms. 44099.
16 Stuart to Russell, August 10, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/36; Clarendon
News of the Union defeat at the Second Battle of Bull Run and Lee's invasion of Maryland, however, led Palmerston, Russell, and Gladstone to believe that the time to act was rapidly approaching. On September 13 Russell instructed Lord Cowley, British ambassador to France, to sound out informally Edouard Thouvenel, the French foreign minister, regarding a joint recommendation of an armistice to be followed by the threat that if the Union alone rejected it, Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and Italy "might" recognize the independence of the Confederacy. Such a recommendation, he thought, would "tend to shorten the war, & dispose the North to Peace." Russell thus conceived of a joint offer of mediation as a weapon to be used to bring the Americans to their senses. On the following day Palmerston informed Russell of his agreement with this approach, noting that the Union had suffered "a very complete smashing" and faced worse disasters, including the possible loss of Washington or Baltimore. While awaiting Thouvenel's reply, Russell wrote Palmerston that he planned to call a Cabinet meeting on either September 23 or 30 to discuss mediation. He argued that "whether the Federal Army is destroyed or not it is clear that it is driven back to Washington, & has made no progress in subduing the Insurgent States." Significantly, Russell added that along with the proposal of mediation, British neutrality should be restated, and forces in Canada should be concentrated "in a few defensible points, before winter sets in." When Palmerston informed Gladstone of this position and added that the approaching battle in Maryland could decide matters and compel Britain to act before October, Gladstone quickly agreed. Palmerston noted that if McClellan were defeated, "the Federal Cause will be manifestly hopeless . . . ."

Other members of the Cabinet, however, opposed Russell's scheme, primarily because of their concern about the American

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18 Palmerston to Russell, September 14, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/14D.
19 Russell to Palmerston, September 17, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/RU/728.
20 Palmerston to Gladstone, September 24, 1862, Gladstone Papers, Add. Ms. 44099; Gladstone to Palmerston, September 25, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/GL/94; Morley, Gladstone, II, 76–77.
reaction. Argyll wrote Gladstone that although he was now "doubly" convinced that the North could not subdue the South and had so written Charles Sumner and John Lothrop Motley, mediation would be successful only when the North became likewise convinced. That conviction, however, did not then exist. The South had not yet achieved its independence, as Gladstone had maintained in a previous letter. Secretary for War George Cornewall Lewis and Earl Granville also doubted that the time was right to offer mediation, the latter suggesting that in the absence of any real understanding of American politics and of the broad expectations of either side, mediation would be a dangerous and probably futile policy. Among other things, it could result, Granville argued, in an armistice not for the purpose of peace but to prepare for a greater military effort. Outside the Cabinet, Clarendon also counseled delay.21

While Cabinet members expressed their opposition to mediation, news arrived from Paris that France was also cool to the scheme. Stuart wrote on September 1 that Mercier wanted to wait "until after the Elections in November, which he thinks will bring out the real feelings of the people." Mercier made the same suggestion to Thouvenel, who, unlike Napoleon III, was generally unsympathetic to interference. Cowley on September 18 informed Russell that Thouvenel, on the basis of Mercier's report, was also "disposed to wait to see the results of the Elections."22

Mercier had suggested to Thouvenel that although the moment for offering mediation had not arrived, when that time came "it might be only a fleeting moment which would be lost by a reference to London and Paris." Therefore, he wanted Lyons to return to America immediately with the power to make the offer at his own discretion. Mercier also suggested that Lyons's early return "might exercise a certain effect upon the public mind and prepare the people for mediation." In fact, Mercier hoped that "some means" could be developed to arouse the nation and promote the growth of a peace party which

21 Argyll to Gladstone, September 23, 1862, Gladstone Papers, Add. Ms. 44099; Granville to Russell, September 29, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/25; Russell to Palmerston, October 2, 1862, Palmerston Papers, CC/RU/731; Palmerston to Granville, October 3, 1862, Palmerston Papers, PM/J/1; Palmerston to Russell, October 3, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/14D; Clarendon to Cowley, September 15, 1862, Cowley Papers, FO 519/178.

22 Stuart to Russell, September 1, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/36; Mercier to Thouvenel, July 6, 1863, Correspondance Politique, États-Unis, Vol. 128 (Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris); Cowley to Russell, September 18, 1862, Cowley Papers, FO 519/230.
would be able to override Seward's expected opposition. Thouvenel fully accepted this plan, suggesting that Lyons return to Washington in October. The French minister believed that the scheme would be successful only if a strong peace party emerged with the power to "set aside" Lincoln and Seward.²³ Lyons, however, disliked having such discretionary power since it could embarrass him in dealing with Seward, and Russell agreed that so important a move should only be decided upon in London.²⁴ Had the Cabinet not been so divided at that time on the wisdom of mediation, perhaps Russell would have considered Thouvenel's tactic, which was somewhat similar to his own. Under the existing circumstances, however, little consideration was given to the French scheme.

Palmerston also urged caution. On September 22 he advised Russell that Britain should await the outcome of the battle looming north of Washington and suggested that it would be premature to hold a Cabinet session on Russell's proposal before news arrived. Palmerston thought that northern determination would not flag until the northern army was "thoroughly beaten" and Baltimore had joined the Confederate cause. Then, he thought, northern leaders "may be brought to a more reasonable State of Mind." The next day Palmerston, after accepting Russell's general plan and suggesting that Russia be invited to enter the scheme, added, "If the Federals sustain a great Defeat they may be at once ready for Mediation and the Iron should be struck while it is hot. If, on the other hand, they should have the best of it we may wait awhile and see what may follow." On September 26 Russell wrote Cowley and Palmerston wrote Charles de Flahaut, French ambassador to the Court of St. James's, advising them of this position.²⁶

Significantly, even at this juncture neither Palmerston nor Russell expected that southern victory would cause a collapse of the northern military machine or compel the North to sue for peace. Palmerston clearly expected that, at most, northern leaders

²³ Cowley to Russell, September 18, 1862, Cowley Papers, FO 519/230.
²⁴ Lord Newton, Lord Lyons: A Record of British Diplomacy (2 vols., London, 1913), I, 89-91. See also Lyons to Russell, February 7, November 14, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/38; Adams, Great Britain and the American Civil War, II, 41.
²⁵ Palmerston to Russell, September 22, 23, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/14D; Russell to Cowley, September 26, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/105; Palmerston to Flahaut, September 26, 1862, Palmerston Papers, PM/J/1. Palmerston's letter was mislaid on his desk and not mailed until October 6.
would recognize the utter futility of continuing the war. Russell agreed, but he also concluded that "whichever way Victory inclines, I cannot think the South can now be conquered." Thus, while Palmerston planned to delay mediation if the North were successful in Maryland, the forthcoming contest made little difference to Russell. Palmerston nearly came to this position on September 30. As reports began filtering into Britain of the battles in Maryland, he wrote Russell that "last accounts from America shew as you say that the Forces of the North & South are pretty equally balanced & that neither are likely to overpower the other. This is just the Case for the Stepping in of Friends." Other members of the Cabinet, however, continued their opposition to Russell's mediation scheme, and when Russell forwarded Granville's and Lewis's letters against interference in American affairs to Palmerston on October 2, the prime minister returned to his original position. "Coming events on the Theatre of War," he concluded, "must determine our course."

News of the Battle of Antietam arrived in England between September 30 and October 2, and between then and about October 25 the movement for mediation reached its climax. After hearing of Antietam Palmerston wrote Russell that the situation in America remained confused and the problems of offering mediation complex. The final decision, he thought, could "only be cleared up by some more decided events between the contending armies." His main point, however, was that the North would not consider mediation, especially on the basis of separation, until it had "had a good deal more pummelling from the South." By mid-October, he thought, Britain might be in a better position to act. Russell, however, was undeterred by Antietam. On October 4, after hearing from Cowley that Napoleon III favored recognition of the Confederacy, Russell proposed to Palmerston that Britain immediately adopt a mediation plan on the basis of separation between the North and South to be offered jointly with the French to the Americans along with a restatement of British neutrality. Two days later Russell recommended

26 Palmerston to Russell, September 22, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/14D; Russell to Cowley, September 26, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/105.
27 Palmerston to Russell, September 30, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/14D.
28 Russell to Palmerston, October 2, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/RU/731; Palmerston to Granville, October 2, 1862, Palmerston Papers, PM/J/1.
following Mercier’s suggestion to Stuart that Britain and France arrive at a decision and that Lyons return to America via Paris with a suggestion of an armistice and an offer of their “good offices.”

When on October 13 Russell prepared a detailed memorandum for the Cabinet advocating this mediation plan, virtually the only support he received came from Gladstone. Opposition came from both within and without the Cabinet. The Duke of Newcastle, secretary for the colonies, thought the proposal premature and wrote Russell, “I do not think it can be long before a large Party in the North declare itself adverse to the War. Premature intervention by Europe would prevent any such movement, & unite the two Parties in the same mad resolve to go on.” Clarendon wrote Palmerston that Lord Derby, the leader of the opposition, also opposed intervention, and Palmerston transmitted the letter to Russell. Palmerston at this time suggested that Britain postpone action until winter, when military activities had slowed down and the American political situation became clearer. On October 22 he informed Russell that he tended to agree with Lewis and thought “that we must continue merely to be lookers-on till the war shall have taken a more decided turn.” Palmerston later concluded that in view of the bitterness of northern politics, talking peace to the Americans “would be as useless as asking the winds . . . to let the waters remain calm.”

By October 20 Russell himself began to waver. Lyons had advised him that Russia probably would not join an Anglo-French scheme, and Stuart suggested that Britain wait. This advice, in

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30 Cowley to Russell, October 3, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/58; Russell to Palmerston, October 4, 6, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/RU/732, 733. Seward learned of Russell’s proposal on October 27. See Henry S. Sanford to Seward, October 10, 1862, William Henry Seward Papers (University of Rochester Library, Rochester, N.Y.). Gladstone was apparently as unimpressed by news of the Battle of Antietam as was Russell. He delivered his well-known speech at Newcastle on October 7. For a consideration of Gladstone’s position see Robert L. Reid, ed., “William E. Gladstone’s ‘Insincere Neutrality’ During the Civil War,” Civil War History, XV (December 1969), 293–307; see also Morley, Gladstone, II, 69–86.

31 Russell, “Confidential Memorandum,” October 13, 1862, Gladstone Papers, Add. Ms. 44595; Newcastle to Russell, October 14, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/25; Clarendon to Palmerston, October 16, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/CL/1207; Russell to Palmerston, October 18, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/RU/734; Palmerston to Russell, October 22, 24, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/14D; Gladstone memorandum, “War in America,” October 23, 1862, Gladstone Papers, Add. Ms. 44572.
addition to the expressed opposition to mediation, led Russell to accept a postponement of the Cabinet meeting. The doubtfulness of Russian support had become important, especially since Russell had decided that his program would only be feasible if France, Russia, Prussia, and Austria joined Britain. "Less than the whole five," he now insisted, "would not do." Later in the month, Russell heard from Stuart that Baron Édouard de Stoeckl, Russian minister in Washington, suggested waiting until after the November elections, "when some of the leading Democrats might be sounded about it [European mediation]." The question was thus left open, and Lyons was sent back to America with no special instructions, "at which," Russell noted to Palmerston, "he is much pleased."

It was at this time that France made a formal request to Britain that it join with Russia in proposing to the Americans the establishment of a six-month truce accompanied by a suspension of the northern blockade. Napoleon III suggested that even if the offer were rejected by Lincoln, the peace party in the North would be strengthened and it might be able to overthrow the Lincoln government. Cowley's suggestion that Europe wait until after the elections was brushed aside, as apparently were the objections of Napoleon's new foreign minister, Édouard Drouyn de Lhuys. Russell, however, saw enough merit in Napoleon's scheme to give it his support and to present it to the Cabinet on November 11.

The Cabinet refused to agree to the French proposal. Palmerston, Clarendon, and Lewis continued to counsel waiting until after the American elections, and on November 8 Lord Napier telegraphed from St. Petersburg that Russia definitely would not join in the scheme. Russell was not as hopeful as he had been previously that it would be acceptable to the Americans before the elections, but he thought the attempt worthwhile nevertheless, especially since he had heard from Stuart

32 Russell to Palmerston, October 20, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/RU/735; Stuart to Russell, October 17, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/36.
33 Russell to Palmerston, October 24, 1862, Palmerston Papers, GC/RU/736.
34 Cowley to Russell, October 27, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/14D; Cowley, "Memorandum of a conversation with M. Drouyn de Lhuys," October 28, 1862, FO 27/1446; Cowley to Russell, October 31, 1862, FO 27/1446. On November 1 Russell informed Lyons of the French proposal and stated his pessimism concerning its acceptance and consideration by the Americans. He added, "Russia must be a party to any thing done by us and France—if we do anything," Russell to Lyons, November 1, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/96, also quoted in Newton, Lord Lyons, I, 92.
that Seward "looks to mutual extermination, & to the superior numbers of the North, in order to restore the Union!!" In a note to Cowley, he asked, "Was there ever any war so horrible?" Russell on November 11 received firm support only from Gladstone and the lord chancellor, Lord Westbury. Palmerston supported Russell weakly, and on November 12 the Cabinet formally declined the French offer.85

Russell had hoped (and several others in the Cabinet expected) that the elections in America would quickly settle the question, and Russell instructed Lyons to report immediately his evaluation of the significance of the Democratic victories in New York and elsewhere when he returned to America.86 Lyons's dispatches continued to counsel delay. He found that many people in New York, encouraged by Democratic successes, expected Lincoln to "strengthen the moderate and conservative element in the Cabinet" and to seek to conciliate the South in order to end the war. Some, however, believed that Lincoln had gone over to the Radicals and would soon replace Seward and other moderates with members of the "violent abolition party." Although Lyons avoided raising the question of foreign mediation with Democratic leaders, he learned that they were "very nervous on the subject," fearing that if Lincoln happened to be in the hands of the Radicals at the time mediation were proposed, the Radicals "would make use of the offer as a means of rousing the passions of the people, and . . . upsetting all the conservative plans . . . ." The Democrats, it

85 Russell to Lyons, November 8, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/96; Russell to Cowley, November 1, 12, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/105; Palmerston to Russell, November 2, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/14D; Clarendon to Cowley, November 5, 1862, Cowley Papers, FO 519/178; G. C. Lewis to Palmerston, November 7, [1862], Palmerston Papers, GC/LE/164; Napier to Russell, November 8, 1862 (No. 407), FO 65/609; G. C. Lewis to Clarendon, November 11, 1862, Maxwell, *Clarendon*, II, 268–69. See also French mediation proposal (draft), Drouyn de Lhuys to Flahaut, n.d. (No. 109) and Flahaut to Drouyn de Lhuys, November 13, 1862, Corr. Pol., Angleterre, Vol. 722; Clarendon to Cowley, November 26, 1862, Cowley Papers, FO 519/179; Palmerston to King of Belgium, November 18, 1862, Palmerston Papers, PM/J/1. See also Case and Spencer, *United States and France*, 353–73.

86 Russell to Lyons, November 1, 8, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/96. Stuart had already written Russell of Democratic gains in the elections of 1862. On November 7 he called these gains "a political revolution," and he ascribed the chief cause to be "disgust with the war and desire for peace." Stuart to Russell, October 17, 24, November 7, 1862 (Nos. 299, 313, 336), FO 414/19. Writing from Belgium, Henry S. Sanford informed Seward that the elections "have not helped us abroad: they are interpreted as showing hostility to the war & a disposition of a party for peace at any price, even that of foreign intervention." Sanford to Seward, November 7, 1862, Seward Papers.
appeared, would welcome a foreign mediation proposal only as a last resort, only if moderates gained control of the government, and only if the proposal came from "all the Powers of Europe." Lyons therefore suggested that Britain wait until March, when the new Congress met, or December, if there were sufficient military reverses to change the public temper.  

Throughout November and December Lyons continued to report that the time was not right to offer mediation. On November 14 he wrote that recognition of the South would provoke an Anglo-American war and hurt the growing peace party. In a dispatch ten days later he approved Russell's rejection of the French plan, and on November 28 he added that the publication of Seward's diplomatic correspondence for 1862 made it clear that mediation would have failed in October.  

Upon his return to Washington Lyons met with Mercier, who was sorely disappointed at the failure of joint mediation. Mercier argued that an offer just before the election would have increased the Democratic majorities so that it would have become "impossible for the Government to reject the proposal." After the elections, however, the Radicals were even more deeply committed for political reasons to prosecute the war. Furthermore, they were compelling Lincoln, now completely under their control, to act "in defiance of public opinion." Lyons disagreed, suggesting that the Democrats were, in fact, ahead of public opinion before the election and might well have been forced to disavow their peaceful inclinations and repudiate mediation. In answer to a request by Russell for information on the nature of northern confidence, Lyons reported that although "all men of all parties have lost heart about the war" and were "not confident of success," they still had not wholly reconciled themselves to defeat. Furthermore, the moderates had lost all hope of winning Lincoln's support.  

In early January Lyons's position seemed to be justified, and he now placed no reliance on the Democrats. Even Mercier

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87 Lyons to Russell, November 11, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/36; Lyons to Russell, November 17, 1862 (No. 437), FO 414/19.  
88 Lyons to Russell, November 14, 24, 28, December 12, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/36; see also Lyons to Russell, November 28, December 12, 1862 (Nos. 466, 509), FO 414/19.  
89 Lyons to Russell, November 18, 1862 (No. 438). FO 414/19.  
40 Russell to Lyons, December 20, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/96; Lyons to Russell, January 9, 1863, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/37; Lyons to Russell, December 8, 1862 (No. 494), FO 414/19.
by that time had given up hope for Democratic support. Mercier complained to Lyons that the Democrats had reversed themselves on the question of mediation and peace. Before the elections Democratic spokesmen had assured him that a foreign proposal would gain them 800,000 votes. Now they appeared more war-like than the Radicals. Lyons also noted the new Democratic belligerency. He interpreted it to mean that the Democrats, believing that Republican power stemmed solely from control of the executive branch, had decided against exerting pressure on the government through Congress and were instead preparing to support the repudiated General McClellan and a peace platform in the 1864 elections. Popular dissatisfaction with Lincoln was growing, and they planned to allow the President full freedom to dig his own political grave. Lyons, therefore, expected that the Democrats would shy away from supporting foreign mediation so as not to arouse popular ill will toward them and give the Radicals a dangerous new means of attacking them. With the Radicals apparently in firm control of Lincoln and Seward and the Democratic peace elements in temporary retirement, there was not the slightest hope that foreign mediation would be entertained for some time.

The failure of the mediation scheme, therefore, did not stem primarily from the military consequences or implications of the Battle of Antietam, which only indicated that the war would continue interminably and which thereby served to reinforce the arguments of those such as Russell and Gladstone who favored European intervention to end the war. Evidence suggests that, with the exception of Palmerston, Antietam was essentially irrelevant to the ultimate decision to postpone offering mediation.

Even for Palmerston, the battle was important only in its relation to northern politics and opinion. The invasion of Maryland failed to become the coup de grâce to the northern war spirit, and Lee's retirement made uncertain the state of significant northern discontent with the war. Palmerston and a large majority of the Cabinet could not judge the immediate effect of the battle on northern opinion. That effect, they decided, could only be reliably measured by the results of the November elections.

41 Lyons to Russell, January 13, 1863 (No. 38), FO 414/19.

42 By November Russell, too, resigned himself to the notion that "there seems no use in talking of America until the elections are over." Russell to Cowley, November 1, 1862, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/105.
Therefore, as far as foreign relations were concerned, the real significance of the Battle of Antietam, understandable only in its relation to American politics before the vitally important November elections, was that it confused the British in evaluating the American political situation and thereby caused British leaders to return to their cautious policy of watchful waiting. The political situation after November served to confirm the British decision to remain neutral observers of the American struggle.