

in ignorance, in this condition of things, of our manner of regarding it. I request you, therefore, sir, to seize the first occasion of opening yourself frankly to Mr. Seward, and, if he asks it, send him a copy of this despatch.

Receive, sir, the assurance of my high consideration,

THOUVENEL.

Monsieur HENRI MERCIER,  
*Minister of the Emperor at Washington.*

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*Mr. Seward to Mr. Mercier.*

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,  
*Washington, December 27, 1861.*

SIR: I have submitted to the President the copy you were so good as to give me of the despatch addressed to you on the 3d of December instant, concerning the recent proceedings of Captain Wilkes, in arresting certain persons on board of the British contract mail steamer Trent.

Before receiving the paper, however, the President had decided upon the disposition to be made of the subject, which has caused so much anxiety in Europe. That disposition of the subject, as I think, renders unnecessary any discussion of it, in reply to the comments of Mr. Thouvenel. I am permitted, however, to say that Mr. Thouvenel has not been in error in supposing, first, that the government of the United States has not acted in any spirit of disregard of the rights, or of the sensibilities, of the British nation, and that he is equally just in assuming that the United States would consistently vindicate, by their practice on this occasion, the character they have so long maintained as an advocate of the most liberal principles concerning the rights of neutral States in maritime war.

When the French government shall come to see at large the views of this government, and those of the government of Great Britain, on the subject now in question, and to compare them with the views expressed by Mr. Thouvenel on the part of France, it will probably perceive that, while it must be admitted that those three powers are equally impressed with the same desire for the establishment of principles favorable to neutral rights, there is, at the same time, not such an entire agreement concerning the application of those principles as is desirable to secure that important object.

The government of the United States will be happy if the occasion which has elicited this correspondence can be improved so as to secure a more definite agreement upon the whole subject by all maritime powers.

You will assure Mr. Thouvenel that this government appreciates as well the frankness of his explanations, as the spirit of friendship and good will towards the United States in which they are expressed.

It is a sincere pleasure for the United States to exchange assurances of a friendship which had its origin in associations the most sacred in the history of both countries.

I avail myself of this opportunity to renew to you, sir, the assurance of my high consideration.

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

Mr. HENRI MERCIER, &c., &c., &c.