

UNTIL HELL FREEZES OVER: A CRITICAL REANALYSIS OF GRAND  
STRATEGY IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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TC 660H

Plan II Honors Program

The University of Texas at Austin

May 8, 2020

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## **ABSTRACT**

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**Title:** Until Hell Freezes Over: A Critical Analysis of Grand Strategy in the American Civil War

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The concept of “grand strategy” is both an overall plan that encompasses the military, diplomatic, economic, and social aspects of waging war, and an analytical lens through which we can examine the progression of historical conflicts and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of why they were fated the way they were. The American Civil War is a truly massive specimen that is frequently analyzed in smaller proportions that do not do the complex and fluid nature of the conflict justice. Too often are inflated importances given to individual battles and people. Examining the grand strategies of the Union and Confederacy - whether intentional or not - yields a clearer picture of how the war reached its outcome, and assigns the proper levels of importance to the various aspects of the conflict.

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, thank you to my family - Dad, Mom, Molly, Grandpa, Grandma, and Daddy Doc - for being willing and able to provide me with the experiences that culminated in this thesis. There are many more Civil War battlefields to traverse, but we have a good start.

Second, thank you to my advisors for their infinite wisdom, patience and graciousness in sticking with me throughout this project.

Last, thank you to everyone who has written or will write a book about the Civil War. Perspective on this great conflict cannot be lost, lest we lose our way as a nation and a species.

*He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part - a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country - was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire.*

- Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*

*“What a piece of work is man... in action how like an angel!” And the old man, grinning, had scratched his head and then said stiffly, “Well, boy, if he’s an angel, he’s sure a murderin’ angel.”*

- Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels*

*It is well that war is so terrible, otherwise we should grow too fond of it.*

- Robert E. Lee at the Battle of Fredericksburg, 1862

*I will fight until Hell freezes over and then fight on the ice!*

- Union captain William Mattingly at the Battle of Bulltown, 1863

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## 1. Introduction

In May of my freshman year of high school, I went on my first date with my first girlfriend ever. It was a simple coffee date to our local Barnes & Noble with two mutual friends who had already been dating for more than a year to that point. There was no solid plan for the outing, and we expected it to last no more than an hour.

We all arrived separately - none of us were quite ready for our parents to know about our relationships yet - and I after the three of them. They secured a table on the balcony overlooking the entrance, and waved and hollered at me as I stepped out of my mother's car. I told them that I would be right up after grabbing something from the coffee shop, and proceeded to keep them waiting another thirty minutes as I shuffled around the store, my nose in a particularly interesting book I spied on the bargain table. It turned out to be one of the most fateful chance encounters of my life.

When I finally joined my friends, I was pummeled with questions about what took me so long, why I did not have a beverage with me, and what the book was in my hand. I swallowed my embarrassment from having kept my new girlfriend waiting half an hour while I perused a book about strategy in the American Civil War, and I apologized. While they were all unimpressed that *that* was the book that kept them waiting for such a long time, I dated that girl for another three years - on and off, of course - so my first date *faux pas* clearly did not leave a lasting impression on her. But it did on me.

To be honest, I do not remember the name of that book. I am not sure I ever learned the name of it. I can barely remember what the cover looked like. I just remember the fully-illustrated and thoroughly annotated diagrams of the major battles of the Civil War. It was probably one of a thousand books of its kind, but it was monumental to me. I grew up in love

with the Civil War, with the image of two massive bodies of blue and gray clashing back and forth across an open field, while a triumphant symphony blasted somewhere in the background. I was infatuated with how sweeping, epic, and romantic it all seemed to be. As a child, I read *The Red Badge of Courage* and *The Killer Angels*, and watched their film adaptations dozens of times over. I had visited the Gettysburg, Petersburg, and Antietam battlefields by the time I was fourteen. I dressed up as a Union soldier for Halloween on more than one occasion. It was an obsession, to be sure, but this book - this mundane, straightforward, cartographic representation of these mythical events - turned it into a passion. This was the book I had been waiting my whole life to find.

From an academic standpoint, I was interested almost exclusively in the strategy of the conflict. I wanted to know how the battles unfolded, not who ran against Lincoln in 1860 or about his relationship with Frederick Douglass. I cared not for the individual figures and politics of the era. I wanted to see two giant armies shooting at each other, trying to outdo the other, and this book presented me with every major scenario, with the strategy meticulously rendered and explained on each page. I bought and consumed it, and it damn near ended my first relationship before it even had a chance to begin! It quickly became the best and most-read thing on my bookshelf.

I lost that book and everything else when my home in Ventura, California burned down in the wildfire that ravaged the county in December 2017. My family was okay, thankfully, but there were a lot of memories in that house that I will never see again. I think about that book often. I think about how perfect it was, and how rare it is to come across something that so satisfies you the way that book satisfied me. I think about how that book is responsible for the thesis you are reading right now, not only because it ignited my intense love for the Civil War,

but because it awakened in me an interest in the overarching concept of strategy. It was this awakening that inspired me to enroll in Dr. Austin Bay's Junior Seminar course on military strategy, entitled "War Games." Here, I was quickly made aware of how little I knew about the subject with which I had spent most of my life being enamored.

Before, I had always considered "strategy" and "tactics" to be one-and-the-same. They are not. Strategy, as it is commonly defined with regard to war, is the "science and art of military command exercised to meet the enemy in combat under advantageous conditions."<sup>1</sup> Contrasted with tactics, which are simply the "science and art of disposing and maneuvering forces in combat,"<sup>2</sup> strategy encompasses the objectives and plans of an entire war or operation, not solely the actions undertaken in a specific battle or part of a battle. For example, Operation Overlord had an overall strategy of launching massive airborne and amphibious assaults on the beaches of Normandy, to break through the German defense of the French coast and provide the Allies with an unfettered access point to send new troops and supplies to their armies marauding in the heartland. The use of Bangalore torpedoes to breach the seawall on Omaha Beach was a tactic, a small but vital component of that overall strategy. Strategy is a broad, overarching plan to achieve a primary objective. Tactics are the individual means through which a strategy is realized. This is an overly simple distinction, but it is one I did not learn until I was a junior in college.

Furthermore, Dr. Bay introduced me to the concept of "grand strategy," which extends beyond military affairs to incorporate political, social, and economic factors into an overall strategy. I will elaborate more later, but suffice it to say this concept reshaped my understanding of everything from the conquests of Hannibal and Alexander the Great, to the U.S. presidency as

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<sup>1</sup> "Strategy." *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/strategy>.

<sup>2</sup> "Tactics." *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tactics>.



a whole and the process of rebuilding a Major League Baseball franchise like the Houston Astros. It is a broadly applicable analytical lens and it has the ability to provide a more comprehensive understanding of large-scale events. In my mind, the event that stands to gain the most from this approach is the Civil War, so I was compelled to write my term paper for Dr. Bay's course as a critical reanalysis of key moments in the conflict, specifically battles like Antietam and Gettysburg. My goal was to reassess the value and importance that has been placed on different events in the war, and how, by viewing them through the lens of grand strategy - instead of traditional *tactical* significance - it could be determined that the most important moment of the war - the so-called "turning point" - was actually in September 1862, not July 1863.

From this clumsy first attempt, my thesis was born. I subsequently enrolled in Dr. Robert Icenhauer-Ramirez's course on the Civil War and Reconstruction in the fall of my senior year. It was the first course on the topic I had had the opportunity to take in my academic career, and as the semester progressed, I realized that even at the university level it is hard to achieve a truly holistic approach to historical analysis, especially when the subject is as massive as the American Civil War. The incredible scope of the conflict makes it particularly convoluted and difficult to assess wholly. Breaking it down into eras, regions, battles, and people makes it easier to digest, and more accessible to students. However, I do not feel this approach does the intricate, fluid nature of the conflict justice. Much like how World War II is usually divided into European and Pacific theaters, the Civil War is divided into the Antebellum, War, and Reconstruction eras, and Eastern and Western theaters. The battles are individually analyzed and specific people are held responsible for specific events. Analyzed in a vacuum, these eras, regions, battles, and people do not provide an understanding of the war as a whole. Again, there is nothing "wrong"

with the individualized approach - as in there is nothing inherently incorrect or deceitful about it - but I feel it does a disservice to the natural ebb and flow of the conflict - how every action from every battle, speech, proclamation, publication, diplomatic mission, and economic transaction conducted in the name of the war affected its course. I decided that, in order to do justice to the subject I love so dearly, I needed to expand my thesis' inquiry. I needed to offer a fresh, cohesive reevaluation of the nature of the Civil War, as a whole.

This is an admittedly an ambitious task, but that is where grand strategy comes into play. Viewing the conflict through the lens of grand strategy affords the consolidation of the aforementioned aspects, by examining how the Union and Confederacy sought to win the war from the outset, and how their strategies evolved - or stagnated - over the course of four years of fighting. This will reveal at what points their mentalities changed, and what events triggered, and were triggered by, these shifts. This will provide a more organic view of the war in its totality, and a new outlook on its progression. The culmination was the sum of many different parts; what determined the fate of the Union and Confederacy was how they conducted themselves across the board, not the arbitrary outcomes of specific events. Demolishing the habit of assigning linear importances to things is key to organizing and constructing a cohesive picture of the enormous spider's web that is the American Civil War. That is what this thesis aims to do.

## 2. What is “Grand Strategy?”

The problem I seek to rectify is not one that stems from a lack of analysis. Indeed, the Civil War is the most studied and written-about episode of American history, with an estimated 50,000 books devoted to understanding the incredible bloodshed and dramatic upheaval of our society.

“There have been histories of single years, single campaigns, single battles, and single days of single battles,” writes Graham, “as well as studies from any number of racial, ethnic, gender, and national perspectives. Virtually every aspect of the war has at least one book devoted to it, and there are few episodes of American history that we know as much about.”<sup>3</sup>

The goal of this thesis is not to discover new information or present new ideas about a war that concluded nearly 155 years ago. Rather, it is to gather the information we already have in abundance and assemble a new kind of examination of the conflict. As previously stated, this will be done by analyzing the overarching, grand strategy of both armies and their associated governments. In order to do this, however, a better understanding of what “grand strategy” is must first be established.

According to the great Prussian strategist General Carl von Clausewitz, war was “merely the continuation of policy by other means.”<sup>4</sup> It was one instrument with which strategic ends could be met, and other forms of policy should exist alongside it in terms of importance, and our willingness to default to it. This was the foundation for the concept of “grand strategy,” upon which historian B.H. Liddell Hart elaborated in his 1954 work *Strategy* as being the “policy that guides the conduct of war.” More precisely, “the role of grand strategy... is to co-ordinate and

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<sup>3</sup> Graham, T. Austin. *A History of American Civil War Literature*, edited by Coleman Hutchison, Cambridge University Press, 2016, ch. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Von Clausewitz, Carl. *On War*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 87.

direct all of the resources of a nation... toward the attainment of the political object of the war.”<sup>5</sup> Grand strategy does not solely concern itself with military endeavors - troop movements, fortifications, reconnaissance, et cetera. As Hart posits, it is the convergence of the economic, diplomatic, commercial, ethical, *and* military aspects of waging war, as well as what comes after the conflict. It is an understanding of the totality of war, a fuller picture of something that is often reduced to on-field action and tactical repercussions.

While it is clear that Hart refers to grand strategy as a conscious creation of militaries and governments, Dr. Bay framed it as a useful lens through which we can analyze the overall functions of militaries and governments from eras before grand strategy was a concept. This helps provide a more comprehensive analysis of why wars turned out the way they did, looking beyond individual tactical victories to the triumphs and failures of governmental structure, economic status, and social involvement. Some excellent examples of this critical method can be found in Bryan N. Groves’ 2010 article, “The Multiple Faces of Effective Grand Strategy.” He analyzes the reigns of Phillip II of Spain and Elizabeth I of England, and the varying degrees to which they unknowingly applied the Clausewitzian principle of war-policy harmony in their conduct.

Phillip II sought to restore Catholic dominance in England and increase his religion’s influence across Western Europe. He perceived himself as a divine instrument of God in realizing a greater destiny, and embarked upon an ill-fated naval campaign to conquer the English Isles. The expedition was marred by insufficient food stores and his unwillingness to assemble a bureaucratic chain of command, where his commanders were free to make the “operational decisions necessary to ensure success.” Instead, “they sought guidance from Phillip,

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<sup>5</sup> Liddell Hart, B.H. *Strategy, Second Revised Edition*. New York, Fredrick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967, p. 335.

but often did not obtain a timely answer due to the time lag associated with couriers and from Phillip's inefficient information processing." Consequently, "these failures... contributed significantly to the rout of his Armada by Elizabeth I." Even though Phillip was willing to "subordinate military means to reach his political objectives,"<sup>6</sup> as Clausewitz recommended, "he did not use the means necessary to successfully accomplish it." Phillip believed his divine ordainment and superior economy and navy were enough to defeat the English, but completely ignored the capacity of human error and necessity of efficient administration to wage war. Thus, he failed.

Groves also analyzes the opposite side of this engagement, remarking how Elizabeth's approach was almost entirely different from Phillip's. She understood the dynamic of power within her realm, "remaining unmarried and... abstaining from wars that did not suit England, [so as not to be] drawn into wars simply for dynastic reasons... [as well as] avoid overstretching her [relatively weak] nation."<sup>7</sup> She also decentralized the command of her naval forces, allowing her commanders to develop and enact their own strategies for continuously tormenting the Spanish, to the point where their attack on England had to be delayed by a year. This efficiency of command allowed them to weaken their enemy so much that when their attack finally came, it was ineffectual, and England survived with minimal casualties. Elizabeth considered and understood the various aspects that go into igniting a war, and how each aspect served her overall goal of strengthening her nation's position in England.

The decision to wage war is complex. It is rooted in every facet of society, not just the battlefield. Nowhere is this more evident than the American Civil War. Minimal studies have

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<sup>6</sup> Groves, Bryan N. "The Multiple Faces of Effective Grand Strategy." *Journal of Strategic Security*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Groves, Bryan N. "The Multiple Faces of Effective Grand Strategy." *Journal of Strategic Security*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, p. 6.

been conducted about the grand strategies of the conflict, with the one of the foremost being Dr. Donald Stoker's *The Grand Design*, from which I pull much analysis for this thesis. However, it is the relative lack of studies, and the realization that the Civil War exemplifies grand strategy, that led me to right this wrong. By thoroughly analyzing the components of the Union and Confederacy's conduct, we will come to a new and more comprehensive understanding of the nature of the Civil War - what it began as, what it became, what it meant to people, and why it was fated the way it was.

### 3. Prelude to War

While it is highly likely that the reader is familiar with the issues and events that sparked the Civil War, the forthcoming analysis will certainly benefit from a brief recapitulation.

In a time when individual state power was almost supreme, political power was derived from likemindedness. From the outset, states naturally differentiated themselves based on their economies, and historical values. States that were established as agricultural colonies, that brought enslaved and indentured laborers over to cultivate the fields, developed the same ideals and needs. States ill-suited for agriculture, and/or founded as havens from persecution and inequality, achieved far more industrialized societies that required entirely different oversight than the agricultural states. Nothing better exemplified the differences between the two than slavery.

Slavery was the lifeblood of the Southern economy. An historical dependence on slave labor transformed the aforementioned ideals and needs of each agrarian state into a universally “Southern” mentality. As the Union grew, territories that were admitted as “slave” states inevitably adopted that Southern mentality.

The question of morality and slavery’s legitimacy as an institution dogged American politics from the nation’s inception, and rising abolitionist fervor led Southern idealists to seek its protection in the Constitution. One such article of protection was the Three-Fifths Compromise, which was vital for Southern states to maintain a competitive balance of power in Congress. However, by 1820, Northern and Southern states were continuously at odds over federal actions that seemingly favored one side intentionally over the other. Jeffersonian Republicans in the North felt the inequalities in representation given to the South by the Three-Fifths Compromise were no longer tolerable, but the constitutional amendment necessary to void

it was likely too difficult to get. So, they went after the next best thing: the very foundation of Southern society.

During Missouri's bid for statehood, many Northern Republicans, led by James Tallmadge of New York, fought to restrict slavery in the territory, as a lack would likely lead to the state developing Northern ideals that would significantly increase its population. Southerners feared exactly this, as the North already far surpassed the South in population. According to census data from 1820, the populations of the "Northern" and Southern" regions were about 5,239,667 and 4,398,786, respectively. Of that Southern number, 1,538,022 were identified as slaves, leaving a non-slave population of only 2,860,764.<sup>8</sup> It is clear why Southern politicians not only relied on the Three-Fifths Compromise, but also feared any admission of another "free" state, with its associated Northern industrial mentality. The number of Southern representatives would otherwise pale in comparison to the Northern number.

Eventually, Jesse Thomas of Illinois and Henry Clay of Kentucky brokered a compromise that allowed Missouri to enter the Union as a slave state, on the condition that Maine, which would boast a much smaller population, entered as free. Additionally, slavery was restricted in the remaining territory from the Louisiana Purchase north of the 36-30 parallel. While controversial at the time for its literal division of the country along economic and racial lines, the compromise did solve an issue that could have escalated dangerously, and it was believed to have set a precedent for dealing with similar issues in the future.

The Missouri debacle made it clear the South felt extreme pressure to keep their balance of Congressional power intact, but the necessity for doing so would not be pushed to the forefront until 1832. Most of the time, the industrial North and agrarian South thrived in

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<sup>8</sup> "Census for 1820." *United State Census Bureau*, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1821/dec/1820a.html>.



harmonious coexistence. In fact, the South had found its own profitable niche, while the North competed with an industrialized world that was already years ahead of it, technologically. As such, the economic interests of each region did not hinge on the same factors, and did not benefit from the same actions. For example, tariffs - such as the 1828 “Tariff of Abominations” - that were designed by Northern politicians to protect Northern industry from cheap foreign imports greatly burdened the South financially. The country was either subjected to outrageous taxes on imported goods and raw materials - some as high as 45% under the Tariff of Abominations, which was created by President John Quincy Adams, a Massachusetts native, and enacted by noted anglophobe Andrew Jackson - or significantly higher prices for the same domestically produced goods and materials. Southern states who relied on foreign goods that were not efficiently produced in the U.S. could not afford either option.

Additionally, many Southerners - chief among them being Jackson’s South Carolinian vice president John C. Calhoun - felt tariffs like these affected foreign ability to purchase and interest in purchasing the South’s primary export, cotton. Difficulty accessing what was once one of the largest importers of European goods not only hampered the economies of many nations, but also threatened to send them searching for cotton in cheaper, more accessible - if comparatively undeveloped - locales, such as Egypt. The predicted damage to the Southern economy was immense, leading to the Nullification Crisis of 1832-33

South Carolina felt especially impacted by the Tariff of Abominations. Considering they were no longer one of the main exporting states in the Cotton Belt since the invention of the cotton gin, the potential detriment to their economy from foreign pullback was far greater than for states that were more productive, like Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, and states that were more economically diverse, like Virginia, whose main cash crop was tobacco, not cotton.

Recognizing this, Calhoun anonymously published a pamphlet in 1829 entitled, “South Carolina Exposition and Protest.” He invoked the sentiments Thomas Jefferson and James Madison expressed in their famous “Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions” in 1798, that the “union was a compact of sovereign states... and the federal government was their agent with certain specified, delegated powers.” As such, the “states retained the authority to determine when the federal government exceeded its powers, and they could declare acts to be ‘void and of no force’ in their jurisdictions.”<sup>9</sup> Essentially, Calhoun targeted the constitutionality of the Tariff of Abominations, claiming the power to enact tariffs “is granted as a tax power for the sole purpose of revenue, a power in its nature essentially different from that of imposing protective or prohibitory duties.” Because of its expressed protectionist intent, Calhoun argued in his pamphlet that “the protection of one branch of industry at the expense of others... is unconstitutional, unequal, and oppressive, and calculated to corrupt the public virtue and destroy the liberty of the country.”<sup>10</sup>

Calhoun thought this was enough to warrant nullification. Though no legislative action was taken by any Southern state, Jackson’s administration sought to relieve some of the unrest by implementing a new tariff in 1832 that reduced the duties of its predecessor by roughly 10%. South Carolina remained unimpressed. The state’s leadership revisited nullification, and Calhoun vacated the vice presidency to become a senator, a position that would allow him to better defend nullification in Congress. On November 24, 1832, a special convention called by the South Carolina legislature issued the “Ordinance of Nullification,” which declared the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 “null, void, and no law, nor binding upon this state, its officers or citizens.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Nullification crisis.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nullification-crisis>.

<sup>10</sup> *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*. 1829.

<sup>11</sup> *Ordinance of Nullification*. 1832.

Determined to preserve the Union, Jackson issued his “Proclamation to the People of South Carolina,” which declared “the power to annul a law of the United States, assumed by one state, [is] incompatible with the existence of the Union, contradicted expressly by the letter of the Constitution, unauthorized by its spirit, inconsistent with every principle on which it was founded, and destructive of the great object for which it was formed.”<sup>12</sup> South Carolina began preparing for military intervention in the wake of the proclamation, declaring their intent to secede if such intervention occurred. This prompted Congress to pass the Force Bill, authorizing Jackson to send troops to enforce the tariffs in South Carolina. Jackson also informed the South Carolinians that secession was treason, and would be dealt with accordingly. Simultaneously, Congress enacted a new tariff - dubbed the “Compromise Tariff” and proposed by Calhoun and the same Henry Clay - that would reduce duties to 1816 levels over the next decade. South Carolina was appeased, likely realizing they stood no chance either combating the tariffs in court or combating the U.S. Army, and no further major action was required to settle the issue of nullification.

Nationalists revered Jackson as a hero for his navigation of the crisis, but “Southerners were made more conscious of their minority position and more aware of their vulnerability to a Northern majority as long as they remained in the union.”<sup>13</sup> The Nullification Crisis greatly strained the federal government’s relationship with South Carolina, in particular, and inflamed the debate about federal jurisdiction versus states’ rights. Often, all it took was for Southern states to band together in the face of perceived injustices. While South Carolina acted alone on the issue of nullification, the debate that raged as a result engulfed the nation.

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<sup>12</sup> *Proclamation to the People of South Carolina*. 1832.

<sup>13</sup> “Nullification crisis.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nullification-crisis>.

In an attempt to empower individual states and settle the persistent issue of slavery's expansion, Henry Clay and Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas forged the titanic Compromise of 1850. In addition to reorganizing the territory gained from the annexation of Texas and Mexican Cession, the principle of "popular sovereignty" was invoked to allow the people of each new territory to decide if it would be free or slave. While the debate was prompted by California's bid for admission as a free state, proslavery politicians were placated by a new and improved Fugitive Slave Act tacked onto the compromise that made the returning of runaway slaves to their states of origin a federal responsibility. While leaving the decision of making new states free or slave to popular vote worried Southerners about the continued security of slavery, they achieved valuable ends for the moment with the Fugitive Slave Act and New Mexico and Utah enacting slave codes that paved the way for slavery in those territories.

The complacency would not last long, however. "The precedent of popular sovereignty led to a demand for a similar provision for the Kansas Territory in 1854," and the "application of the new Fugitive Slave Act triggered such a strong reaction throughout the North that many moderate antislavery elements became determined opponents of any further extension of slavery into the territories."<sup>14</sup> The exploits of prominent abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Frederick Douglass furthered the perception of slavery as an affront to civilized society, and the institution was now being attacked from three angles. Firstly, it was, as discussed above, a wholly unfair Congressional advantage for slave-holding states. Even though the North's population continually superseded the South's, any addition of another slave state threatened to reverse that. Since the freeman population in the North was negligible compared to the slave population in the South, it was argued that slaves were an entire class of

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<sup>14</sup> "Compromise of 1850." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Compromise-of-1850>.

people whose existence was illegal in the North, therefore constituting an impossibility for the two regions to be principally equal. This was an atrocious and, to many, unconstitutional legislative misstep that needed to be rectified.

Secondly, attacking slavery weakened the South's internal power and stability. "Northern attacks on the institution were regarded as incitements to riot among the slave populations - deemed a dire threat to white southern security."<sup>15</sup> The promotion of slavery to a constant topic of national discussion began to arouse a sentiment in the general population that it was a matter that needed to be dealt with, swiftly and permanently. Hopefully, such discourse would reach the ears of the slaves themselves, and incite a riot here and there that would portend the implausibility of continued enslavement. Unfortunately, the most prominent slave revolts, such as Nat Turner's in 1831, had little immediate effect in the North, and supremely negative effects in the South, such as the implementation of anti-literacy laws and the raising of white militias to defend against future riots.

Lastly, it was morally wrong. Even at the time of the Missouri Compromise, Northern politicians "rooted their antislavery arguments, not in political expediency, but in egalitarian morality."<sup>16</sup> Garrison's abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, Stowe's bestselling 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Douglass' various autobiographies and orations made the stories of the injustices of slavery more accessible for the general public, and finalized the transplant of the debate from the halls of Congress to the taverns, streets, and homes of America. Proslavery politicians fought the changing tide any way they could.

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<sup>15</sup> Wilentz, Sean. "Jeffersonian Democracy and the Origins of Political Antislavery in the United States: The Missouri Crisis Revisited." *The Journal of the Historical Society*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2004, p. 383.

<sup>16</sup> Wilentz, Sean. "Jeffersonian Democracy and the Origins of Political Antislavery in the United States: The Missouri Crisis Revisited." *The Journal of the Historical Society*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2004, p. 387.

Though he was not publicly pro- or antislavery, Stephen Douglas sought to quell the rising tension by introducing the Kansas-Nebraska Act into Congress in 1854. The act formally organized the Kansas and Nebraska Territories, which were portions of the Louisiana Purchase located above the 36-30 parallel. The act also effectively repealed the Missouri Compromise, and replaced its slavery restrictions with popular sovereignty. While this technically allowed for the territories to vote themselves free if they wanted, the act was seen as “a capitulation to the proponents of slavery,”<sup>17</sup> and inspired the newly-formed Republican Party - an entity different from the Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans mentioned above - to establish antislavery as their primary platform. Soon, large elements of pro- and antislavery citizens migrated to the Kansas Territory to claim the state free or slave, and engaged in a long period of bloodshed known as “Bleeding Kansas” to drive the other from the territory. This opened the floodgates of violence as legitimate means to settle the issues that arose in the confrontations between Northern and Southern mentalities, leading to further episodes of bloodshed, like John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry.

The seeds of discontent sowed decades ago with the Missouri debacle were now blossoming with unprecedented fervor. The entire country began to operate in a day-to-day state of conflict, with common folk taking matters into their own bloody hands, and politicians working tirelessly to settle the issues in the House, Senate, and Supreme Court. It was never enough. The nation had indulged in too much hatred and tasted too much violence. Dissolution became inevitable.

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<sup>17</sup> “Kansas-Nebraska Act.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kansas-Nebraska-Act>.

#### 4. The Secession Crisis

In short, it was Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency in 1860 that finalized the secession of the Southern states. The Republican Party had shown indefatigable resolve in their mission to restrict the expansion of slavery, and was beginning to develop distinctly abolitionist aspirations. Their surprising success in the Election of 1856 - their candidate, John C. Frémont, won eleven of sixteen "Northern" states, despite losing overall to the Democrat, James Buchanan - foreshadowed a long and arduous fight for the South to protect their livelihood. They essentially resolved to secede from the Union if a Republican president was ever elected, faithless that such a man would understand and support their interests.

The time to put principles to the test came sooner than anticipated, thanks in equal measure to Lincoln's charisma and vision, the Republicans' fervor, and the Democrats' utter disintegration over the issue of popular sovereignty. Stephen A. Douglas was the obvious candidate for Northern Democrats, who generally viewed popular sovereignty as the ultimate mutual concession on slavery's expansion. A senator from Mississippi named Jefferson Davis led the Southern Democrats in nominating John C. Breckinridge, Buchanan's vice president. Where Buchanan failed to address the issue of slavery in either direction, Breckinridge was an ardent Southern opponent of restricting slavery in territories before they became states under true federal jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup> While these men were strong candidates individually, the splintering of the Democratic Party, especially in the face of such Republican unity, consequently splintered Democratic votes into too many camps. The Republican Lincoln won handily.

The president-elect was given no time to lay out his plans for the country. On December 20, 1860 - only about a month-and-a-half after Lincoln's election - another special convention

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<sup>18</sup> "John C. Breckinridge." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-C-Breckinridge>.

assembled by the South Carolina legislature made good on the Southern threat, unanimously passing an ordinance of secession.

It is unsurprising that South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union, given their tempestuous history with the federal government. In their secession document, they decreed that “the frequent violations of the Constitution... by the Federal Government, and its encroachments upon the reserved rights of the States, fully justified this State in then withdrawing from the Federal Union.” They invoked the philosophical principles from the Declaration of Independence that “whenever any ‘form of government becomes destructive of the ends for which it was established, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government.” The “destruction” rendered was the failure of the federal government to enforce the Fugitive Slave Clause in Article Four of the Constitution. Increasing “hostility” directed towards the institution of slavery by free states “has led to a disregard of their obligations” that the federal government neglected to rectify. For years, the hostility remained at the state level, but now the federal government directly involved itself by electing “a man to the high office of President... whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery,” and aimed to place slavery, the foundation and necessity of Southern economy and livelihood, “in the course of ultimate extinction.” This threatened the rights of the individual state to control its own institutions and regulate its property. These perceived Constitutional violations, and the overall “current of anti-slavery feeling,” led to the state to formally secede from the Union.<sup>19</sup> While the legitimacy of South Carolina’s claims that states’ rights were neglected/violated continues to be debated, the above “feeling” they regarded was enough to inspire six other states to secede by

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<sup>19</sup> *Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union*. 1860.



February 1861. The Confederate States of America was then officially formed, with Jefferson Davis elected as its first president.

## 5. The Motivational Impact on Strategy

The preceding background was necessary because Groves' prior-discussed analysis of Phillip II and Elizabeth I demonstrates that motivations matter in the formation of strategies. They not only provide valuable context for a faction's aims, but also insight into their state of mind, and another opportunity to find similarities with other factions from other wars. For example, Phillip's bureaucratic judgment was clouded by the belief that he was a singular instrument of God, while Elizabeth was motivated by nothing other than the desire to preserve her kingdom, a decidedly more specific and practical end than spreading Catholicism to an entire continent. Phillip's goal was also far more offensive in nature, requiring the processing of more information than his administration was capable of - how to combat numerous different opponents in unfamiliar conditions, how to institute and govern a religious empire larger than he had experience with - whereas Elizabeth only had to worry about defending *her* realm from *one* attacker.

In summary, conditions birth the requirements for success, and motivations shape conditions. Therefore, it is prudent to examine the conditions of the Union and the Confederacy rendered by their motivations on the eve of the war.

The tragedy of the Confederate States of America began similarly to how the Articles of Confederation nearly destroyed the infant United States in 1787. From its earliest iteration, the C.S.A. lacked a coherent strategy. It was at once a proud institution that derived legitimacy from how cooperatively it formed, and one that was afraid to consolidate power in a central body. It lagged in forming a standing army, and allowed its states to conduct themselves however they pleased. For instance, South Carolina instructed its militia to drive any remnants of U.S. armed forces from the state. In January 1861, they fired on the civilian steamship *Star of the West*, which was transporting troops and supplies to the federal Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. On

April 12, the militia, commanded by the viciously passionate General P.G.T. Beauregard, fired on the fort, officially igniting the American Civil War and inspiring four more states to secede to round out the infamous eleven Confederate States.

However, the states did not initially plan to go to war with their former nation. A self-acknowledged “agricultural people,” they claimed, as a body, to seek “peace and commerce with all nations.”<sup>20</sup> As evidenced by South Carolina’s secession document, the majority of states believed historical precedent would legitimize their venture, the way the Declaration of Independence and Revolution legitimized the United States. They hoped Unionists would reach this understanding and leave their territory with minimal shows of force. Bloodless separation would be achieved. However, Davis simultaneously insisted that “it is by abuse of language that [the South’s] act has been denominated a revolution,” stressing the foundational right to dissolve ties to their oppressive former government differentiated the current situation from that in 1776.<sup>21</sup> Their secession was not a revolution, and they only wanted “to be left alone.”

Their actions suggested otherwise. Nevermind their pursuit of “huge swaths of territory belonging to a number of other powers, particularly the Union,” it was South Carolina’s bullheaded attempt at scaring the U.S. away that proved Southerners severely overestimated their opponent’s willingness to capitulate, and “wanted to foment revolution against the U.S. government.”<sup>22</sup> They acted brashly - a trait common to Beauregard’s exploits - forcing the C.S.A. into a conflict it may not have wanted, and leaving it racing to raise a provisional army, and solidify its regular armed forces.

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<sup>20</sup> Davis, Jefferson. “Inaugural Address.” Confederate States of America President Inauguration, 18 February 1861, Alabama State Capitol, Montgomery, AL. Inaugural address.

<sup>21</sup> Davis, Jefferson. “Inaugural Address.” Confederate States of America President Inauguration, 18 February 1861, Alabama State Capitol, Montgomery, AL. Inaugural address.

<sup>22</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 21.

To that end, they amassed a formidable army of passionate, able-bodied volunteers led by an impressive assortment of Mexican-American War veterans and West Point elites, such as Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jackson, Joseph E. Johnston, and James Longstreet. Roughly 80% of the adult white male population of the Confederacy of suitable age flocked to join the cause, translating into nearly 900,000 men. While the Union army featured a greater number of men serving over the course of the war - about 2.8 million - the “soldierly traditions of many of [the South’s] people” offset the disparity. Davis boasted that Southerners were “a military people... perhaps we are the only people in the world where gentlemen go to a military academy who do not intend to follow the profession of arms.”<sup>23</sup> As such, Southern armies required less extensive training than their Northern counterparts, allowing them to achieve great victories early in the war.

However, Davis and the Confederacy knew military might would not be enough to defeat the Union’s vast economy and nearly limitless capacity to produce munitions and recruit troops. By 1860, “there were 128,300 industrial firms in the United States,” of which the Confederate states combined for only 18,206. The South’s industrial output “was but 7.5 percent of the American total,” and the North’s agricultural production technically outweighed the South’s, especially once skilled white farmers and laborers were taken from the frontier and placed in the Confederate Army.<sup>24</sup> To eliminate these obstacles, the Confederacy sought assistance from abroad, politically, militarily, and financially. In the end, Southern success hinged on foreign intervention. Even as the war unfolded in ways impossible to foretell, this reliance never changed.

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<sup>23</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 23-24.

That being said, there was much to be optimistic about at the outset. Faith in the Southern cause would keep morale high. They also knew the war would likely occur primarily on Southern soil, given how the U.S. capital - the end-all target of the Confederate military - was basically in the South. Victory felt so close, and the idea that they were defending their homeland added a new dimension to the cause. They were also established on the land, while the Union would have to expend a lot of resources to construct, maintain, and protect its communication and transportation lines into the South. Any additional requirements for Union victory were always welcomed by the Confederacy.

The North felt optimistic because of all the ways it was superior to the South. Their arms, equipment, fortifications, and capacity to manufacture each were of a higher grade. There was a comforting belief that no single battle could wipe out the Federal Army, as well as the knowledge that they required little beyond the aid they could provide internally. This made foreign diplomacy an aspect of the war the Union did not need to address. It could concentrate on what was happening at home, and if the war found itself running longer than anticipated, it had the resources to fight it.

Moreover, the South made a point of assigning explicit motivations to their secession, inextricably linking them to slavery for the duration of the war. Never could they have retracted their association with the institution, even if they had wanted. Not only was it an economic necessity upon which their value to other nations depended, it was also specifically identified as the reason for their pulling away from the United States. It was what differentiated “Southern” and “Northern” culture, and upon what the entire Confederacy was premised. The association was so psychologically ingrained in the Southern people, and the peoples of Europe, as their foundation that it could never have been truly eliminated. The overall Southern strategy can be

characterized as rigid - rigid in its motivations, rigid in its inherited circumstances, rigid in its consequential requirements for success, and rigid in the decisions made during the war. There was a pervasive sense of sameness; Confederate leaders often found themselves falling prey to an inability or unwillingness to adapt and change.

Meanwhile, there was no true Northern equivalent to the secession documents, nowhere they needed or wanted to enumerate their intentions and motivations. The closest thing was Lincoln's inaugural address, which, while certainly powerful, was not intended to be such a formal precedent. The very natures of the Union's goal - reunification - and its motivation - secession being illegal and unviable - were broad, and allowed the war to be fought however needed. The Union was not constrained by economic necessity, philosophy, or foreign perception. How and for what reasons it waged war never contradicted its goal, and never violated the premise of the United States. As a result, the South had to wage war on far more fronts than the Union, and it was the ability to singularize its focus and adapt its strategy that enabled the Union to exploit Confederate vulnerability more than any single military victory. This may seem obvious in the forthcoming analysis, but that is the beauty of grand strategy.

## 6. War and Diplomacy in 1861

When further conflict became unavoidable after Fort Sumter, both sides strove for a quick resolution. The South was ever conscious of its inherent inferiorities, and the lingering possibility that foreign aid would not manifest. They simply could not sustain a decade-long fight - as Robert E. Lee himself mused it could last<sup>25</sup> - on their own. If they were unsuccessful in securing aid, they would need to win the war sooner rather than later. A quick victory would also help cement their legitimacy on the world stage.

The North, on the other hand, worried that a prolonged war would wear down the general public and tear the fabric of society apart, irreparably harming the people's faith in the viability of the Union. This made even overall victory seem too costly if the war lasted too long. It needed to end far more quickly than it began.

Union strategy in the first year of conflict was focused on incapacitating the Confederacy in a single stroke. Lincoln successfully implemented a blockade of Southern ports that would progressively weaken the C.S.A. economically. The Commanding General of the U.S. Army, Winfield Scott, introduced his famous "Anaconda Plan," which would extend the blockade and send 60,000 troops down the Mississippi River to conquer New Orleans. At the same time, it would serve as a diplomatic effort to stir Unionists in the South to counterrevolt.<sup>26</sup> It was deemed infeasible because of the fragility of the Unionists' footholds in the region, but elements of its framework were enacted in various ways throughout the war, showing Lincoln's willingness to revisit ideas when the situation allowed. It also showed the staggering transition of Union leaders from diplomatic preservationists to warmongering traditionalists in a matter of months. Before

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<sup>25</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 38.

fighting broke out, the president had espoused predominantly preservationist rhetoric, hoping to halt secession and negotiate the return of the Southern states. He sought to maintain the status quo and assuage Southern fears that his election doomed slavery. In his first inaugural address, Lincoln said, “There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you.” Further, he had “no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.”<sup>27</sup> His stance ultimately had no effect, and it would obviously change, but it was the closest the Union came to employing diplomacy at the beginning of the war.

On the other side, the *only* hope the South had to counter Northern superiority was to obtain foreign aid, particularly from European superpowers like Great Britain and France. However, in May 1861, one month after the confrontation at Fort Sumter, Britain formally declared its neutrality in the conflict to protect its economic interests. By declaring favor for either side, they stood to lose the “55 percent of foodstuffs imported each year” from the U.S., and “the South’s share of three quarters of the British market for raw cotton.”<sup>28</sup> Recognition of the Confederate States of America as an independent nation would ensure a war with the United States, costing Britain the industrial and agricultural benefits of the North, while likely making their cotton trade with the South a target of military intervention. If they sided with the Union for some reason, they would effectively forfeit the entire cotton trade. “Stop the cotton trade and

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<sup>27</sup> Lincoln, Abraham. “First Inaugural Address.” United States of America Presidential Inauguration, 4 March 1861, U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C. Inaugural address.

<sup>28</sup> Paterson, Thomas, et al. *American Foreign Relations: A History, Volume 1: To 1920*. Cengage Learning, 2009.



England's economy would allegedly collapse.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, Britain sought to protect both interests, and declared its neutrality.

Initially, this did not matter. The Union entered July 1861 with the mentality that the Southern armies were composed of angry farmers bringing their own guns with them into battle, not trained soldiers armed by the finest Northern factories. The sheer lopsidedness in skill and size all but guaranteed a decisive victory at the first engagement and a quick mop-up job in the aftermath. The South would be re-enveloped, and the healing could begin in earnest. With an “urge” for “instant and vigorous action... Lincoln forced Scott to mount an offensive aimed at Manassas, Virginia,”<sup>30</sup> as it seemed to be the most “militarily feasible” foothold in the South at the moment. Northern sentiment was so assured of victory that the forthcoming battle was advertised, and civilians from Washington, D.C. traveled to the battlefield to spectate. Simultaneously, troops massed in the Shenandoah Valley, attempting to cut off communication between the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia and Richmond, their capital. President Davis demanded his primary generals in the East, Beauregard and Joseph E. Johnston, commit to “a vigorous attack” that would drive the Union army “across the Potomac,” and “by threatening the Capitol... compel the withdrawal” of their forces in the Shenandoah.<sup>31</sup> The Confederacy engaged the Shenandoah Union troops, only to learn of a larger Union force moving on Manassas Junction. Johnston and Beauregard met Union general Irvin McDowell there, with the intention of not only pushing him back, but showing the North they were in for a tough and unsure fight should they choose to wage war against the Confederacy.

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<sup>29</sup> Paterson, Thomas, et al. *American Foreign Relations: A History, Volume 1: To 1920*. Cengage Learning, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 41.

Perhaps it was the heat of a Virginian summer day. Perhaps it was the gallantry of General Thomas Jackson, who stood like a stone wall in the face of an overwhelming Union advance. Most likely it was the surprising equivalence in skill of the two armies that startled McDowell into retreating. Much the opposite of what had been touted by proud Unionists, the Federal Army present at Manassas was as hastily assembled and poorly trained as their counterparts. All the South needed was one advantage then, and they found it in ferocity. General Jackson ordered a bayonet charge to drive back the Bluecoats, and the guttural cry emitted by his troops that became known as the “Rebel Yell” shocked the Union so much, they ran all the way back to Washington. It was a humiliating defeat for the North that would shake up the very foundation of their army. General Scott retired from service in late 1861, and was replaced with the infamous George B. McClellan.

Though humbled, the Union’s resilience in the face of defeat and the appointment of McClellan signaled to the Confederacy a need to revive diplomatic efforts in Europe. They were in for a long fight, but were hopeful the rousing victory at Manassas changed attitudes in Great Britain and France. Perhaps an ultimate Confederate victory now seemed more plausible. James Murray Mason and John Slidell were dispatched as envoys, with tall orders to secure recognition, military intervention, and, at the very least, financial backing. They departed from Cuba on the British mail steamer RMS *Trent*, after a long and winding journey from the Southern states to evade capture by the Northern blockade. On November 8, 1861, the U.S. sloop-of-war *San Jacinto*, captained by Charles Wilkes, intercepted the *Trent* and arrested Mason and Slidell on the grounds that they were contraband of war. The two envoys were imprisoned in Boston, and

the country rejoiced, having “longed for a man who would do, taking the responsibility of the doing.”<sup>32</sup> Wilkes seemed to be that man.

This rejoicing was indicative of the mostly forlorn sentiment Americans had towards the war in its early days. Continued defeats after Manassas, however small, weighed heavy on the public, and many prominent figures in the North seized the opportunity to revitalize public faith in their cause following the capture of the Confederate envoys. Most notable was Richard Henry Dana Jr., a Boston lawyer who was deemed “as high an authority on maritime law as there was at the American bar.”<sup>33</sup> The author of the cited article practiced law in the office of Dana Jr., and had a “vivid recollection of the day when the news of the seizure was flashed to Boston.” Dana Jr.’s face reportedly “lighted up, and, clapping his hands with satisfaction of the tidings, he expressed his emphatic approval of the act, adding that he would risk his ‘professional reputation on its legality.’” Adams added that “this was the view universally expressed and generally accepted.” Indeed, Dana Jr. would later state in the *Boston Advertiser*: “In the present case, the mission [of the two envoys] is in its very nature necessarily and solely a mission hostile to the United States. It is treason within our municipal law, and an act in the highest degree hostile within the law of nations. If a neutral vessel intervenes to carry such persons on such a mission she commits an act hostile in the same degree.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, former Secretary of State and Minister to Great Britain Edward Everett, a figure “than whom no one stood higher in general estimation as an authority on topics of this character,” contributed: “You see that there is not the slightest ground for apprehension that there is any illegality in this detention of the mail packet;

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<sup>32</sup> Adams, Charles Francis. “The Trent Affair.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1912, pp. 540-562.

<sup>33</sup> Adams, Charles Francis. “The Trent Affair.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1912, pp. 540-562.

<sup>34</sup> Adams, Charles Francis. “The Trent Affair.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1912, pp. 540-562.

that the detention was perfectly lawful, the capture was perfectly lawful, their confinement in Fort Warren will be perfectly lawful.”<sup>35</sup>

Predictably, Great Britain protested the seizure of the *Trent* and the arrests of Mason and Slidell. They asserted that “the ‘Trent’ was not captured or carried into a port of the United States for adjudication as prize, and, under the circumstances, cannot be considered as having acted in breach of international law,” and that “the conduct of the United States’ officer commanding the ‘San Jacinto’... was illegal and unjustifiable by international law.”<sup>36</sup> U.S. violation of maritime laws and intentional seizure of a British vessel were feared to be catalysts for a war between the two nations. In a letter dated December 16, 1861, former president Millard Fillmore warned Lincoln against inciting this separate conflict, saying, “[If] we are so unfortunate as to be involved in a war with her at this time, the last hope of restoring the Union will vanish, and we shall be overwhelmed with the double calamities of civil and foreign war at the same time, which will utterly exhaust our resources, and may practically change the form of our government and compel us in the end to submit to a dishonorable peace.”<sup>37</sup> Lincoln understood this, and soon released Mason and Slidell to rectify the situation. The two remained Confederate envoys and departed for Britain once again in January 1862.

Fillmore’s letter best outlined the ramifications foreign intervention would have on the war, and why the Confederacy so desperately pursued relations with Great Britain and France. The *Trent* Affair best outlined the early iterations of the Union’s shapeshifting strategy. When the opportunity arose to stifle Southern diplomacy, the North seized it. When the opportunity arose to lift the public’s spirits by parading the captured envoys as prizes of war, the North

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<sup>35</sup> Adams, Charles Francis. “The Trent Affair.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1912, pp. 540-562.

<sup>36</sup> Baxter, James P. “Papers Relating to Belligerent and Neutral Rights, 1861-1865.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1928, pp. 77-91.

<sup>37</sup> Fillmore, Millard. “To Abraham Lincoln.” 16 December 1861.

seized it. When such behavior threatened to drag Great Britain into the fight, the North retracted. Meanwhile, the Confederacy was enslaved to its inability to seek anything but foreign involvement. This rigidity would soon begin to seep into its military strategy.

## 7. March - August, 1862

Historians cannot seem to agree on how to characterize George McClellan. Many paint him as paranoid and indecisive, pointing to his correspondences with his wife where he expresses his feelings of being undermined by Lincoln and doubts about the trustworthiness of intelligence on Confederate troop numbers. He always anticipated far greater forces than were present, and consistently delayed offensives because he felt undermanned and underprepared. Others call him patient and strategic. He masterfully transformed his army into fighting shape, and was perpetually scheming “a decisive use of the Army of the Potomac that could lead to a Union victory in the war.”<sup>38</sup> While he shared Lincoln’s desire for a quick end, he did not share his aggression. He eventually developed “a deep contempt for the president,” and would often refuse to share his plans, exhibiting no intention of conducting decisive military operations in the near future.<sup>39</sup> In response, Lincoln issued “General War Order No. 1” on January 27, 1862, which instructed all land and sea forces to advance by February 22. In the West, Ulysses S. Grant complied and captured Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers in quick succession, but McClellan still did nothing. Enraged and disheartened, Lincoln removed McClellan from his position as Commanding General, relegating him to commanding only the Army of the Potomac. Eventually, McClellan embarked on his infamous Peninsula Campaign in March 1862.

For nearly five months, the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia fought across southeastern Virginia, every day inching closer to Richmond. In early June, General Johnston, commander of the Northern Virginia, was severely wounded and replaced by

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<sup>38</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 71.

<sup>39</sup> “President Lincoln orders Union forces to advance.” *History*. A&E Television Networks, 13 November 2009, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/lincoln-orders-armies-to-advance>.

Robert E. Lee, catalyzing a dramatic shift in the Confederacy's military outlook. Where Johnston matched McClellan's caution and patience, Lee rampaged against the Union army, commanding some of the most awe-inspiring and brutal victories ever seen on a battlefield. McClellan was stunned by Lee's fury, and withdrew with impressive losses. Having successfully defended Richmond and humiliated the Union, Lee felt the time was ripe to go on the offensive again.

As he pressed north, Lee decimated his foes in battle after battle. The Union Army of Virginia, commanded by General John Pope, was nearly eradicated at the Second Battle of Manassas in late August 1862. The war had now been going on for over a year, and the Union was still being defeated on the same principles it had been all war. Everything about the two armies were opposite. The brilliant commanders the Union lacked the Confederacy had in spades. The lack of emotional investment in the North trembled before the Southern "cause." The rapidity of Lee's momentum north consistently caused the Union to overestimate his numbers, and if the occasion arose where a general was courageous enough to underestimate, they were massacred. Meanwhile, the dashing Confederate cavalry commander General J.E.B. Stuart taunted, prodded, and utterly confounded Union communications, and consistently secured actionable intelligence for Lee's army, even by accident. Stuart commenced a raid of Pope's headquarters in Virginia so he could get back his favorite plumed hat and cloak that had been captured in a prior Union attack. During the raid, Stuart also happened upon some communications regarding reinforcements coming to meet Pope around the time he was moving on Manassas Junction. Luck was on the Confederacy's side, and it had seemingly abandoned the Union entirely. That was about to change.

## 8. Antietam and the Emancipation Proclamation

The Union was desperate entering the fall of 1862. The primary army separating Washington from the Confederates had been obliterated, and Lee was relentlessly pushing his way north. While McClellan's army could return in time to defend the capital, Lincoln understood the troops and citizens were becoming disillusioned with the high cost and low return of the war. He knew he had to target the emotions of those with whom war was waged. He had to spur the nation's belief in the cause of unification, to convince them they were fighting for something greater than themselves.

The likelihood of a Franco- or Anglo-Confederate alliance was never greater than in the fall of 1862. Defeat after defeat only made the North look incompetent and the South increasingly legitimate to these powerful European nations. A weakened and disheartened United States was a boon to all who competed with her in the industrial market. Moreover, the Confederacy was exacting retribution that Great Britain and France felt was well-deserved. The general sentiment in the North was that these powerhouses were eager to join the fray and finish off one of their nemeses, and Lincoln's rhetoric to dissuade foreign involvement lacked authority and confidence to that point. Faced with this possibility, and growing pressure from abolitionist leaders like Frederick Douglass to transform the war into a "remorseless revolutionary struggle,"<sup>40</sup> Lincoln realized he could kill two birds with one stone: dismantle any chance of foreign aid to the Confederacy, and stoke the abolitionist fires in the North that would continue to fuel the war effort.

European abhorrence of slavery, from the leadership to the general citizenry, was well-known. It was likely one of the reasons the nations with the biggest axes to grind with the U.S.

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<sup>40</sup> Blight, David W. *Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln: A Relationship in Language, Politics, and Memory*. Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 2001, p. 10.



were hesitating to throw their weight behind the South, Lincoln thought. Open support for a “nation” whose very foundation was the institution of slavery would not sit well with the citizens, and cause unnecessary protest at home. Denouncing slavery and moving towards legislation against the institution was a powerful card to have in his deck, but Lincoln knew if he played it too early and without significant authority, the act would seem desperate and grasping. The denouncement needed to feel completely independent of the war, as if it were something Lincoln would have sought even if the Union had stayed unified. If it felt like just another ploy to weaken the Confederacy, it would have no effect. It needed to appear to come from the heart, and for that to be the case, the Union needed to appear to be able to win the war without it. Sure, General Grant had commanded several successful campaigns along the Mississippi, but the battles raging around the capital drew the most attention, and none of them lent the authority Lincoln needed to make his proclamation.

Enter Special Order 191, a Confederate dispatch issued by General Lee detailing the intended movements of the Army of Northern Virginia after they had penetrated Maryland and begun their campaign towards Washington. Lee opted for a roundabout route to D.C. after Second Manassas through Maryland so he could sever the railroad line between Washington and Baltimore, rendering the state useless to the Union and surrounding the capital on all sides with Confederate-held territory. It was a solid plan, and historians seem to agree that Lee probably had the momentum to pull it off. However, Special Order 191 was left behind by a member of Northern Virginia’s intelligence staff, and was found later by resting Union troops. Of course, the order could have been assumed to be a misdirection ploy, but McClellan authenticated it and was able to halt the Confederacy’s advance at South Mountain and Sharpsburg, a little town on the bank of Antietam Creek. After a ferocious battle that resulted in approximately 23,000

casualties, the Army of Northern Virginia was driven from Maryland, wrestling with the strategic ramifications of failing in its first attempt to invade the North.

However, the battle was tactically a draw. Both armies suffered enormous losses, and even after receiving reinforcements once the battle had concluded, McClellan failed to capitalize on Lee's struggle to cross the Potomac and essentially allowed the Confederate army to escape when it could have been easily destroyed. McClellan's indecision caused him to miss out on his vaunted "decisive use of the Army of the Potomac," and he was not given field command again in the war.

Despite the missed opportunity to truly end the war, Lincoln felt the perceived Union victory was just what he needed to add weight to his denouncement of slavery. On September 22, five days after the battle, he drafted the Emancipation Proclamation. It was continuously revised and advertised until it was officially issued on January 1, 1863. The document acted as both an excellent denouncement of slavery aimed at foreign powers, and a "fit and necessary war measure for suppressing [the] rebellion"<sup>41</sup> that would doubly inspire the citizens of the Union.

Ironically, the issuance would occur mere days after yet another humiliating Union defeat at Fredericksburg, but this only seemed to lend credibility to the Proclamation because it flew in the face of adversity. It was issued of its own accord, damning military circumstances. It also damned the Confederacy. As Lincoln predicted, Great Britain and France reneged on any support cultivated by Mason and Slidell. The Prime Minister of Great Britain at the time was Lord Palmerston, a staunch opponent of the United States, but an even stauncher opponent of the slave trade. He recognized the U.S. as an up-and-coming threat to Britain's global power, and felt a Confederate victory would not only weaken America's global stature, but also open a vast

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<sup>41</sup> *Emancipation Proclamation*. 1863.

market in the Confederate States for British manufacturing. Palmerston personally supported the Confederacy, but, like much of the British government, feared the civil unrest that might come from openly supporting a slave-holding entity. France felt the same way, as both nations had outlawed slavery in the last thirty years. Palmerston, himself, abhorred the institution. When Lincoln issued the Proclamation, it closed the door on physical intervention by a foreign power on behalf of the Confederacy.<sup>42</sup>

Straying from the point of this thesis for a moment, it is generally accepted that the Battle of Gettysburg, which will soon be discussed, was the so-called “turning point” in the Civil War. While this is not unwarranted, it can be contended that the single battle with the most influence on the course of the war was Antietam. Gettysburg’s significance is augmented by Grant’s simultaneous capture of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Antietam stood on its own. It marked radical shifts in the perception of the conflict. Lee’s aggression was shown to be faulty, and he hesitated on invading the North again for a while. McClellan’s indecision cost him his job, leading to a revolving door of generals commanding the Army of the Potomac for the next year. Lincoln successfully planted the seeds that would alter the entire perceived aim of the war. Those seeds would blossom with his Gettysburg Address in November 1863, and the fight for unity would become a fight for liberty.

This is the prime example of the evolving Union strategy. Lincoln promised the preservation of slavery in his inaugural address, hoping such domestic diplomacy would temper the South. He then adopted a traditional military mindset, seeking to squash the rebels on the battlefield. When that proved too difficult, he abandoned preservationism and welcomed emancipation in states “in rebellion against the United States.”<sup>43</sup> It was at once a piece of

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<sup>42</sup> Ridley, Jasper. *Lord Palmerston*. Bello Pan MacMillan, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> *Emancipation Proclamation*. 1863.

domestic and foreign diplomacy, a measure beyond the battlefield that truly influenced the war. Because it had not attached itself to any specific motivation at the outset, the Union was able to fluidly transition between whichever motivations suited its purpose. The ultimate goal of reunification remained, but the means to achieve it were beginning to change consistently.

Likewise, the Confederacy's link to slavery proved to be the downfall of its bid for foreign aid. Its economic dependence on slavery meant it could not abandon the institution to curry favor in Europe, and its dependence on external intervention or aid could not change because of the nature of Southern society. The North was able to exploit whatever opportunities arose. The South was not given the same opportunities.

Furthering the point, Lincoln had a contingency plan in case the Proclamation was a dud. In August 1862, he met with a black delegation and "told his guests that 'we [the two races] should be separated' and that the only hope for equality rested in their emigration to a new land"<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Abraham Lincoln, the oft-thought great emancipator, had put into motion a plan to deport all free black persons to another land, in an effort to "sweeten the pill of emancipation" for all those who did not necessarily advocate for it. In fact, on the same day he was to formally issue the Emancipation Proclamation, he also signed "a contract... to use federal funds to remove five thousand black men, women, and children from the United States to a small island off the coast of Haiti."<sup>45</sup> This plan, developed simultaneously with what would become the Emancipation Proclamation, shows the depths to which Lincoln was willing to go to appease whom he needed, discourage whom he needed, and scorn whom he needed to achieve his endgame. He took advantage of everything, regardless of what form it took - preservation,

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<sup>44</sup> Blight, David W. *Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln: A Relationship in Language, Politics, and Memory*. Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Vorenberg, Michael. "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization." *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1993, p. 23

abolition, or relocation. The president was ruthless, in a sense, but it was that ruthlessness and ability to adapt however the situation necessitated that ultimately led to victory, and Lincoln was consciously aware of that.

## 9. Gettysburg and the Erlanger Loan

The aforementioned revolving door of generals between September 1862 and July 1863 was a nightmare for the Army of the Potomac. Ambrose Burnside, a Pyrrhic hero of Antietam and the namesake of sideburns, led it to disaster at Fredericksburg in December 1862. He was quickly replaced by Joseph Hooker, who had distinguished himself at Antietam and Fredericksburg. He, too, led the army to disaster at Chancellorsville in May 1863. George Meade was given command at the end of that June, after John F. Reynolds turned down Lincoln's suggestion that he take over. Meade would have likely also led his men to disaster at Gettysburg had it not been for the valor of his subordinates like Reynolds, Winfield Scott Hancock, John Buford, and Joshua L. Chamberlain.

Though the defeats at Fredericksburg (approximately 13,000 casualties) and Chancellorsville (approximately 17,000 casualties) were two of the most devastating the Union would suffer in the war, they were also two of the last. The Union's ability to withstand these defeats is a testament to their vast resources, and willingness to adapt. Though consecutive decisions to replace the Army of the Potomac's commander did not play out favorably, Lincoln's insistence on retooling whenever the situation warranted eventually landed him with the successful Meade and the victorious Grant.

Meanwhile, President Davis superseded Lincoln in personal military experience, but was less adroit as a strategic leader.. Lee had demonstrated much success, but also significant failure. Still, Davis felt he could not simply replace the beloved general, even when his tactics began to grow stale. Meade and his subordinates had well-encountered Lee's aggression, and allowed the Confederate commander to play to his perceived strength at Gettysburg. On day one - July 1 - of that fateful battle, General Buford set up his cavalry unit along three ridges just outside of the town that was perfect terrain to delay the approaching Confederate infantry until the bulk of

Meade's army arrived and took up defensive positions on even better ground in and around Gettysburg. On day two - July 2 - the Confederate advance on the Union's left flank was halted by the valiant stand of Colonel Chamberlain and the 20th Maine regiment on Little Round Top. On day three - July 3 - the fabled "Pickett's Charge" was easily repulsed by a dug-in and consolidated Union army behind a stone wall. All three days featured a Confederate offensive and Union defensive. All three days saw Union victory. Where generals like McClellan, Burnside, and Hooker aimed to meet Lee head-on, Meade and his subordinates understood that a defensive coordinated from the start would likely stand a better chance than another offensive, especially with Gettysburg's defensible terrain. The Union, once again, adapted their strategy, while the Confederacy did not. Lee remained aggressive; even after two bloody days of virtually no progress, he still opted for offense because he had had so much success drawing Union commanders into his whirlwind before. Meade resisted the temptation, and ultimately took the battle. It was the last time Lee would attempt, or even be able to attempt, an invasion of the North.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Grant managed to secure Vicksburg, Mississippi the very day after Lee was driven from Pennsylvania, yielding control of the vital River to the Union. They firmly had the upperhand in the West, and could now better commit to fighting Lee, who had always been their biggest threat. That is not to say the Army of Northern Virginia had not seen better days. Ultimately, Lee's second invasion "fulfilled neither the strategic nor the operational objectives its commander set for it."<sup>46</sup> He had hoped threatening Northern territory after the significant victory at Chancellorsville would draw the Union out of Virginia, which sorely needed reprieve. The state had seen the lion's share of hard fighting in the war. Its people

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<sup>46</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 304.

were exhausted, frightened, and helpless, and its natural resources were so depleted that it took considerably longer to import them from elsewhere. However, by July 26, “Lee was already writing of his fear that ‘we shall soon have [the Union] back again’”<sup>47</sup> in his home state.

Numerically, the South suffered between 23,000 and 28,000 casualties at Gettysburg, an ungodly number even by this war’s standards. Psychologically, Lee was embarrassed, but President Davis and the Southern people did not waver in their support of the beloved Bobby Lee. The most notable person to voice dismay about the commander’s lapse at Gettysburg was his trusted subordinate, General James Longstreet. He was swiftly transferred to Tennessee. Once more, rigidity played a role in the Confederacy’s demise but that will be addressed later.

Perhaps the most damning ramifications of Gettysburg and Vicksburg were diplomatic and economic. By 1863, the governments of Great Britain and France had declared they would not officially involve themselves in the war, leaving the Confederacy floundering for whatever it could get. The envoy Slidell found a little more success in Paris than Mason found in London. In March, a prospectus for a loan accumulating to approximately \$15 million was published by the French banking house, Emile Erlanger & Company. The loan was for “Confederate bonds backed by cotton” that were redeemable once the war was won.<sup>48</sup> This was an attractive prospect for many citizens and speculators, and those bonds began to be widely circulated on the market, even in Great Britain. Over the remainder of the war, “the South had received [an additional] \$6,000,000 to aid in their war effort.”<sup>49</sup>

These impressive financials were not undeserved. The Confederate States were still the world’s largest exporter of cotton entering the summer of 1863, though Egypt and India were on

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<sup>47</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 304.

<sup>48</sup> “Erlanger Loan.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Erlanger-Loan>.

<sup>49</sup> “Erlanger Loan.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Erlanger-Loan>.



the rise. Regardless, the price of the bonds hovered between 88% and 92% of their original value in the spring and summer,<sup>50</sup> respectable numbers for a country in the midst of one of the bloodiest wars in human history. “King Cotton” was alive and well. Even more respectable was the “42 percent chance of [ultimate] victory”<sup>51</sup> European investors gave the Confederacy after Chancellorsville, all in spite of the inherent inferiorities and the loss of “Stonewall” Jackson at the battle.

However, “[news] of the severity of the two rebel defeats [at Gettysburg and Vicksburg] led to a sell-off in Confederate bonds”<sup>52</sup> that sent their price “tumbling from 89 ¼ [percent] to 60 [percent].”<sup>53</sup> Investors not only felt their cotton tied to the bonds was in jeopardy, but the viability of America’s entire cotton enterprise was, as well. In a panic, Europe began to lean more heavily on Egypt and India, further depreciating the value of Confederate cotton. The last bastion of attainable aid in Europe disintegrated, and the South was left to fend for itself for the remainder of the war. Southern diplomacy had largely failed.

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<sup>50</sup> Gentry, Judith Fenner. “A Confederate Success in Europe: The Erlanger Loan.” *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1970, p. 163.

<sup>51</sup> Weidenmier, Marc D. and Kim Oosterlinck. “Victory or Repudiation? The Probability of the Southern Confederacy Winning the Civil War.” *NBER Working Paper Series*, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Weidenmier, Marc D. and Kim Oosterlinck. “Victory or Repudiation? The Probability of the Southern Confederacy Winning the Civil War.” *NBER Working Paper Series*, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Gentry, Judith Fenner. “A Confederate Success in Europe: The Erlanger Loan.” *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1970, p. 163.

### 10. Grant, Sherman, Abolition, and the End of the Line

The first half of 1863 culminated more in a Confederate defeat than a Union victory. Save for Vicksburg and the tactical expulsion of Lee's army from the North, there was not much to immediately celebrate in Washington. General Meade, like McClellan before him, neglected to pursue the retreating Army of Northern Virginia, which "deeply mortified" Lincoln, because destroying them would have been "perfectly easy." He lamented, "Gen. Meade and his noble army had expended all the skill and toil, and blood, up to the ripe harvest, and then let the crop go to waste."<sup>54</sup>

This botched follow-up was worrisome because Lee had still proven himself to be a superior commander to all Union commanders he had faced, and Southern morale had not waned. He continuously sought opportunities to contest Meade again, confident he could "crush his army while in its present condition."<sup>55</sup> Meade had exploited Lee's aggression, but Lee now understood Meade's game. He was ready, and situated himself strategically around Richmond, hoping Meade's tentativeness would conflagrate with Lincoln and Commanding General Henry Halleck's demanding pursuit of the Confederates and draw him into an engagement with Lee for which he was not prepared. Much to his consternation, Meade resisted the bait, and maintained a successful series of clashes with Lee that made no serious dents in either army. What it did, however, was put the Union in a position to mount an offensive.

Entering 1864, there seemed to be only one man in the U.S. Army who had exhibited the elusive combination of aggression and success like Lee, and he had been constrained to the Western Theater for the entire war. On March 2, Ulysses S. Grant was promoted to lieutenant

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<sup>54</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 304.

<sup>55</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 309.

general, a rank only previously held by George Washington, and given command of the entire army. Recently, the chips had fallen favorably for the Union. Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" in November 1863 firmly established abolition as a war aim. For the first time since his inaugural address, Lincoln pleaded directly to the people of the North. He knew the war effort required their emotional support, and two bloody victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg were not enough. There needed to be a purpose for the blood that people could resonate with emotionally. Abolition became that purpose, but then decisive military action - the kind Meade seemed unwilling to provide - was needed to ignite the fire. The tinder and tools were there, but someone needed to strike the flint.

Grant wasted no time. In his first private meeting with the president, he stated his understanding that no true victory could be achieved "until the military power of the rebellion was entirely broken."<sup>56</sup> He had also always known the necessity of the Eastern and Western armies working in concert, but had not had the authority to orchestrate that. Now he did, and his good friend William Tecumseh Sherman was in charge of all troops in the West. At this point in time, there could have been no duo better equipped and more excited to end the war.

Sherman pushed down from Tennessee and nearly burned Atlanta to the ground before cutting a swath 300 miles long to the Atlantic. The state of Georgia was left in ruins, and by Christmas 1864, Sherman was able to present the city of Savannah to President Lincoln as a gift. The infrastructure of the Confederacy was shredded, and the only formidable Confederate bodies left in the country were Joseph E. Johnston in South Carolina and Lee in Virginia. Sherman pushed up through the Carolinas against Johnston, aiming to pin the two Confederate armies back-to-back, with Grant crushing down from the north.

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<sup>56</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 351.

To that end, Grant launched his famed Overland Campaign with the Army of the Potomac that relentlessly pushed Lee towards Richmond. In June 1864, the Union laid siege to Petersburg and Richmond, enduring nine months of brutal trench warfare in and around the cities. It was aggression and ferocity Lee had not witnessed by a Union general, and he was wholly unprepared for it. Eventually, Richmond fell, and the Confederacy began its surrender after the Battle of Appomattox Court House, on April 9, 1865. The last organized Confederate forces surrendered on June 23.

It was not that Lee was strategically incapable of handling a coordinated Union offense, it was that he was not expecting one. For the entirety of the war until March 1864, Lee had been fighting against the cautious McClellan, the inflated Burnside, the overconfident Hooker, and the defensive Meade. In that time, he consistently had the Union on the run, making it impossible for them to counter with anything but defensive tactics. Lee remained rigid in his approach, and it eventually cost him.

After Gettysburg and the gentle poking and prodding of Lee in late 1863, the Union could finally catch its breath, and the opportunity arose to mount an offensive. Rather than rest on the laurels of Meade, Lincoln capitalized by promoting Grant, whose celebrity lent a heft to Lincoln's persuasion that the war was being fought for something emotionally bigger than politics, and victory was within striking distance. Grant's promotion was as much an emotional ploy as a tactical one, and it is the primest example of Lincoln's quick thinking and willingness to adapt to any situation. Where Jefferson Davis and the South always protected Robert E. Lee, Lincoln felt no similar duty to his officers, replacing them as soon as they proved contrary to the necessary strategy of the Union, eventually leading him to the man that would save the United States of America.

## 11. Conclusion

When all was said and done, approximately 620,000 men lost their lives, along with a countless number of civilian and slave deaths. That toll is still higher than all other American wars before and since combined. It is a well-known statistic, but it bears repeating. There is no way such a number was achieved by the success and failure of military might alone. Just as every aspect of Northern and Southern society was affected by the war, each contributed to its outcome. The longstanding blood feud between the Southern states and the federal government inspired the people of the South to support the political, economic, and philosophical cause of independence. There was no shortage of volunteers taking up arms against the Northern aggressors. The general public of the North did not seem to comprehend the detrimental effects of Southern secession, and much of their military strength was drawn from official calls for volunteers and, eventually, drafts. This provoked disdain for the conflict at the outset. Thus, the Confederacy was lulled into thinking it would be a straightforward matter of outlasting and outmaneuvering the enemy, while the Union was ready to adapt whenever things grew stale.

Equipping itself to outlast the U.S. Army was the difficult part for the Confederacy. They benefited from fighting on their land and began with a formidable number of troops, but their recruiting and manufacturing capabilities were limited. The overall cost of the war was going to be more than they could immediately afford. James Mason and John Slidell did what they could to lobby foreign aid, but their efforts mostly failed due to the Confederacy's interminable link to slavery.

In many ways, the South was pigeonholed. Such economic disparity made it impossible for them to rely on anything *but* foreign assistance, and their relations with powerful European nations like Great Britain and France depended upon their exportation of cotton. But, cotton could not be produced in sufficient quantities without slave labor. The eventual elevation of

emancipation and abolition to Union war aims caused those foreign governments to back away. The motivations of the Confederacy constricted its circumstances, and its circumstances constricted its requirements for success. They also struggled to consolidate their intentions at the outset. The desires of each state were simultaneously the same, in that they wanted independence, and scattered, evidenced by the clear disparity between President Davis' declarations and South Carolina's actions. In this way, the Confederacy was both too narrow and too broad. While the consolidation did occur and a formidable war machine was produced, the war itself would have been delayed, and perhaps altogether avoided, if Fort Sumter had not been fired upon. But that is conjecture for another thesis.

These issues did not exist in the North. They knew their goal from the start. Their established industry afforded them flexibility and the peace-of-mind that no single battle would likely end the war. If it became a war of attrition, they could play that way. Industrial and economic flexibility also allowed for strategic flexibility. Abraham Lincoln did not have to worry about obtaining help from abroad, so he could focus on what was happening at home. Initially, his strategy was one of appeasement, assuaging fears that he would eradicate slavery when elected. When his diplomatic rhetoric did not work, he turned the blossoming war over to more traditionally-minded commanders who wanted to begin and end the conflict on the battlefield. Lincoln "never wanted to interfere in military matters," but endured waves of defeats, inaction, and public pressure that made his intervention necessary.<sup>57</sup> He rotated generals on a consistent basis based on what each new situation required. Eventually, he came to the defensive George Meade, who happened to strike gold against Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg. Later, Ulysses S. Grant would take command of the entire U.S. Army at a time when an offensive was ripe, and

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<sup>57</sup> Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 351.

would batter Lee into surrendering. When the situation necessitated defense, the Union employed it. When the situation afforded offense, the Union - specifically Grant - capitalized. When nothing seemed to be going right, Lincoln was not afraid to make changes.

The same cannot be said for the Confederacy, at least not where it mattered. Lee was a brilliant, operationally adept commander, but he became too comfortable with how he achieved success against the Union, and remained rigid with his plans until it was too late. He took each Union commander for granted - he did indeed seem to face a different one in each contest - and did not learn from his mistakes at Gettysburg. He had been too aggressive, and Meade was able to implement a coordinated defense from the beginning. Lee never prepared himself thereafter to be on the defensive, and that allowed the persistent Grant to exploit his overeagerness. When the Army of Northern Virginia was finally backed up against the walls of Richmond, it was not used to or prepared for the kind of war Grant was waging. Given their incredible successes early in the war, it was entirely feasible for the South to come out on top if the North had not been able to rally its people and find the right commanders. However, a few military missteps put more emphasis on the Confederacy's success on other fronts, like foreign diplomacy and economic dealmaking. Indeed, Lee's costly mistakes at Gettysburg ruined the statistical, tangible viability of Confederate bonds in Europe. Without external financial backing, more emphasis was placed on needing to deal an irreparable blow to the Union army. It was a vicious cycle that was impossible to satisfy, where every aspect depended on and contributed to the emphasis of the others. It all stemmed from rigidity - rigidity in motivation, rigidity in circumstance, rigidity in need, and rigidity in military philosophy.

The Union had the opposite mentality. There was fluidity from the broadest strategic aims - evidenced by the transition from preservationism to abolitionism in three years - to

treatment of prisoners of war, like Mason and Slidell. This allowed each aspect of the war to not affect the others too drastically. However the war needed to be fought, the Union fought it.

Whether conscious or unconscious, the mentalities of each entity pervaded their overall strategies. No single strength, weakness, or decision determined the course of the war. Each and every contributed a string to the web. Each aspect of waging war - military, diplomatic, economic, social, philosophical - was considered and developed by the leadership of the Union and Confederacy, but not necessarily as a cohesive grand strategy. Grand strategy was not popularized as a method of actively waging war until the next century, but by observing the methods of both entities through the lens we have come to know as grand strategy, we can appreciate the interplay of each aspect in determining the outcome. Approaching the Civil War in one aspect and assigning inflated importance to individual people and battles does a disservice to the truly massive scope of the conflict. There is more to war than victory on a battlefield.



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## **Author Biography**

Will Hammer was born on February 1, 1997 in Ventura, California. Almost the entirety of the maternal side of his family resides in Texas, so he knew what he was getting himself into when he chose to attend the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to studying in the Plan II Honors Program, Mr. Hammer also majored in History, with a minor in Communications. While his immediate interests have driven him to pursue an MBA after graduating in 2020, and an eventual career in hospitality, his lifelong passion for history – specifically the American Civil War – will likely lead him back to a Ph.D in the future. Mr. Hammer is currently quarantining with his family in Ventura, due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.