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14. ABSTRACT
The British effort in the American Southern Colonies (1778-1781) failed due to poor stragecic decisions based on faulty assumptions and incorrect assessments. The British government pinned their hopes on utilizing Loyalist supporters which they believed existed in great numbers in the Southern colonies. By using the Loyalists the British would be able to fight the campaign without a large number of British regulars which were required to fight in other parts of the war against the colonies as well as against the French and Spanish around the world. As it turned out the Loyalists did not exist in great numbers and the lack of British regulars precluded the British from organizing and securing the Southern colonies thus allowing Loyalists to risk their lives and come forward. The result was a quasi civil war between the minority Loyalists and an ever growing rebel movement which overwhelmed the British and drove them out of the Southern colonies.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

THE BRITISH SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN 1778-1781: THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC LEVEL ASSESSMENTS AND ASSUMPTIONS ON BRITISH DECISION MAKING

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Executive Summary

Title: The British Southern Campaign 1778-1781: The Impact of Strategic Level Assessments and Assumptions on British Decision Making

Author: Major Paul C. Merida, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Ultimately, the British government's overreliance on the putative capabilities of loyalist supporters who essentially underpinned the entire British strategy in the Southern Campaign proved pivotal to the campaign's failure.

Discussion: In 1777, the British suffered a humiliating defeat against the Americans at Saratoga. The biggest impact of this battle was the entrance of France into the war on the side of the American colonies. The American Revolution immediately turned into a global conflict between rival empires and the British decided to shift the focus of the American Revolution to the Southern colonies south of the Potomac River. The British believed that the Southern colonies contained an abundance of Loyalist support that they could utilize to augment British regulars. This shift in strategy sought to break the military stalemate that had occurred in the middle colonies around New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania and would rely on Loyalist support and active participation in military operations. At first, the campaign showed some signs of success. The British secured footholds in Georgia and South Carolina and then moved their forces into the countryside to begin pacification and to carry out recruitment of these much-anticipated Loyalist forces. However, within months the design of the campaign began to unravel as South Carolina erupted into violence characterized by irregular warfare between Loyalist forces and American (rebel) partisan units. What resulted was a civil war and more violence than the British could handle. The Loyalists, who were supposed to be the answer to pacification proved unreliable and incapable of controlling the countryside. The Loyalists seemed more bent on revenge and righting perceived wrongs that they had endured over the past five years and they constantly frustrated British commanders who did not have the resources to control or stop the violence that they had helped unleash.

Conclusion: Much American scholarship focuses on a failure or breakdown at the tactical and operational levels of war on the British side. Specifically it is General Charles Cornwallis and his subordinates Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton and Major Patrick Ferguson who usually suffer the blame for the British disaster. This study, however, sees that the real responsibility belongs to the British government at the strategic level, which based this entire shift in strategy on shaky assumptions over the capabilities and limitations of the Loyalists. What was supposed to be the answer to many British problems turned out to be the exact opposite and instead of being the reason for British success became the reason for the British defeat.

Preface

My interest in studying the American Revolution has grown in the last several years since America has become involved in limited wars of national interest (vice national survival) in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this role, America has taken on the part that England played in our revolution – a global superpower fighting insurgents in lands thousands of miles from home. In conducting the research for this paper, I was struck by the similarities in the difficulties that the British faced in the 1770s in making strategic policy decisions with the challenges that America has dealt with in crafting strategy in our current conflicts.

In completing my research and writing this paper, I wish to acknowledge the support of my Marine Corps University mentor, Dr John W. Gordon. Throughout this process, he has provided me with excellent advice and I have benefited from his wise counsel and guidance. I would also like to recognize the support of my Operational Art instructor Dr. Bradford A. Wineman who has challenged me throughout this academic year and who has provided me with a tremendous amount of assistance in completing this paper.

Introduction

"In dealing with the loyalists Britain made two palpable errors. She turned to them for assistance much too late and then relied upon them much too completely."[1]

From 1778 to 1781, the British Empire shifted the focus of effort of the American Revolution from the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania to the Southern colonies. With British military resources dwindling and facing a military stalemate in the Northern and middle colonies, the British attempted to win the war by relying on "a mighty reservoir of untapped military strength" that they believed existed in the Southern colonies.[2] The campaign began well for the British but three years later, it ended in defeat. At the tactical and operational level British and Loyalist forces and their commanders, although occasionally successful, could not turn what they perceived as tactical advantages into operational or strategic success. Despite an absence of organized American resistance, the British commanders failed to put together a campaign that moved them closer to overall victory.[3]

Much scholarship has been devoted to the tactical engagements of the Southern Campaign such as King's Mountain (October 1780), Cowpens (January 1781) and Guilford Courthouse (March 1781) as well as the performance of the British at the operational level, specifically General Charles Cornwallis. However, British performance at the strategic level, as it relates to the Southern Campaign, generally has received less attention. Perhaps this is because British leaders at the strategic level were in London or perhaps it is because American leaders and heroes of the American Revolution had little to no interaction with British actors at this level. Regardless of the reasons, it is unfortunate, because the roots of the British failure in the Southern Campaign relate to assumptions made by strategic level decision makers in the British government in London. Ultimately, the British government's overreliance on the putative

capabilities of loyalist supporters who essentially underpinned the entire British strategy in the Southern Campaign proved pivotal to the campaign's failure.

Strategic Setting

"But the loss of 5,000 troops at Saratoga in October 1777 and the entry of France into the war in Spring of 1778 combined finally to force a fundamental reassessment of British military policy."[4]

The genesis for the British Southern Campaign began in 1777 after the British defeat at Saratoga in upstate New York. At Saratoga, the Americans achieved a decisive victory over the British by forcing the surrender of General John Burgoyne and his army of 5,000 British regulars. The American victory at Saratoga significantly transformed the war at the strategic level for both the American colonies and the British. The major victory in the field of an American army over British regulars gave the American cause enough worldwide respect that one of Britain's principal European rivals, France, officially entered the war on the side of the American colonies, with other European states soon acting against Britain if not formally as allies of the Americans.[5] Furthermore, British humiliation over surrendering an entire army to the Americans added to the shock of failure in a campaign that was supposed to end the war. This humiliation and frustration registered in London as opposition to the war began to grow in Parliament.

Thus, in February 1778, France became the first European power to enter the war on the American side followed by Spain the following year. Support for the American colonies from these European powers came in two types. The first was direct support in the form of money, troops and ships. France had been loaning the American colonies large sums of money for over a year but now with France formally entering the war against Britain, French troops and ships

would now take part in operations in the American theater. The other form of support that the European powers provided was more indirect. France and Spain used their military power, especially naval power, to challenge British mastery of the seas and threatened British colonial holdings around the world in such strategic locations as India, Gibraltar, the Mediterranean the Caribbean and the English Channel.[6] The British were now fighting a global war and not only had to be concerned about holding on to their empire but they had to worry about maintaining their ability to use the sea lines of communication to command and control, resupply and reinforce their empire. Finally, the British now had to protect their homeland as what had only recently just been a war against rebellious colonies thousands of miles away was now a conflict of much greater scale and with much greater stakes involved.[7]

The greatest and most substantial impact that this indirect support had on Britain was how it over-stretched British military resources, namely British Army regiments and Royal Navy fighting ships, as Britain tried to counter French and Spanish efforts around the world while conducting operations in America. As the threats to British colonial holdings increased around the empire, the British government was now compelled to transfer or withhold British regiments and ships from the American theater to counter French and Spanish actions when and where they arose around the globe and even near England itself. Additionally, British leaders held ground and naval forces, which could been used in America, close to home in order to prevent a possible French and Spanish invasion of England itself.[8] All of these competing military requirements influenced Britain's ability to wage war on the American continent, which was 3,000 miles away. The British government rerouted reinforcements, intended for the American colonies, to all parts of the British Empire and British commanders in America received orders from London to send their own forces to support British operations in the Caribbean. Two examples of this are

General James Grant who sailed to the West Indies vice America with nearly 5,000 troops and later General Charles Cornwallis in 1778 to Jamaica with 4,000 regulars. Some of these British forces would make it back to America but many regiments were kept in the West Indies to garrison those islands against possible French offensive operations and many regiments that did return came back worn down by disease and sickness.[9] Just as important, British ships that were supposed to support operations in America now supported British naval operations throughout the empire to counter the French naval forces that were threatening British mastery of the seas and British naval forces had to support the movement and resupply of British ground forces throughout the empire.

At home in England, it was not just the threat of a French and Spanish invasion that had the British uneasy. The rising costs of this expanded war and the conflict's overall effect on the British economy was now a prime concern of British citizens and, by extension, the British Parliament. With resources strained to meet the numerous threats around the empire, the British had to reassess how to fight the war in America and meet these additional threats throughout their empire. The most obvious option would be to increase the size of the army and navy, but this would involve a tax increase that would face growing opposition in Parliament. The British government under Prime Minister Lord Frederick North was unwilling to raise taxes as the effort could very well make the now expanded war even more unpopular.[10]

Strategically, the British needed to consider whether the rebellious American colonies and the worldwide war the colonies had spawned were worth the effort of fighting with the possibility of potentially losing other key colonies around the world. British leaders also had to consider how the American colonies figured in the larger context of their empire. The war had

obviously started in America but now existed in numerous theaters around the world. Important British colonies were vulnerable in several places throughout the British Empire. Gibraltar was in danger of falling to Spain, and more importantly, British colonies in the West Indies were at risk of falling to the French. The West Indies were widely considered more important to Britain than the American colonies due to the revenue generated from the production of sugar and rum. According to John Pancake, imports from the West Indian brought in 4,500,000 pounds annually, more than twice the value of imports from the mainland American colonies.[11] When put in context against the other threats around their empire, the American theater was now one of many theaters competing for limited resources; and in the view of the British government, the American colonies were not as vital, at least economically, as sugar producing colonies in the Caribbean.

Some in the British government considered giving up the American colonies in order to focus on the war with France and Spain. A resolution in Parliament presented by Lord John Cavendish received support from a third of the House of Commons and even Lord North had stated that the benefits of winning the war in America were not worth the costs.[12] King George III disagreed stating, "we must stretch every nerve to defend ourselves, and must run some risks, for if we play only a cautious game ruin will inevitably ensue."[13] The king believed that giving up America would give other British colonies an impetus to seek their own independence and that without the American colonies, and potentially the West Indies, Britain would be a much poorer and less powerful country.[14] This 18th century version of the "domino theory" gave the British government the rationale to continue the war in America and in late 1777, the British government sought to change their strategy. The new strategy would have to take into account

the increased scale of what was now an international war, not just against thirteen rebellious colonies but also against several powerful European nations.

A New British Strategy

"Conquest of these provinces is considered by the King as an object of great importance."[15]

Lord George Germain, the Minister of the American Colonies, wrote the above statement to General Sir Henry Clinton the American commander in chief in America. Lord Germain's declaration represents the change in the war's focus – the conquest of the American colonies south of the Potomac River. Among the principal strategic policy and decision makers for the British was King George III, the head of state. Despite not being the absolute ruler of the British Empire, he still held great influence over British policy. Lord Frederick North served as the British Prime Minister but he delegated nearly all of the planning and control of the war against the American colonies to Lord George Germain, the minister of the American colonies or the American Secretary. Lord Germain was, ostensibly, the most important Englishman in London when considering British strategy and policy towards the American colonies. He was responsible for coordinating the military support from the British Army and Navy as well communicating directly with military commanders in North America. As the governmental representative who had direction of the war, Lord Germain operated at the strategic level of war. In this capacity, his duties made him, according to Robert Ketchum, "responsible for grand strategy, which included the staggering logistical task of assembling supplies and transporting them to America, determining how Britain's resources would be employed and distributed to the various theaters of war."[16]

With the decision to continue the war against the American colonies, the British administration in London reviewed its strategy. What the British decided upon was a new approach that shifted the focus of the war in America to the Southern colonies below the Potomac River.

Several reasons existed for why the British decided to shift the focus of operations away from the Northern and middle colonies where the rebellion began. First, the British saw the war in the Northern and middle colonies as essentially a stalemate. Since the British defeat at Saratoga and the inconclusive campaign in Pennsylvania General Sir Henry Clinton had been unable to bring General George Washington to battle. With perhaps their ability to maintain waning public and Parliamentary support, the British saw the Southern colonies as a way to make some progress in a war in which they needed some positive gains both for military and political reasons.[17]

Secondly, as part of a larger struggle, the Southern colonies were geographically closer to the British colonies in the Caribbean and thus it would be easier for the British army and navy to coordinate actions between the Southern colonies and the Caribbean. With military resources strained, the British were looking for innovative ways to support operations in numerous theaters without drastically expanding the size of their army and navy by raising taxes at home. British strategic leadership believed it was possible to economize between the American and Caribbean theaters by transferring regiments and ships from one theater to the next with the changing of the seasons. During the summer, British troops and ships would operate in the American theater and when the weather became too cold to campaign in America, the same troops and ships would move to the Caribbean to campaign there. This close coordination between the American and

Caribbean colonies would assist British naval efforts in cutting American trade that originated from Southern ports, especially Charleston, South Carolina.[18]

Third, there were those on the British side that believed that the decisive victory against the Americans was no longer going to occur and that a negotiated settlement might be the more probable outcome. As stated above, after Saratoga the war in the Northern colonies north of the Potomac River had reached a stalemate and the New England colonies recognized as lost to the rebellion.[19] The Southern colonies, on the other hand, were relatively untouched by the rebellion and the war and thus Britain needed to be, as John Gordon states, "in the best possible position when the parties came to the table. This meant holding as many chips as possible – *Southern* chips."[20] With the ability to move large numbers of British regulars by sea to a region of America that contained substantially less American forces, the British saw an opportunity to put themselves in a position to bargain from a position of strength if the war came down to negotiation.

Lastly, and most importantly, a Southern campaign was desirable because the British believed that Southern colonies contained large numbers of Loyalists who would flock to the British and provide military support when the British arrived. As Paul Smith writes, "an offensive utilizing the southern Loyalists would permit the administration to continue operations with a minimum increase of manpower."[21] This "minimum increase in manpower" specifically British manpower would allow the British to economize their force. This economy of force would serve as the rationale for the entire shift in strategy.[22] As John Shy states, "no longer would British troops try to occupy and hold directly every square foot of territory; instead, the war was to be 'Americanized' – territory once liberated would be turned over as quickly as

possible to loyal Americans for police and defense, freeing redcoats to move on to the liberation of other areas. With care and patience, Americanization meant that a relatively small British force could conquer the whole South and thus win the war."[23] A strategy that required little to no increase in manpower was advantageous for political reasons as well since, as Paul Smith writes, "the administration was able to command Parliamentary support for the war only because the use of Southern loyalists promised to relieve Britain of much of her military burden, British strategy increasingly became dependent upon the cooperation of the loyalists."[24]

This last rationale would prove the most important. The British government facing a global war against their closest rivals and unable to provide the necessary troops, ships and funds to fight the war in America saw a great opportunity to meet the military challenges in America and the political realities that existed after Saratoga with the entrance of France into the war against Britain.

The British strategy for the Southern campaign envisioned a methodical advance from South to North through Georgia, the Carolinas and then Virginia. The British regulars would defeat organized American forces in a colony and then turn the pacification of that colony over to Loyalist forces that the British would raise once they arrived. Once the Loyalists in a colony were operational, the British regular forces would move on to the next colony. The British would continue their methodical advance, one colony at a time, relying heavily on the loyalists to control the colonies in the British rear.[25] As Lord Germain wrote General Clinton in March, 1778 "after the Month of October [he was] to proceed to the conquest of Georgia and the Carolinas" as "the intention was to leave those to the northward to their own feelings, and make them suffer every distress which cutting off their supplies and blocking up their ports might

occasion." [26] The strategy relied on the availability of Loyalist support. The British government believed that there existed widespread support for the British crown in the Southern colonies as reported to the British government from former Royal Governors of Southern colonies.[27] The British assumed that this "untapped reservoir of available manpower" would be able to fulfill the military roles that the British envisioned.[28] Lord Germain believed that the Loyalists, once recruited and organized into Loyalist units or militias, would be able to pacify the colony they lived in and secure British lines of communication and resupply. The loyalists would free up British regulars for offensive operations against the American conventional forces and the British would be able to sustain itself farther inland with greater ease by using Loyalist grown and owned supplies vice having to rely on the British navy.[29]

Tactical and Operational Outcomes

"Ever ready to accept reports at face value, Britain was vulnerable when poorly planned operations came to depend heavily upon the friendly disposition of the countryside, and doubly vulnerable when they were poorly executed."[30]

Georgia, the southernmost American colony, was the first test of the British Southern strategy. In late 1778, a British force of 3,000 regulars and Loyalist provincials captured Savannah on 29 December. Reinforced by an additional 1,000 British regulars from Florida they then moved inland and seized Augusta. With these two principal towns in their possession, it appeared that the British now controlled one of the thirteen rebellious colonies. Unfortunately, for the British, the Georgia countryside around Augusta soon erupted into violence and as David Wilson describes, "the Patriots easily raised and deployed thousands of militiamen from Georgia and the Carolinas against the British, driving Campbell (the British commander) out of the backcountry." [31] Few Georgians joined the British and their willingness to support the Crown

declined after the British left Augusta and retreated to the coast. Although the British occupied Savannah, they had been unsuccessful in organizing enough Loyalist support to conquer Georgia.[32]

A year later in October, 1779, after defeating a French and American attempt to take Savannah, the British launched an overland campaign from Savannah into South Carolina. The British cut short the attempt to reach Charleston, South Carolina due to the appearance of a larger American army under General Benjamin Lincoln but they were pleased and surprised at their ability to move unmolested through the South Carolina countryside.

The major effort of the Southern campaign began in late 1779 when General Sir Henry Clinton and 12,000 troops sailed south from New York aboard the fleet of Admiral Marriott Arbuthnot. After an arduous journey wracked by storms, the fleet reached Georgia and prepared for amphibious operations near Charleston. In February 1780, the British began a nearly flawless joint campaign that resulted in mid-May 1780 with not only the capture of Charleston, South Carolina but also the complete surrender of the 5,600 man American army.[33]

With the seizure of Charleston and the collapse of American military forces in the South General Clinton returned to New York with the majority of his army. General Charles Cornwallis remained in charge of the Southern campaign and he quickly moved to garrison the South Carolina countryside in order to raise loyalist support and ensure the pacification of the rest of the colony. Additionally, Cornwallis had to respond to a new American threat posed by Horatio Gates' 3,000-man army, which he soundly defeated on August 16, 1780 at Camden, South Carolina. In an effort to follow up British success at Charleston and Camden, Cornwallis sent small British garrisons to a number of posts throughout the South Carolina countryside as

the British began to establish Loyalist militias that would eventually take control of pacification efforts in South Carolina.

From the fall of Charleston in May until July 1780, British efforts in South Carolina succeeded remarkably well. Many South Carolinians who had sided with the American cause began supporting the British, including prominent American leaders such as Andrew Pickens and Andrew Williamson.[34] Due to the capture of the entire American army at Charleston and then the subsequent rout of Gates' 3,000 man force at Camden, there existed a near absence of violence in the South Carolina countryside. The British enjoyed a rare and potentially fleeting opportunity. With the absence of American organized resistance, the British had the ability to disperse their forces into smaller groups and attempt to hold some ground. The inability to destroy Washington's army had made the capacity to breakdown British forces into smaller groups a near impossibility and extremely risky in the Northern colonies.[35] Once British forces began occupying several locations throughout South Carolina recruitment of Loyalist militias proceeded smoothly but only in a few areas around Ninety-Six, Little Peedee, and Orangeburg. In the majority of the state however, the British experienced much more difficulty in drawing Loyalists to their side.[36]

With the appearance of British regulars and Loyalist, militias roaming throughout the state, American partisan units began operating against the Loyalists and British beginning in July through September 1780. Over the span of just a few months South Carolina erupted into a quasi civil war, as Loyalists bent on revenge and British troops seeking plunder, unleashed a wave of violence characterized by a level of cruelty not yet seen in this war. American partisan units throughout the state responded in kind. The execution of prisoners, murder of civilians and the

destruction of homes and property were common tactics on both sides and with few British troops scattered throughout the state the British could neither stop the American partisans nor control their Loyalist allies.[37]

By October 1780, the Southern campaign had begun to unravel for the British. The strategic assumption that provided the foundation for the campaign began to look inaccurate. Although Loyalists, in a few areas of South Carolina, joined the British cause, they had proven completely incapable, because of their own motivations as well as a chance for revenge, of pacifying and controlling the countryside. The British with their limited manpower were powerless to control the Loyalists once they had been empowered and unleashed on the rest of the population of South Carolina.

Cornwallis, unable to counter the American partisans who were quickly gaining the upper hand against the Loyalists, decided to expand the campaign by moving his forces into North Carolina. His hope was that by moving into North Carolina he could cut off support for the American partisans in South Carolina.[38] By this time, Washington had assigned Nathanael Greene to take over forces in the Carolinas and now the Americans in the Southern colonies had a regular military force to rally around. Greene's army was extremely small, numbering close to 1,500, with only a fraction of those being Continental regulars.[39] Cornwallis' first attempt at moving into North Carolina was aborted when a Loyalist force was completely destroyed at King's Mountain, South Carolina in October, 1780 and later a combined Loyalist and British force under Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton was decisively defeated at Cowpens, South Carolina, in January, 1781. Still unable to control or stop the violence in South Carolina, Cornwallis moved his army into North Carolina in pursuit of Nathanael Greene's army.

A hard fought and costly British victory at Guilford Courthouse in March, 1781 left Cornwallis' army in such poor shape that he decided to move the remainder of his army into Virginia. Nathanael Greene, understanding that Cornwallis' movement to Virginia and away from the Carolinas and Georgia presented the Americans with a great opportunity, refused to follow Cornwallis north and moved his forces back into South Carolina. Greene's forces overcame British and Loyalist garrisons that remained in South Carolina and Georgia, except for the large British garrisons in Charleston and Savannah, and within three months of Guilford Courthouse, the British Southern campaign was essentially over as the Americans regained control of Georgia, South and North Carolina.[40] Cornwallis found himself surrounded in Yorktown, Virginia, where in 1781 George Washington and the French forced his capitulation, which signaled the end of the American Revolution.

Strategic Culpability

"Lacking the statesmen who had once won her an empire, the British frittered away a reservoir of manpower, which actually proved a military liability when British strategy after 1780 became rigidly dependent upon the loyalists."[41]

As demonstrated by the aforementioned quote, the British and in particular, their Loyalist allies did not perform to expectation at the tactical and operational levels. However, there is a good explanation for this – the strategic assumptions influenced by political necessity, waning British domestic support and flimsy evidence about the extent and capabilities of Loyalist assistance drove a British strategy that quickly came undone when the assumptions that underpinned the entire plan proved inaccurate.

The decision-making at the strategic level that drove the British Southern campaign was correctly influenced by the fact that the American theater was one of many theaters in a global

conflict against not just the American rebels but France and Spain as well. Additionally, the British recognized the resultant strain and shortage of military resources that the global conflict had caused. With this in the forefront of their minds, the British leadership relied on a strategy based on economy of force. The British, trying to maintain popular and Parliamentary support by not raising taxes, attempted to win the war "on the cheap" by not increasing troop levels that were required to control the territory that would allow Loyalists to come forward without fear.

On paper and thousands of miles away in London, the plan and its objectives appeared practicable. The new strategy seemingly solved the problem of political opposition and it addressed the strain of military resources the British now faced. The problem was assuming the Loyalists could perform the way the British needed it in this campaign. This critical assumption proved to be incorrect and as John Shy suggests, "the British failed to think through the way in which their military strategy could be politically effective; they simply assumed armed force could 'work' in America as it did in Europe or in Ireland."[42] The British fell into a common strategic pitfall of looking for a strategic panacea – defined in MCDP 1-1 *Strategy* as a strategic prescription that will guarantee victory in any situation. This becomes problematic for strategic decision makers because the strategic panacea "denies any need for understanding the unique characteristics of each strategic situation, offering instead a ready-made universal solution."[43]

In America, the British government had a poor appreciation for the details that comprised the American problem. For example, the vast size of America and the dispersion over a distance much greater than the British Isles of an American population, which, was anything but ethnically and economically homogeneous made determining American motivations much more difficult than in Ireland or Scotland. Moreover, the British consistently underestimated the level

of broad base support for the rebellion in America – initially believing that only a few colonial elite were responsible and later on continuing to believe that a large segment of the American population would remain loyal to the Crown. The British government unwittingly found itself relying on their past imperial experiences to develop their understanding of the rebels in the American colonies.

Taking this poor appreciation for the scope of the problem into account, the British developed a strategy that did not fit the situation in the Southern colonies and in particular South Carolina. Soon after American resistance collapsed, the Loyalists demonstrated that they favored a strategy of revenge and righting past wrongs rather than showing any sort of conciliation and working towards the British goal of pacification. Again, the British leadership should have been able to predict the Loyalists violent actions. Even a satisfactory understanding of recent South Carolina history, which William Campbell the former Royal Governor of South Carolina living in London could have provided, would have shown the British that much of South Carolina's previous twenty years was one of constant and savage violence. Initially, against the Cherokee Indians and later between South Carolinians in vigilante and counter vigilante movements known as the Regulators and the Moderators which waged a vicious war against each other in the South Carolina backcountry.[44] As MCDP 1-1 conveys, "without a basic understanding of the situation, decision-making and action are likely to be seriously flawed."[45]

The British expected the Loyalists to pacify areas through which British troops had already moved. This meant that the British, with a limited number of regulars, would have secure areas behind them and protected lines of communication and supply. However, the Loyalists chose to unleash a wave of violence on rebels and suspected rebels throughout South

Carolina. Their wave of retribution and violence had two effects that contributed to the failure of the British Southern campaign. One was that it greatly accelerated the formation and growth of American partisan units. Led by such men as Francis Marion, Andrew Pickens, and Thomas Sumter, these partisan units grew in size and proficiency and quickly un-pacified the South Carolina countryside. Two, by proving the British could not protect civilians and their property more people that were neutral or were waiting to see which side provided a better opportunity at survival, rushed toward the American cause.[46] Regardless of the exact proportional breakdown in regards to rebels, Loyalists and neutrals, it was quickly shifting in the rebels favor as Loyalists began to run off or remain quiet and neutrals were migrating to the rebel cause.[47]

In formulating strategy, the British leadership in London essentially, "cherry picked" the information they wanted to hear. Whatever sounded positive they utilized and if the reports did not sound promising, the British leadership ignored them or reasoned them away. Several former Royal Governors gave glowing reports of large-scale Loyalist support and as Ira Gruber writes, "the ministry, desperate for a quick and inexpensive way to end the rebellion, was swayed by the reports of refugees from Southern colonies. The former governors of Georgia and the Carolinas were particularly skillful in emphasizing the advantages of campaigning in the South."[48] However, the British leadership failed to realize (or, if they did realize it they failed to understand) that these former Royal Governors fled their states and returned to Britain two to three years prior. During their absence, the situation and sentiments had possibly changed not to mention the information and reports came from men who had a stake in getting back into power in their previous positions.[49]

In addition to the potentially outdated information provided by former Royal Governors armed with self-vested interests the British government also received conflicting information from British military leaders who had served in America. General William Howe, the former British commander-in-chief in America, had mixed feelings about the Loyalists. While Howe believed that Loyalists could fill some support roles and would be essential in providing supplies and intelligence he also felt, as Paul Smith writes, "that their main value would not involve their direct military participation" and furthermore, "Howe never considered Loyalists, enlisted in Provincial units, a substitute for regular reinforcements."[50] Certainly, Howe saw some worth in utilizing the Loyalists but certainly never imagined that Loyalist support would form the backbone of any British strategy. Lord Germain, on the other hand, already had come to place more faith in the Loyalists than did some of his military commanders.[51]

More relevant was the British government's failure to see the signs or ignore the signals of the level of Loyalist support in the Southern colonies. By late 1780, the British had already experienced a lack of Loyalist support in Georgia and in South Carolina. Some Loyalists did in fact join the British troops where the British established garrisons but the Loyalists never made up a majority of the population except in a few small areas.[52] Moreover, an ever-growing amount of information signaled that perhaps the principle of economy of force, which underpinned the entire campaign, begun to appear ineffectual. The British did not have enough troops in Georgia to control the countryside and they had failed to realize that in order to acquire Loyalist support, the British needed to secure territory. Without a large number of regulars, the British were unable to occupy much territory and their recruitment of Loyalists suffered accordingly.[53] Furthermore, requiring a large contingent of British regulars tasked with pacification called into question the entire premise of moving the war to the south. Without the

support in Parliament to raise taxes and increase the military resources in America, the British did not possess the ground forces necessary to do anything in the South not based on economy of force.

MCDP 1-1 *Strategy* succinctly states, "when we find our resources or abilities inadequate, we cut our ambitions to match."[54] The British had certainly recognized that their means were inadequate but they erred by not adjusting their ends. With a growing unpopularity at home in England and in Parliament and with the war now expanded with the entrance of France the British government needed to match its ambitions to the resources available. The British attempt to make up the difference with Loyalists demonstrated a measure of desperation.

A strategy based on the principle of economy of force would only have been possible if the Loyalists were 1) more numerous than their Patriot opponents and 2) extremely conciliatory in their motivations, agendas and conduct. With not enough British troops to assist in pacification, there would have to be a substantial amount of Loyalist support. However, by the time the British implemented this strategy, there was no good evidence that the Loyalists were as numerous as the British government believed.[55] Outnumbered in each of the Southern colonies, the Loyalists had their own agenda and their own ideas on how pacification would occur. Their actions were so out of concert with the British strategic and operational designs that the actions of the Loyalists completely worked against the underlying principle of economy of force.[56]

At the strategic level, the British government should have foreseen that this reaction by the Loyalists was a possibility. Lord Germain and the British leadership had a very poor understanding of the problem they faced. Once again, a more detailed comprehension of the situation in South Carolina would have provided them a more accurate view of Loyalist

motivations and capabilities. At the operational level, Clinton did possess some idea that this could occur. John Shy writes, "Clinton refused to unleash the Tory dogs of war; he sometimes resisted, sometimes evaded pressure to turn the war into one of counter-insurgent terrorism" and that "his refusal to undertake a full-scale campaign of terrorism stemmed also from a well-documented sense that the chief instrument of terrorism, the armed Loyalist, would poison the American political atmosphere beyond recovery, at best turning the colonies into a larger, more remote, less manageable version of Ireland."[57] This lack of common understanding among the British on how to utilize the Loyalists resulted in operational level commanders trying to implement a plan that they had far less faith in and Lord Germain who generated the strategy did not have to concern himself with executing it.

Certainly, there was no evidence since 1775 that the Loyalists would come out in overwhelming numbers or that they would be capable of shouldering enough responsibility that would allow the British to carry out their economy of force mission. As Wallace Brown states, "the Loyalists, a minority everywhere, often needed a British military presence, to flush them from their nests – hence the obvious connection between the British occupation and Loyalist strength in Georgia, South Carolina, New Jersey, New York, and elsewhere. New York had - more Loyalists than any other colony – partly a reflection of the long occupation of New York City."[58] The Loyalists, as John Calhoun states, "could only be mobilized at a price which the mother country could not afford to pay – the dispatch of enough troops to occupy large regions where fearful, insecure subjects of the Crown resided and thereby to overcome the sense of weakness which immobilized these defenseless people."[59]

The Southern campaign was not the first time the British explored enlisting the support of the Loyalists. Several times since the war began, the British had at least talked about using Loyalists as a way of supporting their military operations. However, what was lacking throughout the war was a comprehensive policy about the Loyalists who did make up a portion of the population at any time during the war.[60] Regardless of the size of the Loyalist population, a comprehensive policy needed to include how to view the Americans who rarely fit neatly into categories like rebel or patriot. Many Americans did not belong to either side and many changed sides as the fortunes of war shifted from one side to the other. Most importantly, at all times during the war a very sizable portion of the population was neutral and was taking a "wait and see" approach. This "wait and see" approach could succeed or fail for the British depending on what strategy or plan they developed. Yet, what the British never really appreciated that the essential issue was not enlisting the support of the Loyalists that would lead to pacification. The essential issue was convincing the neutral portion of the population that the British were the best alternative to the individual safety of the people and that it would be in the best interest of the people to give their support to the British.[61]

For many reasons the British leadership in London never fully developed a plan to use the Loyalist population of the American colonies and never developed a plan that targeted the neutral population as potential future Loyalists. Early in the war, the British thought that only a small number of "rabble rousers" were behind the rebellion, the British believed that the military would very quickly crush the rebellion and it would be easier, quicker and less expensive than recruiting, training and organizing Loyalist forces.[62] As the war unfolded, the British began to think more about using the Loyalists but repeatedly failed to comprehend the complexity of finding, securing and utilizing Loyalist support. General James Burgoyne in upstate New York

or General William Howe in Pennsylvania did not repeat what had worked fairly well in New York and New Jersey where the British army controlled territory by garrisoning the area with a substantial number of British regulars over an extended period of time. As a result, the numbers of Loyalists fell well below what the British had expected.

Strategic arrogance and poor planning helped account for why the Loyalists were never seriously, in earlier phases of the war, considered as a decisive source of support. Since the British pursued a military solution to winning the war, they never really gave serious thought to how military victory could transition into a political solution. Thus, when the Loyalists became the linchpin that success depended upon in the Southern campaign the British were at a loss on how to go about gathering that Loyalist support, how to organize the support they received and how to develop their plans for the Loyalists with some understanding as to Loyalist motivations, capabilities and weaknesses.[63]

The British failed strategically in regards to the Loyalists during the American Revolution and especially during the Southern campaign by failing to control territory. The ability to control territory was the critical requirement for Loyalist support to manifest as the British had done with some success in New York and New Jersey. Without that physical control of territory, the Loyalists would not risk life and property and come forward if the British were not present to protect them. If the British could not deliver protection, the Loyalists would usually not appear. When Loyalists did come forward and organize themselves without protection from British forces, they found themselves outnumbered and defeated by American militia units. In North Carolina in early 1776, the Royal Governor, Josiah Martin, attempted to crush the rebellion in his state by calling for Loyalists to assemble near Wilmington. The

Americans did the same and in late February, an American force of over a thousand decisively defeated a smaller Loyalist force of 800. Here was an early example of the extent of American and Loyalist support. Far from just a few colonial elite, the Loyalists obviously did not enjoy a vast majority of support compared to the rebels. Governor Martin's report after the battle stated that in fact American numbers far exceeded Loyalist totals.[64]

In the Southern campaign, the British government, due to the political and diplomatic situation, did not supply the manpower to adequately control territory and thus properly organize Loyalist support. This first occurred in Georgia in 1778 when British forces captured Savannah and moved inland to Augusta. The British did not have enough forces to hold the areas around Savannah and Augusta, as well as maintain communication between those two towns. Without enough British regular forces to maintain a permanent presence in Augusta, those forces pulled back to Savannah. The Americans reoccupied Augusta and Loyalists in the Augusta area did not have the protection required to come forward. Without the manpower to hold ground, the British did not reoccupy one of the thirteen American colonies because their control only existed in Savannah where they maintained a garrison.[65] Responsibility for providing the necessary manpower, of course, rested with the British leadership in London and failure to recognize that the Southern strategy with its reliance on Loyalist support was not compatible with the principle of economy of force. London considered this first test of the British Southern campaign and their new strategy a success but in reality, Lord Germain saw what he wanted to see and ignored what did not fit his preconceived strategic designs.

The British based their strategy on economy of force. British regulars, who were few in number, would focus on conventional operations. Loyalist forces would conduct pacification

once the British took control of a given area. This strategy was a way of maintaining the Parliamentary support for an increasingly unpopular war and a strategy that was in step with the growing military commitments around the globe. It was Lord Germain and the British strategic leadership that developed this strategy of economy of force for the Southern colonies. Faced with what they believed was a stalemate in the Northern colonies and anxious of some progress in a war that was becoming more unpopular the British government was essentially crafting a new strategy based on political necessity and out of desperation rather than sound and valid information. The evidence did not support the strategy they were committing themselves to and they set up their operational commanders to fail with a strategy that was based on unsound assumptions regarding the extent of Loyalist support, Loyalist capabilities and limitations and these poor assumptions made British plans to win the Southern campaign "on the cheap" almost impossible.

Conclusion

"It was widespread public support, though never undivided or unqualified that made American independence feasible. British reluctance to accept the reality of that support and to grasp its crucial importance undermined every effort to suppress the American rebellion."[66]

The Southern campaign ended for the British in decisive defeat at Yorktown, Virginia, in April 1781. What had started as a shift in the war's focus and the opening of a new theater in the American Revolution had resulted in disaster for the British and eventually independence for America. A combination of reasons on both sides account for the outcome and certainly American performance, which started poorly, progressively improved. The British performance, which began well gradually declined.

At the tactical level, British regulars and their Loyalist allies used tactics completely inappropriate for the type of conflict and through their actions; they exasperated the violence instead of pacifying the countryside. Additionally, the British and loyalists suffered several devastating tactical defeats at the hands of American regular and militia units reducing the overall strength of British ground forces and further complicating their ability to control territory. At the operational level, General Charles Cornwallis, consistently struggled with how to achieve the ends that he believed would equate to victory. Unable and unwilling to recognize the nature of the conflict and unable to recognize the true source of American strength, the British failed to correctly apply their combat power and thus conducted a campaign that almost from the beginning went in the wrong direction.

However, the British defeat ultimately occurred because of failures and mistakes at the strategic level in London. Faced in 1777 with a greatly expanded conflict in terms of scale, scope and difficulty, the British leadership in London increased the expectations of their military leaders fighting in America while, at the same time, reducing the resources at their disposal.[67] Further complicating matters for their commanders in America the British opened up a second American theater in the Southern colonies. Already stretched thin and facing French intervention, the British split their available forces and embarked upon the Southern Campaign. Ultimately based on the principle of economy of force, the campaign would rely little on British regulars, and heavily on the contributions and support of a large Loyalist population that they believed existed in the Southern colonies. The Loyalist support that the British relied on did not materialize and when it did, the Loyalists did not perform as the British had expected. What occurred in South Carolina did not at all resemble what the British had designed and the resulting failure eventually ended the war in British defeat.

The foremost explanation for this failure was a tendency by Lord Germain to interpret information to fit his previously established ideas and plans. As policy makers in 1777 struggled to construct strategy for limited wars, the same types of issues continue to challenge leaders at the strategic level today. Fully and correctly understanding the problem has been just as much a struggle for America as it was for the British to understand the environment in the thirteen American colonies. Furthermore, being able to identify a viable end-state that matches a thoughtful analysis of the problem is just as challenging today in Afghanistan as it was in America in the 1770s.

Lastly, strategic policy decisions have been and continue to be subject to the reality of politics and public support. For nations that participate in limited wars of national interest, maintaining domestic support is not only essential but must be part of the overall campaign plan. If this support cannot be maintained strategic leaders and planners will need to reassess and adjust their strategy and possibly the strategic end state. For Lord Germain and the British when public and political support began to wane the British constructed a strategy that maintained this support. However, this new strategy was not based on a firm grasp and understanding of the environment in the Southern colonies. Lord Germain framed the problem how he needed the problem framed in order to sell his new strategy and as Paul Smith states, "the administration tethered its strategy to the chimera of Loyalist support."[68]

Notes

[1] Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy,* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 173.

[2] Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies and Practice 1763-1789,* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), 354.

[3] David K. Wilson, *The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia 1775-1780,* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 266.

[4] Smith, 72.

[5] Piers Macksey, *The War for America 1775-1783,* (Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 147 and 159-160.

[6] Higginbotham, 431-432.

[7] John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782,* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1985), 3-4.

[8] Macksey, 174-176.

[9] Ibid, 272-274.

[10] Ira D. Gruber, "The Origins of British Strategy in the War for American Independence," in *Military History of the American Revolution: The Proceedings of the 6th Military History Symposium USAF Academy 10-11 October 1974,* ed. Stanley J. Underdal, 38-51 (Washington DC: Office of Air Force History, 1976), 44.

[11] Pancake, 10.

[12] Macksey, 263.

[13] Ibid, 263.

[14] John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 230.

[15] Wilson, 59.

[16] Richard M. Ketchum, *Saratoga,* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc.), 69.

[17] Smith, 171.

[18] Pancake, 12.

[19] John W. Gordon, *South Carolina and The American Revolution: A Battlefield History,* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 61.

[20] Gordon, 61.

[21] Smith, 88.

[22] Wilson, 266.

[23] Shy, 199.

[24] Smith, 121.

[25] Wilson, 62.

[26] Ibid, 61.

[27] Ira D. Gruber, *The Revolutionary War in the South: Power, Conflict and Leadership,* ed. Stanley J. Underdal, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), 218.

[28] Higginbotham, 354.

[29] Wilson, 63.

[30] Smith, 55.

[31] Wilson, 89.

[32] Ibid, 65-80.

[33] Pancake, 57-67.

[34] Walter Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats: The Southern Conflict That Turned the Tide of the American Revolution,* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 139.

[35] Wilson, 242.

[36] Smith, 139.

[37] Edgar, 140.

[38] John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse,* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1997), 307.

[39] Pancake, 49-50.

[40] John E. Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence,* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 517.

[41] Smith, 78.

[42] Shy, 129

[43] Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Strategy,* MCDP 1-1, (Washington D.C: U.S. Marine Corps, November 12, 1997), 95-96.

[44] Edgar, 122-123.

[45] Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Strategy,* MCDP 1-1, (Washington D.C: U.S. Marine Corps, November 12, 1997), 81.

[46] Smith, 141.

[47] Ibid, 141.

[48] Ira D. Gruber, *The Revolutionary War in the South: Power, Conflict and Leadership,* ed. Stanley J. Underdal, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), 218.

[49] Ibid, 218-219.

[50] Smith, 46-47.

[51] Ibid, 47.

[52] Higginbotham, 134-135.

[53] Robert M. Calhoon, "Civil, Revolutionary or Partisan: The Loyalists and the Nature of the War of Independence," in *Military History of the American Revolution: The Proceedings of the 6th Military History Symposium USAF Academy 10-11 October 1974,* ed. Stanley J. Underdal, 93-109 (Washington DC: Office of Air Force History, 1976), 101.

[54] Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Strategy,* MCDP 1-1, (Washington D.C: U.S. Marine Corps, November 12, 1997), 51.

[55] Wilson, 63.

[56] Shy, 130-131.

[57] Ibid, 191-192

[58] Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution,* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1969), 58-59.

[59] Calhoun, 101.

[60] Smith, vii.

[61] Ibid, 168-170.

[62] Ibid, 168-169.

[63] Shy, 197.

[64] Wilson, 30-35.

[65] Ibid, 101-102.

[66] Shy, 296.

[67] Wilson, 63-64.

[68] Smith, 98.

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