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13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the curriculum. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT This paper maintains that the British military successes in the North American theater in 1776 failed to produce a quick victory because British military planners fundamentally misunderstood operational factors at play in the theater, made critical miscalculations concerning the presence and durability of organic loyalist support, and were profoundly restrained by a confluence of operational factors at play in the theater. The biggest driving factors to the British failure were the failure to appreciate that the American insurgency was a widespread affair, rather than a localized or sectorized threat to rule of law, the employment of policies and tactics that created political consequences that eroded support amongst the American populace, and domestic cultural factors that restrained the British military response.					
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Thesis: British military successes in North America during 1776 failed to produce a quick victory over the Americans because the British military planners fundamentally misunderstood the operational factors at play, made critical miscalculations concerning the presence and durability of organic loyalist support, and were profoundly restrained by geopolitical factors in their pursuit of victory.

Supporting Arguments:

- a. *British leadership misunderstood the operational landscape of the American colonies. This misunderstanding caused the British administration to prepare a law enforcement action rather than a bona fide military effort to suppress a widespread insurgency.*

The American colonies were established as colonies of settlement rather than of resource extraction. (Mackesy 553) British settlers created the institutions of civil society shortly after arriving on the continent. A generalized sense of self-governance and autonomy flourished due to salutary neglect and the necessities imposed by distance-related delays in communication and supply. (O'Shaughnessy 174-177) These delays had the second-order effect of detaching British leadership from the ground truth developing in their American colonies. (O'Shaughnessy 188-191)

At the outset of the war, the belief in British circles was that the American insurrection was the product of a minority faction led by an insular conspirator group. (Mackesy 547-548) Adherents to this belief maintained that the loyal British subjects living in the American colonies faced imminent danger from a lawless group of wayward insurrectionists. The insurrectionists were mostly concentrated in New England and corrupted their fellow countrymen's minds while trampling on loyalists' rights. Essential to this perspective was the notion that most British

subjects residing in the American colonies were loyal to the Crown and would rise to support the British army when it landed. (O'Shaughnessy 10-11, 188-189, 354-355)

According to this perspective, the Continental Army and Congress were the physical manifestations of the adversary's center of gravity. Planners sincerely believed that the destruction of the Continental Army and Congress's disbandment would allow for order to be restored and protect legitimate British interests, including restoration of lawful taxing actions. The initial plans called for exploiting the rebellion's critical vulnerability by killing or capturing essential rebel leadership. If the tumor could be excised, the patient would heal in due time.

This perspective was ideologically convenient, as it allowed military and political planners to disregard the far more concerning possibility that the British rule was regarded as illegitimate by most colonists. While it remains challenging to assess loyalist support amongst the colonists, it is now accepted that the source of the overstated loyalist support in the colonies was British citizens' reports in England with vested interests in the colonies. They dramatically overstated the colonists' organic support for British action due both to self-interest and wishful thinking. (Mackesy 547) Planners also accepted certain assumptions without critical assessment, such as the assumption that the southern colonies were unshakable bastions of support that would require little military support to pacify, and that would ultimately provide personnel and materials to support the British army. (Mackesy 547-548)

The American movement's actual center of gravity was the movement's political legitimacy in their fellow colonists' eyes. Years of salutary neglect, arbitrary and capricious state actions, and oppressive taxing policies diminished England's political legitimacy and bolstered the Continental Congress' claims. Because political legitimacy in a cause such as this is not embodied in any person, the killing or capturing of any combination of leaders was unlikely to

derail the rebellion. The death of a highly visible person, such as Washington, may have had the contrary effect. Worse for the British, the mere movement and presence of their Hessian ground forces radicalized local populations, delegitimized their presence, and validated the rebels' claims that the British were a distinct, unwelcome power operating on Americans shores.

(O'Shaughnessy 10-11)

British military planners also fundamentally misunderstood the critical strength of the rebels. The source of the rebellion's power was not its ability to corrupt loyal subjects. It was the distributed force and logistical laydown of the Continental Army, means of production, and the militia system. Colonies did not have traditional European-style capital cities whose seizures could force a settlement. Agriculture, industry, and people were spread throughout an expansive territory that would require unsustainable manpower and resource commitments on the part of the British to hold. (Weigley 22) The theater's extensive size also directly supported the Continental Army's strategic defense plan because the British Army was incurring losses due to local militia action, camp illness, and negative local interactions as they moved in pursuit of the American force. (O'Shaughnessy 165) As lines of action stretched, costs skyrocketed for the British forces.

A lack of understanding about the operational factors at play caused the British to miss a tremendous opportunity that could have been realized immediately after the initial battles. The Continental Army's workforce and staffing model represented a critical vulnerability that was not properly exploited. The Continental Army spent the war fighting manpower and supply shortages, camp illnesses, and the British, seemingly in that order. Short term enlistments were as typical as defections and fraudulent enlistments. The Continental Army never realized its

congressionally authorized end strength and often teetered on total collapse, as troops routinely departed the ranks at the end of their enlistments. (Weigley 4-5)

After the initial victories, an intelligent British strategy would have been to offer to parole any defecting rebels, offer bonuses or land grants to encourage defection, and accept the higher costs of operation by purchasing supplies in contested theaters to deny the Continental Army access to support. These approaches may have inspired enough people to walk from Valley Forge to the nearest fireplace and to discard their weapons along the path. Offering privateers special licenses that afforded access to preferential trade routes may also have wooed enough of them to reduce the threat and unbelievable costs that they imposed on British shipping. (O'Shaughnessy 331) This approach would have been incredibly difficult to sell to the hardline British authorities who opposed any conciliatory approaches. (O'Shaughnessy 176-177) Ironically, the hardline approach that was intended to bring a rapid conclusion to the conflict likely forced its protraction.

- b. British military and political leadership failed to appreciate the true scope and depth of loyalist support from the outset of the conflict and adopted policies and tactics that eroded the base of loyalist support while legitimizing the rebellion.*

The British planning assumptions were overly optimistic regarding both the strength and prevalence of loyalist support in the American colonies. At the outset, the planning assumption was that many colonists would greet the British army as liberators while swelling their ranks with loyalist militia support, that the southern colonies would be a secondary theater at worst, and that the overwhelming support for the rebellion could be found in New England. (Mackesy 547)

While there were loyalists throughout the colonies, they were nowhere near well enough organized, armed, or equipped to provide meaningful force augmentations to the main British

force. This is particularly true in the months immediately before the conflict, as loyalists were systematically excluded from positions of trust and confidence in local militias and governments. (O'Shaughnessy 9-11) This created a local environment where loyalists were either abstaining from conflict outright or were operating in small, ineffective cohorts against their local governments' machinery. (Weigley 23-26)

As the belief that loyalists who were willing to support the British cause comprised a majority of the civilian population decayed into the belief that they were the silent majority, the British Army seemed to undertake every possible action to derail local support, marginalize loyalists, and reinvigorate the rebelling colonists. (O'Shaughnessy 354-355) Four significant practices employed by the British were particularly disastrous for fostering political support in the Americas.

First, the British Exchequer sought to reduce the conflict's financial burdens and encouraged military leadership to forage or commandeer necessary supplies from British colonists. The practice of "living off of the land" was widespread at the time, and there was no practical alternative to this supply method due to the length of lines of communication. (O'Shaughnessy 12-13, 197) Realities of war in the American colonies did little to cool the anger of colonists who had their assets taken by the army, and this built resentment that was exploited by the Americans. (O'Shaughnessy 11)

Second, the British land army failed to act to prevent acts of retaliation against former separatists. This was particularly true in the southern colonies. Separatists who defected or who did not re-enlist once their enlistments expired were quickly made a target of reprisal actions by loyalists. These actions often included significant property destruction or outright violence and

were cited as a significant reason why many high-profile American rebels rejoined the fight. The net outcome of this was that pacified areas were forced back into contention. (Weigley 25)

Third, the British missed a tremendous opportunity to delay the rebellion when they received actionable information that British and local rule's very mechanisms were being disassembled and co-opted by those sympathetic to rebellion. Their failure to act early enough when it should have become clear that the colonies' local town governments were rapidly manning militias populated entirely by those sympathetic to the cause of rebellion. (O'Shaughnessy 9)

Finally, the British's political strategy was disastrous insofar as it eroded the support they needed in the south and west and kept those areas in contention throughout the conflict's duration without producing much positive effect in the mid-Atlantic or New England areas of operation. Promising freedom to defecting slaves, supporting tribal armament and action, and deploying Hessian mercenaries throughout the area all marginalized loyalists and made the pacification of contested areas far more difficult, if not impossible. (O'Shaughnessy 354-355)

- c. Geopolitical restraints prevented British leadership from adequately expanding and changing their North American operations, resulting in a half-hearted attempt to suppress the insurgency.*

The earliest victories failed to produce an outright victory in the American colonies because of the interplay between geopolitical factors and British actions. Peer competition was a major limiting factor that forced the British to restrain their initial response and limit their follow-up actions. In the American theater, the French intervention on behalf of the American colonists complicated the naval picture by placing British shipping, troop transports, and warships in danger. French warships forced the British to increase their maritime commitment to the conflict by sending more ships to the American theater, to other colonies to prevent adverse

actions, and to reinforce the British mainland to protect against invasion. The French navy also frustrated the free movement of British soldiers along the coast and stopped the rescue of Cornwallis' forces at Yorktown. (Pritchard 89-90)

There was a recurring fear that overcommitment or escalation of action in the American theater could also reduce the British ability to respond to a contingency situation at home or another colonial holding. (O'Shaughnessy 331, 340) Britain was confronting the American revolutionaries at precisely the same time that it faced a united continental Europe. They encountered this geopolitical situation with a naval fleet in reasonably poor condition, that was not adequately resourced or manned, and that was equipped with dated weapons. (O'Shaughnessy 331, 340, 345, 355) The concern that a combined French and Spanish action could hazard the English homeland was palpable and pervasive amongst English authorities. This fear of invasion was ever-present and reached near panic levels when France and Spain declared war against Great Britain in 1778 and 1779, respectively. (Weigley 21)

The British financial situation was also a major limiting factor and was a significant cause of the American revolution. Fleet modernization efforts led by the Earl of Sandwich and the fielding of large armies were incredibly expensive aspirations. The national debt was soaring, and there was a concern that the Crown's balance sheet would face undue pressure from a more considerable action in the American colonies. (O'Shaughnessy 331, 345-347, 355) Attempts to reduce the cost of colonial activities included implementing the taxing laws that drew the ire of the revolutionaries, directives to the British forces to raid local supplies, and limiting the availability of larger naval ships. (O'Shaughnessy 11-13, 197)

While the Americans were fighting an existential conflict that would determine their ability to exist as an autonomous state, the British were confronting one rebellion that made up

only a part of their commitments and challenges. Collateral obligations prevented the British from making a broader commitment to the American theater and contributed to the inability to capitalize on the earliest victories.

Counter-Argument: A reasonable argument could be made that the earliest successes failed to produce a net victory because the British failed to commit adequate resources, particularly naval resources, to the conflict. While the British were incapable of maintaining a perfect blockade along the eastern seaboard, the British navy could have sent a significant contingent of naval ships to Boston, New York, and Philadelphia at the outset of the conflict as a mass show of force and to amplify the impact of the army's victories.

A show of force may have been visually impressive, but it would likely have failed to produce a different result by the terminal phase of the conflict without significant political operations, such as those discussed above. The luster of a moored ship quickly dulls, and those ships would be needed to check French action off the coast of North America and around other colonial holdings. A shock-and-awe approach should also be considered suspect because there is not much evidence that its impact would be felt far beyond the ships' visual range.

Conclusion: The British military successes in North America during 1776 failed to produce a quick victory over the Americans because the colonists' struggle for independence could not be reversed through military force. Military action can snuff out a nascent insurgency that enjoys little support, and it can force a population to languish in oppression while they toil in a resource extraction colony, but it cannot imbue a system of government with political legitimacy. It was the lack of political legitimacy that inspired and sustained the rebellion.

By the time military successes were being realized in North America, the colonists had established a government and currency system, enjoyed a rudimentary infrastructure network,

and were able to establish diplomatic relations with Britain's European continental adversaries.

The successes did not end the war because military action was the wrong tool for the job.

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