

History 225
Re: Lecture/Outline # 3

CTR

General Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan for Victory

Short bio. on Scott:

At the time the Civil War began Scott was general-in-chief of the Northern armies. He was the finest soldier of the first 70 years of the Republic. He fought in the War of 1812 and came to recognition w/ victory over British Regulars at Chippewa. Scott was the architect of the US army's defeat of the Mexicans in the Mexican-American war (1846-8).

By the time of the Civil War Scott was 75 years old. His former impressive mental and physical stature was devastated by age and especially by gross obesity. (He could not even mount a horse he was so hugh by 1861). The demands of enormous frame sapped all his energies. During staff meetings or strategy sessions with the President and his adviers Scott was likely to drift off.

Scott's grand strategy for a Union victory called the Anaconda Plan was two-fold:

1. Blocade of the CSA's Atlantic Ocean ports

2. Use of navy and army in joint cooperation to control the Mississippi (thus splitting the Confederacy) and then a massive use of land troops to march from New Orleans across the Lower South (as Sherman would ultimately do in 1864/5) with a sweep up toward the Virginia battlefields.

The Anaconda plan deployed the Union's two initial physical superiorities: its great pool of manpower which would allow it to confront the South on two fronts: Richmond/Petersburg and to take a large force across the Lower South. (Pinning the CSA forces in Virginia to protect the capital and not relieve the marching columns of Union troops marching through Georgia and the Carolinas. And its greater industrial technology (the fighting ship in blockade mission and taking control of the Mississippi. Thus, the Union would over time squeeze the South into submission.

The problem was time. Lincoln did not have time. The North--papers, Congress, and the general populace wanted action and action soon.

O\Point here: The Civil War was perhaps the most democratic war in our history.

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Here was the danger: Pose a hypothetical worse case scenerio:

Britain and France (with other European nations in tow) would offer to mediate the crisis in America. The purpose would be to stop the terrible slaughter taking place in America. The entire civilized world was appalled over this viscious war. They demanded that it be ended, etc, etc.

Richmond would have responded with alacrity and sent her delegates to a "peace" conference at some neutral site. Some place on the continent.

Lincoln would have refused mightly. he would have also warned England/France, etc. that the Civil War was not an issue for mediation. That European nations must mind their own collective business.

The "peace" conference would go on and the CSA would be in their seats. Britain taking the lead would recognize that while the Union was recalcitrant the Confederacy was peace-loving and amenable to a solution of the problem. Britain would move now to recognize the Confederacy. Conditional upon recognition would be to open trade with the CSA.

Trade would entail breaking the Union blockade. Shooting and war between the Union and Britain, France, et al.

Consequences: See A. Nevins page on this.

Trent Affair: Covered in text. This event nearly pushed England into belligerent status. This was an affair of honor. US Ambassador to Court of St. James (Charles Francis Adams) told his legation that they would be home in a month.

Secretary of State Seward was overheard in a conversation at the Portuguese embassy in WDC that if England wanted war she shall have it. "We will wrap the whole world in flames!"

Seward's role during this whole 18 months was to make it clear that if England went beyond neutrality (eg. recognition) that war was a certainty. He played hard ball all the way. This did influence the British.

Summary: Trent affair blew over when the Union returned th two Southern diplomats--George Mason (author of the infamous 1850 Fugitive Slave Act) and Slidell (a red-hot secessionist).

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England never moved to initiate mediation and/or recognition? Why?

Answers have been because Lincoln preempted the issue with the Emancipation Proclamation in September. This explanation is flawed.

The basic reasons were (1) England was not going to involved herself is that if she introduced mediation or extended recognition prematurely she would find herself in a war with the Union. The Palmerston govt. feared that the first casualty in any Anglo-American War would be Canada. The US would strike hard and perhaps fatally at the British dominion in North America.

(2) What I meant by prematurely, is just that there was a flaw in the Confederacy diplomacy on this issue. Richmond assumed by playing her King Cotton card she could blackmail England to extend recognition and thereby win her independence. The reality of the situation was that before England would extend recognition the CSA was going to have to show signs that she could or had won her independence on the battlefield.

Well after Antietam the Palmerston govt. was still on the verge of initiating mediation. Epecially true after 2nd Bull Run. Then Lee decided to take the war into the North again, this time into Pennsylvania. The upshot was the 3-days of Gettysburg. A defeat for the Confederacy--big time. England had held back to see what the outcome would be.

With Lee's defeat and retreat cooler heads began to take over in the higher reaches of the British govt. Mediation was soon dropped as a practical possibility.
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