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Anatomy of a Failed Occupation: The U.S. Army in the Former Confederate States, 1865 to 1877

Louis A. DiMarco

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Anatomy of a Failed Occupation:

The U.S. Army in the Former Confederate States, 1865 to 1877

by Louis A. DiMarco

Louis A. DiMarco retired as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army in July 2005 after more than 24 years of active service. He was commissioned as an Armor officer from the U.S. Military Academy in 1981. His military assignments include command and staff positions in armored cavalry squadrons and division, corps and joint forces headquarters. He was a doctrine writer both at the U.S. Army Armor Center at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from the U.S. Military Academy, a Master's Degree in Military Art and Science from the U.S. Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, and a Master of Arts Degree in International Relations from Salve Regina University, Rhode Island. He is a Ph.D. candidate at Kansas State University and is writing a dissertation focused on U.S. Army occupation operations from 1865 to 1940.

Currently Mr. DiMarco is assigned to the faculty of the Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, where he teaches military history and elective courses on the history of modern urban warfare and modern warfare in the Middle East. He has authored several key Army doctrinal manuals including Field Manual (FM) 3-06, *Urban Operations* (2002). He also contributed to the Army's recent manual FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (2006). Other written projects include an award-winning monograph on reconnaissance doctrine in World War II, a contribution to the 2003 Combat Studies Institute publication *Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations*, and the first work in the Combat Studies Institute's Global War on Terror series entitled *Traditions, Changes, and Challenges: Military Operations and the Middle Eastern City* (2004). He has written and lectured on a variety of military affairs topics including urban warfare and counterinsurgency. His most recent work is an article entitled "Losing the Moral Compass: Torture and Guerre Revolutionaire in the Algerian War," published in *Parameters*, Summer 2006.

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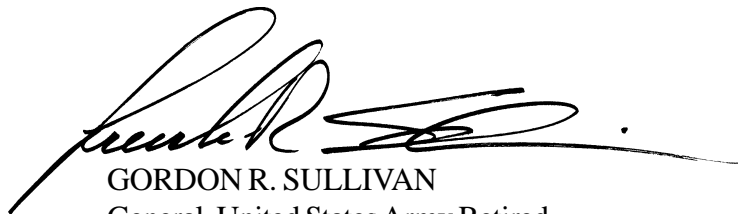
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Foreword

The occupation of the Southern states by the U.S. Army after the end of the Civil War highlights numerous lessons—as applicable today as they were in the 19th century—regarding occupation-type missions. One of the most important is that occupation policies must be executed decisively immediately after hostilities to take advantage of the physiological state of the enemy population immediately after defeat. Additionally, failure of the occupation to consolidate the political objectives of the war will result in the Army and the nation having to confront those issues again at a future date. Finally, occupation operations must be viewed as the final phase of strategic warfighting. Post-conflict operations are essential to strategic success. Successful post-conflict operations require that the government recognize the political nature of the operations, mobilize domestic support for them, resource the Army to conduct them, and be prepared to sustain the operations over a long period of time. Success also requires that the Army institutionally embrace the mission. Failure to do so will result in failure to obtain strategic objectives, squander the opportunities achieved through battlefield victory, and ultimately require reengagement of the problems at a later date.

“Anatomy of a Failed Occupation: The U.S. Army in the Former Confederate States, 1865 to 1877” examines the factors that contributed to the failure of the United States to achieve its postwar strategic objectives in the occupied former Confederate states after the conclusion of the Civil War. Specifically, the paper focuses on why the U.S. Army was unable to successfully transform the political and social environment in the occupied states.



GORDON R. SULLIVAN
General, United States Army Retired
President

November 2007

Anatomy of a Failed Occupation: The U.S. Army in the Former Confederate States, 1865 to 1877

The United States Army won a great victory through a series of brilliant campaigns. The enemy's capital and major cities were under U.S. control. The field armies were destroyed, the enemy's government had fled and its leaders were captured or in hiding. All agreed that it was a great feat of American arms, and the Army paraded through Washington with its mission accomplished. Amidst the heady euphoria of victory, it was impossible for the President, Congress, the generals, the soldiers and the country at large to imagine that in a few years much of the fruit of the great victory would largely be squandered through a mismanaged postwar occupation. In the subsequent years, a vicious insurgency, shrewd political maneuvering, partisan domestic politics, insufficient resources and a lack of political, military and popular will resulted in the failure of U.S. postwar policy.

In the years between 1865 and 1877, the U.S. Army and the American government mismanaged the occupation of the ex-Confederate states; the result was that most of the strategic political objectives of the "Reconstruction" were subverted or not obtained. The experience of the U.S. Army in the ex-Confederate states illustrates the challenges and complexity of postwar operations.

For at least a decade after the end of the Cold War, a central theme of the senior leadership of the U.S. Army was that the Army's core mission was "fighting and winning the nation's wars."¹ This was often a euphemism for the point of view that the Army is not designed for unclear nation-building operations. However, the experience of Reconstruction makes clear the point that at the strategic level post-conflict operations are the continuation of the war at a lower scale of violence and with a greater role for strategic political policy. Post-conflict operations are a part of war; if the Army is to win the nation's wars, it must have a robust post-conflict capability. If the Army as an institution refuses to embrace this view of war and to plan and organize for it, it is doomed to repeat the failure of the occupation of the Confederacy.

Overview

Though occupation of the Southern states was not technically the U.S. Army's first experience with occupation (the Army had occupied portions of Mexico in the 1840s), it was the first time large-scale occupation duties—for an extended period of time and with the intent of supporting the political transformation of the occupied area—had been conducted. The post-Civil War environment was the Army's first experience with imposed regime change and political and social reconstruction. The role of the U.S. Army—which occupied the Southern states in a variety of configurations and under various authorizations from 1865 to 1877—in Reconstruction and the occupation of the secessionist states can be divided into five phases.

The first phase of the occupation was a short period of direct military government occurring immediately after the military defeat of the Confederate forces and the establishment of military control by federal authorities. In some states, such as Louisiana, this occurred in parts of the state as early as 1862. The second phase was Presidential Reconstruction, which began under President Abraham Lincoln before the war ended but in reality was the policy of and was supervised by President Andrew Johnson after Lincoln's assassination. Presidential Reconstruction lasted until it was overturned by the Congressional Reconstruction Act of March 1867, and the period of Congressional—sometimes called Radical—Reconstruction began.

The third and fourth phases of the occupation took place during the period of Congressional Reconstruction. Phase three was direct military rule by military governors. In this phase military commanders were tasked with registering voters and supervising the creation of state constitutions and the election of civil governments. The Army applied and enforced strict voting criteria, previously established by Congress. Phase four began with the transfer of power from military government to civil government elected under Army supervision. States were then readmitted to the Union and state congressional delegates were admitted to Congress. This began in 1868 and lasted in the various states until Republican party governments were ousted over the course of the following decade—the last Reconstruction government was replaced in Louisiana in 1877.

The two phases of Congressional Reconstruction were followed by the final phase of Reconstruction, known in the South as the Redemption period. During this phase Republican party governments, elected originally under military supervision, were replaced by Democratic party governments. This Redemption period was characterized by terrorism, intimidation and corruption. By the end of 1874 the Democrats had carefully used a combination of court suits, intimidation, voter registration, terrorism and ballot-box stuffing to regain control of Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas and Texas.² It had no specific end and in some states carried on in some forms into the 20th century. In terms of its relationship to the Army's occupation duties, the final phase ended in 1877 with the compromise that awarded the 1876 presidential election to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes in exchange for federal recognition of Democratic party control in Louisiana and South Carolina. After taking office, Hayes ended the Army's post-conflict missions in the secessionist Southern states.

Failure

Modern historians see the occupation of the South as a failure because most of the political objectives of Reconstruction policy were either undermined or not achieved. To be sure, the major objectives of the war—preserving the Union of the United States and abolishing slavery—were achieved. However, underlying the broad war objectives were assumptions regarding the political transformation of Southern government and society; that transformation was unsuccessful. By 1877, the leadership of the Southern states—governors, congressmen and other notable state and local officials—was predominantly of the same class and ideology that had led the South into rebellion in 1861. Even more disheartening was the undermining of abolition. Though the slaves were free, the resurgent Southern leadership, and their political

allies in the north, restricted the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the point that most Southern Freedmen were unable to vote, did not have equality of opportunity, and were legally and socially relegated into a subservient class. Thus, the social status of the Freedmen and the political structure of the South, though altered from their antebellum form, fell far short of the objectives envisioned by the American government at the end of the Civil War. It would require a second Reconstruction period—the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s—to complete the political, social and economic transformation of the South envisioned by the liberal Republicans of the Civil War era.

Why It Failed

The failure of Reconstruction was more a political failure than a military failure. However, post-conflict operations are conducted in an environment where military organizations and capabilities are intricately involved in the execution of political policy. The threat of force, rather than force itself, along with leadership and a stable reliable organizational structure were the military capabilities needed to impose order and change on the South amid the chaos of the defeat of the Confederacy. The Army's organizational structure was the essential tool for disseminating policy, supervising administration, enforcing laws and executing justice in an environment where the civil structure could not or would not perform essential governmental functions. Although the Army demonstrated its ability to perform the required administrative tasks well in specific instances, Reconstruction of the South failed because the Army could not replicate its successes over an extended period of time and over the entire occupied area. One reason for this failure was that the Army did not embrace the mission. Army commanders, even those who proved dedicated and talented administrators of civil government in the South, hated the mission. More important, national partisan politics, local political opposition, lack of planning, terrorism, lack of resources and lack of will all contributed to the army's inability to achieve and sustain success throughout the South.

Partisan Politics

One of the important reasons for the failure of the occupation was partisan politics in Washington. Post-conflict operations for the military require the application of nonlethal military capabilities—backed up by the threat of force—more than the direct application of force. The military's communications, organizational and manpower resources are as important as its combat capabilities. However, all of these capabilities must be fixed on a clearly defined political goal. This was not the case in the postwar South. A constant political struggle waged by a variety of political partisans characterized the entire Reconstruction period. The policy wars caused the replacement of the Secretary of War, presidential impeachment, presidential vetoes, overriding of vetoes, and frequent relief of senior commanders in the occupied states. The result was constantly shifting policies, priorities and directions.

Without a clearly articulated Army commander's intent, with a controversial and distracted Secretary of War and with the President and Congress in a political fight to the death, early Reconstruction was largely left to local commanders, who were hampered by lack of policy

and funding. Thus postwar occupation was a fragmented and disorganized process from the beginning. Commanders continued to change frequently after the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, as the President attempted to use his authority as Commander-in-Chief to emplace politically sympathetic generals, and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and General Ulysses S. Grant, General in Chief of the Army, attempted to mitigate the influence of politically motivated changes with changes and policies of their own.

The partisan dispute over Southern policy made achieving the eventual goals of the occupation very difficult and aided Southerners insistent on resisting federal government-imposed reform. Immediately after the war the white population of the South was subjugated and their leadership discredited. This was the period when the moral and physical powers of the occupation forces were at their greatest. However, two years of regressive Presidential Reconstruction policy allowed the Southern leadership to rally and the memory of defeat to fade. General Grant recognized the growing defiance of the whites in the South and had concerns that the victory won by the army would be lost in the postwar political maneuvering. He told the *New York Times* in 1866, “A year ago they were willing to do anything; now they regard themselves as masters of the situation.”³ In November 1866 Grant observed that continued occupation was necessary “to ensure the execution of law, and to protect life and property against the acts of those, who, as yet, will acknowledge no law but force.”⁴ Thus, when the Army tried to execute the progressive Congressional Reconstruction policy after 1867, it faced an organized and belligerent opposition. The two-year delay before moving forward with a progressive Reconstruction policy lost the physical advantages of a large occupation army and the psychological advantages of having just won victory on the battlefield. By 1867 the Union Army was widely resented by the white Southern population and their officials. General Philip Sheridan observed in 1867 that

nearly every civil officer within my command was either openly or secretly opposed to the law and to myself. . . . [There was only] one sensible course to pursue and that was to remove every civil officer who did not faithfully execute the law, or who put any impediment in the way of its execution.⁵

Northern partisan politics emboldened the Southern white population. Execution of policy absent a cowed population was extremely problematic.

Southern Political Opposition

The political attacks on Reconstruction did not occur only in Washington. There was an active and effective local political campaign against Army enforcement of occupation policy. These local campaigns took two forms: One was passive resistance to Army policy and operations—local government officials and citizens, mayors, sheriffs and jurors refused to support Army efforts to control resistance or enforce the law. The other political resistance was more active and took the form of public officials inciting the people in their districts to resist the policies of the Army and the United States government. In virtually all cases, local officials backed down when directly confronted by the Army. However, insufficient resources

precluded the Army from being everywhere. Additionally, many local politicians attempted to walk the edge of insubordination to government policy, often making it a matter of the Army commander's judgment as to whether they should be removed from office. Local civilian leaders as well as Army commanders recognized that the advantage lay with shrewd local politicians. If the Army allowed a local politician to act against government policy, his standing and influence in the community went up. Paradoxically, if the Army prevented him from acting against government policy, his support among the local population also increased. Thus, though possessing unlimited power to summarily remove civil officials, Army leaders were very judicious in exercising that power, and their real practical power was limited. Army commanders understood the political maneuvering of Southern state politicians. General John Pope wrote to General Grant concerning Georgia state politicians:

These politicians are wily and sagacious. They will make no laws which are not equal on their face to all men. It is in the execution of these laws, which seem to bear equally on all, that wrong will be done and a condition of things produced which bears no resemblance to free government except in name.⁶

Lack of Planning

The divisiveness of the political partisans regarding postwar policy might have been mitigated if the Army and the U.S. government had entered the occupation with a clearly articulated plan and goals for governance in both the short and long terms. However, the American Army gave no thought to the post-conflict period or its role in it until well after General Robert E. Lee had surrendered to Grant. General Philip Sheridan put it bluntly:

At the time of Kirby Smith's surrender the National Government had formulated no plan with regard to these or the other States lately in rebellion, though a provisional Government had been set up in Louisiana as early as 1864.⁷

Post-conflict planning by the Army would have prevented a power vacuum into which the traditional Southern leadership inserted itself, and would have acted as a mechanism to push civil political policy planning before the war ended.

Terror and Intimidation

Another reason that the occupation failed was the success of terror and intimidation in undermining the political process. Intimidation and terror against Unionists and Freedmen existed before the war ended and continued after the peace. It became increasingly pronounced in 1866, when the Ku Klux Klan was founded as a Tennessee social club. By 1868 the Klan had spread to every Southern state and had launched a deliberate reign of terror to intimidate the Republican vote—black and white—in the Southern states.⁸ Though they did not have a central command and control apparatus, the various local Klan groups were united by a common purpose and common set of tactics. “In effect, the Klan was a military force serving the interests of the Democratic party, the planter class, and all those who desired restoration of white supremacy.”⁹

The third phase of Reconstruction—the return of military government—was short and relatively successful. General George H. Thomas, commander of the Department of the Cumberland, reported:

Although there still remains much to be desired in the way of protection to life and property throughout my command, outrages are not now so prevalent as formerly; but the feeling of the people does not warm in love for the government or its flag.¹⁰

The essential tasks of military government were accomplished—constitutions were written, voters registered, local and state elections held—and the military governors turned over administration to elected civil authorities. By the summer of 1868 seven states had been returned to civil control.

Although the third phase of Reconstruction was largely successful, after authority was turned over to civil leaders, disgruntled whites increased the use of terror and intimidation to erode Freedmen and Unionist white political power. The Southern white population was increasingly defiant in the face of Army success in imposing Reconstruction policy. A Democratic newspaper vowed, “These constitutions and governments will last just as long as the bayonets which ushered them into being, shall keep them in existence, and not one day longer.”¹¹ The terrorists were effective at discouraging blacks and Republican whites (carpetbaggers¹² and scalawags¹³) from voting.

Local Army commanders, after turning power over to elected civil officials in 1867–68, were not unaware of what was happening. When General Alfred H. Terry took command in Georgia, he recommended to Major General H. W. Halleck that

all orders recognizing Georgia as a state of the Union be revoked, and that the military authority of a district commander under the reconstruction laws, with authority to try citizens by military tribunals, be restored or resumed in that state.¹⁴

Terry further reported:

There can be no doubt of the existence of numerous, insurrectionary organizations known as the ku-klux klans, who shielded by their disguises, by the secrecy of their movements, and by the terror which they inspire, perpetrate crime with impunity.¹⁵

However, in the critical year of 1868 senior Army commanders were unwilling to take action. General Halleck, commander of the Department of the South, stated:

Although there may be special organizations of outlaws in particular localities under the name of Ku-Klux, I am of the opinion that no such general organization now exists in the Southern States.¹⁶

General in Chief Grant, a supporter of Southern reform, was distracted by running for President in 1868, and General William T. Sherman, his replacement as General in Chief in 1869, was determined that the Army would be as removed from politics as possible.

The Klan and other supremacist organizations, such as the White League in Louisiana, were effective wherever Army troops were absent. Historian Eric Foner described a wave of counterrevolutionary terror that swept over large parts of the South between 1868 and 1871 [that] lacks a counterpart either in the American experience or in that of the other Western Hemisphere societies that abolished slavery in the nineteenth century.¹⁷

One out of every ten black members of the 1867–68 state constitutional conventions became the victim of Klan-type violence. Seven were murdered by white groups.¹⁸ The rule of law broke down in many places in the South, and General Terry reported from Georgia, “In many parts of the state there is presently no government.”¹⁹ It was no surprise that in the 1868 presidential election the two Southern states that Grant did not carry were Louisiana and Georgia, where violence decimated the Republican organizations and made it impossible to get out the black vote.²⁰

The Army response to the terrorist threat was initially haphazard. During Andrew Johnson’s administration, commanders who acted decisively against terrorists were relieved. After Grant became President in 1869, commanders who acted decisively with force were effective at suppressing them. Texas and Arkansas were able to launch very effective anti-Klan campaigns. Arkansas Governor Powel Clayton put ten counties under martial law and used the state militia, made up of blacks and scalawag whites, to enforce the law. Scores of Klansmen were arrested and three executed after trial by military tribunals. By early 1869 the Klan was eliminated as a force in Arkansas politics. In Texas, Governor Edmund J. Davis organized an elite 200-member state police of which 40 percent were black. Between 1870 and 1872 they made more than 6,000 arrests and effectively suppressed the Klan. Similar tactics in North Carolina, however, failed to achieve the desired result because of indecisive leadership and an inadequate legal foundation for the action.²¹

An obstacle to vigorous pursuit of the Klan was commanders with conservative political and social views who chose to ignore the evidence of Klan activity. Despite some successes, these attitudes—and a lack of troops—allowed the terrorists to operate unchecked in most of the South. This situation changed in 1871 as the Grant administration made a priority of reestablishing the rule of law. Using the enforcement acts, the federal government pursued the Klan through the offices of Attorney General Amos T. Akerman and Solicitor General Benjamin H. Bristow. A new organization, the Department of Justice, was established, and district attorneys, marshals and the Army began a campaign to eliminate the Klan.

Fighting the Klan was not easy. Federal forces were limited by the number of Army troops, budget constraints, the difficulty of securing evidence and witnesses, hostile juries and well-funded defense attorneys. However, they made steady progress. In North Carolina troops helped make arrests. In Mississippi nearly 700 indictments were obtained, though most cases that went to trial resulted in suspended sentences. South Carolina was the only state where troops were used on a large scale as the President suspended the writ of habeas corpus in nine

counties. It is thought that as many as 2,000 Klansmen may have fled the state to avoid arrest. Most of the Klan leadership was arrested and imprisoned.²² The legal offensive of 1871 broke the Klan's back and drastically reduced violence.²³ By the mid-1870s the capability of the terrorists was broken. However, the 1871 campaign came too late: by 1871 the terrorists had already succeeded in undermining several state governments and reestablishing white political dominance in much of the South.

Lack of Resources

Another reason for the failure of reconstruction was the Army's lack of resources to carry out the political policy of the government. Sherman alluded to the necessity of a "hundred thousand men" in an occupation force.²⁴ Congress was unwilling to provide the Army the resources necessary to carry out the missions it was assigned in the South. In addition, the American Army never fully committed its resources to the occupation of the South. Finally, the resources committed to the South were not of the type needed to be most effective in the role assigned.

In 1865, at the end of the war, the Army's strength was 1,034,064 volunteer troops.²⁵ By the end of 1866 it was 38,545. From 1866 to 1869 the average Army troop strength in the Southern states was 21,000 men.²⁶ In 1869 there were 11,000 Union troops occupying the South. By 1875 the number was down to 3,327.²⁷ During the 1870s the average troop strength was 7,500.²⁸ These troops were tasked with policing an area of 770,000 square miles and a population of about nine million, of whom approximately five million were hostile whites and four million were impoverished Freedmen. The adult white male population was likely slightly over one million. Modern militaries consider an acceptable ratio of military forces facing a potential insurgency to be at least one soldier for every 50 inhabitants.²⁹ At its best, in the 1860s, the army had a force ratio of one soldier to 428 inhabitants; in the 1870s the ratio was one soldier to 1,285 inhabitants. Thus, troop strength was never even close to that necessary for effective security. The opposition well understood the dilemma Union commanders faced in dealing with the requirements of Reconstruction and their troop strength in the 1870s. A Democratic newspaper, the *New Orleans Bulletin*, writing about what the Democrats of Louisiana considered the illegitimate state government, warned in 1874 that "it will take a regiment of Federal soldiers in each parish to sustain . . . the officials and appointees of the [Republican governor William P.] Kellogg usurpation."³⁰

Not only did the force strength not match the needs of the mission, but the force structure was also not optimum. Cavalry and officers of the Freedmen's Bureau were absolutely essential to mastering the entirety of the post-conflict environment. Neither existed in sufficient quantity to have more than local effects. Highly mobile cavalry were essential to making up for the low troop density relative to the population and to cover the extensive area of occupation. In 1866 only one regiment of cavalry (the 5th U.S. Cavalry) was dedicated to service in the occupied South, and four of its 12 companies were stationed in the immediate Washington, D.C., area. The other eight were scattered throughout the former Confederacy: four in the Division of the

South and four in the Division of Tennessee. There was virtually no cavalry in the states of Mississippi, Florida, Georgia and Alabama. The Division of the Gulf had three full regiments of cavalry, but only a few companies were not engaged in operations against hostile Indians in Texas.³¹ By 1868 the total cavalry serving in the South was one company of the 6th Cavalry Regiment.³² The employment of large portions of the 7th Cavalry to South Carolina was an important element in the effective anti-Klan campaign of 1871, but it was the exception that proved the rule. Without cavalry, terrorists and insurgents, who were mounted, had a significant tactical and mobility advantage over the army, putting army security forces on the defensive and leaving the initiative with the adversary.

The Freedmen's Bureau was charged with ensuring the Freedmen's rights were protected in the former Confederate states. The bureau was woefully underfunded and undermanned. In its first year of existence there were no monies allocated to its operation and personnel; funding had to come from the War Department. At its peak there were no more than 900 agents of the bureau in the South. The average agent had responsibility for 40,000 Freedmen.³³ In a benign environment the bureau was capable of providing some small support to the Freedman population; however, in areas where the Klan was active, the bureau was powerless to do more than observe and report.

Reconstruction operations were not the army's top priority after the Civil War. The bulk of the Army was stationed in the Divisions of the Missouri and the Pacific—the areas where the majority of the hostile Indian tribes were located. The bulk of the ten cavalry regiments served in those two divisions. As the overall size of the Army shrank between 1866 and 1877, the size of the force in the South decreased disproportionately. In 1866, forces in the South were approximately 40 percent of the regular Army. However, not counting the Indian-fighting forces in Texas, the portion of the Army engaged in Reconstruction was only about 22 percent.³⁴ By 1875 the portion of the Army involved in Reconstruction was 13 percent of total Army strength.³⁵ The priority of the Indian-fighting missions was the major reason, aside from the overall Army strength budgeted by Congress, for the lack of sufficient troops in the South. Without adequate command and national priority, the mission was doomed to failure.

Corruption

Army military government occurred twice: immediately after the war and then again in the initial months of Congressional Reconstruction. Army rule relied primarily on civil support to minimize the Army's burden as well as to facilitate the eventual transition to civil control. Corruption was thoroughly widespread through reconstruction government and politics. It prevailed among civil servants of both political persuasions: Unionist Republicans and ex-Confederate Democrats. Corruption among Republicans, however, was particularly detrimental to the occupation mission because it tended to delegitimize the federal government's policies, which were largely responsible for the election of Republican state governments. Henry C. Warmoth, Republican governor of Louisiana, was representative of the Southern politician in general. He "established a system of 'exactng tribute' from Louisiana's railroads and left the

governorship a wealthy man.” Louisiana’s governmental corruption was not new; its prewar laws had not even made bribery a crime.³⁶ U.S. economic policy exacerbated the corruption problem. The federal government did not support the South with an economic rebuilding plan or federal investment or funding. Northern and European investors were uncomfortable with new Southern enterprises because of the unstable political and social situation. This not only retarded economic development but also attracted opportunists and encouraged corruption.³⁷ Ultimately, the Army may have been the only bastion of honesty.

Lack of Will

Fundamentally, the outcome of the occupation ultimately devolved into a battle of wills. The occupation pitted the will of the federal government, the Army and the Northern population, against the will of the Southern whites who opposed the occupation. In the contest of wills, all three components of the Northern will failed.

Political Will. The political will to achieve the goals of Congressional Reconstruction was never higher than after the elections of 1868, when General Grant, a firm believer in Congressional Reconstruction, was elected President. With the liberal Republicans in charge of Congress and Grant in the White House, the Fifteenth Amendment (guaranteeing the right to vote), the Civil Rights Act and enforcement acts (including the anti-Klan act) were passed. Republican governments were established in six Southern states (Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana and Alabama).

The political will to continue to support Congressional Reconstruction was short-lived and began to decline even before the 1870 mid-term election. Though Grant won the presidency, the election of 1868 saw major Democratic gains in northern states. The Democrats picked up a total of 20 new seats in the House. The Democrats recorded key victories at the state level in Ohio, California and New York. Votes against black suffrage in Minnesota, Ohio and Kansas indicated that the Northern population was tiring of the focus on Freedmen and Reconstruction. One Ohio politician remarked on the future focus of national politics: “The Negro will be less prominent for some time to come.”³⁸ In the 1870 House elections the Democrats picked up 37 seats while the Republicans lost 35. Still, the Republicans continued to control both houses of Congress.

In 1872 it appeared that the Republicans had reestablished their hold on Congress and the presidency. Grant easily won reelection and the Republicans in the House picked up 63 seats, while the Democrats lost 16. Many Republican supporters of Reconstruction moderated their views in order to retain their seats. Thus, after 1871 a coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats toned down the vigorous support of Reconstruction in the Congress. In addition, by 1872 three Southern states—Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia—had reverted to Democratic control. The President’s interest and ability to continue to support Reconstruction in the South waned.

In the 1874 mid-term elections the Democrats, spurred by an economic depression for which the Republicans were held responsible, crushed the Republicans. Grant’s party lost 96

seats while the Democrats gained 94—and control of the House for the first time since the beginning of the Civil War. As important, the Democrats regained legislative control in Alabama, Texas and Arkansas, giving them every Southern state except Florida and South Carolina.

In December 1874 White League gangs in Vicksburg, Mississippi, prevented blacks from voting. When confronted by a black sheriff the whites, with superior firepower, dispersed the black posse and then went on a rampage. As many as 300 blacks may have been murdered in the area before federal troops restored order in January 1875. The Vicksburg events became the Democratic blueprint for redeeming the state in the elections of the fall of 1875.³⁹ Two riots in the late summer where white gangs attacked Republican political events resulted in dozens of dead blacks. The point was made in terms of political intimidation. President Grant, acutely aware of declining political and popular support of Reconstruction policy, responded that “The whole public are tired out with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South . . . [and] are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the Government.” In 1876 the Republican governor of Mississippi, Adelbert Ames, resigned, saying, “A revolution has taken place—by force of arms—and a race are disfranchised.”

Grant’s failure to act to ensure proper elections in Mississippi and to prevent the usurpation of power by Democrats—along with the presidential election of 1876 and the contested returns in the states of Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina—spelled the death-knell of Reconstruction.⁴⁰ Democrats won clear control of Mississippi and North Carolina. The contested returns caused a compromise, brokered by moderate Republicans and Democrats, that conceded Democratic control of South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana in return for Republican electoral votes for Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes. By the summer of 1877 all of the Southern Secessionist states were back firmly under Democratic party control, as they had been prior to the Civil War.

Military Will. Soon after assuming office, President Hayes ordered the Army to cease its role in domestic affairs in the South. This order was received with satisfaction in the Army because many of its commanders were not supporters of the Army’s role in Reconstruction. Some saw the occupation as a distraction from the Army’s real mission of fighting Indians. Others disagreed with the national policy. Army commanders such as General John M. Schofield and General Winfield S. Hancock—and staunchly conservative General Sherman—opposed allowing Freedmen to vote and to participate in the political process. As Military Governor, Schofield precluded elections in Virginia, thus preventing the radical wing of the Republican Party from establishing a strong presence in the state.⁴¹

Other commanders—such as General Henry Halleck, commander of the Division of the South—denied the influence of the Klan and other terrorist groups or were reluctant to use troops to enforce the will of Congress. North Carolina Freedmen’s Bureau Chief and future General in Chief of the Army Nelson Miles’ disagreements with General George Meade, his commander, over Meade’s reluctance to authorize the use of troops to support the state government, finally led Meade to request Miles’ relief.⁴² General Sherman, the General in Chief of the Army after 1868, was sympathetic to the Southern white point of view and detested

the manner in which the Army was used to enforce political policy. Passive nonsupport of the occupation objectives by Army officers had material effects. A friend and supporter of President Johnson, General Lovell H. Rousseau commanded in Louisiana during the 1868 election. He refused to take action against violence that resulted in as many 200 blacks being killed prior to the election. In fact, Rousseau advised blacks to stay away from the polls for their own self-protection. He stated that the “ascendance of the negro in this state is approaching its end.”⁴³ The dissatisfaction with the occupation mission among many in the Army leadership had a subtle but important subversive effect within the Army and influenced the rigor with which the Army carried out its mission, prioritized its resources and argued for additional resources.

Popular Will. The most important blow to Reconstruction may have come from issues unrelated to Reconstruction policy. In 1874 the United States entered a severe economic depression after a decade of prosperity fueled by Civil War-inspired economic expansion. In the face of economic depression the American people—most important, the influential population of the Northern industrial centers—focused their priorities on those economic issues that had immediate local effects. National issues relating to a war that had ended a decade before were much less important. The plight of the Southern Freedmen did not attract as much sympathetic support as the issue of slavery had. Public support for Reconstruction policy faded to the point of disinterest. Without enthusiastic public support, the political energy to provide resources for Reconstruction, supporting legislation and supervision of Reconstruction policy could not be generated. By the mid-1870s the only constituency for Reconstruction policy comprised a dwindling group of radical congressional Republicans and the South’s Freedmen—a large portion of whom were unable to register their views through the vote.

Summary Lessons

The American Army occupation of the South was a failure. The reasons for its failure are also a list of preconditions for the success of post-conflict operations. First, post-conflict policy must be clear and well planned before the conflict ends. There is a window of opportunity at the end of conventional operations when the adversary has been subjugated and the civil population is amenable to change. No planning for the post-Civil War occupation of the South was done by the Army or the Union’s political leadership. This, combined with the lenient and regressive Presidential Reconstruction policy as it evolved in the months after the war, gave the Southern leadership and population the opportunity to recover from the shock of defeat.

A lack of consensus on the issue of postwar policy caused the policy to change dramatically. Political policy for the post-conflict environment must be bipartisan. Without a widespread shared political vision of the post-conflict environment, political policy vacillates and successful policy implementation becomes difficult. Thus the Army entered into the period of Congressional Reconstruction with the force structure designed to support the relatively benign Presidential policy.

The occupation of the South was not resourced with the numbers or types of troops necessary for success. The military effort must be resourced appropriately to achieve success.

The American Army in the South did not have enough troops to carry out its assigned missions. It had virtually no cavalry—the most effective type of force for the mission—and it had competition for resources with the higher-priority Indian campaigns on the Western frontier. In many states there was almost no capability outside of the major population centers to oppose the Klan and other terrorist organizations. Specific organizations designed to execute reconstruction operations must be created, given priority and resourced. The Freedmen’s Bureau, the only agency created specifically for missions during Reconstruction, was never properly manned or given the command priority and budget necessary to do its job.

The Army was slow to come to grips with the terrorist activity in the South. Some aggressive commanders recognized early on that there were well-led terrorists with political objectives. In 1866 General Sheridan stated,

[W]hen outrages and murders grew frequent; and the aid of the military power was an absolute necessity for the protection of life, I employed it unhesitatingly—the guilty parties being brought to trial before military commissions—and for a time, at least, there occurred a halt in the march of terrorism inaugurated by the people whom Mr. Johnson had deluded.⁴⁴

For his efforts Sheridan was relieved of his command in 1867. From 1868 to 1871 the Klan and like organizations operated with impunity in many parts of the South. By the time the Klan Act was passed in 1871, the terrorists had accomplished their objective.

Finally, the most important reason for the failure of U.S. Reconstruction policy was a failure to sustain the political, military and popular will to accomplish the policy goals. By 1877 Congress, the President, the leadership of the Army and the voters in the Northern states had no interest in devoting resources to meeting the political objectives of the radical Republicans who had instigated Congressional Reconstruction ten years before. After the departure of General Grant, his replacement as General in Chief of the Army, General Sherman, had no interest in supporting occupation operations. In contrast, the white population of the South remained politically engaged with the issues of Reconstruction throughout the 12-year period of occupation. Ultimately, sustained political enthusiasm for the post-conflict objectives is absolutely necessary for success.

The unsuccessful occupation of the South by the Army and the failure of Reconstruction highlight some strategic characteristics of post-conflict operations. First, the failure of post-conflict operations is largely a strategic failure of political policy rather than of military operations. Consequently, the judgment of history, as in the case of Reconstruction, will largely focus on policy and politics rather than on military capability. Second, failure of post-conflict operations, unlike defeat in battle, will have little, if any, strategic impact on the readiness of the military force. The American Army did not identify itself with the failure of Reconstruction, and that failure had no impact on the readiness challenges faced by the Army. Another characteristic is the lack of easily identified decisive points. Post-conflict operations like Reconstruction are characterized by the slow evolution of events that are difficult to decipher. Elections are a

measure of political progress, but they have been and continue to be difficult to analyze. Elections influenced by corruption and terrorism are even more complex. Thus, the political metrics of post-conflict operations are inherently complex and ambiguous.

Conclusion

Two final and most important characteristics of post-conflict operations were represented in Reconstruction. One is that when the operation fails to obtain its strategic goals, the issues do not go away; instead, they continue to be issues until ultimately the government is forced to address them again. In a foreign occupation, this likely requires the reengagement of U.S. military force at some future date. In the case of Reconstruction it required the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s to overcome 90 years of human rights abuses and inequality in the American South and to achieve the goals that Reconstruction aspired to but was unable to accomplish. The other important characteristic of occupation is that it is an integral part of warfighting. Granted, there is a significant political component of post-conflict operations: many of the most critical aspects of military occupation, including policymaking and resourcing, are areas that require the executive and legislative branches of government to act. Still, the actions of these branches of government are consistent with their constitutional roles in war. It is a mistake not to see post-conflict operations as integral to war at the strategic level. General John Pope, commander of the 3rd Military District (Alabama, Georgia and Florida) in 1867, said to General Grant,

It is a misnomer to call this question in the South a political question. It is War pure and simple. The question is not whether Georgia and Alabama will accept or reject reconstruction. It is, shall the Union men and Freedmen, be the slaves of the old Negro rebel aristocracy or not? Or rather shall the former be permitted to live in these states at all or the Negroes as free men?⁴⁵

Pope's argument was that post-conflict operations are the final phase of war at the strategic level.

Post-conflict operations are extremely difficult, and it is easy to rationalize why it is not possible for military forces to conduct extensive post-conflict operations effectively. Narrowly defining "fighting and winning the nation's wars" is one way to avoid the mission. General Sherman, an opponent of the Army's role in the postwar South, said, "No matter what change we may desire in the feelings and thoughts of people . . . we cannot accomplish it by force. Nor can we afford to maintain . . . an army large enough to hold them in subjugation."⁴⁶

Sherman, though accurately identifying the difficulties, is not correct. Post-conflict operations are essential to strategic success. Successful post-conflict operations require that the government recognize the political nature of the operations, mobilize domestic support for them, resource the Army to conduct them, and be prepared to sustain the operations over a long period of time. Success also requires that the Army institutionally embrace the mission. Failure to do so will result in failure to obtain strategic objectives, squander the opportunities achieved through battlefield victory, and ultimately require reengagement of the problems at a later date.

Endnotes

- ¹ This theme is explicitly stated in the annual posture statements of the Secretary of the Army and the Army Chief of Staff from 1997 to 2003. All the statements 1997–2007 are available online at <http://www.army.mil/institution/leaders/posturestatement>.
- ² Joseph G. Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction: Louisiana, 1862–1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. 181.
- ³ Edward Jean Smith, *Grant* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), pp. 424–425.
- ⁴ U.S. Grant, “Report of General U.S. Grant, Commanding Army,” November 21, 1866, in *Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1867), p. 17.
- ⁵ Quoted in Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, p. 60.
- ⁶ Quoted in Peter Cozzens, *General Pope: A Life for the Nation* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 288.
- ⁷ P. H. Sheridan, *The Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), p. 413.
- ⁸ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), p. 342.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 425.
- ¹⁰ George H. Thomas, “Report of Major General George H. Thomas, Commanding Department of the Cumberland,” September 30, 1867, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1867), p. 184.
- ¹¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 332–333.
- ¹² Northerners in the South after the American Civil War, usually seeking private gain under the reconstruction governments (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/carpet%20bagger>).
- ¹³ White Southerners acting in support of the reconstruction governments after the American Civil War, often for private gain. (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/scalawag>).
- ¹⁴ Terry to Halleck in H. W. Halleck, “Report of Major General H.W. Halleck, Headquarters Military Division of the South,” November 6, 1869, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1869), p. 77.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ¹⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 425.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 426.
- ¹⁹ Alfred H. Terry, “Report of Brevet Major General Alfred H. Terry, Commander, Headquarters Department of the South,” in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1869), p. 89.

- ²⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 343.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 440–441.
- ²² The effective South Carolina campaign is described in J. Michael Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan: Exposing the Invisible Empire During Reconstruction* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).
- ²³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 457–459.
- ²⁴ William T. Sherman letter to his brother John Sherman, in Rachel Sherman Thorndike, *The Sherman Letters: Correspondence Between General and Senator Sherman From 1837 to 1891* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1894), p. 228.
- ²⁵ Edwin M. Stanton, “Annual Report of the Secretary of War,” November 14, 1866, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington, D.C.: War Department, 1867), p. 1.
- ²⁶ E. D. Townsend, “Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the Army for the Year 1866,” November 21, 1866, in *Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1867), p. 2.
- ²⁷ Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784–1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 234.
- ²⁸ Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, p. 4. From James E. Sefton, *The United States Army and Reconstruction, 1865–1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), pp. 260–261, and Russell Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, Inc., 1967), p. 567.
- ²⁹ Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), p. 25. These ratios are based on modern situations. It is likely that, given more primitive communications and transportation, the optimum densities in the 19th century were much higher.
- ³⁰ Dawson, *Army Generals and Reconstruction*, p. 179.
- ³¹ Townsend, “Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the Army for the Year 1866,” p. 4.
- ³² Halleck, “Report of Major General H.W. Halleck,” pp. 75–76.
- ³³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 143.
- ³⁴ This number is calculated based on Townsend, “Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the Army for the Year 1866,” pp. 4–5.
- ³⁵ Coffman, *The Old Army*, p. 234.
- ³⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 385.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 391.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 314–316.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 558.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 560, 562–563.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 412–413.

⁴² Peter R. DeMontravel, *A Hero to His Fighting Men: Nelson A. Miles, 1839–1925* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1998), p. 58.

⁴³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 342.

⁴⁴ Sheridan, *The Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan*, pp. 434–435.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Cozzens, *General Pope*, p. 295.

⁴⁶ Coffman, *The Old Army*, p. 237.