

## **JOMINIAN PRINCIPLES AND CIVIL WAR AND STRATEGY**

By Leslie J. Rodman

The following are three perspectives relating to the study of Jominian principles of strategy as they were applied during the Civil War. John Shy speaks to each of Jomini's defined principles, calling them timeless in their application, while Archer Jones relates strategy to specific battles. T. Harry Williams asserts that Jominian principles didn't work during the Civil War because the Civil War was the first "*modern war*" which called for strategies beyond Jominian concepts, labeling Union command failures during the first two years of the war as failed attempts by commanders to fight a modern war with outdated Jominian techniques. This situation changed only when Grant came East in 1864 and modified the techniques.

John Shy meticulously traces the development of Jominian principles on warfare from origin during the years of the French Revolution through the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29 and the Crimean War 1854-56. Jomini's key principles centered upon the fundamental premise that an effective strategy was the very key to warfare controlled by certain invariable principles, which focused on the offensive, the massing of forces, and the striking of a weaker enemy force at some decisive point. <sup>1</sup>

Shy points to the influence of German Karl von Clausewitz on Jomini's writings, but also points to an important distinction in the way both men looked at warfare. Clausewitz saw war as a tragic, complex enterprise, always threatening to escape human control, while Jomini saw war in terms of simplicity and clarity, viewing it in personal or heroic terms, but always under the control of a masterful commander. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shy, John, "Jomini" in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. Ed. Peter Paret. Princeton University Press, 1986, pg. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Shy, John, "Jomini" in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, .pg. 158.

In addition, Jomini emphasized “*lines of operation*” as an essential principle of warfare which he categorized as natural lines of operation, i.e., topographical barriers (including man-made fortifications, etc.) which he called “*territorial lines*” and the strategic choices, i.e., where to fight, how to fight, etc. which he called “*maneuver lines.*”<sup>3</sup>

Shy believes that although Jomini purported to follow simplicity and clarity, his works often become ambiguous. On one occasion victory would seem to depend upon strict adherence to principles of strategy, while on another, victory seems to depend upon the genius of the commander. Another important principle to Jomini is that of the pursuit of a beaten foe. This point is driven home by T. Harry Williams who points to Lincoln’s frustration with his commanders in the East who constantly sought to capture Richmond, rather than placing their focus upon destroying Lee’s army. If the Army of Northern Virginia could be destroyed, Richmond would soon fall.

Archer Jones looks at Jominian principles articulated by Shy in a more practical straight forward application of their use<sup>3</sup> in specific engagements. This works well in the case of the East where there were abundant examples of textbook Jominian-type battles. However, the West was a totally different story due to the vastness of the territory and the openness of the terrain. In these areas west of the Appalachians Jomini found less application to his principles. Good examples of this were Sidney Albert Johnston, upon being given a unified command, formed a cordon defense and tried to protect every foot of Confederate territory possible. Likewise, Henry Halleck’s slow and

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<sup>3</sup> Shy, John, “Jomini” in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, .pg. 166.

methodical advance on a defeated Confederate Army at Corinth ran counter to Jominian principles. <sup>4</sup>

On the other hand there were some resounding Jominian-type successes in the East. Jackson's Valley Campaign during the spring and Lee's maneuvers during the summer of 1862 were textbook Jominian, where interior lines were employed, bringing Jackson from the Valley to reinforce Lee during Seven Days, and later to concentrate Confederate forces against Pope at Second Manassas. <sup>5</sup> Jones identifies the railroad and the telegraph as the major innovations of the Civil War, both being successfully employed to implement interior lines on several occasions, i.e., Johnston to reinforce Beauregard at First Manassas, and Bragg's 1862 Kentucky Campaign. <sup>6</sup>

Jones point out that although Sherman's raids into Georgia and the Carolinas were actually contrary to Jominian principles for dealing with conquered populations, both had a dramatic impact politically as well as and psychologically, contributing significantly to killing the rebel spirit in the South. Jones concludes that in reality, the continual use of interior lines by the Confederates, while effective in the short term, only served to prolong the war, and contribute to the indecisiveness of battles which contributed heavily to the human cost of the war. Actually, the most effective principal

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, Archer. "Jomini and the Strategy of the American Civil War, a Reinterpretation." *Military Affairs*, (December 1970) pg. 129.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, Archer. "Jomini and the Strategy of the American Civil War, a Reinterpretation." *Military Affairs*, (December 1970) pg. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Jones, Archer. "Jomini and the Strategy of the American Civil War, a Reinterpretation." *Military Affairs*, (December 1970) pg. 128.

strategic innovation employed during the war was the strategy of exhaustion used to ultimately strangle the Confederacy.<sup>7</sup>

T. Harry Williams seems to agree with historian David Donald who makes the point that Jominian principles didn't work in the Civil War because the Civil War was a modern war, while Jominian principles had been designed for earlier wars fought under different circumstances and views about warfare. To Williams as well as Donald the Civil War being a war of ideas which contained no limitations upon its objectives. In other words, war had become a zero sum game. The South fought for its independence and the North fought to preserve the Union. There could be no in between. One side had to win and one side had to lose.

Williams continues his argument for the modern war theory by pointing to the fact that this was the first time that large-scale weapons, techniques, and technologies were being employed; many of the same techniques and equipment that would become common in the wars of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Williams calls the American Civil War as a kind of a laboratory where the weapons of modern warfare were tested for their use in future battles. Williams concludes that by 1862 the war had become a no holds barred struggle which demanded a different kind of strategy than could be gleaned from Jomini.<sup>9</sup> For the first time massive armies were raised and arms and supplies mass-produced resulting in a

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<sup>7</sup> Jones, Archer. "Jomini and the Strategy of the American Civil War, a Reinterpretation." *Military Affairs*, (December 1970) pg. 130.

<sup>8</sup> Williams T. Harry, "The Return of Jomini" *Military Affairs* (December 1975) pg. 204.

<sup>9</sup> Williams T. Harry, "The Return of Jomini" *Military Affairs*, pg. 204

profound experience in warfare and serving as a catalyst for many changes that would come about in military thinking.

Williams views Jones as contradicting himself in his adherence to Jominian principles when advocated two conflicting strategies. In the case of Frederick the Great (18<sup>th</sup> Century) he recommended the destruction of the enemy's army, and in the case of Napoleon (early 19<sup>th</sup> century) he recommended a strategy of exhaustion. Jones resolves this apparent contradiction by stating although he favored Napoleonic strategy of battle and annihilation, he believed that the destruction of an enemy army was hard to achieve and that a strategy of exhaustion was usually more practical. Thus, Williams concludes that Jones looked at the non-Jominian strategy of exhaustion as not only more practical but also a more humane way of waging war.

The primary argument made by Williams in his book *Lincoln and His Generals* is that the Civil War was the first modern war, and therefore, a new kind of strategy was necessary incorporating a much wider view than Jomini would ever have envisioned. Within in this context, Williams makes some very key points, the most salient of which was that because of its nature as the first modern war, Jominian principles just didn't apply. In fact, Williams would likely view the successful employment of Jominian principles during the early years of the war as suggested by Jones, as isolated and misleading, and in fact, most often resulting in high casualties, indecisive battles, and a war that drug on for four years.

A second important point made by Williams is that although Abraham Lincoln was a man of humble origins, he possessed great talent and vision, and found himself totally out of sync, both politically, and in terms of military strategy with his early commanders. Not only did he find himself struggling and out of sync with his commanders, he would continue to be so until he brought Grant east in 1864. It was not

until this time that he finally had the general who would implement his ideas of strategic warfare and bring the war to a conclusion.

For the first two years of the war, Lincoln had been frustrated with the likes of McClellan, Burnside, Hooker, Pope, Buell and Rosecrans; field commanders who just didn't get when it came to grasping the concept of total war. They failed to grasp the concept of what constituted "*Union Territory*," and most either failed or refused to adhere to the importance of the strategic value in destroying the Confederate Armies as their objective, instead of focusing on capturing Richmond. <sup>10</sup> And most certainly he had been frustrated by McClellan who consistently misjudged his abilities and underestimated his character. <sup>11</sup> Had McClellan been willing to communicate with Lincoln and incorporate the president's thought into his own, and by doing so forge a strategic partnership, his command might have had a chance for success.

Upon bringing Grant east in the spring of 1864, Lincoln realigned the Union Armies under commanders who saw the war in the same manner as did he, and as a result, unleashed coordinated attacks in Virginia and northern Georgia, which ultimately crushed the Confederacy.

The Civil War was a war which had to happen in order to bring about the development of our federalist system we enjoy today. Consequently, it can be equally said that the war was as significant to the evolution of the modern American military and strategy as the Industrial Revolution was to the development of the American economy.

*Jones, Archer. "Jomini and the Strategy of the American Civil War, a Reinterpretation." Military Affairs, (December 1970) pp. 127-131.*

*Jones, Archer, Civil War Command and Strategy, Arthur Jones and the Free Press, New York, NY 1992.*

*Shy, John, "Jomini" in Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age. Ed. Peter Paret. Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 143-185.*

*Williams, T. Harry, Lincoln and His Generals, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and Random House, Inc., New York, NY, 1952, reprinted by MBS for American Military University.*

*Williams T. Harry, "The Return of Jomini" Military Affairs (December 1975) pp. 204-206.*