



# Understanding British Strategic Failure in America: 1780-1783 (American Revolutionary War)

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The War for American Independence was a complex, unconventional, and violent political struggle for the loyalty and allegiance of the American population writ large. It could not, and would not, be decided by the application of conventional military force alone. This paper uses an abbreviated examination of the Southern Campaign (1780-1782) to explore the principal causes and enduring lessons of British strategic failure in America. Unwilling to destroy the colonies in order to save them, British military strategy became a reluctant prisoner of deeply flawed strategic assumptions, a government that failed to determine a realistic and militarily attainable political objective, and a blatant inability to accurately determine the kind of war upon which the nation was engaged until it was far too late. In the process, the British learned that battlefield brilliance seldom rescues bad strategy, there are, in fact, limits to what military force can achieve, and national leaders who base their plans and policies primarily on hope and a stubborn belief in the sanctity of their concerted views, if wrong, can lead a nation to disaster.

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