**Analysis for 1776**

**Slide 1**

Strategic Dilemma for the English:

In 1776, the British were confronted by a great dilemma. What was the right Military Theater Strategy [*see “The Strategic Level,” FM 3-0, sec. 2-4*] to attain the national goal of “controlling of the colonies?” The British faced four major problems:

* American colonies occupy a huge area of land with a population spread thinly throughout with only a few coastal concentrations of people.
* The inhabitants were a mixture of both colonists still loyal to the government (called Tories) and rebels. The right amount of military force was critical. A heavy handed military strategy would sway colonists towards the rebel camp. Too little force and the war would become a continuous drain on British resources with no resolution in sight.
* Further complicating the British situation was the nature of their army. A professional force, it was designed to fight limited wars in the European style of the 18th century. This was an army designed to win decisive battles in a Europe with well developed roads and rivers to keep it supplied. North America was largely a wilderness with few well developed transportation networks.
* The American enemy had no discernable central government or capital. Indeed, the British could not determine a truly decisive center of gravity for the rebels. [*Centers of Gravity are those characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight. Destruction or neutralization of the enemy center of gravity is the most direct path to victory. FM 3-0, sec. 5-27]*

General Sir William Howe, who replaced General Gage as the commander in chief of forces in the Colonies, therefore collected 32,000 Regulars and half of the Royal Navy under his brother, Admiral Richard Howe, to re-occupy the colonies. (This was to prove to be the highest concentration of British forces for the entire war) The strategy he decided on was to invade the colonies, engage them in a grand battle to inflict an overwhelming defeat, and thus convince the colonists that further rebellion was futile. Howe believed that a decisive battle was “the most effectual Means to terminate this expensive War.”

COA’s: What were General Howe’s Courses of Action (COA’s)? What were the pros and cons of each?

Possible solutions:

* COA 1: invade the colonies in the south. This option had two main advantages and one disadvantage:
  + - * + The southern colonies were relatively close to British forward operating bases in the West Indies.
        + Loyalists were relatively strong in this area compared to the northern colonies. Thus re-conquest would be relatively easy.
        + The main disadvantage of the course of action was that it was far from decisive. The heart of the Rebellion was New England. That is where the decisive main battle would be more likely found.
* COA 2: invade the Mid-Atlantic Colonies through either the Delaware or Chesapeake Bays:
  + - * + Once the British Army was present in strength in this region, Loyalists would hopefully “rally to the flag.”
        + The capture of the capital city of Philadelphia promised to cripple rebel morale.
        + Threatening Philadelphia would hopefully draw the enemy into a grand battle where it could be soundly defeated by the superior British regulars.
        + The main disadvantage was movement beyond the middle colonies to other areas was potentially difficult. The force would likely have to split, one heading south to Virginia and the other north towards New York and then on to the heart of the rebellion in New England. Washington and a well entrenched Continental Army would likely be located along this northern line of march.
* COA 3: invade New York.
  + - * + Provide an excellent port with an extremely desirable naval link back to England.
        + Facilitated a link up with British forces in Canada commanded by General Carleton. Controlling the Hudson River Valley in this manner would sever the hotbed of rebellion, New England, from the rest of the colonies. The British Army could then turn south and more easily subdue the rest of the colonies.
        + New York and the mid-Atlantic colonies promised more Tory support than the more rebellious New England.

General Howe chose the third Option. However, General Washington came to the same conclusion, and also located his army in New York, waiting for the English invasion.

**SLIDE 2**

British Plan for 1776:

The British plan was designed to shape American public opinion and convince them to end their revolution and accept Royal government. It had two main components:

* Win a decisive battlefield victory to create the image of British invincibility. This promised the quickest most efficient means for a large, well-trained, professional army to end the war at minimal cost. The British had to win this victory quickly, however, because a prolonged conflict would require increasing demands to be placed on the American public to supply and support the British. This would be sure to encourage them to support the revolution.
* Recover territory to encourage a negotiated peace. This would both protect American Loyalists as well as root out rebels.

Once the British had demonstrated their overwhelming military power through battlefield victory and territory occupation, the American public at large would decide it was in their best interests to make peace.

Strategic Dilemma for the Americans:

Washington also sought to gain and keep the support of the American people. He had two main disadvantages as the British moved on New York City by sea.

* He lacked an American navy. The British thus held the initiative and could land unopposed at a time and place of their own choosing.
* He felt politically committed to defending New York City because of its importance to American Revolutionary morale. The symbolic importance of attempting to hold New York was so important to him that he risked nearly destroying the Continental Army.

**SLIDE 3**

American Analysis

The Americans failed at the Battle of Long Island for two main reasons:

* Security – Putnam failed to secure the eastern flank of his forces on the Heights of Guian. His western flank was relatively secure because of the wooded, hilly terrain, but his eastern flank was open and vulnerable. The five officers sent to secure this flank through observation were inexperienced and were captured. They were not able to warn the Americans of the approach of the British and the western flank.
* Loss of Offensive (initiative in the British Hands) – by digging in on Long Island and Manhattan with a split force unable to support each other, Washington surrendered his mobility and allowed the British to seize the initiative, attacking at the time and place of their choosing.

British Analysis

Did the British fail in any way at Long Island?

* Tactically: no. Operationally: yes. Howe demonstrated British tactical superiority by routing the Americans at the Battle of Long Island. His mistake was not completely destroying the American force around New York City. He had an excellent chance to capture the Americans at Brooklyn Heights, but he allowed the American Army and their Commander to slip across the river, back to Manhattan. Howe has often been criticized for moving too slowly by constructing siege lines at Brooklyn Heights instead of attacking the American lines directly. However, emplacing siege lines to counter enemy fortifications was common (as is later demonstrated by Washington at Yorktown). The true British failure, impaired by the weather on the day of the evacuation, was the Royal Navy’s inability to prevent the Americans from escaping by water (this was also successfully demonstrated by the French Fleet at Yorktown). (*As a side note, the soldiers that operated the boats evacuating Washington troops – skilled fisherman of Colonel Glover’s Marblehead Regiment – were the same men who operated the boats in the crossing of the Delaware*.)
* Howe followed the principle of Maneuver [*see “Maneuver,” FM 3-0, sec. 4-4 to 4-10*]. by conducting a series of turning movements [*see “Turning Movement,” FM 3-0, sec.7-35]* to threaten the American army and hasten its surrender without a fight. He also deftly uses military deception to help gain victory. [*See FM 3-0, sec. 6-35]*

Why not just use Navy and maneuver to the north of all of Washington’s forces?

* A valid point. Howe, however, seeks a decisive battle, and he will find that where the American forces are, either Manhattan or Long Island.

**SLIDE 4**

British Analysis

Throughout this campaign, Howe continuously allows the American’s to withdraw from the field without destroying it (Brooklyn Heights, Manhattan and White Plains). He is very slow to move in between engagements, allowing Washington to react and escape his maneuvers. It was Howe’s objective to decisively beat the Americans to show invincibility. He accomplishes this time and again, yet final victory eludes him – why?

From Howe’s perspective, his actions had been a continuous success. Howe is trying to achieve a decisive victory, and simultaneously negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Americans. Therefore, he feels an extensive and costly fight with the Americans would be counterproductive for achieving his second objective. This course of action, however, did not take into account that the Continental Army was the life of the rebellion. Howe failed to recognize that the destruction of the American Army could have ended popular support of the rebellion. Without the protection of an organized army, it is doubtful the population could have resisted returning to the empire. Howe accomplished his first goal of invincibility. However, his second goal had not identified a “*decisive and obtainable objective*”.

American Analysis

This Campaign was a disaster for Washington. He had piecemealed his army away, and been defeated in almost every engagement. He lost NY and 4,000 troops. Half of his remaining troops’ enlistments were to expire at the end of the year. Moral of the troops was very low and the Congress had abandoned Philadelphia in despair. What were his options?

Washington’s options after the Battle of Long Island

COA 1: Move to Winter Quarters and rebuild the Army.

* The army will be extremely vulnerable to attack from British forces in New Jersey once the Delaware freezes.
* Washington would need to rebuild an army after loss upon loss. He would therefore be trying to recruit after demonstrating his is a ‘losing’ cause.

COA 2: Disband the Army and move toward a militia based resistance that could be built in the summer. Possibly even rely on a more ‘American Indian style’ warfare based on hit and run tactics.

* This may be perceived as an admission of defeat, and further hurt and already wavering moral problem all across the revolutionaries.
* An unsavory gorilla war may be more harmful than helpful in winning more popular support of the war.

COA 3: Attack.

* Highly risky – The known constant – the Army = the revolution. Keep the Army alive, and the revolution is alive.
* The main advantage of an attack – Washington can end the year on a high note and go to winter quarters with a win (just before half time). This will help recruitment, and may drive out the British from New Jersey to acquire more secure winter quarters. However, success is never guaranteed against British regulars (particularly with the 1776 record for the Americans and the condition of Washington’s forces in December)

Washington chose COA 3 and took the offensive, stealthily [crossing the Delaware](http://www.arikah.com/encyclopedia/Battle_of_Trenton) on [Christmas](http://www.arikah.com/encyclopedia/Christmas) night and capturing nearly 1,000 Hessians at the Battle of Trenton on [December 26](http://www.arikah.com/encyclopedia/December_26), [1776](http://www.arikah.com/encyclopedia/1776). Cornwallis marched to retake Trenton, but was outmaneuvered by Washington, who successfully attacked the British rearguard at Princeton on [January 3](http://www.arikah.com/encyclopedia/January_3), [1777](http://www.arikah.com/encyclopedia/1777). Washington then entered winter quarters at Morristown, New Jersey, having retaken most of the colony from the British.

**SLIDE 5**

Discuss the importance of Trenton/Princeton and its effect on the 1776 Campaign

Howe has driven Washington from NY, had won every battle (with the exception of the final raid on Trenton/Princeton) and decimated the Continental Army. Was the 1776 campaign a victory for the British?

No. The British failed to achieve their goal of convincing the Americans to end the rebellion through military force and rejoin the British Empire.

* First and foremost, Washington and his army survived. As long as the Americans maintained a viable standing army in the field, the revolution was alive, and was the most obvious evidence of its success.
* The perceived hotbed of the revolution, New England, was not controlled by the British. New England was the birthplace of the rebellion and continued to fuel the ideological fire of revolution.
* New Jersey, which was thought to contain a great number loyalists, fell far short of expectations. The British believed that by entering New Jersey, a groundswell of support would rally around the Union Jack. While this initially appeared to be the case, most “loyalists” returned to neutrality or even full support of the revolution when Washington won his victories at Trenton and Princeton and the British troops withdrew back to New York. Indeed, many New Jersians became more committed revolutionaries because of demands placed upon them by an occupying British Army.
* Discuss the effectiveness of Washington as a General in this campaign.

-Washington was less than successful in an operational and tactical sense during the Long Island Campaign, but redeemed himself with success during the Trenton/New Jersey Campaign. Ultimately, he was strategically successful because he kept the Continental Army in being, and force the British Army to withdraw from New Jersey.

Long Island Campaign: Washington, with a smaller army of about 25,000 men, divided his troops about equally between Long Island and Manhattan in the face of a stronger British opponent. He did this because he was unsure where the Howes intended to strike. By dividing his force, however, he violated a cardinal rule of warfare at the operational level, massing one’s combat power at the decisive place and time. [*see “Mass,” FM 3-0, sec. 4-39*] Howe was thus able to win a decisive tactical victory at Brooklyn Heights. Only Howe’s unwillingness to conduct a vigorous pursuit and destroy Washington’s Army saved the Americans from a defeat that could have possibly ended the Revolution. Howe did not destroy the Americans because he hoped the Battle of Long Island would bring them to their senses and they would sue for peace. Washington was thus able to keep the revolutionary spirit alive by maintaining the Continental Army in the field.

Washington did display some tactical prowess by maximizing the use of fieldworks and fortifications to bolster the effectiveness of his troops against British regulars. This did not prove to be enough, however, to stave off defeat.

Trenton/New Jersey: Washington’s performance was brilliant. Outnumbered 3 to 1, he managed to deftly outmaneuver the occupying British forces and ultimately drive them back to winter quarters in New York City, Amboy, and New Brunswick.

Washington displayed courageous initiative [*see “Initiative,” FM 3-0, sec. 4-51*] with his attack across the Delaware against Trenton. First and foremost, he sought to maintain the public’s morale by acting to protect Philadelphia as well as actively demonstrate that the Continental Army was still viable. He refused to surrender the initiative after his victory at Trenton and defeated the British rearguard at Princeton. Washington’s personal courage [*see “Personal Courage,” FM 6-22, sec. 4-36 to 4-41*] was displayed here as he appeared on horseback at the critical point of the battle and rallied the American troops.

Thus, Washington’s extreme gamble to attack the British in winter conditions with dilapidated troops was a huge, strategic victory for the Americans. Although tactically insignificant with the amount of troops involved, it saved the American cause from the humiliation of a year of defeat. Hope and moral, while not fully restored, improved greatly.

Political/Military Relationship:

-At the core of Washington’s failure in Long Island was the fact that he attempted to hold New York City at all. He attempted to hold the City based on the assumption that it was important politically to keep it out of British hands. As congress later told him, this was not the case. He unnecessarily risked the destruction of the Continental Army in doing this.

-He skillfully managed the expectations of congressional hothead leaders such as John Adams, who wanted a quick end to the war by beating the British at their own game in a conventional grand battle. Adams and other civilians believed that patriotic fervor and divine providence would enable the Americans to defeat the British Army. General George Washington knew better.

-Throughout 1776 he managed to establish true civilian congressional control of the army while preventing them from making any disastrous military mistakes. This ensured subjugation of the military to civilian control.