

HOKA HEY! The Unattainable End State and the Limits of Operational Art

A Monograph

by

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2019

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 23-05-2019		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) June 2018-May 2019	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Hoka Hey! The Unattainable End State and the Limits of Operational Art			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Maj. Daniel J. Tabacchi			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301			8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School of Advanced Military Studies, Advanced Military Studies Program.			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Following the Civil War, the US government renewed efforts to expand west. On the Northern Plains, its efforts met Native American resistance, most notably, from the Lakota Sioux. Two Native American leaders transcended tribal boundaries and emerged to coordinate Native American actions attempting to maintain their hegemony in the region. From 1866 to 1868 Red Cloud successfully orchestrated a campaign to close the Bozeman Trail. Red Cloud's War ended with the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, with the US government acquiescing to the Native American demands. Red Cloud's war demonstrates the only substantive operational and strategic victory of Native Americans against Westward Expansion. In 1876, Sitting Bull rose to direct efforts against a new influx of encroachment into the unceded Indian territory as outlined in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Sitting Bull delivered a string of tactical victories culminating in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, but failed to link tactical success to operational and strategic objectives. By mid-1877, the US Army defeated Lakota resistance on the Northern Plains and the Great Sioux War ended. Analyzing Lakota actions during the wars illustrates the presence of effective and ineffective operational art in a culture unfamiliar with the concept and demonstrates the importance of deriving end states while accounting for strategic context.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Great Sioux War of 1876; Red Cloud's War; Sitting Bull; Red Cloud; Operational Art; Lakota Sioux; Indian Wars of the West; Northern Plains					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)	(U)	47	Maj. Daniel Tabacchi
					19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code) 913 758-3300

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL PAGE

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Abstract

HOKA HEY! The Unattainable End State and the Limits of Operational Art, by MAJ Daniel J. Tabacchi, US Army, 47 pages.

Following the Civil War, the US government renewed efforts to expand west. On the Northern Plains, its efforts met Native American resistance, most notably, from the Lakota Sioux. Two Native American leaders transcended tribal boundaries and emerged to coordinate Native American actions attempting to maintain their hegemony in the region.

From 1866 to 1868, Red Cloud successfully orchestrated a campaign to close the Bozeman Trail. Red Cloud's War ended with the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, with the US government acquiescing to the Native American demands. Red Cloud's war demonstrates the only substantive operational and strategic victory of Native Americans against Westward expansion.

In 1876, Sitting Bull rose to direct efforts against a new influx of encroachment into the unceded Indian territory outlined in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Sitting Bull delivered a string of tactical victories culminating in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, but failed to link tactical success to operational and strategic objectives. By mid-1877, the US Army defeated Lakota resistance on the Northern Plains and the Great Sioux War ended.

Analyzing Lakota actions during the wars illustrates the presence of effective and ineffective operational art in a culture unfamiliar with the concept and demonstrates the importance of deriving end states while accounting for strategic context.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family for their tireless support. I would also like to thank my monograph director, Dr. Rick Herrera, and my seminar leader, Colonel Geoffrey Whittenberg, for their guidance and support during the year.

Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
JP	Joint Publication
OE	Operational Environment

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Introduction

The seven bands of the Lakota Sioux were relative newcomers to the plains of Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming in the mid-nineteenth century. With the introduction of horses, firearms, and diseases from Europe and the encroachment of other Native American tribes into traditional Sioux lands east of the Missouri River, the Lakota migrated west and spread out on the plains. The horse allowed them to pursue the buffalo more efficiently and their empire grew by driving out the resident Crows, Kiowas, and Arikara from the Northern Plains in the eighteenth century. Despite the novelty of their hegemony, Lakota control became the paradigm for the Northern Plains and bore conflict as the United States continued its Westward expansion. The term Lakota encompasses the seven bands of the Lakota Sioux: the Oglalas, Brules, Miniconjous, San Arcs, Two Kettles, Hunkpapas, and Blackfoot Sioux. Bound by a common language and traditions the Lakota routinely cooperated, but small band interest trumped tribal identity and unity. A loose confederation of cultural similarity and shared interests more aptly describe the Lakota than a hierarchical and organized society easily understood from a Western perspective. Within these subbands, a similar structure existed which allowed the bands to cooperate when it served their interest.¹

On the eve of the American Civil War, the Lakota held primacy across the Northern Plains of the United States. The Oglala and Brule occupied the southern portion of the Powder River Basin in present-day Wyoming. The Miniconjou and San Arc lived east of the Black Hills in present-day South Dakota. The Hunkpapa and Blackfeet roamed the northern Powder River Basin in present-day Montana.² Lakota interaction and trade with settlers and frontiersmen happened regularly with conflict generally limited to small encounters representative of the

¹ Robert W. Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 7–10, 19–21, 35; Bob Drury and Tom Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 42.

² Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 43.

Lakota raiding culture and settler response.³ The nature of the interaction changed dramatically with the influx of travelers along the Oregon and Bozeman trails. The Oregon Trail brought travelers to the doorstep of Oglala, Miniconjou, and Brule lands near Fort Laramie, and the Bozeman Trail struck through the center of their core hunting areas. The invasion of white settlers presented problems; the buffalo as the foundation of Lakota society, suffered heavily from the influx of people, firearms, livestock, and over-hunting. The declining buffalo herds coupled with encroachment into their recently acquired lands compelled the Lakota to act to protect their way of life. The Lakota had fought bitterly against the Crow for the land in the early and mid-eighteenth century and could not now show weakness and expect to retain it. The first challenge to the Lakota came with the opening of the Bozeman Trail through Wyoming and Montana in 1863. The trail bifurcated the best Oglala and Brule hunting grounds in the Powder River Basin as prospectors flooded the trail to reach gold fields in Montana. Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho initially open to negotiation concerning the trail became incensed when they discovered US Army Regulars under the command of Colonel Henry B. Carrington creating forts along its length in 1866. The Native Americans ceased negotiations, determined to close the trail by force.⁴

Red Cloud, of the Oglala band, rose as the Lakota leader coordinating Native American efforts to protect their territory and negotiate with the United States government. Red Cloud built a confederation of Oglala, Brule, Hunkpapa, San Arc, and Miniconjou Sioux with Cheyenne and Arapaho support. The Two Kettle and Blackfoot Sioux, not directly affected, largely abstained

³Three notable exceptions being the Grattan Fight in 1854 with the Brules near Fort Laramie, the Sand Creek Massacre perpetrated against the Cheyenne in southeastern Colorado in 1864, and the Connor Expedition along the Bozeman Trail in the summer of 1865. While the Sand Creek Massacre did not affect the Lakota directly, it certainly had implications concerning Native American perspectives towards the increasing numbers of soldiers and settlers.

⁴ Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 79–80; Peter Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), 33–36; Dee Brown, *The Fetterman Massacre* (New York: Putnam, 1962), 18; Charles D. Collins Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*, 2nd ed. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 5–6. The Connor Expedition was the first major challenge to the Lakota along the Bozeman Trail. The Lakota victory emboldened the Indians and increased the number of attacks on settlers and prospectors crossing.

from the endeavor. Red Cloud's effective application of what is today termed operational art produced a campaign against the forts on the Bozeman Trail and culminated in the Fetterman Massacre. Two other notable engagements included the Hayfield and Wagon Box fights in August of 1867. While tactical losses for Red Cloud, their strategic impact promoted the accomplishment of his objectives illustrating that tactical defeats can still yield victory. The campaign resulted in the short-term realization of his ends through the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1868. Red Cloud's War remains the most successful campaign waged by Native Americans against the US government. Following the treaty, the Northern Plains entered a period of relative calm until Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer's expedition discovered gold in the Black Hills in 1874. Tempted by large surface deposits of gold, prospectors and settlers encroached on the area despite its designation as Lakota land in the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty.⁵

The Cheyenne and Lakota considered the Black Hills sacred and refused to cede the territory. The US government tried to dissuade prospectors but never mobilized enough troops to enforce its ban. Faced with the increase of prospectors and settlers, the Lakota took up arms, this time under the leadership of Sitting Bull. Faced with an increased risk of violence the US government issued an ultimatum on 3 December 1875 for the non-treaty Lakota to return to their agencies while negotiations proceeded. Any Lakota not near the agency by the end of January 1876 would be considered hostile. Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa medicine man, refused to comply with the order and thus began the Great Sioux War of 1876. The US Army Division of the Missouri, led by Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan deployed to execute a winter campaign designed to compel the Lakota to sell the mineral rights of the Black Hills and abandon their

⁵ Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 35–40; Philip Weeks, *Farewell, My Nation* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1990), 124–28, 135–40; Richard G. Hardorff, *Lakota Recollections of the Custer Fight: New Sources of Indian Military History* (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark, 1991), 10.

traditional way of life for life at an agency. Resource shortfalls, bad weather, Lakota cunning, and US hubris marked the winter campaign and offered no decision.⁶

As spring approached Sheridan initiated a three-pronged campaign to envelop the non-treaty Indians. The summer campaign reaped defeat after defeat for Sheridan and culminated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in June of 1876. Lakota under the leadership of Sitting Bull, repeatedly achieved tactical victories but could not stem the flow of soldiers and settlers. In response to the army's defeat, the US government redoubled efforts to force the Lakota to reservations. Reinforced significantly after the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Sheridan renewed his campaign, dispersed the Lakota, and defeated them in detail. Under threat of extinction, the Lakota coalition fractured with some, including Sitting Bull, driven north to Canada, and others complying with government demands and entering reservations. Defeated in late 1876 through May 1877, most of the non-treaty Lakota surrendered, and the Great Sioux War ended.⁷

The immediate outcome of the two Sioux wars could not have been more different. Both Red Cloud and Sitting Bull achieved decisive tactical victories, but only Red Cloud realized the accomplishment of his end state, at least in the short term. Military planners benefit from multiple iterations of adversary analysis. In the contemporary operating environment across the range of military operations, it is likely that parallels exist between the Lakota and current day threats. Most studies of operational art in the nineteenth-century Indian Wars focus on the conventional operations executed by US government forces. Much clearer links exist to doctrine, and it is simpler to analyze actions of a western force with a western perspective. By applying current doctrinal frameworks to an enemy unfamiliar with the concept illustrates the presence of

⁶ See Mark H. Abrams, *Sioux War Dispatches: Reports from the Field, 1876-1877* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2012), 1–29, for an excellent collection of primary sources and analysis of the gold rush in the Black Hills after the Custer expedition and through the war; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 218–20, 222–27.

⁷ Bruce Vandervoort, *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada, and the United States, 1812-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 178–79, 187–88; Collins Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*, 35.

operational art. Analyzing Lakota actions, motivations, and desired strategic end state during the two wars through the present-day construct of operational art will provide a deeper understanding of a culturally different enemy. The Sioux Wars are a mature field of study, and significant primary and secondary source material exists to apply the framework. While the dichotomy of the two Sioux Wars is useful for organization and study, it is somewhat false, the Lakota faced an existential threat to their traditional society, and their struggle against encroachment spanned throughout.

Historiographic Review

Available literature is pervasive and wide-ranging. The Indian Wars of the West have captured the imagination of Americans since they occurred. Popular sentiment has vacillated from pro-US to pro-Indian and authors have followed suit with their work. Peter Cozzens' recent work, *The Earth is Weeping*, attempts balance. It is a wide-ranging work covering the Apacheria from northern Mexico and Texas to the Pacific Northwest and all points in between. Cozzens' stated purpose is to bring historical balance, citing the swinging of sentiment since the war's occurrence. *The Earth is Weeping* neither romanticizes the plight of the Indians nor demonizes them while offering a fair representation of the United States government as well. The narrative is well organized, engaging, and comprehensive.⁸

Dee Brown influences every discussion of the Indian Wars. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* is Brown's seminal work and is largely responsible for reigniting interest in Indian perspectives of the wars. Brown's work is lopsided, however, focused on the suffering of the tribes, and the atrocities perpetrated against them. While fascinating and descriptive, it is an incomplete picture of the events of the day. *The Fetterman Massacre* is a detailed account of the circumstances and actions that precipitated the largest tactical defeat of the US Army by Indians to that point. Since Brown published *The Fetterman Massacre*, more scholarship emerged and

⁸ Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 3–9.

called into question Brown's conclusion that Captain William Fetterman's recklessness and disobedience led to the stunning defeat. Most notably, John H. Monnett's *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, and Shannon Smith's *Give Me Eighty Men* challenge that Fetterman is responsible for the annihilation of his command.⁹

Monnett's work advances the scholarly understanding of Red Cloud's war and illuminates additional context to directly challenge the "myth" associated with Fetterman's demise. He succinctly articulates the context on the Indian and US government sides and provides a comprehensive overview of the struggle between the Lakota and the United States immediately following the American Civil War. If only one book were available for study, this is the best. Smith's work, published just two years before Monnett's landmark, challenges Brown's assertions as well. In a detailed description of the role of women in Victorian society, she asserts that Carrington and his wives successfully placed the blame for the disaster by painting Fetterman as a reckless and arrogant glory monger.¹⁰

Two books offer condensed versions of events to help frame how the Sioux Wars fit into the broader context of Westward expansion. *Farewell, My Nation* by Philip Weeks written as a textbook served that purpose particularly well. Bruce Vandervort's *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada, and the United States* provides overview information and highlights links between Indian resistance across the continent. Vandervort describes the effects of cultural aspects and their implications on the behavior of the various tribes. In addition to the two overarching

⁹ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (1970; repr., New York: H. Holt, 1991); Brown, *The Fetterman Massacre*; John H. Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed: The Struggle for the Powder River Country in 1866 and the Making of the Fetterman Myth* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010); Shannon D. Smith, *Give Me Eighty Men: Women and the Myth of the Fetterman Fight* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*; Smith, *Give Me Eighty Men*.

histories, Charles Collins Jr.'s *Atlas of the Sioux Wars* provides excellent tactical detail of the significant engagements throughout both wars and is essential to understanding the chronology.¹¹

Turning toward the significant Indian leaders during the wars several biographies are particularly insightful. For Red Cloud, two biographies exist. Robert Larson's *Red Cloud: Warrior Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, details the chronology of Red Cloud's life and the factors affecting his decisions and efforts to resist, and eventually co-exist with the United States. He offers detailed background information on Lakota societal structure and discusses the difficulties of unifying it in common purpose. Written like a novel, Bob Drury's and Tom Calvin's *The Heart of Everything That Is* contains rich details that make for a fascinating read, but proffer more than their sources account for. Nonetheless, *The Heart of Everything That Is* chronologically and accurately portrays the events of Red Cloud's War. For Sitting Bull, the widely acknowledged biography is Robert Utley's *The Lance and the Sword*, a comprehensive work that is the standard biography in the field for Sitting Bull.¹²

Delving into the specifics of the campaigns and major battles provides insights into how the Lakota linked tactical actions in time, space, and purpose. Many works exist from both perspectives of the conflicts. For Red Cloud's War Monnett's *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, Larson's *Red Cloud*, and Drury's *The Heart of Everything That Is* provide the background of the campaigns, and eventually Red Cloud's effort to negotiate its settlement. Taken together, and weighed against the overview offered by Cozzens and Brown's narrative, a clear pattern of Red Cloud's genius emerges.¹³

¹¹ Weeks, *Farewell, My Nation*; Vandervoort, *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada, and the United States, 1812-1900*; Collins Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*.

¹² Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*; Robert Marshall Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993).

¹³ Brown, *The Fetterman Massacre*; Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*.

For the Great Sioux War, a tremendous amount of research exists, although primarily from the United States' perspective. Marc Abrams' *Sioux War Dispatches* provides a plethora of primary sources coupled with analyses from the United States' perspective. John Gray's *Centennial Campaign* serves as an exhaustive writing for the war that accounts for the actions of each side. To fully understand the context surrounding the conflict Gray's work is the perfect reference. Paul Hedren's *Powder River; Disastrous Opening of the Great Sioux War* offers a comprehensive history of the first campaign conducted by the US Army in the winter of 1876, and the struggles experienced by the US Army as they adapted techniques to counter the Lakota strengths. Matthew Blome's monograph, "The Emergence of Operational Art in the Great Sioux War 1876-1877" offers more details concerning the US Army's actions during the war as framed through the current lens of operational art.¹⁴

Much less research has focused on Lakota actions at anything above the tactical level. The best synthesis from the Lakota perspective comes from Gregory Michno's *Lakota Noon*, where he creates a chronology of the Battle of the Little Bighorn based on primary source material offered from Indian participants. This coupled with Richard Hardorff's *Lakota Recollections of the Custer Fight* give rich tactical insights into Indian actions during the most noted engagement of the war. Nathaniel Philbrick's *The Last Stand*, also expertly lays out the details of the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the context surrounding it. To understand Sitting Bull's perspective throughout the war and in the immediate aftermath, two works serve as the basis to understand his version of operational art. The first is Utley's biography and the second is Joseph Manzione's *I am Looking to the North for My Life*. Manzione's work is exclusively from Sitting Bull's perspective and offers insight into the considerations he faced after the Battle of the

¹⁴ Abrams, *Sioux War Dispatches: Reports from the Field, 1876-1877*; John S. Gray, *Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Paul L. Hedren, *Powder River: Disastrous Opening of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); Matthew L. Blome, "The Emergence of Operational Art in the Great Sioux War 1876-1877" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2013).

Little Bighorn. It is invaluable to understanding cultural and contextual factors driving the conclusion of the war.¹⁵

Operational art is *en vogue* in the contemporary US military community; it is the panacea that allows commanders to obtain the conditions required to meet the end state and thereby accomplish their mission. Defined in Joint doctrine and slightly tweaked in the Army's, operational art is easily understood but difficultly executed; Figure 1 juxtaposes the definitions of operational art from *Joint Publication (JP) 5-0* and *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0*. Similar sentiments, highlighted in similar colors show the structure of each definition and how they are nested. The juxtaposition indicates that the definitions are congruent within current doctrine, with subtle structural differences easily accounted for by the different focus of each echelon. It is important to realize that current doctrine herein serves as an analytical tool. Doctrine, as it is known, did not exist in the nineteenth century, and the Lakota had no such concept.¹⁶

	JP 5-0	ADRP 3-0
Operational Art	Operational art is the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, means, and risks.	For Army forces, operational art is the pursuit of strategic objectives , in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose. Operational art applies to all types and aspects of operations. It integrates ends, ways, and means while accounting for risk.

Figure 1. Operational Art nesting in doctrine. Created by author.

¹⁵ Gregory Michno, *Lakota Noon: The Indian Narrative of Custer's Defeat* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing, 1997); Hardorff, *Lakota Recollections of the Custer Fight: New Sources of Indian Military History*; Nathaniel Philbrick, *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (New York: Penguin, 2010); Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*; Joseph Manzione, "I Am Looking to the North for My Life": *Sitting Bull, 1876-1881* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991).

¹⁶ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), xxi; US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 2–1.

ADRP 3-0 goes on to state “Operational art encompasses all levels, from strategic direction to tactical actions. It requires creative vision, broad experience, and a knowledge of capabilities, tactics, and techniques across multiple domains.” While Red Cloud and Sitting Bull were not commanders in the US military sense, they certainly provided the vision and direction for Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho resistance against the US government. Analyzing their actions in terms of ends, ways, means, and risk informs how they linked actions in time, space, and purpose to fulfill their ends. Additionally, the importance of cultural, demographic, and strategic factors cannot be overstated. Regardless of brilliance in the application of tactical actions and repeated tactical victory, if the strategic end state is untenable, no operational artist can achieve it. Central to successful operational art is unity of effort, within the confines of Lakota society achieving unity of effort is difficult. *JP 3-16 Multinational Operations* provides a useful framework to analyze Lakota cultural factors and their attempts to achieve unity of effort among the various bands and tribes with similar goals. Understanding the context enables analysis of Red Cloud’s War and what contributed materially to the US government making the most substantial concessions to native persons in history. Following Red Cloud’s War, the Great Sioux War will provide the foundation to examine how Sitting Bull’s attempt at operational art either successfully or unsuccessfully drove towards his desired end state, and whether it was ever achievable.¹⁷

Strategic Context

Fundamentally, the Sioux wars were a clash of competing cultures. The Lakota and their allies dominated the Northern Plains and resisted Euro-American and competing Native-American encroachments. Differing religions, societal structure, demographics, and forms of governance clashed and precipitated an existential threat to the Lakota. The US government,

¹⁷ US Army, *ADRP 3-0*, (2017), 2–1; US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, Multinational Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013).

never directly under threat from the Indians, executed wars of limited aims. Its goal was to “civilize” the Indians and provide security for the extraction of natural resources and the peaceful expansion to achieve the country’s manifest destiny. According to Peter Berger’s and Thomas Luckmann’s seminal sociological work, *The Social Construction of Reality*, the Lakota required resocialization, that is, an alteration of their symbolic universe to survive nihilation. The Lakota, lacking enough material resources either consented to the resocialization or fought on under increasingly long odds. That is not to say the Lakota cause was lost from the outset, but rather that the desired end state needed to be grounded in reality.¹⁸

United States Government

The US government’s first attempt at an enduring peace on the Northern Plains came with the negotiation of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. A delegation under the leadership of Thomas Fitzpatrick negotiated with the Northern Plains tribes and obtained signatures from many of the chiefs. Originally a trapper, Fitzpatrick became an Indian agent and diplomat highly regarded by the US government and most of the tribes. The treaty delineated tribal boundaries and included clauses that the tribes would not fight each other and would allow settlers passage through their lands in exchange for annual annuities. What the assembled chiefs understood of the treaty is debatable, as well as their authority to enter into such an agreement. Predictably so, the tribes did not adhere to the treaty, and the Lakota continued to raid and war with other tribes. Despite the warring between the plains tribes, the Euro-Americans traveling west had few violent encounters with the tribes following the treaty. As the Civil War approached, the US government’s focus passed from territorial disputes in the West to the East and Southeast. During

¹⁸ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 115, 156.

the Civil War, the government's concern for the West centered on the flow of natural resources and the government used volunteer regiments to secure them.¹⁹

Following the Civil War, Westward expansion renewed with much vigor, and the path towards conflict became clear. The US government developed a three-part strategy to deal with the territorial disputes with the Native Americans. First, it instituted the policy of concentration, designed to consolidate native populations into more manageable areas and allow Euro-Americans to settle the desirable lands. The second was to assimilate native populations into the Euro-American societal and cultural structures. Third, the federal government would oversee all Indian affairs by removing the authority of the states' governments. Thus was the basic construct to overcome the violence associated with the expansion west. While public sentiment would shift and limit the resources available to enforce these tenets, they would remain unchanged for the remainder of the nineteenth century. One of the major factors that limited the material means to execute the government's strategy was the nation's focus on Southern Reconstruction and an unwillingness to accept high casualties after the Civil War. Much of the willingness to negotiate a termination to Red Cloud's War would evaporate by the time of the Great Sioux War.²⁰

Lakota Culture

Lakota culture was fundamentally different from the Euro-Americans they struggled against. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Lakota were a strong people. Having wrested the Northern Plains from competing tribes, the land became theirs, and their culture evolved as the regional hegemon. Only the Comanche of the Southern Plains and Southwest had ever obtained similar organization and territory in North America since European arrival. Lakota success stemmed mainly from their ability and willingness to adapt as they entered the plains west of the Missouri River in the eighteenth century. The pressures that drove the Lakota west were the same

¹⁹ Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 20–21; Weeks, *Farewell, My Nation*, 62–63, 106.

²⁰ Weeks, *Farewell, My Nation*, 110–12.

pressures they leveraged to secure territory on the plains. The firearm, horse, and ferocity enabled them to adapt to the new environment and mercilessly pursue their enemies.²¹

The three main tribes that stood between the Lakota and regional hegemony were the Arikara, Crow, and Kiowa. The Lakota, initially smaller in population than the sedentary Arikara benefitted from a smallpox epidemic that decimated the “dirt eaters.” The Lakota raided the Arikara encampments, killing the men and capturing women, children, and horses. Through the raids, the warriors grew in reputation, and Siouan culture developed its own “cult of the offense,” placing primacy on the offensive raiding tactics and courage in battle to gain acclaim and improve their social status. Simultaneously, the warriors raided Crow and Kiowa encampments over control of hunting ground. Disadvantaged with less access to firearms and Euro-American goods, the Crow, a nomadic hunting tribe, struggled to resist the Lakota advance and retreated westward. Lakota raiding parties destroyed Crow camps killing men and mutilating the corpses of their foes. The desecration of enemy corpses played a central role in the raiding culture of the Lakota. Lakota religious beliefs dictated that the body would maintain its form in the afterlife. By scalping, disemboweling, removing eyes and genitals, and otherwise mutilating the body of the foe, that enemy would endure eternity in that state. The Lakota desecration of corpses intensified the hatred Euro-Americans had for them. To Western society, desecration was culturally abhorrent and propagated racism and the dehumanization of the “savages.”²²

Through the struggle to control prized hunting grounds Lakota warrior culture flourished. Displaying courage in battle provided excellent prospects for upward social mobility, but also contributed to a rising tension. Bravery in battle cemented social standing, but demographically

²¹ Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 19; Vandervoort, *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada, and the United States, 1812-1900*, 27–29.

²² Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 42–44, 56–58; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 17–18; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 49. Dirt Eaters is the pejorative name the Lakota called the tribes who farmed and did not roam the plains.

large numbers of losses were not supportable. The Lakota diet consisted primarily of meat and whatever edible plants and roots they encountered. The poor Lakota diet resulted in low birth rates and high infant mortality. With low recruitment between generations, children became revered in Lakota society. Based on the tribe's inability to sustain high casualty rates came the emergence of the coup. Seen as braver than simply killing an enemy, a warrior counted a coup by incapacitating an opponent regardless of whether they killed him. The most admired coups came from touching an armed opponent rather than killing him. The enemy survived to fight another day, but lost respect because of the coup. Lakota warriors rose in esteem for the number of coups they acquired in battle, with coups documented in the winter counts. Documented acts of valor elevated the warrior, and the best warriors became the nexus of governance in Lakota society. Red Cloud reportedly accrued eighty coups and Sitting Bull, forty-five.²³

The bands of the Lakota executed governance and decision making in very different ways than the Euro-Americans. They sought out head chiefs as decision makers and held them accountable for the actions of the tribe. Their efforts were continually frustrated because Lakota society did not operate on that basis. The Lakota ruled by consensus with a leader's power of influence dramatically changing depending on the situation. The basic structure of Lakota society centered on a *tiyospaye*, the name for a small band, that usually included ten or more extended families. *Tiyospaye* identity trumped tribal identity, and thus familial ties were paramount with a similar concern shared for relatives as for children. Inside each *tiyospaye*, there was one or more *itancan*, or "father" responsible for the welfare of his people. The Euro-Americans generally sought the *itancan* as the head chief, despite his inability to agree to anything on behalf of the band. The *itancan* would oversee camp councils that only occurred when important decisions

²³ Philbrick, *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, 29–30; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 48–49; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 74; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 41–42. Winter count refers to the Lakota tradition of capturing the most significant events of a year during the winter by drawing them on hides or shields. While not an exhaustive history they provide great insight into particularly significant events.

needed to be made. Camp councils included members such as the *blotahunka*, or war leader, the *akicita*, or enforcer, the *wakiconza*, or camp administrator, and the *wicasa wakan*, or holy man. In addition to the defined roles, other members of the *tiyospaye* participated in the council, including women. Camp councils often frustrated Euro-Americans accustomed to more centralized rule. The Lakota councils required consensus and if it proved elusive would simply adjourn and try again later.²⁴

Slow and laborious camp councils were the mechanism for making decisions, but day to day administration and crises required a different protocol. Depending on the situation, the tribal leader responsible for making decisions varied. For instance, the *itankan* would defer to the *wakiconza* in all matters pertaining to the movement of the band and selection of encampments. Similarly, in the event of an attack on the band, the *wakiconza* would yield to the *blotahunka*. Decision making authority cycled through the various groups in a way that was incomprehensible to Euro-Americans. The fluidity of the Lakota political structure meant that no leader or coterie maintained absolute authority and thus, could not represent the Lakota for long. *Itankans* wielded much influence over their band and some transcended band boundaries, but fundamentally, they influenced actions, not decided them. It is important to note that neither Red Cloud or Sitting Bull were *itankans* when directing fighting and negotiations with the US government. Among the most revered warriors, Red Cloud rose through the ranks as a *blotahunka*; the US government projected the role of *itankan* onto him. Sitting Bull, while also a great warrior, was a *wicasa wakan*, a holy man known for his prophetic visions. He did not obtain high power status until 1870 when his uncle, Four Horns, orchestrated his naming as an *itankan* of the non-reservation Lakota bands. Still, not all Lakota recognized Sitting Bull's authority.²⁵

²⁴ Catherine Price, "Lakotas and Euroamericans: Contrasted Concepts of 'Chieftainship' and Decision-Making Authority," *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 3 (1994): 449–51, accessed 8 September 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2307/481834>; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 35–36.

²⁵ Price, "Lakotas and Euroamericans," 451–52, 457–58; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 138; Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 87–89.

Lakota society did not lend itself to easy management by individuals or even coteries. *Tiyospaye* identity trumped tribal identity and small populations dispersed over vast areas provided difficulty when organizing resistance. Poor recruitment from generation to generation and attrition through conflict placed a high cost on casualties and a lack of industrial resources hamstrung war efforts. These facts, coupled with a society of revolving decision makers disadvantaged the Lakota in the efforts to protect their way of life. Additionally, the dependence of the Lakota on the buffalo as the lynchpin for sustenance presented an opportunity for the US government to dismantle Lakota culture indirectly. What the US government was trying to make the Lakota do was anathema to their culture. Concentration and assimilation undermined the foundations of Lakota life and provided the motivation for the Lakota to resist.

Methodology of Analysis

According to *Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 Operations*, an operational approach is “a commander’s initial description, to help guide further planning, of the broad actions the force must take to achieve objectives and accomplish the mission. It is the commander’s visualization of how the operation should transform current conditions into desired conditions – the way the commander wants the operational environment (OE) to look at the conclusion of operations.”²⁶

While doctrine, as it is today did not exist, it is useful as an analytical tool to understand Red Cloud’s and Sitting Bull’s considerations while orchestrating their campaigns. Lines of Operations, Lines of Effort, Termination, Military End State, Culmination, Decisive points, Objectives, Effects, and Operational Reach apply as directly to Indian operations as they do to current US military operations. The Indian leaders’ ability to influence them varied as any commander’s does. Red Cloud and Sitting Bull were not the commanders of the Indian coalition resisting the US Army, but they certainly drove the operations process as described in current

²⁶ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), II–6.

doctrine. According to *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 5-0, The Operations Process*: “commanders drive the operations process through understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations.” Analyzing Indian action through current doctrinal constructs may inadvertently provide undue credit to Red Cloud and Sitting Bull, but regardless the Indians executed the campaign within the principles of what would become the elements of Operational Design and Operational Art.²⁷

For the continuing analysis, Red Cloud’s War and the Great Sioux War of 1876 are re-created operational approach graphics produced as figures to aid in the analysis. The operational approach graphics are created based on available information and constitute a blend of the Native American campaign’s blueprint “as built” rather than “as designed.” Insufficient primary source information exists to produce a complete analysis of Indian action as conceived by the leaders in the context of the time.

Red Cloud’s Success

Red Cloud’s war began in June of 1866 when negotiations regarding the Bozeman trail broke down between the Indian Bureau and the *itankans* of the Oglala and Miniconjou bands of the Lakota. The peace council, conducted at Fort Laramie, sought to obtain unmolested access to the gold fields of southwestern Montana and offered assurances that travelers would not depredate the land. Edward B. Taylor stood on the Indian Bureau side and negotiations seemed on track until Colonel Carrington arrived with his Overland Circus to garrison the trail by reoccupying Fort Connor, and building two new forts. The Lakota, incensed by the duplicitousness, promised to contest the move. In one of Red Cloud’s most famous quotes, captured by the wife of one of Carrington’s lieutenants he said. “The Great Father sends us presents and wants us to sell him the road, but the White Chief goes with soldiers to steal the road

²⁷ US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 5-0, The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2; US Army, *ADRP 3-0*, (2017), 2–4; US Joint Staff, *JP 5-0, Joint Planning*, 2017, IV-1.

before the Indians say yes or no.” With Carrington’s arrival and Red Cloud’s outburst the peace conference ended and the Lakota rode north into the Powder River country resolute in denying Carrington’s regiment unfettered access to the trail.²⁸

While the Lakota mobilized for war, Carrington proceeded along the trail and re-established Fort Connor as Fort Reno and established forts Phil Kearny and C.F. Smith. The Lakota conducted small raids and generally harassed travelers and the soldiers, but did not engage in set-piece battles for the remainder of the summer. In December this would all change, and the Lakota coalition would direct their efforts against Fort Phil Kearny, essentially besieging the outpost. The Fetterman fight occurred on 21 December, followed by a lull until the following summer. In 1867 hostilities renewed with the Wagon Box and Hayfield Fights as the Lakota threatened Fort C.F. Smith and Fort Reno. Figure 2, below shows the locations of forts along the Bozeman Trail. Lakota raids all but ceased emigrant traffic on the trail, and by the fall of 1867, the US government sought negotiations with the Lakota to end the conflict. Many of the Lakota coalition wanted to negotiate a cessation, but Red Cloud vowed to continue the resistance until the US government closed trail and abandoned the forts. It was not until November 1868 after the US Army abandoned the forts that Red Cloud came and signed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 after acquiring the concessions he sought.²⁹

²⁸ Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 33–34; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 91–93. Carrington’s Overland Circus is the pejorative name for Carrington’s battalion as it traveled to garrison the Bozeman Trail. Carrington brought 700 soldiers and upwards of 300 support personnel including a band, women, and children, quite the spectacle for a battalion deploying to what would end up being the most hostile territory in the United States.

²⁹ Collins Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*, 6; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 44–46; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 124–25; Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, 207–8; Vandervoort, *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada, and the United States, 1812-1900*, 175; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 356.

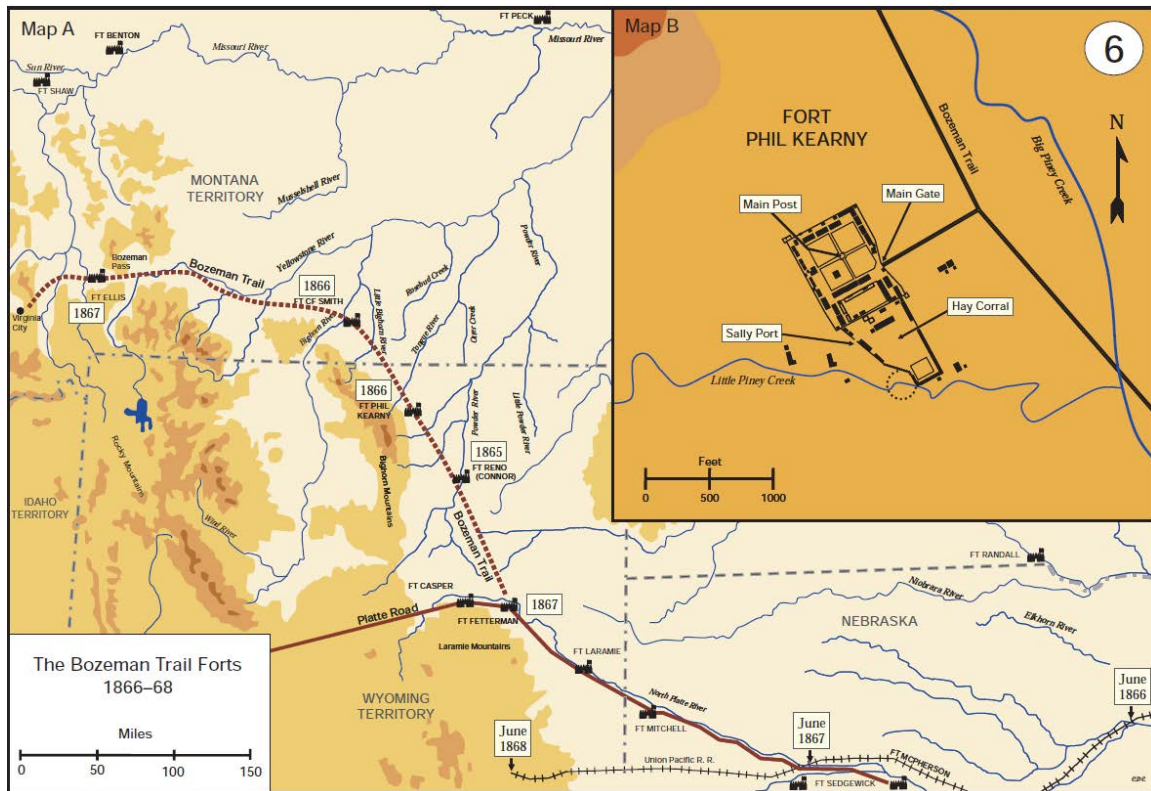


Figure 2. Location of Forts along the Bozeman Trail. *Atlas of the Sioux Wars* 2006, 6.

Red Cloud the *blotahunka*

Red Cloud was an Oglala Sioux, born to a Brule father and Oglala mother in 1821 near the confluence of the Blue Water Creek and the North Platte River.³⁰ Such intraband relationships were common amongst the Lakota. Red Cloud's father, Lone Man, died of alcoholism while Red Cloud was young and his mother returned to her original Oglala band. Luckily for Red Cloud, his mother's band accepted him completely and his uncle, Old Smoke the *itankan*, invested into developing the young boy. Red Cloud's early years were consistent with Lakota norms, frequent exposure to Euro-Americans through trade and the traditional emphasis on martial skill and hunting. What was not normal was Red Cloud's acumen for fighting, leadership, and his *coup*

³⁰ Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 30–33. Exact records do not exist, but the scholarly consensus indicates this location and birth year as the most probable based on a variety of sources. Larson does an excellent job of outlining the conflicting evidence in the pages listed in note.

d'oeil. Red Cloud's primary socialization as a warrior allowed him to develop the bravery and brutality that would propel him to a leadership role previously unimaginable in Lakota society.³¹

Red Cloud's exploits as a young warrior pursuing competing tribes garnered him reverence among the Lakota. By acquiring credit for an incredible eighty coups, and becoming known for his brutality against enemies, Red Cloud ascended to the role of *blotahunka*. Absolute authority did not exist in Lakota society, but with increasing tension between the Euro-Americans and the Lakota bands, the Lakota became increasingly reliant on *blotahunkas* to protect the wellbeing of the tribe. Red Cloud overcame significant disadvantage in his rise to leadership. As a son of Brule who died as a drunk, Red Cloud's prospects for upward mobility relied on individual merit alone. By 1865 Red Cloud became a "shirtwearer," and assumed a significant leadership role. With only four Oglala "shirtwearers" Red Cloud, in his forties, transitioned away from gallantry in battle to directing the wartime strategy of the Lakota at large. He possessed a unique ability to understand the situation and leverage complementary interests to build the coalition through indirect authority.³²

Red Cloud the Operational Artist

Red Cloud understood the situation clearly, his younger life on the Northern Plains saw increasing emigrant traffic, and he understood the limitations of his people and the advantages of the US government. Figure three, depicts Red Cloud's Operational Approach, linking effects, objectives, and lines of effort to materially contribute to reaching the military end state. The color

³¹ Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior Statesmen of the Lakota Sioux*, 35–38; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 66–69; Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 578, the term *coup d'oeil* refers to Clausewitz's definition from Book VIII Chapter 1.

³² Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 39–43, 48–49; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 71–74. Larson describes the role of shirtwearer and when Red Cloud rose to prominence on page 48. Regardless of when it occurred, by 1866 Red Cloud had firmly established himself as one of the most influential and capable *blotahunkas* in the Oglala band.

gradient along each line of effort depicts the relative efficacy of each line of effort in terms of achieving the desired effect from the Indian perspective.

Red Cloud's Operational Approach

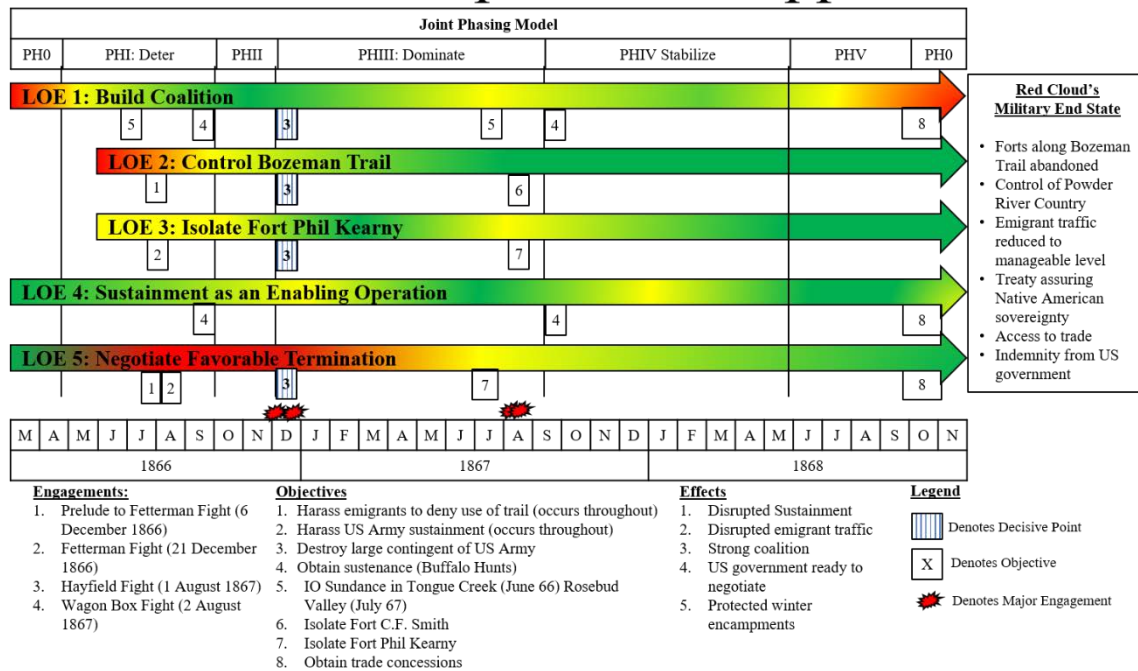


Figure 3. Red Cloud's Operational Approach. Created by author.

In contemporary doctrine, the military end state is defined as “the set of required conditions that defines the achievement of all military objectives. It is a period in time or set of conditions beyond which the President does not require the military instrument of national power as the primary means to achieve remaining national objectives.” While not a perfect corollary, the definition is useful to establish the point at which Red Cloud transitioned towards diplomatic efforts. Red Cloud's military end state encompassed six key conditions all focused on retaining the Lakota way of life on their indigenous lands. First, and most clearly, Red Cloud desired the closure of the three forts along the Bozeman Trail. The closure of the three forts would enable the Lakota to control the Powder River basin and deny its use for emigrant traffic. Additionally, Red

Cloud sought US government recognition through treaty designating the area as sovereign Lakota land, accompanied by an indemnity, and unfettered access to trade.³³

To achieve his vision of the military end state Red Cloud organized Indian actions along what is contemporarily termed as lines of effort. According to *JP 5-0*, “A Line of Effort links multiple tasks and missions using the logic of purpose—cause and effect—to focus efforts toward establishing operational and strategic conditions,” with an understanding of the political objects in mind, Red Cloud organized actions along five lines of effort. The first line of effort dealt with maintaining a sufficient number of warriors from across tribal and band boundaries to conduct operations. The second line of effort organized action to control the Powder River country. The third line of effort, and central to Red Cloud’s vision of success centered on the isolation of Fort Phil Kearny. The fourth line of effort directly supported the first and concerned the sequencing of operations to ensure adequate sustainment. The fifth line of effort entailed the overall orchestration of the campaign and how to leverage its events to negotiate a favorable outcome for the Lakota and their partners.³⁴

The first line of effort during Red Cloud’s War centered on building an Indian coalition to field sufficient forces to combat the US military. Red Cloud sought alliances with the neighboring tribes and other bands of the Lakota. Through his diplomatic efforts, Red Cloud obtained support from Oglala, Brule, Hunkpapa, San Arc, and Miniconjou Sioux bands as well as the Northern Cheyenne and Arapahoe. The Cheyenne and Arapahoe came as eager participants, motivated by the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864. Red Cloud understood the significance of the action and even went as far as to offer terms to the Crows to gain their support, but they rebuffed

³³ US Joint Staff, *JP 5-0, Joint Planning*, 2017, I–10; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 33–34; Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, 33–34, 51–54, 205–8.

³⁴ US Joint Staff, *JP 5-0, Joint Planning*, 2017, III–6.

his efforts. With significant support from numerous Sioux bands and partnering tribes Red Cloud amassed over 500 lodges worth of warriors as the war began.³⁵

Maintaining the coalition in support of the first line of effort consumed significant portions of Red Cloud's time and proved to be among the most significant challenges he faced during Red Cloud's War. Lakota and Native American culture and lifestyle were ill-suited for central control and as the war progressed Red Cloud's ability to achieve unified action amongst the disparate bands and tribes ebbed and flowed. Red Cloud understood the importance of the coalition and closely tied the fourth line of effort to the first to enable continued cooperation. *Joint Publication (JP) 3-16 Multinational Operations* outlines five tenets required for successful multinational operations; they are respect, rapport, knowledge of partners, patience, mission focus, and trust and confidence. In Native American culture respect, rapport, and trust and confidence were the key aspects that Red Cloud leveraged to maintain the coalition. Red Cloud did not make overt attempts to dominate the other tribes and bands but sought to leverage their capabilities towards the accomplishment of shared objectives.³⁶

While cognizant of the delicacy of the Indian coalition, Red Cloud used his ascendant position as a great warrior to maintain discipline. In one instance he humiliated an *itancan* of the Northern Cheyenne, Black Horse, when he caught him trading with civilians traveling with Carrington's men for whiskey. Red Cloud abhorred alcohol, and the effect it had on the Indians, this episode in the summer of 1866 displays the unprecedented stature Red Cloud assumed as a trans-tribal leader. Prior to the quirting of Black Horse, Red Cloud conducted the first Sun Dance since the "declaration of war" following the breakdown of peace negotiations at Fort Laramie in June. Sun Dances proved pivotal to Red Cloud's efforts to organize and maintain the coalition and would prove equally important for Sitting Bull in the Great Sioux War of 1876. Sun Dances

³⁵ Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 93–94; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 35–40.

³⁶ US Joint Staff, *JP 3-16, Multinational Operations*, 2013, I-3-I-4, II-2.

enabled the Indians to select objectives and develop plans for attack in the coming fighting season. Red Cloud would execute an annual Sun Dance during each summer of the war.³⁷

After significant effort to build the coalition prior to the actual start of hostilities, Red Cloud sought to develop the initial objectives to organize actions. During the Sun Dance of 1866, Red Cloud developed his initial operational approach. Using a metaphor to describe Carrington and the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry, Red Cloud decided to cut off the white snake's head from its body and then destroy the head. Red Cloud's metaphor describes Fort Phil Kearny as the head of the white snake, and thus it became the central objective of 1866.³⁸

With over 500 lodges and in excess of 2000 warriors the Indians began skirmishes with Carrington's men as they advanced on the future site of Fort Phil Kearny on 17 July 1867. The initial skirmishes occurred in the north near Fort Phil Kearny, directed against the head of the white snake. The first significant engagement, the Battle of Crazy Woman Fork occurred on 20 July 1867. Red Cloud's warriors stole livestock from an infantry column and killed several civilians at a fording site between Fort Reno and Fort Phil Kearny. This attack occurred closer to Fort Reno and had large implications on continued traffic along the trail. The Indians executed the attack consistent with their raiding culture. Feints coupled with flanking attacks and efforts to draw reinforcements into ambushes gave the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry a taste of the bitter campaign to come. Over the course of the next ten days, the Indians continued similar style attacks, greatly supporting the second and third lines of effort and denying the use of the Bozeman Trail to emigrant traffic. Similar engagements occurred throughout the summer and early fall until the Lakota ceased to go on the fall buffalo hunt. By this point, news of the harassment reached the east coast, and emigrant traffic along the trail all but ceased, and those

³⁷ Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 257–59; Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, 56; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 96; Brown, *The Fetterman Massacre*, 79.

³⁸ Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 257.

that continued faced increasing threat of molestation. Red Cloud's operational approach was working; he successfully isolated the head of the white snake and prepared to kill it.³⁹

Red Cloud received reinforcements from other bands as news of the coalition's success against the white soldiers spread across the tribes. Additional warriors came to join the coalition as fall transitioned to winter. The warriors perfected their tactics throughout the summer and fall, and as the forts transitioned from construction to preparation for winter, the Lakota experienced additional opportunities to exploit. One evolution, in particular, would bear significance in the final battles of 1866. The Indian attacks on the forts focused on stealing livestock and attacking hay and wood cutting parties outside the fort walls. As this pattern emerged, soldiers prepared response parties staged to pursue the raiders before they could escape with the livestock. The tactic initially met with success, and the losses attributed to the Lakota raiding declined. The Indians first tried a response to the quick reaction force in a battle that would become the dress rehearsal for the Fetterman Fight on 6 December.⁴⁰

Despite the Indian efforts to isolate Fort Phil Kearny in preparation for a major assault, Carrington, and the men of 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry continued to receive reinforcements and completed Fort C.F. Smith, ninety miles to the northwest along the Bighorn River. With the occupation of three forts, near constant Indian raiding, and the impending winter, the soldiers of Carrington's command were spread thin and restless. Their frustration came to a head on 6 December when another of Red Cloud's raiding parties lured the soldiers into pursuit. A band of over 100 warriors attacked a wood train several miles to the northwest of Fort Phil Kearny eliciting a response from the newly arrived Captain William Fetterman and Carrington. Fetterman led a party of cavalry in pursuit while Carrington flanked to the north attempting to cut off the fleeing warriors. Nearly overtaken by the Indians, the soldiers struggled to maintain control of

³⁹ Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, 57–58, 63–67.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 92, 94–97.

their formations. The 6 December skirmish frustrated the soldiers and provided Red Cloud a model on how to lure the soldiers away from the protection of the fort.⁴¹

Red Cloud and leaders from the other Sioux bands and tribes developed a plan for the next engagement following the skirmish on 6 December. They devised an elaborate scheme of maneuver to draw a large contingent of soldiers into an ambush. On 21 December, the Indians drew a relief column from Fort Phil Kearny by attacking a wood train party several miles north of the fort. A small element of decoys then lured the relief party into a pursuit. The pursuit led the company of infantry escorted by mounted soldiers into a sizeable ambush, with some Indian accounts indicating more warriors present than at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Once the soldiers were in the ambush, the warriors befell them, leaving no survivors. This fight became known as the Fetterman Fight, named after the commander of the relief column. The Fetterman Fight represented a decisive victory for Red Cloud and the Lakota, inflicting the highest number of casualties on the US Army in the Indian wars to that point. The masterful plan and disciplined execution of the engagement points toward significant planning and preparation by the Indian coalition.⁴²

Red Cloud's specific role in planning and executing the Fetterman Fight remains fiercely debated. Regardless of his presence, it is inconceivable that an *itancan* of his standing would not be involved at a minimum in a supervisory capacity. Following the victory, and anticipating a response from the US government, Red Cloud and the coalition dispersed and passed the remainder of the season in winter encampments. News of the Indian victory circulated widely in the winter encampments and supported Red Cloud's efforts the following year to recruit forces.

⁴¹ Collins Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*, 7; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 310–16; Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, 106–15.

⁴² Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, 120–30; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 98–101; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 330–35; Brown, *The Fetterman Massacre*, 177–88; Collins Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*, 8–10. Monnett's and Collins's account of the Fetterman Fight offer the most balanced views. Monnett addresses many of the myths concerning the engagement and offers many rich tactical insights. As a practitioner, Collins provides excellent detail for tactical analysis.

The news also shocked the remainder of the United States, with the Sanborn Commission established to investigate the matter. The Sanborn Commission was a government investigation led by Brevet Major General John B. Sanborn. Following service in the Civil War Sanborn became an Indian affairs expert and oversaw the investigation of the Fetterman Massacre with the significant finding indicating Fetterman's failure to follow orders as the proximate cause for the event. The political necessity to place blame coupled with the intense scrutiny of the army's actions defeated any chance of a coherent response by the US government. Carrington received a prompt transfer, and the government sent more reinforcements to garrison the three forts, but the trail remained closed to emigrant traffic. With the military as the only occupants in the Powder River basin, and their continued inability to stem the aggression from the Indians, the US government contemplated closing the forts in the spring of 1867.⁴³

As spring transitioned into summer in 1867, Red Cloud renewed the offensive against the forts. Bolstered by the success in December and emboldened by a lack of response the Indians renewed the campaign. Firmly established as the senior *itancan*, Red Cloud found less resistance directing operations until mid-summer. During the Sun Dance in Rosebud Valley in July of 1867, Red Cloud found dissent over which fort to focus efforts against. Red Cloud maintained a laser focus on Fort Phil Kearny while some of the Northern Cheyenne chiefs contested that Fort C.F. Smith should be the target. The coalition's inability to agree on an objective resulted in a bifurcation of efforts and a challenge to the first line of effort in Red Cloud's operational approach. In early August the Lakota embarked from the Rosebud to attack Fort Phil Kearny, and the Northern Cheyenne embarked on attacking Fort C.F. Smith. The two resulting engagements, the Hayfield and Wagon Box fights maintain operational significance for three reasons. First, they illustrate a tactical evolution that would have implications for the rest of the war. Second, Red Cloud's inability to unite the coalition behind a common objective would be a harbinger of

⁴³ Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, 190–94.

challenges to his first line of effort as the war concluded. Third, when news of the two large attacks on consecutive days reached the east coast, the US government appreciated the significance of Indian resistance. The US government sought to explain such a significant and organized military capability, and identified Red Cloud as the “head chief” of the northern Sioux.⁴⁴

Several weeks before the engagements the soldiers garrisoning the trail received new armament in the form of M-1866 Springfield-Allin breech-loading rifles. The new rifles greatly increased the rate and accuracy of fire from the small outposts and inflicted unsustainable casualties on the attackers. The Indians did manage to steal large herds of livestock but failed to inflict serious damage. Estimates of casualties vary greatly, with each side claiming the engagements as victories. Following the indecision of the Hayfield and Wagon Box fights both sides paused to calculate their next move. Red Cloud supported his fourth line of effort and dispersed the coalition for the fall buffalo hunt in preparation for winter. Additionally, he altered his operational approach away from large attacks designed to destroy outposts and directed smaller harassment style attacks considering the new material advantage of the soldiers. The US government had cause for concern too. The Powder River basin was still too dangerous, and Red Cloud and the Indian coalition still powerful enough to mass over a thousand warriors to challenge the forts.⁴⁵

The remainder of the months in 1867 and leading into 1868 saw a stalemate develop between the Indians and the US government. Red Cloud avoided large engagements and Indian activity centered on their traditional life, including raids on any unescorted parties found along

⁴⁴ Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 101–4, 110; Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, xxxiii; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 347.

⁴⁵ Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 354; Collins Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*, 11–12; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 110–11.

the trail. Politicians in Washington, DC; grew restless, the continued instability coupled with the near completion of the Union Pacific railroad made the Powder River basin less important. With the nation's focus on Southern Reconstruction along with the railroad offering an alternate route to Montana, the US government sought peace. All this set the conditions for Red Cloud to achieve his military end state. Red Cloud's ability to build the largest Indian coalition in history and his ability to meaningfully employ them coherently to shape conditions allowed him to reach his objective and then transition to negotiation.⁴⁶

Red Cloud the Statesmen

By late 1867 the US government began making peace overtures towards the Lakota. These initial negotiations proved fruitless with an impasse developing over uncompromising Indian demands to close the three forts. Substantive progress was not made until after the peace commission in April of 1868. In May, the government acquiesced to the closure of Fort Reno, Phil Kearny, and C.F. Smith. The US Army abandoned the forts in July and sent another peace commission in November. Red Cloud appeared to the commission and triumphantly signed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, receiving all the concessions demanded. Partially spurned by the arrival of breech-loading rifles, and adept at understanding the larger context Red Cloud ceased large battles after the Hayfield and Wagon Box fights and restored his harassment strategy until conditions were right for diplomacy. Known for his fierce negotiating and oratory skills Red Cloud, directly and indirectly, harangued the peace commissions until they met his demands. Contemporary operational artists have much to learn from his effective transition from military operations to diplomacy.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 355–56.

⁴⁷ Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 114–23; Drury and Calvin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud*, 355–57; Monnett, *Where a Hundred Soldiers Were Killed*, 205–8.

Red Cloud's victory did not result merely from his effective leadership. As is often the case, strategic context drove the situation, and effective application of operational art aided the belligerents. What Red Cloud understood of the strategic context will remain a mystery, but analyzing his actions illustrates adept management of finite resources, and even more adept management of terminal negotiation. Following the war, Red Cloud became the face of Indian resistance to the United States. He made several trips to Washington DC and became fully aware of the futility of continued struggle. His diplomatic efforts for the remainder of his life would involve negotiating to achieve the best possible terms from a position of weakness.⁴⁸

Red Cloud had won, the US government met his conditions, and he signed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. The treaty, while meeting Red Cloud's conditions created problems that would eventually lead to the Great Sioux War of 1876, although Red Cloud and his most loyal followers would not take up arms against the US government again. The treaty created the Great Sioux Reservation and contained stipulations necessitating three-quarters of adult male Lakota signatures to cede any territory. The treaty also included provisions attempting to acculturate the Lakota into an agrarian lifestyle. Many among the Indian coalition refused the terms, rejected Red Cloud's leadership, and continued to harass Euro-American encroachment. Red Cloud's coalition fractured, and sizeable portions, primarily of the Hunkpapa band vowed to continue to fight. Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa, would emerge as the leader directing Indian operations a decade later during the Great Sioux War.⁴⁹

Sitting Bull's Failure

The Great Sioux War of 1876 is the most famous war between the Indians struggling against the Westward expansion of the United States. Once again forced to build a coalition to

⁴⁸ Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 128–36.

⁴⁹ Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 14–15; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 44–46; Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux*, 122–25; Paul L. Hedren, *Fort Laramie in 1876: Chronicle of a Frontier Post at War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 2–7.

challenge the vast material wealth of the US government the Lakota would band together under the leadership of a single *itancan*. The *itancan* this time was Sitting Bull. Sitting Bull faced many of the same challenges Red Cloud faced, in some cases he expertly built and led a coalition, even achieving a more stunning tactical victory at the Little Big Horn. However, in the end, his efforts ended in failure, and Sitting Bull lost the war. The Lakota were forced to abandon their traditional society and transitioned to reservation life.⁵⁰

Following Red Cloud's War and the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, Red Cloud's coalition fell apart. Red Cloud and his remaining supporters mostly adhered to the terms of the treaty and continued negotiations with the US government to establish agencies on the Great Sioux Reservation. The other portion of the coalition refused to acknowledge the treaty and continued to live their traditional way of life on the western portion of the reservation labeled as unceded Indian territory. However, the bifurcation of the Indian coalition was incomplete. Many of the treaty Indians moved freely back and forth between the two groups with the changing of the seasons. Additionally, the non-treaty Indian behavior was not specifically forbidden in the treaty, they hunted, roamed, and lived on the unceded Indian territory to the west of the Great Sioux Reservation. Figure 4 depicts the location of reservations and the unceded Indian territory as well as US Army fort locations before the Great Sioux War.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Weeks, *Farewell, My Nation*, 176–88; Vandervoort, *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada, and the United States, 1812-1900*, 175–84.

⁵¹ Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 88.

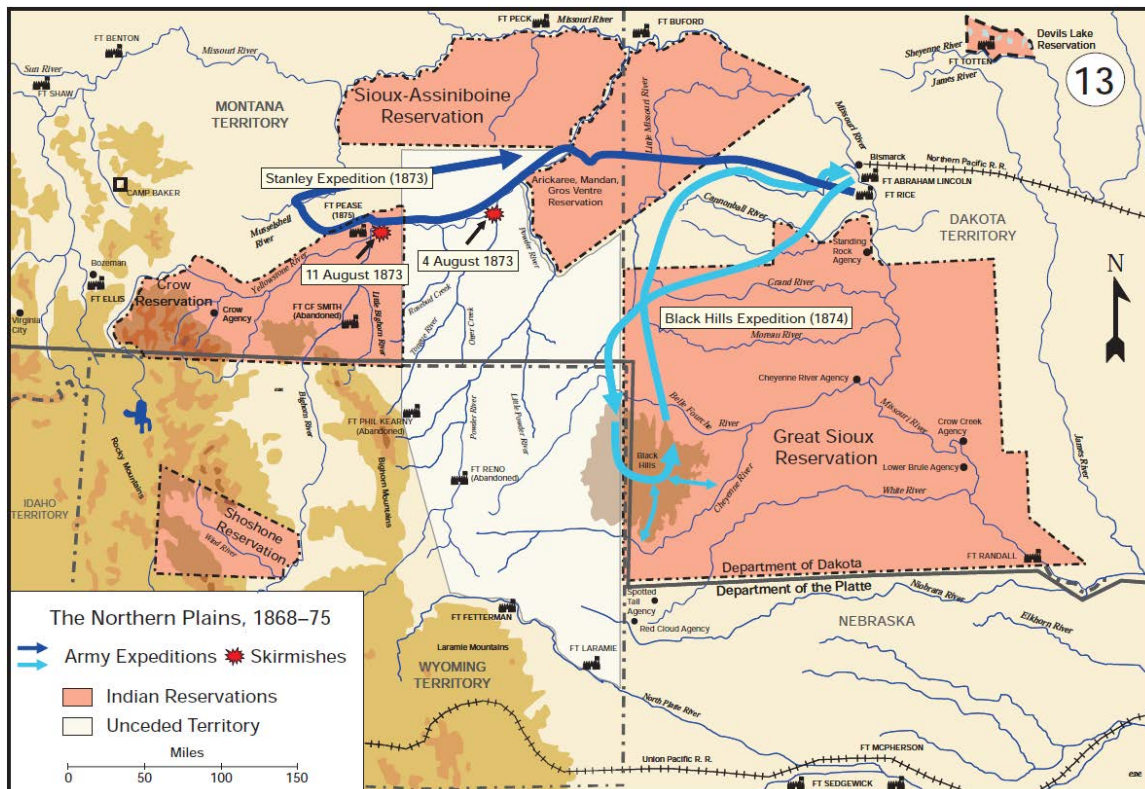


Figure 4. Map depicting locations of Great Sioux Reservation, unceded Indian territory, and US Army forts prior to the Great Sioux War. *Atlas of the Sioux Wars* 2006, 13.

Although not directly affected by Red Cloud's war, Sitting Bull and the Hunkpapa further to the north welcomed the groups of Red Cloud's coalition that refused to make peace with the US government. Intent on maintaining their control of the land the Lakota continued to follow the buffalo, raid other tribes, and challenge any encroachment into their territory. For several years the Fort Laramie Treaty seemed to work, relative peace on the plains endured not because the treaty would provide an enduring solution, but because of the relative lack of Euro-American encroachment. Two notable instances almost ignited a war before 1876, the first, an expedition by the US Army in 1873. The 1873 expedition led by Colonel David Stanley sought to ensure the right of way for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Sitting Bull, the Hunkpapa, and their allies resisted the expedition and the US government and investors abandoned the railroad project, not because of Indian resistance, but because of the Panic of 1873 and collapse of the stock market. The second and more significant precursor to the Great Sioux War came in 1874. The US Army's

Black Hills Expedition was sent to reconnoiter the Black Hills region and determine its suitability for establishing an army fort. The Indians again resisted the expedition, but not before rumors of surface gold deposits circulated widely. The Black Hills lay in the unceded Indian territory of the Great Sioux Reservation, and news of abundant gold brought fortune seekers trespassing on Indian land.⁵²

Fortune seekers pouring into the Black Hills country sowed the seeds of conflict. Faced with a dilemma about the increasing tension in the region the US government fundamentally had three options. First, it could enforce the provisions of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and protect the Indian land. Second, it could negotiate with the Lakota to obtain access via a lease or purchasing the land outright. Third, it could provoke a war with the non-treaty Indians and forcibly take the territory as a spoil of war. While the government made some efforts in line with the first option, it required too much effort to be politically viable. The second option emerged as the best alternative, but the Lakota refused all propositions. President Ulysses S. Grant decided on the third option, and on 6 December 1875 issued an ultimatum to the non-treaty Indians to return to the reservation by 31 January 1876 or face military action to force them to comply. How many of the Indians actually received and understood the ultimatum is debated, as is their ability to comply even if they agreed to, but what is clear is that none of them did. On 1 February 1876 Major General Phillip Sheridan began operations to force Indian compliance, and the Great Sioux War began.⁵³

⁵² Collins Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*, 13; Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 16–17. See also M. John Lubetkin, *Jay Cooke's Gamble: The Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic of 1873* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

⁵³ Collins, Jr., *Atlas of the Sioux Wars*, 13; Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 19–23, 31; Paul L. Hedren, *After Custer: Loss and Transformation in Sioux Country* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 18–19; Paul L. Hedren, *Great Sioux War Orders of Battle: How the United States Army Waged War on the Northern Plains, 1876-1877* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 41.

Sitting Bull the *wicasa wakan*

Likely born in 1831, Sitting Bull experienced a youth consistent with Lakota norms. Born to a prominent Hunkpapa family Sitting Bull ascended through the rank and file as a particularly adept hunter, warrior, and leader. His father, also named Sitting Bull, and his uncles invested heavily in his development. At the age of fourteen, he counted his first coup during an attack on a small Crow contingent. Sitting Bull firmly established himself as one of the bravest and revered warriors by the early 1850s and became an *akicita*. Sitting Bull's youth revolved around raiding the Crows and hunting, the Hunkpapa living further north than the Oglala had less interaction with Euro-Americans. Sitting Bull possessed all the qualities expected of a Sioux warrior, but his spirituality set him apart. Spirituality played an important role in Lakota life, but Sitting Bull drew a tenderness and restraint from his that was uncharacteristic of most warriors. After participating in his first Sun Dance in 1856, Sitting Bull became a *wicasa wakan*. By becoming a spiritual leader for his people, Sitting Bull rounded out a trifecta of tribal standing. As a decorated war leader, established hunter, and spiritual leader Sitting Bull became a leader to whom his people would turn for guidance.⁵⁴

By the late-1850s the Lakota people needed Sitting Bull's guidance. Increasing numbers of Euro-Americans began to appear in the Hunkpapa lands with their impact increasing as more time progressed. In 1857 the Hunkpapas sought unprecedented organization, during a tribal council the warriors elected Sitting Bull as the head *itancan* of the Hunkpapa tribe. The first significant challenges to the Hunkpapa would not come until 1863 and 1864 when the US Army dispatched two expeditions into the eastern portions of Lakota territory. Sitting Bull directed Indian resistance and had his first encounters fighting against US soldiers. He drew lessons from

⁵⁴ Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 3–13, 28–29, 32–36.

these engagements that helped him understand requirements when he fought them again in the Great Sioux War.⁵⁵

Sitting Bull and the majority of Hunkpapa along with Miniconjous largely abstained from fighting in Red Cloud's War. Their territory, located further to the northeast in present-day North Dakota, was not affected by the Bozeman Trail. Sitting Bull still directed action against settlers and army personnel near Forts Buford and Stevenson but did not coordinate with the Oglala and Brules in the Powder River country. Largely inconsequential to the larger policy of the US government, the limited fighting with the Hunkpapas did not play a significant role in the outcome of the war or the negotiation for its termination. Following the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, the US government sent peace commissions to meet with the Lakota leaders further to the north. Sitting Bull and the other Indian leaders rejected the provisions of the treaty and continued to practice their traditional nomadic way of life on the plains in the unceded Indian territory as outlined by the treaty.⁵⁶

Sitting Bull the Operational Artist

After ascending to nearly unprecedented status among the northern Lakota bands, Sitting Bull directed larger operations including more warriors than any other plains Indian in history. Having rejected all peace overtures from the US government, Sitting Bull loosely presided over approximately one-third of the Lakota population that stayed away from the agencies and became known as winter roamers. Winter roamers comprised the hardcore contingent of Indians that contested US Army operations during the Great Sioux War. The winter roamers received augmentation each summer from sympathetic Lakota that became known as summer roamers. The summer roamers proved critical to the frustration of US Army plans and to furthering Indian resistance. The summer roamers lived near the agencies in the winter, accepting handouts from

⁵⁵ Ibid., 22, 62–64.

⁵⁶ Utley, 82–85; Hedren, *Fort Laramie in 1876*, 2–3; Hedren, *Powder River*, 27.

the government and as the weather improved each spring would leave to join the winter roamers in hunting bands. The augmentation in terms of numbers of warriors enabled large engagements such as the Battle of the Little Bighorn.⁵⁷

Figure five depicts Sitting Bull's operational approach. In Sitting Bull's case, however, the re-creation of his operational approach is more difficult than that of Red Cloud's approach. He faced a larger and more resolute enemy with significant material superiority. Additionally, his requirement to protect the encampments from the converging columns of the US Army removed his ability to go on the offensive. The Indian coalition's inability to conduct offensive operations higher than the tactical level largely ceded the initiative to the US Army in favor of a strategic defensive. Four Horns, Sitting Bull's uncle and orchestrator of Sitting Bull's rise to head chief, provided advice that would come to define Sitting Bull's leadership. He stated: "Be a little against fighting, but when anyone shoots be ready to fight." This philosophy set the conditions for Sitting Bull's operational approach that rested squarely as a strategic defense. Unlike Red Cloud, Sitting Bull would not instigate hostilities but reacted to aggression forced on him.⁵⁸ Because of this fundamental difference in the organization of Indian actions, engagements have replaced Indian objectives for Sitting Bull's operational approach at the bottom of Figure five. Lines of efforts and desired effects still meet the current doctrinal criteria and remain included.

⁵⁷ Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 85.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 91.

Sitting Bull's Operational Approach

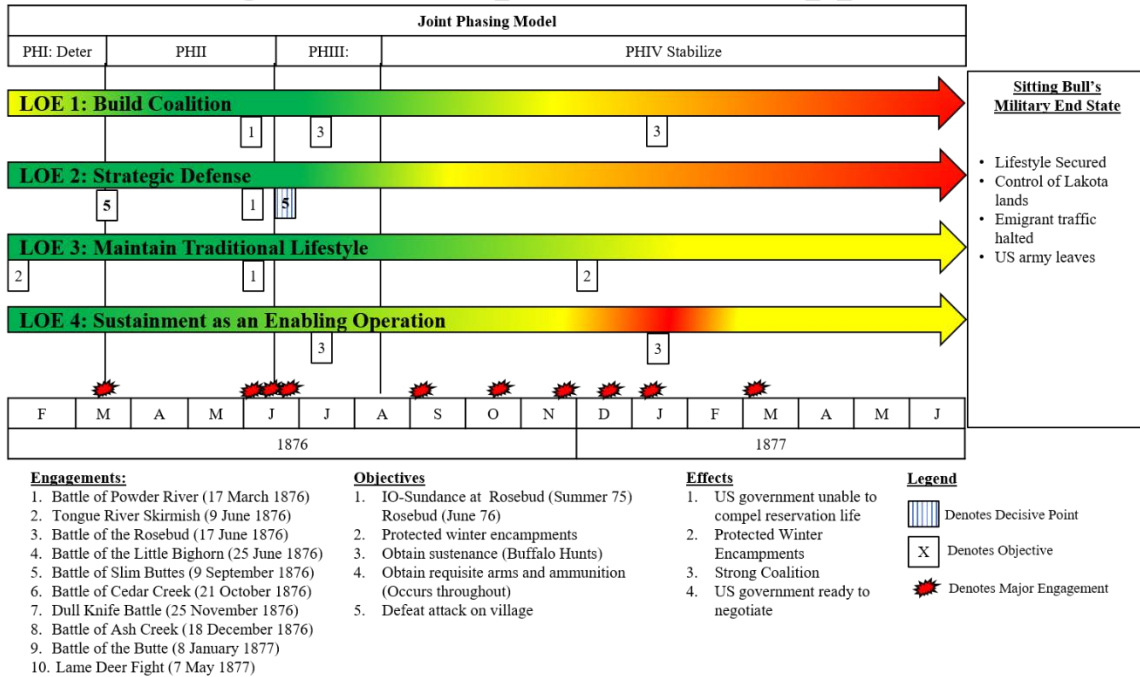


Figure 5. Sitting Bull's Operational Approach. Created by author.

The resulting operational approach contains lines of effort and a military end state, but lacks objectives in the current doctrinal sense. To meet the criteria as an objective, the goal must be “clearly defined, decisive, and attainable.” Sitting Bull had an end state, the desire to maintain his traditional way of life unmolested by Westward expansion, but he lacked a coherent mechanism to support his end state and create the effects necessary to realize those conditions. The lack of clear objectives undermined the Indian efforts and removed the chance of anything but tactical success. While the lack of objectives is a fundamental flaw in Sitting Bull's operational approach, it is still beneficial to analyze Indian actions throughout the Great Sioux War. More specifically, it begs the question for contemporary military planners of how to break free from constraints that prevent the realization that the end state is unattainable with links to contemporary US military operations.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ US Joint Staff, *JP 5-0, Joint Planning*, 2017, IV-20-IV-21.

Sitting Bull's military end state encompassed his political aims in the conflict he neither started nor wanted. His end state centered on the status quo, where his people would continue to live their traditional way of life. Shifting demographics, environmental changes, Westward expansion by the United States, and other factors of strategic context probably made his end state unobtainable from the start. Regardless, Sitting Bull's efforts leading the Indian coalition broadly organized into four lines of effort. The first, and equally crucial to Sitting Bull as to Red Cloud was building and maintaining the Indian coalition to provide the forces necessary to fight the US Army. The second correlates to his strategic defense of Lakota territory. The third organized the insistence on clinging to the Lakota way of life. The fourth, also in line with Red Cloud's concerned itself with ensuring adequate sustainment to execute operations.

Sitting Bull's actions along his first line of effort illustrate prowess in his ability to build a coalition and achieve unity of effort. His efforts rival those of Red Cloud, and Sitting Bull experienced much success as well. Using similar mechanisms as Red Cloud, Sitting Bull used Sun Dances and tribal councils to cajole followers. As the probability of conflict escalated Sitting Bull worked tirelessly to gather support from the Northern Cheyenne and Northern Arapaho. Since the end of Red Cloud's War, the Cheyenne had been at peace with the US government, and Sitting Bull used their reverence of the Black Hills to bring them into the coalition. The Arapaho however, refused to join and complied with governmental demands. Without Arapaho support Sitting Bull understood the importance of obtaining Cheyenne support. In the summer of 1875 Sitting Bull convened a Sun Dance in the Rosebud Valley to bolster support. The Cheyenne readily allied with the Oglala, but had limited interaction with the Hunkpapa, and Sitting Bull's Sun Dance at the Rosebud cemented their partnered status.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 215–16; Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 122.

Sitting Bull's next Sun Dance consolidated his control over the coalition and brought the support of the summer roamers firmly under his tutelage. Summer roamers refers to the groups of Native Americans who lived near the reservations during the winter but joined the non-treaty bands in the unceded Indian territory during the summers. This Sun Dance occurred after the war began in early June of 1876 and once again in the Rosebud Valley. Sitting Bull danced for days and relayed his famous vision about "upside down" soldiers and a great Indian victory, prophesizing the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Sitting Bull's status as a war chief and *wicasa waka* caused the other Indians to rally behind his cause. Sitting Bull effectively leveraged the status of his position and cultural mechanisms to form and maintain his coalition. With the coalition secure Sitting Bull needed to assure the strategic defense aspects of his plan.⁶¹

Necessary for conducting the defense, Sitting Bull needed to secure resources to sustain operations in accordance with his fourth line of effort. Indian sustainment involved two major considerations that would come to drive operations and relationships with other entities for the duration of the war. The buffalo remained the nexus of roamer life and Sitting Bull would continue to pursue sustenance from them via dispersal of the coalition to conduct hunting parties. Most notably following the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the Indian coalition dispersed to hunt in preparation for winter. The dispersal of the coalition confounded US Army efforts to exact retribution following the engagement. With hunting driving some operations and supporting the third and fourth line of effort, the other sustainment consideration revolved around securing arms and ammunition. While Sitting Bull rejected most trade, he expertly opened pathways to supply the coalition with arms and ammunition. The three primary sources of arms and ammunition were

⁶¹ Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 133, 137–38; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 232; Philbrick, *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, 34–35; Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 157.

either other Indians, primarily the summer roamers, the Canadian Metis, a mixed-race people, and Euro-American traders.⁶²

With the coalition sufficiently sustained in the early portions of the war, Sitting Bull finalized his second line of effort. As early as 1870 Sitting Bull elected to heed Four Horns advice and cede the initiative to the US Army. Sitting Bull would never again direct offensive action, but only fight when attacked. The lack of truly offensive operations significantly hamstrung the attainment of Indian objectives, but they were able to coordinate effective tactical responses as US Army soldiers approached. In the end, effective tactical responses proved insufficient to reach the conditions required of Sitting Bull's military end state. His efforts unifying and directing the coalition resulted in a series of stunning tactical victories including the Battle of the Little Bighorn, but failed to materially contribute to the broader campaign. In fact, they would have the opposite effect, and strengthen the resolve of the US government.⁶³

Following the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the US Army committed significantly more resources to address the non-treaty Indian coalition. The influx of soldiers coupled with the dispersal of the coalition to pursue buffalo created conditions where the Indians could no longer gather in large numbers without risking annihilation. Faced with the growing unlikelihood of maintaining their lands and way of life the coalition fell apart. Some resigned themselves to compliance and departed for the reservation, others maintained their way of life in small bands until found by soldiers, and some others including Sitting Bull left the area to seek refuge in present-day Canada.⁶⁴

⁶² Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 102–3, 165; Manzione, “I Am Looking to the North for My Life”: *Sitting Bull, 1876-1881*, 35. The Metis were a mixed race of French and Native Americans who roamed the plains further to the north in present day Canada. Firearms became prized possessions for the Lakota and maintaining sufficient ammunition was a constant problem. Some government sanctioned trading occurred with the treaty bands for hunting and much of it found its way into the hostile bands.

⁶³ Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 91, 135–36, 164; Philbrick, *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, xvii.

⁶⁴ Philbrick, *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, xix; Vandervoort, *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada, and the United States, 1812-1900*, 178–79, 187–88; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 35; Jerome A.

Sitting Bull the Statesmen

Look at me. See if I am poor, or my people either. The whites may get me at last, as you say, but I will have good times till then. You are fools to make yourselves slaves to a piece of bacon, some hardtack, and a little sugar and coffee.

—Sitting Bull, *The Lance and the Shield*

Sitting Bull was an adept leader for his people, but he could never provide terms that were acceptable to them and the US government simultaneously. Before the Great Sioux War Sitting Bull attempted negotiations to ward off the conflict, and then again sought terms upon his expulsion from Canada. When he was willing to negotiate, the US government was not, or his win set was too narrow to allow effective level one negotiations. In Robert Putnam's article, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," he describes the interplay between international negotiations and domestic politics that enable the ratification of an agreement. For Sitting Bull, his level two (domestic) politics generated stipulations that could not produce an agreement with the US government. The resulting impasse was the genesis of the conflict and stymied negotiation short of armed conflict.⁶⁵

Following the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the dispersal of the Lakota bands, Sitting Bull reinvigorated his first line of effort attempting to reinforce his success. He saw opportunity in Canada, but some factions of the Lakota refused to leave their traditional lands. Sitting Bull proceeded north and diplomatically tried to gain support from other tribes, namely the Yankton and Santee Sioux, Assiniboine, Blackfeet, and Gros Venture. By building the confederation Sitting Bull hoped to provide enough force to resist the American soldiers and Canada's North-West Mounted Police. Sitting Bull's plan to leverage the larger force to achieve tactical success and recruit further Indian support to prevent Euro-American encroachment. While an interesting

Greene, ed., *Battles and Skirmishes of the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877: The Military View* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 204–5.

⁶⁵ Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 436.

plan, and despite Sitting Bull's best effort, he was unable to achieve unity of effort, with the divergent interests among the tribes too difficult to overcome. Unable to garner support Sitting Bull's camp roamed the back and forth between Canada and the Northern United States for the remainder of 1876 and into the spring of 1877.⁶⁶

By the spring of 1877, the Canadian North-West Mounted Police noticed the large influx of refugee Lakota and conducted councils with Sitting Bull. In the councils the Canadians articulated the terms of the Lakota asylum, most importantly the Lakota could not use Canada as a base of operations to raid into the United States. Sitting Bull readily agreed and the Lakota enjoyed relative plenty and peace, rejecting offers from the US government to surrender and move to the Sioux reservation. The new life did not persist. By late 1880, the buffalo herds sustaining the Lakota all but disappeared and diplomatic relations between the Canadian, British, and American governments deteriorated, making the Canadians less comfortable with a sizeable Lakota presence. The declining buffalo caused tension among the tribes and Lakota began traveling south into Montana in search of game. The porous border further damaged relations between the Lakota and the North-West Mounted Police. Sitting Bull continued negotiations with other tribes, the Canadians, and the US government but could not reach a sustainable situation. With no means of providing sustenance and deteriorating relations, Sitting Bull returned to the United States and surrendered.⁶⁷

Conclusions

Red Cloud fought a war that he could win and stopped before he could not. Sitting Bull fought a war he could not win, stuck obstinately on his desire to reshape the present into the past.

⁶⁶ Manzione, *"I Am Looking to the North for My Life": Sitting Bull, 1876-1881*, 31-35; Jerome A. Greene, ed., *Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian Views of the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 64.

⁶⁷ Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*, 192-97; Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West*, 310; Manzione, *"I Am Looking to the North for My Life": Sitting Bull, 1876-1881*, 49-52, 105.

Despite Sitting Bull's tactical victories and coalition building ability, his end state was unattainable and his efforts frustrated. The lesson is most applicable to single heads of state charged with securing diplomatic outcomes through military victories than it is for today's operational artists, but the cautions remain. The importance of strategic context to understand the realm of what is possible is fundamental to all campaigns. Even the most effective application of operational art will not deliver an unattainable end state. Conversely, even with favorable strategic context, abortive operational art as illustrated by Carrington in 1866 and Custer in 1876, can lead to defeat in otherwise winnable campaigns. In the contemporary operating environment, operational artists must be cognizant of the end state, offer sound military advice with an understanding of feasibility, and direct operations to link policy to military operations. Operational art pushes towards the maximum potential of what is possible; ineffective operational art throttles efforts and precludes success.

The most significant tactical defeat of the US Army in the Indian Wars happened at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, yet Sitting Bull failed to achieve his ends. His operational art linked operations in time and space, but failed to do so in purpose. Sitting Bull's operational approach lacked objectives, which propel lines of effort towards the conditions of the military end state. Without objectives, the enemy has the initiative to prosecute his own, and nothing can be done about it. The tactical outcomes matter, but only if they generate the effects that are congruent with the objectives. Objectives only matter if they support lines of efforts that create the end state conditions. Identifying the linkages in the system requires situational understanding and synchronization, not brilliance. Red Cloud's effective leadership during his war to close the Bozeman trail demonstrates fox and hedgehog-like reasoning. Red Cloud's handling and blending of fox and hedgehog concepts allowed him to reach his objectives and secure success in the near-

term. Contrarily, Sitting Bull demonstrated a hedgehog-like mentality that did not allow him to alter his end state to something possible considering the context.⁶⁸

Even Red Cloud's success was short-lived, which evokes Peter Senge's laws of the fifth discipline, namely that "today's problems come from 'yesterday's' solutions."⁶⁹ Red Cloud won his war, and after he adeptly managed the Lakota transition towards reservation life and fought for the welfare of his people. He compromised Lakota culture to secure their place in the new society with disastrous consequences. While the two Sioux wars created immediately different results, in the end, the same outcome emerged. The Lakota lost their lands and way of life and succumbed to Westward expansion.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ US Army, *ADRP 3-0*, (2017), 2–1; John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 4–5, 14–15, 20–27. The terms fox and hedgehog refer to Isaiah Berlin's philosophical essay describing thinking patterns as used in Gaddis' *On Grand Strategy*. Hedgehogs focus on one thing and foxes on many, with obvious advantages and disadvantages to each.

⁶⁹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 2006), 57.

⁷⁰ Succumb is an insufficient term, it discounts the lingering effects of the subjugation of the Native Americans with implications felt to the present-day.

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