

THE OLD REPUBLIC

# Lincoln, Diplomacy, and War

by Joseph E. Fallon

In the tumultuous six months between his election in November 1860 and the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861, Abraham Lincoln rejected all diplomatic efforts to resolve the deepening crisis peacefully. In the political dispute with the newly constituted, but militarily weak, Confederate States of America, there would be no meaningful negotiations. No compromise would be offered or accepted. Instead, tensions between the two governments would be heightened, and the passions of the American public inflamed, by Lincoln's provocative and deceptive rhetoric.

Lincoln's words were a reflection of his unflagging desire to wage total war on the South. It was to be a war that would last until the enemy agreed to unconditional surrender and U.S. public officials and private contractors had made a financial killing. In 1878, Henry S. Olcott, special investigator for the U.S. War and Navy Departments, estimated "at least twenty, if not twenty-five, percent of the entire expenditures of the government during the Rebellion, were tainted with fraud." We could call this the Lincoln principle of diplomacy—a principle that was followed by the Clinton administration in Bosnia and the George W. Bush administration in Iraq.

Lincoln's ideological view of politics equated progress and patriotism with support for a high protective tariff, internal improvements, and a national bank. Capturing just 39 percent of the popular vote, Lincoln considered his election a democratic mandate to pursue his agenda. A rejection of his economic program by the political leadership of the South, therefore, would

be a rejection of democracy. Lincoln's program depended on the tariff, and the tariff depended on the South remaining in the Union, as did the survival of the Republican Party. For that reason, Lincoln initially pledged his support for the Corwin Resolution, which had been adopted in the waning days of the Buchanan administration. This was the original Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. It made the institution of slavery perpetual in the slave states. It had been passed by the House and the Senate, and signed by President Buchanan, but it was never ratified, because, by then, many Southern states had decided to secede. The fact that the South withdrew from the Union despite the passage of this amendment indicated other issues besides slavery motivated their secession. Foremost was the South's embrace of free trade, the antithesis of Lincoln's economic agenda.

In an attempt to prevent the impending disunion, there was a flurry of activity to reach a compromise by the Senate Committee of Thirteen and House Committee of Thirty-Three. The Crittenden resolutions and amendments were introduced to resolve the status of the territories. A Peace Convention was convened attended by 21 states, a "body [which] . . . not only [was] respectable in the standing and talents of its members, but comprised many names highest in leadership."

As his secretaries John G. Nicolay and John Hay wrote in *Abraham Lincoln: A History*,

It is evident that Lincoln was at this time not without serious apprehensions that the threats and movements of secession might induce some of the less sturdy Republicans to appeals for concession . . .

In letters written between December 13, 1860, and February 4, 1861, Lincoln anxiously lobbied Republi-

cans to reject all compromise:

Prevent as far as possible, any of our friends from demoralizing themselves, and our cause, by entertaining propositions for compromise of any sort, on slavery extension. There is no possible compromise upon it, but which puts us under again, and leaves all our work to do over again.

Indeed, he continued,

Whether it be a Mo. line, or Eli Thayer's Pop. Sov. it is all the same. Let either be done, & immediately filibustering and extending slavery recommences. On that point hold firm, as with a chain of steel.

In a letter to Secretary of State William Seward, he wrote:

[A]ny trick by which the nation is to acquire territory, and then allow some local authority to spread slavery over it, is as obnoxious as any other. I take it that to effect some such result as this, and to put us again on the high-road to a slave empire is the object of all these proposed compromises. I am against it.

In that same letter, he declared:

On the 21st. ult. Hon. W. Kellogg, a Republican M.C of this state whom you probably know, was here, in a good deal of anxiety, seeking to ascertain to what extent I would be consenting for our friends to go in the way of compromise . . . I am for no compromise which assists or permits the extension of the institution on soil owned by the nation.

Lincoln was successful in his efforts to rein in his fellow Republi-

cans. Soon, Senator Clark of New Hampshire introduced a new resolution, insisting

That the provisions of the Constitution are ample for the preservation of the Union and the protection of all the material interests of the country; that it needs to be obeyed rather than amended; and that extrication from our present dangers is to be looked for in strenuous efforts to preserve the peace, protect the public property, and enforce the laws, rather than in new guarantees for particular interests, compromises for particular difficulties or concessions to unreasonable demands.

Attempts by peace commissioners from the new Confederate government to negotiate all outstanding differences with Washington were similarly rebuffed by Lincoln. Nicolay and Hay write that

The [Confederate] commissioners were instructed to solicit a reception in their official character, and if that were refused, to accept an unofficial interview; to insist on the *de facto* and *de jure* independence of the Confederate States; but nevertheless to accede to a proposition to refer the subject of their mission to the United States Senate, or withhold an answer until the Congress of the United States should assemble and pronounce a decision in the premises, provided the existing peaceful status were rigidly maintained.

After keeping the Confederate commissioners waiting for days under the mistaken impression that negotiations would be possible, "Seward replied confidentially, 'that it was impossible to receive the commissioners in any diplomatic capacity, or even to see them peacefully.'"

On July 4, 1861, a victorious Lincoln could declare in his first message to Congress that "No compromise by

public servants could, in this case, be a cure." War was to be the only option for settling a political dispute he helped to exacerbate. For Lincoln, pursuing war became an obsession. On June 28, 1862, he wrote to Seward, "I expect to maintain this contest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsakes me."

Lincoln promised the North a short war. Addressing Union governors on July 3, 1862, he asserted, "If I had fifty thousand additional troops here now, I believe I could substantially close the war in two weeks." The next day, in a message to Congress, he made the same promise of a short war, but with a request for eight times the number of troops:

It is now recommended that you give the legal means for making this contest a short, and a decisive one; that you place at the control of the government, for the work, at least four hundred thousand men, and four hundred millions of dollars.

As the North soon wearied of a war with no victory or end in sight, Lincoln expressed his concern over the growing prospect of a negotiated settlement. In a memorandum dated November 1, 1862, he wrote, "The army, like the nation, has become demoralized by the idea that the war is to be ended, the nation united, and peace restored, by strategy, and not by hard desperate fighting."

Throughout 1863 and 1864, increasing calls in the North for negotiations with the South to end the war were rebuffed by Lincoln. First, he maintained, "I do not believe any compromise embracing the maintenance of the Union is now possible." Then, he changed tack, asserting that there was no one in the South with whom he could successfully negotiate an end to the war.

[N]o paper compromise, to which the controllers of Lee's army are not agreed, can, at all, affect that army. In an effort at

such compromise we should waste time, which the enemy would improve to our disadvantage; and that would be all.

When many in the North became aware of Southern attempts to negotiate an end to the war, Lincoln responded disingenuously:

Now allow me to assure you, that no word or intimation from that rebel army, or from any of the men controlling it, in relation to any peace compromise, has ever come to my knowledge or belief. All charges and insinuations to the contrary, are deceptive and groundless.

Finally, Lincoln dismissed the merits of peace, writing, "I am yet unprepared to give up the Union for a peace which, so achieved, could not be of much duration." Lincoln knew a negotiated peace between Washington and Richmond meant the recognition of the South as an independent country. On September 12, 1864, he wrote, "An armistice—a cessation of hostilities—is the end of the struggle, and the insurgents would be in peaceful possession of all that has been struggled for." It would spell the end of Lincoln's economic program and the Republican Party. To prevent this, he refused to cut and run, and opted to stay the course.

As he told an audience in Philadelphia on June 16, 1864,

It is a pertinent question often asked . . . when is the war to end? . . . I do not wish to name a day a month, or year, when it is to end . . . We accepted this war for an object, a worthy object, and the war will end when that object is attained. Under God, I hope it will never end until that time.

In his Annual Message to Congress on December 6 of that year, Lincoln reiterated his objection to a negotiated peace:

On careful consideration of all

the evidence accessible it seems to me that no attempt at negotiations with the insurgent leader could result in any good . . . Between him and us the issue is distinct, simple, and inflexible. It is an issue which can only be tried by war, and decided by victory.

Then, he added a new rationale: "The Executive power itself would be greatly diminished by the cessation of actual war."

Lincoln no longer spoke of a short war or a war nearly over; now, it was war without end:

The important fact remains demonstrated, that we have more men now than we had when the war began; that we are not exhausted, nor in process of exhaustion; that we are gaining strength, and may, if need be, maintain the contest indefinitely.

He denied the reality of the human cost his war had inflicted on the North—the dead, the maimed, the destitute. He clung to his mandate:

The [1864] election has exhib-

ited another fact not less valuable to be known—the fact that we do not approach exhaustion in the most important branch of the national resources—that of living men. While it is melancholy to reflect that the war has filled so many graves, and carried mourning to so many hearts, it is some relief to know that, compared with the surviving, the fallen have been so few. While corps, and divisions, and brigades, and regiments, have been formed and fought, and dwindled and gone out of existence, a great majority of the men who comprised them are still living. The same is true of the naval service. The election returns prove this. So many voters could not else be found.

He then repeated his call that the war go on until the South unconditionally surrendered:

They can at any moment have peace simply by laying down their arms and submitting to the national authority under the Constitution . . . No cessation of

hostilities short of an end of the war and the disbanding of all forces hostile to the government.

The South surrendered unconditionally. Lincoln placed his political interests above those of the American people—and won. His war ensured that the Republican Party controlled the federal apparatus for half a century. It ushered in a time of unprecedented corruption—the "Gilded Age." It provided an ideological cover—promoting democracy—for future wars and war profiteering. As Gen. Smedley Darlington Butler observed nearly 75 years ago,

War is a racket. It always has been . . . It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives . . . Only a small "inside" group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes.

*Joseph E. Fallon writes from Rye, New York.*



## Shaming

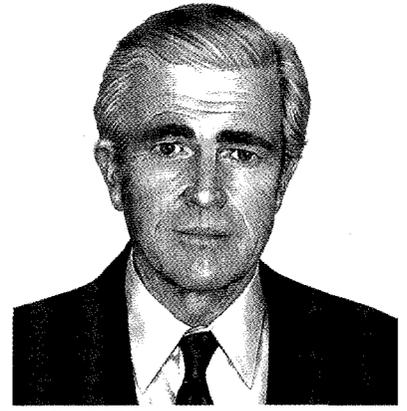
Thirty-five years ago, the Supreme Court discovered the constitutional right to abortion. Unbeknownst to earlier generations, it was hiding out in the 14th Amendment's implied right to privacy. Since its discovery, this right has been exercised over 50 million times. That's a lot of carnage in the name of privacy. Not surprisingly, Americans have come to question the moral cost of killing the unborn. The number of abortions performed in this country has been falling slowly but steadily. There's been a 25-percent drop since 1990.

Quick to capitalize on the public's change of heart, Hollywood has inaugurated what seems to be an anti-abortion boomlet this year. In director Judd Apatow's *Knocked Up*, a gorgeous TV newscaster played by Katherine Heigl foolishly—and, I might add, improbably—gets drunk one night and recklessly picks up a hapless schlub played by the undeniably typecast Seth Rogen. She then takes him home and allows him to impregnate her. Abortion would be the approved solution for such a hideous *faux pas*, but not for this babe. She doesn't once consider getting rid of the baby, even when she learns how feckless a loser Rogen is. He fancies himself an entrepreneur, having mounted a website that informs its subscribers which recent films display the breasts of popular actresses—surely a supererogatory exercise, given that today's movies are batting nearly a thousand on the mammary scoreboard. She is nevertheless determined to have her baby, although doing so will put her glamorous broadcast job at risk, to say nothing of her reputation for good judgment. Of course, this being a Hollywood story, the growing evidence of her condition actually boosts her ratings. Americans are so understanding.

In *Juno*, we have another pregnant young lady, this one only 16. She, too,

elects to have the baby she carelessly and quite unromantically conceived. Juno (spunky Ellen Page) was bored one afternoon and decided to lose her virginity courtesy of a very surprised classmate, a nerdy kid whom she likes but, she's quick to add, is *not* her boyfriend. Finding herself gravid two months later, she decides to “nip it in the bud” and heads for her local abortion clinic, *Woman Now*. But before she can get through the door, she meets a classmate picketing against infant slaughter and learns that, at two months, a child *in utero* already has fingernails. This bit of biological reality clutches her heart, and she flees the abortuary. She'll have her baby and give it up for adoption. This, of course, means telling her parents. Her father is nonplussed. “I always thought of you as a girl who knew when to say enough,” he sighs, adding that he'd prefer her to have been nabbed for hard drugs or driving while intoxicated.

Juno soon finds a childless couple advertising in the *Penny Saver*—where else?—for a girl in just her predicament. They turn out to be upscale yuppies living in a planned community where everyone has a three-car garage and four bathrooms. Perfect. In no time at all, Juno, her father, the couple, and their attorney are negotiating a contract. Does she want an open or closed adoption? Having no idea what the question means, Juno replies in teenspeak, “I'm just gonna, ya know, squeeze it out and hand it over to you.” She'd like to “kick this old school.” Her response is supposed to be winningly cute, but I'm afraid I found it quite charmless, not to mention unbelievable. The film wants us to accept Juno as an irrepressible life force who, in her own words, is “doing things way above my maturity level.” I can't help thinking that most responsible parents in the audience will find her an unbearably



### Knocked Up

Produced and distributed  
by Universal Pictures  
Directed and written by Judd Apatow

### Juno

Produced and distributed by  
Fox Searchlight Pictures  
Directed by Jason Reitman  
Screenplay by Diablo Cody

### 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days

Produced by Mobra Films  
Directed and written  
by Cristian Mungiu  
Distributed by IFC Films

spoiled brat in need of an old-school walloping.

I suppose there is reason to rejoice that these films aimed at a young audience dramatize alternatives to abortion. How far we've come from 1973, when *Maude*, a popular sitcom of the day, could get a laugh by having its heroine quip that her scheduled abortion was of no more consequence than having a tooth extracted. Still, I'm not entirely reassured. Both young ladies are too sunny, too self-confident to be believable as first-time mothers with no reliable support to help them bring their children into the world. True, both start screaming when their respective labors begin, but their agonies are kept brief and audience-friendly. They serve as little more than comic relief, giving the women an opportunity finally to screech unbecomingly to their fear, anger, and humiliation unchecked by feminine politeness. This is odd, since