



Confederate Tide Rising: Robert E. Lee and the Making of Southern Strategy, 1861-1862

Joseph L. Harsh

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In this re-examination of Confederate war aims, Joseph L. Harsh analyzes the military policy and grand strategy adopted by Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis in the first two years of the Civil War. Recent critics of Lee have depicted him as a general of tactical brilliance, but one who lacked strategic vision. He has been accused of squandering meager military resources in vain pursuit of decisive victories during his first year in field command. Critics of Davis claim he went too far in adopting a "perimeter" policy which attempted to defend every square mile of Southern territory, scattering Confederate resources too thinly. Harsh argues, to the contrary, that Davis and Lee's policies allowed the Confederacy to survive longer than it otherwise could have and were the policies best designed to win Southern independence. The Confederacy needed to retain the resources of the upper South, and wanted to include the border states, so its aims were offensive rather than defensive. For the most part, Davis encouraged his field commanders to undertake aggressive operations, but it was not until Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia that Davis found a general with the intelligence and courage to invent and then execute a cogent strategy which gave the South a chance to win the war.

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