

Promises, Preponderance, Politics, and Provisions (Revisited)

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It is said, “those who refuse to acknowledge history are doomed to repeat it.” In today’s military operations, the occurrence of dealing with displaced people is becoming a frequent occurrence. For the U.S. military, this is not a new development. From its inception, there has been a recurrent involvement in what is known in operations planning as the “phase IV.” Yet our planning is often minimal in this critical recovery phase. The adage, “as we train, so we fight” applies. This observation has led to the question, “Could understanding of the forced relocation of the Cherokee be useful in future dealings with relocations of displaced populations?” This event occurred on our own soil, with our own citizens, less than two-hundred years ago, and could be an example of a near perfect case study. However, it is often avoided, minimized, and in some cases, blatantly absent from military history education.

In the complete version of Promises, Preponderance, Politics and Provisions, the author’s Masters’ Degree thesis, there is an in-depth review of the stakeholders and the PMESII (political, military, economic, social, infrastructure and information) model assessment. For this condensed version, the content will include the original question and a discussion of the secondary and tertiary questions, a general overview of each stakeholder plan. This work is not intended to assign blame, pass judgment or elicit any misplaced emotion. It is an attempt to take a critical look at one of our own historical events, and facilitate thought as to how we, as the military and community can improve these operations today.

For a military plan to be viable it must meet the criteria of adequate, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete.¹ While this is current doctrine, it is not new criteria. This criterion has existed for centuries prior to the forced removal and was common teaching in military schools prior to the plans development. Viewing the plan through a historical lens, it may have been adequate, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable; it appears lacking in the “complete.” There are areas of sustainment that only considered the initial movement and not the extended movement.

In 1836, what had been a 100-year struggle to decide who would occupy the land east of the Mississippi River came to dramatic end. The natives had resided in the land long before the settlers arrived. In fact, that was a portion of the conflict. The Supreme Court had difficulty categorizing their status; were they “residents” or “British possession?” If they were British possession, then their land, possessions, and persons would be “spoils of war,” and therefore U.S. government owned. Land ownership was foreign to the natives who resided in communities with established boundaries but did not hold “titles,” as was the European custom.

Meanwhile, more and more settlers arrived, the natives were pushed further and further west, and the Mississippi provided a geographical marker that seemed appropriate at the time. Land was obtained and provisioned as “Indian Territory” in what is now Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas. That is where this portion of the story will begin.

The native plan for relocation is that it would not occur. Although a portion of the tribes had resigned themselves to the move and left prior to the event; most (16,000) had stood fast, going about daily tasks,

living as they had for the previous years that the debate had occurred. John Ross (Cherokee Principal Chief) continued to negotiate through the legal channels of the new government by repeated appeals and petitions. The legal system moved slowly and the decisions often conflicted. His guidance to the people was to allow the system to work, stay calm. It was the belief by most that the new government could not help but see reason when presented to them.²

The settlers had been present in smaller numbers for over a hundred years. Several generations had lived through this continuing debate. As their numbers increased, it was evident that the natives would go “somewhere.” They felt they were the more advanced race and were entitled to the “undeveloped land.” Most expressed little opinion regarding the “how” of the move would take place. They were aware there would be a move, but continued to interact with their native neighbors as they had in years past.

The state of Georgia needed the natives to go so they could capitalize on the growth opportunities presented by the industry developers. The Supreme Court had told them the natives would go; until the last decision that came after the relocation was already in motion. The development of the railroads, refineries, and discovery of gold on native lands further complicated the timeline. Hostilities with encroachments were increasing.³ The state was certain they would be validated and supported by the Federal Government.

The clergy had observed it all from the beginning, assisting in the assimilation efforts, and interacting closely with both the settler and native populations. One or two clergy members assisted in drawing up cessation agreements that were signed by small portions of the natives (later used as the fulcrum of the Georgia position).⁴ Others served as interpreters and conductors during the relocation.⁵ This divided effort added ambiguity.

The executive branch consisted of first, Andrew Jackson, and finally, Martin Van Buren. Andrew Jackson’s plan was to have the natives peacefully relocated across to the Mississippi to the land provided with all their belongings and people. The natives would be compensated for their land and structures. These proceeds would provide means for the natives to travel. The natives were allotted two years to accomplish the move.

After eighteen months, there were very few natives that had moved. Most were waiting for a legal resolution. The order was issued for military force to be used to facilitate the move. Initially, General John Wool was selected for this duty, but his statements regarding the motivations and ethics of the action held him up in court too long to be retained. He was later cleared of any wrongdoing.⁶ Andrew Jackson was nearing the end of his presidency and the new President Martin Van Buren took office. Both presidents were intensely aware of the brewing conflict. A few years earlier, a depression had followed the economic crisis of the bank collapse. Citizens were eager to see improvements and progress. The Natives’ hesitancy to move and increasing defensive posture regarding the encroachments added to the urgency.

General Winfield Scott was summoned. He was given a two-week period to put the operation together. He would receive four-thousand regular troops and supplement his forces with another three-thousand National Guard and reserve. He immediately began identifying existing stockades and constructing new ones that would be used as collection points and internment centers. Those natives located furthest out would be transported by rail to the river landings. The natives would then be transported with their livestock and belongings by water and disembark near Indian Territory. The provisions for food (self-provided), water, shelter (self-provided), medical, and spiritual (clergy volunteers) were assembled.⁷ Strict instructions were given that there was to be no undue suffering of the natives. The trip would take about 80 days.

The Cherokee leadership realized after the military action began that there was no turning back. The challenge encountered in the military operation proved to be more cumbersome than initially anticipated and after the first five thousand Natives were transported. The removal was transferred to contract.⁸ Fifteen hundred natives died in the first effort. Most deaths were attributed to disease and exposure from the prolonged waiting for transport and crowded conditions at the internment camps.

The contract was granted to Chief John Ross. The remaining eleven thousand were transported by both land and water routes. The routes chosen depended on the navigation status of the river and the season. The government allocated money and the relocation continued. Another twenty-five hundred natives died in this phase of the relocation. There continues to be discussion and controversy regarding the motivations and ethical status of the relocation.

What was the turn of events that called for military action to complete the forced migration? The continual increases in settler population growth was forcing the physical space between cultures and economies to collide. While the legal and moral debate extended the better part of three decades (and longer in some instances); physical space is more limited and the population was steadily increasing inside the finite geographical boundaries. Finite resources such as land, water, food, boundaries, gold, and railroads become strained, and the victor in this instance was the enlarging United States. The two remaining options were to relocate or be removed through hostility and bloodshed.

Did the urgency and alterations in timelines lead to critical inadequacies in preparation, planning and sustainment? Yes. This answer becomes quickly apparent in the bottleneck that resulted at the internment centers when the river was not in an acceptable state due to turbulent currents, debris, icy conditions or low water levels. Resources quickly became inadequate. The forced urgency and timeline became the factor most influencing survivability. Adjustments were attempted, as indicated by the willingness for the action to be delayed until the “bad season” had passed. Medical personnel continued to report rampant disease and sanitation issues. The effort was moved to contract (which the Native Chief John Ross won) when the situation exceeded acceptable losses.⁹

The delay of the regular forces was unexpected. The rush to complete the operation with the forces present formed the acceptance of compliance through violence policy. The insistence that the natives immediately comply left no time to gather even the most meager of supplies.

The incongruences and indefinite decisions also opened doubt as to whether preparation was necessary at all. The delays in messaging, as well as the obstacle of language barriers and media delivery methods, all added to the confusion.

A lack of contingency for a pause and regroup when the conditions became bottlenecked at the river caused critical short supplies in space, food and sanitation. The extended timeline caused travel to fall during the heat of Midwest summer and harshness of the winter. The strict timeline and inability to go backward (to the east) forced all the populous to move westward at once, thus depleting foraging and hunting opportunities.

Was the relocation an attempt at genocide? No. For the term genocide to be accurate there must be an inarguable demonstration of intent to exterminate. If this had been the case, there would have been no expenditure on the establishment of plans, stockades, internment, gathering of transportation and supplies, securing of destination lands, or notification of the move order (however brief). General Scott’s orders to the troops to use the highest manner of humanity toward the natives and President Jackson’s struggle with the outcome demonstrated their conflicted motivations to keep the settlers from extinguishing the natives and to uphold his sworn duty to preserve the Union.

Why did the timing suddenly become urgent when the issue had been discussed for 40 years? The Nation was amid financial crisis and there was little policy to guide actions. Economic depression was quickly extinguishing growth in the east. Only the growth and access provided by the railroads and industry could stabilize the sinking economy.¹⁰ Standing between the settlers and this growth and development was the Cherokee Nation.¹¹

What was Jackson’s motivation? President Jackson had participated in military operations against the natives to secure the status of the new nation. He had also rescued native children that fell victim to those

operations and raised them as his own. He also recognized the critical impact the economic state of the union would have on the new Nation's ability to function and sustain. He often referred to his obligation to consider and provide for the stability and preservation of the Union.

Where in the legal process did the natives stand--sovereign, or not? The decision that the new American territory had been secured from the British and all the territory within the boundaries became American territory set the precedent for all future debates. The Native Tribes were within the boundaries of the British occupancy and therefore as a conquered nation, the Native Tribal Land became possession of America.

Could the lack of disclosure and transparency in this historic event have produced an unnecessary and enduring resentment and complicated population unity? Yes. A message that is delivered clearly and consistently, with explanations as required and appropriate, is far more effective than an unclear one.

The fact that this remains a topic of uncertainty and elicits such strong debate and emotion from both native and Non-Native Citizens demonstrates the issue is not "closed".¹² There are clear road signs in Oklahoma (formerly Indian Territory) that still mark Tribal Nation boundaries. Many native business establishments and older natives decline the U.S. twenty-dollar bill, requesting instead another denomination due to the image of Andrew Jackson on the currency. A common practice of land title transfer among families in this area holds that if sold it must first be offered to and declined by the other family members before it can be sold publicly (informally known as the Indian clause). Native schools and offices are usually open on the Federal holiday celebrated as "Columbus Day."

Native American Public Telecommunications (2006) presented a series called "Indian Country Diaries" that discussed the assimilation efforts and forced relocation. The term "genocide" is frequently used. The title "Assimilation, Relocation and Genocide" leaves little room for speculation regarding the tone for the presentations.

There are few, if any native museums that do not contain poems and artwork depicting the suffering and sadness that accompanied the relocation, the loss of home, the loss of loved ones, and wounds that "will never heal." It is impossible to not feel compassion and sympathy, but as military professionals, that alone is inadequate.

As recently as September of 2016, the Federal government is continuing to make amends for the events and dealings with American Natives through redistribution of funds and lands. The settlements were with more than 100 tribes and exceeded 3.3 billion dollars.¹³

The answer to "Could understanding of the forced relocation of the Cherokee be useful in future dealings with relocations of displaced populations?" is yes.

Now, it is our duty to learn from that how to best avoid needless suffering and maltreatment by reviewing what could have been improved in this situation. The way to understand that is to objectively study and teach the events.

In this analysis, we have reviewed the events using the PMESII model and identified areas that could have been improved upon. Many of these same areas remain poorly addressed in current practice. Repeatedly, cultural and religious aspects of populations are not considered, thus increasing an already emotionally charged situation. This presents fertile ground for enduring resentments when the friction and fog of actual action begin to arise. Miscalculations and misjudgments then are viewed as intentional and purposeful. Today's communication methods place these actions in open view for the world community. It is essential that the military leaders of today recognize this and improve on these relationships.

After the round up was completed, there is no indication that there were any "be prepared to" orders

issued to the irregular troops. All indications are that they were released to return home. This left the 4,000 regulars, who had recently arrived, with the responsibility of the containment and 800-mile move to the receiving military installations on the other side.

We have one account from a private regular Soldier that was written as an 80th birthday letter to his family. It indicates that his rank remained PVT. One can surmise that his service in the Army extended just past the relocation for a while. The emotional letter implies that he had remained silent for years after his military service, and this letter contains the story his family had been requesting all those years. The account is brief, detailed, and heartwrenching. The young Soldiers memories are haunting. Yet, today's military still sacrifices their own in a similar manner. In the military setting, today even more than yesterday, the need to retain and nurture Soldiers that can grow into seasoned leaders capable of sorting through such complicated issues as this is essential. The impact of premature loss due to lack of insightful action is a powerful motivator for change.

It is evident the native population received mixed messages and timelines. The legal boundaries were vague. The decision to use military force was made and initiated without an adequate force ratio and with no immediately evident means of execution if obstacles were encountered or adaptations required. The loss of life and the circumstance surrounding them continue to cause doubt and elicit feelings of the need for restitution.

Albert Einstein is attributed to be the originator of the quote, "Insanity is doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results." Current U.S. Army Doctrine includes the PMESII model. This is an important step for dealing with populations that have been or will be relocated. The awareness of each group's unique situation and history will enhance our ability to influence the experience. The circumstances may never be reversed, but as ambassadors of freedom and compassion we hold a unique responsibility to facilitate as atraumatic a transition as possible.

Planning after conflict phase operations (recovery and transition of power) is an area that could be improved in the military. Many of these operations are left to the non-governmental and social agencies. These efforts have limited funding and resources. While the military is in place, planners could share their expertise and connections to identify pending trouble areas and anticipate mitigation actions that would set conditions for success after withdrawal.

These things cannot be accomplished using only our own perceptions of "right." The culture and belief systems of the people that have been relocated must be the starting point. Provision of simply monetary or materiel solutions is not enough. These solutions may not be sustainable without direct support. Rather, understanding the need and supplying training and reconstruction assistance, sustainable sanitation, food and water, and healthcare are basic elements of life. The refusal of food and medicine by the Native Americans, even in times of starvation and sickness demonstrates how fearful, suspicious populations can be resistant to comply with authorities.

The messaging supplied by the "softer" elements of public address, public affairs, engineering, chaplaincy, and medical forces can be used to ease suffering, anxiety, and build positive relationships. These disciplines must be included in planning military operations from the conception to the completion. By building positive relationships with the displaced populations, there can be a greater expectation of peaceful compliance than what would be produced by strangers shouting orders.

A further recommendation would be further study, perhaps of other relocation efforts. The reintegration and residual attitudes of the Japanese and German internment detainees are a possible cohort. The current U.S. efforts toward secure borders have segregated out several populations, these could be a focus for study and intervention as well.

Further uses of this information may be for students at Command and General Staff College to exercise planning around historic events such as this to gain insights and critical thinking pathways that could be used to further develop doctrine in these areas. Additional studies that could build on this example and then apply to more recent operations could be a benefit to extend applicability. There is room for improvement in our incorporation of the softer skills alongside the military might for which the U.S. is known.

If there is conflict that forces populations to flee or be annihilated, the military will be faced with assisting with this type of relocation. Events other than war, such as nuclear accident or chemical or biological contamination have forced evacuation and “no further occupancy” orders. Natural disasters have eliminated communities and cities, forcing the people residing there to relocate en mass to other locations. Many reside in temporary living quarters until they can be processed and moved into a more permanent setting. The transition from independently functioning citizen to dependent, displaced person cannot be anything but frightening. Frightened individuals can become dangerous hordes. Hostilities flare and innocents are caught in the middle.

It is a worthy undertaking to attempt to identify a specific set of steps that could be applied to lessen this impact on these people and facilitate their peaceful reintegration to world community. By applying the resulting concepts, lingering resentments can be minimized and the transition can be just a little less painful, for all concerned.

Endnotes

- 1 United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operation Planning, Joint Publication 5-0*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff 2011).
- 2 Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma 2002), 99.
- 3 John D. Benedict, *Muskogee and northeastern Oklahoma: including the counties of Muskogee, McIntosh, Wagoner, Cherokee, Sequoyah, Adair, Delaware, Mayes, Rogers, Washington, Nowata, Craig and Ottawa* (S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, Chicago, Illinois, 1922), 27-29. Accessed February 26, 2017, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2012/20120509001mu/20120509001mu.pdf>, p. 54-57
- 4 Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era*, 100.
- 5 Theda Perdue, *The Cherokee Removal; a Brief History with Documents* (Bedford/St. Martin's Press, Boston, MA, 2005), 71.
- 6 John S.D. Eisenhower, *Agent of Destiny: The Life and Times of General Winfield Scott* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma, 1997), 189.
- 7 Eisenhower, *Agent of Destiny: The Life and Times of General Winfield Scott*, 199.
- 8 Benedict, *Muskogee and northeastern Oklahoma: including the counties of Muskogee, McIntosh, Wagoner, Cherokee, Sequoyah, Adair, Delaware, Mayes, Rogers, Washington, Nowata, Craig and Ottawa*, 87-88.
- 9 John Ehle, *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* (Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. New York, NY, 1988) 344-345.
- 10 Website of Golden Ink Internet Solutions; “*Cherokee Removal Forts*” Aboutnorthgeorgia.com. http://www.aboutnorthgeorgia.com/ang/Cherokee_Removal_Forts (accessed February 27, 2017).
- 11 Steve Inskeep, “The Cherokee leader who paved the way for MLK,” *Washington Post*, May 29, 2015, 4-5. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-chokeee-leader-who-paved-the-way-for-mlk/2015/05/28/7325d05c-ffef-11e4-833c-a2de05b6b2a4_story.html?utm_term=.59d47e5b9da4 (accessed March 4, 2017).
- 12 Steve Inskeep, “The Cherokee leader who paved the way for MLK,” *Washington Post*, May 29, 2015, 1-2. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-chokeee-leader-who-paved-the-way-for-mlk/2015/05/28/7325d05c-ffef-11e4-833c-a2de05b6b2a4_story.html?utm_term=.59d47e5b9da4 (accessed March 4, 2017).
- 13 Sari Horwitz, “U.S. To Pay 17 Indian Tribes \$492 Million To Settle Long-Standing Disputes,” *Washington Post*, September 26, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-to-pay-17-indian-tribes-492-million-to-settle-long-standing-disputes/2016/09/26/61d55e02-83fc-11e6-92c2-14b64f3d453f_story.html?utm_term=.ad896c006ee2 (accessed March 4, 2017).