

Throughout history, every nation that has expanded and attempted to become a powerful empire has eventually collapsed. Most empires are very unstable, and subject to civil war. Almost all empires dissolve within 250 years of their founding. The biggest exception to this trend is the Roman Empire, which lasted almost a thousand years. However, during that time Rome suffered several civil wars. In the year 395 C.E. the empire threatened to fall into chaos once again, because of fundamental disagreements among several factions competing for control of the government.

Fortunately, for the peoples of the Roman Empire, wiser heads drew back from civil war and chartered a course for a peaceful solution. Their solution was to divide the empire in half. The Western Empire stretched from England and Iberia to Italy and Croatia, as well as North Africa from Libya to Morocco. Its capital remained in the city of Rome. The Eastern Empire covered the eastern Mediterranean lands, including what is now Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Syria, Israel, and Egypt. Its new capital became the city of Constantinople (which is now Istanbul, Turkey).

Over the course of history, countless political bodies have dissolved their bonds of unity without war. Separation does not equate civil war. To take only the most recent cases, a century ago Norway declared its independence from Sweden, and the Swedes had the good sense not to try to force them to remain as part of the Kingdom of Sweden. More recently, the Czechs who lived in the western half of Czechoslovakia, and the Slovaks who lived in the eastern half of that awkward nation, decided to go their separate ways in a peaceful separation.

Certainly the most dramatic case of peaceful separation in the twentieth century occurred in the Soviet Union. When that government was established in 1917, a bitter civil war ensued. After years of Russians slaughtering each other, the USSR held together and became a major world power. It kept expanding, and during the decades of Cold War, the Russians challenged world domination by the United States. If someone in 1982 had suggested the Soviet Union would not exist in a decade, they would have been considered insane.

Yet, the breakup of the Soviet Union actually came to pass. And they managed to separate into several countries without violence. History is seldom cut and dried. All sorts of unpredictable things come true.

In fact, as the history of Rome shows, civil wars are more likely to happen when a nation-state does NOT divide itself.

For those who are ready to dismiss the idea that the United States will never fracture, it is important to remember this unpredictable history. Since many nations have broken apart without war, a peaceful breakup of the United States can also be envisioned.

The historical example of the American Civil War has blinded Americans to the possibility of a peaceful breakup. From December 1860 to February 1861, seven states of the Deep South (from South Carolina to Texas) declared themselves to be out of the Union, and they formed a new government called the Confederate States. Their stated reason for seceding was because the

Republican Party candidate Abraham Lincoln won the election on a platform that opposed the spread of slavery into any U.S. territories.

President James Buchanan kept trying to broker a compromise that would persuade the Southern states to return to the Union. But every proposal for compromise failed to gain enough support to pass.

Yet, during the last four months of President Buchanan's administration, between early November 1860, and early March of 1861, there was no war. Even during the first month after the inauguration of the new president, there was no war. Lincoln held firm in his opposition to the spread of slavery, but as a compromise he made a solemn promise that he would not interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed.

Tensions rose, however, when a small federal garrison refused to evacuate Fort Sumter, on the coast of South Carolina. Lincoln ordered the resupply of the fort, but let the governor of South Carolina know that the supply ship carried only food and water for the U.S. troops, and no arms or armaments. Confederate President Jefferson Davis did not trust Lincoln, so he ordered Confederate artillery to bombard Fort Sumter and force it to surrender. This was a stupid mistake by Davis, because from the 12th of April 1861, until the collapse of the Confederacy four years later, the armed forces of both North and South waged a civil war that was a bloody tragedy for the whole nation.

What would have happened if Abraham Lincoln had not ordered the resupply of Fort Sumter? What would have happened if Jeff Davis had not ordered the bombardment of the small fort? Those federal troops were not a danger to the city of Charleston, and they were close to running out of food, so they would have had to evacuate the tiny fort within a week or so. When the rebels fired the first shot, that rash action electrified the Northern public to support a war to bring the South back into the Union by military conquest.

It is hard to know what might have happened if the Confederates had not started the Civil War. Would violence have commenced somewhere else? Lincoln was very worried that the eight slave states of the Upper South might also secede, so this might have inhibited him from attacking the Deep South.

So, if the Confederates had determined to remain peaceful, they might have been able to establish their independence. This would have meant that slavery would have continued to exist in the Deep South, at least for awhile. However, slaves were nearly half of their population, and there was a real possibility that there might have been massive slave revolts. White Southerners were terrified of slave rebellions, and without a powerful U.S. military to suppress such revolts, they might have been overwhelmed. Also, more enslaved persons might have begun to escape, and the small borders of the Confederate States would have meant a shorter journey to freedom.

If Lincoln had resisted the calls for him to raise an army to attack the South, and had kept his promise not to interfere with slavery in states where it already existed, there might have been other alternatives to war. Disgusted with inaction by the federal government, Northern

abolitionists might have resumed their earlier strategy of trying to end slavery on the state level. After all, it was by action of state governments that slavery was abolished in the North.

In the 1850s, Kansas Territory was divided over whether to approve of slavery or not. Since the North and Midwest were growing much faster in population than the South, due to many job opportunities which led to massive immigration by Europeans, Northern settlers prevailed over Southern settlers simply by persuading more Northerners to join them. Once they had a majority, Northerners simply voted to approve a state constitution prohibiting slavery. In January 1861, Kansas was admitted as a free state.

At the same time, voters in the slave state of Maryland were deeply divided. If a large number of Quakers, who fervently opposed slavery, had relocated over the border from their nearby Pennsylvania homes, they could have outvoted pro-slavery Marylanders. And if Maryland had ended slavery, that would have forced their neighbor Delaware (where only a small number of voters owned enslaved persons) to prohibit it as well.

Missouri had long been a slave state, but in the 1850s a massive settlement of German immigrants (who were firmly opposed to slavery) had doubled the state's population. If abolitionists had convinced enough anti-slavery Northerners to settle in Missouri as well, that state also could have ended slavery on the state level.

Arkansas voters had rejected a call for secession during March 1861, but after Lincoln called for an army of 75,000 men to invade the seceded states of the Deep South, they reversed their vote and decided to join the Confederacy. If Lincoln had not made that proclamation "to suppress insurrection," it is quite likely that Arkansas would have remained in the Union. The state was still sparsely populated, and if enough anti-slavery Northerners had moved there, they could easily have outvoted pro-slavery voters.

Kentucky was a state where the numbers of pro-slavery and anti-slavery voters were almost exactly equal in size. Knowing this, state leaders wisely decided on a policy of neutrality. Nevertheless, a clear majority of Kentuckians who fought in the Civil War enlisted on the side of the Union. It would not have required a large number of additional anti-slavery voters for Kentucky to also approve an end to slavery in that border state.

Thus, if Abraham Lincoln had continued the peace policy he advocated during his first month in office, and if abolitionists had convinced enough anti-slavery voters to migrate to Maryland, Delaware, Missouri, Arkansas, and even Kentucky, it is entirely plausible that those five states might have ended slavery within their states. If that had happened, only three slave states (Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina) would have remained in the Union. And there was a strong anti-slavery minority in all three of those states. Anti-slavery representation in Congress would have been large enough to pass a 13th Amendment to the Constitution, perhaps by the end of the 1860s, when another

History is so full of complications and accidents that it is impossible to know what might have happened if there were no Civil War in the United States between 1861 and 1865. Imagine what your policies would be if you were in Abraham Lincoln's place. If I were president in 1861, I

would try to separate the Confederate states, and defeat them one-by-one. Specifically, I would try to entice Texas into seceding from the Confederacy, and reverting to its pre-1845 status as the independent Lone Star Republic.

Let's say that Lincoln sent his Secretary of State William Seward, a skilled negotiator if ever there was one, to bargain a separate deal with Texas.

Slavery might have continued to exist for many years in the Deep South, but if slave revolts led to massive numbers of white Southerners fleeing for their lives, or if so many enslaved persons escaped to the jungles and swamps of sparsely-populated Florida, the Sunshine State (or indeed, the entire Deep South) might have ended up being an independent black nation. Stranger things have happened in history.

What is more certain is that if Abraham Lincoln had not made his call for 75,000 volunteers to invade the Deep South, the states of the Upper South would not have joined the Confederacy. He would not have gone down in history as the Great Emancipator, but the nation would have been spared the grueling bloodbath that cost over 800,000 American lives, ruined the Southern economy for a century, and left bitter feelings on all sides.

With a determination to remain non-violent, however, a future secession movement need not make the same rash mistake that the Southern secessionists made in the 1860s.

Peaceful separation, whereby some states leave the Union while others continue within it, is a viable alternative. Rather than dismissing such an option out of hand, wise minds may come to agree that a parting of the ways, but with peaceful trade between the states, is the better alternative to continued political strife and instability.

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