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- [Web search](#)
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  - [SIDtoday Blog](#)
  - [SIDtoday Series](#)
  - [SIGINT Worldwide VTC](#)
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- [SIDtoday Article](#)
  - [Letter to the Editor](#)
  - [SIGINT-y Social Media Page](#)

**(U) The SIGINT Philosopher: Lessons for Civil Servants from the American Civil War (That Don't Concern Killing Vampires)**

FROM: (U//FOUO) [REDACTED]

**SERIES:**

**The SIGINT Philosopher**

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(U) I am an enthusiast of the American Civil War. I'm not proud of this, as I long held that the Civil War was the lone preserve of aging, bearded, paunchy men named [REDACTED] who would make up for their lack of charisma by memorizing the entire order of battle for Longstreet's wing at Chancellorsville\* or reenacting Chickamauga on the weekends with paintball guns. But eventually, it got to me. It's hard to resist the compelling nature of the crucible of our nation's history, especially when I live within two hours of a dozen of the most important battles. I may have even been seen celebrating the 150th anniversary of Antietam in September at Sharpsburg. (Not as a re-enactor, although I do have an excellent beard.)

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(U) As I've begun to read a little deeper into the war, I can't help but think that if I had been an adviser to Lincoln at the outset of war in 1861, I'd have probably told him that trying to win such a war was insane. I think I'd have advised him

to win such a war was insane. I think I'd have advised him that it was folly to try and fight a war to make a nation as large as the South agree to rejoin the Union. Questions I'd have raised might have included: "How will you raise an Army? Who will lead it when so many of the best officers are from the South? How will you raise taxes to support it when you have a population that hates taxes? What if Europe intercedes? And what if, by some miracle, we can win this war -- how will we govern a people who do not want to be governed, and who may continue a low-level resistance forever?"

(U) My reasoning would have been based on a pragmatic philosophy that I've spent a lot of time developing, and which I can elucidate eloquently. (Not as eloquently, though, as Jack Sparrow elucidates the same philosophy when he hits Will Turner upside the head and tells him "the only thing in this world that matters is what I can do and what I can't do.") For all my well-reasoned dissent, though, the advice I'd have given Lincoln would have been wrong.

(U) We are all experts -- or at least very well-informed -- about the issues we work. And there is a good chance that as an expert, you may find that you disagree with our national policy on the issue you work. If you are an expert in information security, maybe you think our cyber security posture is weak. If you are an expert in Zendian foreign policy, maybe you think we are taking too hawkish or too soft a stance on the Zendian arms embargo. We probably all have something we know a lot about that is being handled at a higher level in a manner we're not entirely happy about. This can cause great cognitive dissonance for us, because we may feel our work is being used to help the government follow a policy we feel is bad.

(U) Such cognitive dissonance isn't new. U.S. Grant, the great hero of the Civil War, first earned his bona fides in the Mexican-American war. He wasn't entirely thrilled about his role in that war, though. He once called the conflict "the most unjust war a powerful nation ever inflicted upon a weaker one." So how do we reconcile ourselves to being cogs in a machine we think is damaging our own best interests?

(U) Many people may answer this with two versions of "it's not my responsibility." You can take the less noble of the two versions of this and simply say "It's above my pay grade, and as long as I'm getting paid, it's on someone else if they mess up." A higher form of this sentiment might say "I may not

5. [The SIGINT Philosopher: Unlike All My Terrible Teammates, I Am a Wonderful Teammate](#)
6. The SIGINT Philosopher: Lessons for Civil Servants from the American Civil War (That Don't Concern Killing Vampires)

up." A higher form of this sentiment might say "I may not like what decision makers are doing, but my oath is to uphold the constitution, and as long as those decision makers are operating constitutionally, I will put my own feelings aside, and support them."

(U) The Civil War has helped me to see two other ways I might reconcile my misgivings. First, I realize that *as hard as it is to believe, I might actually be wrong*. I'd have been wrong about the Civil War, although I'd have had brilliant reasons for being wrong. It is possible that, as much as I know about the subject I am an expert in, I still might have managed to just be wrong.

(U) Secondly, I realize that sometimes, *you can be wrong and still get away with it if you commit to the wrong thing with enough determination*. Legendary baseball pitcher Greg Maddux was once asked about how he became such a brilliant, foxy pitcher, always throwing the pitch that fooled batters. He said he wasn't really a genius, but that if you throw the pitch you mean to throw in the right location at the right speed, it doesn't usually even matter if it's the "right" pitch. You'll still usually get a good result, and end up looking like a genius.

(U) No Civil War figure demonstrated this successful commitment to the wrong idea more than Confederate General Robert E. Lee. His campaigns are a study of foolhardiness that worked for the better part of two years. Time and again, he would buck all military wisdom, attack against greater forces, attack with his flank exposed, attack when Venus was aligned with Pluto, attack, attack, attack. It worked for so long in part because even though his plans may not have always been very wise, he and everyone in his command *believed* they would work, and committed to making them work.

(U) So I try to be a good lieutenant and good civil servant of even the policies I think are misguided. Perhaps I will be wrong. Or perhaps, if I support a poor policy well enough, I can make that policy look like it was a good one all along. At the very least, I can always take solace that I have a really cool beard.

(U) Notes:

\* (U) Yes, [REDACTED] I realize that Longstreet was not at Chancellorsville.

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