

Factors Leading to Confederation

The Fenian raids were only one of many issues facing the British North American colonies in the 1860s. It was an unsettling time. The idea of Confederation had been put forward, but there were still many obstacles to overcome. What would make the colonies determined to unite? In the 1860s, five major problems provided the final push.

1. The Threat of an American Takeover

From 1861 to 1865, the Americans fought a bloody civil war. A **civil war** is a war between people who live in the same country. In the American Civil War, the Northern states were fighting the Southern states. The issue was whether North and South should remain united or whether the South would separate.

The American Civil War had nothing to do with Canada or Britain. But wars have a habit of affecting many countries. Britain appeared to support the Southern states. The South was a great producer of cotton and British textile factories depended on this supply of cotton. Britain's support of the South did not make Britain popular with the Northern states.

Canada became involved in the tensions in 1864. A group of Southern soldiers raided the village of St. Albans in Vermont, a Northern state. They robbed banks, set houses on fire, and then dashed across the border into Canada to escape. The Northern states saw this incident as evidence that Canada was hostile to the Northern cause.

When the North won the Civil War in 1865, Canadians really began to worry. They wondered whether the North would now turn its vast armies against them. Would the North attack Canada as a way of getting revenge on Britain?

At the same time, a number of American newspapers and politicians had been talking about the takeover of Canada. Many Americans believed in **Manifest Destiny**. That is, they believed it was natural that the United States would one day control all of North America. Before long, would the whole continent belong to the United States?



People in the British North American colonies took the threat of an American takeover very seriously. Thousands of citizens volunteered for military training and joined a militia force. By 1870, the militia numbered over 30 000. This photo shows the volunteer regiment of Elora, Ontario in 1862.