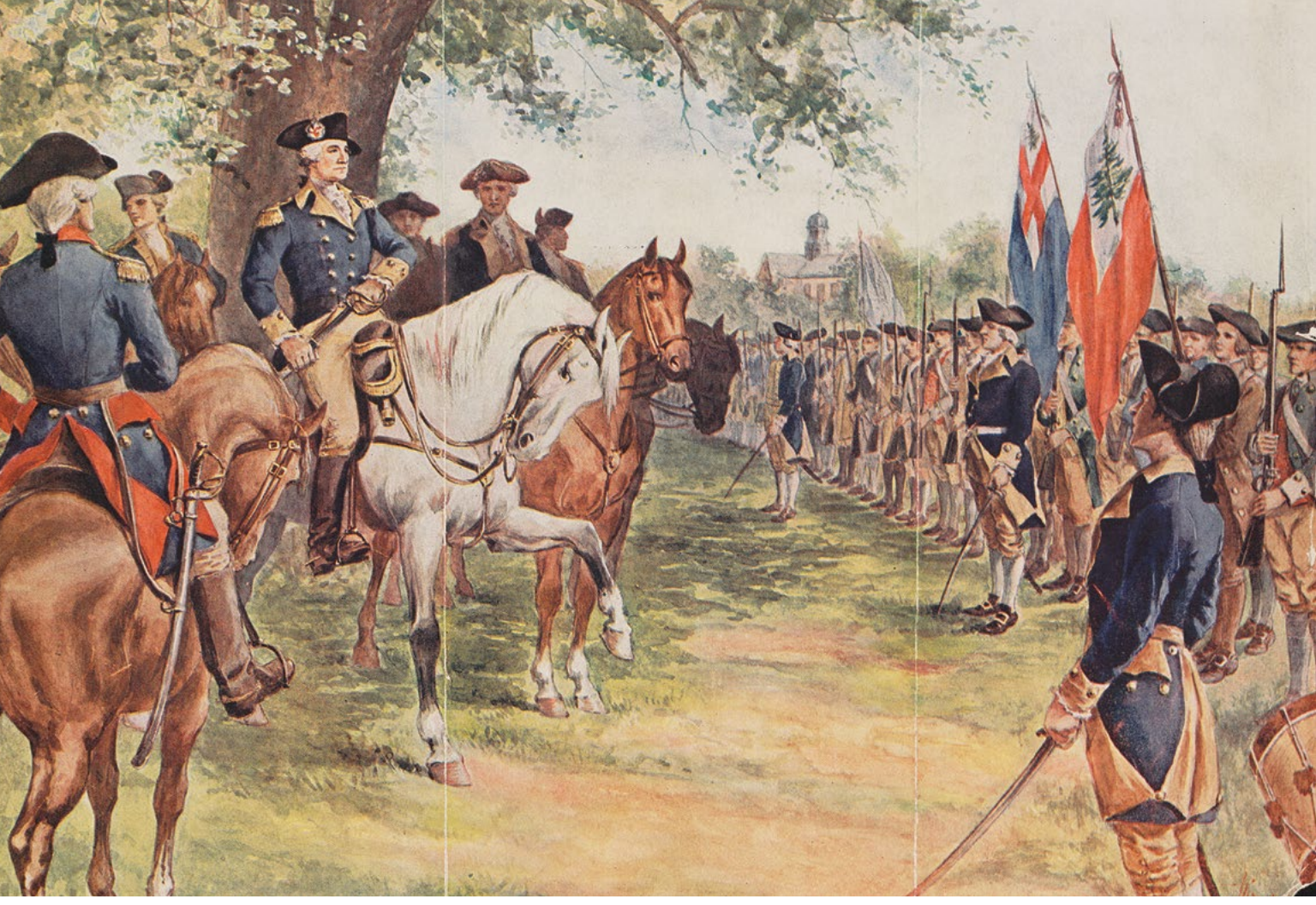


Washington Taking Command of the American Army Under the Old Elm at Cambridge, ca. 1908, photomechanical print, 21.3 x 29 cm. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

George Washington and the Foundations of Civilian Control of the Military

Robert F. Williams, PhD

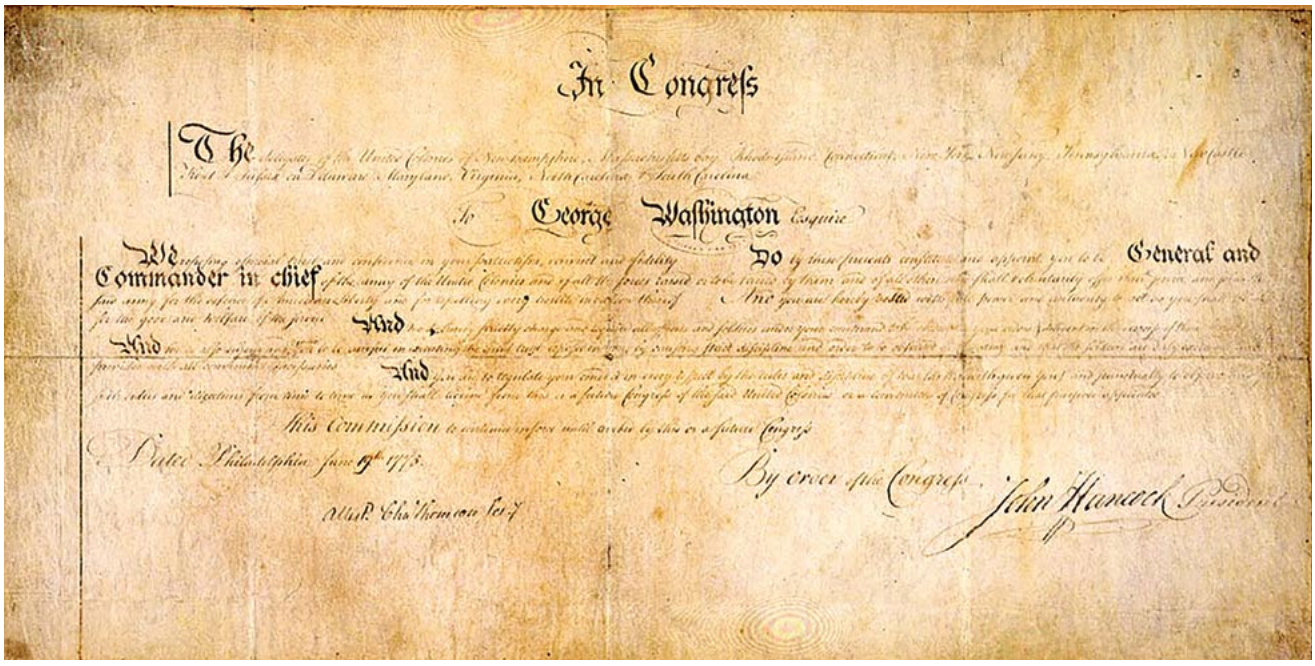
When the American Revolution ended, George Washington was perhaps the most famous man in the world. In subsequent decades, he came to mean different things to different people but always as a paragon of virtue. He has been viewed as the American Cincinnatus, who went from farmer to commander in chief and back to farmer after playing a monumental role in delivering independence to the colonies.[1] While much of Washington's life has been mythologized, he established an important norm for new countries that persists to this day—civilian control of the military. Throughout the war, he devoted himself to reinforcing the political legitimacy of the fledgling Continental Congress. He came to embody the entire cause. He was the foremost American nationalist, and his entire military career is proof that war and politics are inextricably linked.[2]

At its core, politics is how groups of humans negotiate the distribution of power, make decisions, and allocate resources. The process by which these decisions are made is critical to the governance of a country. In that regard, militaries are integral to any political process. For Washington, this required direct communication with Congress, state governments, and the leaders of various regional military departments. He was often more of a "communicator in chief" or "explainer in chief," consistently explaining his army's condition to Congress and congressional action to his army, usually to great frustration. He was the consummate middleman, a diplomat between a weak Congress and thirteen regional governments.[3] In this complex political-military environment, he established norms and precedents that exist to this day. Washington's understanding of prevailing thoughts on standing armies, his adherence to political control through his dealings with Congress, and his symbolic transfer of power at the war's end serve as essential examples. Washington was a perceptive politician and commander who immersed himself in politics with a deft hand as needed and set an example for the modern military officer.

In May 1775, Washington arrived at the Second Continental Congress in style—wearing his blue and buff uniform of the Fairfax County militia to remind everyone of his background in the French and Indian War and signal his readiness for military action. His fellow lawmakers viewed him as one of them, a lawmaker with military experience.[4] He was chosen over his more experienced military contemporaries like Charles Lee and Horatio Gates because of his connections to the Continental Congress and political abilities. Unlike the other two, Washington was American-born and looked like a military leader.[5] Both were more experienced military men, but none had the combination of political, managerial, and military experience as Washington. He also represented an opportunity to connect the New England militias then at Boston with other forces from the southern colonies—a political calculation. In selecting Washington, Congress prioritized political acumen over long military experience. Regardless, Washington's election as "General and Commander in chief of the army of the United Colonies" began the American experiment in civilian control of its military.[6]

On 17 June, Congress granted George Washington "full power and authority to act as [he] shall think for the good and welfare of the service" while reminding him "punctually to observe and follow such orders and directions" as Congress delivered. Congress's end of the bargain was that they were to "maintain and assist him and adhere to him … with their lives and fortunes."[7] Congress was adamant that he follow all orders and directions "from this, or a future Congress of these United Colonies, or committee of Congress."[8] Congress wasted little time in establishing the rudimentary chain of command. In fact, despite appointing four major-generals, they were so concerned with the possibility of an American Cromwell wielding a standing army that they failed to work out the "intricacies of rank and

Robert F. Williams, PhD, is a research historian with Army University Press at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. A former airborne infantry noncommissioned officer, he served in both Iraq and Afghanistan in various airborne and Stryker units. He earned a BA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an MA and a PhD from Ohio State University. His work has appeared in the *Journal of Military History*, *Parameters*, War on the Rocks, the Modern War Institute, and *Stars and Stripes*. His first book, *The Airborne Mafia: The Paratroopers Who Shaped America's Cold War Army* (Cornell University Press), came out in early 2025.


In Congress

The

To George Washington Esquire

We reposing special trust and confidence in your patriotism, valor and fidelity Do by these presents constitute and appoint you to be General and Commander in chief of the army of the United Colonies and of all the forces now raised or to be raised by them and of all others who shall voluntarily offer their service and join the said Army

And

And

This Commission to continue in force until revoked by this or a future Congress

Dated Philadelphia June 19th 1775.

By order of the Congress John Hancock President

Attest Chas Thomson Secy

Two days after the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Continental Congress commissioned George Washington to lead the Continental Army on 19 June 1775. Congress unanimously voted on the measure, which read, in part, "We, reposing special trust and confidence in your patriotism, valor, conduct, and fidelity, do, by these presents, constitute and appoint you to be General and Commander in chief, of the army of the United Colonies, and of all the forces now raised, or to be raised, by them, and of all others who shall voluntarily offer their service, and join the said Army." (Scan courtesy of the George Washington Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division)

seniority" among those senior officers.[9] Nevertheless, his commission served as a reminder that his authority and legitimacy derived not from his military status but from Congress and the states—from the people's representatives, and therefore, from the people.[10]

While Washington was en route to Cambridge—he took command of the forces there on 3 July 1775—Congress issued sixty-nine "articles of war." These outlined his guidelines and provided the initial basis for a military justice system with which he could discipline and shape his forces.[11] Congress also formed a Board of War to which Washington was to report, but the larger body continued to weigh in on and decide most military matters. They instructed him to only act after consulting his "council of war," which referred to his other senior officers. Moreover, these articles of war outlined various disciplinary offenses and offered punishments. This gave Washington the legal backing to discipline his troops—particularly against the traditional excesses and plundering that accompany most military endeavors. Washington understood that he needed to retain the loyalty of the American people and took major steps to curtail unruly behavior with harsh punishments, including flogging and execution.[12]

Upon arrival, Washington maintained lines of communication with the Continental Congress and established them with local governors. This was critical for supplying his forces in the field, as much of the logistics system flowed from the states to their respective regiments. He specifically avoided confrontation with or irritating civilian leaders, especially New Englanders. The war was one between not just two armies but a struggle between two armies for the "hearts and minds" of the American people and the political legitimacy of the fledgling Continental government. Washington understood this "triangularity" of the struggle and took steps to keep his forces cognizant of that as well. This included making sure his men did not bathe nude within the eyesight of Massachusetts women to keep local politicians happy.[13] In the first nine months that Washington was in command outside Boston, he wrote fifty-one letters to John Hancock (then serving as the president of Congress) and more than double that number to Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island leaders.[14] Communication was routinely directed to the

president of Congress throughout the war, but that was often not the most influential member of that body, nor did it remain the same. After Hancock's resignation in 1777, Congress went through seven different presidents during the remaining six years of the war.[15]

Politics also played an important role in many of Washington's tactical decisions. In 1775, he sought and received approval before dispatching Maj. Gen. Richard Montgomery to try to bring Canada into the fold. Further political considerations played a role in his thought process; he thought it militarily prudent to loosen the siege of Boston and withdraw his forces into the countryside, while his officers insisted that a retreat would not endear him to his soldiers nor Congress.[16] The pressure to defend Philadelphia and hold New York was also immense. The Continental's capital was in the former, and the latter's ports held strategic importance to British efforts. Washington was ambivalent about ideas for burning New York to prevent the British from using its ports until Congress resoundingly forbade it. He understood the city's importance yet juxtaposed that with how burning the city might lose him the support of the people.[17] Nevertheless, after withdrawing from Harlem Heights, Washington was disgruntled and nearly ready to resign. Foreshadowing things to come, he saw Congress as an ineffective and frustrating instrument that placed too much stock in patriotism rather than paying officers, as if a well-paid army might suddenly turn into an uncontrollable mercenary force.[18]

Washington's efforts to convince Congress of the plight of an army full of short-term enlistees paid off in the fall of 1776. As most Continental enlistments were set to expire on 31 December 1776, Washington was in a bind. Similar problems at the end of 1775 meant he was re-creating his force, retraining, and redisciplining it for the 1776 campaign season. In Washington's mind, the citizen-soldier ideal had led in part to the failure to secure Quebec, and Washington was faced with the prospect of not having an army for the next campaign season. He needed troops enlisted for the duration of the war that he could train and discipline into an effective fighting instrument to beat the British. As such, after weeks of deliberation by the Board of War, on 16 September, Congress approved a plan to provide cash bonuses and postwar land grants to entice men to enlist for the duration of the war. In so doing, it authorized an army of eighty-eight battalions and upward of seventy-five thousand men. Congress continued to commission officers above colonel, while the states were still expected to commission colonels and below and provide arms and clothing for its regiments. Four days later, Congress amended its Articles of War from sixty-nine to seventy-six, giving Washington wider latitude to discipline his men as needed. The major change was an increase in the maximum number of lashes from thirty-nine to one hundred.[19] The collapse of enthusiasm for the cause and British victories in 1776 made Washington's case. This was the beginning of the Continental Congress's realization that it could not rely on militia alone and needed something more professional to supplement the militia tradition of the colonies.

Nevertheless, during the winter at Morristown, Washington decided on a "Fabian" strategy that sought to win the war by avoiding the main British army. This was derived from a classical understanding of Quintus Fabius Maximus's strategy that wore out his numerically superior Carthaginian opponent led by Hannibal in the Second Punic War. Fabian avoided giving Hannibal a pitched battle and chose instead to attack his supply lines and deny him the ability to convert more Italian provinces to defect through a decisive battle. Hannibal eventually left Italy after fifteen years of inconclusive campaigning.[20] Washington realized then that the way to win this war was not to lose. This included avoiding pitched battles and waging *la petite guerre*, or "unconventional warfare," in the triangular struggle with the British army for the support of the population.[21] This notion did not enthuse Congress, as it meant he would not defend the capital at Philadelphia.[22] He then lost consecutive battles at Brandywine Creek on 11 September 1777 and Germantown on 4 October—effectively clearing the way for the British to take Philadelphia. Meanwhile, the Continentals secured a great victory in the Hudson River Valley at Saratoga on 17 October 1777. John Burgoyne surrendered his army to Gen. Horatio Gates, and the French decided to join the war. Gates had been reinforced by Arnold and Daniel Morgan, and this continued to sour Washington's reputation.[23]

His Fabian strategy manifested his deep understanding of the political ends of military service.

Clausewitz reminds strategists that the destruction of the enemy's main force is, in fact, "only a means to an end, a secondary matter."[24] Washington sought to defeat the British by isolating them in their urban center, avoiding pitched battles, and wearing them down so that Parliament and the king might give up. Washington, like Fabian, sought battle when and where it made sense, and as a result, the Continental Army had only two major victories. At Saratoga, he was not involved, but it may have helped convince the French of the worthiness of the American cause. At Yorktown, the full defeat of Cornwallis's forces, with massive French support, was enough to end British attempts to subdue their subjects in North America. The key for Washington was to keep the army alive. The British could not win the war if he did that.[25]

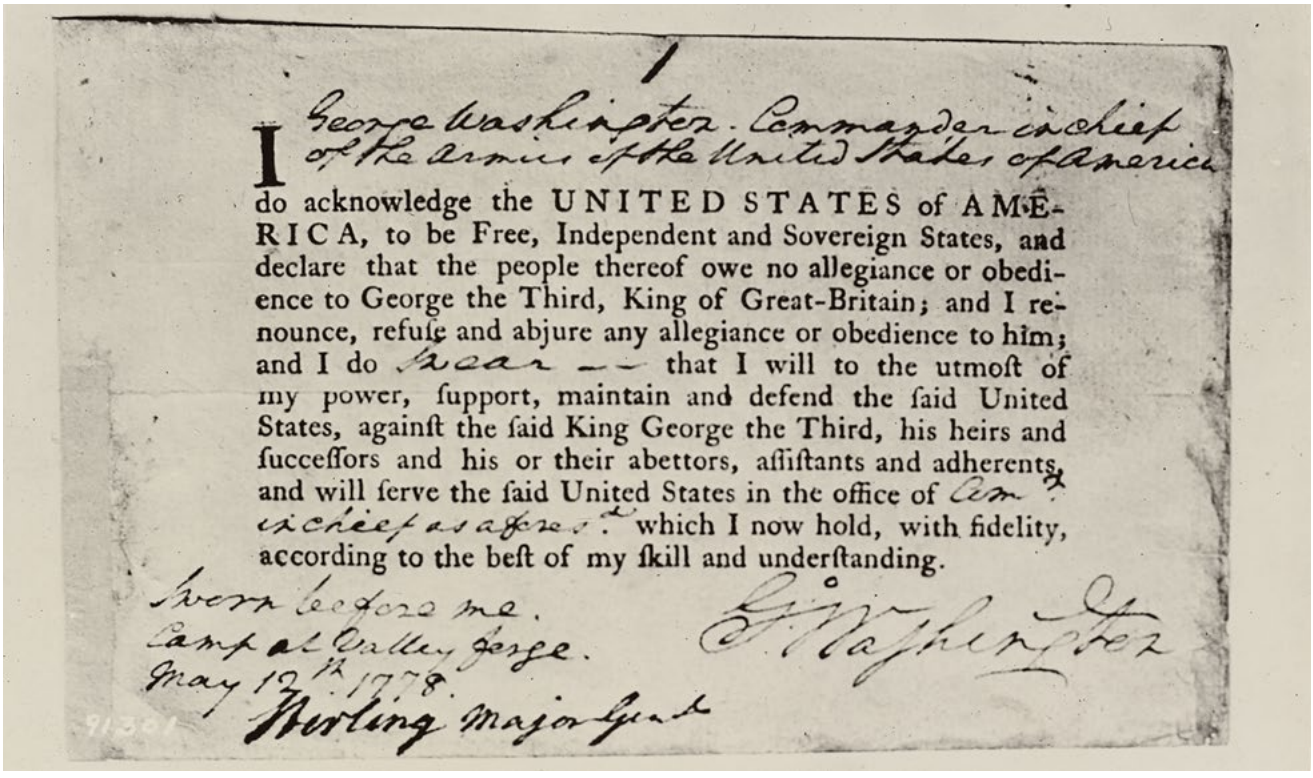
Washington's navigation of twin crises during the winter of 1777 into 1778 was even more incredible than the winter of 1776. This manifested in two ways: his handling of the so-called Conway Cabal and his ability to convince Congress to allow him to rebuild his deteriorating army in his vision. The Conway Cabal was an alleged scheme to replace Washington as overall commander with Gates hatched by members of Congress.[26] Just as important, Washington convinced Congress to allow him to construct a disciplined and well-supplied national army during the winter encampment at Valley Forge.

As fall turned to winter, Gates looked like a hero, while Washington had just surrendered the capital, prompting speculation that a change might be in order.[27] Washington learned of the gossip network's half-baked scheme to replace him in an intercepted letter from Gen. Thomas Conway to Horatio Gates that supported Gates as commander in chief. The whole affair was nothing more than some correspondence between Conway and Gates. Still, it did serve as a major embarrassment for Washington and Congress, except for the retooling of the Board of War and the appointment of Conway as the inspector general.[28] Washington's former quartermaster general, Thomas Mifflin, was among the disgruntled officers. He described Washington as inept and surrounded by sycophants afraid to challenge him. He corresponded with Gates, telling the former to prepare for command as a "mighty torrent of public clamor and public vengeance" was brewing against Washington.[29]

Adding to the chaos, on 27 November 1777, Congress passed a resolution that appointed Gates to a new and reorganized Board of War that included Mifflin, former commissary general Joseph Trumbull, and Thomas Pickering, among others. This effectively made Gates superior to Washington. Gates had the authority to appoint officers, propose reforms, and supervise the quartermaster and commissary departments. Congress appointed an inspector general, Thomas Conway, to oversee Washington's forces. An outspoken critic of Washington, the Irish-born, French-trained Conway was appointed to that role on 13 December 1777. He was to report directly to Gates and Congress—independent of Washington's command—and he was not instructed to inform Washington.[30]

Washington revealed what he knew to the press to counter Gates and Conway's influence. Conway resigned in full, but Washington urged his supporters to duel with Gates and Conway. Gates refused to duel, apologized, and was reassigned. Washington's loyal subordinate, Gen. John Cadwalader, challenged Conway to a duel and shot him in the mouth. Conway was wounded but alive and fled to France to recover, where he issued an apology that Washington never returned.[31] With Conway out as inspector general, Washington appointed Friedrich Wilhelm August Heinrich Ferdinand von Steuben, also known as Baron von Steuben, to that post as a direct subordinate. Washington appointed his most trusted subordinate, Nathanael Greene, quartermaster general.[32] After this so-called cabal—where there is no evidence of a concerted effort to oust Washington—no further issues with civil-military relations sprang up until the war's end.[33]

The winter at Valley Forge is a seminal moment in U.S. Army history for several reasons, including how it informed civil-military relations. The choice of location was itself a political decision to placate civilian leaders. Washington seriously considered a winter campaign and an attack to retake Philadelphia but ultimately decided against it. Should a move like that fail, it would have ruined the army and the cause. Still, Congress did not want Washington to take his army into winter quarters. In early December, he sent a delegation to his headquarters only to find a demoralized and destitute army. According to Henry Laurens, this army had been on the move for the past six months and was "half in Rags & half of them without Blankets."[34] Washington



I George Washington. Commander in chief of the armies of the United States of America do acknowledge the UNITED STATES of AMERICA, to be Free, Independent and Sovereign States, and declare that the people thereof owe no allegiance or obedience to George the Third, King of Great-Britain; and I renounce, refuse and abjure any allegiance or obedience to him; and I do swear —— that I will to the utmost of my power, support, maintain and defend the said United States, against the said King George the Third, his heirs and successors and his or their abettors, assistants and adherents, and will serve the said United States in the office of Com. in chief as aforesd. which I now hold, with fidelity, according to the best of my skill and understanding.

Sworn before me.
Camp at Valley Forge.
May 12th 1778.
Stirling Major Genl

G. Washington

The Oath of Allegiance and Fidelity that was signed by Gen. George Washington while encamped and in command of the Continental Army at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, on 12 May 1778. His oath was sworn before, and also signed by, Maj. Gen. William Alexander, Earl of Stirling. This affirmation came to be taken due to a Congressional Resolve dated 3 February 1778, which directed "every officer who holds or shall hereafter hold a commission or office from Congress" to take this oath. (Scan courtesy of the National Archives)

ultimately chose Valley Forge for his winter quarters due to a host of factors, but ultimately, the decision represented a compromise between military, political, and logistical needs. It was close enough to Philadelphia to monitor British forces but far enough away to be defensible. It contained natural defenses and quick access to major roads for resupply or movement. Most of all, Washington chose the location to balance Congress's wishes for a continued offensive with the beleaguered state of his forces.[35]

The winter at Valley Forge was most important for Washington's ability to re-create his army as he saw fit. Thanks to the efforts of Steuben—who arrived on 23 February 1778—to implement standard drills to train the Continental Army, the force that left camp in late spring 1778 was a far better-trained and led force than the one that entered.[36] Nevertheless, going into Valley Forge, the Continental Army was severely short on manpower, supplies, and funding—indicative of the strained relationship between Washington and Congress. To plead his case in the most direct manner possible, he hosted another congressional committee. This five-member delegation came to his headquarters on 10 January 1778 and stayed until March. Attendees included Francis Dana of Massachusetts, Nathaniel Folsom of New Hampshire, John Harvie of Virginia, Gouverneur Morris of New York, and Joseph Reed of Pennsylvania.[37] His previous experience in politics had prepared him well for this moment. Opponents in Congress had chastised him for overstating the army's situation, but this allowed him to demonstrate clearly to the delegates exactly what his army was enduring. The delegates, in turn, worked with Washington to attempt to resolve logistics and manpower issues; Washington called for a limited draft and civilian recruiting system, which Congress recommended to the states. Nothing would be completed before the campaign season, but the committee did adjust state quotas to better reflect their populations.[38]

Washington and his staff likewise penned a letter negotiating the army's needs against Congress's wants. Within, he outlined a Table of Organization for the

Mutiny of the Pennsylvania Line by Edmund A. Winham and James E. Taylor, 1881, woodcut, 11 x 12 cm. (Image courtesy of the New York Public Library Digital Collections)

army he needed to defeat the British. The letter called for increased pay to curb resignations, half-pay for life for his officers in retirement, an overhaul of the state-based regimental system so he could create a true national army, and the ability to levy promotions.[39] On 27 May 1778, Congress passed a resolution that created a new military establishment that reflected Washington's desires for the composition of regiments of infantry, artillery, and cavalry, as well as the structure of other noncombat departments. They also prescribed updated rates of pay and methods of promotion.[40] While this did not solve all of Washington's problems, it reflected his ability to persuade the political body and demonstrate the dynamic relationship between civilian and military leaders. They even approved half-pay pensions for officers in May 1778—restricted to seven years—and an eighty-dollar bonus for anyone who reenlisted for the duration.[41]

Throughout the war, Washington remained cognizant of prevailing aversion to a standing army. He endeavored to prove his republican credentials as a temporary military commander of citizens. Most of Congress eventually came to trust him. From the beginning, Washington and the Continental Army

took great pains to obey state laws and even provided receipts for items procured. Washington communicated directly with state-level governments because he understood that power lay at that level. In doing so, he endured problems with diffuse confederation-style governance that fueled his conviction that the country needed a strong national government—an opinion he began to express as early as 1780. To Washington, a failure to strengthen the federal government would lead to the forfeiture of hard-won gains in the war. The country would not consolidate its gains if it allowed the old, dispersed government to continue.[42]

During their stay at Valley Forge, soldiers noticed the refusal of so-called "patriots" to surrender food and goods to help the army survive—much less agree to any increased taxation. Accusations of war profiteering abounded, and the relationship between the army and the citizenry deteriorated despite congressional acquiescence to army demands.[43] As such, by early 1780, Washington warned Congress to address at least some of the army's grievances.[44] In January 1781, two minor mutinies served as precursors to the Newburgh Conspiracy. First, on 5 January, a group of one thousand disgruntled and unpaid soldiers from the Pennsylvania line marched on Congress with artillery. While en route, they shot two loyal officers and made sure to declare to everyone who would listen that they were "no Benedict Arnolds"; they were simply fed up with broken promises. Washington and his officers persuaded them to turn back. He also urged Congress to address their grievances and assured the lawmakers—and the states—that he and his fellow officers were committed to republican government.[45]

A second mutinous incident occurred three weeks later with troops from the New Jersey line. These men threatened to march on their state capitol at Trenton with intentions like the Pennsylvanians'. In this instance, Washington reversed course and chose to suppress this mutiny—to make an example. He dispatched Robert Howe and a six-hundred-man detachment to quell the mutiny, instructing him to compel their "unconditional submission," and that if he succeeded, he was to "instantly execute a few of the most active and most incendiary leaders."[46] Howe's men surrounded the rebels and then followed their orders, killing the two lead conspirators.[47] These two incidents were less of a problem in civil-military relations than the Conway Cabal or the Newburgh Conspiracy because they involved lower-ranked officers, the threat was minimal, and the attempts were quickly put down. Nevertheless, they had the potential to squander what support remained among the population.

Civil-military relations remained relatively calm until 1783. After the victory at Yorktown in the fall of 1781, Washington urged Congress to send him on the offensive, yet they declined. Dislodging British garrisons in New York or Charleston would be difficult at best and risked both civilian casualties and interrupting the ongoing peace process. It is important to note that Washington did not take his army on the march against the remaining pockets of British forces; rather, he adhered to the principle of civilian control by respecting Congress's wishes. However, he insisted on maintaining his army in a high state of readiness until a peace treaty was signed and moved to within striking distance of New York City.[48] His maintenance of a standing army during this time, while waiting for the signing of the Treaty of Paris, renewed fears of an American Caesar or Oliver Cromwell—the classic and recent examples of how republicanism ended in military dictatorship. Rumors about Washington wishing to prolong the war to extend his power—an accusation leveled at him before and something he addressed directly on multiple occasions, especially during his "Fabian" phase, where he deliberately avoided giving battle.[49] His most famous refutation of power and desire to return to Mount Vernon came in his 23 October 1782 letter to William Gordon. "I can say, with much truth, that there is not a Man in America that more fervently wishes for Peace, and a return to private life than I do." Washington wrote, "Nor will any Man go back to the rural & domestick enjoyments of it with more Heart felt pleasure than I shall."[50]

The war had reinforced what he had learned as a young officer in the Virginia militia, that successful generals *had* to immerse themselves in politics. He initially tried to remain above the fray of politics. Washington feared the impact he might have in influencing decisions in a political environment that feared a standing army and unchecked military power. However, he soon realized that, to have any army capable of taking on the British that was supplied and fed and to cooperate with Congress, he needed to be political. He needed to engage in the process of determining

George Washington by Charles Willson Peale, 1776, oil on canvas, 44 x 38 5/16 in. (111.7 x 97.3 cm). (Painting courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum, Dick S. Ramsay Fund)

how to allocate a finite number of resources to the young country. In so doing, he leaned on his experience as a politician to become an active and influential part of the political process. He specifically sought politically skilled officers to serve as his aides and corresponded with those politicians at all levels who might best influence events in favor of the army.[51]

The Newburgh Conspiracy is the closest the United States has come to a military coup d'etat or mutiny. It was a complex affair involving officers and members of Congress conspiring to strengthen the federal government and provide pay and benefits to war veterans. The origins of the crisis stemmed from the years of sacrifice made by the army for the cause. On top of that, officers were apprehensive about rejoining a civil society where their friends had grown rich from the opportunities that came during wartime while they suffered and sacrificed. Their pay had been in arrears for nearly four years—by some accounts, the cumulative total was over five million dollars. Congress was in debt to six million dollars and could not tax; only the states could. In 1780, Congress granted a lifetime half-pay pension, which was halted in 1782 to save money. In a December 1782 memorandum, Continental Army officers asked Congress to maintain funding and allow them to receive their pensions in a lump sum payment with back pay rather than lifetime half-pay pensions. The officers included in that memorandum a threat that "any further experiments on their patience may have fatal effects."[52] On 6 January 1783, a congressional committee met to discuss the grievances but was ultimately fruitless.[53]

The petitioners had also ridden to Philadelphia and conferred with two young members of Congress—James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. They later met with Robert Morris, the congressional financier. Their timing was perfect. Virginia had just joined Rhode Island in vetoing a tax bill known as the Impost of 1781.[54] This would have provided funding to the federal government to fund veterans' programs, and favorable political winds had shifted to a faction of nationalists (pre-Federalists) who wanted to increase governmental authority. These congressmen then discussed the concerns of the delegation led by Maj. Gen. Alexander McDougall, urging them to cooperate. Hamilton thought that an officer revolt might help change the minds of other members of Congress. Morris and the rest also threatened that they would not refer their army claims to the various states if they did not participate. Their debate continued, each attempting to persuade the other, but in essence, a faction within Congress was attempting to use the army to threaten other members of Congress into bending to their will to increase the power of the federal government.[55] What is most striking is that these men later advocated on behalf of the Federalist Party.

As trouble brewed, Hamilton suggested that Washington not interfere; rather that he let the conspirators intimidate Congress. Hamilton also suggested that many within the ranks viewed him as too mindful of Congress and that he ignored the needs of soldiers. Hamilton's ideas were dangerous and would have set a terrible precedent in American civil-military relations. Washington did not respond to Hamilton's remarks for three weeks and even then, only to tell him that he decided not to join any schemes.[56] Washington wrote back to Hamilton on 4 March that "the sufferings of a

complaining Army on one hand, and the inability of Congress and tardiness of the States on the other, are the forebodings of evil."[57] One of their major grievances was the pension plan and its status as a political football. As these officers believed that they had sacrificed the most to the cause, they felt they deserved compensation for their time away from their families and livelihoods—a point Washington consistently reminded Congress about.[58] However, the situation intensified when, on 10 March 1783, an incendiary letter circulated the camp. This directive was more forceful. It referred to an ungrateful country and an indifferent Congress, suggesting that they did not disband until their grievances were redressed, or should war resume, they should step aside. Washington decided to act. He needed to extinguish the flames of dissent before the officers' plots ruined whatever gains they had just won in seven years of war.[59]

The plotters had originally planned for all officers, including Washington, to meet on 11 March. Washington foiled that and scheduled a new meeting for 16 March 1783. In that meeting, he delivered one of his most impassioned speeches. He reminded his officers that their ideas were anathema to the principles for which they had just fought. He urged them "not to take any measures, which, viewed in the calm light of reason, will lessen the dignity, & sully the glory you have hitherto maintained." He likewise viewed their intentions as an attack on his integrity and reputation: "As I have ever considered my own Military reputation as inseparably connected with that of the Army," he said.[60] And so, he had made himself synonymous with the cause, and his refusal to take part demonstrated the futility of their ideas as the officers knew they needed him.[61]

His speech included an unscripted moment where he pulled out his spectacles and put them on. The officers assembled did not realize he had begun to lose his sight. "Gentlemen," he apologized, "you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country." While that statement does not appear in Washington's prepared remarks, it is attributed to him by an eyewitness, Henry Knox's aide-de-camp, Samuel Shaw.[62] He closed his remarks with a lesson in civil-military relations:

> And let me conjure you, in the name of our common Country—as you value your own sacred honor—as you respect the rights of humanity, & as you regard the Military & national character of America, to express your utmost horror & detestation of the Man who wishes, under any specious pretences, to overturn the liberties of our Country, & who wickedly attempts to open the flood Gates of Civil discord, & deluge our rising Empire in Blood.[63]

This dramatic moment communicated to his officers that their wartime sacrifices were too great to soil their reputation and that of the American army on the altar of selfishness. It would have set a dangerous precedent at that moment if their grievances had been sent to Congress in the same fiery tone with which they were written to each other. As it was, Washington diffused the situation and continued to remind his officers of their role. Extinguishing such a fiery situation was difficult considering the widespread belief among the officer corps that they had a monopoly on what the cause meant and what it meant to be an American. How he handled Newburgh is the best example of Washington's understanding of the civil-military relationship and the principle of civilian control. He diffused the situation by maintaining clear and consistent communication with both parties. In talking to his army, he stressed that the delegates in Philadelphia were doing their best, albeit slowly. In turn, he stressed to Congress that his officers had made their requests respectfully, yet they deserved compensation for their sacrifice. As such, on 22 March, Congress offered a compromise of turning the half-pay-for-life pension into five years of full salaries through interest-bearing government securities. Washington immediately reproduced that legislative decision in his next general orders to his troops.[64]

The Newburgh Conspiracy, while as close as the United States has ever come to a military coup, was never going to replace the government with a military dictatorship. Washington consistently admonished his officers, Alexander Hamilton in particular, for playing politics with the army, noting that an army "is a dangerous instrument to play with."[65] It was, however, a case of the military attempting to exert immense outside pressure on the standard political process by force of arms. If Washington had not intervened, it would have been, in Richard Kohn's words, a "declaration of independence from the nation by the military" that would have created a major political crisis.[66]

> War and politics are inseparable. And despite his faults—of which there were many—Washington should be revered for his refusal to seek, seize, or otherwise hold power outside of legitimate means, for his consistent acknowledgment of how and where power is derived within the nascent United States and where the military *must* fit into that equation.

Washington's efforts to diffuse the situation and surrender his commission without incident are a testament to his leadership style, which was essential in the establishment of civil-military norms in the United States and his commitment to republican government.

The war officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 3 September 1783. Despite this, British forces did not depart New York City until the end of November. During that time, Washington maintained his army in readiness, as he had since Newburgh, north along the Hudson River at West Point. On 2 November, he issued his final farewell remarks to his men. Thinking of civil-military relationships after the war, he urged his "virtuous fellow Citizens in the field" that they "should carry with them into civil Society the most conciliating dispositions; and that they should prove themselves not less virtuous and usefull as Citizens than they have been persevering and victorious as Soldiers."[67] The army began demobilizing, and British forces departed New York City at noon on 25 November. Washington was careful to let civilian authorities reclaim the city, not his army, although he rode in with the New York militia regiments alongside Governor Clinton.[68]

After securing New York City, Washington focused on returning to civil life. On 19 December 1783, he arrived in Annapolis, where the Continental Congress was operating, and on 23 December 1783—eight years, six months, and five days after Congress granted him command of the army in Philadelphia—he surrendered his commission in front of Congress in Annapolis.[69] In prepared remarks, Washington closed the loop on the civil-military relationship granted in his initial commission of June 1775. "The great events on which my resignation depended having at length taken place," he remarked, "I have now the honor of offering my sincere Congratulations to Congress & of presenting myself before them to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me, and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the Service of my Country."[70] He then returned to Mount Vernon just in time for Christmas.

At that moment, he rejected becoming an American Caesar and instead chose to embody Cincinnatus. Educated like most of his generation on popularizations of ancient history, Washington had patterned his behavior on his understanding of Roman heroes. Joseph Addison's 1713 play *Cato: A Tragedy* shaped Washington's conception of himself as he took steps to model his behavior from the Roman leader who exemplified public virtue and liberty. Fabian served as his example for victory and Cincinnatus for his postwar life. Cincinnatus is famous for having picked up the sword when called to save his country in 458 BCE and laying it down again to return to the plough and the life of a yeoman farmer. He embodied the citizen-soldier ideal that influenced Enlightenment thinking on the matter.[71]

Washington's experience provides ample material for students of civil-military relations. His experience, on the one hand, suggests that civilians and citizen-soldiers are effective, that expertise in arms was unnecessary in a republic, and that the need for a professional officer corps was moot. Despite Washington's argument for the contrary, his experience fueled advocates for a small military establishment. Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States continued to give high rank to amateur officers with militia backgrounds who used military service as a steppingstone to political office, including six presidents: Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, Franklin Pierce, Rutherford B. Hayes, James A. Garfield, and Benjamin Harrison. On the other hand, Washington's struggles in being unprepared offered lessons to twentieth-century military officers such

as during the Korean War. His example then provided fuel for advocates of a larger standing military establishment prepared for any eventuality. Washington served as an example for both an amateur military establishment as well as a large professional cadre in arms.[72]

The "myth of Cincinnatus," that valiant citizens will defend the country when called has informed how Americans have mobilized and prepared for war since the revolution.[73] Washington understood that citizen-soldier militias were limited, which informed his desire to develop a well-paid, professional standing army. This tension, however, lay at the base of contemporary notions of civilian control of the military and was something with which Washington struggled throughout the conflict.[74] When the war began in 1775, Congress tried to administer the Continental Army in the same way they understood American politics—as diffuse as possible. Congress's stubbornness to maintain divided authority that relied on state-level governments was a direct side effect of Anglo-American fear of standing armies and the American localist worldview. Fighting a war, however, required centralized command and logistics. This focused combat power on the desired political end state and provided the necessary equipment and food to sustain an army in the field. If the defeats of 1775–1777 are indicative of anything, the nascent United States could not sustain an army. There existed, then, a fundamental struggle between the ideal and the real. Ideally, the fledgling United Colonies could throw off the yoke of British rule with motivated citizens. To achieve independence, a professional force was required. The Continentals won their independence despite, rather than because of, their political ideals. That Congress adapted over time is thanks to George Washington's ability to influence and adeptly navigate politics. Time and again, Washington made a concerted plea to his civilian leaders, and sometimes Congress listened, yet other times deferred to extant American political culture.[75]

War and politics are inseparable. And despite his faults—of which there were many—Washington should be revered for his refusal to seek, seize, or otherwise hold power outside of legitimate means, for his consistent acknowledgment of how and where power is derived within the nascent United States and where the military *must* fit into that equation.[76] Yet because they prefer separate political and operational spheres, American officers have not always allowed for tranquil civil-military relations. George McClellan, for example, was famously at odds with President Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War. McClellan was raised on the teachings of Antoine-Henri de Jomini, who argued that after war began, civilian authorities should let the officers fight without interfering. Lincoln rejected this notion, as did President Harry S. Truman when he relieved Douglas MacArthur in 1951. Likewise, this occurred again when President Barack Obama's administration sacked Stanley McChrystal from his post in Afghanistan. Suppose these generals had followed Washington's example. In that case, they might have understood that the military, even in times of war, cannot be the only national priority, and that civilian leaders must manage all elements of national power in support of the broad political goal that the war is being waged to achieve, and that they must navigate contested political waters.[77] Throughout the nineteenth century, the military and politics became a consistent feature. The debate between standing armies and militias continued. Many officers ran for office while in uniform, while others foreswore their commission to take up arms against their country. ■

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