



Civilian Leadership & the Military

The history and importance of a civilian-led military in America

Time and Grade Level:

Two 50 minute class periods in a Grade 9-12 US history, government or civics classroom

Purpose of the Lesson:

The purpose of this lesson to assist student understanding of why the American Constitution places ultimate authority of the military in the hands of civilians rather than military leaders. Students should appreciate the historical uniqueness of the American military as an extension of constitutional principles in which the people always have the last word.

Critical Engagement Questions & Lesson Objectives

1. Why does a civilian led military make the United States unique? Is this design a strength or a flaw of the American System?
 - Objective: Students will be able to list the provisions of the Constitution that relate to the creation of the federal military and use comparisons of other nation's military to explain why this organization is unique.
2. Why did the Framers of our Constitution choose this organization for a federal military?
 - Objective: Students will be able to explain, using historical primary sources, why the Framers of the Constitution were fearful of a federal military and identify how these concerns led to the creation of a civilian led military.

Standards:

[Common Core Standards: English Language Arts Standards-History/Social Studies-Grade 11-12](#)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.10 By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

[C3 Standards: Suggested k-12 Pathway for College, Career, and Civic Readiness Dimension 2, Civic and Political Institutions, Perspectives, & Causation and Argumentation](#)

D2. Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizen in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories and democracy, changes in Americans’ participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.

D2.His.10.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

Overview of the Lesson

Day One
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discussion of ConSource’s primary source documents about the federal military read for homework. 2. Reading of the Newburgh Address (in-class student assignment) 3. Fishbowl discussion of the Newburgh address incorporating primary source readings. 4. Assignment of homework: News story related to the Egyptian Military Coup in 2013.
Day Two
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Class discussion of the Egyptian Military Coup and comparison with American military.

Materials

Printed copies of both Horatio Gate’s letter to soldiers at Newburgh and General Washington’s response (found in Appendixes [A](#) & [B](#))

1. Access to the ConSource documents: [Newspaper Report of the Massachusetts Ratification Convention](#), The [Federalist No. 4](#), [Federalist No. 8](#), [Federalist No. 41](#), [Samuel Nasson to George Thatcher](#), [Dissent of the Minority of the Pennsylvania Convention](#), and [Newspaper](#)

[Report of the Massachusetts Ratification Convention](#) (Descriptions of these documents are found in Teacher Warm-Up).

2. Printed copies of the fishbowl discussion questions for each student (found in [Appendix C](#)).
3. Printed copies of the Egyptian Military Coup guiding discussion questions for each student (found in [Appendix D](#)).

Student Warm-Up for the Lesson

Prior to the start of the lesson, students should be assigned some or all of the recommended readings from the ConSource library. These readings discuss the importance, and weigh the necessity, of providing for a national military in the Constitution. These readings will help students understand why the addition of a standing army was controversial and how the Founder's in favor of creating a national military won support among the opposition.

Suggested Readings (Descriptions of each reading are found under teacher warm-up):

- [Newspaper Report of the Massachusetts Ratification Convention](#)
- [Federalist No. 4](#),
- [Federalist No. 8](#)
- [Federalist No. 41](#)
- [Samuel Nasson to George Thatcher](#)
- [Dissent of the Minority of the Pennsylvania Convention](#)
- [Newspaper Report of the Massachusetts Ratification Convention](#)

Teacher Warm-Up for the Lesson

OVERVIEW OF TOPIC

Civilian-Military relations are often overlooked by educators because they are taken for granted—in today's day and age, it is unthinkable that the military would ever conduct a coup d'état or attempt to override political decisions. But we need only look to the news or to our own post-Revolutionary history to find a much different situation. General Washington's decision to disband the Army in 1782 is widely considered to be the historical moment that highlighted and ensured civilian control over the military that was so important and controversial in the Founder's creation of a military in the Federal Constitution. This class explores this moment in history and encourages students to understand the historical and modern implication of this event.

DESCRIPTIONS OF BACKGROUND READINGS

1. [Newspaper Report of the Massachusetts Ratification Convention](#) (January 24th, 1788)

a. In this newspaper article covering the Massachusetts ratifying convention for the Constitution, delegates bring up several key points about standing armies and the few of adding one to the Constitution: -While many feared that a standing army could bring tyranny, the delegates had not complained about the set-up under the confederation which would have given Congress even greater power in controlling the military.

i. Sedgwick's comments also ponder if a tyrannical army could be possible in the United States, given the sheer size of the country and the fact that the citizenry cherishes their liberty and would take up arms against any military who tried to take it from them.

ii. Mr. Dawes then adds to this train of thought by stating that since the power to raise an army is vested in congress and that Congress represents the will of the people through its debates, the creation of any excessively powerful army would be unlikely.

iii. Mr. Dawes also explains that not being able to raise an army would place the United States at a disadvantage since most other countries in Europe have the ability to do this. Also, Mr. Dawes points out that the Constitution does give Congress the absolute power to raise an army, it includes set limits of Congressional war powers and checks via the executive branch.

2. [Federalist No. 4](#)

a. In this paper, John Jay builds an impassioned case for the Constitution to include war powers including the ability of Congress to raise and supports armies and navies. Jay explains that the purpose of the American government is not to induce war, but prevent it as much as possible and that the war powers must be such that the federal government can take the steps necessary to ensure as much peace as possible. Jay's call for a federal military is largely based off the preamble's promise to "promote the general welfare." Jay discusses the importance of a national military as compared to state militia, highlighting the power of one national government to encourage the development of a powerful, organized, and effective military.

3. [Federalist No. 8](#)

a. Hamilton used Federalist No. 8 to explain the need for a federal military as a unifying force to prevent attempted assaults on the new national by other powers.

4. [Federalist No. 41](#)

a. Madison explores each of the arguments related to raising and supporting a federal military in Federalist No 41. Systemically going through each of the war powers

provided by the Constitution, Madison makes the case why each are necessary. Concerning the power to raise and support an army and navy, Madison states that they are necessary for self-defense. Responding to the problem of the indefinite power of the Constitution to raise and support troops in both peacetime and wartime, Madison explains that it would be ridiculous and naive of the United States to think that it could predict attacks on its soil by foreign powers. He states, “how could a readiness for war in a time of peace be safely prohibited, unless we could prohibit in like manner the preparation and establishments of every hostile nation?” In response to fears of tyranny by the military, Madison points readers toward the proposed Constitution which, “destroys every pretext for a military establishment which could be dangerous,” as a way of detailing the limits on military power which are also outlined in the Constitution.

5. [Samuel Nasson to George Thatcher](#)

a. This letter describes the opinions of Samuel Nasson, a member of the Massachusetts ratification convention on the inclusions of the war powers provisions in the Constitution. Nasson is not a supporter of the sections which give Congress the power to create a standing army. Nasson believes that the inclusion of these powers only highlights the need for amendments which protect the right of individuals to bear arms, highlighting his personal belief that a standing army could prove tyrannous for the new government. While Nasson touches upon the topic of standing armies in times of peace, he quickly negates the discussion by stating, “spare me on the subject of standing armies in a time of peace the alway was first or last the downfall of all free government-it was by their hep caesar made proud rome Own a Tyrant and a Traytor for a Master.”

6. [Dissent of the Minority of the Pennsylvania Convention](#)

a. Students should be asked to review all section of the document relevant to discussion of the military, but may focus in on annotation 39 which states, “As this government will not enjoy the confidence of the people, but be executed by force, it will be a very expensive and burdensome government. The standing army must be numerous, and as a further support, it will be the policy of this government to multiply officers in every department: judges, collectors, tax-gatherers, excisemen and the whole host of revenue officers will swarm over the land, devouring the hard earnings of the industrious. Like the locust of old, impoverishing and desolating all before them.” The Dissent’s point here is to draw out the economics ramifications of a standing army.

7. [Newspaper Report of the Massachusetts Ratification Convention](#) (February 1st, 1788)

a. For this reading, direct students toward annotations 14-15. This newspaper article from the Massachusetts ratification convention again explores the cost of a standing army, but also includes discussion of the chief problem of standing armies among opponents, chiefly, their ability to become tyrannical.

RESOURCES FOR BACKGROUND ON THE TOPIC

Sources for Background on the Newburgh Address

The Newburgh Address is used in this lesson as it is an example of an attempted military overthrow of government in the United States:

- [George Washington’s Mount Vernon](#)
- [Library of Congress webpage on the Newburgh Address](#)

Sources for Background on Egyptian Military Coup in 2013

- [“Egypt Army Outs Morsi, Suspends Charters”](#) - New York Times, Neutral
- [“Army Coup in Egypt -- History Repeating”](#) - Real Clear World, Neutral

Activity

DAY ONE

Activity	Description	Suggested Questions
Review of ConSource Readings	Create a list on the chalkboard/whiteboard of the pros and cons of creating a federal military as discussed in the readings. Also create a list of the factors that create a civilian controlled military.	
Reading of the Newburgh Address	Use the resources provided in “Teacher Warm-Up for the Lesson” to become familiar with the material of Gates’ letter and Washington’s response. Provide students with the fishbowl discussion questions and have them read the material independently after introducing the event.	1. Does military obedience to the federal government diminish its power? 2. Would today’s military ever consider inciting a rebellion? Why or why not?
Fishbowl discussion of the Newburgh readings	Have the class arrange their seats into a circle and use the remainder of class time for a fishbowl discussion about the development and importance of a civilian-led military and what thoughts, actions, and opinions led to the creation of a federal military.	3. Does constitutional structure alone prevent our military from playing a more powerful role in government?
Homework Assignment	Direct students to look into the news coverage of the Egyptian Coup and choose a story that exemplifies the role of the Egyptian military in the coup.	

DAY TWO

Activity	Description	Suggested Questions
Class Discussion of the Egyptian military coup	Have students present the news stories they found for homework for the first 20 minutes of class. Then as a group, discuss what caused the coup	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What about the structure of the Egyptian military makes it different from the U.S? 2. What does the case of the Egyptian military coup and the Newburgh address tell us about the needs of effectively structuring a military?

Homework

Day One: In preparation for a comparison of Egypt’s military coup in 2013, ask each student to bring in a piece of news (article, report, pictures, video) about the event and be prepared to present their resource to the class.

Extension Activities

Essay: Our nation’s military was carefully designed by our Founder’s to remain under the watchful eye of the people. Consider what our nation would be like if this wasn’t the case.

Project: Ask students to prepare a pamphlet (which could be made available in their school’s career center or activities office) about one of the various ways a citizen (a civilian citizen) can become involved in national service.

Optional Book Reading: Use the prompts provided throughout this lesson plan (as footnotes in italics) to incorporate a reading of Michael Neiberg’s, [Making Citizen-Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service](#).

Book Report of [Making Citizen-Soldiers](#): What does Neiberg’s book tell us about the nature of the U.S. military? What surprised you about his discussion of the various ways civilians influence, empower, or otherwise effect the U.S. military? How does this (if at all) differ from your previous understanding of the military? How does this understanding effect the way you look at government, specifically the role of individual citizens?

Appendix A. Newburgh: Horatio Gate's Letter¹

The Anonymous Letter

To The Officers of the Army

Gentlemen,

A FELLOW-SOLDIER, whose interest and affections bind him strongly to you; whose past sufferings have been as great, and whose future fortune may be as desperate as yours — would beg leave to address you. Age has its claims, and rank is not without its pretensions to advise; but though unsupported by both, he flatters himself that the plain language of sincerity and experience, will neither be unheard nor unregarded. Like many of you, he loved private life, and left it with regret. He left it, determined to retire from the field with the necessity that called him to it, and not till then; not till the enemies of his country, the slaves of power, and the hirelings of injustice, were compelled to abandon their schemes, and acknowledge America as terrible in arms as she had been humble in remonstrance.

With this object in view, he has long shared in your toils, and mingled in your dangers; he has felt the cold hand of poverty without a murmur, and has seen the insolence of wealth without a sigh. But, too much under the direction of his wishes, and sometimes weal enough to mistake desire for opinion, he has, till lately, very lately, believed in the justice of his country. He hoped, that as the clouds of adversity scattered, and as the sun-shine of peace and better fortune broke in upon us, the coldness and severity of government would relax, and that, more than justice, that gratitude would blaze forth upon those hands which had upheld her in the darkest stages of her passage, from impending servitude to acknowledged independence.

But faith has its limits, as well as temper; and there are points beyond which neither can be stretched, without sinking into cowardice, or plunging into credulity. This, my friends, I conceive to be your situation. Hurried to the very verge of both, another step would ruin you forever. To be tame and unprovoked when injuries press hard upon you, is more than weakness; but to look up for kinder usage, without one manly effort of your own, would fix your character, and show the world how richly you deserve those chains you broke. To guard against this evil, let us take a review of the ground upon which we now stand, and from thence carry our thoughts forward for a moment, into the unexplored field of expedient.

¹ Also found [here](#)

After a pursuit of seven long years, the object for which we set out is at length brought within our reach! — Yes, my friends, that suffering courage of yours, was active once — it has conducted the United States of America through a doubtful and a bloody war! It has placed her in the chair of independency, and peace again returns to bless — whom? A country willing to redress your wrongs, cherish your worth, and reward your services; a country courting your return to private life, with tears of gratitude, and smiles of admiration; longing to divide with you that independency which your gallantry has given, and those riches which your wounds have preserved? Is this the case? Or is it rather, a country that tramples upon your rights, disdains your cries, and insults your distresses? Have you not, more than once, suggested your wishes, and made known your wants to Congress? Wants and wishes which gratitude and policy should have anticipated, rather than evaded. And have you not lately, in the meek language of entreating memorial, begged from their justice, what you would no longer expect from their favour? How have you been answered? Let the letter which you are called to consider to-morrow, make reply.

If this, then, be your treatment, while the swords you wear are necessary for the defence of America, what have you to expect from peace, when your voice shall sink, and your strength dissipate by division?

When these very swords, the instruments and companions of your glory, shall be taken from your sides, and no remaining mark of military distinction left, but your wants, infirmities, and scars! can you then consent to be the only sufferers by this revolution, and retiring from the field, grow old in poverty, wretchedness, and contempt? Can you consent to wade through the vile mire of dependency, and owe the miserable remnant of that life to charity, which has hitherto been spent in honour? — if you can, go — and carry with you the jest of tories, and the scorn of whigs — the ridicule, and what is worse, the pity of the world! Go, starve, and be forgotten!

But if your spirit should revolt at this; if you have sense enough to discover, and spirit enough to oppose tyranny, under whatever garb it may assume; whether it be the plain coat of republicanism, or the splendid robe of royalty; if you have yet learned to discriminate between a people and a cause, between men and principles — awake! — attend to your situation, and redress yourselves. If the present moment be lost, every future effort is in vain; and your threats then will be as empty as your entreaties now.

I would advise you, therefore, to come to some final opinion, upon what you can bear, and what you will suffer. If your determination be in any proportion to your wrongs, carry your appeal from the justice to the fears of government — change the milk and water style of your last memorial; assume a bolder tone, decent, but lively, spirited and determined; and suspect the man who would advise to more moderation and longer forbearance. Let two or three men, who can feel as well as write, be appointed to draw up your last remonstrance; for I would no longer give it the sueing, soft, unsuccessful epithet of memorial. Let it be represented (in language that will neither dishonour you by its rudeness, nor betray you by its fears) what has been promised by

Congress, and what has been performed; how long and how patiently you have suffered; how little you have asked, and how much of that little has been denied. Tell them that though you were the first, and would wish to be the last, to encounter danger; though despair itself can never drive you into dishonour, it may drive you from the field; that the wound often irritated, and never healed, may at length become incurable; and that the slightest mark of indignity from Congress now, must operate like the grave, and part you for ever; that in any political event, the army has its alternative. If peace, that nothing shall separate you from your arms but death; if war, that courting the auspices and inviting the directions of your illustrious leader, you will retire to some unsettled country, smile in your turn, and Å«mock when their fear cometh on.'

But let it represent also, that should they comply with the request of your late memorial, it would make you more happy, and them more respectable: that while the war should continue, you would follow their standard into the field — and when it came to an end, you would withdraw into the shade of private life, and give the world another subject of wonder and applause — an army victorious over its enemies — victorious over itself."

[Anonymous]

Appendix B. Newburgh: Washington's Response²

General George Washington's Response

"Gentlemen,

"By an anonymous summons, an attempt has been made to convene you together? how inconsistent with the rules of propriety! — how unmilitary! — and how subversive of all order and discipline, let the good sense of the army decide.

"In the moment of this summons, another anonymous production was sent into circulation; addressed more to the feelings of passions, than to the reason & judgment of the army. The author of the piece, is entitled to much credit for the goodness of his pen: — and I could wish he had as much credit for the rectitude of his heart for, as men we see thro' different optics, and are induced by the reflecting faculties of the mind, to use different means to attain the same end: — the author of the address, should have had more charity, than to mark for suspicion, the man who should recommend moderation and longer forbearance or, in others words, who should not think as he thinks, and act as he advises. But he had another plan in view, in which candor and liberality of sentiment, regard to justice, and love of country, have no part, and he was right, to insinuate the darkest suspicion, to effect the blackest designs.

"That the address is drawn with great art, and is designed to answer the most insidious purposes. That it is calculated to impress the mind, with an idea of premeditated injustice in the sovereign power of the United States, and rouse all those resentments which must unavoidably flow from such a belief. That the secret mover of this scheme (whoever he may be) intended to take advantage of the passions, while they were warmed by the recollection of mind which is so necessary to give dignity & stability to measures, is rendered too obvious, by the mode of conducting the business to need other proof than a reference to the proceeding.

"Thus much, gentlemen, I have thought it incumbent on me to observe to you, to shew upon what principles I opposed the irregular and hasty meeting which was proposed to have been held on Tuesday last: — and not because I wanted a disposition to give you every opportunity, consistent with your own honor, and the dignity of the army, to make known your grievances. If my conduct heretofore, has not evinced to you, that I have been a faithful friend to the army, my declaration of it at this time would be equally unavailing & improper. But as I was among the first who embarked in the cause of our common country As I have never left your side one moment, but when called from you, on public duty As I have been the constant companion & witness of your distresses, and not among the last to feel, & acknowledge your merits As I have ever considered my own military reputation as inseparably connected with that of the army As

² Also found [here](#)

my Heart has ever expanded with joy, when I have heard its praises and my indignation has arisen, when the mouth of detraction has been opened against it it can scarcely be supposed, at this late stage of the war, that I am indifferent to its interests.

"But how are they to be promoted? The way is plain, says the anonymous addresser. If war continues, remove into the unsettled country, there establish yourselves, and leave an ungrateful country to defend itself. But who are they to defend? — Our wives, our children, our farms, and other property which we leave behind us. Or in this state of hostile separation, are we to take the two first (the latter cannot be removed) — to perish in a wilderness, with hunger cold & nakedness? — If peace takes place, never sheath your sword says he until you have obtained full and ample justice. This dreadful alternative, of either deserting our country in the extremest hour of her distress, or turning our arms against it, (which is the apparent object, unless Congress can be compelled into instant compliance) has something so shocking in it, that humanity revolts at the idea.

"My God! What can this writer have in view, by recommending such measures? ? Can he be a friend to the army? — Can he be a friend to this country? — Rather is he not an insidious foe? — Some emissary, perhaps, from New York, plotting the ruin of both, by sowing the seeds of discord & separation between the civil & military powers of the continent? — And what compliment does he pay to our understandings, when he recommends measures in either alternative, impracticable in their nature?

"But here, gentlemen, I will drop the curtain; — and because it would be as imprudent in me to assign my reasons for this opinion, as it would be insulting to your conception, to suppose you stood in need of them. A moment's reflection will convince every dispassionate mind of the physical impossibility of carrying either proposal into execution.

"There might, gentlemen, be an impropriety in my taking notice, in this address to you, of an anonymous production but the manner in which that performance has been introduced to the army, the effect it was intended to have, together with some other circumstances, will amply justify my observations on the tendency of that writing. With respect to the advice given by the author to suspect the man, who shall recommend moderate measures and longer forbearance. I spurn it as every man, who regards that liberty, & reveres that justice for which we contend, undoubtedly must — for if men are to be precluded from offering their sentiments on a matter, which may involve the most serious and alarming consequences, that can invite the consideration of Mankind; reason is of no use to us, the freedom of speech may be taken away, and, dumb & silent we may be led, like sheep, to the slaughter.

"I cannot, in justice to my own belief, & what I have great reason to conceive is the intention of Congress, conclude this address, without giving it as my decided opinion; that that honourable body, entertain exalted sentiments of the services of the army; — and, from a full conviction of its merits & sufferings, will do it complete justice: — That their endeavors, to discover &

establish funds for this purpose, have been unwearied, and will not cease, till they have succeeded, I have succeeded, I have not a doubt. But, like all other large bodies, where there is a variety of different interests to reconcile, their deliberations are slow. ? Why then should we distrust them? — and, in consequence of that distrust, adopt measures, which may cast a shade over that glory which, has been so justly acquired; and tarnish the reputation of an army which is celebrated thro' all Europe, for its fortitude and patriotism? — and for what is this done? — to bring the object we seek for nearer? — No! — most certainly, in my opinion, it will cast it at a greater distance.

"For myself (and I take no merit in giving the assurance, being induced to it from principles of gratitude, veracity & Justice) — a grateful sense of the confidence you have ever placed in me a recollection of the cheerful assistance, & prompt obedience I have experienced from you, under every vicissitude of fortune, — and the sincere I feel for an army I have so long had the honor to command, will oblige me to declare, in this public & solemn manner, that, in the attainment of compleat justice for all your toils & dangers, and in the gratification of every wish, so far as may be done consistently with the great duty I owe my country, and those powers we are bound to respect, you may freely command my services to the utmost of my abilities.

"While I give you these assurances, and pledge my self in the most unequivocal manner, to exert whatever ability I am possessed of, in your favor let me entreat you, gentlemen, on your part, not to take any measures, which, viewed in the calm light of reason, will lessen the dignity, & sully the glory you have hitherto maintained let me request you to rely on the plighted faith of your country, and place a full confidence in the purity of the intentions of Congress; that, previous to your dissolution as an Army they will cause all your accounts to be fairly liquidated, as directed in their resolutions, which were published to you two days ago and that they will adopt the most effectual measures in their power, to render ample justice to you, for your faithful and meritorious Services. 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.

"By thus determining — & thus acting, you will pursue the plain & direct road to the attainment of your wishes. You will defeat the insidious designs of our enemies, who are compelled to resort from open force to secret artifice. You will give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism & patient virtue, rising superior to the pressure of the most complicated sufferings; — And you will, by the dignity of your conduct, afford occasion for posterity to say, when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to mankind, had this day been wanting, the world has never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining."

Appendix C. Fishbowl Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the real General Washington was right? Why not influence the Congress to grant the military officers their just reward for such distinguished service?
2. Could such a debate ever occur today? If one of our nation's leading generals- assuming they hold similar popularity as George Washington- decided to incite the military to rebellion, would his men support it? Why or why not?
3. Does the military physically have the capability to overthrow the government (tanks and planes on Washington)? Then why doesn't it? What prevents it?

Appendix D. Egyptian Military Guiding Questions

1. Was the Egyptian coup warranted?
2. Does a military coup undermine democracy?
3. Because of the military structure we have, could this happen in America?