

Citizen of the State of Maryland Remarks on a Standing Army, 12 April 1788

The following REMARKS on a STANDING ARMY, were written by a Citizen of the State of Maryland, and we judge them well worthy the attention of the friends to liberty at this critical juncture.

In *England*, by their bill of rights, a standing army is declared to be contrary to their constitution, and a militia the only natural and safe defence of a free people—This keeps the jealousy of the nation constantly awake, and has proved the foundation of all the other checks.

In the *American constitution* (now proposed) there is no such declaration, or check at all.

In *England*, the *military* are declared by their constitution, to be in *all* cases subordinate to the civil power; and consequently the civil officers have always been active in supporting this pre-eminence.

In the *American constitution*, there is no such declaration.

In *England*, the mutiny bill can only be passed from year to year, or on its expiration every soldier is free, and the equal, by law, of the first general officer of the land.

In *America*, the articles of war, which is the same thing, have been already considered as *perpetual* (as I am well informed) under even the present Congress, although the constitutions of all the States positively forbid any standing troops at all, much less laws for them.

In *England*, the appropriation of money for the support of their army must be from year to year; in *America*, it may be for double the period.

How favourable is this contrast to Britain; that Britain which we lavished our blood and treasure to separate ourselves from, as a country of slavery; but we then held different sentiments from those now become so fashionable; for this I appeal to the constitutions of the several States.

In the declaration of rights of Massachusetts, sect. 17.—The people have a right to keep and to bear arms for the common defence. And as in time of peace, armies are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be maintained without the consent of the legislature, and the military power shall always be held in exact subordination to the civil authority, and be governed by it.

Sect. 27. In time of peace, no soldier ought to be quartered in any house without the consent of the owner; and in time of war, such quarters ought not to be made but by the civil magistrate, in a manner ordained by the legislature.

Declaration of rights of Pennsylvania, sect. 13—That the people have a right to bear arms for the defence of themselves, and the State; and as *standing armies*, in the time of peace, are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be kept up; and that the military should be kept under strict subordination to, and governed by, the civil power.

Declaration of rights of Maryland, sect. 25—That a well regulated militia is the proper and natural defence of a free government.

Sect. 26. That *standing armies* are dangerous to liberty, and ought not to be raised, or kept, without consent of the legislature.

Sect 27. That in all cases, and at all times, the military ought to be under strict subordination to, and controul of the civil power.

Sect. 28. That no soldier ought to be quartered in any house in time of peace, without the consent of the owner; and in time of war, in such manner only as the legislature shall direct.

Declaration of the rights of Delaware, in the same words as Maryland.

Declaration of rights of North-Carolina, Sect. 17—That the people have a right to bear arms for the defence of the State; and as standing armies in times of peace are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be kept up; and that the military should be kept under strict subordination, and governed by the civil power.

Constitution of South-Carolina, sect 42—That the military be subordinate to the civil power of the State.

But some writers have told us, that our *poverty* is our best *security* against many standing troops; are we *then*, and *our posterity* always to be poor? This security would certainly cease with out poverty; but the truth is, our poverty instead of preventing, will be the first cause of the increase of a standing army; our poverty will render the people less able to pay the few troops, it is admitted we must keep. This expence, added to the immense public and private debts, which an efficient government seems to be requisite to enforce payment of, together with the onerous and complicated civil governments, both Continental and State, will be productive of future uneasiness and discontent. The most sanguine among us, must expect some turbulence and commotion; let the smallest appearance of commotion peep out again in any part of the continent, and there is not a rich man in the United States, who will think himself or his property safe, until *both* are surrounded by standing troops. This is the only public purpose for which these men ever did, or ever will, willingly contribute their money. But then, according to their laudable custom, they must have interest for their advances; this increases the public burthens; commotion is followed by commotion, until the spirit of the people is broken and sunk, by the halter, the scaffold, and a regular army of mercenaries.

My Countrymen! never forget this truth, which the sad experience of your fellow mortals, has witnessed with their blood! Remember it yourselves! Engrave it on the tender minds of your children, as the first article of their political creed: *That there is no government safe with a standing army, and there is none that is not safe without.* A people may frequently be so unfortunate as to lose their liberties. They may be so foolish as to give them away, as in *Denmark*, where not only the senators and representatives of the people, but also every man in the whole empire of the smallest note or consequence, signed a formal surrender of their liberties, on an instrument now kept in the archives of that kingdom; an everlasting monument of—*how catching a thing this signing of names is*, or of what is now called—*a modest deference for the opinion of others*: But whether they lose them or give them away, they will soon regain them, or resume them, unless they are prevented by *a standing army*.

The conduct of some people in Philadelphia, immediately after the general convention broke up, was equally foolish and absurd. They blindly followed the dictates and tenets

of a few ambitious demagogues, who prepared petitions to the legislature, praying the adoption of the proposed government, and, like the miserable Danes, would have readily *signed away* not only their own, but even the liberties of their children.

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