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## Foreign Spectator VI Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, 7 November 1788

REMARKS *on the Amendments to the Federal Constitution, proposed by the Conventions of Massachusetts, New-Hampshire, New-York, Virginia, South and North-Carolina, with the minorities of Pennsylvania and Maryland, by a FOREIGN SPECTATOR.*

### NUMBER VI.

We proceed to consider the amendments that regard the military power of the federal government. It is pleasing to find that the states of Massachusetts and South-Carolina are entirely silent on this important subject:—They having wisely reflected, that although a friend may possibly point that weapon to my breast, which I give him to defend me against an assassin, yet it would be absurd either to tye his right arm, or to give him only half a sword; especially when I am well armed myself. The conventions of Virginia, New-York and North-Carolina, request by the 9th, 7th, and 9th amendment respectively, “*that no standing army or regular troops shall be raised or kept up in time of peace, without the consent of two-thirds of the members present in both houses.*” The convention of New-Hampshire requires, the “*consent of three quarters of the members of each branch of Congress,*” am. 10. The minority of Pennsylvania declare in the 7th part, that “*as standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be kept up;*” that of Maryland will allow it on the same condition with the three first mentioned conventions, 4th am.

The expression ‘*time of peace,*’ is very equivocal: Does it mean any time previous to a declaration of war? that whatever hostile intentions any powers may betray, or whatever formidable preparations they may carry on by sea and land, Congress must not raise a single battalion, until the enemy falls like a thunder-storm on some part of the union? It would be an unpardonable affront to suppose any American of common sense capable of such irrational language; to make him say it is time enough to raise troops, when Philadelphia, New-York, Charleston is taken—when two or three thousand of the militia, who made head against a superior force, are cut to pieces—when the enemy has laid the country under contribution, and committed ravages far and near—when my father or brother is killed or taken. I repeat again, it would be the grossest insult to deem any federal citizen capable of such sentiments. The restriction, then, only means that when there is no danger of war, no regular troops shall be kept up. But who shall be a judge of this? what symptoms of danger shall be prescribed? Is it expected that any foreign power will give us notice, that next year, or in six months, they intend to come with fifty thousand men to cut our throats, and waste our country with fire and sword? So much politeness is not yet fash-

ionable. It is rather esteemed very clever to dart upon you like a tyger, when you least expect it; and ten to one but you receive extraordinary caresses, assurances of eternal friendship, &c. &c. just before your property and blood is demanded. If you complain of unfair dealing, they will laugh in your face, and call you a fool for not *knowing mankind better*. You think I speak of the savages? No; I mean all your good brethren of Adam's race, including the most polite nations of Europe. As for those blood-hounds of the wilderness, that have scalped and burnt so many families, I hope to God there is none among us so base and cruel as hereafter to begrudge the defenceless women and children a protection from the horrid tomahawk and the lingering fire.

The words *army or regular troops* being applicable to small numbers, extend the restriction even to the necessary garrisons, and to any military corps which may be wanted on the frontiers.

As America is happily situated so far from Europe, and will hopefully be wise enough not to involve herself in the vortex of European politics, she cannot often have occasion for a great body of regular troops, provided the militia is under good regulations; at the same time, as the congress may be under necessity of making considerable preparations of defence some time before an inimical power has taken off the mask, and unsheathed the sword, a restriction, *when or in what degree to arm*, would be pernicious. The constitution has already enacted, that *no appropriation of money for the raising and supporting of an army shall be for a longer time than two years*, 1st art. 8th sec. 12, a limitation in fact very strict, because if ever a formidable enemy should invade the United States, he may not be expelled in that time; especially as the federal army must be supported some time before it can begin to act.

On every important affair the national council ought to be nearly unanimous, because the want of wisdom or virtue is unpardonable; a minority of one fourth itself should not exist. But how far something more than a bare majority may be constitutionally required, is a delicate question. In all cases when precipitancy is more dangerous than delay, it is prudent to fix a surplus of majority according to circumstances. The present case I apprehend is quite the reverse—If the country is not in a proper state of defence, it will the sooner invite an enemy, opens its bosom to him, and may receive a dangerous wound before the arms can ward off the stroke; but all the disadvantage of collecting an army of perhaps 10 or 15,000 men without eminent necessity, is to impose some new taxes, which can never be oppressive, as the greatest part of the money is directly laid out in the country. As to any danger to liberty from such an army, it is altogether visionary; and it is needless to repeat what has been so often said on that subject. While the people have property, arms in their hands, and only a spark of a noble spirit, the most corrupt congress must be mad to form any project of tyranny.

This fair statement of the matter might dispense me from answering the question, why should not two-thirds of the congress agree in raising regular troops, if it really is necessary? Why do you surmise that a bare majority of congress would form the wicked absurd scheme of enslaving the country? Is not this much more improbable? But as the subject will bear a full examination, I shall take it up with a candid freedom. Two-thirds of both houses may not agree in timely measures of defence for these reasons—First, the natural indolence of individuals and public bodies is averse from any troublesome enterprise while it possibly can be avoided. The national character of America is also rather too easy than rash, and besides much influenced by the peaceable spirit of a republic, intent on agriculture and trade. The apparent security of local situation, the plausible reasonings of the minority, and the fear of displeasing a part of the people

by a demand of supplies, will co-operate with this indolence in many well disposed minds. Secondly. As property and pecuniary interest is rather over-valued by too many, perhaps even some delegates in congress may not consider, that gold must be defended by steel; that honor and humanity forbid a true American to expose his country to disgrace, and his fellow-citizens to danger; that a single drop of patriotic blood should not be sold to keep a dollar more in all the pockets through the United States. Thirdly. A numerous and in many respects estimable denomination is religiously prejudiced against even defensive war; some of these may be members of congress, or influence its decisions in critical times. Fourthly. If corruption should ever taint any members of the federal council, it will be most dangerous under the venerable form of public spirit. The man, who in flaming colours paints a small American army as the execrable tools of traitorous tyrants, may be the very person who lets loose an host of enemies on the vitals of his native land. A time may come when some hostile power will pay a vote against raising an army with 10,000*l*. Fifthly. As by the advantage of local situation and domestic resources, some of the states may suffer less from the eventual calamities of war, they may be less affected by the real magnitude of danger. Such a selfish disposition of only one or two may prevent the consent of two-thirds in both houses, and is more probable than treason in more than one half of congress.

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