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# Jefferson's West Point - A Durable Political Change

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# Jefferson's West Point - A Durable Political Change

## **Abstract**

This essay evaluates a variety of national security visions put forth between the Revolution and War of 1812. It uncovers how a professional army became the prevailing national security apparatus during America's nascent years. Additionally, special attention is given to Thomas Jefferson's role in the process, which culminated in the establishment of a military academy at West Point. The essay argues that the academy's creation advanced a professional army with characteristics particular for its time: a diverse and egalitarian force, bound to the ideals of republicanism.

## Jefferson's West Point - Political Development in Early U.S. Security Policy

Preslav Mantchev

**Abstract:** *This essay evaluates a variety of national security visions put forth between the Revolution and War of 1812. It uncovers how a professional army became the prevailing national security apparatus during America's nascent years. Additionally, special attention is given to Thomas Jefferson's role in the process, which culminated in the establishment of a military academy at West Point. The essay argues that the academy's creation advanced a professional army with characteristics particular for its time: a diverse and egalitarian force, bound to the ideals of republicanism.*

### Introduction

Thomas Jefferson's illustrious career in government has maintained reverence for centuries. He is regarded as one of America's most important statesmen, a legacy that became eternalized after his likeness was etched onto Mount Rushmore. It is not for this reason alone, however, that Jefferson has also been dubbed the "American Sphinx". Even a brief overview of his statecraft compels scholars to notice a series of puzzling contradictions, especially regarding Thomas Jefferson's approach to external affairs and more specifically, national security.

Jefferson officially entered American politics as the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration was a "negative charter" which "articulated... rights against government" and embodied Americans' lasting suspicion towards strong, centralized leadership (Lim 2013, 5). But, less than three decades later Jefferson would be overseeing the Marines' occupation of Derna, a city all the way in the Mediterranean. Jefferson bitterly opposed Alexander Hamilton's seemingly unconstitutional bank charter, yet went on to double the United States' size by purchasing land on credit. He lamented military build-up under Washington's Federalist administration, yet pushed for one of the largest expansions to date as president.

At first glance, it is difficult to reconcile Thomas Jefferson's military activism with his

role as poster boy of a political culture seemingly predicated against such practices. Parochial observers might lament his legacy as undoubtable evidence that power corrupts. However, upon a closer inspection of the Anti-Federalist movement that based its principles on “his” Declaration, it becomes easier to understand and appreciate our third president’s national security policy. He was part of a cosmopolitan, elite faction of a heterogeneous and dynamic movement. Jefferson’s presidential statecraft between 1801 and 1808 consisted of thoughtful, deliberate actions to advance his vision of a stable republic founded on personal freedoms, political participation, and class mobility.

Perhaps the best embodiment of Thomas Jefferson’s statecraft was his establishment of the West Point Military Academy. He used the presidency as a forgotten, yet classic “instrument of negation” not by using its typical veto powers, but by exercising enumerated privileges in order to counteract a movement that was reticently aristocratic and had a tendency to erode liberty (Lim 2013, 53). From his first days as president, Jefferson turned a small garrison into a multi-tier school, which would more than quadruple its enrollment by 1808 (Crackel 1987, 538). The academy would train the army’s leading infantrymen, artillerists, cavalrymen, and engineers not only in military strategy, but also in math, foreign language, and science. Its foundation was a critical juncture which instituted a truly exceptional military: a force open to all socioeconomic classes, not bound to any idols except the United States Constitution.

### **Federalists, Anti-Federalists, and National Security**

As one conjures images of the American nation’s birth, it is hard to ignore tensions involving security policy. Even the hallmark rallying cry of the American Revolution - “no taxation without representation” - was reflective of a broken British security policy. King George

III's exorbitant taxes were prompted by his ambitious desire to keep a standing army in North America *and* pay off debt from the Seven Years' (French and Indian) War, a conflict whose spoils colonists could hardly enjoy after the Proclamation of 1763. After the colonies won the war of independence against Great Britain, discussions regarding national defense would not take a back seat. In fact, our first leaders were deeply engaged in answering a basic question that accompanies national independence: how should the government keep Americans' liberty secure in an anarchic world filled with other self-interested powers?

Elvin T. Lim presents the birth of American governance as a constructive tension between adherents of two distinct "Foundings," the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. This debate, concerning the vital relationship between local and national government, is dubbed a "Lovers' Quarrel" by Lim. It manifested itself most strongly during the state ratification conventions of 1787-1788. Federalists touting the writings of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton ardently advocated for replacing the Articles of Confederation with a document that gave the national government greater authority over the former colonies. Inter-colonial issues such as the absence of a common currency undoubtedly bolstered their cause. The Federalists' most vociferous argument, however, was one that presented the confederation of states as a vulnerable nation.

Jonathan Marshall emphasizes how "the Federalists saw foreign predators on all sides ready to take advantage of America's weaknesses" (1980, 234). The 1783 Treaty of Paris had ended the Revolutionary War, yet the "congress" of American negotiators had "only a limited power delegated by the thirteen sovereign states... [and] no obligation to bind them" (Keohane 2002, 61). The former colonies acted unilaterally in repaying outstanding debts to Britain, but many were poor and nearing financial crisis. Furthermore, several southern states flat-out

“refused to honor the [1783] treaty’s provisions for the safe return of Loyalists and payments of debts to British merchants” (Keohane 2002, 61). In response, the British felt no need to uphold their end of the peace deal. They refused to vacate forts on the western frontier and proceeded to arm several Indian tribes (Keohane 2002, 61). This policy exacerbated instability along the frontier. Additionally, the British chose to discriminate “severely against American trade” (Keohane 2002, 62) which was already hindered by frequent pirate attacks.

Alexander Hamilton predicted that an economically troubled America, without a collective initiative to preserve national security, would cause “our liberties... [to] be prey to the means of defending ourselves against the ambition and jealousy of each other” (Marshall 1980, 237). He suspected that the former colonies’ collective action problem would sooner or later be turned against them by a conniving foe. Alternatively, a more centralized republican government would create a “strong and respected America [that] could live in peace with the Great Powers... Liberty would prosper under such an umbrella of calm and security” (Marshall 1980, 238).

The Anti-Federalists voiced a rebuttal to Federalist suggestions for a new national arrangement. They did not deny that a strong national government and army would allow the U.S. to live among great powers. More precisely, they were skeptical whether this coexistence would be peaceful. A regular army would invite frequent wars, and precipitate the erosion of liberty back home. However, their rhetoric has been largely forgotten by everyday citizens. Jonathan Marshall notes that even scholars have assumed “‘anti-Federalists rarely discussed foreign affairs’ and when they did ‘they accepted Federalist arguments’” (1980, 238). As Marshall reveals, these misconceptions stem from Anti-Federalists’ “failure... to produce a unified body of political thought remotely comparable to the classic *Federalist Papers*” (1980, 238). This is also partially why the Anti-Federalists lost the Constitutional debate. Their rhetoric

was scattered among “many speeches, pamphlets, and newspaper articles” (Marshall 19080, 238). Indeed “the perception that few papers would publish material was fairly accurate” as printers and newspaper editors tended to favor the Federalists (Cornell 1999, 122). Nevertheless, Marshall demonstrates that despite their relative disorganization, Anti-Federalist writings did evoke alternatives to Federalist security proposals.

To start, Anti-federalists “discerned no imminent foreign dangers, and concluded that the threat to liberty from a strong, consolidated government far outweighed the more remote terrors of a foreign invasion” (Marshall 1980, 239). Through mockery, some attempted to discredit Federalists’ message of fear. William Grayson, for example, satirized Federalist predictions: ““Algerines, whose flat-sided vessels never came further than Madeira, are to fill the Chesapeake with mighty fleets... and the Carolinians from the south (mounted on alligators, I presume), are to come and destroy our cornfields...”” (Marshall 1980, 239). Grayson uses a straw-man argument, casting Federalists as irrationally fearful of distant, primitive people.

The true dangers, Anti-Federalists posited, were remnants of “a severe and tedious war... that disturbed the course of commerce, introduced floods of paper money, the stagnation of credit, and threw many valuable men out of steady business” (Marshall 1980, 241). Conditions were improving slowly but surely, and this process could be best maintained by a “frugal, free, and mild government” (Marshall 1980, 241) under the Articles of Confederation. This quote was drawn by Jonathan Marshall from the writings of Richard Henry Lee. Alongside William Grayson, Lee is identified by historian Saul Cornell as an “elite Anti-Federalist” – a man who had the luxury of being born into privilege, was well-educated, and maintained cordial relations with leaders across the seaboard, even Federalists.

Characterized by their tempered rhetoric, elite Anti-Federalists saw their “duty as

freemen and citizens to consider ‘measures,’ not ‘men’” (Cornell 1999, 38). William Grayson’s sarcastic mockery of Federalist arguments was about as far as his critique would go; ad-hominem attacks were unthinkable. Instead, elite Anti-Federalists approached the Constitutional debate along the principle of disinterested virtue. “Men like Richard Henry Lee... believed that matters of public concern ought to be discussed and debated in correspondence with other men of influence” (Cornell 1999, 78). They saw it as their duty to look out for those below them. Each man sought to suspend their personal stakes, using knowledge and reason to reach a solution that would benefit the greater public good. Accordingly, elite Anti-Federalists presented clear and tempered critiques of the Constitution, and feasible remedies. Thus, it is easy to grasp Lee’s notion of a “frugal” government. It involved an institution fundamental to national security, but also expensive: the armed forces.

Federalist designs for an army went beyond the Constitution’s codifications. As early as 1783, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton had petitioned the Confederation for a “multi-tiered [national defense] system” (Katznelson 2002, 94). The system consisted of “(1) a capable Navy to protect commerce; (2) state militia service for all men between eighteen and fifty; (3) a volunteer militia under national control; and (4) a regular army ‘to awe the Indians, protect our Trade, prevent the encroachment of our neighbors of Canada and the Floridas, and guard us at least from surprises...’” (Katznelson 2002, 94). As one may guess, “the post-independence Congress failed to agree on this or alternative designs,” sectional rivalry being the main impediment (Katznelson 2002, 94). Thus, Hamilton’s warning in the Federalist papers about Americans “defending ourselves against the ambition and jealousy of each other” was more than a pessimistic foreshadowing (Marshall 1980, 237). It conveyed a reality he had already observed.

The proposed Constitution made the President “Commander-in-Chief” and gave Congress explicit authority to raise an army and levy taxes. Anti-Federalists viewed this as an attempt at circumventing state resistance against Washington and Hamilton’s original plan. They took greatest issue with the prospects of a “regular,” or in colloquial terms, “standing” army. A standing army was antithetical to the idea of frugality. Stationed soldiers would consume government funds even during times of peace, which would inevitably come out of state coffers. A much more cost-effective alternative, expressed by Pennsylvania Anti-Federalists in their *Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority* was a “prohibition of standing armies in times of peace,” replaced by a “military... under civilian control... [and] return of control of militia to the states” (Cornell 1999, 33). These suggestions were inextricably tied to Anti-Federalists’ call for a right to bear arms that later became the Constitution’s second amendment. With a public armed and ready, armies could be quickly assembled and disbanded democratically. The cost borne by such forces would be limited to their equipment and compensation during time of conflict.

Armies’ “civilian control” does not imply that Anti-Federalists sought to remove the president’s title of “Commander-in-Chief” or transfer commanding authority to Congress. In fact, Anti-Federalists expressed concern that Congress would be too powerful as well, since it possessed both the privilege of funding armies and declaring war (Kistler 2011, 467). Anti-Federalist thinkers insisted that states should have control over armed forces, since they “were the true expression of people’s political will” (Cornell 1999, 63). They were strong adherents to Baron de Montesquieu's idea that republicanism could flourish only within small, homogenous political units. The American public would be safest from despotism, so long as their state governments had a strong say in questions regarding collective defense.

This logic explains Anti-Federalists’ desire to preserve militia chapters. Aside from being

able to counter immediate threats to American security, militias also embodied local values and interests that would not be lost to the dogma of generals and politicians at the national level.

They would be an important safeguard against the possibility of a subversive despot exploiting a security crisis to consolidate power. Contrary to common perceptions, a budding tyrant does not need an internal struggle to justify their personal expansion of power. In Napoleonic France, for example, foreign threats would prove to be sufficient precursors in allowing a military regime to take hold at home.

Saul Cornell's "Middling" Anti-Federalists voiced support for militias most consistently. This group includes authors such as James 'An Old Whig' Hutchinson and 'Federal Farmer'. Hutchinson and Melancton Smith, suspected by experts to have co-authored the 'Federal Farmer' writings (Cornell 1999, 88), were both active intellectuals in their respective communities. These men's everyday roles motivated them to value the importance of local decision-making and interests. They had little experience with the intricacies of international conflict, but their appreciation of order allowed for a productive relationship with elite Anti-Federalists and Federalists.

Federal Farmer expresses Anti-Federalist designs for national defense most vividly: "'A militia, when properly formed, are in fact the people themselves...' State control of the militia 'places the sword in the hands of the solid interest of the community, and not in the hands of men destitute of property, of principle, or of attachment to the society and government'" (Cornell 1999, 93). It is noteworthy how Federal Farmer placed barriers on many individuals from influencing community defense, not only distant rulers. He was wary that men who were poor, unreligious, or uneducated could be easily manipulated by demagogues. To avert this from happening, middling Anti-Federalists alluded to the 2nd amendment's "well-regulated" clause:

“Federal Farmer endorsed the right to bear arms, but he linked that right to an individual’s responsibility to be trained in arms, submit to state control, and demonstrate he was not a dependent” (Cornell 1999, 93). States’ control of the militia did not simply mean ownership; it implied a strict level of oversight as well.

In sum, the quintessential Anti-Federalist security arrangement was controlled by individual states. Each state would compose its own security body, either through mandatory conscription or voluntarism. State militias were virtuous through careful vetting. Participation criteria for militia service was likely similar to states’ voting requirements at the time. The service would only be open to men who demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the state constitution or the bible, and provided proof of their education and assets. These citizen-soldiers would not lose virtue in the chaos of combat, or exploit the chaos for self-gain. On a national scope, this security arrangement was diffuse. The national government only had a supporting role. Its authority was granted by the states, and would only expand under extreme circumstances. This decentralized structure slowed collective security action, making it even impossible at times. The Anti-Federalist security arrangement made up for this deficiency by ensuring that the most severe consequences of improper security action would be confined to single states. If one state succumbed to tyranny, the others would be immune for the time being.

### **Radical Anti-Federalists and the Carlisle Debacle**

Aside from Washington and Hamilton’s strong regular army, the other alternative to middling Anti-Federalists’ model of state militias was a distinctly localist idea. Dubbed “radical polemicists” and “plebeian populists” by Saul Cornell, authors such as Centinel and Aristocrotis were suspicious of a well-regulated state militia almost as much as they were of a centralized

national government. These authors “were among the most widely reprinted during ratification,” particularly due to their scathing rhetoric (Cornell 1999, 100). Given their mass appeal, it is likely that their incisive writings invited the stereotype observed by Jonathan Marshall, which posited Anti-Federalists as “men of little faith”.

William Petrikin, a “self-described ‘mechanic’ and tenant farmer,” wrote under the name Aristocrotis (Cornell 1999, 107). He viewed regulation of the militia as a way “to disarm the peasants [vis-a-vis] the farmers, mechanics, and labourers” (Cornell 1999, 108). Aristocrotis valued a society in which participation in the armed forces was not “tied to property requirements” (Cornell 1999, 109). He was suspicious of all higher authority, and advocated for an ongoing revolution. The government would be held in check by individuals’ ability to spontaneously revolt.

This idea of national security did not take long to be discredited, however. In late 1787, Federalists in the town of Carlisle, Pennsylvania gathered to celebrate the state’s ratification of the Constitution. The festivities got broken up by an angry mob of Anti-Federalist rioters, who went on to celebrate their symbolic victory by burning effigies of famous Federalists (Cornell 1999, 110). Rioters also destroyed a celebratory cannon. They declared it “‘was the property of the United States, that what belonged to the United States belonged to the People; that they were the People, and consequently had a right’ to confiscate it” (Cornell 1999, 113). Local authorities arrested several rioters on charges of assault, and detained them after they refused to make bail. In response, militia units from the surrounding areas sent representatives to meet with officials and press for prisoners’ release.

Saul Cornell stresses how “Anti-Federalists in Carlisle *actually* acted out the suggestions of the most radical essayists” (1999, 110). The mob-rule that materialized, and its disregard for

basic assembly and property rights completely discredited the localist conception of collective security. Local militias drew their membership from inherently narrow sections of the population. Their voluntarism dubiously blended with self-initiative. Self-initiative was easily guided by self-interest. If unrestrained, self-interest was antithetical to virtue. Radicals' rejection of any constitutive criteria for militias meant that virtually any group, regardless of its size or values, could take up arms. If one were to evaluate local militias amongst each other, it would not take long to recognize they asserted a dizzying array of various interests. At the same time, there was no hierarchy that could reconcile differences among these bodies or formulate a set of collective action goals. Even the most mundane issues could be securitized and turn into armed conflict. This institution - or lack thereof - bred anarchy, not security.

The Carlisle Riot “split the two most democratic wings of the Anti-Federalist coalition apart” as Middling Anti-Federalists rejected anarchy and mobocracy, having themselves been victims of Federalist riots (Cornell 1999, 118). This schism produced a new Anti-Federalist coalition between middling politicians and elite executives, planters, and traders. As more and more states decided to ratify the Constitution and amend it with the Bill of Rights, the “quarrel” would transition from a question of *if* to a question of *how*. Behind the backdrop, states would retain the ability to organize militia units. But the regular army would be here to stay. Under the spotlight, Federalist and Anti-Federalist successors would debate its use, funding, and size, along with questions on how to maximally uphold the Constitution.

### **Thomas Jefferson – the Anti-Federalist?**

While his colleagues debated the Constitution's merits, Thomas Jefferson was across the Atlantic serving as U.S. Minister to France. This precluded him from being a major player in the

ratification conventions. As a result, Saul Cornell refrains from mentioning Jefferson in *The Other Founders* until his narrative on “Politics of the First Congress” (1999, 157). Thanks to the national archives, however, we can discern Thomas Jefferson’s stance on ratification according to his own words. In a letter dated March 13th, 1789, Thomas Jefferson responded to a curious friend with the following testimony:

“I am not a federalist, because I never submitted... my opinions to the creed of any party of men... where I was capable of thinking for myself... Therefore I protest to you that I am not of the party of federalists. But I am much further from that of the Antifederalists. I approved from the first moment of... the new constitution, the consolidation of the government, the organisation into Executive, legislative and judiciary... What I disapproved from the first moment also was the want of a bill of rights to guard liberty against the legislative as well as executive branches of government... To these points of disapprobation I adhere.”

Jefferson expresses a qualified approval of Constitution, contingent on the passage of a Bill of Rights. His desire to refrain from choosing a faction evokes the principle of disinterested virtue. When we also consider that he routinely corresponded with Federalist leaders (e.g. James Madison), and had preferred his *Notes on the State of Virginia* to be circulated among colleagues rather than published (McDonald 1999, 176), it becomes easy to classify Jefferson as an elite Anti-Federalist. But we cannot ignore Jefferson’s admission of being “much further from... the Antifederalists” and his quick approval of consolidation. These revelations nudge Jefferson towards the Madisonian camp of Federalists.

Thomas Jefferson’s first major leadership role was the governorship of Virginia. He was elected in 1779 while the war for independence was still raging. Not many battles were fought on Virginian soil. However, the British used the colony’s coastal inlets as a pit-stop between their New York headquarters and main garrison in the Carolinas. Jefferson’s inexperience, along with

Virginia's constitutional limits on the executive made it very difficult for him to protect his homeland from pillaging. Francis Cogliano describes how the Virginia constitution's "deliberately diffused and decentralized executive power" hindered defensive responsiveness: "The governor had to work with an eight-man Council of State, whose members served at the pleasure of the legislature... [Jefferson] could not call out the militia... without first seeking advice of the council. In administrative terms, the governor and council should exercise... authority through the state Board of War appointed by the House of Delegates" (Cogliano 2014, 15).

The recurrent raids put Jefferson in a frustrating position. Oftentimes, the militia took too long to assemble and respond in time. It was also impossible to keep the militia constantly assembled; these men were not professional soldiers and had families to care for. A cycle of frequent assembly and disassembly carried its own risks. False alarms would discredit Jefferson among the militiamen and "alienate the populace" (Cogliano 2014, 19). If the governor did not pick - or guess - his battles wisely, he risked putting the state in severe jeopardy. For Jefferson to gather sufficient wisdom (i.e. information), though, he would need time. This compounded the militia's slowness, and created an inescapable conundrum. Without a large-scale, concerted defensive effort by the Virginians, Benedict Arnold's troops were able to penetrate 125 miles in a matter of three days (Cogliano 2014, 19). They stormed Richmond and its neighboring towns, plundered public and private property, and disrupted the Continental Army's flow of supplies to the southern colonies (Cogliano 2014, 21). Frustrated and discouraged, the governor would forego reelection.

To add insult to injury, Jefferson became subject to an inquiry by the Virginia assembly at the end of his term. Members of the assembly had brought forth 11 charges "related to his

conduct during Arnold's invasion the previous winter" (Cogliano 2014, 28). Per one of the charges, they sought to investigate how Jefferson had instructed county magistrates to supply soldiers according to legislation that had expired days earlier, on New Year's Day. Admittedly, Jefferson had undertaken such action. However, it was done out of necessity; Virginia was under attack and the assembly could not be summoned in time.

According information gathered by Jefferson's allies, and later admissions by the men involved, the bizarre investigation was part of a conspiracy. Several Virginian legislators had become apprehensive about the state's security and remorseful of the extreme limits placed upon the governorship in 1776. As a remedy, they sought to establish a temporary dictatorship to keep Virginia safe, per Roman precedent (Cogliano 2014, 32). The conspirators knew that Jefferson would be likely to condemn such an idea. Therefore, they sought to discredit him and underscore the state's vulnerability.

The plot could not garner enough support in the Assembly and lost all relevance after the American victory at Yorktown in 1781. Meanwhile, Jefferson's gubernatorial experiences would guide his statecraft for years to come. He rejected the militia as a sole guardian of liberty. On principle, it was alluring. However, when put to the test of practicality, the militia in his home state had failed. Its practical ineffectiveness was so severe that it tempted Jefferson's colleagues to consider the unthinkable. They sought to mortgage their liberty to someone who would hopefully recuse himself after the need expired. In a twist of irony, Virginia's militia had inspired the very despotism that Anti-Federalists later argued it would prevent. Even as the Revolutionary War was winding down, Jefferson promoted the idea of a regular army: "That it would be burdensome is undoubted, yet it is perhaps as certain that no possible mode of carrying it on can be so expensive to the public and so distressing and disgusting to individuals as by the

militia” (Cogliano 2014, 37).

While Jefferson’s experiences in Virginia put him at odds with the state constitution, his experiences abroad would lead to his frustration with the Articles of Confederation as well. As Minister to France, Jefferson also cooperated with John Adams – Minister to Britain – to oversee American relations with other Old World countries. Their biggest challenge was negotiating peace treaties with the Barbary States in the Mediterranean. Loosely aligned with the Ottoman Empire, these North African sultanates began seizing American merchant vessels and holding their crews for ransom in 1784 (Cogliano 2014, 43).

Congress refrained from authorizing a naval build-up, but it allocated a small amount of funds to be used in the negotiations (Cogliano 2014, 52). This approach worked well with Morocco, whose leader “sought a commercial treaty... and was willing to make concessions” (Cogliano 2014, 55). Yet when Jefferson and Adams sent a merchant consul to negotiate with Algiers, they ended up frustrated. The American consul grossly exceeded his ransom budget, but wasn’t able to free any crewmembers or negotiate a peace settlement (Cogliano 2014, 57). John Adams, while less intent on using force compared to Jefferson, conceded that unlike Europeans, American negotiators were “armed only with innocence and the olive branch” (Cogliano 2014, 59). The troubles Jefferson experienced in the Old World epitomized America’s security struggles under the Articles of Confederation. Consensus-based voting, weak fundraising capabilities, and reliance on volunteerism prevented the American government from ensuring the safety of its citizens.

### **Fries’ Rebellion and Hamilton’s Army**

Thomas Jefferson returned to the U.S. to serve as George Washington’s Secretary of

State. He would soon find himself in a contentious position with other cabinet members, namely Alexander Hamilton. The two men turned out to have fundamentally different views on the same document they had supported a few years prior. Elvin Lim contends that for us “to recall what the Federalists stood for, is not enough to consult the *Federalist Papers*, which were written... to win over an Anti-Federalist audience” (2013, 35). True Federalist intentions would be best-discerned by examining their early initiatives under the Washington presidency. Playing upon the Constitution’s ambiguities, Alexander Hamilton quickly began pushing for a large expansion of federal powers. In contrast, Madison and Jefferson strictly viewed the Constitution as a stronger safeguard of the First Founding’s negative rights. Upset at Federalists’ broad use of fiat in the extended republic, they started the Democratic-Republican movement.

In contrast to Alexander Hamilton’s flexible interpretation of the Constitution, it is easy to label Jefferson as a “strict constructionist”; someone who interpreted the document literally and renounced anything not explicitly permitted by it. This label of Jefferson stands at odds with his later actions. A military academy was hardly more justified by the clause in Article 1-8 permitting Congress “To raise and support Armies...” than Hamilton’s National Bank was justified by the clause “To coin Money, regulate the Value thereof, and of foreign Coin, and fix the Standard of Weights and Measures.” This discrepancy may point some observers to dismiss Jefferson as a hypocrite who became corrupted by power.

David N. Mayer insists the reason why Jefferson used a flexible approach towards West Point in 1801, but decried Hamilton’s economic policies ten years earlier, was because the bank was an inward institution that failed to pass “the most stringent test of necessity” and “would exercise powers in conflict with many state laws” (Mayer 2004, 59). Institutions with an outward focus, which were monopolized by the national government, could be more liberally addressed

by Jefferson. Although early clashes with Hamilton over vertical separation of powers created mistrust, the two men's outward activism allowed them to collegially manage the army for the time being.

Throughout the early 1790s, Republicans cooperatively advocated for a smaller army. Unless there were obvious needs for expansion like in 1792 – when generals Harmar and St. Clair suffered embarrassing losses against Indian tribes – they advanced “arguments of utility and expense, not ideology” (Crackel 1987, 11). The only major internal discord during the decade's earlier half was the Whiskey Rebellion. It was quickly put down by Washington, who led a force of 12,000 militiamen on a mission they were best suited for: internal policing (Crackel 1987, 11). While high Federalists blamed Democratic-Republican Societies for fomenting the revolt, Republican newspapers had not hesitated to denounce the anarchy (Cornell 1999, 201). Additionally, the force that went into Pennsylvania had a roughly equal number of Federalists and Republicans (Crackel 1987, 11).

Loyal opposition politics began to fall apart in 1795, though. The French Revolution's aftermath had sparked war between England and France, which inflamed latent mistrust between the two parties across the Atlantic. In the coming years, “neither... party recognized the legitimacy of the others' opposition” (Crackel 1987, 12). Federalists were branded as anglophiles who conspired to trample liberty. Republicans, meanwhile, were stereotyped as Jacobin francophiles who plotted their own insurrection.

In 1798, the Federalists in power began to fuse national security politics with the everyday agenda. During the summer of that year, they passed the infamous Alien and Sedition Acts in order “to prepare for war [against France]...” (Cogliano 2014, 134). In particular, the “Act for the Punishment of Certain Crimes... which called for the fines and imprisonment for

writing, speaking, or publishing anything of ‘a false, scandalous and malicious’ nature against the government or its officers” (Cogliano 2014, 134) did not take long to be used against the public, especially Republicans. Federalist judges used it to stifle Republican newspaper editors (Cornell 1999, 234). Even symbolic forms of protest, such as “liberty poles,” were prosecuted (Cornell 1999, 236).

To go with their new laws, the John Adams and Alexander Hamilton expanded the military. Nicknamed the “New Army,” it consisted of 12,000 men and predictably boasted Hamilton as its inspector general (Crackel 1987, 18). Federalists in Adams’ cabinet had made the expansions through an exclusionary method: “They screened officer applications personally. The slightest hint of Republican sympathies drew a telling note, ‘won’t do’” (Crackel 1987, 19). Officers made up only a small part of the army’s overall size, though. The volunteer ranks, which composed a bulk of the force “had a similar - even deeper - political tint. [Federalist] recruiters invited only men of correct political persuasion to join the ranks” (Crackel 1987, 19). Political amity was not enough to encourage men into the New Army ranks. They had to get paid, and the Federalist Congress instituted a property tax to raise funds (Crackel 1987, 19). This tax would spur a momentous, yet overlooked revolt in 18th century America.

John Fries, a Pennsylvanian militia captain, and veteran of the Revolution and Whiskey Insurrection expedition, led a group of many former Federalists to chase away the tax collectors (Crackel 1987, 21). The government response was disproportionate from the beginning, and brought Republicans’ worst fears into a reality. Secretary of War James McHenry “urged the President to issue a proclamation that would condemn the actions as ‘overt acts of levying war against the United States’” (Crackel 1987, 22). Federalists had equated a small armed protest to a coup d’état or secession movement. Adams would authorize the use of federal volunteers to

restore order, yet militia troops were excluded from the police effort; even units from outside of Pennsylvania (Crackel 1987, 23).

High federalist national security agenda showed its hand more and more. While Hamiltonians had never explicitly sought to abolish militias, their insistence on using an army of regulars and volunteers to quell the Fries rebellion demonstrated a severe lack of trust in local loyalty. Unlike George Washington in 1794, Hamilton showed preference for a national security model that rejected any state support. The problem with using regular troops exclusively, especially those recruited from the same background, was that they hardly identified with the locale they were sent to pacify. In one sense, New Army soldiers were polar opposites of the radical plebeian militiamen that had stormed Carlisle a decade earlier. They thoroughly embodied a distant, upper-class suspicion of the western frontier. Just like their antithetical rivals though, the New Army would display a similar degree of callousness against the public.

Newspapers reported how soldiers “came to restore ‘Peace and good Order,’ ...but, by their conduct, were more apt to excite the people to insurrection.” (Crackel 1987, 24). Troops vandalized property. They even harassed elderly people, women, and children. Then, the soldiers took out their spite against journalists who had dared to speak out: “Jacob Schnider, the publisher of the staunchly Republican *Adler*... had scourged them regularly for their treatment of local citizens... Storming into his office, they grabbed him, ripped off his clothes, and dragged him into the street...” (Crackel 1987, 24). Theodore Crackel mentions how “unlike... 1794, when papers of both parties had urged against [The Whiskey] rebellion, the Fries affair drew sympathy from Republican *and* independent papers across the nation” (1987, 25).

The scathing news would reach America’s highest office. Even John Adams, who had initially authorized the expedition, decided he could not be complicit in such abuses. As he

pardoned John Fries from a death sentence (Crackel 1987, 25), a shrouded division was developing among the Federalists. Adams had originally sought to take sensible precautions during the Quasi War, but “the Anglophile Federalists had come to their own delusion... [and] cast themselves in the role of strident and inept censors... [with a] desire to make of these emergency measures a permanent system” (McColley 1968, 29). George Washington’s passing uncovered this rift in December of 1799, as Adams Federalists quickly cooperated with Republicans to dismantle Hamilton’s army (Crackel 1987, 32). Within six months – twelve since the fateful rebellion – this coalition had stopped recruitment, suspended officer appointments, compelled the Secretary of War to resign, and completely disbanded the New and Provisional forces (Crackel 1987, 33).

The abuses by Hamilton’s New Army demonstrated the peril of using selective recruitment and promotion based on adherence to an ideology that prioritizes security over liberty. Today, one may refrain from judging its abuses too harshly. After all, a common culture regarding the Bill of Rights had yet to take hold. But, if the New Army had maintained its grip on America in the late 1700s, the legal precedents we currently take for granted might not exist. The doctrinaire soldiers recruited by Hamiltonians demonstrated the destructive extension of their ideology. They would have probably fared well against a foreign invasion. On their own though, they were unfit for upholding internal security.

### **The Revolution of 1800 and West Point**

Thomas Jefferson entered the presidency in 1801 on a public mandate. The people and the electors had overwhelmingly voted Republican in the past year. He saw it as his duty to overhaul the federal government after a decade of Federalist influence. In current times, a

president's first 100 days are used as a litmus test to understand their priorities. If we apply this test to Jefferson in 1801, our attention gets drawn to the military and West Point.

First, it is vital to understand what kind of military institution Jefferson inherited. State militias existed in their many shapes and forms, but Jefferson already knew they were best suited in a supporting role. The New and Provisional armies had been disbanded; "The Old Army... was retained" (Crackel 1987, 33). Yet, here was a real chance many previous soldiers could re-enter the service. A threat of war with France or Britain still loomed, and the administration wouldn't be able to recruit selectively in wake of a crisis.

Also, while Jefferson knew "the volunteers in Pennsylvania had proved... dangerous" (Crackel 1987, 32), his true concern lay with the small number of soldiers still in service. Over 90% of the officers within the Old Army were Federalists appointed by Washington, Hamilton, and Adams (Crackel 1987, 175). Many of the high-ranking officers were some of Jefferson's biggest political opponents and criticized him among military circles (Onuf 2004, 5). For years, Republicans were suspicious of a Federalist military becoming a caste; something like the Society of the Cincinnati, but less bound by the symbolism of past services and more inclined to conspire future actions.

The military had just evidenced its gross tendency of abuse during the Fries rebellion; they had even bucked Hamilton's advice of "discipline 'and to prevent injury or insult to the inhabitants'" in 1799 (Crackel 1987, 26). While Hamilton may have dismissed the officers as simply incompetent, Jefferson viewed this group as an extreme extension of Hamilton's statecraft: unscrupulously bent on ensconcing their own privilege: "here was a class of courtiers without a king... anxious to advance its corporate and personal interests at the people's expense" (Onuf 2004, 4). Such men were especially dangerous in the fledgling Republic's military, where

personal ties and honor outweighed a nascent sense of nationalism. Jefferson had to “unify the army around something else besides the ‘crucible of revolutionary combat’” (Onuf 2004, 11). Otherwise, he feared the army would become an exclusive, self-interested institution. Soldiers would foment conflict to earn a chance at experience and glory. Promotion would only come to those who displayed competence during combat, and had the right lineage. America would be stuck in a constant state of war, ultimately at the expense of its everyday citizens.

In the summer of 1801, President Jefferson and his War Secretary, Henry Dearborn, began a quick and auspicious search process to staff a military academy at West Point according to past provisions. A 1794 law had designated West Point as garrison for the Corps of Artillerists and Engineers, providing them with ample space to train. The superior officers were originally tasked with buying books and tutoring cadets on how to build fortifications and aim cannons (Higginbotham 2004, 44). Memoirs by famous generals were exchanged throughout the ranks as tactical guides (Higginbotham 2004, 36). 1798 legislation authorized the appointment of specialized teachers at West Point, though no students - cadets - had even been appointed since 1794 (Mayer 64). A fire at the garrison’s library and the Adams-Hamilton split had thwarted the school’s institutionalization until after Jefferson took office (Higginbotham 2004, 45).

Jefferson and Dearborn seized upon this *carte blanche*, pressing Congress to approve legislation that would become the 1802 Military Peace Establishment Act. On the surface, it was sold as a stereotypically Republican piece of legislation; it sought to reduce the army’s size and save money (Crackel 1987, 45). But these savings were minimal, as would be the initial cuts. The Act did not relieve swaths of regulars, but rearranged the soldiers’ organization in such a way that less officers were needed (Crackel 1987, 45). Without surprise, the ones discharged were Federalists.

Additionally, the Act gave the president “exceptional powers over the new Corps of Engineers... not bound by traditional promotion by relative rank and seniority” (Crackel 1987, 65). While Jefferson was free to mold the Corps of Engineers to his liking, a wrinkle in the legislation let him do more than flood the army with fort-builders: “Though Jefferson usually referred to West Point simply as a school of instruction for artillery... the fact is that newly commissioned graduates were assigned where they were needed” (Crackel 1987, 61). Thus began Thomas Jefferson’s “chaste reformation” of the army.

In the following seven years, a Jeffersonian army took form. A core of regulars watched over the frontier and helped secure New Orleans upon its purchase from France, with tacit militia assistance. The president took an incremental but steady approach to filling the ranks with Republicans, even replacing officers who had shown “political apathy” (Crackel 1987, 50). He was careful not to provoke dissent among the Federalists, or jeopardize national security by trading experience for ideological allegiance too hastily. Nevertheless, the ranks were flipped by the time Jefferson would leave office: 90% of officers in the army were of a Republican background (Crackel 1987, 175). The few others were moderate “Republican Federalists.”

The West Point academy was instrumental to this achievement. Theodore Crackel emphasizes that “if the commissioned ranks were to be accessible to all classes of citizens; if the aristocracy of wealth and birth in the army was to be replaced with the aristocracy of virtue and talent... education and training would have to be provided that would equip [men] to lead” (1987, 73). Thomas Jefferson sought to flood the ranks with Republicans who exhibited virtue in their applications. But, these men came from a diverse array of backgrounds, some of which were highly underprivileged. West Point’s instruction of battle tactics, math, geometry, and foreign language gave them the basic skills to earn a commission and lead alongside the

privileged sons of Federalists. The school was closely monitored by the President and Secretary of War; not only to keep an eye on its political mood, but also to keep it as cost-efficient as possible (Crackel 1987, 58).

Jefferson's military academy allowed him to cultivate virtue, and create a national security apparatus that was both energetic and constrained to our founding principles. It would be supplemented by state militias and if need be, and checked by them as well. The Jeffersonian soldier-citizen was an ideal balance between the citizen-soldier militiaman and Hamiltonian soldier. He would compensate the citizen-soldier's impracticality by being paid, trained, and ready. Yet unlike the unrestrained Hamiltonian soldier, he would value liberty and represent America's socioeconomic diversity.

### **Conclusion – West Point as an American Political Development**

While European monarchs consolidated power in the 18th century by creating large armies with the help of landed elites, Thomas Jefferson started the 19th century by designing an American army predicated on class diversity and allegiance to principles rather than people. An institution crucial to this exceptional product was the West Point Military Academy. In addition to facilitating Jefferson's short-term transformation of the army's ranks, "it established a source of Republican officers for the future" (Crackel 1987, 45). The academy's foundation by Thomas Jefferson and Henry Dearborn presents a critical juncture, in which they instituted a durable shift in America's national security framework.

Slightly before Jefferson's presidency, a national military already existed. It was complemented by state militia chapter as part of national security arrangement which allowed for collective action while safeguarding local interests. However, the national military became

hijacked by some of Thomas Jefferson's most extreme political opponents. Their exclusive, hyper-partisan recruitment methods, and dismissal of state-level assistance created a security arrangement that was hardly representative of the American public, and therefore prone to commit abuses against it.

Thus, what Jefferson's military academy would do is ensure that the military possessed virtuous leadership and better represented the American social classes for decades. Evoking Bo Rothstein's idea that "institutions set limits on what some agents can do... [and] construe an advantage in future political battles" (1992, 35) we can assert that Thomas Jefferson's establishment of West Point created an institutional path dependency in American national security. This path dependency can be expressed in two simple ways. On one hand, future agents from less privileged classes would find it easier to access the military and participate in the execution of national security policy. The military may end up becoming a caste, but it would be an accessible one nonetheless. On the other hand, agents similar to Jefferson's rivals would have an inherently harder time pushing policies of the Federalist decade. Such repression was hardly replicated after 1800. The Reconstruction Era comes to mind, but its context was much different.

Jefferson's durable reform of the national security framework perfectly illustrated a synthesis of the two American foundings that so often stand at tension. Elvin Lim considers American political developments as durable shifts of authority towards the federal level or away from it. Within this scope of understanding, West Point's establishment echoes America's Second Founding – an expansion of federal authority. Yet, by no means did the original proponents of the Second Founding – the Federalists – gain any power from this development. Thus, Saul Cornell was right in asserting that "while the Federalists won the battle of ratification, it is the ideas of the Anti-Federalists that continue[d] to define the soul of American politics."

While creating West Point, President Jefferson infected the institution with his own political ideas that echoed our First Founding. In addition to promoting order, the military would be a tool to protect negative liberties. It would exhibit restraint against its own people, and compensate what it lacked in experience with training and knowledge. This formula was not perfect, evidenced by Jefferson's controversial embargo of 1807, and American struggles against British redcoats in the War of 1812. However, the American people would remain free from military coercion until the Civil War – an unfortunate and complex chapter of American history. Jefferson's creation of West Point to reform the military from illiberal leanings perfectly portrays the triumph of Anti-Federalists principles within the national security framework of the Second Founding.

While celebrating this triumph though, we must stay tempered and recall Louis Hartz. His "Lockean Consensus" posits American political battles differently on the global scale, and is evidenced by the mere eight years it took Jefferson to achieve a more republican national security establishment. Although both factions insisted otherwise, the Federalists were hardly more aristocratic than the Carlisle Anti-Federalists were Jacobin. American aristocracy's less-entrenched status allowed Jeffersonian reforms to take hold quickly and without bloodshed.

**Table 1:** Competing Institutional Models for National Security

	<b>Hamiltonian</b>	<b>Moderate Federalist</b>	<b>Jeffersonian</b>	<b>Anti-Federalist</b>	<b>radical</b>
<i>control</i>	national	national, supported by state gov't	national, supported by state gov't	state, supported by national gov't	local
<i>composition</i>	appointment & recruitment (partisan)	appointment & recruitment (less partisan)	appointment & recruitment (partisan)	regulated voluntarism	voluntarism
<i>character</i>	unscrupulous	utilitarian	virtuous (cultivated)	virtuous (vetted)	unscrupulous

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