

**Building an Army: How the American Political Process
Guided the Continental Army's Creation, Operation,
and Demobilization**

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Abstract

Anything involving humans inevitably involves politics, and the design and engineering of modern technological systems, organizational processes, and infrastructures is no exception. Analysis into case studies has revealed patterns of political behavior and influence classifiable via heuristics known as the "Political Facts of Life" [1]. Politics also impact military systems, structures, operations, and even successes and failures. Military historians go to great lengths to explain military affairs and organizations, and politics inevitably explains how and why certain things occur. This paper, however, uses the Political Facts of Life as a guide to analyze the Continental Army's exploits in the American Revolution.

The American Revolution came to a head in 1775, when colonists and the British Army exchanged fire at Lexington and Concord, and hostilities would not officially end until 1783 [2]. The force at Lexington and Concord consisted of militiamen, but soon the colonies would have a Continental Army led by General George Washington [3]. This Army would enjoy victories such as Bunker Hill and Saratoga coupled with defeats in New York, Pennsylvania, and in the south before ultimately triumphing over the British at Yorktown [2]. But this Army was not rewarded with a continued life, and instead found itself drawn down to a mere fraction of its peak strength [3]. And interestingly, the Political Facts of Life explain the why and how of this trajectory. In doing so, the Political Facts of Life prove themselves as a useful tool for the past as well as the present due to the common thread of humanity linking the military and warfare across multiple eras.

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I. Introduction

Politics routinely influence and shape the development and design of systems, processes, infrastructures, and organizations. Ranging from material choices for a building, organizational structures for a military, mission sets for spacecraft, to safety requirements on a car, the political process has had more influence than systems engineers, administrators, and planners likely ever wanted. Such influence is so prevalent in systems, organization, and process design that patterns have emerged over time. Work by Dr. Brenda Forman and Mr. Ken Cureton led to the development and refinement of heuristics that identify and explain patterns found in politics' interaction with the creation of a system, process, or organization [4]. These "Political Facts of Life" explain the seemingly illogical political interactions with logically and rationally bounded engineering processes [1]. Additionally, they provide a useful tool for understanding why a project's end state varied from its initial concept [1].

Most traditional studies on this topic focus on physical systems such as spacecraft or aircraft like the V-22 Osprey [5, 6, 7]. However, some studies highlight process influence and how politics shape a less tangible process or infrastructure such as national firefighting [8]. This paper will focus on establishing an army, an institution that, by design, is intimately tied to the political process. The period of focus will be the Continental Army during the American Revolution. The Political Facts of Life (FOL) serve as heuristic guides for analyzing how the Continental Army came to be and why certain successes and failures befell it administratively and operationally during the American Revolution. This analysis will explore the timelessness and adaptability of the FOLs by applying them to an historic setting and institution versus a modern, tangible end system. The goal is to analyze the Continental Army and American Revolution through a new perspective, while simultaneously determining the adaptability and flexibility of the FOLs. If applicable for unconventional historic applications, it then follows that they can then continue to adapt and apply to future military systems and force structures analysis.

A. The Political Facts of Life

Dr. Forman and Mr. Cureton established five Political FOLs and 7 supporting "other" FOLs [1]. The FOLs are:

1. **"Politics, Not Technology, Controls What Technology is Allowed to Achieve"**
[1]

Meaning: Politics set an artificial boundary on achievement different from what technology or systems architecting may achieve on its own in a limitless environment [1]. Applied to the Continental Army, this may pertain to organizational, strategic, operational, or tactical matters in addition to technological issues.

2. **"Cost Rules"** [1]

Meaning: Clever accounting techniques may be necessary to successfully market an idea to politicians controlling funding, and funding approval is ephemeral, necessitating a new sales pitch for each new funding cycle [1]. Furthermore, when funds come, they rarely come in an “Optimal Funding Profile,” but rather via “more level-loaded funding over a longer time” [9].

3. **“A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential”** [1]

Meaning: To survive political scrutiny, programs must “serve multiple agendas” so as to satisfy “Constituents [who have] different priorities and needs” [9]. Strong constituency sustains a program, while weak constituency threatens it, and constituency membership is oft targeted by proponents and opponents of a program or system [1].

4. **“Technical Problems Become Political Problems”** [1]

Meaning: Challenges or problems that arise during development or operation of a system, process, or organization often become ammunition leveraged by opponents [9]. Intentional misinterpretation or misunderstanding of events and reports are “misused by parties with little or no technical expertise” as levers to achieve a political end [9].

5. **“The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions”** [1]

Meaning: In the face of several options or courses of action, disciplined, logical analysis relevant to the topic and decision will suggest a clear choice [9]. Meanwhile, political activity and analysis may suggest an alternate, seemingly illogical choice due to the different considerations of the political process [9]. In the case of the Continental Army, “engineering” may apply to operational decisions, manning decisions, and other general military problem where multiple options exist.

Supporting FOLs:

S1. “Timing is Everything” [9] – The right program at the wrong time may not withstand political scrutiny. The wrong program at the right time may find success.

S2. “Political Problems Become Technical Problems (or Become Technical Opportunities)” [9] – Issues in the political world may create stipulations or challenges that impose needless or unanticipated technical problems upon a system.

S3. “Politics Prefers Immediate, Near-Term Gratification” [9] – The “Event Horizon” of the election cycles and continuous budget battles mean quick results are politically appealing [9].

S4. “Politics Believes in Gurus and Heroes... And Once Tarnished, Forever Untrustworthy (Stink Sticks)” [9] – Individuals who build a reputation for themselves as an expert in a field, regardless of whether they truly are one, often

become the go-to person for politicians. Individuals who foul their image become toxic, and this often defines them for the remainder of their political career.

S5. “A Catchy Slogan Is Essential to Getting Attention” [9] – Branding and marketing matter, and can make or break a cause.

S6. “Perception Is Often More Important Than the Truth” [9] – Emotions, viewpoints, psychology, and ideologies distort perception and can corrupt otherwise rational decision-makers for better or worse. Also, incorrect facts delivered prior to the truth can still color human perception even once the true story is available.

S7. “Staffers Shape Decision-Making” [9] – Those subordinate to or those doing the legwork for the decision-maker may shape opinions and decisions due to proximity, trust, and familiarity with each other.

These facts of life will guide analysis of the Continental Army's genesis, administration, operation, and ultimate disbandment at the conclusion of the war.

II. Genesis of a Revolution – Uniting the Congress

A. The Ideological Mindset

It is important to understand the prevailing ideological mindset of the colonies, as it influenced both governance and the Continental Army. The colonial worldview of localism meant colonists were given to a “deep distrust of the military” [10]. Colonists believed in “the limited role of government,” exemplified by the diminutive footprints and limited staffs of provincial governments [10]. Further fueling localism was the decentralized nature of the colonies; far removed from England and occupying a large, difficult to travel land mass in North America led to “the fragmentation of power” [10]. Localism came naturally, too, given some of the colonist's initial experiences in England. Many New England settlers previously lived in locally managed townships that fell under the King of England, who continually led “aggressive [efforts] to extend his civil and ecclesiastical authority” [11]. This created an unusual situation in which a small community's “most serious [threats] usually [came] from the king himself” [11]. It makes sense, then, that these colonists would have suspicions of centralized government and, when given the separation of the Atlantic Ocean and a chance to start anew, they would aspire for self-sufficient local communities presided over by a weak, limited government.

An important wrinkle is how voting rights were determined in colonial times. In the colonies, “voting privileges were tied to property requirements because of the belief that a citizen should have a ‘stake in society’” [10]. Threats to property or land via taxation, impressment, or military quartering would repulse colonists, as this “meant not only impoverishment but also the loss of political rights” [10]. The ideology of localism combined with concern over loss of one's societal stature and political rights created natural aversion to the presence of a “standing army” [12]. A standing army represented power and reach of central government and was also a tool to enforce mechanisms (such

as taxation, quartering, and impressment) that threatened liberty [12]. But to ward off the threats of the British standing army and win independence, the colonists would need their own standing army. Uniting the colonies to this contradictory end took time and a confluence of supporting events explainable via the Political FOLs.

Additionally, when analyzing the Continental Army via the Political FOLs, it is important to consider the makeup of the Congress. Dr. Carp explains that “during the first two years of war, only five [of the 65 congressmen] had served with the British in military operations,” of which only one of the five had experience in logistical support of military operations [10]. The preceding sets unfavorable conditions for the Continental Army; not only did it face the British, but it had to counter colonial ideology, widespread fear of standing armies, and a Congress that lacked military experience.

B. Uniting to form an Army

Distrust of British motives had been growing for some time, with affronts to colonists such as the Stamp Act, the Quartering Act, disbanding colonial assemblies, the Townshend Duties, and the Boston Massacre [12]. It makes sense then, that growing tension would lead to war. A precipitous point was reached when British, seeking to destroy an arms store in Concord, engaged in a gunfight with American militiamen [3, 13, 14]. Accounts differ on who fired first, but “the patriots were first to get their events out to the American public” [13]. Numerous American accounts before Congress gave the impression that the Redcoats fired first, which fit with the longstanding narrative of the British Army's aggression and encroachment upon the liberties of the colonists [15]. As the Continental Congress convened in 1775, the New England delegation sought unification of the colonies and attempted “to secure congressional support for armed opposition to Great Britain” [3]. This would ultimately lead to the establishment of the Continental Army.

Several FOLs come in to play. The first is **Perception is Often More Important Than the Truth (FOL S6)**. The truth about whether General Gage's Redcoats or the American's fired first at Lexington and Concord was unknown, but American depositions before Congress painted a picture of callous British aggression that instigated the incident and resultant loss of life [13, 15]. This fit the prevailing ideology of the time; the standing Army was a threat to local towns, villages, and the colonies. The British Army, perpetrator of the Boston Massacre, was once again acting as the aggressor on behalf of England by firing the first shot in a skirmish that came at the expense of colonists' lives and munition stores [13, 16]. Regardless of how the engagement occurred at Lexington, what mattered was the perception that the physical arm of the country who perpetrated impressment, quartering of soldiers, the stamp act, and the Boston Massacre initiated yet another unprovoked act of violence.

This FOL was highly consequential during the era and worked in concert with another FOL: **Timing is Everything (FOL S1)**. News often took days to spread from colony to colony. The actions at Lexington and Concord occurred on 19 April 1775 [3]. Consider

the following timeline, which was quick for the era, for reporting on Lexington and Concord [3]:

- 19 April – Battle at Lexington and Concord [14]
- 24 April – News of the battle reaches New York City [3]
- 25 April – News of the battle reaches Philadelphia [3], the location of the Continental Congress [10]
- 10 May – News of the battle reaches Savannah, “the city farthest from the scene of the engagement” [3]

Delivering news first not only colored perception, but it also significantly impacted momentum. If information arrived stating that the British unjustifiably fired first upon colonists in yet another act of unprovoked royal treachery, those receiving the news would have significant time to solidify their view of the event before any new information arrived. This could lead to decisions with second and third-order effects that harden an individual or community's perception of or position on the event, a stance that with each passing day becomes more difficult to reverse when the truth arrives. By the time the British account of being fired upon by rebellious and harassing Bostonians arrived (if it ever did) [17], initial perceptions may have given momentum to various anti-British actions such as proclamations, legislation, and military action. Additionally, previously established perceptions may cause individuals to question a late-arriving truth.

Perception and momentum mattered because it was a lever to manipulate another FOL: **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential (FOL 3)**. The New England colonies formed an army after Lexington, but New England would need all of the colonies to mount a serious charge against England [3]. Before the Continental Congress, New England asserted its actions were “merely protecting [themselves] from British aggression, and that in doing so [New England] was acting to defend all colonies” [3]. Massachusetts's exploits at Lexington coupled with the news and **perception** of how the battle began served to “rally hundreds, if not thousands, of colonists to the rebellion” [13]. The **perception** and **timing** of the news delivery on Lexington and Concord played in to garnering local support, but forming an Army was anathema to colonial ideology on standing armies and still needed Congressional support.

This would not be the first time forming **constituency** amongst the colonies was difficult. Notably, during the French and Indian War of 1754 to 1763, the colonies grappled with uniting towards a common objective spearheaded by a central governing body [18]. Recognizing the perils of division, Benjamin Franklin penned his famous “Join, or Die.” political cartoon (Figure 1) in 1754 [19]:

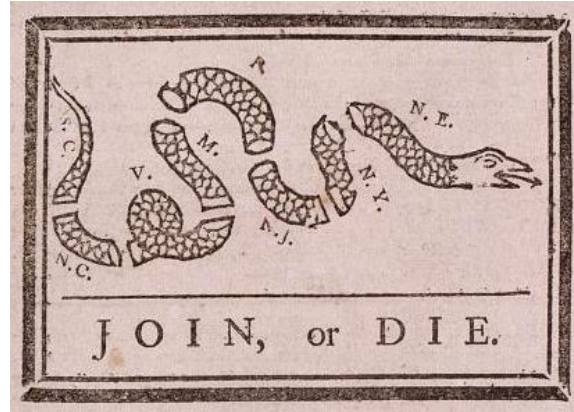


Fig. 1: Benjamin Franklin's "Join, or Die" cartoon [19].

The cartoon leverages the following supplemental FOL: **A Catchy Slogan is Essential to Getting Attention (FOL S5)**. Similar to the FOL about perception, this was originally used to build a strong, coherent constituency to align the colonies during the French and Indian War [18]. Later, Paul Revere used an adaptation of the snake cartoon in 1774 [20], and during the revolution the snake would continue as “a symbol of patriotic unity with the motto: ‘Don’t Tread on Me’” [21]. Such **slogans** serve to encapsulate a movement, rally and unite individuals, and form and strengthen the **constituencies** necessary to take action, initiate programs, and catalyze change.

Massachusetts needed more than its control of Lexington’s perception and the era’s popular slogans, though, to garner the **constituency** necessary for a vote on a Continental Army. Fortunately, other events played into their hand. Congress soon found itself advising New York on how to deal with “a rumor that British troops were on their way to the city” [3]. Congress formed two committees; the first was “to consider the general defensive needs of [New York],” and on the committee was “Virginia delegate George Washington” [3]. The second committee was called the Committee of the Whole [3]. While a constituency had been brewing, formal steps were finally underway, and momentum was in the direction of launching a standing Army for the colonies. An initial motion in May 1775 to raise an army from Virginian Richard Henry Lee met a mixed reaction and no resolution, but then another fortuitous event occurred [3]. Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen seized Fort Ticonderoga, with intelligence gleaned from the capture causing “Congress to assume that the British planned to use troops stationed in Canada against the colonies” [3]. This military accomplishment by Arnold and Allen represents the following supplemental FOL: **Timing is Everything (FOL S1)**.

The information from Arnold and Allen at Ticonderoga as well as follow-on reports from Arnold of British military maneuvers within the month of May came at a critical moment [3]. Between the perception of the British firing first at Lexington, New England’s lobbying, and New York’s rising concerns, the new information from Arnold came at just the right time to solidify a **constituency** in Congress that resolved to form an Army for the colonies. On 14 June, “Congress adopted ‘the American continental army’” via the Committee of the Whole [3]. This was no small achievement for the colonies; such a constituency took time and a confluence of shaping events that leveraged supporting

FOLs before the necessary constituency voted for an Army. Recall that a standing army was anathema to colonial political ideology, and colonies favored localism. Despite this, British interactions with the colonists coupled with escalation of military action on both sides pushed Congress to unite as a **constituency** to form a Continental Army to counter the fabled British military. Were it not for Congress' ability to unite as a constituency and vote, the Continental Army would not have been instituted in 1775.

The final matter to attend to was the selection of the Army's commander. George Washington had some experience on defense matters, including his advisement on the defense committee for New York [3]. Perhaps most importantly, his "modesty and competence" coupled with him having "taken to wearing his old uniform" to the Continental Congress contributed to a **perception** of his military leadership and operational acumen [3]. In short, Washington's behavior led others to see him as a military guru and a possible choice for military command. This is important, because **Politics Believes in Gurus in Heroes (FOL S4)**. His June 16 appointment as commanding general of the Continental Army was unanimous [22]. Furthermore, Congress so believed in his military prowess that they "granted him extensive powers which combined functions of a regular British commander with the military responsibilities of a colonial governor" [3]. His open-ended and unclear guidance coupled with limited oversight and Congressional guidance on how to staff, man, and stand up the initial force gave away the degree to which Congress viewed him as a **guru** [3]. Historian Dr. Wright likened it to a "blank check" [3]. Given the consequences of failure in rebelling against the King of England, the Congress clearly trusted and believed in Washington's ability to perform an undertaking greater than anything he had previously done.

III. Administration and Operations in the War for Independence

A. Campaigns in 1775 and 1776

Days after the creation of the Continental Army, but before Washington could take command and begin shaping his force, militiamen in New England engaged in the battle of Bunker Hill [2]. Though the British took the hill in what was technically a victory, they suffered significant losses and the colonists proved themselves formidable fighters [2]. The British commanders "realized that Boston, politically and militarily, was a poor British base" from which to quell the rebellion in the colonies [2]. Militarily, moving to a more favorable location was the best option, but political influences from the crown sought to "win the war, not give up territory" [2]. King George set a hardliner tone in dealing with the rebellion, and while the ultimate strategy did have the British moving on from Boston to other territories, developing this plan took much time [23]. Also, having just pushed the rebels forces out of Bunker Hill at great cost, the King hardened his resolve to defeat the rebellion and ultimately decided to send an additional "2,000 reinforcements to Boston without delay" [14]. The political influences from the crown led British Generals Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne to remain at Boston despite their tactical assessments suggesting otherwise [2]. In the interim, American forces made advancements and territorial gains that otherwise could have been averted had the British maneuvered out of Boston [2].

This is an example of the following FOL: **The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions (FOL 5)**. In the wake of a Pyrrhic Bunker Hill victory, the British Army faced two choices: retain the territory in Boston or depart Boston for other colonies (such as New York). The political arguments took time to finalize the British strategy, exacerbated in part by communications delays caused by the ocean crossing [23]. Furthermore, in light of the devastating news arriving in London about casualties at Lexington, Concord, and now Bunker Hill, the British political desire was to present tangible results for the war effort (in this case, holding land in Boston) [2, 23]. Tactically, however, the ground commanders knew remaining in Boston made little sense, and instead maneuvering the British Army to other territories gave greater opportunity and advantage to the well-trained British regulars. This could possibly reinforce British efforts elsewhere while diverting or thwarting American efforts in less politically unified or more tactically vulnerable colonies [2]. Despite this, the best political solution was to remain, in part because of appearances and in part because Britain could not solidify its own strategy in a timely manner (which would ultimately refocus efforts from Boston to elsewhere) [2]. This decision to stay bought time to finalize a strategy while also holding territory to symbolize victory and control [2].

However, this decision gave the Continental Army time, too, allowing Washington to travel to Boston, take command, and meet General Howe's forces at Dorchester in March of 1776 [2]. Thus, the best political decision ultimately left the British facing a potential repeat of Bunker Hill in a tactically disadvantageous colony [2]. Eventually, the British decided to flee Boston for New York, a full 8 months after their decision window opened post-Bunker Hill [2]. **Politics, Not Technology, Controls What Technology is Allowed to Achieve (FOL 1)**, and in this case politics prevented the British Army from acting rapidly and decisively, costing it an 8 month window on which it could have decisively maneuvered to more advantageous theaters. For the Continental Army, a stationary British force was advantageous. Washington relied on "[s]low but steady recruiting" to develop his force to the point where, eventually, he "could begin to apply pressure on General Howe in Boston" [3]. The British, who would eventually leave Boston regardless, now gave the appearance that they were leaving because of the Continental Army's slowly amassing force [3]. Their departure after the Dorchester encounter, which was not a battle, "gave [Washington] his first victory" [3]. Had the British simply left earlier, they would have taken advantage of time and would have avoided the **perception** of defeat as they departed.

The tactical advantage for the Americans in Boston was because of a Political FOL: **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential (FOL 3)**. Massachusetts had found itself at the forefront of the Revolution, having endured the flashpoints of Britain's tyranny meeting colonial rebellion (the Boston Massacre), and having created flashpoints of their own (the Tea Party) [24]. Colonies already had traditions of manning militias, and New England's "response to the possibility of armed confrontation with [the] British... had been a strengthening of the militia" [3]. This later became The New England Army, which "consisted of 26 infantry regiments from Massachusetts and 3 each from New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut" [3]. Recall that it was New England militia

that engaged in the first conflict of the war at Lexington and Concord, and New England was the staunchest proponents of forming a Continental Army at the second Continental Congress [3]. In order to sever ties from the crown, New England formed a solid **constituency** from the commoners in the militia, to the New England Army, to its Congressional representatives. This resolve led to a persistent, formidable and engaged populace, as evidenced by its initial combat actions.

This constituency manifested itself in a unified and ready front for meeting the British, and this constituency factored significantly in the British Army's tactical assessment that remaining in Boston was unfavorable. A **strong constituency** is oft necessary for initiating action or programs, and in this case it resulted in expelling the British forces in March 1776. **The FOL of constituency** factored in to the assessment of Boston's tactical favorability, and it also factored into strategic decisions on how the British should go about facing the Continental Army and the war. The British strategy was "strangulation of New England," achieved by taking New York City via a southern approach and connecting along the north-south running Hudson River with British forces descending from Canada [23]. This strategy, coupled with naval blockades, sought to fragment the colonies, **breaking the constituency** in Congress and bringing "colonists... to their senses following one or two spectacular British successes" [23]. Alternately, it could militarily "crush New England," eliminating the strongest voice and historical leader of the rebellion and pro-independence constituency [23]. Such outcomes could effectively fragment Congress and also fragment the population between loyalists and rebels, the result being a weakened constituency that may end in dissolution of the Congress and Continental Army.

The political FOL for **constituency** immediately showed promise for the British and a liability for the Continental Army at Long Island [2]. Under leadership of Generals Howe, Clinton and Cornwallis, the British landed on Long Island in August of 1776 to much fanfare from loyalists [14]. Unlike reception in New England, "Loyalists by the hundreds converged to welcome the invaders, many of them bringing long-hidden supplies of all kinds" [14]. Militarily severing New England via the Hudson had potential to further rally loyalists, possibly giving them greater influence in the affairs of Continental Congress and the ability to more openly communicate their ideas in local communities. This change cascade would favor the British by leveraging anti-constituents, and is an example of how the political FOLs *can guide strategic and operational military decisions*.

In addition to the warm loyalist reception, the British followed through with several victories over the Continental Army, who contributed to its defeats with its own blunders [2]. This furthered the British strategy by casting doubt within the Continental Army, weakening the "American's confidence in themselves and in Washington" [2]. The British would go on to occupy New York City [2], and embarrass Washington at "the surrender of Fort Washington on Saturday, November 16" [14]. The loss of Fort Washington was particularly damaging to the Army and its morale, with Washington stating, "I am wearied almost to death with the retrograde motions of things" [14]. The loss of Fort Washington and retreat south from New York gave the British "more than a

thousand American prisoners,” and fostered doubt and frustration within the Continental Army **constituency** from top to bottom [14].

The British push to pull loyalists into its **constituency** ran into some difficulties. An unfortunate wrinkle in the interplay of the two sides fighting for local constituency in the north manifested itself via atrocities against civilians [14, 23]. Americans decried “the British and the Hessians, as well as the New Jersey Loyalists” over pillaging and raping non-combatant Americans disloyal to the King [14]. This ran anathema to Britain’s attempt at forming a loyalist **constituency** and fragmenting the colonists in New Jersey. Such atrocities may harden the opposition from those on the side of the victims. And despite the Continental Army “defeats at Long Island, White Plains, Harlem, ...Fort Lee, [and] ...retreat across New Jersey,” the British strategy suffered another setback as the Continental Army won the battles at Trenton and Princeton in late 1776 and the first week of 1777 [2, 23]. But winning these battles hinged upon overcoming challenging issues explainable via the political FOLs.

B. Administrating the Army – Enlistments

Washington’s Delaware crossing and victories at Trenton and Princeton relied on tailoring tactics to the limitations of his force [3, 23]. Though conducting a retreat from New York down through New Jersey, Washington managed to leverage maneuver and the strengths of his Army to finally ward off Britain’s superior force, which enjoyed an approximate 1,000 man advantage [23]. The result was “[flushing] the enemy from lower New Jersey,” and “Washington was able to inform Congress that ‘Genl Howe has left no men either at Trenton or Princeton’” [23]. Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles that Washington overcame, though, occurred on December 31st. Traditionally, this was the end of yearlong enlistments and “most experienced troops were to be ‘at Liberty’” on January 1st, 1777 [23]. In other words, Washington was at risk of losing a significant portion of his force after his first successful encounter at Trenton. Had this occurred, the Continental Army would have likely ended its 1776 campaign, surrendering its operational initiative and tempo that let it reengage the British at Trenton and Princeton through the first days of January 1777.

This enlistment dilemma makes sense given the ideological viewpoint of the time. Localism, distrust of strong central governments, and fear of standing armies factored in to yearlong enlistments. Congress itself favored “the militia rather than attempt to recruit more... [due to] practical and ideological reasons” [3]. Rapidity of force generation and geographical dispersion were two other benefits Congress saw in militias, and Congressional delegates “felt that the militia, rather than the regular army, was the military institution which represented the people” [3]. Thus, Washington was saddled with enlistments that terminated at the dawn of each New Year, while also having his regular troops augmented by militias.

This created persistent problems, including the general inconsistency of the militia and regulars, which “would be sometimes brilliant and sometimes just awful” [25]. Militias also had inconsistent equipment and arms [14]. Furthermore, “few men stayed the length

of the war,” and desertions were regular occurrences amongst enlisted, officers, and militia [25]. In addition to creating problems of inconsistency and hampering an ability for the Army to continually mature and build operational capacity, it created tactical problems such as the one Washington faced at the close of 1776. His solution to expiring enlistments was an appeal to patriotism, followed by an appeal for “service to the cause of liberty,” both an attempt to get soldiers to stay longer [23]. Neither had much effect, but the promise of a “ten-dollar cash bounty” retained “more than half of those who were about to go home” [23]. The enlistment setup had some benefits, though the realization of those benefits occurred on a longer, more strategic scale. The effect of using militias and having short enlistments resulted in a continuous cycling of Americans through the Continental Army [25]. At peak, “Washington’s main army... [fluctuated] between ten and thirteen thousand men” [25]. This led to “approximately two hundred fifty thousand Americans,” or “nearly half the adult men in the country,” having served in the Continental Army during the war [25].

This alludes to the first of several Political FOLs that explain how Washington ended up in his New Year’s Eve predicament: **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential (FOL 3)**. Recall that Congress and Americans generally disliked standing armies, and Congress held a preference for militias. Militias had diverse social and geographical makeups across the colonies. Furthermore, enlistment windows ensured a revolving door for the Continental Army, creating a large cadre of veterans. This harkens to Congress’ belief that Revolution “demanded the full participation of society” [3]. The war for independence was the defining moment for the people, not only the Congress or the Army. Thus, increasing participation across a larger group of Americans made more people shareholders in the Revolution and brought the war home as enlistments expired and soldiers returned to their homesteads. Recall the large loyalist reception at Long Island; diluting large populations of loyalists or those who were ambivalent with American veterans would result in a gradual pro-Revolution shift of public sentiment across the colonies. Shoring up a constituency that supported independence was a critical requirement for establishing the United States. A constituency of pro-Revolution Americans had to advocate for and act on behalf of the country in militias, the Continental Army, and members of their local communities. This in a sense meant that the Continental Army and the militia were **performing multiple missions** in order to win the Revolution. First, they had to serve tactical and operational purposes to fight and win the war. Second, they served strategic purposes that created patriotic stakeholders in the Revolution, who would in turn support independence from Britain and the establishment of a new country. Franklin’s historic snake cartoon with the **slogan**, “Join, or Die.” epitomizes this [19]. The Army could be likened to the teeth of the snake, the Congress the head, and unified Americans the body. All would need to work in concert to win.

Congress’ pursuit of this **constituency** and its multiple missions still left tactical problems for Washington, and this highlights the following Political FOL: **The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions (FOL 5)**. The annual inflow of green soldiers and outflow of experienced soldiers meant a loss of tactical knowledge and capacity, which hindered institutional growth and learning. Reliance on militias, while sometimes advantageous and very helpful, proved

troublesome due to the inconsistencies and the militia's unreliable nature. Washington held a low opinion on the use of militias, stating, "The Dependence which the Congress has placed upon the Militia... I fear will totally ruin, our Cause" [23]. While he acknowledged the militia provided some usefulness, his overall assessment was continually negative [23]. Complaints included desertion, a burden on the Army's support systems, and theft of "the Continental's precious equipment" [23]. In the eyes of Washington, they were not always worth the extra difficulties they brought with them [23]. Thus, for the ground commander of the Continental Army, the best technical military solution was to raise and rely upon regular enlistments and commissions in the Continental Army. This is because of the militia's unreliability and inconsistency, which prompted Washington to attempt "to convince the politicians to enlist troops for the duration of the war" [26]. However, the best political solution was to rely on both militias and yearly enlistment of regular soldiers in the Continental Army because this aligned with the prevailing ideology. Also, it furthered the development of a **constituency** of Americans who held a personal stake in the American Revolution.

The preceding highlights how politics may make a tradeoff that hampers development of a system or institution. This is outlined in the following Political FOL: **Politics, Not Technology, Controls What Technology is Allowed to Achieve (FOL 1)**. In this case, the "technology" is the Continental Army, an institution. The Continental Army could have achieved greater institutional learning, stability and tactical and operational capability through longer enlistments and a lower level of reliance on militias. This may have resulted in more decisive and effective engagements with the British Army, and possibly even a shortening of the war. However, the Continental Congress limited the Continental Army to enduring unreliable militia support and continual annual enlistment expirations, causing capability decreases and even risky tactical problems such as the one Washington experienced on New Year's Eve, 1776. This is because the Continental Congress acted according to the ideology that was averse to standing armies, favored localism, and sought to build constituency amongst all Americans by pushing the use of militias to augment the Continental Army. The "Militiamen were extremely parochial," and "were fighting for the United States, to be sure, but they were really fighting for their state and county" [25]. By incorporating these militiamen, the Continental Congress fulfilled its strategy of following the revolution's guiding ideology whilst creating national stakeholders within local communities across the colonies. General Washington would simply have to find ways to overcome the tactical and operational challenges the militia created.

Washington's successes in New Jersey at the close of 1776 and dawn of 1777 had some positive fallouts for both alternatives, though. Recall the Political FOL: **Politics Believes in Gurus and Heroes (FOL S4)**. Washington's victories against the odds continued to reinforce his status as a guru, with a newspaper article even suggesting he could "be worshiped as a god" [14]. Washington would leverage his victory in a request to Congress for "[more] infantry regiments, more artillery, and a force of cavalry" [3]. Congress approved Washington's request with unusual alacrity, "[acting] upon [his] requests within a month" [3]. Washington was able to parlay victories into support for his alternative, gaining more regular troops and units. Also, the best political solution for

handling enlistments would change. Several factors influenced Congress' thought process, such as Washington's history of advising against yearlong enlistments, Washington's rising lore as a military **guru**, as well as the near catastrophic losses during the New York retreat [23]. For 1777 and on, "men were to enlist for longer periods, up to three years" [23].

This represents a shift in the outcome for the following FOL: **The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions (FOL 5)**. This is because the political landscape changed significantly following the winter of 1776. The Continental Army suffered stinging defeats and an embarrassing retreat across New York. However, Washington, against great odds, recovered by rallying his army to several victories. This proved what the Continental Army was capable of, while also proving Washington's resolve and leadership. It now made political sense to give Washington more of what he wanted, while also answering for the defeats in New York. Furthermore, the victories rallied support amongst Americans and "energized the American rebellion," with Washington observing that the "Militia are taking spirit" [23]. **Constituency** made it more politically fashionable to support regular troops, though Congress did not fully capitulate, as the militia remained and Washington's original request "to enlist troops for the duration of the war" never came to be [26].

Note the importance of a military victory on the Political FOLs. Without victory at Trenton and Princeton, the story would have been of Washington's failure as he retreated out of New York, New Jersey, and into Delaware, with his **guru** status threatened by a long, losing campaign in 1776. Fortunately, the Continental Army closed the campaign with two victories, gaining new support and administrative improvements from Congress. Washington added to his legend, and the rebellion's **constituency** grew. These events added momentum to the Americans' cause.

C. 1777 to Valley Forge

The British would finally receive word of the 1776 campaign's close "in the last two weeks of February 1777," and would "finally approve a plan for campaign 1777 [in] the last week in March" [23]. Having to deal with the Atlantic crossing slowed information passage on the British side, explaining the month gap before the British learned of Trenton and Princeton. Prior to that, "the war remained popular in an [unaware] England," but as news hit, an immediate "clamor swelled among the foes of ministerial policy" [23]. This impacted **constituency** on the British home front. Consider, too, that while the communications were being ferried, both General Howe and the British ministry were continuing to operate under different planning considerations. The British, pleased with progress in New York and Fort Washington, continued to enjoy the **perception** that Campaign 1776 was going as expected while, unbeknownst to them, their fortunes had turned in New Jersey [3, 23]. The British ministry were planning 1777 in December and had General Howe's recommendations to work with, which were "prepared on November 30" of 1776 [23]. They also had General Burgoyne's recommendations, which were prepared before Princeton and Trenton [23].

Meanwhile, General Howe had to make winter camp and prepare for Campaign 1777 with a full understanding of the reality of his situation as the commander on the ground, but he had limited campaign guidance from the crown. And as the British ministry continued to draft campaign plans, they would periodically receive new information plans from General Howe that would further drift from the ministry's original plan "of seizing control of the Hudson from Albany to New York" [23]. For example, one of Howe's updated plans arrived "[o]n February 23, just four days before [the ministry] intended to recommend Burgoyne's plan" over Howe's prior plan [23]. Eventually, the ministry approved a rather fragmented campaign, only to receive a new update from General Howe, proposing "to take his army from New York to Philadelphia by sea" [23]. This is far from an ideal planning environment. Also consider that as Generals Burgoyne and Howe are sending recommendations, they may lack full, up to date awareness of what each other's armies are doing.

This is an example of **Timing is Everything (FOL S1)**; the communication delays made unified planning efforts with clear operational pictures extremely difficult. Just when the ministry felt it had a solid picture and could proceed with a campaign plan, updated information would arrive. Note, though, that by the time this information arrived, it could very well be out of date. This impacted **constituency (FOL 3)**, as a unified planning front between Burgoyne, Howe, and the British ministry became near impossible. Also, there was a reaction delay as positive and negative news took time to arrive. This could allow momentum in one direction to snowball to the point where, by the time contrary information arrives, it is too late to reverse course. These delays also impacted the ability to select from alternative campaign plans, which ties to **FOL 5: The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions**. The political environment was based on delayed, incomplete, and possibly outdated information and **perception** weighed heavily. The best **engineering** or **technical** solution may not get delivered on time to be effectively actioned, or it may arrive too late to overcome political momentum. Edmund Burke surmised the problem for the British Empire [23]:

"Seas roll, and months pass, between the order and execution... and the want of a speedy explanation of a single point is enough to defeat a whole system." – Edmund Burke [23]

Eventually, the campaign would begin as General Howe pulled his forces from New York and set off to capture the Continental Congress' home in Philadelphia [27]. This was to be a quick undertaking, and the British ministry "presumed there would be ample time for [Howe] to 'cooperate with the Northern Army'" [23]. The Northern Army, commanded by British General Burgoyne, was intended to campaign in Northern New York and New England [23, 27]. But General Burgoyne fared poorly, as General Horatio Gates defeated him "at Bemis Heights, cut him off from Ticonderoga, and forced [him] to surrender on 17 October" at Saratoga [3]. With nearly six thousand men, their arms, and their equipment seized, the battle at Saratoga represented a significant victory [3, 23]. Interestingly, though, "[o]ver two-thirds of the Northern Department's soldiers... were militiamen from New England and New York," making Continentals the minority [3]. The main body of the Continental Army would fare worse in Pennsylvania, where they held a significant troop deficit to Howe's approaching forces [2]. With relatively little

effort, “the British and Germans occupied Philadelphia,” forcing Congress to relocate [2]. Washington, unable to retake Philadelphia, mounted a late 1777 attack in Germantown in an attempt to repeat 1776’s closing successes [3]. While reminding the British of his existence and persistence, the attack failed to translate into anything actionable [3].

With 1777 closing, the Continental Army withdrew to camp at Valley Forge [2, 3, 23]. During the unfavorable winter weather, armies would camp, regroup, and prepare for next year’s campaign [3, 25]. And while “[e]ncampment, and a cessation of campaigning, was essential for rehabilitating, training, and preserving the soldiery,” doing so was far from being a risk-free endeavor [23]. Supplying the Continental Army was continually challenging, and Congress and the political process influenced, positively and negatively, these challenges.

In politics, **Cost Rules (FOL 2)**, and this would prove true for the Continental Congress. Salaries and inflation would cause problems for Congress and the Continental Army, specifically in the Commissary Department, with “Congress’s reluctance to increase wages [stemming] from its concern with keeping down the costs of war” [10]. Furthermore, standing up a country and its currency led Congress to “finance the war by emissions of paper money, [and they] issued \$31 million by the end of 1777” [10]. Congressional emissions of currency, the volatile tides of war, and America’s nascent, unestablished political status led to currency devaluation [10]. This led to creating a sub-optimal funding profile, as low wages collided with a depreciating currency. “Commissary General Trumbull was dissatisfied with congressional pay policy,” finding his pay incommensurate with his work and the commissions policy inequitable across Continental Army support agencies [10]. For example, other agencies that “engaged in procuring supplies received a commission while [Trumbull] did not” [10]. This may have been to encourage more than one means for acquiring provisions, but the effect was to discourage and disillusion the Commissary General. General Trumbull’s insistence on receiving a commission resulted in him quitting in summer 1777, setting off a cascade of resignations throughout the Commissary Department over pay and wages [10].

Congress found itself approaching an economic death spiral, because when “Congress had raised... pay, compensation continued to lag behind the increase in prices” due to inflation resulting from spending and emission of money [10]. Departures over wages necessitated replacements, but quality replacements were scarce [10]. Effectively, Congress “[returned] the Commissary Department to the inexperienced and inefficient days of 1775” [10]. Inflation, funding, and Congressional folly also impacted the local purchases of supply, and at Valley Forge, Washington found himself unable to compete in the local economy [23]. When seeking food for encampment, the financially fluent British “not only paid more, they paid in specie, while the Continentals offered a depreciated paper currency” [23]. Additionally, Congressional labor regulations sought to control army expenditures and thus “limited the price of hiring a wagon, driver, and four horses,” but operators found better offers on the open market [10]. This limited the Continental Army’s ability to resupply itself, as their regulatory spending cap was misaligned with true market values for transporting goods [10]. The situation at Valley Forge left the Continental Army in a dire state, with morale running low and soldiers

pondering desertion [28]. In fact, “more than 1,100 of Washington’s soldiers defected to the British [encampment] in Philadelphia,” which enjoyed lavish conditions and a burgeoning red light district [23]. General Washington described it to Congress as such [28]:

“The... deficiencies in the Article of Provisions... seem now on the point of resolving themselves into this fatal Crisis, total want and dissolution of the Army.” – General George Washington [28]

This situation represents a Political FOL cascade. **Cost Rules (FOL 2)** necessitated that a fledgling, new country in war for independence manage funds tightly. Congress saw salaries as a way to manage costs, but the result was disgruntlement amongst employees, particularly in the Continental Army’s Commissary Department. This resulted in loss of **constituency (FOL 3)** in the department, fragmenting the organization as resignations arrived from commissary general down. Offering wage increases did little, though, as Congress’ method for funding via cash emissions coupled with fluctuating trust and confidence in the American currency created depreciation. In fact, adding more currency via wage increases ran the risk of increasing depreciation, thus negating the wage increase altogether. This depreciation, along with the Congressional “effort to hold down the cost of labor” via wagon hiring regulations, put the Continental Army at a competitive disadvantage for acquiring goods on the local economy [10]. This all stemmed from **cost ruling** decision-making, resulting in suboptimal funding and poor financial techniques to keep government and the war effort afloat.

Cost Rules (FOL 2) fed another Political FOL: **Political Problems Become Technical Problems (FOL S2)**. As the **constituency** at the Commissary Department splintered, replacements lacked quality and experience, and Congress had difficulty recruiting [10]. **Timing is everything (FOL S1)**, and this splintering of the commissariat occurred in the summer and fall of 1777, which would normally be a critical time to prepare supply chains and plan logistics for winter encampment [10]. As the commissary department floundered and attempted to rebuild its capacity and unit cohesion (**constituency**), Washington found himself at a disadvantage on the local market and enduring difficult conditions at Valley Forge [10, 23]. Other factors did contribute to the hardships, such as the Army’s lack of logistical expertise and the choice of Valley Forge, a location “[b]oth armies had picked over” in recent campaigns [23]. But to have the administrative support mechanism, the Commissary Department, in its current state was a significant factor in the hardships [10]. The results were **technical problems**, with Washington having to quell threats of desertion, manage his troops through “a sustained period of poor nutrition,” and sustain the Army through “a squalid environment... and the stench of death” [23].

This would come full circle via the Political FOL: **Technical Problems Become Political Problems (FOL 4)**. The Continental Army’s numerous technical problems at Valley Forge were administrative and support-based in nature, and the Army’s Commander in Chief warned of suffering great enough to create total disbandment of the force [28]. Something had to be done. Congressional investigation followed, and “in

January 1778 [Congress] dispatched a committee... with broad powers to investigate and reform the staff departments" [10]. The committee assessed the Quartermaster, Commissary, and Hospital Departments, and made recommendations counter to the prevailing mindset of the era [10]. First, they recommended "to increase the power of the quartermaster general" and to provide "a salary commensurate with the importance of the offices" [10]. Second, the committee recommended the same for the Commissary Department [10]. Finally, the committee glossed over "the Hospital Department except to lament the high mortality rate," though they relayed that "the soldiers expressed no complaints against their surgeons or physicians" [10]. The first two recommendations essentially decreased Congressional involvement (and thus oversight) and created a significant gain in power and autonomy for the Quartermaster and Commissariat. This recommendation to centralize power in the departments at the expense of Congress "reinforced Congress's general distrust of the military" [10]. The President of the Continental Congress, Henry Laurens, went so far as to attack the report for not pinning failures to specific names [10]. In short, "[the] congressman reduced the entire logistical problem... to incompetent and dishonest staff officers" [10].

Amidst bickering over the political fallout and the very important task of blame assignment, the reality of the 1777 campaign loomed [3, 10, 23]. Despite battlefield successes in the North, the British held Philadelphia and General Howe's formidable Army was not yet defeated [2, 3]. This was another **technical problem** in the prosecution of the war effort that only compounded the existing **political problem**. However, it was enough to force resolution, as "[t]he experience of wartime failure was beginning to make inroads on the ideological assumptions of many congressman" [10]. The committee's recommendations on centralization of power were followed for the Commissary and Quartermaster departments [10]. General Nathaniel Greene became quartermaster, Jeremiah Wadsworth commissariat, and "Congress reversed its longstanding opposition to paying staff officers on a commission basis" [10].

While this would not be the end of the Continental Army's supply problems [10], it is an interesting example of how the Political FOLs can compound a problem and even come full circle. In an attempt to handle **cost**, Congress unintentionally hamstrung its administrative departments, causing a break in **constituency** in the commissary that weakened the Continental Army's administrative arm and created political problems as Congress scrambled to rebuild the Commissary. This fallout over wages occurred at the worst possible **time**: the buildup before winter encampment. The result of **political** mishandling of the Commissary Department was a **technical problem** at Valley Forge in the form of soldiers suffering greatly, leading to Army experiencing a weakening **constituency** as desertion and disbandment threats rose. This **technical problem** of fixing the administrative and supply failures needed a solution, which then created a **political problem** over how to move forward. This all leads to Political **FOL 1: Politics, Not Technology, Controls What Technology is Allowed to Achieve**. The Continental Army could have achieved a more successful encampment at Valley Forge. However, it had been limited by the political process to enduring persistent supply and nourishment issues due to the political process' mishandling of the Commissary Department and funding. Because of these issues, Washington assessed that his Army came close to total

disbandment, which would have effectively ended the war for the Americans [28]. While the Army emerged from Valley Forge, the hardships and loss of life during the encampment could have been far lower had the political process enabled a more successful supply system.

Valley Forge was not the only **technical problem** to cause **political problems (FOL 4)** at the close of 1777. Gates' forces of primarily militiamen won a staggering victory, while Washington's force of primarily regulars had no clear victories to celebrate as it struggled during Valley Forge [3]. These technical challenges and defeats for the Continental Army in 1777 created **political problems** for Washington and Congress [3]. The debate over militia reliance was now back in the spotlight after "a smashing victory" at Saratoga, while "Washington, most of the senior officers, and other delegates" argued in favor of retaining the current Continental Army setup [3]. There was also a personal **political problem** for Washington, whose 1777 Campaign was compared to Gates' [3, 23]. Chatter erupted, as "members of Congress, particularly New Englanders, wondered why Gates... should not replace Washington, who did little but retreat" [2]. Ultimately, Washington's **constituency** in Congress would come through, as would the **timing** of the debate [2]. Not only did "Washington [have] enough allies in Congress," but he also had **constituency** "in the army itself" [2]. While technical problems with the execution of campaign 1777 created (and reignited) **political problems**, the problems were ultimately defused in favor of Washington's continued leadership [3, 23]. In the end, reason prevailed in the debate as "Congress understood that [Washington] had faced a stronger British force" [23]. Additionally, **Timing is Everything**, and "Valley Forge... was hardly a propitious moment for Congress to risk a crisis over changing its commander" [23]. Changing command at this time would fracture **constituency** within the force. Washington and the Continental Army remained as is and continued to prepare for 1778.

D. Treaty with France

The events of 1777 helped shape 1778 and beyond, specifically with regards to the Political **FOL 3: A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential**. As news of Saratoga and Burgoyne's surrender arrived in London, "the fury of the Opposition knew no bounds" [23]. Discord befell parliament, and public sentiment quickly devolved as "Germain [the British minister] and [General] Howe were mercilessly flayed in the press and Parliament" [23]. The **technical problem** of an unsuccessful 1777 military campaign quickly became a **political problem** for the British (**FOL 4**). Somebody had to pay for the challenges; General Howe was soon replaced with General Clinton [2]. Changing military command amidst a war can impact **constituency** as it impacts unit cohesion, trust, and understanding within the unit and between subordinates and leadership. Howe, respected by the British officers and loyalists, received a lavish sendoff [2]. The new commander and the unit would have to learn each other and rebuild cohesion to wage an effective campaign in 1778 and beyond.

Things were going differently for the Americans, as Benjamin Franklin had been in Paris for over a year, and was now leveraging Saratoga so as to broaden Congress' **constituency** [23]. The French had been providing support to the American cause of independence, and as time progressed, that support grew more open [3, 14, 23]. In winter

of 1778, Congress' diplomatic efforts gave way to "a treaty of military alliance that would leave France to decide on the timing of its belligerency" [23]. Furthermore, the alliance included a "provision that [stated] that the partners 'mutually engage not to lay down their arms until [achieving] the independence of the United States'" [23]. This is another example of momentum, as America was gradually pulling France into its **constituency** until they were finally comfortable enough to make a formal treaty. The British and French were historic competitors in the race to settle new world, and the British foresaw "the virtual certainty of Anglo-French hostilities" [23]. The budding relationship between the United States and France forced the British to reconsider their strategy, and the discombobulated British ministry, amidst hostile press and infighting, developed its "Southern Strategy" over concerns about French designs for the Caribbean [23].

For the British, **technical problems** in war **became political problems (FOL 4)** that wreaked havoc on **constituency**. For the Americans, **technical success** in war **became political opportunities**. Now, with France in the picture, "the thirteen colonies were no longer to be the main effort of the war" for London [23]. The evolution of **constituency** effectively reshaped British strategy, and did so in favor of the American cause. **The best technical solution** for the British prosecution of war in the colonies succumbed to **the best political solution (FOL 5)**, which now had to account for France's motivations in other theaters. The political situation of 1778 was vastly different than in the earlier years, as the British no longer enjoyed a solid pro-war constituency, and international players such as France were openly forming alliances. Now, the political picture changed, and while still important, the colonies were but one theater in what the British projected to be a multi-front war [2, 23]. Of note, communications again played an interesting role in establishing the treaty with France. Franklin had led the forging of an "unauthorized military alliance," the news of which "took weeks... to cross the Atlantic" [23]. Thus, initial Congressional planning for 1778 occurred with no idea of alliance, and news of the treaty would not arrive until May [23].

E. Campaign 1778 to Yorktown

The British began their long movement from Philadelphia under new leadership from General Clinton [2, 23]. The British would "give up Philadelphia but hold New York, and... send most of [the] men to Florida and the Caribbean" [2]. The Continental Army would engage Clinton's forces at Monmouth, with General Lee in command [2, 3, 23, 25]. Lee's tactical acumen would come under question after he commanded a retreat and Washington took over mid-battle [3]. "Lee's behavior under fire had been credible," but poor maneuvering from a subordinate unit commanded by Lafayette and the fog of battle led Lee to see no other option but retreat [23]. Washington furiously chastised Lee mid-battle [23, 25]. Then, "George Washington, on his white horse, rode back and forth in front of the American lines to yell out orders and rally the troops" despite the grave danger he exposed himself to [25]. Enlisted and officers later "gushed that Washington had saved the day," adding to the stature and legend of Washington [23]. After what is oft-considered a draw at Monmouth, Clinton withdrew his force overnight to make passage to New York [3, 23].

Washington was the central figure in the Continental Army and its prosecution of the ground war, and his battlefield actions further entrenched him as the indisputable military **guru** of his time. It also continued to strengthen his **constituency**, with soldiers across ranks singing praise of his actions. General Lee, though, had the **stink** of retreat sticking to him. Recall that **Politics Believes in Gurus and Heroes, And Once Tarnished, Forever Untrustworthy (Stink Sticks) (FOL S4)**. Soldiers saw Washington's scathing, explicative-laden encounter with Lee on the battlefield, and competing subordinate officers volleyed post-battle rumors about Lee's character and capability [23]. Lee "self-destructed" and unprofessionally "complained loudly about his mistreatment" [23]. Lee "demanded a court martial... to clear his name," which an unhappy Washington gladly delivered upon [23]. Historian John Ferling contests "that the evidence exonerated Lee on the two most serious charges" [23]. However, Lee "was convicted on both charges" [23]. Disrespecting a revered war-time commander did not weigh favorably, nor did it help that Washington's **constituency** extended into the judicial realm, with many "judges [having] served under Washington" [23]. Lee **tarnished** his name, deservedly or not, in the battle of Monmouth. **Once tarnished**, he could not overcome the events of that day, nor could he overcome his later unprofessional challenges to Washington and his broad **constituency**. As Clinton departed Monmouth, so too did Lee's career.

Clinton's arrival in New York was enabled by **Timing is everything (FOL S1)**, as "the French fleet arrived off the Delaware" a week too late to intercept Clinton [2]. British departure from New York to the south was another example of **constituency** influencing strategy, as "the loyalty of the Carolinas and Georgia" resulted in only "token resistance" when the British arrived [2]. Additionally, the British were "offering freedom to slaves who deserted their rebel masters" [23]. The French fleet moved north to assist in efforts in New England, but ultimately abandoned the siege of Newport to pursue the British in the Caribbean, much to the frustration of New Englanders [2, 23]. Furthermore, John Adams' travels to France left him questioning France's reliability [23]. Campaigning in 1778 concluded with the British seeking to bolster **constituency** in the southern slave states in an attempt to salvage some form of victory, while the Americans sought to retake New York and Newport with little luck [23].

In 1779, several developments started to impact the Continental Army and the revolution. Spain entered the **constituency** when it "declared war on England in April" [2]. This would lead to "the allies [possessing] naval superiority" [23]. More significantly, though, the British now faced three wars. **A strong, coherent constituency is essential** to obtaining military victory, and through simple membership, America's constituency now held a tactical, operational, and strategic advantage over the British. This opened new opportunities for the American war at sea, and "[t]he American ability to attack so close to the English coast and threats from Spain, France, and Holland demoralized the British public" [2]. Not only did parliament have to wage a multi-front war, but now there was a war for public sentiment [23]. The British **constituency** was weakening further. As John Adams would say, "[Europe] universally and Sincerely united in the Desire of reducing [Britain]" [23].

Things were going differently in the southern states, however, as the British occupied Savannah and were threatening Charleston [23, 29]. General Benjamin Lincoln, responsible for Charleston, demanded additional troops of Congress to defend the city [23]. Congress was perturbed at how the south had “furnished little help to the northern states” whilst having “neglected themselves” [23]. However, Lincoln used an adaptation of **Cost Rules (FOL 2)** to leverage support [23]. In addition to constant reminders of Charleston’s importance to the South and the United States, “[Lincoln] fudged [troop numbers] considerably, reporting that he possessed 2,400 men,” though “[in] reality, he believed that he might have nearly four times that number” [23]. Oftentimes, requests to Congress must understate costs necessary to achieve consent for a plan or request. In this case, General Lincoln understated his force so as to paint a bleaker situation, serving multiple motives such as convincing Congress to send reinforcements or to temper operational expectations for the force. While most likely a lie, Lee may have been able to justify such a claim on the fluid nature of militia memberships. Regardless, eventually “Congress... ordered reinforcements sent to Charleston” [3]. Many of those who arrived would ultimately be captured as the British seized Charleston [2, 23]. The British imprisoned around “5,700 American soldiers,” of which about “2,500... were Continental soldiers” [23].

Cost Rules (FOL 2) continued to be problematic, as currency printing to manage large budgets and expenditures led to the near total devaluation of Continental currency [10]. Congressional military expenditures between 1775 and 1776 totaled just over \$20 million, and by 1779 had surpassed \$149 million, all performed with printed money [10]. Congress lacked buying power and drove the cost of goods prohibitively high, unto the point were “in March 1780, ...Congress essentially declared bankruptcy, repudiated its own currency, and resolved to retire its outstanding bills” [10]. This **political problem** led to a **technical problem (FOL S2)**, as economic woes were snowballing in the months before “the three-year enlistments of 1777 [were set to] expire” for the Continental Army [3]. Washington suggested regulars “cost less than constantly calling out the militia,” and soon Congress employed state quotas for recruiting backed by drafts when recruitment failed to meet numbers [3].

Troubles continued as Horatio Gates suffered defeat at Camden and South Carolina fell into disarray [2]. **Constituency** problems occurred as General Arnold’s defection in 1780 filled Washington “with rage,” causing him to question, “Whom can we trust now?” [23]. Public sentiment turned to worry, fueled by “chatter in newspapers about what had gone wrong in the war” [23]. The last decisive Continental Army victory occurred in 1777 at Saratoga [2]. But recall that “[o]ver two-thirds” of Saratoga’s force “were militiamen” [3]. Furthermore, an accomplished military **guru**, General Arnold, **forever tarnished his name** as he turned against the rebels he had fought alongside for so long [2, 23]. **Constituency (FOL 3)** suffered further blows when “Pennsylvania troops mutinied” over “grievances connected to lack of food, clothing, back pay, and enlistment time” [25]. **Cost Rules**, and the economic troubles of Continental Congress were catching up to the Army’s ability to sustain itself. Washington understood “mutinies were an inevitable consequence of ‘keeping an army without pay’” [2]. To the British, this suggested a **constituency** crumbling across the colonies [25]. General Greene, now in charge of the

Army in the south, could not win full engagements with the British, but instead resorted to “guerrilla and hit-and-run warfare” [29]. In another (and in this case more direct) blow to morale, Washington’s “Mount Vernon [home] had... been the target of a raid” [23]. American efforts were stagnant, and momentum had slowed. It would take rekindling the strong **constituency (FOL 3)** with America’s ally, France, to reverse American fortunes [2, 23].

War in the south continued as General Greene halted Cornwallis’ northern thrust at Guilford Courthouse, forcing Cornwallis to fall back and eventually reposition at Yorktown [2]. Washington had no designs of moving south, despite meeting with French Commander Rochambeau, who recommended “a campaign against the British Army in Virginia” [23]. Despite insisting upon retaking New York, Washington offered flexibility “should a French fleet ‘arrive upon the Coast’” [23]. After the meeting, Rochambeau “secretly called [Comte de] Grasse to sail for the Chesapeake,” ultimately getting his way by manipulating Washington’s offer [23]. French naval maneuvers and Rochambeau’s Army augmented Washington, and the Continentals set forth to siege Cornwallis’ force at Yorktown [3]. Facing a superior force, British General Cornwallis would surrender in October 1781, and the war appeared to be over [2, 3, 23].

IV. Disbanding the Continental Army

As focuses shifted post-Yorktown, Washington worried over finality, and “remained skeptical that peace was at hand” [23]. Congress found itself in a precarious political situation. The economy had yet to recover from Congress’ bankruptcy and the market chaos of inflation, and Congress “wanted to trim expenses” [3]. Concerns also existed over the wait for a peace treaty, continued British presence in colonies, and general concerns about “a world of dangerous superpowers” coupled with the unsettled American frontier [23]. There were two proposals before Congress [3]:

- Force reductions [3] – “A [Congressional] committee recommended cutting... regiments and... officers” [3]
- Leaving the Army intact [3] – Washington proposed leaving things as is given no treaty and the presence of British and loyalists [3]

Washington’s belief was based on his concerns that a proclamation of peace had yet to arrive coupled with his understanding of the tactical scenario [3]. The British had yet to leave Manhattan, and their forces (to include Loyalists) remained together [3]. The Continental Army continually lost soldiers departing for home, and recruitment opportunities dwindled [3]. Congress’ stance was simple: **cost rules (FOL 2)** [3, 23]. With a staggering debt and a nation ready to refocus on rebuilding, Congress had its way despite “Washington [protesting] that the changes particularly impaired the Army’s mobility” [3]. This was of no matter, as explained by the following Political FOL: **The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions (FOL 5)**. Washington, concerned with security amidst a continued British presence and the long wait for a peace treaty, advised that leaving the Continental Army intact was the best technical solution. However, the best political solution differed because of shifting, post-war priorities and Congressional disputes over budgets. **Cost rules (FOL 2)**, and with the

prevailing belief that a peace treaty was coming, Congress went against the recommendations of military **guru** General Washington. The cuts would continue over the next several years [3].

Though hostilities had officially ended in April of 1783, **political problems** with budget and economy created **technical problems (FOL S2)** in the Continental Army [23]. Specifically, “disaffection among the army’s officers arose over the pension issue” [23]. The officers organized and threatened to “disband should the war continue [or] refuse to demobilize should peace come” [23]. The Continental Army knew of and suffered at the hands of Congress’ history of printing money, causing massive debts and inflation. “Hints that Congress might renounce the promise of half-pay [pensions]” circulated, and the **perception** that Congress would renege on its deal grew so strong that conspiracy was afoot [3]. Having just warded off a standing army in a war for independence, the Continental Army’s leadership now threatened to either give way to their defeated foe or to become the enemy of Congress. Dissatisfaction over the **technical problems** of pension payment threatened to become a **political problem (FOL 4)** for Congress. Fortunately, Washington was able to diffuse the “Newburgh Conspiracy” before it spiraled beyond control, and a compromise was reached on pensions [23].

In another display of **FOL 5**, Congress once again would go against Washington’s technical recommendations on a peacetime army as “ideological arguments resurfaced... during the long debate over the legality of any permanent army in peacetime” [3]. In the wake of peace with Britain, Washington recommended a modest yet capable force with elements “assigned to a specific sector of the frontier” [3]. Congress devised its own solution: the post-war Army would start with a mere 700 men [3]. **The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions (FOL 5)**, as evidenced by Congress’ decision. Congress had the potential to retain a broader, more capable force that was tactically and operationally attuned to the United States’ present military needs. Instead, they chose a peacetime Army that held a diminutive footprint, which allowed the majority of its institutional knowledge and experience to depart as each Continental Army veteran’s enlistment expired or as each veteran officer departed sans replacement.

This again leads to **FOL 1: Politics, Not Technology, Controls What Technology is Allowed to Achieve**. The present focus on building the nation, past economic decisions that squandered most opportunity to pay for a larger force (or just about anything), and the ongoing ideological and legal debate about standing armies stood in the way. Had these roadblocks not existed, a more capable force may have remained in place and ushered in the new American era. Instead, the victorious yet weak United States had to gamble its security on geographical dispersion from superpowers, local policing via militias, and a fledgling 700-man standing Army. The reality of the world situation, especially America’s open western frontier, would later ensure that “this small peacetime Regular Army gradually expanded over the next decade” [3].

V. Summarizing The Continental Army’s Victory via the Political FOLs

Washington described the Continental Army's victory as "little short of a standing miracle" [23]. And while divine intervention may provide an explanation, so too do the five primary Political FOLs. It all began with **constituency**. **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential**, and the British actions in the colonies were serving two purposes: weakening their empire's constituency while creating a new American constituency. Actions such as the Quartering Act, Stamp Act, Tea Act, and Intolerable Acts gave way to flashpoints such as the Boston Tea Party and Boston Massacre [12, 24]. This weakened the British empire's **constituency** while simultaneously creating and solidifying a diverging, American **constituency** to the point that it voted to create a standing Continental Army, something anathema to its prevailing ideology.

The initial British actions during the start of the war in Boston in 1775 and early 1776, which benefited The Continental Army, are explainable via **The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions** and **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential**. British troubles in New England stemmed from New England's near impenetrable constituency, making other theaters more advantageous, but the British delayed departing in favor of holding ground due to political reasons centering upon appearance of victory and territorial control [2, 23].

The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions and **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential** explain Washington's predicament in 1776 regarding enlistments. Seeking nationwide constituency and distrusting standing armies led Congress to favor short enlistments and local militia use [3, 23]. This was the best political solution, but not the best technical solution. In summary, **Politics, Not Technology, Controls What Technology is Allowed to Achieve**. The Continental Army would deal with a revolving door of personnel and continually having to retrain and rebuild due to political ideology and decision-making.

Congress would strike again via **Cost Rules**, and unintentionally destroy its own Commissary Department via sub-optimal wage systems and economic mismanagement that ruined **constituency** in the department [10]. This led to technical problems in force sustainment during the Valley Forge encampment, and **Technical Problems Become Political Problems** [10]. Congress had to reform its handling of the support system, and in the process showed once again that **Politics, Not Technology, Controls What Technology is Allowed to Achieve** [10]. If the Commissary was not hamstrung by **Cost Rules**, perhaps the Valley Forge encampment could have gone better for the Continental Army.

Britain's inability to stop the Continental Army in instances such as Trenton, Princeton, and Saratoga proved that **Technical Problems Become Political Problems** [2, 3, 23]. Britain's technical troubles in the tactical war fractured constituency, and **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential** to sustain a costly overseas war effort [23]. Conversely, **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential** to win wars against a superpower such as Britain. America understood this in its alliance with France, which would ultimately lead to allied naval superiority over the British Navy [23]. **Cost Rules**, though, and economic hardships coupled with Congressional bankruptcy challenged the

Army's efforts, including recruiting [3]. Years of no decisive victories and the defection of Benedict Arnold created a malaise in Continental Army advances that harmed constituency [2, 23, 25]. **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential** to victory, and, fortunately, at the decisive moment in Yorktown, the Continental Army worked in coordination with French ground and naval forces [2, 23]. Ultimately, the British were too overwhelmed in dealing with the allied constituency, which spanned multiple continents and countries.

With victory secured, Congress downsized the Continental Army despite an uncertain world and a long wait for a peace treaty, because **The Best Engineering Solutions are not Necessarily the Best Political Solutions** [3]. Economic woes and a focus on domestic issues were of greater political importance than maintaining the now well-established and capable Continental Army [3]. As the Continental Army dwindled down to a small force of 700 men, it showed that **Politics, Not Technology, Controls What Technology is Allowed to Achieve** [3]. Instead of a standing Army ready to face an unknown future and an open western frontier, the Army instead held a diminutive footprint, and Congress could barely afford that.

And all throughout this story, the supporting FOLs influenced the primary FOLs and associated events. **Politics Believes in Gurus and Heroes** such as Washington, Thomas Paine, John and Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and others who influenced **constituency** and the American cause for independence [3, 14, 23]. Some, such as Benedict Arnold, would forever **tarnish** their name [2, 23]. **Timing is everything**, and this influenced **perception** of Lexington and Concord as well as the conditions at Valley Forge, which suffered from the Commissary Departments troubles in the months prior to encampment [3, 10, 13]. Also, **Slogans** influenced **constituency** towards colonial unification and the establishment of the Army [18, 19, 20, 21]. Washington's perceived military **guru** status landed him the Commander in Chief job, and he would prove his **guru** status in a way that helped him build influence and **constituency** in Congress [3, 23].

In many cases, the Political FOLs did their best at thwarting the British and American Armies. But perhaps **constituency** best explains the Continental Army's trajectory. The British constituency slowly suffered as the war failed to come to a favorable end [23]. Conversely, Britain's adversary's constituency avoided decisive defeat while growing to include international superpowers [23]. The Continental Army experienced numerous low points, and "[k]eeping the army together was Washington's greatest triumph" [2]. As Franklin suggested long before the war, the colonies needed to "Join, or Die" [19]. Try as the British might, enough people in the colonies joined together, and the right international powers joined at the right time to align against the British. The broad, transatlantic constituency was too much for even the British Empire to counter.

VI. Lessons Learned

While analyzing the Continental Army through the prism of the Political FOLs, several themes emerged that are explainable through new FOLs and corollaries to existing FOLs. The first is a corollary to **A Strong, Coherent Constituency is Essential**:

1. Momentum and Directionality win the Long War for Constituency

The spectrum of constituency in the Revolutionary War consisted mainly of rebels, loyalists, and the undecided. However, the ideological conditions were set to convert many to the rebel's cause of independence. Recall that the colonists' experience led them to favor localism, and many new settlers came from communities who experienced their "most serious threats... from the king himself" [11]. Also recall colonial distrust for a standing army [10, 12]. In the lead up to war, the British were winning legislative battles and implementing their policies upon the colonies, but they were doing so at the expense of the war for constituency [12]. Flashpoints from the Tea Party to the Boston Massacre eventually led to war at Lexington and Concord [3, 24]. Even though the British may have militarily met their objectives by seizing the munition stores, they added momentum to a blooming opposition constituency [13, 15]. Consider Figure 2, which notionally shows the evolution of constituencies at play:

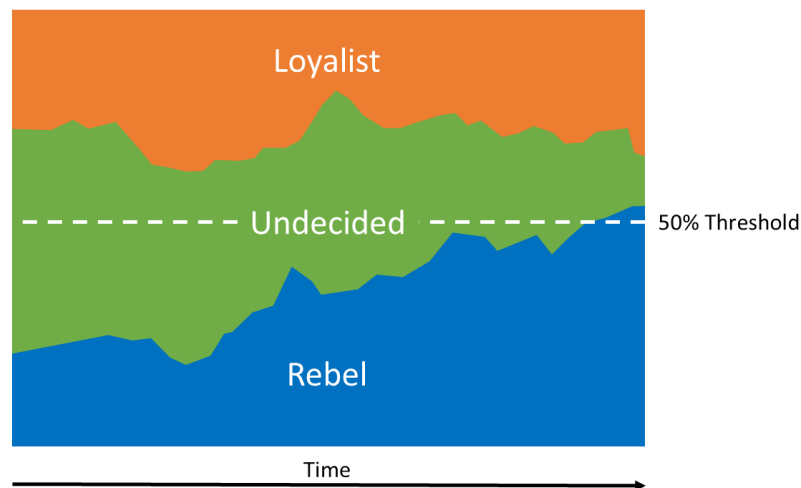


Figure 2: A Notional Evolution of a Constituency

In Figure 2, the rebel and loyalist constituencies vie to strengthen themselves by converting opposition and undecided actors. As the British continued getting legislative wins and exerting their will on the colonists, the rebel constituency pulled from the undecided pool while converting loyalists [3, 15]. This would play out in numerous scenarios such as battlefield victories and defeats. Also, the short enlistment terms and militia reliance fostered widespread emotional, patriotic investment in the American cause [3, 23]. And while the 50% threshold is important, it also presumes that the undecided are actively engaged in events, which is not always the case. Thus, when seeking to build a constituency, it is important to understand momentum and directionality. Is the constituency adapting and growing? Does it need additional encouragement? Is it broadening so in a direction that favors the overall strategic and political goals being sought? What are the decisive defeats the constituency must avoid to

retain its momentum? And at what point has constituency reached a tipping point where it can be leveraged towards a political goal? As momentum builds towards constituency, it may eventually lead to a group of colonists contradicting themselves via the implementation of a standing army so as to divorce themselves from the tyranny imposed upon them by a standing army [3]. And in battle, it may lead to a decisive allied victory as seen at Yorktown [2].

The following is a proposed FOL:

1. Communication Delays and Information Gaps can Create Unpredictable Divergence in Policies, Constituency, and Alternatives... and, if Unchecked, the Divergence May Become Irreversible.

There were several moments that showed how communications delays and their associated information gaps may have caused unique circumstances and events. First, the news of Lexington and Concord took a month to travel to the southernmost city in America [3]. The Colonists' account arrived first and painted the British as aggressors [13, 15]. This exploited the **FOL S6: Perception is Often More Important Than the Truth**. Somebody on the fence about rebellion vs. loyalism may receive this news and begin acting, possibly in an irreversible manner (for example, engage in treasonous acts against the King) before any contradictory news comes in. By the time a second account arrives, it may be too late to overcome perceptions or irreversible, unforgivable actions may have already occurred.

Also consider the planning situation the British found themselves in at the close of 1776 and start of 1777. Initial planning was done via a plan from General Howe that was first penned in November and a plan from General Burgoyne, which was also penned before British defeats at Princeton and Trenton [23]. Thus, with a popular pro-war constituency, the British ministry planned for 1777 for almost two months under the belief that things were going swimmingly and Princeton and Trenton never occurred [23]. But as updated news came, so too did updated plans from General Howe, and no party appeared to be on the same page [23]. The difficulties of this were reflected in a disjointed 1777 campaign plan, and may have played a factor in how Saratoga was lost due to lack of coordination between Burgoyne and Howe's armies [23].

A corollary to this proposed FOL is: **Beware of Oscillation's Impact on Constituency and Options**. As Franklin forged alliance with France, "Congress was in the dark through the winter and early spring about the diplomacy" [23]. Dreariness weighed upon Congress in the early months of 1778, only to completely reverse course upon learning of the alliance [23]. So too did spirits at Valley Forge elevate upon hearing the news, and it also reshaped strategy from a "debate on whether to attack New York or Philadelphia" to a new strategy of "Do nothing risky" [23]. But French interests were not completely aligned with the Americans, and after the incomplete siege of Newport, the French "repaired [their] fleet in Boston, then sailed to the Caribbean" [2]. The result was lampooning of the French in press and questions over their true motives [2, 23]. But later, a refocusing of this alliance led to victory at Yorktown [2, 3, 23]. The threat is that as

information gaps, strategic understanding, and communications delays mount, constituencies can oscillate from being strong to weak and back again. This can stress the constituency, threatening its cohesion and altering its decision-making and policy focus. If the oscillations between extremes are too violent, constituency may shatter or rash options and alternatives may arise.

VII. Conclusion and the Way Forward

Politics shaped the Continental Army from its inception, during its operations, and through its drawdown in the American Revolution. And while its successes have been characterized as a “miracle” by none other than General George Washington, its victory over the British is explainable via the political facts of life [23]. Perhaps the reason these facts of life are so timeless is because they deal with politics, a human discourse. And while many things changed between 1775 and present day, the human element of creating military forces and then operating and administering them still exists in present day. Washington’s proclamation of divine intervention also hints at how external processes beyond a military oft conspire to impact its implementation, operation, and battlefield results [23]. Fortunately for the Continental Army, their conclusion was one of victory over the British, though it did not come without needless misfortune, waste, and difficulty explainable by the political facts of life.

Current and future military planning and mission analysis would benefit from incorporating the political facts of life and their impact on strategic and operational aspects of warfare. Just as politics shaped the Continental Army, so too will it shape future forces. And, if fully understood, the facts of life provide offensive tools to advantageously leverage stakeholders in a multitude of various situations. Or, in a worst case scenario, the Political FOLs may help anticipate likely maneuvers and designs of stakeholders, friend and foe. The technology and theaters of warfare will change. However, the human element will remain, and thus the political facts of life will factor in to the future of Army composition, disposition, and operation as they did for the Continental Army.

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