



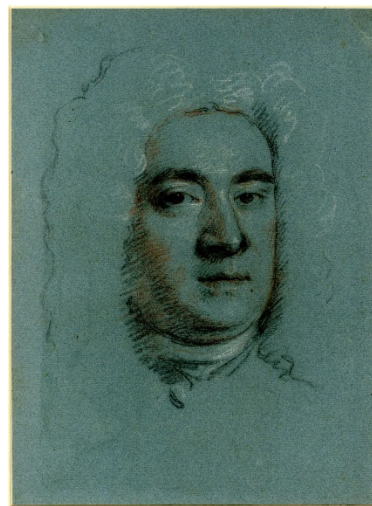
JOHN TRENCHARD AND THE OPPOSITION TO STANDING ARMIES

***John Trenchard** (1662-1723) was a radical Whig and Commonwealthman who, along with his collaborator **Thomas Gordon** (1692-1750), were important voices defending constitutionalism and individual liberty in the 1720s in England. Trenchard came from a prominent family, went to Trinity College, Dublin, and briefly served in the House of Commons. He worked as a journalist in the 1690s writing works criticising the idea of standing armies and the political power of the established church. Trenchard co-wrote *The Independent Whig* (1720-21) and *Cato's Letters* (1720-23) with Gordon. He was a defender of the idea of liberty against political corruption, imperialism and militarism in the early 18th century. Their writings, especially *Cato's Letters*, were also much read in the American colonies. In this Liberty Matters discussion David Womersley, the Thomas Warton Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford, revisits Trenchard's criticisms of standing armies in the light of the continuing relevance of the question of where to locate, in whose hands to place, and how to exercise the state's powers of deadly military force. He is joined in the discussion by Stephen P. Halbrook, an attorney in Fairfax, Virginia, the independent historian Joseph R. Stromberg, and David Wootton, the Anniversary Professor of History at the University of York.*

JOHN TRENCHARD AND THE OPPOSITION TO STANDING ARMIES

by David Womersley

The questions of where to locate, in whose hands to place, and how to exercise the state's powers of deadly military force inform a perennial topic in political theory and coalesce into a recurrent problem in political practice. Theory and practice came together in England at the very end of the 17th century when John Trenchard (coauthor with Thomas Gordon of the essays written under the name "Cato") launched a pamphlet war by publishing his attack on the institution of a standing army, *An Argument, Shewing That a Standing Army Is Inconsistent with a Free Government, and Absolutely Destructive to the Constitution of the English Monarchy*, in October 1697. Swift rejoinders were published by Daniel Defoe and John, Lord Somers, as well as by a crowd of more minor and anonymous authors. What had provoked this flurry of publication?



Thomas Gordon

Together with his wife Mary, William III had been crowned on 11 April 1689. Only a few weeks later, on 5 May, England declared war on France, thus initiating a conflict that would be known by a variety of names: the War of the League of Augsburg, the War of the Grand Alliance, or the Nine Years War. Over the coming months William put together a coalition of nations (Scotland, Austria, Spain, Savoy, and some German states)

to frustrate what he saw as the ambitions of Louis XIV towards European hegemony and universal monarchy. The ensuing war was contested principally in the Low Countries, was hard-fought and long in the balance, and was eventually concluded by the Treaty of Ryswick (1697). However, no one knew better than William that the present peace was anything but firm. Therefore he was privately determined to retain his army of at least 87,000 experienced soldiers in preparation for the next--and imminent--round of his uncompleted struggle with Louis XIV. But a coalition of Tories and radical Whigs--the "New Country Party"-- which had come into embryonic existence as early as 1693, and which had on occasion already successfully resisted the measures of the ruling Whig Junto, was preparing at the same time to reactivate a long-standing topic of anti-Stuart resentment by agitating for the disbanding of the army.

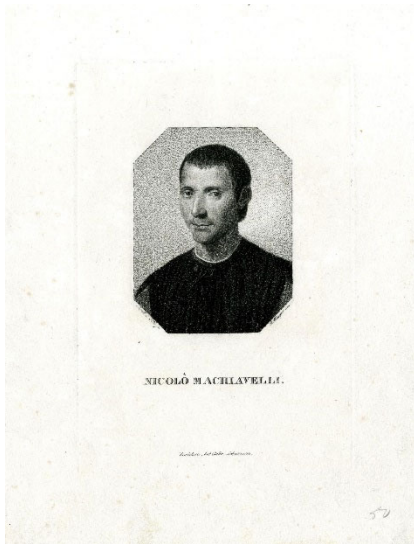
The present crisis over the size of the land force was well chosen for the assembly of this checkered coalition of divergent interests and discordant sentiments, for (as Macaulay would remark) resistance to standing armies was a banner under which even the most unlikely allies could unite: "One class of politicians was never weary of repeating that an Apostolic Church, a loyal gentry, an ancient nobility, a sainted King, had been foully outraged by the Joyces and the Prides: another class recounted the atrocities committed by the Lambs of Kirke, and by the Beelzebubs and Lucifers of Dundee; and both classes, agreeing in scarcely anything else, were disposed to agree in aversion to the red coats."^[1]

So the ground of the subsequent quarrel was to some extent already staked out and the lines of engagement already defined when, on 3 December 1697, William opened Parliament and in the course of the speech from the throne remarked that England's safety would be endangered "without a land force." When it transpired that the majority in Parliament against a standing army was not to be moved and that accordingly at least some of William's forces would have to be stood down--including the elite "Blue Guards" and the Dutch Life Guards that William had brought with him in 1688 from

the United Provinces-- the king's dignity was undoubtedly damaged.

So much for the concrete circumstances. What, however, was the intellectual background to the quarrel, and how do the arguments mounted for and against a standing army in 1697-98 compare on the one hand with apparently similar arguments in antiquity and early modern Europe, and on the other with apparently similar arguments which periodically flared up in England throughout the 18th century?

The political thinkers and historians of antiquity had been acutely aware of the dangers that might arise should an army become attached more deeply to its general than to the state. Such transference would be very natural--nothing more, after all, than a reversion to a point of departure. For thinkers such as Polybius suspected that civil society itself had begun in the personal loyalty felt by soldiers towards a successful commander.^[2] Yet they also knew that, for a city to endure, the duty of obligation, although it may have originated in the personal ascendancy enjoyed by a charismatic *imperator* as a result of his immediate contact with the men he had led to victory, must be institutionalized and transferred to the *urbs*-- hence the strong component of city-worship in classical paganism. Were that transference ever to falter, the threat to the state would be grave. And such an eventuality was always to be feared. For the qualities of a good general, the Roman thinkers of the later empire such as Tacitus well knew, were also naturally imperial qualities: "*ducis boni imperatoriam virtutem esse.*"^[3]



Niccolo Machiavelli

It was Niccolò Machiavelli who developed the Western discussion of the political problem of force beyond the formulations of antiquity. Machiavelli's interest in this question had been aroused and focused by the disturbances of the *quattrocento*, in which the Italian city-states had experimented with the use of mercenaries, generally with disastrous results. In [chapters 12-14](#) of *The Prince*, in [Book II](#) of the *Discourses*, and in [Book VII](#) of *The Art of War*, Machiavelli had compared recent Italian experience with Roman history. Guided by what he saw in that contrast, Machiavelli had argued that the marvellous expansion of the Roman Republic had been due to the willingness of its male population to take up arms on behalf of the state. He went on to generalize this observation about early Roman history into a political principle, insisting that a citizen militia was always and necessarily superior to a mercenary army, and (furthermore) was an infallible symptom of free government. Those who were content to subcontract their defense to paid professional soldiers had placed their ease above their liberty, and had thereby laid themselves open to tyranny. The decline and fall of Roman power, in this civic humanist analysis, could be traced to the replacement of the militia of the Republic by the professional, and increasingly mercenary, standing armies of the Empire.

The debate over standing armies that arose in England at the end of the 17th century was a particular and acute

instance of this perennial political problem of military force. However, the 17th-century English debate did not merely go over old ground. It possessed new aspects.

We first encounter the English phrase “standing army” in 1603, when Richard Knolles used it to refer to the domestic policy of Tamerlane: “he kept alwaies a standing armie of fortie thousand horse, and threescore thousand foot readie at all assaies.”^[4] For the next 40 years or so the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists no more than a handful of further occurrences of the phrase, until we reach the outbreak of hostilities between Charles I and Parliament in 1642, when unsurprisingly it became much more common. However, what this pattern of usage across the 17th century disguises is the fact that the phrase “standing army” is at first used broadly to refer to an army which is kept together in peacetime (no matter how it is funded or sustained). But then at the end of the century it is used much more narrowly to refer to an army that is kept together during peacetime *and paid for out of taxation*. The intellectual roots of the 17th-century English standing-army debate extended deep into the European past. But that late 17th-century debate derived its particular energy from much more recent developments. Its participants were guided by the long-standing Western anxiety about the possibility that an unscrupulous general might use his troops against his personal internal enemies, rather than against the external enemies of the nation. At the same time, that traditional anxiety had acquired a new edge for the subjects of William III because of the enhanced fiscal powers of the Williamite state.

The political situation created by these new instruments and powers was disturbing and unprecedented. Until the 1690s the financial sinews of the English state had been weak. During the Civil War both Parliamentarians and Royalists had encountered extraordinary problems of supply. Both sides had been reduced to expedients such as sequestering money and valuables, and pawning jewels. Loans were to be had only at ruinous rates of interest. Therefore, as recently as 1656, and reflecting in Machiavellian style on English experience in the Civil War, James Harrington had dismissed the notion of a standing army supported by taxation as “[a mere fancy, as](#)

[void of all reason and experience](#) as if a man should think to maintain such an one by robbing of orchards; for a mere tax is but pulling of plumtrees, the roots whereof are in other men's grounds, who, suffering perpetual violence, come to hate the author of it.”^[5]



Peacetime armies had long been recognized as a threat to the liberty of the subject, as their [prohibition in the Bill of Rights of 1689](#) had made clear. However, that in 1689 the danger they posed was conceived principally to be one against liberty rather than property is suggested by the fact that the Bill of Rights prohibits them only in “this kingdom” (i.e., England), but not (for instance) in Ireland. For until the 1690s the threat posed by standing armies to the subject's property (as opposed to his liberty) had been more spasmodic. Before the financial innovations introduced under William III the threat to property had been more a question of the bad luck of being pillaged or billeted on, rather than of the imposition of the regular and inescapable burden of taxation. This was why no legislation against a standing army was passed between 1660 and 1685: Parliament could always emasculate any plans to enlarge the army by refusing to vote additional revenues. But by the late 1690s the situation had changed dramatically. So in the autumn and winter of 1697 standing armies— now properly so-called because they had become a permanent part of the resources of the state and were paid for out of taxation— might for the first time be resisted on the grounds of both liberty and frugality. For the real burden of taxation per capita had increased considerably in the later 17th century in England.

The matrix of examples and sources for the debate had been established from the outset by Trenchard in *An Argument, Shewing that a Standing Army is Inconsistent with a Free Government*. To begin with, we find a series of lurid instances of the miseries of military despotism drawn from ancient history. Here the principal guide was Machiavelli, whose bitter comparisons of mercenaries and militias provided an initial point of entry into the historical record. Even so, the pamphleteers were far from scholarly. There are some surprising inclusions amongst the classical sources (for instance, Aulus Gellius), as well as some surprising absences. One might have expected more use to be made of Tacitus. It may be, however, that the writers of these pamphlets were reluctant to stray too far from the classical authors they had studied at school: hence, perhaps, their fondness for epigraphs and tags drawn from Horace and from books II and III of the *Aeneid*, over which as pupils they must have spent long and painful hours.

The lessons of antiquity were reinforced by further examples taken from later 16th- and 17th-century European and Levantine history. (The inclusion of references to the very recent history of the near East and the Ottoman empire is a point of particular interest.) But especially telling for the first readers of these pamphlets, one imagines, were the examples drawn from recent English experience, that is to say, the examples supplied by Cromwell's rule, and by the “late reigns” of Charles II and James II. Here the opponents of standing armies drew heavily on the constitutional library of vulgar Whiggism: on the various printings of Rushworth's *Collections*; on Nathaniel Bacon's *An Historical Discourse of the Uniformity of the Government of England* (1647), *The Continuation of an Historical Discourse of the Government of England* (1651), and *An Historical and Political Discourse of the Laws and Government of England* (1689); on very recent works, such as Roger Coke's *A Detection of the Court and State of England* (1697); and possibly even on soon-to-be published works such as Edmund Ludlow's *Memoirs* (1698-1699).

The arguments constructed out of these varied materials were not conspicuous for either finesse or power. They

did not need to be. Trenchard, Moyle, Toland, and the other writers against standing armies were appealing to prejudice rather than to reason, and they found their advantage more in a disorderly profusion of examples than in fine-drawn ratiocination. This meant that the defenders of standing armies were in a sense always arguing uphill and trying to introduce rationality and dispassion into a debate which, notwithstanding its historical and constitutional scenery, was really about the creation and enforcement of a bugbear. For the moment of the debate interacted critically with broader political circumstances. The terms of the Triennial Act required there to be a general election in 1698. Anti-army pamphleteers such as Trenchard were thus in part writing to influence the electorate, to whom the implicit slogan “Disband the army, pay less tax” would always appeal. A traditional topic of political grievance (standing armies) was being used as a proxy in a campaign against what was in fact a new burden, created by the fiscal innovations of the early 1690s (increasing taxation).

So at bottom the “Standing Army” debate of 1697-98 was about taxation, rather than the ownership and location of deadly force. Some 50 years later the the language and arguments of Trenchard and Thomas Gordon would be revived, but again as a proxy, and interestingly enough in support of a policy diametrically opposed to that of the earlier writers. Taken together, the two episodes form a fine example of that classic snare of intellectual history, when a familiar language is revived to engage with new and unfamiliar objects and is deployed in pursuit of subtly altered objectives.

In the 1730s the hiring of 12,000 Hessian mercenaries led to a flare-up of standing-army language and sentiment. In the following decade the early phases of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), in which 16,000 Hanoverians were taken into English pay, saw another localized eruption. Chesterfield deplored how in these episodes (as he put it) the Hanoverian rudder was steering the English ship, and he advanced the general principle of British foreign policy that “except when the *Dutch* are in Danger, it can never be the Interest of this Nation to embark in the Troubles of the

Continent.”^[6] The language of the standing-army debate of 1697 (for instance, when the Hanoverian mercenaries were referred to as “Janizaries”), and some of its general flavor of suspicion of the measures of kings and courts, were reapplied to this new question, which was at bottom about the continental commitments which had entered English politics with the accession of the house of Hanover, and the associated resentment of the influence exerted by the “little, low Interest of *Hanover*” and “the narrow Views and petty Concerns of a *German* Electorate.”^[7] “The Interests and Influence of Hanover are no longer to be disguised or concealed, but openly avowed, as the Rule of our Conduct, and the Spring of our Actions,” fulminated Chesterfield.^[8] However, although his language seemed to echo the insularity of Trenchard and Moyle, Chesterfield was no enemy of an imperial policy *tout court*. Rather, he deplored Britain's links with Hanover because they inhibited the nation's diplomatic movement, and thus threatened to hamper its freedom to pursue its now evident imperial destiny.



John Toland

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When, from the security of the reign of Victoria, Macaulay reviewed the debate on standing armies which had followed the Treaty of Ryswick, it had seemed to him a purely historical controversy, so thoroughly had men's

opinions on this subject been remodelled.^[9] Today, it is perhaps Macaulay's absolute confidence that the problem of how to reconcile the ownership and location of deadly force with liberty and civil society had been solved once and for all that looks dated. The forms that problem has assumed in more recent decades--for instance, the threat of “Caesarism” so feared by Gore Vidal in America after the Second World War, or more recently the dismaying durability of military régimes in the Middle East--look very different from the standing-army controversy which animated Parliament and the coffee houses of London in 1697-1698. Are there fundamental affinities between these apparently discrepant things? Or is it the fate of the topic of deadly force to be always an emotive pawn deployed in political arguments that are actually hunting other, even bigger, game?

Endnotes

[1.] Thomas Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, ed. C. H. Firth, 6 vols (London: Macmillan, 1915), vol. VI, p. 2732.

[2.] Polybius, VI.4-6.

[3.] Tacitus, *Agricola*, XXXIX.2. “Id sibi maxime formidolosum, privati hominis nomen supra principem attolli: frustra studia fori et civiliū artium decus in silentium acta, si militarem gloriam alius occuparet; cetera utcumque facilius dissimulari, ducis boni imperatoriam virtutem esse.” (It was, he thought, a very alarming thing for him that the name of a subject should be raised above that of the Emperor; it was to no purpose that he had driven into obscurity the pursuit of forensic eloquence and the graceful accomplishments of civil life, if another were to forestall the distinctions of war.) See also, Tacitus, *Agricola*, in Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *The Works of Tacitus. In Four Volumes. To which are prefixed, Political Discourses upon that Author by Thomas Gordon. The Second Edition, corrected.* (London: T. Woodward and J. Peele, 1737). Vol. 4.<[/titles/787](#)>.

[4.] Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (London: 1603), p. 235.

[5.] James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock, Cambridge Texts in

the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 60. See also, James Harrington, *The Oceana and Other Works of James Harrington, with an Account of His Life by John Toland* (London: Becket and Cadell, 1771). </titles/916#Harrington_0050-version3_406>.

[6.] Chesterfield, *The Case of the Hanover Forces in the Pay of Great-Britain* (London: 1742), pp. 30 and 45.

[7.] Chesterfield, *Case of the Hanover Forces*, p. 83.

[8.] Chesterfield, *A Vindication of a Late Pamphlet* (1743), p. 55.

[9.] Macaulay, *History*, vol. VI, pp. 2731-32.

THE STANDING ARMY- MILITIA DEBATE: A LEGACY THAT ENDURES

by Stephen P. Halbrook

It's incredible what jumps out at you on reading the anti-standing-army tracts of the likes of Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard. To David Womersley's reflections on "Trenchard and the Opposition to Standing Armies," I would like to add a few points prompted by [Gordon's *A Discourse of Standing Armies* \(1722\)](#)[10] to suggest that the old debates made a difference at the founding of the American Republic and continue to resonate today.

Let's first consider the debate with the backdrop of the Declaration of Rights of 1689, which stated as necessary for vindicating the "ancient rights and liberties" of Englishmen:

6. [That the raising or keeping a standing Army within the Kingdom in Time of Peace](#), unless it be with Consent of Parliament, is against Law.

7. That the Subjects which are Protestants, may have Arms for their Defence suitable to their Condition, and as are allowed by Law.[11]

The limitations were clear enough – the restraint on standing armies applied only "within the kingdom," not

(as Professor Womersley notes) in places like Ireland, or for that matter in any of the colonies. How else could there be a British Empire without armies abroad? Further, the prohibition applied only in time of peace, and even at one point Gordon "[confess\[ed\], an Army at last became necessary](#), and an Army was raised time enough to beat all who opposed it..." Finally, an army could be raised only with the consent of Parliament, with no further impediment.



King James II

As to those who "may have arms for their defence," it was limited to Protestants, and it would be "suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law." As the Declaration had recited, James II violated the rights of Englishmen by causing Protestants "to be disarmed at the same time when Papists were both armed and employed contrary to law." Instead of allowing all good subjects to be armed, the right did not apply to Catholics, who would be limited to keeping arms for defense of the person or house with the consent of the justice of the peace.[12]

Although speaking on the context of armies, Gordon's following remark also applied to the subjects: "[A Protestant Musket kills as sure as a Popish one](#); and an Oppressor is an Oppressor, to whatever Church he belongs: The Sword and the Gun are of every Church, and so are the Instruments of Oppression." That applies as much to a society wherein segments of the populace are disarmed based on politics, class, or race, just as much as it applies to Gordon's intended situation of an armed

government that oppresses a populace based on its religion. Again, consider Gordon: “[If we are to be govern'd by Armies](#), it is all one to us, whether they be Protestant or Popish Armies; the Distinction is ridiculous, like that between a good and a bad Tyranny....”



Oliver Cromwell

In relation to that point, the tract writers of the period had a knack for using the English language in an animate manner that eludes us today. Consider Gordon’s reference to politicians (and this applies equally now) who distinguish “[oppressive Oppression](#)” – that of their opponents – from their own “unoppressive Oppression.” Or this jewel: “[Oliver Cromwell headed an Army which pretended to fight for Liberty](#), and by that Army became a bloody Tyrant; as I once saw a Hawk very generously rescue a Turtle Dove from the Persecution of two Crows, and then eat him up himself.” As we say today: I’m from the government and I’m here to help you.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of anti-army protagonists on the American Founders, who defeated the most powerful army in the world. Recall that the English Declaration denounced standing armies “within the kingdom,” and the Crown didn’t consider colonies to have that status, but the Americans thought they were entitled to all rights of Englishmen. Again, consider Gordon: “[’Tis certain, that all Parts of Europe which are enslaved](#), have been enslaved by Armies, and ’tis absolutely impossible, that any Nation which keeps them amongst themselves, can long preserve their Liberties;

nor can any Nation perfectly lose their Liberties, who are without such Guests....” Compare that with James Madison’s reference to “[the advantage of being armed](#), which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation,” and his followup comment: “Notwithstanding the military establishments in the several kingdoms of Europe, which are carried as far as the public resources will bear, the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms.”^[13]

That same James Madison drafted a Constitution that delegated power to Congress “[to raise and support armies](#).”^[14] Contrast that with the purist Gordon, who presumed that “[no Man will be audacious enough to propose](#), that we should make a Standing Army Part of our Constitution....” George Mason and his Anti-Federalist colleagues failed to have the Constitution amended to require that two-thirds of both houses of Congress would be necessary to keep up a standing army.^[15] But they succeeded in causing recognition of a counterpart, and Madison’s pen obliged: “[A well regulated militia](#), being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.”^[16]

So no matter the discrepancies between the Gordon-Trenchard *Weltanschauung* and the historical development of the real world, which Professor Womersley rightly pinpoints, the dangers of a standing army and the need for a balance of power in a polity to keep the army in check are ideas that resonated in real-world America. True, Gordon warned Great Britain “[To meddle no farther with Foreign Squabbles](#),” just as Jefferson advocated “[peace, commerce and honest friendship with all nations](#) – entangling alliances with none.”^[17] Neither the United Kingdom nor the United States followed those dictates, and they built standing armies to intervene around the world.

Not that this was always a bad thing, given the need to stop the Axis in World War II. That conflict offered an occasion to revive the militia concept which had gone dormant. After decades of depriving her citizens of arms, with Dunkirk the U.K. couldn’t give them out fast enough to her citizen Home Guard to allow them, as

Churchill said, to help fight the expected Nazi invaders on the beaches, the landing grounds, in the fields, and in the streets.^[18] In America, as the young men went to war, those remaining who were hunters and sports shooters brought their guns to join the State Protective Forces and guard against sabotage and subversion.^[19]

The old debates were echoed in the 2008 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court holding that the Second Amendment, with its militia and arms right clauses, protects an individual right to keep and bear arms, rendering the District of Columbia's handgun ban void. Justice Scalia wrote that the militia was thought to render large standing armies unnecessary and to enable a trained, armed populace to resist tyranny. Recognition of a right to have arms not only made that possible, but also reflected the value placed on the right by Americans for self-defense and hunting.^[20]

Gordon asked, “[Are we never to Disband](#), till Europe is settled according to some modern Schemes?” Some may have thought the European Union would provide such a utopian scheme. But much danger lurks from foreign terrorism originating outside of Europe and which is increasingly home grown in Europe. No army can protect citizens from random, surprise attacks. A long European history of mistrusting the people with their own firearms for self-defense is exacerbated by the E.U.'s drive toward an almost total prohibition of private arms. “[When the People are easy and satisfy'd](#), the whole Kingdom is his [the King's] Army,” wrote Gordon. But there can be no Army of a disarmed people.

As Professor Womersley states, Machiavelli extolled the virtues of Rome's citizen militia. That tradition, Machiavelli added, was inherited by the Swiss, who being armed enjoyed great freedom. The pike and the broadsword were preferred “by the Swiss; since they are poor, yet anxious to defend their liberties against the ambition of the German princes – who are rich and can afford to keep cavalry, which the poverty of the Swiss will not allow them to do – the Swiss are obliged to engage an enemy on foot, and therefore find it necessary to continue their ancient manner of fighting in order to

make headway against the fury of the enemy's cavalry.”^[21]

The theme that a small country like Switzerland, through its armed populace, could beat back all the great armies of the European monarchs was heralded by Colonel John A. Martin in his *A Plan for Establishing and Disciplining a National Militia in Great Britain, Ireland, and in All the British Dominions of America* (1745) and by Patrick Henry, arguing in the Virginia ratifying convention of 1788 against a federal government with expansive powers.^[22] Surrounded by the Axis in 1940, the Swiss dissuaded a Nazi invasion by her people in arms and her Alps. Despite the efforts of the Socialists and Greens to abolish it, to this day Switzerland maintains a militia army.

Gordon and Trenchard would have been proud.

Endnotes

^[10.] Thomas Gordon, *A Discourse of Standing Armies; shewing the Folly, Uselessness, and Danger of Standing Armies in Great Britain*, 3rd edition (London: T. Warner, 1722). <[/titles/1719](#)>. All quotations to Gordon are from this source.

^[11.] 1 Wm. & Mary, sess. 2, c. 2 (1689).

^[12.] An Act for the Better Securing the Government by Disarming Papists and Reputed Papists, 1 W.&M., sess. 1, c. 15 §4 (1689).

^[13.] *The Federalist* No. 46, in *The Federalist (The Gideon Edition), Edited with an Introduction, Reader's Guide, Constitutional Cross-reference, Index, and Glossary* by George W. Carey and James McClellan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001). <[/titles/788](#)>.

^[14.] U.S. Constitution, Art. I, § 8. In James McClellan, *Liberty, Order, and Justice: An Introduction to the Constitutional Principles of American Government* (3rd ed.) (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000). <[/titles/679#McClellan_0088_993](#)>.

^[15.] 9 *Documentary History of The Ratification of the Constitution* 823 (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990).

[16.] U.S. Constitution, Amend. II.
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[17.] First Inaugural Address, 1801, in Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Federal Edition* (New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904-5). Vol. 9.</titles/757#Jefferson 0054-09 302>.

[18.] Speech of June 4, 1940, to House of Commons. See S.P. MacKenzie, *The Home Guard* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[19.] E.g., *Report of the Adjutant General for 1945 23-24* (Richmond, VA: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1946).

[20.] *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, 598-99 (2008).

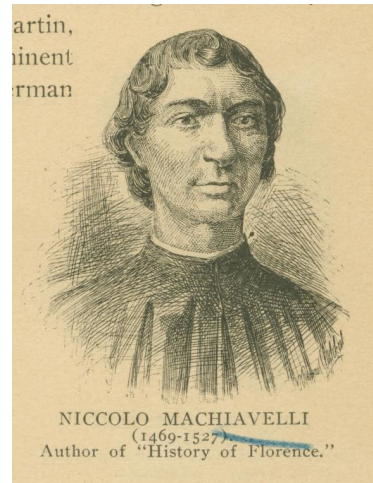
[21.] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, E. Farnsworth transl. (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 46-47. See Bernard Wicht, *L'idée De Milice et Le Modèle Suisse Dans La Pensée De Machiavel* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1995).

[22.] See Halbrook, "The Swiss Confederation In the Eyes of America's Founders," *Swiss American Historical Review* 32 (Nov. 2012).

LIBERTY NOT TAXATION WAS BEHIND OPPOSITION TO THE STANDING ARMY

by David Wootton

Just as one would expect, David Womersley has written an elegant, learned, and clever essay on standing armies. Unfortunately it is, on a key issue, the interpretation of Machiavelli, mistaken, and it goes astray again (in my view) in its account of the standing army debate at the end of the 17th century. On the 18th-century debates I find it entirely convincing.



Niccolo Machiavelli

Womersley's error lies in stating that Machiavelli advocated a citizen militia. This has been often said, but the issue has been clear since the publication of a famous article by Dionisotti in 1967.^[23] Womersley goes wrong because he has been led astray by what would seem to be the best authorities -- Baron, Skinner, Pocock, Viroli (at least in his first book). The error is still to be found in works such as Celenza's *Machiavelli: A Portrait*,^[24] but certainly not in reliable texts such as Vivanti's *Niccolò Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography*.^[25] For a generation of scholars the source of the error was Alan Gilbert's translation of book 1 of *The Art of War* (*Chief Works*, 1965 — Womersley's reference to book 7 is evidently a slip), where the word *ordinanza* (= militia) is translated "citizen army" (so Quentin Skinner came away with the entirely false impression that "The whole of Book 1 [of *The Art of War*] is given over to vindicating 'the method of the citizen army'").^[26] But the error goes back before then, since it is to be found in Ridolfi's 1954 biography of Machiavelli. The best recent scholarship is cautious in its use of references to citizen armies when writing about Machiavelli, but an error that has become so well-established inevitably keeps catching the unwary, and one may suspect that even the best scholars have not made a sufficiently clean break with the mistakes of the past.^[27]

The militia that Machiavelli formed when he served in the government of Florence was a conscript army of peasants. They were not citizens but subjects; in Florentine

discussions of politics there is never any overlap between the two categories -- you are either one or the other. There was strong initial opposition to this new force because it was feared that it would be used to suppress Florentine liberty and establish a principality.

In *The Prince*, *The Discourses*, and *The Art of War* Machiavelli never advocates the establishment of a citizen militia. The claim that men fighting to defend their liberty make the most resolute soldiers is not (I think) to be found in Machiavelli — it is popularized by Boccalini, writing about the Dutch; Machiavelli could never have forgotten that the citizens of Florence had shown no determination at all when it came to defending their own liberty. Machiavelli knew, of course, that the Roman army under the Republic consisted of citizens. He surely knew that Leonardo Bruni and others had advocated a citizen army.^[28] But Machiavelli never said that this Roman practice was to be imitated in this key respect.^[29] What is essential, according to him, is that your army should not consist of mercenaries or auxiliaries but of your own people -- i.e., your own subjects. Otherwise you cannot keep control of it. And the Florentine army should be *commanded* by Florentine citizens for the same reason.

In *The Art of War* Machiavelli makes a further point that he believes to be crucial: the army should not be a professional army. Even its commanders should not think of warfare as their profession. A professional army will believe it has interests different from those of everyone else; an army which consists of conscripts, who serve only for a limited time, and is commanded by officers who expect to return to civilian life, will identify its own interests with those of the nation as a whole. It was this sort of army that Machiavelli consistently advocated: not a citizen army, but a conscript army. In all early modern societies those who could regard themselves as citizens were in a small minority, and Machiavelli was trying to build a substantial force that could withstand the might of France and Spain — the citizen army only comes back on the agenda with the French revolution and the expansion of citizenship, notionally at least, to all adult males.

It is certainly true, then, to say that Machiavelli was opposed to what would later be called a standing army since a standing army was understood to be a professional army. Let me turn then to Womersley's account of the standing-army debate at the end of the 17th century.^[30] Womersley's argument is that "at bottom the 'Standing Army' debate of 1697-98 was about taxation, rather than the ownership and location of deadly force" and that "implicitly" the opponents of a standing army were thus proposing lower taxes. I think it must come as a surprise to any reader who turns to the sources to discover that whatever the debate may have been about "at bottom," the opponents of the standing army were not advocating lower taxes (or at least not explicitly). Turn, for example, to the work which Womersley correctly describes as setting the terms of the debate, Trenchard's *An Argument, Shewing that a Standing Army is Inconsistent with a Free Government* (1697). In that work no claim is made that rejection of a standing army will lead to lower taxes — indeed there is no discussion of contemporary government revenue and expenditure. Such a discussion is to be found in Trenchard's *Short History of Standing Armies in England*, which came out the next year. But there is no suggestion there that by saving on the cost of a standing army taxes can be reduced: rather Trenchard's point is that the vast debts accumulated in the last war must be paid down as quickly as possible if England is to put herself into a position where she can be embark on a new war with France when that becomes necessary. Trenchard seems to accept that there is no going back to a world of low taxes and small government; the question is one of how best to spend the new resources at the government's command. He gives priority to paying off debt.



Trenchard's core argument is straightforward: that where you have a professional army it can be used by the executive to overpower the legislature; in England you can no longer deprive the executive of the financial resources out of which a professional army can be funded (you have to maintain a constant flow of tax revenues if only to pay the interest on the national debt, so you cannot simply refuse supply); so resistance to a standing army must now be made a matter of principle, where before it could be bundled up with the question of avoiding the burden of unnecessary taxes. In other words, far from it being the case that what had once been a question of liberty has now become a question of frugality (as Womersley argues), Trenchard's claim is the exact opposite: an argument which could once be conducted as being about taxation must now be conducted as being about liberty. It is not surprising that, having misunderstood the argument of Trenchard and his colleagues, Womersley concludes (wrongly, I think) that they were "appealing to prejudice rather than to reason."

Trenchard's claim is thus that wherever you have a professional army the people lose their liberty unless (as in the particular case of Holland) they have the means to defend themselves against their own army. Trenchard, it should be stressed, holds exactly the same position as the Bill of Rights of 1689 — there should be no standing army in this kingdom. He had no objection to the use of a professional army to fight wars abroad, arguing merely that it would be cheaper to hire foreign troops than send out English ones, and altogether preferable to have foreigners die in place of Englishmen. And he knew perfectly well that resistance to a standing army was a peculiarly English luxury, for it depended on the claim that all that England needed to defend herself was not a professional army but a professional navy. As he put it in *An Argument*:

[It is certain there is no Country so situated for Naval Power as England.](#) The Sea is our Element, our Seamen have as much hardy Bravery, and our Ships are as numerous, and built of as good Materials as any in the World: Such a Force well

applied and managed is able to give Laws to the Universe; and if we keep a competent part of it well arm'd in times of Peace, it is the most ridiculous thing in nature to believe any Prince will have thoughts of invading us, unless he proposes to be superiour to us in Naval Power....[\[31\]](#)

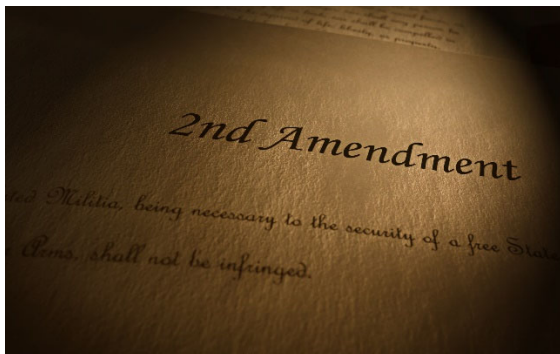
There is a second respect in which Womersley misrepresents the views of the opponents of a standing army when he says that "the 'Standing Army' debate of 1697-98 was about taxation, rather than the ownership and location of deadly force." Not only was it about liberty not taxation, it certainly was about the ownership and location of deadly force. In order to see this we need only turn to Toland's *The militia reform'd, or, An easy scheme of furnishing England with a constant land-force capable to prevent or to subdue any foreign power, and to maintain perpetual quiet at home without endangering the public liberty* of 1699. There Toland bluntly responds to those who object to what they call "arming all the people" that "this is, in my Opinion, so useful and necessary, that, should we obtain nothing, besides, it were well worth our while to procure an Act for this alone."[\[32\]](#)

But, before one hastens to conclude that Toland would have approved of the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment, one has to note that Toland actually wants to arm only what he calls free men, for his proposal is

THAT ENGLAND CONSISTING OF FREEMEN AND SERVANTS, NONE BE CAPABLE OF SERVING IN THE MILITIA BUT THE FORMER. By FREEMEN I understand Men of Property, or Persons that are able to live of themselves; and those who cannot subsist in this Independence I call SERVANTS. The bare Explication of the Terms should, one would think, be sufficient to perswade any Man of Sense that the former should not only be sooner trusted with Arms than the latter; but that they must needs use 'em likewise to better purpose. For besides that all the Endowments which Nature has made common to both are improv'd in FREEMEN, the very Temper of

their Bodies being much stronger and livelier by better feeding, which is no little Ingredient to Courage, they fight also for their Liberty and Property; whereas the other have nothing to lose but their Lives, which are likewise infinitely dearer to those whose Circumstances render 'em more agreeable and easy.[33]

Thus only freemen are to be armed; though servants (a term which includes all employees) are to be trained in the use of arms they are not to be allowed to take their weapons home with them, but are required to surrender them when they leave the parade ground so that they can be safely locked away in an armory. They are not members of the militia, but Toland says, “auxiliaries.” Toland thus equivocates: he rejects the arguments against arming all the people (that armed robbery and poaching will become commonplace — no one will want to rob armed householders, and poaching is easier with snares than with guns)[34] as fallacious, but he accepts that the poor cannot be trusted with weapons. And the reason for his equivocation is simple: since the poor are not really free and are not to be counted as citizens, they cannot be relied on to defend the existing order. It is only men of property who can be trusted to defend the liberties and properties of those who are “able to live of themselves,” for they are bound to “consider they are fighting for their own, and not otherwise employ'd for their Fellows than these are for them, their common Endeavours being to secure every Man's private Property.”[35] Thus the ownership and location of deadly force was indeed the fundamental issue. If a professional army could not be trusted, neither could the poor. Only men of property could be entrusted with weapons and could be allowed to keep them in their homes.



Are there lessons to be drawn from these debates when we think about questions of liberty in our own very different world? Two seem to me important. First, there is a strong case to be made for regarding conscription into the army as being not an infringement of liberty but a precondition for a society founded on principles of liberty and equality. Second, a Second Amendment right to bear arms depends on all — or nearly all — citizens feeling that they are beneficiaries of the existing order; it can only work under quite restricted social and economic conditions. Toland, I think, would have been delighted to find himself living in a society where those conditions existed; but he would have thought it foolish to imagine that such a right should be asserted no matter what the circumstances. Arming the people has its dangers if you put guns into the hands of the wrong people.

Endnotes

[23.] Reprinted in Carlo Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1980), pp. 3-59.

[24.] Celenza, *Machiavelli: A Portrait*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[25.] Vivanti, *Niccolò Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[26.] Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 37. I thank Paul Rahe for pointing out to me the significance of Gilbert's translation.

[27.] See, for example, Maurizio Viroli, *Niccolò's Smile: A Biography of Machiavelli* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), pp. 81-85; John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), pp. 410-12. A sound view is that of Paul Anthony Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 9. I am surprised how cautious my own formulation in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, trans. David Wootton (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), p. xvi was. For an indication that the pendulum is now once again swinging against a Roman reading of the militia proposal, and an up-to-date

bibliography, see Robert Black, "Machiavelli and the Militia: New Thoughts," *Italian Studies* 69 (2014): 41-50.

[28.] C. C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The De Militia of Leonardo Bruni* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961).

[29.] Of course one can argue that he would have liked to say this but for prudential reasons never did: Mikael Hörnqvist, "Perché Non Si Usa Allegare I Romani: Machiavelli and the Florentine Militia of 1506", *Renaissance Quarterly* 55 (2002): 148-91. Perhaps; but his immediate model was not ancient Rome but Cesare Borgia.

[30.] On this, see Lois G. Schworer, "*No Standing Armies!': The Antiarmy Ideology in Seventeenth-century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

[31.] John Trenchard, *An Argument Shewing that a Standing Army is Inconsistent with a Free Government: and Absolutely Destructive to the Constitution of the English monarchy* (London: n.p., 1697), p. 18.

[32.] John Toland, *The Militia Reform'd, or, An Easy Scheme of Furnishing England with a Constant Land-force: Capable to Prevent or to Subdue any Foreign Power, and to Maintain Perpetual Quiet at Home, without Endangering the Publick Liberty* (London: John Darby, 1698), p. 86.

[33.] *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

[34.] Joyce Lee Malcolm, *To Keep and Bear Arms: The Origins of An Anglo-American Right* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Joyce Lee Malcolm, *Guns and Violence: The English Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[35.] Toland, *The Militia Reform'd*, p. 23.

REPUBLICAN EXTREMISM: NO STANDING ARMIES AS ASPIRATION AND POSSIBILITY

by Joseph R. Stromberg

In his well-paced essay David Womersley focuses on the rhetoric directed against “standing armies” and in favor of militia for at least a century and a half. He rightly observes that this political language could (and did) serve diverse causes. The same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, one supposes, for the larger “republican,” “civic humanist,” or “country party” discourse in which the “No Standing Army” theme was often in play. Womersley takes a reasonable history-of-ideas approach that serves to raise the question of whether or not the attack on standing armies had any intrinsic merit in its own time, or indeed, at any time. The author certainly implies it may have.

History of a Concept

Womersley writes that upon settling the Nine Years War (1689-1697), King William III wished “to retain his army of at least 87,000 experienced soldiers” for future needs of his anti-French continental coalition. Reacting badly, a “New Country Party” of Tories and radical Whigs exploited longstanding “anti-Stuart resentment by agitating for the disbanding of the army” – hence John Trenchard’s famous pamphlet of 1697.[36]

In England the “standing army” question -- first heard of in 1603 -- became important by 1642, with civil war looming. The words denoted, Womersley writes, “an army ... kept together in peacetime (no matter how it is funded or sustained),” but toward 1700 came to mean an army maintained “during peacetime and *paid for out of taxation*” (italics added). This emergent republican critique drew on classical history and literature and reflected the ancient fear of a warrior-hero,[37] who would use his success to tyrannize over society. This concern had potential cross-class appeal to all people tired of state-building warfare. Womersley notes that Nicolò Machiavelli’s treatment of Rome’s citizen-soldiers

as the key to successful territorial expansion served as proof of his claims about the superiority of militia to mercenaries.



James Harrington (circa. 1635)

Womersley states that down to the 1690s the “financial sinews of the English state” had been so feeble that in *Oceana* (1656) James Harrington called a tax-supported standing army “a mere fancy.” Harrington was wrong, and because of William III’s financial innovations,^[38] standing armies “paid for out of taxation” became lasting fixtures of the state apparatus. They now endangered both liberty and property and the “Vulgar Whig” pamphlet literature of the 1690s put reliably inflammatory villains like Cromwell, Charles II, and James II in the frame as their inventors.

The Gospel According to Trenchard and Gordon

Here we might well have a look at John Trenchard (1662–1723) and Thomas Gordon’s (1691–1750) formulations in *Cato’s Letters* (and elsewhere), which set a certain standard in the English-speaking world. In their work the militia emerges as an explicit counter-model of defense-as-defense, as against the standing army.

In 1697 Trenchard claimed that the old Gothic Balance “between King, Lords and Commons” characterized the militia, so that “there was no Difference between the Citizen, the Soldier, and the Husbandman, for all promiscuously took Arms when the public Safety required it, and afterwards laid them down....” Even in 1697 “the Nobility, Gentry, and Freeholders of

England [could] be trusted with the Defence of their own Lives, Estates and Liberties.” A militia was suited to defense: “Mr. Harrington hath founded his whole Oceana upon a trained Militia...” He derided “Soldiers of Fortune [who] make Murder their Profession, and enquire no farther into the Justice of the Cause”^[39] than their pay.^[40] Having “an authorized Standing Army [was] far worse than ... a Conquest from abroad.” And “how shall we ever get out of it again?”^[41]

In 1722 Gordon asserted that “military virtue [could] proceed from nothing else” but “liberty only”: “In free states, every man being a soldier, or quickly made so, they improve in a war, and every campaign fight better and better....”^[42] But when could Britain safely “reduce our troops to the usual guards and garrisons, if it cannot be done now...? Or, are we never to disband, till Europe is settled according to some modern schemes?”^[43] “When the people are easy and satisfied, the whole kingdom is his army....”^[44]

Ancient Rhetoric and False Flags

Returning to Womersley’s narrative, we learn that “the “Standing Army” debate of 1697-98 was about *taxation*, rather than the ownership and location of deadly force” (italics added). Here was an early sign that anti-standing-army language could easily serve as a cudgel wielded on related and unrelated questions – a “familiar language” employed “in pursuit of subtly altered objectives.”^[45] Thus in the 1730s there was a flare-up of anti-standing-army language over the use of Hessian and (later) Hanoverian mercenaries (12,000 and 16,000 respectively). In this instance Lord Chesterfield – a familiar type: the imperial “isolationist”^[46] – was actually angry at European commitments that might “hamper [Britain’s] freedom to pursue its now evident imperial destiny” *outside Europe*.

Overshooting Womersley’s stopping point a bit, we find historians Philip Harling and Peter Mandler observing that circa 1815 Britain’s “ruthlessly regressive tax system” produced the highest revenues (per GNP) of any contemporary state. In the 18th century this state had been a war machine armed with credit, taxes, and excises, and driven by foreign policy. Huge debts grew from its

wars, including those with America and France. Under this pressure the English public – acting as a kind of belated Country Party, tired of expensive adventures -- appealed for peace, retrenchment and the gold standard. Whig and Benthamite reformers cut military expenses, but in making the military-fiscal state less costly, they (unfortunately) saved it.[\[47\]](#) Historian Edward Ingram describes the British state built between 1784 and 1842 as “authoritarian and militarist.” Its financial power – the result of world dominance -- accounted for the internal wealth of this “militarist despotism ... dominated by the landed, financial, service elites who represented the City’s interests” (not to mention their alternate power base: a large landed state in India).[\[48\]](#)

Empire beckons, and we shall cross the water only to find that Anglo-American cousinhood has thwarted any all-out institutional break and that distance is not always difference.

American Parallels

Womersley writes that Lord Macaulay now “looks dated” for dismissing the standing army question as a historical curiosity. Adducing Gore Vidal’s “Caesarism,” Womersley suggests there has been a real problem of statecraft here -- “how to reconcile the ownership and location of deadly force with liberty and civil society” -- from time out of mind. Certainly, the leadership of a country bent on having imperial sway in the world – a goal that Englishmen broadly shared[\[49\]](#) – would not tie its hands by adopting a militia system. That would have meant renouncing other possibilities. The Country Party’s anti-public-debt ideas implied a similar renunciation, and they too underwent rhetorical debasement and ultimate abandonment.[\[50\]](#)



Adam Smith

Womersley describes how the Jacobite rising and invasion of 1745 revived arguments for militia. New voices spoke ancient Whig language, asking for militia *not* as a substitute for standing armies (long since normalized), but as an additional source of military strength. Womersley writes: “An empire needs a standing army, and because regular imperial troops must often serve overseas, the *consequent weakness in homeland defence had to be supplied by a militia*” (italics added). Later, Adam Smith himself would summon the militia’s ghost for the same imperial reasons.[\[51\]](#)

Lacking space for a thumbnail sketch of American militia, I refer readers to Jeffrey Rogers Hummel’s essay of 2001.[\[52\]](#) The main fight was over whether the states or the feds would control it, and the feds won. Interestingly, however, Senator Gary Hart (D., Colorado) puzzled the rubes with a book in 1998[\[53\]](#) which trod much the same “republican” ground as the British discussion of 1745. From 1995 to about 1999 the best and brightest of the U.S. intellectual-political-military-economic complex (our Whig oligarchy?) meditated on how to *defend the homeland* when one’s foreign policy is not about defense at all. This was the famous Hart-Rudman Commission. The Department of Homeland Security was its offspring.

Some other Anglo-American parallels arise from shared notions (or illusions?) fathered on republican theory. In 1722 Trenchard rightly spotted a “[close and inseparable ... connection](#) between [trade] and naval power....”[\[54\]](#) Like Harrington he saw naval power as no

threat to domestic liberties. This clever mechanism for having your empire and liberty too gave way to Air Power, that special field of American praxis. Even the Taft wing of the Republican Party took up aero-mania in the early Cold War.

In all Anglo-American empire-building, there is ongoing institutional feedback from overseas: *standing armies* of domestic police, fingerprinting, civil-service reform, colonial offices (e.g., U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Insular Affairs), bureaucratic management, surveillance of occupied territory at home and abroad, and naturally militarization, which affected U.S. police work from the very beginning.

But what if the anti-standing-army/pro-militia strand of republicanism had had a wider constituency and greater practical impact? What then? It is hard to say. But leaving aside a few strays like [John Taylor of Caroline](#), the truest *beir* of the anti-standing-army tradition may well be [William Godwin](#), whose “civic anarchism” revealed possibilities latent in the republican tradition.^[55]

Endnotes

[36.] John Trenchard, “An Argument, shewing that a Standing Army is inconsistent with a Free Government, and absolutely destructive to the Constitution of the English Monarchy” (1697). From John Trenchard, *A Collection of Tracts*, vol. I (London: F. Cogan, 1751). <[/titles/2315#lf1548-01_head_004](#)>

[37.] Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

[38.] John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1989), 151-52.

[39.] The italicized phrase prefigures one of Herbert Spencer’s.

[40.] “An Argument, shewing.”

[41.] “The second part of an Argument, Shewing, that a Standing Army Is inconsistent with a Free Government, and absolutely destructive to the Constitution of the English Monarchy. With Remarks on the late published

LIST of King James’s Irish Forces in France” (1697). <[/titles/2315#lf1548-01_head_006](#)>

[42.] *Cato's Letters*, “Against Standing Armies.” No. 94. Saturday, September 15, 1722. (Trenchard and Gordon). <[/titles/1239#lf0226-03_head_029](#)>

[43.] Speaking of Gibraltar, he notes “[the little use of that place](#).”

[44.] *Cato's Letters*, “Further Reasonings against Standing Armies.” (Trenchard). No. 95. Saturday, September 22, 1722. <[/titles/1239#lf0226-03_head_030](#)>.

[45.] Cf. J.G.A. Pocock, “The varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform,” *Virtue Commerce, and History* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 215-310.

[46.] See John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 70-75, for British “imperial isolationists”; for the Americans, Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *America in Midpassage*, I (New York: Macmillan, 1939), I, 443-46, 456-57.

[47.] Philip Harling and Peter Mandler, “From ‘Fiscal-Military’ State to Laissez-Faire State, 1760-1850,” *Journal of British Studies*, 32 (January 1993), 44-68.

[48.] Edward Ingram, “Hegemony, Global Reach, and World Power: Great Britain’s Long Cycle,” in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds., *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2001), 240-41, 244; on India, 237-39, 244.

[49.] Here the influence of Machiavelli was hardly benign, since it was his “republic-for-expansion” that interested most of his readers.

[50.] Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 151-61, 206, on the career and decline of country ideology.

[51.] Donald Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 103-13.

[52.] Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, “The American Militia and the Origin of Conscription: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 15:4 (Fall 2001), 29-77. See also Sheldon Richman, *America’s Counter-Revolution* (Ann

Arbor, MI: Griffin & Lash, 2016), 32-34, on the militia clauses of the Constitution of 1789.

[53.] Gary Hart, *The Minute Man: Restoring the Army of the People* (New York: The Free Press, 1998).

[54.] *Cato's Letters*, "Military Virtue produced and supported by Civil Liberty only." (Gordon). No. 65. Saturday, February 10, 1722. <[/titles/1238#lf0226-02_head_035](#)>.

[55.] George J. Neimanis, "Militia vs. the Standing Army in the History of Economic Thought from Adam Smith to Friedrich Engels," *Military Affairs*, 44:1 (February 1980), 29-30. For all his faults, Godwin is a remarkably sensible Englishman at times. See *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1985 [1793]), 513-534, on military matters [online version: <[/titles/169](#)>]. J.G.A. Pocock (or his subjects), Alasdair MacIntyre, William T. Cavanaugh, Elaine Scarry, and even Karl Marx may fill in some outstanding gaps.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A STANDING ARMY AND A MERCENARY ARMY?

by David Womersley

After reading these lively and engaged responses, my initial impulse – being an academic – is to engage in a little light scholarly duelling with my good friend David Wootton concerning the points of interpretation and reference with which he takes issue in my original essay. But, aware that this is likely to be of only moderate interest to noncombatants, I will reserve my devastating and unanswerable counterarguments until David and I meet in the south of France in a few weeks' time and are sitting down together over a meal and a drink.



Instead, I am going to explore an unstable aspect of the language of the "standing army" debate as it developed over the course of the 18th century, and in conclusion I will relate what this instability suggests back to the question of the present currency of these texts and arguments, a topic on which all three respondents touched.

It is striking that the early opponents of standing armies do not see any difference between a standing army and a mercenary army. They use the phrases interchangeably, even though it is clear that strictly speaking they mean different things. Just because a soldier is paid to fight, it doesn't necessarily follow that he will fight for anyone who has the money to pay him.

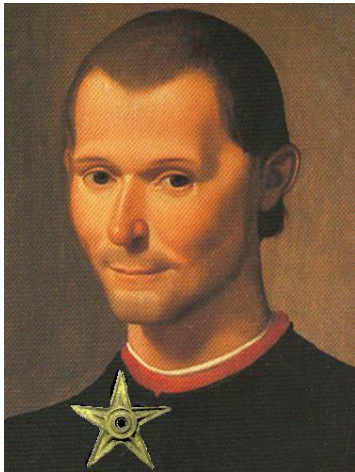
The opponents of standing armies equate professional forces with mercenary forces because, following Machiavelli in *The Art of War*, they assume the existence of a moral gulf between a militia soldiery and paid troops.[56] Machiavelli concluded that the Roman generals who lived and served before the third Punic War (151-146 BC), unlike their degenerate successors Sulla, Caesar, and Pompey, "were Famous as much for their Virtue as Conduct, and the reason was, because these made not War their Profession, and the others did." [57]

Why did Machiavelli think this? For him, the issue turned on the moral consequences of the manner in which soldiers are obliged to subsist (and here it is clear that Machiavelli was unable to conceive of armed forces receiving regular salaries paid for out of normal taxation):

Nor can any man (great or small) who makes War his Profession, be otherwise than Vitious; because that Trade being not to be followed in time of Peace, they are necessitated either to

prevent or obstruct Peace; or in time of War to provide so for themselves, that they may subsist in time of Peace; and neither of those two ways are practicable to an honest Man; for from the desire of providing for themselves against the evil day, when the Wars should be ended, proceed the Robberies, and Thefts, and Murders which are committed daily by such kind of People, and that upon their Friends as well as Enemies.[\[58\]](#)

In the early 16th century it was the simple human imperative of survival that made the theoretically distinct characters of the professional soldier and the mercenary converge in practice. In Machiavelli's day, if war was your trade, you had to be a mercenary, with all that that implied about the corrupting absence of fixed loyalties.



Niccolo Machiavelli

However, English experience over the course of the first three quarters of the 18th century (during which time what Machiavelli had been unable to imagine actually came to pass and professional armed forces were maintained in time of peace and paid for out of the normal revenues of government) revealed that a standing army in fact need not be a mercenary army. It gradually became clear that one could be a professional soldier without being a vicious man.

As a result, the moral gulf between a virtuous militia and a vicious professional army, which had seemed unbridgeable for Machiavelli, and which had yawned so wide for Trenchard and Gordon, gradually

closed. When [Edward Gibbon](#) became an officer in the South Hampshire Militia in the summer of 1759, his journal entries written at the time show no trace of any feeling on his part that the militia was morally superior to the regular troops with whom they occasionally drilled and went on manoeuvres. Indeed, quite the reverse. The regular troops were the object of the militia's emulation. If possible Gibbon wanted his men to seem as "professional" as their regular colleagues in drill, in discipline, and even in appearance:

...from the extreme shabbiness in which we went out we are come, tho' by slower degrees than most other corps of militia, to be as well appointed as the Guards.[\[59\]](#)

So impressed was Gibbon by the regular troops he met in the course of his duties as a militia officer that he even considered taking a commission himself, as he recalled in his "Memoirs": "A young mind, unless it be of a cold and languid temper, is dazzled even by the play of arms; and in the first sallies of my enthusiasm I had seriously wished and tryed to embrace the regular profession of a soldier."[\[60\]](#)

This awareness that, *pave* Machiavelli and Trenchard and Gordon, a standing army need not be a mercenary army also shaped the account of the Roman imperial army Gibbon put forward in *The Decline and Fall*. It is sometimes said that *The Decline and Fall* exhibits the old Whig anti-standing-army prejudice in full strength. But in fact in *The Decline and Fall* Gibbon referred only once to the imperial troops as a "[standing force](#),"[\[61\]](#) and he never called them a standing army. Instead he referred to them consistently as "mercenaries," or as a "mercenary army." (It is also possible that Gibbon's experience in Switzerland, where militia forces had been known to offer themselves for hire as mercenaries, further blurred for him the over-clear distinctions drawn by Machiavelli and his followers in late 17th- and early 18th-century London.) The implication is clear. For Gibbon, modern professional standing armies were very different from the mercenary bands of antiquity.

This erosion of the old prejudice that there was a moral distinction separating militias from standing armies,

which we can see occurring in Gibbon between 1759 and 1776, was complemented and corroborated by the publication in 1776 of *The Wealth of Nations*. Adam Smith not only asserted that, from the point of view of military effectiveness, standing armies were always superior to militias. He also denied that there was any essential moral difference between these two military forms. Smith drove home this point by rereading the very passages of Roman history on which Machiavelli had most relied, and coming to the very un-Machiavellian conclusion that militias, if kept embodied and in the field for long periods, would improve into standing armies, and standing armies, if military discipline became relaxed, would degenerate into militias.^[62]



Edward Gibbon

The straight line of movement away from the confusion of mercenaries with standing armies which Gibbon followed up until at least the publication of the second instalment of *The Decline and Fall* in 1781 was reversed, however, at the end of his life, when in his “Memoirs” he suddenly and unexpectedly relapsed into the old, Machiavellian conflation of professional soldiers with mercenaries when describing his career in the militia:

The defence of the state may be imposed on the body of the people, or it may be delegated to a select number of mercenaries; the exercise of arms may be an occasional duty or a separate trade, and it is this difference which forms the distinction between a militia and a standing

army.... The impotence of such unworthy soldiers [*the old English militia*] was supplied from the era of the restoration by the establishment of a body of mercenaries: the conclusion of each war increased the numbers that were kept on foot, and although their progress was checked by the jealousy of opposition, time and necessity reconciled, or at least accustomed, a free country to the annual perpetuity of a standing army.^[63]

What provoked this revival of a previously abandoned language? Could it be that the military campaigns of the American revolution and the early years of the French revolution, culminating in the battle of Valmy in September 1792, put new life into the old prejudice? The successes of the colonial militia of the American states and the citizen armies of the French republic against the trained professional armies of Britain and Prussia may have hinted that the old Florentine had not been so wide of the mark after all.

Gibbon died long before the French revolution had played itself out and the *ancien régime* had been apparently restored by the actions of the Congress of Vienna. Professional armies had in the end prevailed, notwithstanding the Machiavellian complexion events had seemed to wear for a while between 1783 and the early 1790s. It was from the midst of this post-revolutionary intellectual world that Macaulay dismissed the prejudice against standing armies as a purely historical phenomenon:

The old national antipathy to permanent military establishments, an antipathy which was once reasonable and salutary, but which lasted some time after it had become unreasonable and noxious, has gradually yielded to the irresistible force of circumstances. We have made the discovery, that an army may be so constituted as to be in the highest degree efficient against an enemy, and yet obsequious to the civil magistrate. We have long ceased to apprehend danger to law and to freedom from the licence of troops, and from the ambition of victorious generals. An alarmist who should now talk such

language as was common five generations ago, who should call for the entire disbanding of the land force of the realm, and who should gravely predict that the warriors of Inkerman and Delhi would depose the Queen, dissolve the Parliament, and plunder the Bank, would be regarded as fit only for a cell in Saint Luke's.^[64]

The larger conceptual shift which accompanied this withering of the old prejudice against standing armies was related to the idea of professionalism. "Profession" and "professional" are complex words with fascinating histories. Looking at the various entries in the *OED*, one can see how these terms migrated from the late-17th to the mid-19th centuries, acquiring as they did so positive connotations of disinterestedness, competence, superior performance, and rectitude. Paradoxically, the very aspect of professionalism which had made it suspect to men of the generation of Trenchard and Gordon – namely, the receipt of payment – had been converted, by the time of Macaulay, into the reason why professionals could be trusted. It was precisely because doctors, lawyers, and soldiers received reliable, regular, and substantial emolument that they could be relied upon to discharge the duties of their station without their own narrow personal interest being uppermost. That interest would be looked after anyway, so they were free to put their expertise to work in a disinterested manner and for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Such at least was the social theory of professionalism, a theory which we can detect beginning in England in the late 18th century, and which by the mid-19th had taken secure hold. It is a theory that separates us from the world of the standing army controversy of the late 17th century. However, is that theory itself now succumbing to historical change? In Britain and America there is widespread suspicion of the professions as closed shops which brandish the principle of disinterestedness to disguise outrageous self-enrichment. Films and novels repeatedly put before us stories about professionals "gone bad": corrupt lawyers, incompetent doctors – and, not least, rogue soldiers.

If the Victorian ideal of the professional is being eroded, does that suggest that the anti-standing-army prejudice, or something like it, could revive?

Endnotes

[56.] *Art of War*, book I, chs 2-4.

[57.] *Art of War*, book I, ch. 3; quoting from the 1695 translation of Machiavelli's *Works*.

[58.] *Art of War*, book I, ch. 2.

[59.] *Gibbon's Journal to January 28th, 1763*, ed. D. M. Low (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929), p. 143.

[60.] *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, ed. John Murray (London: John Murray, 1896), p. 188.

[61.] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, 3 vols. (London: Allen Lane, 2004), vol. I, p. 46. [Online version: Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J.B. Bury with an Introduction by W.E.H. Lecky (New York: Fred de Fau and Co., 1906), in 12 vols. Vol. 1. <[/titles/1365#Gibbon_0214-01_131](#)>.

[62.] *Wealth of Nations*, V.i.a.23, 28, 31-34, and 39. [Online version: Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith, edited with an Introduction, Notes, Marginal Summary and an Enlarged Index by Edwin Cannan* (London: Methuen, 1904). Vol. 2. See for example, <[/titles/119#Smith_0206-02_501](#)>.

[63.] *Autobiographies*, pp. 178-79.

[64.] Thomas Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, ed. C. H. Firth, 6 vols (London: Macmillan, 1915), vol. VI, pp. 2731-32.

MACHIAVELLIAN MOMENTS: CONTESTED IDEAS

by Joseph R. Stromberg

Given the range of issues raised by the contributors, it seems necessary to load the scattergun and overstep lines of ideology, politics, military affairs, and economics. I hope that a mixed metaphor is no worse than mixed government, which is part of our story and which rested on the 17th-century English merger (and confusion) of two lines of tripartite political analysis. The first involved social functions (or estates) in their Indo-European, (vestigial) Ancient, High Medieval, and Early Modern iterations. The other built on Greco-Roman analysis of political forms empowering the One, the Few, or the Many.^[65] The ideal polity finds the best mixture of the classical forms or, alternatively, *balances* its estates. Could it do both?

English republican (or Country Party) thinkers wrestled these incompatibles into a rough frame. In the long run, as classicist Patricia Springborg writes: “ancient city-republican forms [were] transported, with unintended consequences, into the setting of the large territorial state ... perhaps due to the factor of scale being overlooked.”^[66] Human-scale cultural and economic interaction and the “concept of the city as a public space” are “lost when the state ceases to be the city and government is removed to *some isolated federal capitol on a hill, with hegemony over lands and seas* on which many of its citizens have never personally cast an eye” (italics added). Even worse, perhaps: “Admiration for empire is admiration for sovereignty on the most extensive scale.”^[67]

Meditations on republicanism, empire, and sovereignty (as modernized in the 16th century) seemingly left a permanent split in the Anglo-American political mind, one that touches on our standing armies and militia. J.H. Hexter writes that, as of 1600, law “was a science, a mode of knowing: of warring there was only a craft, a mystery, at once temporal and irrational...”^[68] Things have not much improved, and the aforesaid split mind lives on,

clinging to a constitution and a set of war powers that seem to exist in parallel universes. The constitution knows something of liberty; its shadowy counterpart knows, or *is*, mainly force.

Thoughts and Deeds

Substitution of Lord Lieutenants and county trainbands for the territorial lords’ private levies allowed England to make, in Hexter’s unkind words, “giant strides toward domestic tranquility and military incompetence.”^[69] In 1642 the Militia question raised by Parliament was part of an assault on the executive powers of Charles I and ultimately involved an assertion of parliamentary *absolutism*. Here, publicist *privado* Henry Parker (1604-1652), ally of Puritans, became a chief theorist. Taking the Machiavellian high ground of supreme emergency, he asserted the right of Parliament to do literally anything inside *or outside* the law. The near-totalitarian pitch of Parker’s theses reflected his deep contempt for the common law and his intention of bringing the war powers (whatever they might be) into play in domestic politics. It was a performance to make Carl Schmitt or John Yoo very jealous.^[70]



King Charles I (circa 1616)

These theses perhaps reflected J.G.A. Pocock’s original Machiavellian moment involving French and Spanish

threats to all of Italy and the *internal* threat of the Medici tyrants to Florence, as viewed from the standpoint of an idealized republican Venice.^[71] In any case, Parker's arguments (or some of them) passed down to the Levellers and into the opposition tradition. Shared commitment to the Protestant cause served to cement this result.

Endnotes

[65.] Ch. 2, "The Idea of the Estates of the Realm," in Michael Mendle's *Dangerous Positions: Mixed Government, the Estates of the Realm, and the Making of the Answer to the XIX Propositions* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985), is probably the best discussion to date of these matters in the English language.

[66.] The Romano-Spartan outbursts of French bourgeois republicans like Saint-Just come to mind.

[67.] Patricia Springborg, *Western Republicanism and the Oriental Prince* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1992), 241-242, 279.

[68.] J.H. Hexter, *On Historians* (London: Collins, 1979), 272.

[69.] J.H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (London: Longmans, 1961), 147 (and see 144 ff).

[70.] Michael Mendle, *Henry Parker and the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. Ch. 4 and 7.

[71.] J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), *passim*.

STANDING ARMIES AND TAXATION

by David Wootton

I'd like to thank Stephen Halbrook for his quotation from Machiavelli about the Swiss -- clearly Machiavelli thought that some free citizens fought all the more effectively because they fought to defend their freedom. I'm still not sure that he thought that this could be stated as a general principle.

"CLEARLY MACHIAVELLI THOUGHT
THAT SOME FREE CITIZENS FOUGHT
ALL THE MORE EFFECTIVELY
BECAUSE THEY FOUGHT TO DEFEND
THEIR FREEDOM."

I look forward, of course, to discussing these matters with David Womersley in a few weeks time, but I'd like to add yet another topic to that discussion. In his original contribution and in his reply David makes an argument repeatedly which I either can't understand or don't agree with. He says that

1. at the end of the 17th century in England the term standing army is "used much more narrowly to refer to an army that is kept together during peacetime *and paid for out of taxation*" (his italics);
2. "as recently as 1656, and reflecting in Machiavellian style on English experience in the Civil War, James Harrington had dismissed the notion of a standing army supported by taxation as '[a mere fancy, as void of all reason and experience as if a man should think to maintain such an one by robbing of orchards](#)'; for a mere tax is but pulling of plumbtrees, the roots whereof are in other men's grounds, who, suffering perpetual violence, come to hate the author of it";

3. “in the autumn and winter of 1697 standing armies— now properly so-called because they had become a permanent part of the resources of the state and were paid for out of taxation— might for the first time be resisted on the grounds of both liberty and frugality”;
4. “it is clear that Machiavelli was unable to conceive of armed forces receiving regular salaries paid for out of normal taxation.”

David seems to think that standing armies are characterized by two novel features: 1) they are kept together in peacetime, and 2) they are paid for out of taxation. The first is straightforward -- a standing army simply is an army kept together in peacetime. It is the second that puzzles me, for how else could an early modern army be paid except out of taxation? Of course tax revenues often fell behind expenditures, so armies were funded by borrowing money, but the money was repaid out of taxation. I can think of some exceptions -- sale of office, for example, was used as a major source of revenue in 17th-century France and doesn't exactly count as taxation. And I suppose Spanish armies were funded by silver from the New World. But elsewhere, unless I am missing something, what paid for armies were taxes. Of course what is peculiar about a standing army is that it requires a regular tax revenue to support it, not exceptional taxes raised at a time of crisis; but I don't think that that is David's point, although he does, as we shall see, refer to “normal taxation,” so perhaps it is.

Machiavelli, we are told, “was unable to conceive of armed forces receiving regular salaries paid for out of normal taxation.” As it happens this is wrong. One of Machiavelli's earliest political texts, dating to March 1503 when he was serving in the Florentine civil service, is entitled *Parole da dirle sopra la provisione del danaio*. (There's a translation in vol. 3 of the Gilbert *Chief Works*, but I won't vouch for its accuracy.) It is a speech (presumably not to be delivered by Machiavelli himself) calling for the establishment of a Florentine standing army funded out of regular taxation. The argument is simple: although Florence is not currently at war, she might find herself at war at any time. No state can survive if it lacks the means

to defend itself against any likely adversary. A Venetian army could be on Florentine territory within two days, Cesare Borgia's army within eight. (The basis of this concern is of course that both the Venetians and Borgia have an army available in peacetime -- in the case of Venice, a mercenary army.) Only a standing army can deter an invasion; indeed if Florence remains undefended she is bound to be invaded.

It is true that Machiavelli turned later that year to organizing the militia, which was designed to be a force which could be quickly assembled and used against any invader. Evidently this was intended to be a cheaper option than a standing army. But Machiavelli clearly had at one point conceived of armed forces receiving regular salaries paid for out of normal taxation -- and indeed the militia, if it was ordered to go on active service, was to be paid out of taxation.

It is also true that Machiavelli was opposed to professional armies. This was not because they would be standing armies or paid for out of taxation. It was because for most mercenary soldiers and officers peace meant unemployment, and they would thus do anything they could to prevent peace; they also engaged in looting and rapine so that they had something to fall back on if peace broke out. The advantage of the militia was that (apart from a small professional corps of NCOs employed full time) its members would all have peacetime occupations to which they could return. Their interests would thus coincide with those of the population as a whole. This is an application of the republican principle of rotation of office -- a principle also applied in Machiavelli's militia, where officers were rotated regularly so that troops would not develop a personal loyalty to them.

What then of Harrington? Cromwell's army had had its pay constantly in arrears. There was enormous hostility to paying those wages out of taxation, and to some extent they were paid by confiscating land from royalists. Harrington was quite right to think that persuading the English to accept a standing army paid for out of regular taxation was almost impossible. But that of course was because England together with Scotland was an island where no invasion could take place without some

warning, as it would require the assembly of a large fleet on the other side of the channel. And this peculiar English/British privilege continues to inform the standing-army debates at the end of the 17th century.

I think it is important to understand that there is an Anglo-American tradition of thinking about standing armies and militias which is premised on the absence of any immediate threat of invasion in normal peacetime. The Florentines, as Machiavelli insisted, could not afford to think about the threats they faced in this relaxed fashion -- and he was right, as the events of 1512 demonstrated.



Jane Austen

I think the point David makes about the professions is an interesting and important one. But what is surely also important is the social location of the officer corps of the British army in the 19th century -- the younger sons and brothers of landed gentlemen, the cousins of clergymen, they were firmly attached to a social elite which they rejoined when they retired from active service. The army was less a separate profession than the Church or the law, for its officers mixed and mingled with the gentry -- including people like Gibbon -- on a daily basis. It is this intertwined character of the British elite, which one can see in Jane Austen's novels, which must in part explain Britain's extraordinary political stability since 1688. Someone must have written a fine book on the

differences between the British and the Prussian armies -- perhaps a reader of this can point me to it.

Joseph Stromberg quotes Harling and Mandler on Britain's "ruthlessly regressive tax system" in 1815. But was it more regressive than tax systems elsewhere in Europe? More regressive than taxes even in Napoleonic France? Certainly for the 17th and 18th centuries the crucial feature of the English tax system was that everyone paid tax -- that nobody was exempt from taxation -- which created a coincidence of interests between legislators and the public, similar to the coincidence of interests created by rotation. This, of course, increased hostility to standing armies at the end of the 17th century; what's astonishing is that the British high tax system was built on parliamentary consent -- because the costs of empire were thought to be worth paying because they were more than compensated for by the economic opportunities that the empire opened up.

THE SWISS MILITIA

by Stephen Halbrook

Machiavelli's construct of the Florentine military force may well have been, as David Wootton suggests, composed not of free men, but of subjects. But Machiavelli's embrace of the Swiss militia, which is consistent with David Womersley's traditional reading, would reverberate in the English and American opponents of the standing army.

Machiavelli tells us in *The Prince* that "the Swiss are well armed and enjoy great freedom."^[72] The wise ruler permits his subjects to be armed, for disarming them shows mistrust of and offends them.^[73]

In *The Discourses*, Machiavelli wrote: "For either I have my country well equipped with arms, as the Romans had and as the Swiss have; or I have a country ill equipped with arms, as the Carthaginians had, and as have the king of France and the Italians today."^[74] A militia is superior for defense but not for aggression: "But when states are strongly armed, as Rome was and as the Swiss are, the more difficult it is to overcome them the nearer they are

to their homes: for such bodies can bring more forces together to resist attack than they can to attack others.”[\[75\]](#)

In *The Art of War*, Machiavelli blamed the demise of the Roman republic on emperors who “began to disarm the Roman people (in order to make them more passive under their tyranny) and to keep the same armies continually on foot within the confines of the Empire.”[\[76\]](#) The ideal militia included all men capable of bearing arms.[\[77\]](#)

For infantry exercises, Machiavelli recommended the crossbow, longbow, and harquebus, “a new, but very useful weapon. To these exercises I would accustom all the youth in the country...”[\[78\]](#) The harquebus was a short matchlock shoulder arm, an early firearm design.



Andrew Fletcher

Fast forward to Andrew Fletcher’s advocacy of “well-regulated militias” in *A Discourse of Government with Relation to Militias* (1698).[\[79\]](#) Fletcher wrote: “The Swisses at this day are the freest, happiest, and the people of all Europe who can best defend themselves, because they have the best militia.... And I cannot see why arms should be denied to any man who is not a slave, since they are the only true badges of liberty...”[\[80\]](#)

Similarly, Abraham Stanyan in *An Account of Switzerland* found among the Swiss maxims: “A well regulated Militia, in Opposition to a standing Army of mercenary Troops, that may overturn a Government at Pleasure.”[\[81\]](#) How was it regulated? “In the Canton of *Berne*, the whole Body of the People, from sixteen to

sixty, is enroll’d in the Militia, and “Every Man that is listed, provides himself with Arms at his own Expence...”[\[82\]](#) (The U.S. Militia Act of 1792 did the same). And there were butts in every community for the people “to shoot with their Muskets, that they many learn to be good Marksmen.”[\[83\]](#) Visit Switzerland today and you’ll hear the music of shooting ranges in every village.

And then there’s Colonel John A. Martin’s 1745 militia plan that cited Machiavelli in support of the theme: “For Britain, as a free state, has this advantage over the absolute monarchies of Europe, that it may trust safely *all* its subjects with arms, whereas those cannot.”[\[84\]](#) (My emphasis.)

In 1771, the patriotic *Boston Gazette* quoted from Thomas Gordon’s *Discourses on Tacitus*: “[The people of Switzerland groaned long under the heavy yoke of Austria](#),” but “asserted their native freedom.... With handfuls of men they overthrew mighty hosts, and could never be conquered by all the neighboring powers.” Recounting the William Tell saga, Gordon concluded: “Was there not a cause, was it not high time to exterminate such instruments of cruelty?”[\[85\]](#)

The symbolism was hardly obscure. The oppressed Swiss could defeat the mightiest armies of Europe. Now the oppressed Americans too could defeat the strongest military force in the world. The year 1775 was not far off.

Endnotes

[\[72.\]](#) Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. L. Ricci (New York: New American Library, 1952), 73.

[\[73.\]](#) *Id.* at 105.

[\[74.\]](#) Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, L. Walker transl. (New York: Penguin, 1970), 308.

[\[75.\]](#) *Id.* at 309-10.

[\[76.\]](#) Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, E. Farnsworth transl. (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 20.

[\[77.\]](#) *Id.* at 36, 38.

[\[78.\]](#) *Id.* at 59.

[79.] Andrew Fletcher, *Political Works* (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1749), 71.

[80.] *Id.* at 33-35.

[81.] Abraham Stanyan, *An Account of Switzerland. Written in the Year 1714* (London: Jacob Tonson), 101.

[82.] *Id.* at 193-94.

[83.] *Id.* at 202.

[84.] Colonel John A. Martin, *A Plan for Establishing and Disciplining a National Militia in Great Britain, Ireland, and in All the British Dominions of America* (London: A. Millar, 1745), xxxvi-xxxvii.

[85.] *Boston Gazette*, April 1, 1771, 3. See also, Thomas Gordon, "DISCOURSE IX.: Of the People, Sect. VI.: The People not turbulent unless seduced or oppressed," in *The Works of Tacitus. In Four Volumes. To which are prefixed, Political Discourses upon that Author by Thomas Gordon. The Second Edition, corrected.* (London: T. Woodward and J. Peele, 1737). Vol. 3. </titles/786#Tacitus_0067-03_301>.

REPUBLICANISM AND ETERNAL RETURNS

by Joseph R. Stromberg

["A naked permission to keep and bear arms"](#) is an insufficient ally of election or civil sovereignty. (...) Without a 'well-regulated militia,' the military sovereignty of a nation exactly resembles its civil society under a government of hereditary orders."

-- John Taylor of Caroline^[86]



John Taylor, of Caroline

Two Points

In response to Dr. Halbrook, I would just add that since the 1970s many historians have rejected the old Federalist disdain for the militia's role in the American Revolution and see the militias as crucial to the winning of American independence. Militias were, in fact, good (or adequate) for local defense, but rather poor at invading Canada. As historian William F. Marina wrote: "A citizen-militia is amateur-oriented service... Volunteer armies, when they assume imperial responsibilities, quickly become professionals with a career orientation." ^[87] (He joked that "standing armies don't stand around for very long.")

Dr. Wootton suggests that British taxation was no more regressive than continental taxation. If so, it was far more productive. Joel Mokyr states that in the 18th-century only the Dutch paid higher rates. He also underscores the centrality of regressive taxes. John Brewer holds that after 1714 indirect taxes (customs, excises) provided about 70 percent of steadily increasing revenues.^[88] If those ratepayers, whose voices counted, approved of overseas projects, we can indict them as social imperialists on some later day.

Underlying Issues

Under a veil of ideology, people on both sides of the water have taken outwardly good ideas (republican theory or Locke), on faith, as sufficient. The fine print having gone unread, the gap between legal constitutions and extra-constitutional powers gradually became an abyss for staring into (and being stared back at). On this, Bruce

Lenman writes: “The U.K. executive’s operative culture leans heavily on the royal prerogative and notoriously preserves ... the authoritarian, condescending style of the ancient régime, complete with the conviction that the security of the state justifies extreme measures and is identical with the convenience of the executive.”^[89] The American executive, sending his arrows of desire around the world in “real time,” shares those attitudes and practices and expects undisputed primacy in them.

One wonders if the problem of the “the ownership and location of deadly force” was very well settled, especially since imperial isolationism has consistently undermined the British^[90] and American opposition movements (Country Parties) with the doctrine that overseas empire does not injure liberty at home. (Our Court Parties have urged the same, but with less “isolationist” rhetoric.)

Empire comes in at least two^[91] forms: (1) a consolidated landed state with an irresponsible executive; (2) overseas empire – colonial or informal. (The United Kingdom and United States have sometimes tried combinations of the basic types.) While the modern Hobbesian bureaucratic state corresponds nicely to empire in the first sense,^[92] it normally drops out of discussion as the noncontroversial ground of putatively liberal order. This, in turn, makes it easier to accept professional -- and nonmercenary – armies as some kind of solution.

A Wintry View of the Prospects for Liberty

The centuries-long career of interest-group politics and corruption^[93] (in republican terms), and the related worldwide crisis of fictitious capital, make a return to Country Party ideas attractive. But the numerical analysis has run out. The One (the executive) claims all, even if it necessarily requires the help of a Few and a section of the Many to do its good works. As for *estates*, it’s unlikely we have any left to “balance.” We therefore find ourselves thinking that “that [our] conclusions should be more drastic.”^[94]

Community, republicanism, and liberty now look essential. J.G.A. Pocock, tireless student of American republicanism in the flow of time, noted the emergence

of the United States as “the greatest empire of patronage and influence the world has ever known,” sustaining “forms of corruption it was created to resist.” Several years earlier, he saw America’s Machiavellian Moment as all played out: “what would succeed that perspective is hard to imagine – the indications of the present point inconclusively toward various kinds of conservative anarchism – and its end does not seem to have arrived.”^[95]

A Door in Need of Opening

Reflecting on the teleological view of America as a Redeemer Nation, rationally and providentially *founded*, Pocock also commented that “to suggest that there were no promises and no covenant would be to strike at the heart.”^[96] But faced with an increasingly militarized state consecrated to commercial empire and given to ideological seizures, we (Americans^[97]) must address many original misunderstandings, including our famous exceptionalism. After that, we might find a way to enjoy real communities on a human scale. Godwin took up that challenge, even if his attempt had its problems. Standing armies and alternatives to them are one place to start.

Endnotes

^[86.] John Taylor of Caroline, *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (London: Routledge, 1950 [1814]), 396 (punctuation modernized). Online version: John Taylor, *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (Fredericksburg, VA.: Green and Cady, 1814). <[/titles/1308](#)>.

^[87.] William F. Marina, “Revolution and Social Change: The American Revolution as a People’s War,” *Literature of Liberty*, vol. 1, no. 2 (April-June 1978), 22-27 (historians’ reevaluation of militia) <[/titles/908#lf0353-02_1978v2_head_006](#)>; “The Dutch-American Guerrillas of the American Revolution,” in Morgan Norval, ed., *The Militia in Twentieth Century America* (Falls Church, VA; Gun Owners Association, 1985), 101-126; “Weapons, Technology, and Legitimacy,” in Norval, *Militia*, 189.

[88.] Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 427 (next-highest rates), 427-28 (“regressive” taxes), 431 (middle classes paid most). John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1989), 89-91, 95, 98-101. Cf. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 3-304, 602-603 (indirect taxes).

[89.] Bruce P. Lenman, “Political Identities and the Languages of Liberty in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of British Studies*, 35 (July 1996), 413.

[90.] See David Armitage, “The Cromwellian Protectorate and the Languages of Empire,” *The Historical Journal*, 35 (1992), 531-555, for early statements of imperial isolationism.

[91.] “There may be others” – Leonard P. Liggio.

[92.] Cf. G. Kitson Clark, “The Modern State and Modern Society,” in Heinz Lubasz, ed., *The Development of the Modern State* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 90-103; Gianfranco Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978); Tom Burns, “Sovereignty, Interests and Bureaucracy in the Modern State,” *British Journal of Sociology*, 31 (December 1980), 494-95; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1985).

[93.] Ludwell Johnson, *The Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in the Civil War* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1993), xiii.

[94.] Bob Dylan, “Queen Jane Approximately.”

[95.] J.G.A. Pocock, “1776: The Revolution against Parliament,” in Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 286, and *The Machiavellian Moment*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 545.

[96.] J.G.A. Pocock, “Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the Ideologia Americana,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (April-June 1987), 338.

[97.] Perhaps something similar could be done across the water.

WHAT COUNTS AS TAXATION?

by David Womersley

Let me see if I can clarify my thinking about the relation between standing armies and taxation to David’s satisfaction.

I think that part of the problem arises from the fact that David is working with a very comprehensive, and also I think unhelpfully modern, definition of taxation. When David asks “how else could an early modern army be paid except out of taxation?,” it seems that he is lumping together all the various revenues that flowed from the population and its activities to government (to use a term that can stretch to include the Crown and the two houses of Parliament) and calling it “taxation.” However, to agglomerate all government income in this way is to obscure some aspects of what we are discussing, and also to render meaningless what Harrington says about the impossibility of maintaining a standing army out of taxation. Clearly, Harrington was not working with David’s all-embracing definition of taxation.



A good place to begin is to recall that in the 17th century the army and navy were associated exclusively with the Crown. One of the first pieces of legislation passed by the Restoration Parliament in 1661 was “An Act declaring the sole right of the militia to be in the King,” the preamble of which begins: “Forasmuch as within all his

Majesty's realms and dominions the sole supreme government, command and disposition of the militia and of all forces by sea and land and of all forts and places of strength is and by the laws of England ever was the undoubted right of his Majesty and his royal predecessors, Kings and Queens of England, and that both or either of the Houses of Parliament cannot nor ought to pretend to the same..." One of the most important items of national spring cleaning to be tackled in 1660 was to get rid of that most egregious and un-English of the various monsters spawned by the Civil Wars, a parliamentary army.

The Crown had numerous revenues of its own which it received without any grant from the House of Commons (much though that House resented some of these sources of income): income from Crown lands, fines, assets sequestrated from traitors or otherwise foregone, the feudal incidents of wardship and marriage, monopolies, purveyance, impositions, ship money (certainly *not* a tax, but rather a payment in lieu), proceeds of disafforestation, etc. Nevertheless, the Crown's revenues were usually insufficient to pay for the defense of the realm, and so additional supplies would as required be voted by the House of Commons to allow an army to be raised and the navy to be kept in repair. (James II however *had* managed to maintain his very large standing army out of the revenues of the Crown, and this was one of the aspects of his rule that had most alarmed his subjects.)

Questions of peace and war, together with foreign policy and relations with other nations, were also, at least formally, matters for the Crown alone. However, because their pursuit normally required a grant of supply, the House of Commons enjoyed an indirect influence over those areas of national life. The Commons could constrain supply, and even withhold it altogether, if it did not like the purpose for which the money was being raised. What the Commons did not possess, however, was any formal power to hypothecate the supplies they granted. Hence that recurrent feature of the reigns of the later Stuarts: suspicion in the Commons that funds

granted for popular purpose X have instead been applied to unpopular purpose Y.

The financial innovations which followed 1688 upset this system. Suddenly the political consequences of withholding or constraining supply were both enlarged and relocated. Enlarged, because supplies granted by the Commons were no longer being applied to future items of expenditure, but rather were being used to service the debt on past items of expenditure. As a result, to withhold supply was no longer to apply pressure to the Crown. It was to undermine the creditworthiness of the government as a whole and hence to jeopardize national life more comprehensively. Relocated, because now the risks of withholding supply did not fall on the Crown alone, but instead were shared more widely.

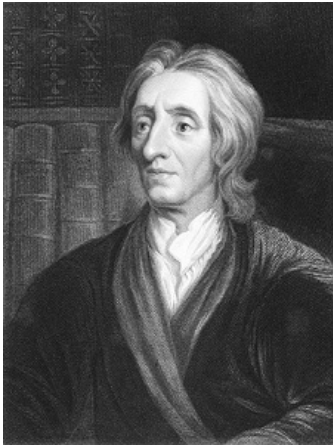
It was because parliamentary supply could no longer be withheld, or even effectively constrained, that for the first time in the later 1690s a standing army could be maintained out of taxation, properly so-called.

REPUBLICANISM: LAST COMMENTS

by Joseph R. Stromberg

Dr. Wootton is probably right to say we won't get much farther here as to how regressive British taxation was or wasn't. If the 18th-century British state was no terrible Leviathan, despite "huge debts," and "its revenues were modest in comparison to GDP," why tax the unrepresented working class at all – even that well-situated London worker?[\[98\]](#)

Locke, Paine, and more recently Hans-Hermann Hoppe have described the clever prince, who permits enough economic freedom to stimulate substantial growth. That, in turn, allows him to raise greater revenue at rates that will seem modest, at least to later scholars.



John Locke

Dr. Womersley writes that post-1688 “financial innovations” altered the state-fiscal system and, with it, political risks. And now standing armies *could* rest on “taxation, properly so-called.” Parliament was supreme but under constraints, and by the time of George III, the King was merely (as Frederick D. Wilhelmsen says) Britain’s biggest lobbyist.^[99]

This new system was precisely what Jefferson, Taylor, William Maclay, and others had in mind when they railed against the Federalist Party as “monarchist.” Our Revolution had been (at least in part) about rejecting that system, and the American Country Party fought against its wholesale transfer here by modernizing visionaries.

Coupled with well-chosen imperial projects, such a system, with (initially) modest demands on GDP, amounted to empire-on-the-cheap. It has been popular with imperial isolationists (including those in the Country parties) since Harrington. When it ceases to be so cheap, confusion reigns.

Money, State, and Militia

Here we stand to learn a good deal from the Country Party critique, despite some glaring omissions and inconsistencies. At their best, these critics saw the linkages between overseas ambitions, empire, and standing armies, and further relations with public debt, stock jobbing, and more. Over the long haul much the same issues and relations have persisted, as John T. Flynn nearly grasped in the 1940s. The opposing model –

nonintervention, wars of pure defense, militia – had its own inner consistency.

The Domestic War Power

We ought at least to mention standing armies of police. After much conscious remodeling of British and American law to accommodate these post-constitutional bodies, we are not surprised at the downward migration of magical war powers into local affairs. (See [the Guardian’s series “The Counted.”](#)) This side of the water, the process displaces an earlier migration of American vigilantism -- an outlier of the great fiction of popular sovereignty — into police work.^[100] Either way, tens of thousands of heavily armed petty officials clank about in their armor, as public vigilantes and domestic military: an exceptional outcome for an exceptional nation.

Legal historian William Novak notes that since U.S. federal authorities control, utilize, and manipulate the personnel of all “lower” governments, especially police and military personnel, the combined American state apparatus is far stronger than most political scientists contrive to believe.^[101] This, despite our apparently modest (non-European) tax rates relative to GDP.

Endnotes

^[98.] The question is meant for those who did it, in their own era.

^[99.] Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, “The Political Philosophy of Alvaro d’Ors,” *Political Science Reviewer*, 20 (Spring 1991), 166.

^[100.] Bureaucratic rationality and less shooting seem to characterize British policing, but the latent powers are equally appalling.

^[101.] William J. Novak, “The Myth of the ‘Weak’ American State,” *American Historical Review*, 113 (June 2008), 752-72.

ANTI-ARMY SENTIMENT IN LITERATURE

by David Womersley

I think David Wootton makes a good point about the social embeddedness of the officer corps of the British army in the later 18th century and thereafter. However, it is interesting that this social reality -- if reality it was -- was not faithfully reflected in literature. David points to the novels of Jane Austen as an illustration of the point he is making, but I think they don't really bear it out. If one thinks of the army officers in Austen's novels, they are unreliable philanderers like George Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* or overbearing martinets like General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*. The most sympathetic of them is the broken and blighted, but at least honorable, Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*. These army officers are certainly *present* in gentry society at the time. But they are not entirely reliable or vigorous members of it.

“HOWEVER, IT IS INTERESTING THAT THIS SOCIAL REALITY -- IF REALITY IT WAS -- WAS NOT FAITHFULLY REFLECTED IN LITERATURE.”

Austen's soldiers form a sharp contrast with her sailors, who are without exception drawn with admiration as paragons of honorable manhood, albeit in slightly differing styles. William Price, in *Mansfield Park*, and Frederick Wentworth, Admiral Croft, and James Benwick in *Persuasion*, all show Austen's fondness for the senior service (a partiality which may of course have been influenced by the fact that two of her brothers, Charles and Frank, served in the Navy and rose to the rank of admiral). It was a partiality (or prejudice) susceptible of some nuance. In *Mansfield Park* Fanny's feckless father, although living in Portsmouth, is an officer in the marines -- seagoing rather than seafaring, then, and tainted with the moral weakness which Austen seems to have associated with the army and not with the navy. The anti-standing-army pamphleteers were also great advocates of

the navy, as a military force which could never be used to intimidate the native population.

Other examples from the 19th-century novel come to mind -- in *Vanity Fair*, for instance, of the three army officers amongst the major characters the loyal (and rather Colonel Brandon-like) George Dobbin is outnumbered by the vain and shallow George Osborne and the wonderfully raffish Rawdon Crawley. The Rawdon Crawley-type perhaps reaches its apogee with the altogether more vicious and luridly drawn Sergeant Troy in Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

A systematic survey of the portrayal of army officers in English literature from 1700 onwards, and extending to the stage and poetry as well as the novel (one thinks of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* and a host of famous poems), would be an interesting project. It might show that, until the conflicts of the later British Empire and the First World War, anti-army sentiment survived in literature long after the grounds for such suspicions had evaporated.

When literature again gave sympathetic treatment to the army, it was the rank and file rather than the officer corps who were presented warmly -- think of Hardy's "Drummer Hodge," or Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads*, or the poets of the First World War. A short poem by Siegfried Sassoon, "The General," crystallizes this relocation of sympathy:

“Good-morning; good-morning!”
the General said
When we met him last week on our
way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are
most of 'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for
incompetent swine.
“He's a cheery old card,” grunted
Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.
...
But he did for them both by his plan of attack.

Endnotes

[102.] Wikipedia, "Tax Freedom Day"
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax_Freedom_Day>.

has held positions in history and politics at four British and four Canadian universities, and visiting positions in the US, before coming to York.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[David Womersley](#) is the Thomas Warton Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford and a fellow of St. Catherine's College. He has published widely on English literature from the 16th to the early 19th centuries and has edited works by Gibbon, Swift, Johnson, Burke, and Boswell. He is the general editor of the projected 26-volume Oxford University Press edition of the *Writings and Correspondence of Edward Gibbon*.

[Stephen P. Halbrook](#), an attorney in Fairfax, Virginia, is author of *The Founders' Second Amendment* and *That Every Man Be Armed*, among other books. He received his Ph.D. from Florida State University and his J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center (1978) and has taught at George Mason University, Howard University, Tuskegee Institute. He is a fellow of The Independent Institute. Halbrook argued *Printz v. U.S.* on federalism and other Supreme Court cases.

Joseph R. Stromberg is an independent historian who earned a B.A. and M.A. in history at Florida Atlantic University (1970, 1971) and did further graduate work in history at the University of Florida (1973-1975, 1981). He wrote "The Old Cause" column at Antiwar.com (1999-2003) and has contributed to such collections as *Secession, State, and Liberty* (1998), *The Costs of War* (1999), *Reassessing the Presidency* (2001), *Opposing the Crusader State: Alternatives to Global Interventionism* (2007), and *Markets Not Capitalism* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2012).

[David Wootton](#) is Anniversary Professor of History at the University of York. He works on the intellectual and cultural history of the English speaking countries, Italy, and France, 1500-1800. He is currently writing a book entitled *Power, Pleasure and Profit* based on his Carlyle Lectures at the University of Oxford in 2014. His most recent book is *The Invention of Science*, published by Allen Lane. He was educated at Oxford and Cambridge, and

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