

***The Articles of Confederation; our first federal system; A bridge to a more robust federal system or a barrier to a new federalism?***

*What follows is the Articles of Confederation, our first national constitution. In its original draft from 1777 it included a strong central government; not unexpectedly, in light of colonial opposition to the strong central government of Great Britain, the final draft included only a weak central government and left much power in the states. It was finally approved by nine states in 1781 and began a formal existence that was to last only until 1787.*

*As you study it reflect on:*

- 1. The nature of its judicial, legislative, and executive powers;*
- 2. how effective a national government it established in light of its powers;*
- 3. The balance of power between the central government and the state governments;*
- 4. Was this a government that had sufficient power to craft policy, sustain itself, and solve problems that were national in nature?*
- 5. Was it a democratic government?*

## THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

Agreed to by Congress November 15, 1777; ratified and in force, March 1, 1781.

### **Preamble**

To all to whom these Presents shall come, we the undersigned Delegates of the States affixed to our Names send greeting.

Articles of Confederation and perpetual Union between the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts bay, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

Article I. The Stile of this Confederacy shall be "The United States of America."

Article II. Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this Confederation expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If there is a doubt about whether a power resides in the central government or not what is the presumption about which government, the central or state governments, has the power? Notice that it uses the words "expressly delegated" to describe those power that the states have surrendered to the central government. Later on in the constitution you will find the articles that have to do with the judicial power of the national government. Consider whether the judicial powers in the national government are comprehensive enough to include the power for the judicial branch of the national government to interpret the constitution that creates it or is the national government dependent upon state courts to construe the power of the national government according to the Articles of Confederation?

Article III. The said States hereby severally enter into a firm league of friendship<sup>2</sup> with each other, for their common defense, the security of their liberties, and their mutual and general welfare, binding themselves to assist each other, against all force offered to, or attacks made upon them, or any of them, on account of religion, sovereignty, trade, or any other pretense whatever.

Article IV. The better to secure and perpetuate mutual friendship and intercourse among the people of the different States in this Union, the free inhabitants of each of these States, paupers, vagabonds, and fugitives from justice excepted, shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of free citizens in the several States; and the people of each State shall have free ingress and regress to and from any other State, and shall enjoy therein all the privileges of trade and commerce, subject to the same duties, impositions, and restrictions as the inhabitants thereof respectively, provided that such restrictions shall not extend so far as to prevent the removal of property imported into any State,<sup>3</sup> to any other State, of which the owner is an inhabitant; provided also that no imposition, duties or restriction shall be laid by any State, on the property of the United States, or either of them.

[OMITTED SECTION]

Full faith and credit shall be given in each of these States to the records, acts, and judicial proceedings of the courts and magistrates of every other State.

Article V. For the most convenient management of the general interests of the United States, delegates shall be annually appointed in such manner as the legislatures of each State shall direct, to meet in Congress on the first Monday in November, in every year, with a power reserved to each State to recall its delegates, or any of them, at any time within the year, and to send others in their stead for the remainder of the year.<sup>4</sup>

No State shall be represented in Congress by less than two, nor more than seven members; and no person shall be capable of being a delegate for more than three years in any term of six years; nor shall any person, being a delegate, be capable of holding any office under the United States, for which he, or another for his benefit, receives any salary, fees or emolument of any kind.<sup>5</sup>

Each State shall maintain its own delegates in a meeting of the States, and while they act as members of the committee of the States.

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<sup>2</sup> What kind of union is it that is no more than a “firm league of friendship”?

<sup>3</sup> The property referred to here is human property, slaves.

<sup>4</sup> Who elects these delegates? How are they elected? To whom are the delegates going to be loyal? If the States can recall them at any time and, potentially, interrupt the business of the national legislature then where is the true center of power in this federal system? Is it in the states or in the central government? Put even more bluntly, can this national government stand on its own with sanction from the people?

<sup>5</sup> So who represented the people in the Articles of Confederation?

In determining questions in the United States in Congress assembled, each State shall have one vote.<sup>6</sup>

Freedom of speech and debate in Congress shall not be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Congress, and the members of Congress shall be protected in their persons from arrests or imprisonments, during the time of their going to and from, and attendance on Congress, except for treason, felony, or breach of the peace.<sup>7</sup>

Article VI. No State, without the consent of the United States in Congress assembled, shall send any embassy to, or receive any embassy from, or enter into any conference, agreement, alliance or treaty with any King, Prince or State; nor shall any person holding any office of profit or trust under the United States, or any of them, accept any present, emolument, office or title of any kind whatever from any King, Prince or foreign State; nor shall the United States in Congress assembled, or any of them, grant any title of nobility.

No two or more States shall enter into any treaty, confederation or alliance whatever between them, without the consent of the United States in Congress assembled, specifying accurately the purposes for which the same is to be entered into, and how long it shall continue.

No State shall lay any imposts or duties, which may interfere with any stipulations in treaties, entered into by the United States in Congress assembled, with any King, Prince or State, in pursuance of any treaties already proposed by Congress, to the courts of France and Spain.

No vessel of war shall be kept up in time of peace by any State, except such number only, as shall be deemed necessary by the United States in Congress assembled, for the defense of such State, or its trade; nor shall any body of forces be kept up by any State in time of peace, except such number only, as in the judgement of the United States in Congress assembled, shall be deemed requisite to garrison the forts necessary for the defense of such State; but every State shall always keep up a well-regulated and disciplined militia, sufficiently armed and accoutered, and shall provide and constantly have ready for use, in public stores, a due number of filed pieces and tents, and a proper quantity of arms, ammunition and camp equipage.

No State shall engage in any war without the consent of the United States in Congress assembled, unless such State be actually invaded by enemies, or shall have received certain advice of a resolution being formed by some nation of Indians to invade such State, and the danger is so imminent as not to admit of a delay till the United States in Congress assembled can be consulted;<sup>8</sup> nor shall any State grant commissions to any ships or vessels of war, nor letters of marque or reprisal, except it be after a declaration of war by the United States in Congress assembled, and then only against the Kingdom or State and the subjects thereof, against which

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<sup>6</sup> This system gives equal weight to the states but is it fair to the populous states such as Virginia and Pennsylvania and Massachusetts that they should be equal in voting rights with the less populous states?

<sup>7</sup> What is the purpose of this right? Is it fundamentally an individual right or does it serve some structural purpose in the federal system?

<sup>8</sup> Notice the myriad caveats in this prohibition on states to declare and make war themselves. How strong is a central government if its constituent parts can force it into a war? Imagine the consequences if Texas declared war with Mexico today over illegal immigration or drug violence that spilled across the border? Would Mexico respect the differences between Texas declaring war and the United States declaring war?

war has been so declared, and under such regulations as shall be established by the United States in Congress assembled, unless such State be infested by pirates, in which case vessels of war may be fitted out for that occasion, and kept so long as the danger shall continue, or until the United States in Congress assembled shall determine otherwise.

Article VII. When land forces are raised by any State for the common defense, all officers of or under the rank of colonel, shall be appointed by the legislature of each State respectively, by whom such forces shall be raised, or in such manner as such State shall direct, and all vacancies shall be filled up by the State which first made the appointment.<sup>9</sup>

Article VIII. All charges of war, and all other expenses that shall be incurred for the common defense or general welfare, and allowed by the United States in Congress assembled, shall be defrayed out of a common treasury, which shall be supplied by the several States in proportion to the value of all land within each State, granted or surveyed for any person, as such land and the buildings and improvements thereon shall be estimated according to such mode as the United States in Congress assembled, shall from time to time direct and appoint.<sup>10</sup>

The taxes for paying that proportion shall be laid and levied by the authority and direction of the legislatures of the several States within the time agreed upon by the United States in Congress assembled.<sup>11</sup>

Article IX. The United States in Congress assembled, shall have the sole and exclusive right and power of determining on peace and war, except in the cases mentioned in the sixth article — of sending and receiving ambassadors — entering into treaties and alliances, provided that no treaty of commerce shall be made whereby the legislative power of the respective States shall be restrained from imposing such imposts and duties on foreigners, as their own people are subjected to, or from prohibiting the exportation or importation of any species of goods or commodities whatsoever — of establishing rules for deciding in all cases, what captures on land or water shall be legal, and in what manner prizes taken by land or naval forces in the service of the United States shall be divided or appropriated — of granting letters of marque and reprisal in times of peace — appointing courts for the trial of piracies and felonies committed on the high seas and establishing courts for receiving and determining finally appeals in all cases of captures, provided that no member of Congress shall be appointed a judge of any of the said courts.

The United States in Congress assembled shall also be the last resort on appeal in all disputes and differences now subsisting or that hereafter may arise between two or more States concerning boundary, jurisdiction or any other causes whatever; which authority shall always be

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<sup>9</sup> How cohesive a fighting force would such a means of filling vacancies make the military?

<sup>10</sup> So individuals are not taxed, states are. Are they taxed in proportion to population? If not, then by what measure are taxes determined? Notice how the power to tax is framed. Is it a power lying in the central government? What government is it that shall be “levying” the taxes? How would this provision read if the clear intention was to empower the central government to tax? If the central government has no ability to compel payment of the taxes how would its operation be impaired? Could it do budgetary planning reliably? Could it borrow money to fund operations or buy military equipment that might take many years to pay back?

<sup>11</sup> Find if you can any authority in this constitution that might give the central government the power to compel payment of these taxes. Many would argue that there must be a power to compel obedience that ultimately undergirds state authority. Does it exist in this system?

exercised in the manner following.<sup>12</sup> Whenever the legislative or executive authority or lawful agent of any State in controversy with another shall present a petition to Congress stating the matter in question and praying for a hearing, notice thereof shall be given by order of Congress to the legislative or executive authority of the other State in controversy, and a day assigned for the appearance of the parties by their lawful agents, who shall then be directed to appoint by joint consent, commissioners or judges to constitute a court for hearing and determining the matter in question: but if they cannot agree, Congress shall name three persons out of each of the United States, and from the list of such persons each party shall alternately strike out one, the petitioners beginning, until the number shall be reduced to thirteen; and from that number not less than seven, nor more than nine names as Congress shall direct, shall in the presence of Congress be drawn out by lot, and the persons whose names shall be so drawn or any five of them, shall be commissioners or judges, to hear and finally determine the controversy, so always as a major part of the judges who shall hear the cause shall agree in the determination: and if either party shall neglect to attend at the day appointed, without showing reasons, which Congress shall judge sufficient, or being present shall refuse to strike, the Congress shall proceed to nominate three persons out of each State, and the secretary of Congress shall strike in behalf of such party absent or refusing; and the judgement and sentence of the court to be appointed, in the manner before prescribed, shall be final and conclusive; and if any of the parties shall refuse to submit to the authority of such court, or to appear or defend their claim or cause, the court shall nevertheless proceed to pronounce sentence, or judgement, which shall in like manner be final and decisive, the judgement or sentence and other proceedings being in either case transmitted to Congress, and lodged among the acts of Congress for the security of the parties concerned: provided that every commissioner, before he sits in judgement, shall take an oath to be administered by one of the judges of the supreme or superior court of the State, where the cause shall be tried, 'well and truly to hear and determine the matter in question, according to the best of his judgement, without favor, affection or hope of reward': provided also, that no State shall be deprived of territory for the benefit of the United States.

[SECTION OMITTED]

The United States in Congress assembled shall have authority to appoint a committee, to sit in the recess of Congress, to be denominated 'A Committee of the States', and to consist of one delegate from each State; and to appoint such other committees and civil officers as may be necessary for managing the general affairs of the United States under their direction — to appoint one of their members to preside, provided that no person be allowed to serve in the office

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<sup>12</sup> This paragraph and the next detail the extent of the judiciary. Is this a permanent court system that reaches down into society to mete out justice on the terms set by the government of which it is a part? Is there any authority to enforce the rulings of these courts? Is this really a court system for the government or just a process that Congress oversees that allows states and parties to resolve their differences? What would happen if the parties just ignore Congress?

Also list for yourself the kinds of cases and controversies that the court system here could hear? Imagine that it became important for U.S. foreign policy to enforce contracts in which British citizens needed to sue Americans in American courts. Can the British citizen collecting a debt properly due him get a fair hearing in Virginia? Or would you prefer that the case be heard in a U.S. court? Could it be heard in a U.S. court under the Articles of Confederation? What about a case in which the central government wanted to charge a citizen of the state of South Carolina for assaulting a post officer? Could the U.S. bring such a case before its own courts or would it have to prosecute the case in a South Carolina court?

of president more than one year in any term of three years;<sup>13</sup> to ascertain the necessary sums of money to be raised for the service of the United States, and to appropriate and apply the same for defraying the public expenses — to borrow money, or emit bills on the credit of the United States, transmitting every half-year to the respective States an account of the sums of money so borrowed or emitted — to build and equip a navy — to agree upon the number of land forces, and to make requisitions from each State for its quota, in proportion to the number of white inhabitants in such State; which requisition shall be binding, and thereupon the legislature of each State shall appoint the regimental officers, raise the men and cloath, arm and equip them in a solid- like manner, at the expense of the United States; and the officers and men so cloathed, armed and equipped shall march to the place appointed, and within the time agreed on by the United States in Congress assembled . . .

[SECTION OMITTED]

The United States in Congress assembled shall never engage in a war, nor grant letters of marque or reprisal in time of peace, nor enter into any treaties or alliances, nor coin money, nor regulate the value thereof, nor ascertain the sums and expenses necessary for the defense and welfare of the United States, or any of them, nor emit bills, nor borrow money on the credit of the United States, nor appropriate money, nor agree upon the number of vessels of war, to be built or purchased, or the number of land or sea forces to be raised, nor appoint a commander in chief of the army or navy, unless nine States assent to the same: nor shall a question on any other point, except for adjourning from day to day be determined, unless by the votes of the majority of the United States in Congress assembled.<sup>14</sup>

[SECTION OMITTED]

Article XI. Canada acceding to this confederation, and adjoining in the measures of the United States, shall be admitted into, and entitled to all the advantages of this Union; but no other colony shall be admitted into the same, unless such admission be agreed to by nine States.<sup>15</sup>

Article XII. All bills of credit emitted, monies borrowed, and debts contracted by, or under the authority of Congress, before the assembling of the United States, in pursuance of the present confederation, shall be deemed and considered as a charge against the United States, for payment and satisfaction whereof the said United States, and the public faith are hereby solemnly pledged.

Article XIII. Every State shall abide by the determination of the United States in Congress assembled, on all questions which by this confederation are submitted to them. And the Articles of this Confederation shall be inviolably observed by every State, and the Union shall be

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<sup>13</sup> This is the mention that the Articles of Confederation constitution gives to the president. Our president is our agent in foreign affairs and often in crafting domestic policy. Would the president of the Articles of Confederation likely be an effective leader of our nation in foreign affairs? If you say no, why not? What powers does this constitution specifically deny to the national government?

<sup>14</sup> Notice all the actions of Congress that require not a bare majority but a super-majority of nine states to conduct business. In light of how voting is handled in Congress you can quickly imagine a scenario in which a few of the less populous states might hold the majority of the states including those very populous states hostage in the face of policies that ought to be passed.

<sup>15</sup> So Canada can join the United States!

perpetual; nor shall any alteration at any time hereafter be made in any of them; unless such alteration be agreed to in a Congress of the United States, and be afterwards confirmed by the legislatures of every State.<sup>16</sup>

And Whereas it hath pleased the Great Governor of the World to incline the hearts of the legislatures we respectively represent in Congress, to approve of, and to authorize us to ratify the said Articles of Confederation and perpetual Union. Know Ye that we the undersigned delegates, by virtue of the power and authority to us given for that purpose, do by these presents, in the name and in behalf of our respective constituents, fully and entirely ratify and confirm each and every of the said Articles of Confederation and perpetual Union, and all and singular the matters and things therein contained: And we do further solemnly plight and engage the faith of our respective constituents, that they shall abide by the determinations of the United States in Congress assembled, on all questions, which by the said Confederation are submitted to them. And that the Articles thereof shall be inviolably observed by the States we respectively represent, and that the Union shall be perpetual.

In Witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands in Congress. Done at Philadelphia in the State of Pennsylvania the ninth day of July in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy-Eight, and in the Third Year of the independence of America.

On the part and behalf of the State of New Hampshire:  
Josiah Bartlett  
John Wentworth Junr. August 8th 1778

On the part and behalf of The State of Massachusetts Bay:  
John Hancock  
Samuel Adams  
Elbridge Gerry  
Francis Dana  
James Lovell  
Samuel Holten

On the part and behalf of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations:  
William Ellery  
Henry Marchant  
John Collins

On the part and behalf of the State of Connecticut:  
Roger Sherman  
Samuel Huntington  
Oliver Wolcott

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<sup>16</sup> This is the amendment provision that tripped up Robert Morris and the Impost Plan. How likely is a constitution to be amended if all the states have to amend it? Then again what is the appropriate balance between a right to amend the constitution that is functional and one that makes the constitution nothing more than the whim of the states? It is the balance between a permanence that prevents changing the constitution as events necessitate and a flexibility that allows the constitution to be changed so often that it would be no more stable than legislation.

Titus Hosmer  
Andrew Adams

On the Part and Behalf of the State of New York:

James Duane  
Francis Lewis  
Wm Duer  
Gouv Morris

On the Part and in Behalf of the State of New Jersey, November 26, 1778.

Jno Witherspoon  
Nath. Scudder

On the part and behalf of the State of Pennsylvania:

Robt Morris  
Daniel Roberdeau  
John Bayard Smith  
William Clingan  
Joseph Reed 22nd July 1778

On the part and behalf of the State of Delaware:

Tho Mckean February 12, 1779  
John Dickinson May 5th 1779  
Nicholas Van Dyke

On the part and behalf of the State of Maryland:

John Hanson March 1 1781  
Daniel Carroll

On the Part and Behalf of the State of Virginia:

Richard Henry Lee  
John Banister  
Thomas Adams  
Jno Harvie  
Francis Lightfoot Lee

On the part and Behalf of the State of No Carolina:

John Penn July 21st 1778  
Corns Harnett  
Jno Williams

On the part and behalf of the State of South Carolina:

Henry Laurens  
William Henry Drayton  
Jno Mathews

Richd Hutson  
Thos Heyward Junr

On the part and behalf of the State of Georgia:  
Jno Walton 24th July 1778  
Edwd Telfair  
Edwd Langworthy