"No Standing Armies!"

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Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

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“A Standing Army Is inconsistent with A Free Government, and absolutely destructive to the Constitution of the English Monarchy.” This emphatic assertion, written by John Trenchard in 1697, was a central assumption in an attitude toward a permanent, paid military force that gradually emerged in England during the seventeenth century. During the entire century, but especially after the Restoration when the Stuart kings set up a standing army, successive generations of Englishmen thought, talked, and wrote about the armed forces of the realm. Between 1697 and 1699, when the question of a standing army in peacetime reached a climax, the arguments for and against a permanent, professional army, which had been offered in fragments before, were forged into coherent statements. The antistanding army arguments, and the political decisions they accompanied, seeded an intellectual tradition that remained vital for at least another one hundred years not only in England but in the American colonies, where it was carried. The arguments still speak to a troubled twentieth century, and although the context is obviously different, much that is said today in the United States about military organization and citizen responsibility echoes the passionate arguments of three hundred years ago.

The term “standing army” refers to a military force that is permanently embodied and kept “standing,” even in time of peace. Standing armies are distinguished from mercenaries, who are paid, professional soldiers hired for an occasion and then dismissed, and
from the armies of the Tudors and early Stuarts, which were com­posed of men who were conscripted to defend the state, to man an expedition, or to fight a war and who were then disbanded. A standing army is also different from the local, casually trained militia, which most Englishmen approved. Properly, a standing army should not be equated with the king's Guards, but the new Guards estab­lished in 1661 served as a nucleus for an enlarged military force and were sometimes purposely denominated a "standing military force" by the king's critics.

England had no standing army until the New Model Army was created in 1645 to win a revolution and was then kept on to support the government of the Commonwealth and Protectorate. The term, with reference to an English force, does not appear in the written record until 1648. But before then, the country had experienced the impact of soldiers who had been raised for expeditions, such as in the 1620s, and individuals had explored the question of military prerogative, a matter of great constitutional significance, such as in the Militia Bill controversy of 1641-42. In many respects, the New Model Army was unique, but it posed the same kinds of problems that any permanent military force did and provoked widespread hostility. Thus, a negative attitude toward soldiers and the central government's efforts to strengthen the military forces already existed in the first half of the seventeenth century, long before a standing army answerable to a legitimate monarch was established by Charles II, long before the issue of a standing army became one of the most politically and intellectually important questions of the late seven­teenth century. The antistanding army ideology articulated in the late seventeenth century is illuminated when earlier episodes and expres­sions of protest against soldiers and the military policies of the cen­tral government are taken into account.

Opposition to standing armies had a long line of development in England. Criticism of soldiers and the government's military policies were part of every major political and constitutional confrontation between the crown, or protector during the Interregnum, and the Parliament. The Petition of Right of 1628, the Militia Bill/Ordinance of 1641-42, the criticism of the New Model Army and the major­generals during the Cromwellian interlude, the settlement at the Restoration, the contest between Charles and the parliamentary op­position during the 1670s, the Revolutionary settlement in 1689, and the controversy over William III's army from 1697 through 1699 each, in different ways, provided the framework within which the
question was argued. In Parliament and press, arguments were offered to show that a standing army in peacetime under the authority of the executive was politically dangerous, economically costly, socially menacing, and morally hazardous and that the country should depend for its land defense on the local militia controlled by the upper classes. This was the English brand of antimilitarism. Persons across the political spectrum could agree on this. But the most articulate and thorough-going indictment of standing armies was made by men who had been infected by the libertarian assumptions of the seventeenth century. What was said and done in the early and middle years of the century set precedents for future attitudes and actions. Yet at each point in the century, the themes of the anti-army argument were adapted to meet specific circumstances.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, a predisposition, which reflected the influence of geography, England's experience, and Renaissance assumptions about military power, already existed (chapter 1). This inclination was hardened by policies of the government in the 1620s, when troops raised for the Thirty Years War were billeted in private houses and soldiers and civilians were disciplined by martial law. The local lieutenancy was bitterly criticized for implementing such policies. The Petition of Right of 1628 was, in part, a protest against the intrusion in the affairs of the local county of an armed central government using the agency of the local lieutenancy (chapter 2). In the 1630s, Charles I's efforts to reform and centralize the militia played a larger part than is sometimes recognized in the Long Parliament's indictment of the government. In 1641-42, the Militia Bill/Ordinance controversy led men in Parliament and in the press to argue that ultimate military power should be vested in Parliament, a conviction that remained central to all subsequent protests against standing armies. The most important of many polemicists was Henry Parker (chapter 3).

Men of every political persuasion expressed fear and dislike of the New Model Army and the major-generals. But the most articulate spokesmen were libertarians and radicals of one kind or another, especially republicans. The most significant among them in the press was the political philosopher, James Harrington, whose *Oceana*, heavily indebted to the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli, influenced subsequent opponents of standing armies (chapter 4). At the Restoration, the Cromwellian army was hastily disbanded. But to meet the threat of domestic insurrection, Charles II created a body of guards
that became the nucleus of the first standing army in peacetime under a legitimate monarch. As part of the military settlement at the Restoration, the militia was after much debate settled in the hands of the king. The military settlement failed to resolve the fundamental question of military authority and laid the groundwork for future confrontations (chapter 5). Antimilitary sentiment surfaced again in the 1670s when distrust of the king deepened because of policies that suggested his sympathy for absolutism, Popery, and France. In this decade, the genuine fear of Charles's forces was exploited by the Country-Whig party to discredit the king, his ministers, and his policies and to promote partisan political goals, especially the dissolution of the Cavalier Parliament. The cry “No Standing Armies” became a slogan and, like the cry “No Popery,” was used as a propaganda tool. Feared as an instrument of tyranny and political corruption, the army was criticized in tracts from the first earl of Shaftesbury's circle and in *Plato Redivivus*, written by Henry Neville (chapter 6).

James II's policy of maintaining a standing army officered in part by Catholics was attacked so vigorously in the fall of 1685 that the king prorogued his only Parliament. Deepening fear of James's growing standing army played a part in the coming of the Revolution of 1688. In the settlement that followed, Article vi of the Bill of Rights, which asserted that there should be no standing army in peacetime without the consent of Parliament, was the only genuinely revolutionary principle. The Mutiny Act of 1689 was also directed toward achieving parliamentary control of the military (chapter 7). Despite these constitutional regulations, the climax in the controversy over standing armies in peacetime and the fullest expression of the antimilitary sentiment came a decade later in 1697-99. Opposition to William III's plans to keep a large army after the Peace of Ryswick was led in Parliament by a new Tory-Old Whig alignment headed by Robert Harley and argued in the press by a group of radical Whigs, especially John Trenchard, Walter Moyle, and Andrew Fletcher, who summed up and elaborated upon what had already been said about the evils of standing armies. Arguments for the king's project were offered by John Lord Somers. The issue was compromised by the establishment of a small permanent force dependent upon parliamentary appropriation, a principle that has lasted. Wider agreement with the idea of maintaining a permanent army was expressed than has been recognized (chapter 8).
Seventeenth-century antiarmy pamphlets and debates seeded an intellectual tradition that continued in eighteenth-century England and was carried to the English colonies in America, where it had a profound impact upon the thinking of American leaders. In both England and the United States, the tradition remained, in the United States as a constitutional issue that challenged executive power in various ways throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed in somewhat different form, the same issues are being raised today, and to those issues the tracts and debates of three hundred years ago can speak (chapter 9).

Inherent in all the successive controversies about the army was a fundamental question, the nature of the English government: whether the king or Parliament should hold ultimate sovereignty in the state, whether the government should move in the direction of an absolute monarchy based on military power as governments on the continent were doing. That military authority expresses sovereignty as no other function of government is axiomatic. The struggle for the command of the militia was, in the words of one Stuart king, the "Fittest Subject for a King's Quarrel." As profoundly as any political philosopher, Charles 1 recognized that without military command, royal power was "but a shadow." The outcome of the controversies about standing armies by the end of the century was a genuine shift in sovereignty in England's government.

That a standing army should have been established was probably inevitable, given the technological and political changes on the continent. But it was not inevitable that the armed forces under the command of the executive should have been so persistently resisted nor that by the end of the century the standing army should have, in terms of size, pay, and discipline, been placed in peacetime under the ultimate authority of Parliament. Civilian control of the military, exercised by the legislature, was the contribution of seventy years of confrontations. This contribution and achievement, which helped to preserve free institutions and to assure a government in which Parliament dominated, must be measured, if its full significance is to be understood, in terms of the development in the seventeenth century

\[1\] The King's Cabinet Opened: Or Certain Pacquets of Secret Letters and Papers. Written with the King's Own Hands (London, 1645), included later in Harleian Miscellany (London, 1746), 7: 525. The king's papers were seized at the Battle of Naseby. For an account of the steps taken to publish them, see R. E. Maddison, "'The King's Cabinet Opened': A Case Study in Pamphlet History," Notes and Queries, New Series, 13 (1966): 2-9.
INTRODUCTION

of absolute monarchies based on large standing armies on the continent and in terms of its ongoing significance for both England and the United States.

Such an important subject has not gone unnoticed. Almost every political and constitutional history of the period mentions the growth of the standing army and notes the development of opposition to it. Over a century ago, Thomas lord Macaulay referred to the standing army question of the 1697 session of Parliament as “preeminent in interest and importance.” Subsequently, Leopold Von Ranke, A. S. Turberville, Keith Feiling, and David Ogg, among other historians, treated the political aspects of the issue within the context of their larger interests. The institutional history of the English army has found many students, such as Charles M. Clode, J. W. Fortescue, and Colonel Clifford Walton, but they do no more than refer to the standing army issue. Interest in military history has grown, but there is still need for a study of the army that would employ demographic techniques and would answer different kinds of questions from those posed by earlier historians. The local militia in the Tudor-Stuart period has also been examined, most recently by Lindsay Boynton and J. R. Western. No attempt is made in the present study to contribute to the work being done on the army or militia as military institutions. During the past two decades, some aspects of the questions that do concern this book have been investigated. Zera Fink’s Classical Republicans illuminated the relationship between the antiarmy ideology and antimonarchical concepts. Many of the men who wrote tracts against the army have been studied for other reasons by Caroline Robbins. Her Eighteenth Century Commonwealtmen and many articles have also contributed to understanding the ideological connections between England and the

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