

Key 22 Confederation achievements

OVERVIEW *The Articles of Confederation, a transition to a stronger constitution, achieved its most important success in the handling of western lands.*

Administration of government: Through committees of Congress.

- Departments of Post Office, Finance, War, and Foreign Affairs were created.
- Robert Morris, Superintendent of Finance, attempted to stabilize tax, currency, and debt policies but was frustrated by the states.
- Confederation delegates successfully concluded the Treaty of Paris (1783), ending the Revolutionary War.

Western land claims: Long a source of dispute.

- Seven states had huge western land claims (some overlapping) based on colonial charters, while six jealous states had none.
- Indian claims to land were either ignored or overridden by a variety of treaties.
- Ratification of the Articles was delayed (by Maryland and others) until western lands were ceded to the nation "for the common benefit."
- Sale of the lands would provide a source of national revenue.

The Land Ordinance of 1785: Provided that the Old Northwest (north of the Ohio River) was to be surveyed and sold to help pay the national debt.

- Townships would be divided into 36 one-square-mile sections to be sold for a minimum of one dollar per acre.
- Income from the sale of one section was to go to the support of public schools (the first example of federal aid to education).
- Later, smaller plots at lower prices reduced land speculation.

The Northwest Ordinance (1787): Provided government for the territory.

- At first Congress would govern through appointed governors, with gradual increase in self-government (an elected legislature).
- When population permitted, three to five states could enter the union on an equal basis with the original thirteen; permanent colonial status was rejected.
- A Bill of Rights protected freedom of religion, jury trials, and other rights.
- Slavery was abolished in the territory.

Key 23 Weaknesses of the Confederation

OVERVIEW *In what some have called "the critical period," weaknesses in the Confederation seemed to prove the need to increase the power of the national government.*

The structure of government: Proved to be defective and inadequate under the Articles of Confederation. Congress could:

- Request funds and borrow money but not lay taxes or collect tariffs
- Declare war but not raise armies
- Not regulate interstate commerce
- Negotiate treaties but lacked authority abroad

Diplomatic problems: Multiplied after the war.

- Congress was unable to compel states to repay prewar debts to British citizens and allow Loyalists to recover confiscated property, as provided in the Treaty of Paris.
- European governments closed off American trade with their colonies, yet British goods flooded the American market.
- Secretary of Foreign Affairs **John Jay** negotiated a trade treaty with Spain, but it was blocked by Congress.

Financial problems: Also troubled the Confederation government.

- Congress and the states had printed "good faith" paper currency during the war. It became virtually worthless and was never redeemed.
- The Confederation government sank deeper into debt.
- Inflation reached 200% between 1776 and 1783.
- States attempted to impose their own tariffs on domestic and foreign trade.
- Foreign trade, disrupted by the war, went through a period of readjustment.

Newburgh Conspiracy (1783): George Washington successfully blocked this threatened military coup aimed at strengthening the central government and guaranteeing back pay and pensions to officers as the war came to a close.

Paxton Boys: Pennsylvania recruits, marched on Philadelphia demanding back pay and causing Congress to flee to various other cities.

Shays's Rebellion (1786): Dramatized the government's apparent inability to maintain domestic peace.