



Written by [Becky Akers](#) on May 6, 2010

Dispatch the War Department

However small or large a government you consider ideal, whether you're left, right or center, you probably agree that the military is indispensable and legitimate. You may quibble about its size and purpose (defensive versus policing the world), but almost no one wonders whether we need an army.

It's time we did.

Questioning the military's necessity puts us in good company, specifically that of the Founders. Many of them vehemently opposed a "standing" army (*i.e.* one that is professionally, permanently established and remains intact rather than disbanding after beating off an attack. That definition encompasses cops as well: the Founders would never have drawn the artificial distinction we do between a force that fights overseas and one that wars on its own citizens. Indeed, the Redcoats patrolling Boston in the 1760's and '70's fulfilled the functions of modern police).



So Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts articulated popular wisdom when he damned standing armies as "[the bane of liberty](#)" during Congressional debate in 1789. The heroic Patrick Henry, too, denounced bellicose professionals because they "[execute the execrable](#) commands of tyranny."

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Even James Madison, among the most Federalistic of the Founders, listed the horrors that "proceed" from armies: "debts and taxes; ... [which] are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few." At the Constitutional Convention,