

The Albany Congress Plan of Union (1754)

Throughout the colonial period British settlers, French colonists, and Native Americans were constantly in conflict with each other as they tried to expand and/or secure their territories. Advances spurred attacks that sometimes led to war. In many cases this border warfare was limited by the time, territory, and people involved. In 1754, however, a border skirmish near the Forks of the Ohio escalated into what the British colonists called the French and Indian War. Lieutenant Colonel George Washington's Virginia troops and Indian allies attacked a French detachment on 28 May. French forces then issued out from Fort Duquesne to return the favor—defeating Washington at Fort Necessity on 4 July. While Virginia conducted that military venture, delegates from seven northern colonies met at Albany, New York, to consult on defense matters and reestablish friendly relations with the Iroquois. They managed the latter to a limited degree by 9 July. The former became more complicated when the delegates decided to create a plan of union for all the colonies to ensure better common defenses and to secure the frontier as they expanded. Benjamin Franklin had advocated such a union, and it was primarily from his plan that the delegates chose to work (though they did incorporate ideas from other plans submitted). The final product was ultimately ignored or rejected by the imperial as well as colonial governments, but it served as an example and basis for later plans of union.

Stephen L. Schechter, ed., *Roots of the Republic: American Founding Documents Interpreted* (Madison, WI: Madison House Publishers, 1990), pp. 114-117. Used by permission. [Editorial insertions that appear in square brackets are from Schechter's edition—Ed.]

Plan of a proposed Union of the Several Colonies of Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pensilvania, Maryland, North Carolina, and South Carolina, for their mutual defence & Security & for the Extending the British Settlements in North America.	Maryland	4
	Virginia	7
	North Carolina	4
	South Carolina	<u>4</u>
	TOTAL	48

That humble application be made for an act of the Parliament of Great Britain by virtue of which one General Government may be formed in America including all the said Colonies within & under which Government each Colony may retain it present constitution except in the Perticulars wherein a Change may be directed by the said act as Hereafter follows.—

That the said General Government be administered by a President General to be appointed & supported by the Crown, & a Grand Council to be chosen by the Representatives of the People of the several Colonies met in their respective Assemblies.

That within —— Months after the passing of such act, the House of Representatives in the several Assemblies that happens to be sitting within that time or that shall be expecially for that purpose convened may & Shall chuse Members for the Grand Council in the following proportions that is to say.

Massachusetts Bay	7
New Hampshire	2
Connecticut	5
Rhode Island	2
New York	4
New Jersey	3
Pensilvania	6

Who shall meet for the first time at the City of Philadelphia in Pensilvania being called by the President General as soon as conveniently may be after his Appointment.

That there shall be a new Election of members for the Grand Council every three Years, & on the Death or resignation of any Member, his place shall be Supplied by a new choice at the next sitting of the Assembly of the Colony he represented.

That after the first three years when the proportion of Money arising out of each Colony, to the General Treasury can be known, the Number of Members to be chosen for each Colony shall from time to time in all Ensuing Elections be regulated by that proportion yet so as that the Number to be chosen by any one Province be not more than Seven nor less than two.

That the Grand Council shall meet once in every year and oftener if occasion require at such time & place as they shall adjourn to at the last preceding meeting or as they shall be called to meet at by the President General on any Emergency he having first obtained in Writing the consent of Seven of the Members to such Call, & sent due & timely notice to the whole.

That the Grand Council have power to chuse their Speaker & shall neither be dissolved, prorogued, nor

continue Sitting longer than Six Weeks at one time, without their own consent or the Special Command of the Crown.

That the Members of the Grand Council shall be allowed for their Service ten Shillings Sterling per diem during their Sessions and Journey to & from the place of meeting; twenty Miles to be reckoned a Days Journey.

That the assent of the President General be requisite to all Acts of the Grand Council, & that it be his Office & duty to cause them to be Carried into Execution.

That the President General with the advice of the Grand Council hold or direct all Indian Treaties in which the General Interest or Welfare of the Colonies may be concerned, & to make Peace or declare War with Indian Nations. That they make such Laws as they judge necessary for regulating all Indian Trade. That they make all purchases from Indians for the Crown, of Lands now not within the bounds of particular Colonies or that shall not be within their Bounds when some of them are reduced to more Convenient Dimensions. That they make New Settlements on such Purchases by Granting Lands in the Kings name reserving a Quit Rent to the Crown for the use of the General Treasury. That they make Laws for Regulating & Governing such new Settlements till the Crown shall think fit to form them into particular Governments. That they may raise & pay Soldiers, and build Forts for the Defence of any of the Colonies, & equip Vessels of force to guard the Coast and protect the Trade on the Ocean Lakes or great Rivers, but they shall not impress men in any Colony without the consent of its Legislature— That for these Purposes they have power to make Laws, & lay, & levy such General Dutys Imposts or Taxes as to themselves appear most equal & just considering the ability & other Circumstances of the Inhabitants in the Several Colonies, & such as may be collected with the least Inconvenience to the People, rather discouraging Luxury, than loading Industry with unnecessary Burthens—that they may appoint a general Treasurer, and a particular Treasurer in each Government when necessary and from time to time may order the Sums in the Treasuries of each Government into the General

Treasury, or draw on them for special Payments as they find most convenient, Yet no money to Issue but by joint orders of the President General and Grand Council except where Sums have been appropriated to particular purposes, and the President General is previously empowered by an Act to draw for Such Sums—That the General Accounts shall be yearly settled & reported to the Several Assemblies.—that a Quorum of the Grand Council, empowered to Act with the President General do consist of Twenty Five Members among who there shall be one or more from a Majority of the Colonies.—That the Laws made by them for the purposes aforesaid shall not be repugnant but as near as may be agreeable to the Laws of England and shall be transmitted to the King in Council for approbation as soon as may be after their passing and if not disapproved within three years after presentation to remain in force.—That in case of the Death of the President General the Speaker of the Grand Council for the time being shall Succeed and be vested with the same power and authorities & continue till the Kings pleasure be known.

That all Military Commission Officers whether for Land or Sea Service to act under this General Constitution shall be nominated by the President General, but the approbation of the Grand Council is to be obtained before they receive their Commissions And all civil Officers are to be nominated by the Grand Council, and to receive the President Generals approbation before they officiate But in case of Vacancy by Death or removal of any Officer civil or Military under this Constitution, the Governor of the Provinces in which such Vacancy happens may appoint till the Pleasure of the President General and Grand Council be known.—That the particular Military as well as civil Establishments in each Colony remain in their present State, this General Constitution notwithstanding; and that on Sudden Emergencies any Colony may defend itself, and lay the Accounts of Expence Thence arisen before the President General and Grand Council, who may allow and order payment of the same as far as they judge such Accounts just and reasonable.

Review Questions

1. What was to be the imperial government's relationship with the newly formed "General Government"? What would define the relationship between this government and those of the individual colonies?
2. How did the delegates propose to organize this government?
3. What were to be the main duties of the General Government?
4. What power would enable this government to carry out these duties?