

The Conway Cabal was the only major political threat to George Washington during the Revolutionary War. The “cabal,” or secret political group, consisted of several senior military officers who aimed to supplant George Washington as Commander-in-Chief. Thomas Conway, for whom the group is named, wrote several letters to the Second Continental Congress and others criticizing George Washington.

In late 1776 and 1777, the Continental Army had experienced a series of significant setbacks, first in disastrous battles in and around New York City, and later at Brandywine Creek and Germantown near Philadelphia. Following the Battle of Brandywine Creek, British forces occupied Philadelphia, causing Congress to flee west to York, Pennsylvania. As Washington took up winter quarters with the Continental Army at Valley Forge, and as conditions there deteriorated for the army, some members of Congress began questioning whether Washington was fit for Commander-in-Chief. Some pointed to Horatio Gates, who took credit for the Patriot victory at Saratoga, as a possible replacement.

Thomas Conway, who served as the army’s inspector general at the time, and who served under Washington in the Philadelphia campaign, wrote a letter to Congress criticizing Washington and lobbying for his own promotion. Washington opposed the promotion of the Irish-born Conway, whom he considered arrogant. He also thought Conway’s promotion would anger those within his ranks that had served longer. In addition, Conway wrote a letter to Horatio Gates that alluded to Washington as a poor general and that it would be better served with Gates in charge. Washington received word of the letter, which caused him to believe his subordinate generals were seeking to supplant him. Washington became so famously annoyed by the sniping and letters that he threatened to resign from the army if it continued. Much to Washington’s chagrin, Congress would actually promote both Conway and Gates to the Board of War. Gates was named president of the Board of War and Washington’s relationship with both men took turns for the worse.

Eventually, however, because most of Washington’s contemporaries fully supported him, Congress reluctantly was forced to give full public support for Washington, short-circuiting any plots to remove Washington from command.

In the end, Conway resigned from the army and was later injured in a duel by a Washington supporter. Horatio Gates remained in the army, but his reputation was permanently marred. Gates would nearly be charged with cowardice after the Battle of Camden, which effectively ended his military career.

- 1. Which of the following best describes the Conway Cabal?**
  - A. A group of military officers who wanted promotions
  - B. A group of military officers who favored the British
  - C. A group of military officers who favored the removal of George Washington
  - D. A group of military officers who were arrogant
  
- 2. What was the effect(s) of the Patriot defeat at the Battle of Brandywine Creek? Select all that apply.**
  - A. Congress fled west to York
  - B. The British were able to occupy Philadelphia
  - C. The Continental Army spent the winter at Valley Forge
  - D. George Washington was replaced as Commander-in-Chief
  
- 3. Why did some members of Congress begin questioning Washington's leadership?**
  - A. Because of the brutal winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge
  - B. Because Horatio Gates claimed victory at Saratoga
  - C. Because of a disastrous series of battles in New York and near Philadelphia
  - D. Because they thought George Washington would serve better elsewhere
  
- 4. Why did Washington oppose the promotion of Thomas Conway?**
  - A. He thought it would anger officers that had served longer
  - B. He thought Conway to be a poor leader
  - C. He thought he was a better military officer than Conway
  - D. He preferred Horatio Gates
  
- 5. Select all of the following that are true.**
  - A. Thomas Conway was nearly charged with cowardice after the Battle of Camden
  - B. Washington believed that the letters he learned about represented an attempt to supplant him
  - C. Horatio Gates wrote a letter suggesting Conway would be better as Commander-in-Chief
  - D. Despite their feelings about George Washington, both Horatio Gates and Thomas Conway were promoted to the Board of War

**6. Which of the following is another way to say the sentence below without losing meaning?**

Much to Washington's chagrin, Congress would actually promote both Conway and Gates to the Board of War.

- A. Washington was pleased that Congress promoted Conway and Gates to the Board of War.
- B. Washington wanted to discuss the promotion of Conway and Gates to the Board of War.
- C. Washington was jealous of the promotion of Conway and Gates to the Board of War.
- D. Washington opposed the promotion of Conway and Gates to the Board of War.

**7. What was the effect of the Conway Cabal?**

- A. The Continental Army was ultimately weakened by the controversy
- B. The only real effect were the negative outcomes for Conway and Gates
- C. George Washington became a member of the Continental Congress
- D. The military career of Horatio Gates ended