

Strengths & Accomplishments

- Government signed a treaty of alliance with France in 1778.
- Government successfully waged a war for independence against the British.
- Government negotiated an end to the American Revolution in the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1783.
- Government granted the free inhabitants of each state “all the privileges and immunities of free citizens in the several states.”
- Government provided for the eventual admission of Canada into the Confederation.
- Government passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which allowed the Northwest Territories to organize their own governments. It allowed the eventual admission to the Union of no more than five states, and no fewer than three, “on an equal footing with the original states.” The Ordinance also banned slavery from the region.
- Government established the Departments of Foreign Affairs, War, Marine, and Treasury.

Weaknesses

- Congress had no power to coin money, therefore each state developed its own currency.
- Congress was unable to regulate interstate and foreign commerce; some states refused to pay for goods they purchased from abroad.
- Congress was unable to impose taxes; it could only borrow money on credit.
- No national court system was established to protect the rights of U.S. citizens.



- No executive branch was established to enforce laws.
- Amendments could be added only with the approval of all 13 states.
- Approval of 9 of 13 states was required to pass a law in Congress.
- One vote was allotted for each state, despite the size of its population.
- It was just a “firm league of friendship.”

So long as any individual state has power to defeat the measures of the other twelve, our pretended union is but a name, and our confederation a cobweb.

Noah Webster, ca. 1780

The establishment of the Northwest Territories was a significant accomplishment of the U.S. government under the Articles of Confederation, given the weakness of its central decision-making power. This map shows the original territories in relation to present-day state boundaries.