The U.S. Presidency:  
Background to the Constitution  
I. Problems Under the Articles of Confederation  

A. National defense and foreign policy  
1. British remained in NW territory, despite Revolutionary War treaty agreement to leave.  
2. Spanish in Florida threatened settlers in Georgia.  
3. Pirates in the Mediterranean threatened Confederate shipping: no navy to challenge or money to pay off  

B. Domestic order and security  
1. 1782, Newburgh Mutiny: army units quartered at Newburgh, NY threatened mutiny until receipt of back pay. Wanted to install Washington as KING. Washington declined, but said he would argue before the Continental Congress on behalf of their pay.  
2. 1783: troops raided arsenals in Philadelphia and forced Continental Congress to flee. Pennsylvania militia was left to round up the mutineers.  
3. 1786, Shays’ Rebellion: farmers in Massachusetts, most veterans of the Revolutionary War, facing high taxes and low crop prices with creditors threatening to take away their lands, crops, everything, drafted petitions to ask MA state legislature to stop foreclosures.  

After legislature ended session without passing legislation to help them, the farmers disrupted court proceedings in various towns, and crowds freed farmers form debtor’s prisons.  

State militia succeeded in defeating Shays’ rebellion and arresting Shays and 150 followers. Shays and other leaders tried and sentenced to death, but MA governor ultimately pardoned all those convicted.
The MA state legislature passed a bill that exempted household goods, clothing, and farm implements from court judgments.

Shays had been a Revolutionary War leader. George Washington questioned whether the concerns of the rebellion were "real grievances which admit of redress," whether the actions were the result of "licentiousness" (bad conduct) or whether Britain might have hand in inciting the rebellion (see Pious 1996).

As Shays was being tried and ultimately pardoned, Washington and others who looked to him for national leadership made plans for a constitutional convention in Philadelphia.

C. National economic prosperity: different currency, weights and measures, etc. interfered with trade; no national trade negotiating body; no national taxation

II. Goals of the Framers

A. Preserve states and territories against European powers and other threats

B. Maintain domestic order against internal insurrection

C. Provide for national prosperity

III. Factors Influencing Alternatives for Executive Considered by Framers

A. Personal experience with King George, led them to be fearful of too much power in hands of central govt; also experience with colonial governments

B. Political history
   1. Under Britain, legislative dominance had prevailed—the royal governors, after all, had
represented the crown, whereas the legislatures represented the colonists.

2. Separation of powers with checks and balances: e.g. governors had absolute veto power over legislation; legislative assemblies, however, could refuse to raise the funds necessary to carry out laws or even pay the governor’s salary

C. Lack of executive under Articles
   1. During the Revolutionary War, General George Washington had proposed single national army, but Continental Congress’ fear of national power resulted in mixed national army and state militias.
   2. Continental Congress had no power to tax—could only request that states send money

From 1786-1787, Washington corresponded with state political leaders and former war officers, asking for proposals for a new national government that would overcome the problems of the Confederation.

Washington was particularly impressed with ideas proposed by Secretary of War Henry Knox and John Jay, who proposed the creation of an EXECUTIVE BRANCH LED BY A "GOVERNOR GENERAL"

IV. 1787, Constitutional Convention: Central Questions Concerning the Executive

A. Single or plural executive?

B. Method of selection?

C. Extent of powers?
V. Arguments For and Against Distinct Alternatives

Note: you should be able to come up with more information to fill in the blanks in this outline—both from the reading and from classroom discussion.