

Observation no: 97

Country-year: United Kingdom 1949

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

No.

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes. Prime Minister Clement Atlee, who served as PM from 1945-1951, joined the British Army in 1914 and served during World War I. He was commissioned as a Captain and held the rank of major by the end of his service in 1918.¹

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?

No. The military, did not, by law, exclude people of a certain ethnic or sectarian background. It is worth noting, however, that the military was to a certain extent classist prior to World War II. Its officers were largely aristocrats and thus did not adequately represent the demographics of the country.² There were likely long-term pipeline effects from this aristocratic bias. Prior to WWII, Officers of the Auxiliary Forces in colonial territory abroad were largely recruited from the mainland. Most units did not recruit non-whites and officer commission of all units was generally restricted to whites until after World War II.³ That said, some historians have disputed this idea, suggesting that there *was* a progressive policy of Indianization of the Officer Corps in India, for example.⁴

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No. There is no evidence of ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps. However, the British upper class was suspicious of potential threats to the state. In the interwar period, Kier describes a widespread "gentleman-officer

¹ "History of Clement Attlee – GOV.UK", *Gov.UK*, accessed May 21, 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/history/past-prime-ministers/clement-attlee>

² Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Two Wars*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.)

³ Kaushik Roy, *The Army in British India: From Colonial Warfare to Total War 1857 – 1947*, (Bloomsbury: Continuum Studies in Military History, 2013.)

⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

culture” in which the armed forces were kept intentionally weak and the officer corps was prevented from professionalizing too much.⁵ In common with most Western democracies following World War II, it was unlikely that someone with pro-Communist ideology would receive the security clearance necessary to become a high-ranking military officer.

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

No.

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

No.

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

No. The United Kingdom has been a democratic, civilian-led, constitutional democracy since the 18th or 19th century.⁶

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

No.

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No. In 1949, the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) was focused on foreign threats to the United Kingdom, primarily related to Communism. None of its component agencies had oversight of the regular military as its part of their explicit mission.⁷

⁵ Kier, 3.

⁶ The exact point at which England democratized has been disputed. For example see, Sheri Berman. “How Democracies Emerge: Lessons from Europe,” *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 18, No. 1 (2007): 28-41.

⁷ Smith, Michael, *SIX: A History of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service*, (London: Dialogue, 2010).

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes. The civil-military forum of the Committee of Imperial Defense (CID)⁸ was suspended at the outbreak of World War II and in 1940, Winston Churchill created the civilian office of Minister of Defence (for himself) in order to co-ordinate civil-military defense issues and have ministerial oversight over the Chiefs of Staff Committee.⁹ Clement Attlee also served in this capacity as PM until his government passed the Ministry of Defence Act of 1946, which created a separate cabinet seat for the Minister of Defence.¹⁰

⁸ Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁹ "History of Sir Winston Churchill – GOV.UK," *Gov.UK*, accessed May 21, 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/history/past-prime-ministers/winston-churchill>.

¹⁰ Jerry Brookshire, *Clement Attlee*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995).