

Observation no: 60

Country-year: United Kingdom - 1938

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?

No. Neville Chamberlain was a career politician.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. Officers were largely aristocrats and thus did not adequately represent the demographics of the country.² Additionally, the UK at the time of World Wars I and II had colonized multiple territories abroad. Officers of the Auxiliary Forces that staffed these locations were only 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

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. Kier describes a widespread "gentleman-officer culture" in which the armed forces were kept intentionally weak and the officer corps was prevented from professionalizing too much.⁴ The rank and file were comprised of poor and unemployed volunteers; the officers, on the other hand, was comprised of aristocrats who would identify with national interests, rather than threatening them as a separate body with corporate interests.

¹ Nick Smart, *Neville Chamberlain*, (Routledge, 2010.)

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

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

⁴ Kier, 3.

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. The military was not used to repress internal dissent in the last five years on the mainland. However, there were small spats of resistance to Colonial Rule that provoked military responses, such as in India.

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.⁵

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 1939, the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) was focused on foreign threats to the United Kingdom. None of its component agencies had oversight of the regular military as its part of their explicit mission.⁶

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

No.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Smith, Michael, *SIX: A History of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service*, (London: Dialogue, 2010).

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

Yes. Following the Second Boer War in 1902 until 1946, the Committee of Imperial Defense (CID) served as a body for both military and civilian experts.⁷ The CID functioned with military personnel integrated equally into the defense committee. This was supposed to give military experts the ability to speak freely without repercussions from their superiors. However, because the prime minister was ultimately responsible for the committee's membership, it served to solidify civilian control.⁸ The CID was the center of multiple sub-committees akin to American task forces. It met often, for example, CID subcommittees met 556 times during the 1928 session of parliament, despite the fact that it was a time characterized by disarmament.⁹

⁷ Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 42. CID replaced the previous Cabinet Defense Committee, which was largely used during crises rather than as a continuous interagency body.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Franklyn Arthur Johnson, *Defense by Committee*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 221.