

Observation no: 114

Country-year: United Kingdom 1955

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. Anthony Eden, who served as Prime Minister (PM) from April 1955 through January 1957, entered the army as a non-commissioned officer. He reached the rank of captain during World War One and was the youngest brigade-major in the British Army at the age of 20.¹ Eden's predecessor as PM, Winston Churchill, entered the British Military as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1895 and was promoted to Major by 1905 and served as a temporary Lieutenant-Colonel in 1916.²

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.³ There were likely long-term pipeline effects from this aristocratic bias.

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

¹ D. R. Thorpe, "Eden, (Robert) Anthony, first earl of Avon (1897–1977)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2011, accessed May 27, 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31060>, accessed 27 May 2014.

² Douglas Russell and Paul Courtenay, "Churchill's Commissions and Military Attachments," *The Churchill Centre* (online), accessed May 27, 2014, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/reference/commissions-and-military-attachments>.

³ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Two Wars*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.)

state. In the interwar period, 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 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.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 1955, the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) was focused on foreign threats to the United Kingdom, primarily related to Communism. None of its

⁴ Kier, 3.

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.

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.

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)⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹

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

⁷ Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁸ "History of Sir Winston Churchill – GOV.UK," *Gov.UK*, accessed May 21, 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/history/past-prime-ministers/winston-churchill>.

⁹ Jerry Brookshire, *Clement Attlee*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995).