

“By Means Fair or Foul”: The British Army versus Jeremy Corbyn

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There would be mass resignations at all levels and you would face the very real prospect of an event which would effectively be a mutiny. Unnamed British General, Sunday Times, Sep 20, 2015

Having stirred the soup of British politics sufficiently to make it interesting again, UK Labour's Jeremy Corbyn finds himself exciting one conservative grouping after another. The pacemakers are refusing to work. Cardiac arrest in some circles, it seems, is imminent. The “security thesis” against him, entailing, for instance, that he would pose a threat to Her Majesty and country, continues to inflate.

This thesis takes the form of a double headed eagle: on the one hand, what he will do in the context of Britain proper, be it military deployments or, as it may turn out, non-deployments; on the other, what his approach to Israel might be. Regarding the former, the weekend offered a few unhappy surprises with the remarks of a senior serving general, who contended that the Army would initiate a mutiny if a Corbyn government tried to shrink their numbers should he win the elections in 2020.[1]

In true masculine reflex, the unnamed general claimed a few immutable points, already suggesting how his view of true authority is distinctly at odds with the idea of civilian control. Leave Trident alone, he was saying. Stay deep and buried in Nato. Do not announce “any plans to emasculate and shrink the size of the armed forces.” In short, going against a long understood rationale, leave war, and even peace, to the generals.

The general evidently found it difficult to forgive Corbyn for not taking a strong stance against the IRA, which managed to kill 730 British troops and injure 7,000 more during the Troubles. (He is said to have served in Northern Ireland during the 1980s and 1990s.) To even suggest that IRA members might be honoured, including the hunger strikers lead by Bobby Sands, was something that stirred the blood.

The statement made to the *Sunday Times* is a measure of how Corbyn has gotten under the skin of various branches of officialdom. “The Army just wouldn’t stand for it. The general staff would not allow a prime minister to jeopardise the security of this country and I think people would use whatever means possible fair or foul, to prevent that. You can’t put a maverick in charge of a country’s security.”[2]

The statement comes on the heels of a growing war lust within Labour’s own ranks. Corbyn is facing a good deal of jingo from the shadow cabinet, which is gradually moving into Caesarean assassination mode. Shadow Foreign Secretary Hilary Benn has simply decided to refuse any idea that nuclear disarmament might be affected, let alone a withdrawal from

NATO. Case closed.

A primary topic of consideration is the embrace of airstrikes on Syria that Prime Minister David Cameron has been pressing for. As long as the plan to target ISIS targets in Syria is “coherent”, Cameron is guaranteed that a good number of the shadow cabinet will cross the floor.

What, then, about this general? Tory MEP, Daniel Hannan, has reminded the general, in the same breath as calling him an “idiot” that, “We’re not Bolivia for God’s sake.” A campaign of sorts has begun to out him, with a Change.org petition started by Left Unity securing over 5,000 signatures. It calls upon the prime minister to sack the general in question. “It is a direct interference in Britain’s democratic process.”

Ben Griffin, a former member of the Special Air Service in Iraq and Afghanistan, and hawk turned dove, has argued that such generals pose an obvious menace to democratic process. “He should go public with his statement. He is threatening the democratic will of the British people and he exposes the lie that the armed forces exist to protect our freedoms.”[3]

A Ministry of Defence source did note that such political commentary on any “future government” was unacceptable. “No one thinks that it is a good idea for a senior serving officer to undermine a potential future government.”[4] But a good deal of foot dragging was also in order, with the MoD telling the *Independent* that launching an investigation into who actually spoke out would be nigh impossible – they would be, it was suggested, too many generals to investigate.

The rebuff would have been unthinkable if the matter had concerned another Edward Snowden like scenario. The big, threatening fish must be left alone, with the MoD reluctant to go through the dirty laundry of the higher-ups. As Griffin noted, “GCHQ could tell the MoD today which general it was.” They, after all, “collect the metadata of all phone calls and emails so they will have a record of which generals have been in touch with the journo who wrote the story.”

Now that would be a turn up for the books and tabloid headlines: GCHQ, grand surveillance bugbear, protects democracy by disclosing the identity of potentially mutinous, leaking general.

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Notes

[1]

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/british-army-could-stage-mutiny-under-corbyn-says-senior-serving-general-10509742.html>

[2] http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/National/article1609597.ece

[3] <https://www.rt.com/uk/316116-sas-corbyn-coup-general/>

[4]

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ministry-of-defence-condemn-army-general-behind-je-remy-corbyn-mutiny-threat-10510353.html>

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