

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHAPTER I

Armed forces; the problem in England; Charles I and the army; Petition of Right; control of the militia; coercion of Parliament; Monk and the Restoration; impeachment of Clarendon; unpopularity of the army; James II; camp at Hounslow

THE preservation of internal order and the prevention of foreign encroachment are among the principal duties of all governments. If these duties are to be carried out, if domestic peace and freedom from invasion are to be vouchsafed to a country, its government must be prepared to maintain an armed force of some sort. It must be ready to expend the lives of its citizens and its treasure in their fulfilment. The weapons which have been wielded from time immemorial in so doing have been the armed forces of the different nations of the world. The raising of armies in the past for aggression against foreign states has been an easy matter. The call to citizens to rally to the defence of the fatherland has met with patriotic response. The creation of armies in face of national peril has presented no difficulties to governments. The defenders of Thermopylae and the soldiers of the first republican armies of France are examples of the spirit which actuates nations in time of difficulty. It is easy for governments to control these armed forces in times of actual conflict, but the task of determining their position in relation to the rest of the State in times of peace has taxed the ingenuity of statesmen and philosophers to its utmost throughout the ages. Kings and emperors, writers and politicians, rulers and ruled, have all wrestled with the thorny problem of the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

relationship which should exist between the majority of the population of the State and a number of men who, by the nature of their calling, must lead, as Plato pointed out, a life somewhat apart from that of their fellow citizens.<sup>1</sup> It is a matter to which special consideration must be given at all times in view of the fact that two special characteristics clearly define the difference between them and the majority of the normal citizens. In the first place, this body of men is entirely dependent on the State for its creation and its upkeep. It is clothed and fed, comes and goes, at the bidding of the State. It is increased or diminished in size by the orders of the State which it exists to defend in time of trial. The second characteristic affords a still greater contrast. These men are armed. The rest of the citizens are not. It is this fact that renders their position in the State a matter of such gravity. Being armed, they represent a force which can coerce the rest of the community and can overthrow the unarmed or civil government of the country if they choose to use the weapons which that government has placed in their hands. Thus it comes about that armed forces are the offspring and ward of the State, to live or die at the wish of the State. At the same time, they may become its masters controlling the means of destroying the State to which they owe their being.

Ancient and modern history are not devoid of examples of the delicate position created in the State by the existence in its midst of this special body of men. Their peculiar situation is not without influence on their attitude to the State. A tendency to assume privileges denied to other citizens can be traced, while from time to time,

<sup>1</sup> *The Republic*, Book II.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE STATE AND ARMED FORCES

3

the brute force possessed by armies has been used to subvert the existing order of government and to substitute and, possibly, to enforce a political system abhorrent to the wishes of the citizens. The Praetorian guards at Rome and the Janissaries at Constantinople made and unmade governments. The victorious Cromwellian army supported the introduction of a new constitutional system in this country. Napoleon III owed his accession to the throne, in part at least, to the goodwill of the army which failed in its allegiance to the then-established order of government in France.

Various solutions of the problem of the position which armed forces should occupy in the State have been adopted, but whether they are the final solutions or not, it is difficult to say with any certainty. Political science is ever-changing and ever-developing. The constitutions of to-day, the established order of generations, may be overwhelmed in some world-wide cataclysm to-morrow. The civil authority may be supreme at one moment and, at the next, the armed forces may assert themselves and seek to establish a form of government which may or may not be more fitted to the political genius of the country. But, in any case, some form of control of the armed forces is necessary whether the central government be in civilian or military hands.

In the following pages an attempt is made to describe the various phases through which the problem of the political control of the army in this country has passed from the middle of the seventeenth to the beginning of the present century. It was one of the principal questions in England during the reign of Charles I. It was a main factor in the dispute between King and Parliament. It

I-2

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

was a contributory cause of the breakdown of the Protectorate. It remained unsolved after the Restoration and was one of the difficulties which had to be faced at the Revolution of 1688. The following year witnessed the establishment of a form of control which, if but a partial settlement, reached at a time of great uncertainty, has endured as the basis from which all subsequent developments have sprung. To make clear the gradual creation of a political system combining military efficiency with parliamentary control, it is necessary to review in broad outline the situation as it existed during the sixty years prior to the settlement effected when William III and Mary came to the throne in 1689. The spirit in which the question was discussed in those troubled years was unlikely to lead to the solution of a highly controversial problem. Men's minds were inflamed by passion. Their judgments were warped by prejudice. Political intolerance played a part in preventing the calm consideration of a difficulty which in happier times might have been debated in a less heated atmosphere.

The riddle which faced the statesmen of this country in the days of Charles I, and for many succeeding years, was that of adjusting the question of the maintenance of an armed force in relation to the prerogative of the Sovereign whilst upholding the long-established rights of the subject in regard to taxation and personal freedom. Some politicians then believed that a personal guard for the Sovereign would develop into a standing army which would misuse its powers in the same way as the Praetorian guards abused their privileged position in the Roman Empire. With some reason they considered that the army would be used against the liberties of the sub-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ject. The Sovereign was equally suspicious of the motives of the politicians, thinking that they wished to deprive him of his rights in order to establish parliamentary control over the Crown.

The measures to be adopted for the defence of the country were a cause of continuous disagreement between Sovereign and Parliament. Any attempt on the part of the King to establish a standing army was watched with jealousy and opposed in every way. Parliament considered that standing armies were characteristic of foreign states where the military situation was entirely different from that of Great Britain, whose shores were lapped by the waters of the ocean and whose natural defence was the navy. Great Britain had no land frontiers coterminous with those of foreign states and was free from the danger of sudden incursions by hostile neighbours. It was considered that, as a general rule, the navy, supported by the volunteer trained bands, provided adequate means for the defence of the country. Other armed forces should only be raised with a definite object in view, and once that object had been achieved, they should be disbanded. Parliament gave no thought to the provision of an army trained in peace which would be ready in the event of an outbreak of war. It regarded a standing army as a thing apart from the rest of the nation, created and controlled by the Sovereign, disciplined by him and obedient to his orders. It feared the establishment of military rule. It dreaded the idea of imposing taxes to pay for such an army. On the other hand, the tendency of the monarchy under Charles I, and his sons, Charles II and James II, was to provide itself with an army with which to enforce its views against those of the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 6

## PARLIAMENT AND THE ARMY

people as expressed, however imperfectly, through Parliament as the constitutional mouthpiece of the nation. The Commonwealth and Protectorate period was one of purely military autocracy in which the army openly used its strength to influence decisions on political questions of all sorts.

The quarrels of Charles I and his Parliament were closely connected with the control of the military forces. Parliament opposed his request for military and naval support for wars with France and Spain. In reply Charles endeavoured to impose taxes without the authority of Parliament. The Petition of Right, to which he had to give his assent, followed in 1628. Among other points, it dealt with the grievance of billeting. The return of the troops in 1627 from the unfortunate expedition to La Rochelle had given rise to many complaints in Devon and Cornwall on account of forced billeting. The inhabitants were compelled to take soldiers and sailors into their homes with but little prospect of receiving any payment in return. They were further provoked by the terrible condition of the men, who were diseased, undisciplined, largely unclothed and practically starving.<sup>1</sup> The Petition stated that

of late great companies of soldiers and mariners have been dispersed into divers counties of the realm and the inhabitants against their wills have been compelled to receive them into their houses. . . against the laws and custom of this realm.

It prayed that the King would remove the said soldiers and mariners “and that your people be not so burdened in time to come”. As will be seen in due course, billeting

<sup>1</sup> Gibbs, *Romance of George Villiers*, p. 287.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

remained a grievance for many years and was frequently discussed in Parliament, but it was long before sanction was given and money voted for the construction of barracks in which members of the military forces could be housed. The Petition also asked that the commission for proceeding by martial law be revoked and annulled and that no such commissions be issued in future. This request arose from the dislike of arbitrary proceedings under so-called martial law which was not subject to the procedure of the civil courts.<sup>1</sup>

As time went on, the relations between Charles I and Parliament became more embittered, and a quarrel arose over the question of the command of the army. It developed in November, 1641, in connection with the reconquest of Ireland. Parliament would not trust the King with control of the army because it feared the purpose for which he might employ it. He was suspected of wishing to use it to bring about the overthrow of the parliamentary constitution. In November of that year, Oliver Cromwell carried a motion that the two Houses should vote power to the Earl of Essex to command all the trained bands south of the Trent and that these powers should continue till Parliament take further order. In the following December, Haslerig introduced a militia bill giving supreme command of all trained bands in England to a general appointed by Parliament.<sup>2</sup> This proposal was one of the immediate causes of the civil war. It asked the King to agree to surrender the control of the militia. In June, 1642, one of the nineteen propositions laid before him at York was that he should hand over the custody of fortified

<sup>1</sup> Maitland, *Constitutional History*, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> Firth, *Life of Oliver Cromwell*, p. 60.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

places and the command of the militia to an officer chosen by Parliament. The King refused, and the First Civil War began when he raised his flag at Nottingham on August 22nd.

It is unnecessary to follow the fortunes of that inglorious struggle between the Royalists and Parliamentarians, the first phase of which only ended when the King was executed in January, 1649. The conclusion of the second phase was reached when Cromwell died some nine years later, and the Monarchy was restored. It is important, however, to note that the parliamentary party, no doubt unwittingly, began to sow the seed of future trouble for itself in relation to the army before the war was over. At one time it proposed that, with the exception of General Fairfax, no officer above the rank of colonel should be employed in the army. Another suggestion was that a large part of the army should transfer itself to Ireland while the remainder was to be disbanded, but no proposals were made to raise money to pay the soldiers who were to return to civil life. Such actions helped to make the army into a machine for forcing Parliament to make concessions. In other words, the army became a political body directed by its officers and the agents of the regiments. For instance, in November, 1648, the army in the south addressed a "Remonstrance" to Parliament against the negotiations then under discussion at Newport with Charles I. The army demanded a rupture and the punishment of the King. When Parliament continued the negotiations, the army resorted to force, and the King was seized and taken to Hurst Castle, in Hampshire. Parliament, ignoring this high-handed action, resolved to consider the King's answer as a basis for a settlement. The



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## SUPREMACY OF THE ARMY

9

army's reply was the arrest and exclusion of members from the House of Commons by Colonel Pride and a body of musketeers. Again, in 1652, the army considered that domestic reforms ought to be continued and petitioned Parliament for a dissolution after certain changes in the electoral system had been made. Efforts to reach an understanding failed and, in the spring of 1653, Cromwell and his soldiers brought the Long Parliament to an end by turning out the members and removing the mace.

It is difficult to see what Parliament could do in opposition to thirty thousand armed men, however strong popular feeling might be against the members of a powerful military party who were determined to assert themselves as the actual rulers of the country. Parliament had no means of resisting the army, which was able to enforce its will even if it was clear that it was not in the best interests of the nation to agree to its proposals. The position was reached when it was true to say that Parliament was the "creature of the army", dependent for its existence on the goodwill of a military organisation, which expected a docile acquiescence in its demands and was not prepared to listen to the edicts of the politicians sitting within the precincts of Westminster Hall. The most that Parliament would do was to vote money for the army for a period of five years only, which was an indirect method of declaring its right to determine at some future date whether the army should continue to exist or not. Cromwell, as Lord Protector, disagreed with this plan as his wish was to make it impossible for money once voted for the army to be withdrawn. When Parliament suggested a reduction in the army rates of pay, it was threatened

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00514-2 - Parliament and the Army 1642-1904

John Stuart Omond

Excerpt

[More information](#)

with military violence. The situation was filled with difficulty and, as a shrewd observer remarked,

indeed there began to arise various forms of jealousy between the army and the Parliament. The latter claimed superiority in respect of its being the Representative of the whole English people; the Army, on the other hand, protected by its General, enlarged upon the services it had rendered to the State, and upon the blood it had shed in many conflicts, nor would it allow the Parliament to introduce reforms to weaken its strength.<sup>1</sup>

Matters drifted on in an indeterminate manner until January, 1655, when Parliament was dissolved. In October of that year, the country was divided into twelve military districts, each under a Major-General, who was granted arbitrary powers with a military force of some thousand to fifteen hundred men at his disposal. The Major-Generals were placed in control of local affairs and made responsible for the enforcement of morals according to the puritan outlook on life. They were charged to put down any tendency to revolutionary movements. They were, in fact, military dictators endowed with powers which placed them above the law of the land. The scheme was unpopular with all classes of society and was withdrawn about twelve months later. Clarendon says that Cromwell

discerned by degrees that these new magistrates grew too much in love with their own power; and besides that they carried themselves like so many bassas with their bands of janizaries towards the people, and were extremely odious to them of all parties, they did really affect such an authority as might undermine his own greatness.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "A Venetian Ambassador to the Lord Protector", *Blackwood's Magazine*, May, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Clarendon, *History of Rebellion in England*, Book xv, para. 25.