DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY IN THE UK: WHY PARLIAMENT MATTERS

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2 July 2021
Research question: What role does the House of Commons play when the UK goes to war?

Two theoretical wagers:

1. That this is an important question to answer.
   - Because Parliaments affect security policy.
   - Because the House of Commons affects UK security policy.

2. That it makes sense to answer it through historical study.
1. International security is a two-level game involving intertwined international-level and domestic-level bargaining processes.

2. Parliaments are important as arenas for and players in domestic-level bargaining.

3. Because of their public nature, parliaments are also especially likely to generate feedback to the international level.

4. But their exact role varies according to the system of government, the distribution of constitutional powers, party politics, and the nature of the issues at stake.
WHEN PARLIAMENTS MATTER

1. Legislators matter in democracies more than autocracies, and matter differently in parliamentary democracies than in presidential democracies.

2. Legislators matter more when they have formal constitutional powers:
   a. To receive information about security.
   b. To devise, amend and approve budgets.
   c. To raise, maintain, discipline and deploy armed forces.
   d. To approve or veto appointments.
   e. To approve or veto international agreements.

3. Legislators matter more when they have the capacity to mobilise public support for the executive.
4. Legislators matter more when the government lacks a firm majority.
   a. Majority governments can more easily ignore or out-vote opposition.
   b. Coalition governments tend to paralysis and extremity.
5. Legislators matter more when a left-wing government is in power.
   a. Left-wing legislators are more likely to demand oversight of military operations.
   b. Left-wing legislators are also more likely to resist military deployments.
6. Legislators matter more when the issues at stake are highly salient.
   a. …to the legislators themselves or to other actors with influence over them.
Setting aside recent debates over *ex ante* veto powers, the House of Commons has historically exerted five forms of influence over security policy:

1. Expenditure
2. Debate
3. Inquiry
4. Confidence
5. Support
The Bill of Rights 1689:

‘the raising or keeping of a standing Army within the Kingdom in time of Peace unless it be with Consent of Parliament is against Law’

‘levying Money for or to the Use of the Crowne by pretence of Prerogative without Grant of Parliament for longer time or in other manner then the same is or shall be granted is Illegall’.
“all further attempts to reduce the revolted colonies to obedience are contrary to the true interests of this kingdom”

Sir James Lowther, 12 December 1781

“That Item A be reduced by £100, in respect of the salary of the Secretary of State”

House of Commons, 21 June 1895
[Pointing at Chamberlain]: “You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!”

Leo Amery, 7 May 1940
“This is not the time to falter. This is the time for this house, not just this government or indeed this prime minister, but for this house to give a lead, to show that we will stand up for what we know to be right, to show that we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk, to show at the moment of decision that we have the courage to do the right thing”

Tony Blair, 18 March 2003
INQUIRY

“enquiry is the proper duty and function of the House of Commons”

Lord John Russell, 28 January 1855
CONFIDENCE

- 1782: Lord North
- 1855: Earl of Aberdeen
- 1856: Viscount Palmerston
- 1895: Earl Rosebery
- 1940: Neville Chamberlain
- 1957: Anthony Eden
- 2013: David Cameron
“I have confidence that His Majesty's Government will act up to their supreme international obligations”

Winston Churchill, 28 June 1950

“[the] Tories will table [a] Motion if we don’t. We’d better do it”

Clement Attlee, 4 July 1950
CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS