

## **‘A well vetted protest’: Visual representations of veteran activism in the British press**

Legal scrutiny of military operations is a well-established phenomenon, yet the Northern Ireland legacy investigations have proven a particularly contentious topic amongst British military veterans. The perceived injustice of the legacy investigations has resulted in the formation of numerous veteran-led campaign groups organising protests that have seen thousands of former military personnel take to the streets in towns and cities across the UK.

Acknowledging the importance of media coverage of social movements, this paper considers how these veteran-led campaigns are visually presented in online news reports of legacy-related activism. Situated at the intersection of visual politics and civil-military relations, this paper examines important questions of veteran agency, criminality, and how the status of veteran figures within British society is informed by divergent memories of conflict. In particular, it questions how photographic representations of the movement engage with dominant discourses of heroism and victimhood associated to British military figures.

Based on the analysis of 372 photographs included in articles relating to legacy-related activism, this presentation discusses three salient features consistent across the images – symbols of military service, the focus on a lone veteran, and the construction of military personnel as imperilled heroes – and assesses their role in consolidating specific framings of military veterans and the legacy investigations. Overall, this paper argues the visual representation of veteran activism, despite its disruptive potential, to be regulated through dominant discourses of British militarism that circumvent questions of military criminality and veteran agency, creating a smooth narrative of past conflict.

### **Bio**

Hannah Richards is a first year PhD student in the School of Law and Politics at Cardiff University. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, her doctoral research is a collaborative project with the Ministry of Defence’s ‘Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre’ (DCDC) and explores the relationship between human rights and the British military. This research interest has grown out of her work with the Ministry of Defence and previous study of British civil-military relations.