



REVELATIONS: Dominic Cummings during his BBC interview with Laura Kuennsberg

What we are seeing from Cummings is cold revenge

THE epitaph inscribed on his monument reads: No eulogy would be a match for such a great name. Apparently Niccolò Machiavelli wrote it himself and asked friends to make sure it was inscribed exactly as he had written it. I wouldn't be surprised to discover Dominic Cummings has written something similar – indeed, probably more grandiose – and packaged it as part of his final will and testament.

I'm not suggesting Cummings comes anywhere close to Machiavelli's skills as a strategist, adviser, tactician, or diplomat (because he clearly doesn't); or that his writings and letters will still be read, let alone remembered and influential, almost 500 years after his death (because I'd be incredibly surprised if they were). Yet it is blindingly obvious he does view himself as some sort of blend of Machiavelli, Moriarty, Svengali, and Voldemort; and, by his own lights, always the smartest one in the room. A fact he seems keen to play on a continuous loop.

History, albeit for the moment, remembers him as the man who 'masterminded' the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. It may yet remember him as the man who accidentally triggered the unravelling of the UK by way of Scottish independence and a united Ireland. Mind you, on Tuesday evening, in an interview with Laura Kuennsberg, he seemed all over the place when it came to Brexit, claiming anyone whoever said it was necessarily a good idea "has got a screw loose".

Hmm. That's not the message that was coming through during the referendum campaign. He was the one who wrote the strap lines and steered key players into place. I don't remember any of them arguing the suck-it-and-see approach to the debate. I don't remember any of them suggesting it wasn't necessarily a good idea. It was like listening to a man – THE man, in fact – trying to convince an

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audience that arguing in favour of something didn't mean it was actually a good idea.

At that point in the interview, I wish it had been Mark Carruthers asking the questions. He wouldn't have let him away with that sort of nonsense. He would have pushed and pushed and kept on pushing until Cummings either collapsed on the floor or actually made a coherent argument in defence of some of the stuff he was trotting out, unchallenged.

Within days of the 2019 general election, he claims there were conversations about removing Boris Johnson from office. Are we really to believe the prime minister who delivered the best election result for the Conservatives since 1987 was in danger of being toppled just days later? Are we really to believe Cummings sat in a room – as Johnson's chief adviser at the time – plotting with a group (and I assume it was a group of those he trusted and worked with) to

overthrow the prime minister? Who knows, because he wasn't pushed to answer those questions.

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of the saga is that Cummings, described by some as the most powerful figure in British politics at the time, was hounded from his job in Number 10 because he fell out with Carrie Symonds a few months later. The man who 'masterminded' Brexit and Johnson's election victory ousted because the would-be Machiavelli went head-to-head with the prime minister's fiancée – and lost.

What we are seeing now is revenge. Mean, cold-spirited revenge. In a series of interviews, statements, evidence to a parliamentary committee and his session with Kuennsberg, he has set out to destroy Johnson. Yet all the faults he accuses him of happened while he was working for Johnson. His evidence against him is brutal, damning, overwhelming and, in a normal world, enough to topple the prime minister. Yet none of it was enough for Cummings to take the moral high ground and resign at the time: which would have been much more damaging for Johnson.

Instead, he kept on working for a man he believed, back in December 2019, wasn't fit to be PM. He sought the comfort of Johnson's protection during his trip to Durham in March 2020. He remained silent at the same time as he was recording and storing all the information he would use later to undermine Johnson. He tried to hold on to his position in November 2020, forcing Johnson to ask him to leave Downing Street, although giving him some cover by saying he was on 'garden leave'.

His attempt to reinvent himself while dishing the dirt (which is mostly accurate, it seems) may please Johnson haters, but I don't think they'll see Cummings in a kindlier light. It's hard to disagree with *The Economist*: "He wasted the greatest opportunity of his life."

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ON THIS DAY

JULY 23 1921

Truce in Ulster

MR EOIN O'Duffy, IRA Liaison Officer for Ulster, has issued the following statement: 'I have returned to Belfast after touring the counties of Louth, Cavan and Monaghan and had satisfactory interviews with the different County Inspectors and British military officers. Generally, the terms of the Truce are being observed in these counties. In some cases it was reported that the military were openly carrying arms but I have been assured that there was no intention of being provocative and this will not occur again. In some cases the Unionists carried out such activities as felling trees across public roads, believing we would be held responsible, and that it would be said we were not observing the Truce. In all such cases the IRA removed the obstructions.'

'In Tyrone and Fermanagh the Ulster Special Constabulary, Class A and B continue to behave in a most provocative fashion. Incessant firing is kept up nightly over wide areas and Catholics are being held up and searched on the roads. At Rosslea a young man named Fox was arrested by a Class A [Special] officer on a charge of drilling.'

With the exception of an occasional outbreak on the part of the anti-Catholic mob, Belfast is quiet but each post brings to our people a number of threatening letters warning them to clear out of their homes within a certain number of hours or their property will be destroyed. The self-restraint exercised by our people in Belfast at a most trying time is remarkable. In the words of the President [de Valera] they regard themselves as 'custodians of the nation's honour'.

FROM Co Monaghan, Eoin O'Duffy (1892-1944) trained as an engineer. Joined the Volunteers in 1917 he was active in Monaghan and Tyrone before becoming Director of Organisation at GHQ in 1921. A close associate of Michael Collins and a fellow member of the IRB, O'Duffy had close links with the Northern IRA divisions during 1919-22 and was appointed Truce Liaison Officer for Ulster in July 1921 with an office in St Mary's Hall, Belfast. After the Treaty split, O'Duffy used his considerable personal influence to persuade the Northern IRA leadership to support the Treaty in exchange for promise of arms and support from Collins and pro-Treaty GHQ. In May 1922 he was centrally involved in plans for an IRA 'insurrection' against the Northern state. Apparently cancelled by O'Duffy and Mulcahy at the last minute, the IRA upsurge was effectively limited to Belfast Antrim and Down and was quickly suppressed. O'Duffy would later emerge as the right-wing leader of the neo-Fascist Blueshirt movement in the 1930s.

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