

Fear-mongering and Media Propaganda: Promoting Britain's Security Service MI5

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Readers of the Guardian woke up last Tuesday (November 1, 2016) to find that the newspaper and website had been given over to promoting MI5. To be more precise: the paper was trumpeting a fearmongering 'exclusive' with MI5 Director-General, Andrew Parker. It was billed as 'the first interview of its kind' and was conducted by the paper's deputy editor, [Paul Johnson](#), and the diplomatic editor, [Ewen MacAskill](#). However, it quickly became clear that this 'interview' consisted largely of the two senior Guardian journalists listening to the MI5 chief and diligently writing down what he said with no discernible challenge or scrutiny.

Ex-Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook [summed up](#) perfectly the contents of the 'interview':

- the Russians under Vladimir Putin are an evil empire;
- Islamic jihadists are everywhere but MI5 is brilliant at foiling their terror attacks;
- the increased budget MI5 has received is entirely justified because it is doing such a brilliant job of foiling terror attacks;
- MI5's extra powers to surveil us all are necessary to foil those terror attacks;
- whatever happens with Brexit, MI5 will continue doing a brilliant job protecting the British people;
- MI5 is determined to become a friendlier place for women and minority ethnic applicants.



This was state ideology masquerading as robust reporting; in Britain's 'flagship' newspaper of liberal journalism, no less. The [front page](#) of the *Guardian* website, with an accompanying photograph of two armed policemen, was a model example of propaganda that should be pored over by journalism students for decades to come:

EXCLUSIVE / MI5 chief warns of growing Russian threat to UK
• Moscow 'using cyber-warfare' against targets across Europe
• 'About 3,000' violent Islamic extremists in Britain
• Andrew Parker is first serving spy chief to give newspaper interview
Andrew Parker / There will be terrorist attacks in Britain
Paris-style attacks / UK police warn of jihadi gun threat
Opinion / 'Hear us out before you knock Prevent'

The featured opinion piece was by Simon Cole who is chief constable of Leicestershire and the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for [Prevent](#). This is a government mass surveillance

programme rolled out under 'the war on terror' which has been heavily [criticised](#) for dividing and alienating sectors of the British public, notably [Muslims](#).

Nowhere in this coverage did the *Guardian* point out that US and British foreign policy – including wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan, bombing in numerous other countries, support for Israel while it brutally oppresses Palestinians, and drone programmes of 'targeted' killings – has boosted the risk of terror attacks here in the UK. Indeed, intelligence services had [warned](#) Tony Blair of the increased terrorist threat to Britons before the invasion of Iraq. Eliza Manningham-Buller, former head of MI5 (and thus a predecessor of Andrew Parker), [told](#) the Chilcot inquiry in 2010 that the invasion of Iraq had 'undoubtedly' increased the terrorist threat in Britain. Intelligence and security officials also [said](#) that UK foreign policy was a factor in the 'radicalisation' of the suicide bombers who committed the 7/7 terror attacks in London in 2005.

Moreover, as historian and foreign policy analyst [Mark Curtis](#) has shown, Britain has long [colluded with radical Islamic forces](#) in order to pursue imperialistic foreign policy objectives. Curtis observes that the UK is now participating in [seven covert wars](#): in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia.

Somehow, none of this was deemed relevant to the *Guardian's* big interview with the head of MI5. Aren't newspapers supposed to do actual journalism, and thus scrutinise and challenge claims made by those in powerful positions? Does the *Guardian* treat its readers with such indifference, perhaps even contempt, that it feels no need to adhere to such basic standards?

Consider, for example, the following words from the MI5 head about the alleged '[increasing threat](#)' posed by Russia:

It is using its whole range of state organs and powers to push its foreign policy abroad in increasingly aggressive ways – involving propaganda, espionage, subversion and cyber-attacks. Russia is at work across Europe and in the UK today. It is MI5's job to get in the way of that.

There was no hint in the *Guardian's* coverage of MI5's *newspeak* that the West is engaged in all of these activities too and, given the huge resources deployed by the US and Nato, to a greater extent worldwide. Nor was there any mention of the West's much larger [death toll](#) with millions of victims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere. It beggars belief that the *Guardian* 'interviewers' would be unaware of all this. So, did they consciously decide not to point out that the West does all the things Parker pinned on Russia, and to a far greater and more deadly effect? Are we to believe that [Paul Johnson](#) and [Ewen MacAskill](#) – supposedly tough, hard-hitting experienced journalists – were so meek as not to challenge Parker? Don't they realise how supine that makes them appear to their readers?

Public Security Is Only 'A Marginal Concern Of Policy Planners'

Jonathan Cook [gives](#) a number of possible reasons why Andrew Parker and the *Guardian* colluded in their 'first interview of its kind'. First, why did the piece not appear in the more obviously establishment-friendly *Times* as a platform for MI5 propaganda? Cook speculates that it might be because the *Guardian* has now become 'the preferred British news source for American elites, whose own media are even more servile to power'.

The *Guardian*'s 'unjustified reputation for leftwing and critical journalism will bestow on this MI5 press release the necessary pretence that Parker has been subjected to tough questioning'. Moreover, Parker 'knew that the *Guardian* would be as docilely accepting of his propaganda as any rightwing outlet of the corporate media.' Any, or all, of these statements are likely true. But none of them apparently occurred to Mark Urban, the BBC Newsnight diplomatic editor, who [warmly welcomed](#) the 'nice scoop' for the *Guardian*, praising the MI5 chief for his 'bold call'. Such is the 'impartiality' of senior BBC News journalists.

Cook also notes the *Guardian*'s deception in framing the encounter with Parker as though he had entered 'a combative environment' in coming to the newspaper, when the *Guardian* journalists reminded readers that the paper was the first to report on the Edward Snowden story. Cook expands:

In fact, the *Guardian*'s Snowden revelations seem like another era. Remember that the *Guardian* got access to Snowden's documents only via their star columnist Glenn Greenwald, who has since departed after what appeared to be an increasingly troubled relationship, especially after the Snowden revelations. Instead Parker is once again given an opportunity to attack Snowden, accentuating the "damage that was done to the work of British and allied intelligence agencies" by Snowden's efforts to bring to public attention the systematic and secretive invasions of our privacy.

Later in the day, the *Guardian* published an [article](#) on its website titled, 'Kremlin pours cold water on MI5 chief's claims of Russian threat'. This was presumably intended as a 'balancing' piece to the propaganda blitz that had preceded it; in much the same way that the 'mainstream' media in 2002-2003 routinely quoted the Official Enemy Saddam Hussein as 'balance' to incessant Western propaganda about Iraq's mythical 'weapons of mass destruction'. Where, instead, were the expert western analysts who could easily 'pour cold water' on MI5 claims?

Perhaps what was most galling about the *Guardian* coverage was that the most real and pressing threat of all was not even mentioned: climate chaos. Nor was there any mention of the ever-present threat of global nuclear annihilation; a danger made worse by establishment support for the renewal of Trident, the supposed nuclear 'deterrent' much loved by the arms industry and their political and financial backers.

The reality is that political, military, intelligence and security elites are not primarily concerned about the safety and security of the general population. Perhaps Noam Chomsky [put it](#) best:

What about the security of the population? It is easy to demonstrate that this is a marginal concern of policy planners. Take two prominent current examples, global warming and nuclear weapons. As any literate person is doubtless aware, these are dire threats to the security of the population. Turning to state policy, we find that it is committed to accelerating each of those threats — in the interests of the primary concerns, protection of state power and of the concentrated private power that largely determines state policy.

[In short:](#)

Power systems seek short-term power and domination; they're not concerned

with security.

The *Guardian's* latest propaganda service on behalf of state power demonstrates this all too well.

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