

Inside the Temple of Covert Propaganda: The Integrity Initiative and the UK's Scandalous Information War

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Recent [hacked documents](#) have revealed an international network of politicians, journalists, academics, researchers and military officers, all engaged in highly deceptive covert propaganda campaigns funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), NATO, Facebook and hardline national security institutions.

This “network of networks”, as one document refers to them, centers around an ironically named outfit called the Integrity Initiative. And it is all overseen by a previously unknown England-based think tank registered in Scotland, the Institute for Statecraft, which has operated under a veil of secrecy.

The whole operation appears to be run by, and in conjunction with, members of British military intelligence.

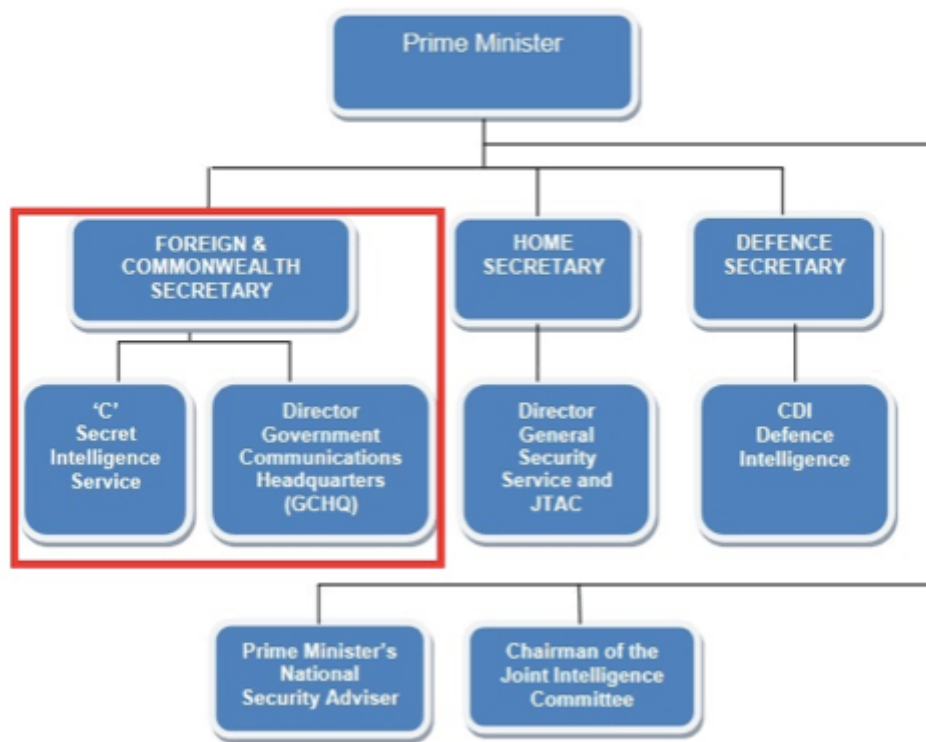
According to David Miller, professor of political sociology in the school of policy studies at the University of Bristol and the director of the Organization for Propaganda Studies, the Integrity Initiative “appears to be a military directed push.”

“The most senior government people are professional propagandists and spooks,” Miller explained. “The ‘charity’ lead on this [[Chris Donnelly](#)] was also appointed as a colonel in military intelligence at the beginning of the project — a truly amazing fact that suggests this is a military intelligence cut out.”

A minister for the UK FCO [has officially confirmed](#) that it has been funding the Integrity Network.

In addition to conducting diplomacy, the FCO oversees both the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) the UK equivalent to the National Security Agency, and the Secret Intelligence Services (SIS) commonly known as MI6.

The Lines of Ministerial Responsibility



SOURCE:

National Intelligence Machinery, UK government briefing November 2010

The think tank that oversees the Integrity Initiative, the Institute for Statecraft, has also received funding from the British Army and Ministry of Defense.

This is pretty major. UK govt admits that not only the Foreign Office but also the Army and the Ministry of Defence have funded the Institute for Statecraft, the body behind anti-Corbyn propaganda. <https://t.co/hl87oulr5tpic.twitter.com/uaROch5ivG>

— Mark Curtis (@markcurtis30) [December 14, 2018](#)

The entire extremely shady enterprise, as Miller explained, is an elaborate front for the British military-intelligence apparatus. Its covert coordination with friendly politicians and mainstream journalists recalls the Cold War-era intrigue known as [Operation Mockingbird](#).

That scandal involved the unmasking of “more than 400 American journalists who...in the past twenty-five years have secretly carried out assignments for the Central Intelligence Agency,” as Carl Bernstein revealed in a [1977 Rolling Stone report](#).

The exposing of the Integrity Initiative has just scratched the surface of what appears to be a much more sophisticated, insidious, and extremely online version of Operation Mockingbird. With new internal documents appearing each week through a hacker's organization called Anonymous Europe, the revelations are yielding one of the most potentially explosive national security scandals in recent times.

But even as members of Britain's parliament thunder with demands for official accountability, the UK and US mainstream media still strangely refuses to touch the story.

Smearing left-wing political figures in NATO member states

The Integrity Initiative claims that it is "counter[ing] Russian disinformation and malign influence," and indeed, the main players behind it appear intent on hyping the Russian threat to justify ramped up military budgets and a long-term war footing.

Personal - In Confidence

Ideas for Ramping up IfS Contributions to the Cause

Outcome(s):

Post-Salisbury, to:

- expose the attack while highlighting and countering Russian disinformation about it, to
- generate as much foreign support as possible for the UK, at every level and as soon as possible.

Approach(es):

IfS can immediately mobilise its international networks with the aim of:

- ramping up the scope and range of its activities and outputs to increase impact, to
- bolstering defences in countries identified as being of primary focus, and therefore
- shifting (inter)national public perceptions about Russian attacks and interference.

NB. IfS has long worked to educate Western decision-makers on Russia's overarching strategic narrative. Understanding, explaining and looking for vulnerabilities in the strategic coherence behind Russian actions is one of our core expertise areas. Western governments have generally lost their capacity for genuine strategic thinking, and often do not appreciate the linkages between apparently unrelated events.

We can now ramp up IfS capabilities to educate decision-makers and publics alike. whether we like it or not, Russia sees itself as being at war with us and we need to think as creatively as possible to defeat its disinformation narratives.

Potential immediate activities and outputs would fall under four broad categories: Personal, Events, Analysis/Technical and Media (including online).

Above: An Institute for Statecraft memo emphasizes the need for "ramping up" anti-Russian messaging

But the Integrity Initiative has also trained its fire on perceived subversives inside NATO member states, including the UK.



Image Source: Wikimedia Commons

NETWORK

Russia and the European Far Left

10 May 2016

Author(s): The Integrity Initiative

While populist radical right parties in Europe and their connections to Russia are frequently discussed, much less attention is dedicated to the radical left side of the spectrum. This study tries to fill this gap by providing an overview of the political successes of radical left parties in Europe and their relations with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

The radical left in Europe: silently successful

"Serious researchers clearly see the impact of reforms in the Soviet Union on the formation of the so-called welfare state in Western Europe in the post-WWII period. European governments decided to introduce unprecedented measures of social protection under the influence of the example of the Soviet Union in an effort to cut the ground from under the feet of the left-wing political forces." This paragraph from the recent article by Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov² clearly shows that the Kremlin not only wants to send messages to radical right forces in Europe, but aims to re-interpret history in a way that fits to the taste of the radical right as well.

An article attacking left-wing activists that was listed in the "Recent Posts" section of the Integrity Initiative website

The Integrity Initiative waged a successful covert campaign to destroy the appointment of Pedro Baños to Director of Spain's National Security Department on the bogus grounds that he was "pro-Kremlin," thus interfering in the affairs of a fellow EU and NATO member. It carried out the hit job through a hand-picked "cluster" of Spanish politicians and operatives to flood social media and [sympathetic outlets](#) with messages demonizing Baños.

Date	Main Integrity Initiative players	Activity/timeline	Outcome
07 06 2018	<p>Spanish Cluster</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nico de Pedro (leader) - Borja Lasheras - Quique Badia-Masoni <p>II Team UK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chris Hernon - Simon Bracey-Lane - Ben Robinson <p>StopFake Spanish Desk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alina Mosendz <p>Serbian Cluster</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jelena Milic 	<p>Midday: II Spanish cluster hear that a well-known pro-Kremlin voice, Pedro Baños, is to be appointed at the weekend (09 06 2018) as the Director of the National Security Department (DSN), which works closely with the Spanish PM's office (La Moncloa) and is very influential in shaping policy.</p> <p>1400: Spanish cluster leader alerts other cluster members and prepares a dossier to inform the main Spanish media. The cluster starts a campaign on Twitter (see att 1) to try to prevent the appointment</p> <p>1545: Spanish cluster leader alerts II UK team which activates the II network to generate international support for the Twitter campaign</p> <p>UK team creates a WhatsApp group (see att 4) to coordinate the Twitter response, get contacts on Twitter to expand awareness and get people retweeting the material. Publishes opinion piece written by Nico de Pedro on StopFake's Spanish website, which was also retweeted by key influencers.</p> <p>Cluster send material to El País and El Mundo to publish (see att 3) and alert contacts at UK and French Embassies.</p>	<p>By 1945 Spanish cluster assesses that the campaign has created significant noise on Twitter (see att 2). Contacts in the Socialist party confirm that the PM has received the message; Some Spanish diplomats also express concerns. Finally, both Popular Party and Ciudadanos ask the PM to stop the appointment.</p>

Defending Democracy Against Disinformation

Above: an Integrity Initiative document detailing how the group's clusters destroyed a Spanish national security appointee.

The Integrity Initiative appears to have employed the same tactics to smear left-wing journalists and political figures across the West, including the leader of the UK's Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn.

This UK government-funded, bogus McCarthyite "monitoring group" the Integrity Initiative repeatedly smeared Jeremy Corbyn, while it claims to "defend democracy against disinformation."

These are effectively state-sponsored attacks on Corbyn and the left. <https://t.co/a5V00Myw6r> pic.twitter.com/sUP3C9SJ1l

— Ben Norton (@BenjaminNorton) [November 27, 2018](#)

Member of Parliament Chris Williamson – a close ally of Corbyn – [is now openly and indignantly calling for](#) "a public inquiry into the Integrity Initiative and similar information war efforts being funded by our government."

It is not necessarily illegal for the FCO to direct propaganda towards its own citizenry, according to Miller of the Organization for Propaganda Studies. However, he said that "it is not legal for ministers to effectively direct a charity. Thus, if the MoD through military intelligence are effectively running a charity, that would be contrary to law."

An abandoned mill in Scotland covers for an active office in London's "Temple"

To conceal its potentially illegal activities, the Institute for Statecraft has employed a web of deceptions. Not only did they hide their government funding, the outfit listed a fake location as its address.

Mohammed Elmaazi, a co-author of this piece, discovered the elaborately hidden location of the Institute for Statecraft inside a posh warren of barristers' offices in London. Elmaazi's swift ejection from the premises confirmed the lengths that this shadowy organization continues to go to to avoid public scrutiny.

The Institute for Statecraft, is a [registered charity in Scotland](#), whose registered office is listed as being an old mill in Fife Scotland involved in the [“manufacture of wood and other products.”](#) David Scott of UK Column news, visited the registered office in Fife [only to find a](#) “an empty, semi-derelict, partly demolished, building.”



The partially demolished address at Gateside Mills. Photo: David Scott

While the address in Fife, Scotland appears to be a derelict building, the London address listed in the hacked documents is fully operational, so far as Elmaazi could tell.

He located the offices belonging to The Institute for Statecraft at the Embankment at Two Temple Place in London. It shares offices in the basement of a [“spectacular neo-gothic mansion”](#) which is owned or leased by [The Bulldog Trust](#), an organization dedicated to “promoting culture and philanthropy”. This area, known as “the Temple,” is filled with barristers' chambers and used to serve as the precinct for the Knights of Templar.



A Christmas themed projection lights up the walls of 2 Temple Place. Photo: Mohamed Elmaazi

Elmaazi found the offices on December 6, having nearly given up and becoming convinced that he would discover nothing more than was found at the derelict house in Fife. When he arrived at the location, preparations were underway for some sort of Christmas-themed event to be held in the main building on the ground floor. But upon discovering the signs pointing downstairs to the basement, Elmaazi found himself staring at a door with a sign that read, "The Institute for Statecraft / The Fore."



Photo: Mohamed Elmaazi

No comment

Elmaazi rang the Institute for Statecraft's doorbell and was eventually let in by a well-dressed elderly gentleman in a beige overcoat. The man claimed that he worked neither at The Institute nor at The Fore but at "another organization." He then called out for "Charles." Having walked in, Elmaazi could see a few smaller offices to the side, with a larger planned office with tables and computers around the corner.

A man whom Elmaazi presumed was "Charles" came around the corner and called out, "Yes?" He seemed somewhat confused by the journalist's presence, understandably so as he was there without an appointment. When "Charles" confirmed that he worked with the Institute for Statecraft, Elmaazi identified himself as a journalist and asked if he would be willing to be interviewed. The request was met with a curt refusal.

"Charles" then guided Elmaazi sternly with his hand back to the entrance. When the journalist repeated his request, he was met with stone silence. And that was that.

A "Charles Hart" [is listed as the](#) chairman of the Institute for Statecraft, but no photo is available to confirm that Hart was the same "Charles" that Elmaazi met.

The neocon connection

Two buildings away from the Institute for Statecraft, separated only by the home of British American Tobacco, lies the offices of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). This think tank is key organ of the Western foreign policy establishment, pushing military

interventionism and [promoting](#) the Saudi-backed Syrian opposition-in-exile.

Among the funders of IISS is the Smith Richardson Foundation.

This foundation also happens to be a supporter of the Integrity Initiative, providing it with £45,000 (about \$56,600 USD) for covert propaganda activities in Europe and the US.



The [Smith Richardson Foundation](#) was founded by billionaire heir to the Vicks fortune, H. Smith Richardson, in 1935. In 1973, the founder's son, Randolph Richardson – a free market fundamentalist and long-time patron of neoconservative ideologue Irving Kristol – inherited the organization.

Kristol's son, William Kristol, is a co-founder of the [Project for a New American Century](#) which [openly called for](#) the US to assert itself as the single global hegemon following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Recipients of funding from the Smith Richardson Foundation include a who's who of neoconservative and militaristic right-wing institutions. The foundation has [bankrolled](#) neoconservative outfits like the American Enterprise Institute (to the tune of nearly \$10 million since 1998), the Hudson Institute, the Institute for the Study of War, Freedom House, the Hoover Institution, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, along with Democratic Party-aligned think tanks like the Center for New American Security and the Center for American Progress.

"To say the [Smith Richardson] foundation was involved at every level in the lobbying for and crafting of the so-called global war on terror after 9/11 would be an understatement," wrote Kelley Vlahos in [a profile](#) of Nadia Schadlow, a former Trump administration deputy national security advisor who previously worked as the senior program director for Smith Richardson.



Smith Richardson complements a roster of international funders backing the Integrity Initiative's parent organization:

1. HQ NATO Public Diplomacy, **£12,000** for each inaugural workshop = **£168,000**
2. Partner institutions **£5,000** for each inaugural workshop = **£70,000**
3. NATO HQ for educational video films – free provision of camera team
4. Lithuanian MOD to provide free all costs for their stratcom team for a monthly trip to support a new hub/cluster creation and to educate cluster leaders and key people in Vilnius in infowar techniques = **£20,000**
5. US State Dept, for research and dissemination activities (excluding any activity in USA) = **£250,000**
6. Smith Richardson Foundation, **£45,000** for cluster activities in Europe and USA
7. Facebook, **£100,000** for research and education activities
8. German business community, **£25,000** for research and dissemination in EU countries

A covert asset in the Bernie campaign?

Elmaazi, the co-author of this piece, was not the only reporter to gain momentary access to the Institute for Statecraft's hidden location at 2 Temple Place. On December 11, five days after Elmaazi's visit, Kit Klarenberg of Sputnik Radio [entered](#) the covert propaganda mill's neo-gothic offices. As soon as he identified himself as a journalist, he was angrily ejected by an Institute for Statecraft staffer named Simon Bracey-Lane.

"You need to leave right now!" Bracey-Lane barked at Klarenberg. "You haven't arranged to see us! Go! Right now! Please leave immediately! Leave!"

Bracey-Lane is a 20-something British citizen with no publicly acknowledged experience in intelligence work. But as Klarenberg noted, there are some unusual details in the young staffer's bio.

In 2016, Bracey-Lane appeared out of nowhere to work in Iowa as a field organizer for the Bernie Sanders campaign for president.



Simon Bracey-Lane being interviewed in Bernie Sanders' Iowa field office on January 27, 2016

"I spent a year working, saving all my money, just thought I was gonna go on a two month road trip from Seattle to New York and I thought, you know what? I'm gonna stay and work for the Bernie Sanders campaign," Bracey-Lane [told a reporter for AFP](#) on January 27, 2016.

He said that after he decided to work for Bernie, he first went to England to "get a visa and get everything legal," then came back to join the campaign in earnest.

Bracey-Lane also claimed to AFP, "I'm not sure there's a place for me in British politics... I've never been struck by an urge to work in my own political system."

However, a February 1, 2016 [profile](#) of Bracey-Lane by BuzzFeed's Jim Waterson said the Brit-for-Bernie "was inspired to rejoin the Labour party in September [2015] when Corbyn

was elected leader. But by that point, he was already in the US on holiday.”

It is clearly odd for Bracey-Lane to tell one reporter that he had never had any interest in British politics, while claiming to another that he had been eager to support Corbyn before he joined the Bernie campaign. What’s more, as Klarenberg reported, Bracey-Lane went on to [establish](#) a get-out-the-vote effort for various progressive politicians and parties in Britain’s 2017 general election, gaining inside access to a wide array of campaigns.

The contradiction in Bracey-Lane’s narrative raises serious questions about his real role on the Bernie campaign, as does his suddenly transition from progressive politics to a staff position at a military-backed propaganda farm that waged a covert information war on Corbyn and other left-leaning politicians across the West.

An Institute for Statecraft document on “roles and relevant experience” of the outfit’s “expert team” notes that Bracey-Lane conducted a “special study of Russian interference in the US electoral process.” The document does not make clear when that study was conducted, however, it is listed directly next to its author’s history of work with the Bernie campaign.



“At Thanksgiving, I was asked, why are you meddling?” Bracey-Lane remarked to Reuters, referring to his work for Bernie Sanders. “Which is an interesting way to phrase it, but I was happy to answer: it needs meddling with.”

Those comments take on an entirely different meaning now that the former Bernie field worker has been outed as part of a British military-intelligence influence operation.

In the coming days, the Grayzone will take a closer look at the Integrity Initiative’s activity inside the US, and whether it is interfering in American politics as it has done in other NATO member states.

Mohamed Elmaazi obtained his LLB from SOAS and Masters in International and Comparative law from the American University in Cairo. He worked in human rights law for a number of years before shifting to journalism. He occasionally reports for The Real News Network and currently contributes to Open Democracy, The Canary, and the Grayzone. You can follow him on Twitter @MElmaazi

Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of books including best-selling [Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement That Shattered the Party](#), [Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel](#), [The Fifty One Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza](#), and [The Management of Savagery](#), which will be published later this year by Verso. He has also produced numerous print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries including [Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie](#) and the forthcoming [Killing Gaza](#). Blumenthal founded the Grayzone Project in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America’s state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions.

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