

The Twitter Smearing of Corbyn and Assange. Britain's "Integrity Initiative"

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Global Research, February 19, 2019

[Consortiumnews](#) 14 January 2019

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Historian and U.K. analyst Mark Curtis checks out the Twitter accounts of journalists whose names have been associated with the Integrity Initiative, a British "counter disinformation" program.

The U.K.-financed Integrity Initiative, managed by the Institute for Statecraft, is ostensibly a "counter disinformation" program to challenge Russian information operations. However, it has been revealed that the Integrity Initiative Twitter handle and some individuals associated with this program have also been tweeting messages [attacking Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn](#). This takes on special meaning in light of the numerous U.K. military and intelligence personnel associated with the program, documented in an important [briefing by academics](#) in the Working Group on Syria Propaganda and Media.

Several journalists have been named as associated with the Integrity Initiative, either in program "clusters" or having been invited to an Integrity Initiative event, in the documents that have been posted online. (For more on this see [section 7.1](#) of this briefing note, the ["UK" section](#) of the "Xcountry" document and journalists invited to speak at an Integrity Initiative event in London in November 2018.)

Analysis of 11 of these individuals has been undertaken to assess to what extent their tweets have linked Corbyn unfairly (for a definition see below) to Russia. The results show two things:

- first, the smearing of Corbyn about Russia is more extensive than has been revealed so far;
- second, many of the same individuals have also been attacking a second target – Julian Assange, trying to also falsely link him to the Kremlin.

Many of these 11 individuals are associated with *The Times* and *The Guardian* in the U.K. and the Atlantic Council in the U.S. The research does not show, however, that these tweets are associated with the Integrity Initiative (see further below).

Linking Corbyn to Russia

The Integrity Initiative said in a tweet, "we are not 'anti-Russian' and do not 'target' Mr Corbyn." However, that tweet was preceded by the following tweets:

- "Skripal poisoning: It's time for the Corbyn left to confront its Putin problem."

- “An alleged British Corbyn supporter wants to vote for Putin.”
- “‘Mr Corbyn was a ‘useful idiot’, in the phrase apocryphally attributed to Lenin. His visceral anti-Westernism helped the Kremlin cause, as surely as if he had been secretly peddling Westminster tittle-tattle for money.’” This tweet was a quote from an article by Edward Lucas in *The Times*, “[Corbyn’s sickening support of Soviet Empire](#).”

Here are examples of tweets from the 11 individuals.

Times columnist Edward Lucas has published an article on the Integrity Initiative website and been quoted as saying that his work with the Initiative has not been paid or involved anything improper. (See [section 7.1.3](#) of this briefing note.) On Twitter, he has accused Corbyn of having blind spots on Putin’s plutocracy and Kremlin imperialism.”

In which I blast [@jeremycorbyn](#) for his blind spot on Putin's plutocracy <http://t.co/UOWeAaOill>

— Edward Lucas (@edwardlucas) [August 26, 2015](#)

Lucas has also tweeted:

- “Why does Corbyn not see that Russia is imperialist and Ukrainians are victims?” and “It’s not just Corbyn. Here’s Swedish leftie @AsaLinderborg explaining why Nato not Putin is the real threat to peace” – linking to the latter’s article in a Swedish newspaper.
- “German hard-leftist GDR-loving wall-defending @SWagenknecht congratulates Corbyn on win” [in the Labour leadership contest]
- “More excellent stuff on Corbyn’s love of plutocrats so long as they are Russian.”

In another tweet, he praised as brilliant [an article](#) about Corbyn “playing into Russia’s hands on the Scribal poisoning.”

Deborah Haynes, until recently defence editor of *The Times* and now foreign affairs editor at *Sky News*, has tweeted:

. [@jeremycorbyn](#) talking tough, v quick to demand end to UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia after [#Khashoggi](#) death in stark contrast to his feeble response towards Russia over [#Skripal](#) attack

— Deborah Haynes (@haynesdeborah) [October 22, 2018](#)

Haynes has also tweeted about Corbyn “displaying staggering naivety and a complete failure to understand this state-sponsored attack by Russia on the UK. Appalling. Is he for real?”

Haynes has also tweeted: “Incredible that [@jeremycorbyn](#) is attempting to score party-

political points in wake of hugely significant statement by [@theresa_may](#) on Skripal attack by Russia.”

Washington Post columnist Anne Applebaum has tweeted that Corbyn is a “useful idiot” of Russia; about a “precise echo of Kremlin propaganda from Corbyn,” and that “Surprise! Russia sides with Corbyn against Cameron.”

Below is another.

Jeremy Corbyn isn't anti-war. He's just anti-West <https://t.co/2Z5Qp3qBds>

— Anne Applebaum (@anneapplebaum) [November 19, 2015](#)

David Clark, a former adviser to the late Labour PM, Robin Cook, has tweeted that Corbyn is an “apologist” for Putin. Below is another of Clark's tweets.

It is an article of ideological faith for Corbyn and people like him that everything wrong with the world is the fault of the capitalist West. Therefore, nothing can be the fault of anyone else.

— David Clark (@David_K_Clark) [September 6, 2018](#)

Anders Aslund of the Atlantic Council in the U.S. has tweeted, referring to Corbyn: “Once a communist always so.”

His colleague at the Atlantic Council, Ben Nimmo, sent the following three tweets on Corbyn's candidacy for the Labour leadership in August 2015:

- “Why Russia loves Corbyn, in one headline”
- “Russia's certainly pushing Corbyn's candidacy”
- “From Russia with coverage – how RT is campaigning for Jeremy Corbyn.” Here's one more, promoting a [piece he wrote for the Daily Beast](#):

How [#Putin's @RT_com](#) is backing Jeremy Corbyn – my piece in [@thedailybeast](#) <http://t.co/PqNcPYMRQu> pic.twitter.com/irla8klrcZ

— Ben Nimmo (@benimmo) [August 17, 2015](#)

Natalie Nougayrede, Guardian columnist and on its editorial board, has tweeted this:

“the time for equivocation, given the sinister nature of Mr Putin's regime, is over”

Guardian editorial on shameful [#Corbyn](#) & Co reaction to [#Russia](#) behaviour & chemical weapon use <https://t.co/ALmpGCoKh5>

— Natalie Nougayrède (@nnougayrede) [March 15, 2018](#)

Nougayrede also retweeted an article by [Nick Cohen, headlined "Jeremy Corbyn isn't anti-war. He's just anti-West."](#)

Three *Guardian/Observer*-linked journalists were invited to speak at an Integrity Initiative event in London in November 2018: Carole Cadwalladr, Nick Cohen and James Ball.

Cadwalladr has tweeted that "Labour has a Russia problem," that Corbyn adviser Seumas Milne is "pro-Putin" and that "Milne's support for Putin has made him a Russian propaganda tool." One of Cadwalladr's tweets noted:

- "Here's Corbyn's principal advisor Seamus Milne on RT explaining why it was the fault of NATO aggression that Russia invaded Ukraine.

Another by Cadwalladr:

"What he has done, wittingly or unwittingly, is to work with the Kremlin's agenda." Extraordinary quote from MP & expert on Russian active measures [@loWBobSeely](#) in this incredible in-depth profile on Seamus Milne - [@jeremycorbyn](#)'s chief advisor <https://t.co/NNc9verN57>

— Carole Cadwalladr (@carolecadwalla) [November 25, 2018](#)

Nick Cohen has tweeted that "Labour is led by Putin fans" and: "What is worse? Farage and Corbyn and twitter trolls divert attention from Russia's political assassinations because they believe Putin is innocent or because they are morally corrupt?" He has also retweeted an Observer article of his claiming that Labour leaders have promoted "endorsements of Russian imperialism" and that Corbyn's policy has given Russia "a free pass" in Syria.

Here is another:

Here's the political problem. Tories don't want to investigate Russia/Brexit because it undermines the referendum result. Labour doesn't because it is led by Putin fans <https://t.co/MFZwBmmkqA>

— Nick Cohen (@NickCohen4) [January 11, 2018](#)

James Ball has tweeted a link to his own article in the New Statesman saying that Corbyn is "playing into Russia's hands on the Skripal poisoning" and accusing Corbyn to the effect that he "took money from Russia Today."

Linking Assange to the Kremlin

Many of the same individuals have also been tweeting false statements about Julian Assange and Russia.

The Integrity Initiative twitter site itself retweeted a Guardian smear article about a lawyer, Adam Waldman, visiting the Wikileaks founder.

US lobbyist for Russian oligarch visited Julian Assange nine times last year

It also tweeted: “If you still believe Assange is some kind of hero, you deserve pity at best.”

Anders Aslund has tweeted that Assange “represents certain Russian agencies” that “Wikileaks, Assange & Snowden are nothing but highly successful Russian special operations” and “Kremlin agents” and that “Assange is collaborating w[ith] Russia Today as program host. Would be strange if not full-fledged agent.”

Cadwalladr has also sought to overtly link Assange to the Kremlin. She has tweeted that “Assange & Milne... are both Russian propaganda tools,” that Assange is a “special friend” of Russian intelligence and that Wikileaks has “colluded with...the Kremlin.”

In addition, Cadwalladr has tweeted several times that “Assange was in direct communication with Russian intelligence in 2016” and that “Wikileaks sought assistance from Russian intelligence officers to disrupt the US presidential election.” Cadwalladr is here claiming that Wikileaks knowingly colluded with Russian intelligence by releasing the files on the Democratic Party in 2016: in fact, this is not known or proven at all, while numerous media outlets also published or had contacts with Guccifer 2.0 and DCLeaks in 2016 – though do not figure as targets in her attacks.

Nick Cohen has also made many smears against Julian Assange, variously calling him a “Russian stooge,” a “Putin agent,” “pro-Putin,” a “Russian toady”, that he “works for Russia propaganda machine” while “Wikileaks will think whatever Putin tells it to think.”

David Leask, chief reporter of The Herald (Scotland), has described Assange as a “Kremlin proxy” while Anne Applebaum tweeted: “‘Wikileaks is a front for Russian intelligence,’” linking to an article of the same headline. Edward Lucas retweeted his Times article suggesting that Assange and Wikileaks are part of the “Kremlin-loving camp” while David Clark has tweeted that “Assange is an active accomplice” of autocrats such as Putin.

Need for further research

There are some key points to be made about this analysis.

First, some of the tweets made by these individuals on Corbyn and Assange, not all of which are included here, are fair comment, even if, in my view, they are usually wrong. But others go beyond this, inferring that Corbyn (and Assange) are in effect agents of Russia and/or are willingly and knowingly amplifying Russia’s agenda, as little more than “tools” – with no evidence provided (understandably, since there is none). There is also sometimes the association of Corbyn with former communists. These areas are held to constitute smearing.

Second, it is not known and certainly not proven that these tweets are associated with the Integrity Initiative. Little is known of the internal workings of the Initiative. It is possible that some of the individuals may have been chosen by the Integrity Initiative to be associated with it precisely because of their pre-existing criticism of Russia or their willingness to accuse figures such as Corbyn with association with Russia. While I am not suggesting that these individuals’ tweets are necessarily linked to their role in the Integrity Initiative, there does appear to be something of a pattern among these people of smearing both Corbyn and

Assange.

Third, and equally important, this is not a full analysis of these individuals' outputs: it is limited to their tweets. Neither is it a full analysis of the false linking to Russia by individuals associated with the Integrity Initiative: several other journalists and figures named in the documents are not analysed here. Again, further research is needed.

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