

UK Integrity Initiative heavily involved in Skripal affair

By Robert Stevens
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The Institute for Statecraft (IoS) and its Integrity Initiative (II) constitute a secret propaganda network tied to the UK security services. They bring together high-ranking military and intelligence personnel, journalists and academics to manufacture and disseminate propaganda serving the geo-political aims of British imperialism and its allies.

The IoS was founded in 2006 and the II in 2015. But their secret role in promoting fake news and disinformation was exposed only in November and December of 2018 by hacking group Anonymous.

A document published by Anonymous shows funding for the II totalled £582,635 in 2017-18, with £480,635 coming from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the rest from NATO.

Funding shot up to £2.6 million in 2018-19, with £1.96 million from the FCO and the rest from the US State Department, NATO and the American neoconservative Smith Richardson Foundation. Facebook, which plays an integral role in imposing censorship on behalf of US imperialism, donated £100,000.

The Working Group on Syria Propaganda and Media (WGSPM) produced a briefing on the II last month documenting the role played by leading figures in the UK Ministry of Defence, US Army and senior intelligence figures. It noted, “The involvement of these senior officers from military intelligence and information warfare units suggests that the MoD rather than the FCO is driving the Integrity Initiative programme.”

On January 4, a fourth trove of documents was made public by the Anonymous collective, taken from the internal servers of the IoS and II. These include many documents related to the poisoning last March of Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in Salisbury.

British Prime Minister Theresa May, without citing any evidence, immediately accused Russia of attempting to

assassinate the pair using the nerve agent novichok, thereby ramping up global tensions. The II leaks indicate that the moves against Russia over the Skripal affair were scripted well in advance, with the IoS planning a detailed anti-Russia propaganda war, including suggested achievable objectives.

A 2015 document written by IoS “team member” Victor Madeira is titled “Russian Federation Sanctions.” It lists “potential levers” to achieve Russian “behaviour change,” “peace with Ukraine,” “return [of] Crimea,” and “regime change.” Such “levers” span almost every conceivable area, including “civil society,” “sports,” “finance” and “technology.”

Under “intelligence,” Madeira calls for the simultaneous expulsion of “every RF [Russian Federation] intelligence officer and air/defense/naval attaché from as many countries as possible”—citing as a precedent the expulsion of over 1,000 Soviet officials from the UK in September 1971. More than 100 Russian diplomats were expelled from over 20 countries just days after the Skripals’ poisoning.

Madeira has lectured at the University of Buckingham. The WGSPM quoted the university’s website: “Dr. Victor Madeira comes to us from Cambridge (where he has been a lecturer and tutor for four years, working with Professor Christopher Andrew and Sir Richard Dearlove and the Institute for Statecraft in London, directed by Chris Donnelly, where he is a senior fellow working on 21st century security architecture.” Dearlove is the former head of the UK foreign intelligence service MI6.

The head of the IoS is Chris Donnelly, formerly a reserve officer in the British Army Intelligence Corps. He previously headed the British Army’s Soviet Studies Research Centre at Sandhurst.

Between 1989 and 2003, he was special adviser to four NATO secretaries general. An online biography confirms that Donnelly is, among many things, an honorary colonel

in Specialist Group Military Intelligence (SGMI) and sits on the official team responsible for scrutinizing the current reform of the UK's Reserve Forces for the defence secretary. SGMI is a Ministry of Defence (MoD) operation based at Denison Barracks in Berkshire, England. It is part of the 1st Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Brigade, which became operational on September 1, 2014.

Another leaked document shows that in October 2016, Donnelly met UK General Sir Richard Barrons. The account of their meeting is chilling in light of the Skripal affair that followed and the escalation of tensions with Russia, including demands by leading generals that the UK prepare for military conflict.

Either Donnelly or Barrons reportedly stated that “if no catastrophe happens to wake people up and demand a response, then we need to find a way to get the core of government to realise the problem and take it out of the political space.”

The speaker continued: “We will need to impose changes over the heads of vested interests. We did this in the 1930s. My conclusion is it is we who must either generate the debate or wait for something dreadful to happen to shock us into action. We must generate an independent debate outside government. We need to ask when and how do we start to put all this right. Do we have the national capabilities [and/or] capacities to fix it? If so, how do we improve our harnessing of resources to do it? We need this debate now. There is not a moment to be lost.”

The Donnelly/Barrons meeting came just one month after the *Financial Times* leaked a letter from Barrons to the MoD making clear that the British military had to prepare for a major war. In his letter, Barrons demanded the upgrading of military and intelligence hardware, capabilities and personnel necessary to prosecute an extended air, land and sea confrontation against heavily armed state opponents, particularly Russia.

Just days after the poisoning of the Skripals, the IoS proposed that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office “study social media activity in respect of the events that took place, how news spread, and evaluate how the incident is being perceived” in various countries. Within days, the II's “Operation Iris” swung into operation. As well as monitoring media coverage with its own team, it recruited the global investigative solutions firm Harod Associates to analyse social media activity related to the Skripals affair.

On March 11, just seven days after the poisonings, II set

out what it called the necessary “narrative.” It declared, “Russia has carried out yet another brutal attack, this time with a deadly nerve agent, on someone living in Britain.”

The May government's account of how the Skripals came to be poisoned was shot through with inconsistencies, with the wider public increasingly sceptical at its ever-changing story. The II raised concerns that the government was “far too weak,” declaring, “[I]t's essential the government makes a much stronger response this time.”

It proposed 11 “possible, realistic first actions,” including such authoritarian measures as banning Russian state news services RT and Sputnik from operating in the UK. Its first demand was to publicly attack the Putin government with a barrage of propaganda “through regular media, social media, and with the assistance of specialists such as those at the Institute of Statecraft.”

A number of senior journalists at the BBC, *Times/Sunday Times*, *Guardian* and *Financial Times* are listed as supportive of the IoS/II in an earlier leaked document. These media outlets each played a central role in disseminating government propaganda throughout the Skripal affair. The named journalists include David Aaronovitch and Dominic Kennedy at the *Times*, Natalie Nougayrede and Carole Cadwalladr at the *Guardian*, Edward Lucas at the *Economist*, Neil Buckley at the *Financial Times*, and Jonathan Marcus at the BBC.

Another figure who has played a central role for II is security consultant Dan Kaszeta. Invoices from his consultancy reveal he was paid over £2,000 to write anti-Russian articles published by the II. These included a puff piece on Porton Down, the UK's chemical weapons laboratory, which has the capability to produce novichok. His piece insisted that Porton Down, located just a few miles from Salisbury, could not possibly have anything to do with the presence of novichok in Salisbury.

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