

Anti-Russia war propaganda is ‘Made in Britain’

8 Mar.—Given they have effectively allied themselves with Ukraine against Russia by providing so-called “lethal aid” to the former and putting sanctions on the latter, it should be obvious that nothing the United States, British, Australian or any other Anglo-American-aligned government says regarding the conflict should be taken at face value. Nor will it shock our readers when we state that the mainstream media’s coverage of the situation in Ukraine is likewise untrustworthy, given their unfortunate propensity to regurgitate government “talking points” and quote as gospel the unverifiable assertions of their unnamed intelligence sources. What might be less obvious, though, is that even “on-the-ground” reports from apparently independent media and local citizens, describing alleged atrocities by Russian forces or plucky defenders’ improbable victories against overwhelming odds, must be considered equally suspect unless and until they can be authenticated. While the USA has played an obvious, up-front role in the political and military machinations that made war inevitable, the UK government has spent most of the last decade laying the groundwork for an all-out “informational war” against Russia, by constructing a pervasive propaganda apparatus, active globally but with a special focus on Ukraine and eastern Europe, in collaboration with Britain’s largest media organisations.



Christopher Donnelly, co-director of Britain’s Institute for Statecraft, which established the Integrity Initiative which has been especially active in Ukraine propaganda that has led to war. Photos: Screenshots

Russophobic Anglo-American propaganda is nothing new, and indeed has been almost continuous ever since the USA and UK declared “Cold War” on the Soviet Union in 1946. After something of a lull following the Soviet Union’s collapse, the clamour over the alleged Russian threat to the “West” began to grow once again, commensurate with President Vladimir Putin’s success in reversing—albeit incompletely—Russia’s disastrous collapse of the 1990s, since he began his first term as President in 2000. Around the same time that the USA escalated against Russia in Ukraine by mobilising its proxy army of fanatically anti-Russian nationalist and neo-Nazi militias, the core factions of which had been in Anglo-American employ ever since the end of World War II, for the November 2013–February 2014 “revolution” against Ukraine’s elected President Viktor Yanukovich, Britain was busy expanding and modernising its propaganda apparatus for the digital age. These efforts culminated in the establishment in early 2015 of two new info-war outfits: the 77th Brigade, an official regular and Army Reserve unit specialising in cyber warfare; and the “Integrity Initiative” of the Institute for Statecraft (IfS), an ostensibly independent not-for-profit project that was covertly funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and headed by a military intelligence colonel.¹

The 77th Brigade was described by *Guardian* defence correspondent Ewen MacAskill in January 2015 as “a special force of Facebook warriors, skilled in psychological operations and use of social media to engage in unconventional warfare in the information age”. According to a mission statement then available online, its assignment was “Counter-adversarial information activity ... [and] collecting, creating and disseminating digital and wider media content in support of designated tasks”, at home and abroad. The Integrity Initiative, meanwhile, billed itself as “a network of people and organisations from across Europe dedicated to revealing and combating propaganda and disinformation” spread by “the Kremlin and its various proxies”. Documents released 5 November 2018 by “hacktivist” group Anonymous, however, revealed that it was in fact funded mainly by the FCO— with help from NATO Headquarters; the US State Department; Lithuania’s Ministry of Defence; various US-based private foundations and think tanks; and Facebook—to spread anti-Russia propaganda, and prevent Russia-friendly officials reaching positions of authority, in as many nations as possible.² “Hiding behind benevolent intentions”, wrote the hackers who posted the documents, “Britain has in fact created a large-scale information secret service in Europe, the United States and Canada, which consists of representatives of political, military, academic and journalistic communities”. Strategic and security consultant Dr Philip Giraldi, a former intelligence officer of the US Army and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), on 21 November 2018 described the Integrity Initiative to Sputnik News as “undoubtedly a covertly funded front NGO carrying out media and agent of influence manipulation that is actually being run out of the embassies’ intel shops”.

Nowhere, it turns out, is this more true than in Ukraine, where rather than establish an autonomous “cluster” of local agents as in other countries, the Initiative’s operations were run directly from London by its very top echelons, with hands-on assistance from the 77th Brigade.

‘Operation Trojan Horse’

New files posted by Anonymous hacktivists in February 2021, under the heading “Op. HMG Trojan Horse Part 4: Undermining Russia” (parts 1-3 concerned similar operations against Syria and Lebanon), reveal that at least as early as 1 March 2014, only days after the coup against Yanukovich, British military intelligence officer and IfS co-director Christopher Donnelly was offering written advice to the new Ukrainian regime. The advice was on how to reassert power over Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula which had historically been part of Russia before it was annexed to Ukraine in the 1950s, whose population had refused to recognise the change of government as legitimate (and who voted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine and re-join Russia shortly thereafter). Ukraine’s armed forces should “set up a cordon sanitaire across the Crimean isthmus”, he advised; both the northern coast on the Sea of Azov, and Sevastopol Harbour in the south, should be mined, the latter to prevent Russia either extracting or reinforcing its naval flotilla based there under a longstanding treaty; and that Ukraine should use its large Soviet-era microwave weapon, presuming it still possessed it, to start shooting down Russian satellites.

Donnelly is a heavy hitter in British intelligence circles. A former head of Soviet studies at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, he was a member of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Soviet advisory team; Special Advisor to four NATO Secretaries-General in 1989-2003, in which capacity he was closely involved in dealing with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the “reform” of “newly emerging democracies” in Central and Eastern Europe; and specialist advisor to three UK defence secretaries (both Labour and Conservative). His current roles include special advisor to the UK House of Commons Defence Select Committee, and also to the foreign minister of Lithuania, another country in which the Integrity Initiative was shown to be very active. He co-founded IfS in 2009, and in 2015 was made “honorary colonel” of the Specialist Group Military Intelligence (SGMI), a secretive unit nominally separate from the 77th Brigade, but which was founded concurrently and is based at the same barracks in Berkshire.

In 2016 the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) hosted Ukrainian army officers at a seminar organised by Donnelly which included the 77th Brigade, SGMI, high-ranking UK and Lithuanian military figures, and NATO intelligence staff. The MoD prepared a briefing paper based on the event, on how Russian forces could be expected to act in a conflict. In 2018 the Integrity Initiative coordinated and hosted an event in Ukraine’s capital, Kiev (also spelled “Kyiv”), which included the 77th Brigade, a Kiev-based US government-funded propaganda shop called the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre (UCMC), and NATO staff, on how to spread their antiRussia message via social media. Also in 2018, the Integrity Initiative ran a “wargaming seminar” on conflict with Russia in north-eastern Europe, in conjunction with the Centre for the Study of New Generation Warfare (NGW Centre), a think tank founded in the US state of Virginia in 2014. The NGW Centre’s website explains its purpose is to “educate the widest range of parties—from lumpenproletariates [sic] in the body politic of Western democracies to the political and military elites of those same societies—concerning the active warfare being waged against liberal democracies by the Russian Government of Vladimir Putin.”

The IfS reportedly had its charitable status revoked in 2019, after journalist David Scott of independent broadcaster UK Column News revealed that its registered address in Fife, Scotland, was in fact “an empty, semi-derelict, partly demolished” former mill. Another independent journalist, Mohamed Elmaazi, [reported](#) 17 December 2018 on investigative journalism website *The Grayzone* that IfS’s real headquarters was “inside a posh warren of barristers’ offices” at No. 2 Temple Street, London. The Integrity Initiative’s website shut down soon thereafter, and it survives by that name only as a Twitter account. It lives on, however, as the “Open Information Partnership” (OIP), with a shiny new website wherein it bills itself as a network of “investigative journalists, charities, think tanks, academics, NGOs, activists, and factcheckers, active in over 20 countries”. It is still supported and funded by the FCO, and its list of members includes the UCMC, another Ukraine-based pseudo-NGO called the Kharkiv Crisis Infocentre, and the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (STRATCOM), along with a host of other state-backed and “independent” NGOs based mainly in eastern Europe.

BBC, Reuters complicit

Completing the “stovepipe” of fake news and war crimes allegations from British intelligence, via “independent” media in Ukraine, to the global viewing public, are two of the world’s largest international news agencies, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Thomson Reuters. The BBC, as a statutory corporation established by Royal Charter, is owned and controlled by the British state (its pretensions to independence notwithstanding), so its wilful complicity in war propaganda is not surprising. As for Reuters, the world’s largest news agency, it was founded in 1850 and has been an armature of British Intelligence since no later than World War I, when its managing director

Roderick Jones was also head of the Ministry of Information’s Department of Propaganda.³ Its connections in that regard have been less obvious since; but not anymore. On 20 February 2021, *Grayzone* editor-in-chief Max Blumenthal [reported](#) that among Anonymous’s “Trojan Horse” files were documents that showed both Reuters and the BBC eagerly participating in a “covert information warfare campaign” against Russia, up at least through 2020, run by a “shadowy department within the UK FCO” called Counter Disinformation & Media Development (CDMD).

“Through training programs of Russian journalists overseen by Reuters”, wrote Blumenthal, “the [FCO] sought to produce an ‘attitudinal change in the participants’, promoting a ‘positive impact’ on their ‘perception of the UK’.” The scheme was equally aimed, however, at undermining support for Putin’s government, within both the local media and, through them, the Russian public. “Reuters and the BBC solicited multimillion-dollar contracts to advance the British state’s interventionist aims”, Blumenthal continued, “promising to cultivate Russian journalists through FCO-funded tours and training sessions, establish influence networks in and around Russia, and promote pro-NATO narratives in Russian-speaking regions. In several proposals to the British Foreign Office, Reuters boasted of a global influence network of 15,000 journalists and staff, including 400 inside Russia.” Moreover, he wrote, “A series of [official documents declassified](#) in January 2020 revealed that Reuters was secretly funded by the British government throughout the 1960s and 1970s to assist an anti-Soviet propaganda organisation run by the MI6 intelligence agency. The UK government used the BBC as a pass-through to conceal payments to the news group.”

The intelligence contractor that oversaw the recent operation, Zinc Media, is notorious for running the media campaigns that whitewashed child-murdering, organ-harvesting, US- and British Intelligence-sponsored al-Qaeda adjuncts the White Helmets in Syria as brave volunteer “first responders”, and for gaslighting the entire British Muslim community on behalf of MI5’s deliberately counterproductive “counter-terrorism” program, Prevent.⁴ It is also an OIP partner organisation. As Blumenthal observed, the leaked documents—which both the BBC and Reuters confirmed are genuine—“cast serious doubt on the independence of two of the world’s ... most prestigious media organisations”, revealing them instead “as apparent intelligence cut-outs feasting at the trough of a British national security state that their news operations are increasingly averse to scrutinising.”

A year later, with the world sliding towards what may well become humanity’s last war thanks in large part to the success of Britain’s propaganda, that warning is more important than ever.

Footnotes

1. [“British Intelligence reactivates Empire’s tools for worldwide dirty tricks”](#), AAS, 30 Jan. 2019.
2. [“Integrity Initiative: Britain’s foreign interference machinery exposed”](#), AAS, 5 Dec. 2018.
3. [“Who’s who in the media cartel”](#), *Executive Intelligence Review*, 17 Jan. 1997.
4. [“The UK’s ‘Prevent’ program: Creating a fascist police-state”](#), AAS, 13 May 2020.

By Richard Bardon and Melissa Harrison, Australian Alert Service, 9 March 2022