

Leaks expose secret British military cell plotting to ‘keep Ukraine fighting’

By Kit Klarenberg, *The Grayzone*

Leaked files show top UK military figures conspired to carry out the Kerch bridge bombing, covertly train “Gladio”-style stay-behind forces in Ukraine, and groom the British public for a drop in living standards caused by the proxy war against Russia.

16 Nov.—Emails and internal documents reviewed by *The Grayzone* reveal details of a cabal of British military and intelligence veterans which plotted to escalate and prolong the Ukraine proxy war “at all costs”. Convened under the direction of the British Ministry of Defence in the immediate aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the cell referred to itself as Project Alchemy. As British leadership sabotaged peace talks between Kiev and Moscow, the cell put forward an array of plans “to keep Ukraine fighting” by imposing “strategic dilemmas, costs and frictions upon Russia”.

The leaks obtained by *The Grayzone* expose a hidden hand behind Britain’s policy in Ukraine, showing in unusually granular detail how it aimed to engineer a long, grinding war through covert operations that stretched the bounds of legality.

Project Alchemy’s proposed schemes spanned every conceivable field of warfare, from cyber attacks to “discreet operations” to outright terrorism. The secret cell even put forward a plan to “aggressively pursue” and “dismantle” independent media outlets—including *The Grayzone*—through an aggressive campaign of legal harassment and online censorship, so they “would be forced to close”. The incendiary blueprints were fed to the highest levels of the British state and national security structure, where they were apparently well-received.

Founded by a senior British Ministry of Defence official, Project Alchemy is composed of veteran military and intelligence operatives united by a desire for all-out war between the West and Russia. Some have trained Ukrainian forces in clandestine sabotage tactics.

Members of the national security cabal tacitly acknowledged that their proposed operations stretched the bounds of British law. Thus they suggested that London should be “prepared to creatively use the law” to meet its goals, and even be willing to erase “legal restrictions on UK deniable ops” against Russia.

Some of Project Alchemy’s most extreme recommendations have already been implemented, often with calamitous results. These include the cell’s proposal to strike Crimea’s Kerch Bridge, which prompted a Russian escalation that saw

punishing attacks on Ukraine’s electricity infrastructure. Alchemy also envisioned the construction of a secret, Gladio-style army of Ukrainian partisan fighters to carry out assassination, sabotage, and terror missions behind enemy lines.

It appears the British premier, Keir Starmer, fell under the influence of the Project Alchemy cabal soon after his election in July, when he eagerly embraced the role of “wartime prime minister”. After pledging to support Ukraine “as long as it takes”, however, Starmer is quietly backing away from the maximalist policy. In Kiev, Ukrainians are left to ponder how their “friends” in London got them into this mess, and why they cannot, or will not get them out of it.

The British spooks who gathered around Project Alchemy reasoned that the longer the proxy war continued, the more Russian president Vladimir Putin’s “credibility at home and abroad drops, and his ability to fight NATO is degraded”. Today, Project Alchemy’s gambit has clearly backfired, as Putin remains popular within Russia, while a crumbling Ukrainian army loses territory by the day despite constant re-arming by the West. But the war planners in London remain staunchly committed to escalation, refusing to shelve their diabolical proposals.

Britain takes ‘unilateral lead’ on ‘regime change’ in Russia

Project Alchemy was founded on the personal orders of Lt. General Charlie Stickland, who is charged with “planning, executing and integrating UK led joint and



Serial	Post	Rank/Grade	Last	First	Remarks	Cost
1	1 Mil Lead	Brig	Scott	Simon		
2	2 Civ Lead	n/a	Morris	Dom	No extra cost if mobilised	500
3	3 COS	Maj	Powell	Johnathan	Private Sector Coord	
4	4 Lead X-Gov Planner	SO1				
5	5 x-Gov planner	Capt	Smith	Ben		
6	6 Logistics	SO2				
7	7 Civ Humanitarian	n/a	Sawyer	Aleks		
8	8 Mil Humanitarian	SO2			Exp planning and delivering CIMIC Operations	
9	9 Info Ops	SO3			77X	
10	10 J2	SO2			Rus/ Ukr SME	
11	11 Info Ops	n/a	Lersten	Gus		500
12	12 Info Ops	n/a	Khan	Amil		500
13	13 Academic	n/a	Boff	Johnathan		500
14	14 Academic	n/a	Ledwidge	Frank		500
15	15 Academic	n/a	Johnson	Rob		500
16	16 Grand Strat	n/a	Fennell	James		500
17	17 X-Gov Results/ Campaign Change Management	n/a	Austin	Becky		500
18	18 Inter Agency Civilian Planner	n/a				500
Total Cost for 3 week						40500
				Requires trawl		
				Individual Identified but requires funding		
				Filled		

Previously, Khan participated in the UK Foreign Office's program to foment regime change in Syria.

Months after Alchemy put Khan forward as a member of its team, The Grayzone exposed him for plotting with celebrity-left journalist Paul Mason to destroy this publication. One leaked email showed Khan proposing a "full nuclear legal [attack] to squeeze [The Grayzone] financially". The newly uncovered documents indicate the decision to assail The Grayzone was met with

approval from the highest ranks of the British government.

multinational overseas military operations" as the head of Britain's Permanent Joint Headquarters. Stickland boasts in leaked communications that his family "come from a long line of pirates and buccaneers". In his email signature, the general identifies himself as an "LGBTQ+ Advocate" in rainbow-coloured text.

Stickland and his assistant, Maj. Ed Harris, did not answer The Grayzone's calls to their personal phones, nor did they respond to detailed questions submitted to them through WhatsApp.

Stickland convened the first meeting of Project Alchemy's on 26 February 2022, just days after Russian troops made their initial foray into Ukraine. According to minutes of the gathering, "an assortment of leading academics, authors, strategists, planners, pollsters, comms, data scientists and tech" was on hand to produce a "grand strategy options paper".

The paper consisted of a series of proposals for the British government to "defeat Putin in Ukraine and set the conditions for the reshaping of an open international order of the future". Throughout the document, the need to "keep Ukraine fighting" was described as London's "main effort" in the conflict.

In an email to British military apparatchiks dated 3 March 2022, Stickland described Alchemy's paper as the result of "some mischief I've been up to" with "a group of 'sideways thinkers'". He expressed satisfaction that "this has been seen by all sorts of people", including senior British government and military officials, "and landed well".

An Excel document listing potential and confirmed recruits for the effort, authored by project chief Dom Morris, names a number of individuals from the private sector and academia alongside high-ranking army officials. Currently a fellow at King's College's "Centre for Grand Strategy", Morris was listed in the document as a "civilian leader". The role of "military leader" was to be carried out by Simon Scott, a brigadier in the British army who was appointed an OBE in 2013 for his "gallant and distinguished services" in Afghanistan.

Information operations were to be headed by a still-to-be determined member of Britain's 77th Psychological Operations Brigade. Also listed as a participant in information operations was longtime British psychological warfare operative Amil Khan, founder of the "counter-disinformation" analysis firm Valent Projects.

In 2021, The Grayzone revealed how the then-Prince of Wales, now King Charles, enlisted Khan's Valent Projects to astroturf a pseudo-socialist YouTube influencer to attack sceptics of the government's ham-fisted response to Covid.

'Ukraine's Next Chapter—Elders Grand Strategy Options Paper'

Within Project Alchemy's covert war room, the obsession with a long war quickly took hold. Members of the cell took their cues from a policy paper Stickland attributed to "The Elders", which he described as "a group of Fusion players", referring to the strata of academics and defence industry figures with strong ties to the British military.

An Alchemy document composed under Stickland's watch and titled, "Ukraine's Next Chapter—Elders Grand Strategy Options Paper", suggests that members of the cabal had convinced themselves a "palace coup" inside the Kremlin was inevitable. So long as Russia struggled inside Ukraine, they believed, British intelligence would be granted "the opportunity to challenge" Moscow's ever-growing "stature as a competent international actor" on the world stage.

"A long war against a small state makes [Putin] look a fool", the Alchemy paper asserted. "He is obsessed by the end of Ghaddafi—he will want to avoid that.... Pressure will pile on from oligarchs as a long war drags on—he will not want to give them excuses to threaten his authority." The group reasoned that "a long war will affect [Putin's] international credibility", as "a failure to quickly defeat Ukraine will seriously ... reduce his credibility with new rich friends in Belarus, Hungary, China, India, Middle East, Brazil etc.

"Most importantly", protracted Russian involvement in Ukraine "will embolden NATO", Alchemy argued. Convinced that Putin would fail in the eastern Donbass region, triggering a collapse of his government, Project Alchemy members openly fantasised about absorbing Russia into the Western-dominated financial order afterwards under the guise of a "Post Putin Marshall Plan". Of particular interest was London's "re-engagement" with Moscow "in global energy and commodity markets", a seeming reference to the West's desire for cheap Russian gas and wheat.

'Discreet operations': reviving 'Operation Gladio' terror ops in Ukraine

To accomplish the balkanization of Russia, Project Alchemy's plotters took inspiration from Operation Gladio, a CIA and NATO-orchestrated covert operation that saw fascist paramilitaries carry out false-flag terrorist attacks across Western Europe after World War II in a bid to prevent communism from taking root.

A section detailing potential "discreet operations" in Alchemy's strategy paper, which stressed the "need to

6. **Discreet Operations.** Need to intervene in every way except 'official'.
 - Revisit legal restrictions on UK deniable ops. Greater resources required for UK discreet ops.
 - Campaign coordination and control mechanisms required XHMG (
 - Use PMCs to out Wagner, Wagner.
 - Urgent - A new doctrine, operating concept, and legal framework, for effectively integrating the activities of PMC's and other non-mil actors .
 - Supply lethal defence equipment now
 - Train and equip units for UKR in UK
 - Equipment capabilities - Fighters and MI35 gunships
 - Recruitment and deployment of Javelin/NLAW training and mentoring teams
 - Protect key UKR people
 - Logs have hit the 72-hour point - Catalyse campaign against RUS logistical tail
 - Info Ops - Directly to RU forces in UKR: to UKR forces of their successes
 - Support UKR to ID & retake/hold key geography & infrastructure
 - Drone project – Commercial drones & Styrofoam gliders (e.g., Kurds)
 - 3D printers – establish and deliver supply chain
 - **Stay behind Gladio handbooks/ Partisan Pamphlet (RJ) [updated for information age]**
7. **Tech-led, low-risk UAV humanitarian operation as hunger and suffering increases.** Assuming grinding series of urban areas under siege, a humanitarian airlift via unmanned aerial vehicles could relieve humanitarian sufferings and allow us to escalate humanitarian flights to manned aircraft. We provide a full and costed proposal and concept of operations for the Arcturus T-20.
8. **Exploit UK's financial and trade levers.** Increase pressure on Putin via the seizing of ships and cargoes busting sanctions, interdicting transactions rather than assets and punishing financial transgressors.

the now-deceased commander Yevgeny Prigozhin. This objective required the formulation of “a new doctrine, operating concept, and legal framework, for effectively integrating the activities of PMCs and other [non-military] actors.” Under these guidelines, British mercenary firms capable of using “sophisticated weaponry like SAMS, cyber, combat air, drones” would be employed to “operate and train and accompany Ukraine formations”.

These operations were all intended to ultimately be “sponsored and commanded” by the UK government, “using discreet cover” to avoid triggering NATO’s Article 5.

Following the production of their grand strategy paper, Stickland invited his team of “side-

ways thinkers” at Project Alchemy to submit further proposals for Gladio-style operations. Among the pitches that arrived was a “mission” to “disable the Kerch Bridge in a way that is audacious, and disrupts road and rail access to Crimea and maritime access to the Sea of Azov.” The blueprints of this highly provocative plot were exposed by The Grayzone in October 2022, in the immediate aftermath of the truck bomb attack that crippled the Kerch Bridge.

Alchemy’s team also produced a PowerPoint presentation entitled, “Training a Ukrainian Commando Force to restore Maritime Sovereignty—Elders”, outlining plans to construct a 1,000-strong Ukrainian commando force “trained in Britain by military veterans equipped with British equipment” to “degrade the Russian Navy and open another flank in the fight for Kherson and the south of Ukraine”.

Alchemy’s team had been working on the plan for at least three months by the time of the presentation’s submission. “Ukrainians abroad and volunteers inside Ukraine” had already been recruited, in advance of 12 weeks basic training “in the use of all troop weapons including mortars, anti-tank missiles, sniper craft, cliff assault, small craft training, demolitions”, the proposal stated.

The plan called for formally integrating the commandos into the Ukrainian Navy. Alchemy boasted that the prospective force “will be a force multiplier and highly mobile”, while Russia’s “outdated doctrine will struggle with a highly motivated and well-equipped naval force conducting hit and run operations and targeting Crimea.”



Training a Ukrainian Commando Force
Global Britain leading the way

What:
Training an immediate commando force to re-establish Ukraine's Maritime Sovereignty, degrade the Russian Navy and open another flank in the fight for Kherson and the south of Ukraine.

How
A thousand strong Commando force trained in Britain by military veterans equipped with British equipment.

IP – Elders Services Ltd.



BASIC TRAINING

We have been designing and preparing the Commando training package for 3 months:

- The WW2 Achnacarry Commando principals form the foundation of our training programme.
- All our instructors are British former Royal Marine Commandos and Special Boat Service.
- Recruited from Ukrainians abroad and volunteers inside Ukraine we have engaged a Ukrainian recruitment agency to ensure compliance with Ukrainian labour laws before being integrated into the Ukrainian Navy on completion of training.
- Basic training of 12 weeks be completed by the unit in the use of all troop weapons including mortars, anti-tank missiles, sniper craft, cliff assault, small craft training, demolitions. Full orientation of Crimea and the Ukraine coastal area and target recognition Russian forces and equipment.

Elders Services Ltd.

intervene in every way except 'official'", explicitly recommended "Stay-behind Gladio handbooks/ Partisan Pamphlets" which would be "updated for Information Age".

Another move Alchemy proposed was to deploy Britain’s “strong” private military [PMC] industry “to out-Wagner, Wagner”. In other words, the group aimed to establish a British rival to the Russian mercenary force founded by

Engaging social media platforms, diplomatically, legislatively and perhaps legally to ensure they enforce their existing policies is a quick and relatively easy way to seriously disrupt Russian power projection

Although there has been political focus on RT broadcasts, Russia's "information seeding" capability encompasses a far greater array of online media outlets. Some like Breakthrough News, Sputnik and Maffick have already been identified as Russian state-affiliated entities. Others, like Grayzone, have

¹ Clint Watts is Distinguished Research Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and Non-Resident Fellow at the Alliance for Securing Democracy and author of *Missing With The Enemy: Surviving in a Social Media World of Hackers, Terrorists, Russians and Fake News*

² In one instance in Sudan, a Facebook takedown of 1,000 Pages caused disinformation output to fall by 75%

managed to obscure their funding. A number of actions can be undertaken against these outlets. The most obvious is legal since the content of these media outriders is frequently in contravention of media law in the UK, US and EU. Aggrieved parties currently tend to ignore libel/defamation by these outlets. Were they to aggressively pursue these outlets, it is likely they would be forced to close.

Moreover, "individuals who are fluent Russian speakers and deemed suitable for covert undercover operations", including "female operators", would be "inserted into southern occupied Ukraine and Crimea for intelligence gathering and sabotage of key infrastructure targets." They would be trained by MI6 officers. For this, Alchemy asked the British government for a total of £73.5 million. "The program is at a high state of readiness. We are ready to go", the presentation forcefully declared.

The enormous sum was to be paid to Elders Services Ltd that was founded by Alchemy members and registered to an address just 15 miles from Fort Monckton, which was described by former MI6 officer Richard Tomlinson as "the SIS's field operations training centre". It is unknown how much money, if any, the firm received from the British government for resuscitating Operation Gladio in Ukraine. Elders Services Ltd shuttered in March 2023 after less than a year of operation, without filing financial accounts.

British spies call for 'action' against The Grayzone

Behind the Project Alchemy team's bravado was a sense that Western hegemony was crumbling on the icy borderlands separating Ukraine from Russia. Referring to the rising BRICS alliance, which gathered in Kazan, Russia this October to challenge the US-dominated financial order, Alchemy planners urged British leadership to "prepare for SWIFT II", as SWIFT was "going to be destroyed" by the West's anti-Russia sanctions, "slowly, but inevitably".

According to Alchemy's analysts, countries across the globe would naturally "see the need for a non-US alternative" means of safely parking their cash and trading. In a rare show of political sobriety, the British spooks predicted that sanctions on Russia combined with the Ukraine proxy war would impose higher prices on consumer goods and "hit British voters in the pocket".

This posed "a threat to public support" for the British government's "hard line" on Ukraine, they warned. "Domestic UK public opinion" would understandably get "fed up" paying more for everyday goods, meaning "pressure grows for a compromise".

To prepare the British public for the coming storm, Project Alchemy's plotters proposed what they blandly described as "information operations", but which could be more accurately described as a blend of domestic state propaganda and malign attacks on disruptive media outlets.

The task they outlined not only included "[dismantling] Russian disinformation infrastructure" by pressuring social media to ban RT and Sputnik, but also targeting critical

independent media like The Grayzone.

"A number of actions can be undertaken against these outlets. The most obvious is legal since the content of these media outriders is frequently in contravention of media law in the UK, US and EU", Alchemy insisted.

"Aggrieved parties currently tend to ignore libel/defamation by these outlets. Were they to aggressively pursue these outlets, it is likely they would be forced to close."

The Grayzone, it was claimed, had thus far "managed to obscure" its funding—a suggestion that this outlet is covertly funded by Russia or some other enemy state, which is completely false. The paranoid fantasies of British intelligence may explain why this journalist was quizzed on the subject by British counter-terror police when they detained and interrogated him at Luton International Airport in May 2023.

Alchemy plotters seek to place Britain at lead of war with Russia

In addition to playing a leading role in media manipulation, Alchemy sought to place Britain at the forefront of the International Criminal Court's agenda to investigate and prosecute the Russian government for alleged war crimes in Ukraine.

Alchemy suggested London "set international conditions, collection mechanisms and funding for collection of data and evidence" in the proxy conflict, and "provide all possible support, including intelligence" to the ICC "in its efforts to investigate war crimes", just as British spies did for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Though not named in the document, high-profile British lawyers, including celebrity Amal Clooney, have since emerged at the forefront of efforts to prosecute Russian officials for war crimes, and establish an ICTY analogue. As The Grayzone's Max Blumenthal reported, Britain played a critical role in the appointment of Amal Clooney's mentor, Karim Khan, as ICC prosecutor.

Project Alchemy's provocative proposals appear to have reached the desk of PM Keir Starmer in some form. At NATO's 75th anniversary summit, Starmer issued his full-throated endorsement of deep strikes by the Ukrainian military into Russia. Echoing the aggressive language found in Alchemy documents, he pledged to "deliver £3 billion worth of support to Ukraine each year... for as long as it takes."

But as the Ukrainian military's offensive in Russia's Kursk region falters, the Biden administration has distanced itself from the calls for striking into the Russian heartland.¹ Fortunately for British leaders hellbent on taking the fight to Moscow, Project Alchemy has ensured that a platter of off-the-books options remains handy.

As Alchemy noted in its grand strategy paper, "The UK seeks always to act multilaterally, but is prepared to take a unilateral lead where achieving multilateral consensus might prove time-consuming or difficult." Among the war's covert sponsors, who were safely ensconced over 1,000 miles away from the front lines, it was firmly agreed: "we should attempt at all costs to keep Ukraine fighting."

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1. This article was written before the US-authorized ATACMS strike at a target in Russia's Bryansk Region on 19 November, which was followed 21 November by the firing of UK-supplied Storm Shadow missiles at a Russian command centre in Kursk Region.