

UK: Cambridge “spy” forum splits over alleged “Russian influence”

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Several leading security operatives and intelligence experts have resigned from their posts at the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar (CIS), amid allegations of “Russian influence.”

The CIS is a prestigious academic forum on western espionage. Founded by official MI5 historian Professor Christopher Andrew, it holds seminars every Friday at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Sir Richard Dearlove, former head of Britain’s MI6, Stefan Halper, a former senior White House policy adviser, and leading historian Peter Martland, quit before the new term in September, the *Financial Times* reported. They stepped down over alleged links between the CIS and the newly-established digital publishing house Veruscript.

According to the *FT*, the three quit out of “fear that Russia may be seeking to use the seminar as an impeccably-credentialed platform to covertly steer debate and opinion on high-level sensitive defence and security topics, two people familiar with their thinking said, speaking on condition of anonymity.”

Veruscript, which has sponsored some of the seminar’s costs, was established by Russian physicist Gleb Cheglakov and his wife, Nazik Ibraimova. In addition to the *Journal of Intelligence and Terrorism Studies*, the firm intends to launch a series of journals across multiple research disciplines, including those in Eurasian Studies and Functional Nanomaterials.

Cheglakov told the *FT* that the London-based company was set up using the couple’s own money and is intended to “shake up the academic publishing business by paying for peer reviews of its articles by approved academics.”

A statement by Veruscript rejected as a “serious and wholly unfounded allegation” claims of its connection with Russian intelligence services and is “reserving our position in terms of legal or other remedy.”

“The Founders of Veruscript, Gleb Cheglakov and Nazik Ibraimova, neither have nor would accept state or related agency influence or sponsorship in their professional or personal lives,” it continues.

Pointing out that it is only one of a number of sponsors of

the CIS, and that its contribution has “amounted to no more than £2,000 in the history of our partnership,” it states that it is “standard practice for academic publishers to support relevant research conferences and seminars.” At no time has Veruscript sought or gained any “influence or involvement in the organisation, content or speakers at the seminar.”

The Veruscript statement notes, and the *FT* admits, that it “has been unable to independently substantiate” the trio’s claims and that “no concrete evidence has been provided to back them.” Cambridge University declined to comment, as have Dearlove and Martland.

The lack of evidence did not stop the leading British financial journal beginning its December 16 report by drawing a comparison with the “heyday of Soviet espionage at the heart of the British establishment,” while also stating how the affair “revives uncomfortable memories of cold war fearmongering.”

This is in reference to the Cambridge spy ring of the 1930s, in which a group of students at the university, including Kim Philby and Guy Burgess, were recruited by the KGB.

Professor Andrew, whose work on the “Cambridge Five” and the Russian KGB is considered among the most authoritative, described the latest allegations as “absurd,” noting that the seminar is “entirely unclassified.” Lectures include such topics as, “Intelligence Chiefs in long-term perspective: from Queen Elizabeth I to Putin, Obama and Theresa May,” “Confusion and Opportunism? British Intelligence and the Battle of the Somme” and “Intelligence, policy and the move towards attritional counter-insurgency against the IRA in 1971.”

Neil Kent, a linguist and expert in Russian culture, is chairman of the CIS and editor-in-chief of the new *Journal of Intelligence*. He said, “The idea any of us would be involved in anything that smacks of Russian influence... it’s real Reds under the bed stuff—the whole thing is ludicrous.”

Kent, a friend of Cheglakov from Cambridge, is reported to have made the connections between the seminar and the journal.

The *FT* said that some of the academics it had spoken to suggest the conflict may be the result of competition. Dearlove and his colleagues who quit the CIS, run the Cambridge Security Initiative (CSI). Professor Andrew was co-chair of CSI along with Dearlove, but resigned in the spring. He has said his resignation was unrelated to the conflict around Veruscript.

The CSI web site is far more obviously oriented to corporate and state agencies. It also involves numerous deep state actors. It is chaired by Dearlove and includes two former heads of Britain's GCHQ spy centre as members of its advisory board. The site boasts that its recent "clients have included UK and US government agencies, management consultants, international accountancy and finance firms" and that "Subjects likely to be high on the agenda include the fast-changing situations in the Middle East, Russia and China and their neighbours, cyber security and the rise of extremism in Europe and security threats to the UK, Europe and the US."

This suggests that the conflict is bound up with more fundamental geopolitical calculations. Dearlove is a signatory to the Henry Jackson Society principles, the British-American neo-con think tank that was closely associated with the Iraq war. As head of MI6 between 1999 and 2004, he was intimately involved in the British/US "war on terror," including the US invasion of Iraq and the "dodgy dossier" alleging Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.

Halper is the only one to have reportedly stated that he quit due to "unacceptable Russian influence on the group." An adviser to US presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan, he is the author of numerous works on the problems of US foreign policy from the standpoint of the "centre-right." He has expressed particular concern at the consequences of an undermining of US authority and influence, especially in facilitating stronger relations between Moscow and Beijing.

The split comes against the backdrop of US and British imperialism's debacle in Syria, as Russia helped Syrian government forces defeat western-backed Al Qaeda-allied proxy forces in eastern Aleppo.

US intelligence officials claim that Russia hacked Democratic Party emails in order to influence the US election and aid Donald Trump's presidential campaign. This has been buttressed by allegations that Moscow is planting "fake news."

The hysterical anti-Russian propaganda is not confined to the US. In Germany, security chiefs are briefing that Moscow is intent on intervening in next year's elections in France and Germany, while UK Labour MP Ben Bradshaw accused Putin of intervening in the UK's June referendum

on membership of the European Union.

Bradshaw's inflammatory claims were made during last week's emergency parliamentary debate over Aleppo. An occasion for war-mongering against Russia, most of those participating blamed parliament's decision in August 2013 not to support US-led military action in Syria as responsible for strengthening Moscow. Labour MP John Woodcock said the UK faced the grave threat of "a tyrannical regime in Russia that has effectively created a global system that has rules but no consequences."

According to reports, two months ago a Cabinet Office meeting involving intelligence officers focussed on the "growing scale of the Russian threat." Although there is no confirmation that Cambridge was discussed, one anonymous security official stated to the *FT* that "they were nevertheless aware that suspicions such as those flagged at Cambridge were 'the kind of thing that we are aware of being of concern'."

The UK is playing a lead role in NATO's military buildup against Russia in central and Eastern Europe. It is sending tanks, drones and troops to Estonia next year.

With calls from "security experts" for the formation of a "war cabinet," Prime Minister Theresa May is to chair a National Security Council session in the new year on Russia.

The *Telegraph* cited the Cambridge split against briefings by Whitehall officials that "Russia is waging a 'campaign' of propaganda and unconventional warfare against Britain," including "fake espionage, misinformation, cyber-attacks and fake news."

"Examples of the new Russian offensive are thought to include state-run news outlets, such as RT and Sputnik," it continued, which are accused of "spreading propaganda to influence British audiences, in particular over key issues such as Brexit and the Scottish independence referendum."

The newspaper also reported the public demand by Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, head of the armed forces, of the "need to pay more attention to counterespionage and counterintelligence to protect our hard-won research, protect our industry and protect our competitive advantage."



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