

Integrity Initiative: UK interference in Norway

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Hacked Integrity Initiative (II) documents have exposed the scale of the UK's anti-Russia foreign interference activities in northern Europe. Norway has been targeted, with the II operating a secret "cluster," whose stated aim is to overturn the views of the Norwegian public that are deemed "soft" on Russia.

The Integrity Initiative is a network of UK military and intelligence operatives, academics and journalists spreading anti-Russia propaganda and fake news. It includes "specialist Army Reserve units" linking to "very senior civilian experts" including "hedge fund managers" and "senior bankers" who have volunteered as "patriots." The group's existence was made public by the Anonymous hacking collective in November.

Among a fourth trove of documents leaked by Anonymous last month is a memo by Chris Donnelly, who co-ordinates II's activities from a basement office at 2 Temple Place in London. He details sinister operations in Norway, including psy-ops targeting the Norwegian public. The II is financed by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

In August 2016, Donnelly visited Oslo and outlined the "current situation" in Norway: "The Norwegian public are generally inclined to be soft on Russia as a near neighbor in the North (where there is a tradition of freindship [sic] and a good working relationship). Although the public can be hard-nosed about Putin and Moscow's policies, their scepticism of US/western politics can lead to their being less critical of Russia's position at times." This problematic public attitude to Russia was expressed in a 2017 Sentio poll, which found that 76 percent of north Norwegians think authorities should do more to improve Norway's relationship with Russia.

The leaked memo included Donnelly's packed itinerary. He attended meetings with Ministry of

Defence, Ministry of Justice and Police officials. At a workshop on "Fighting the Information War" chaired by the Defence Research Institute's Henning-Andre Sogaard, they discussed how "the project" could be "generated in Norway nationally, across Nordic states, and internationally. Building the cooperation between the classified and unclassified world, keeping in mind that one of the main targets is the hearts and minds of the public."

The Anonymous leaks expose an anti-democratic conspiracy aimed at subverting public discourse and shifting the political climate in a right-wing militarist direction.

Despite evidence of such top-level intrigue, Norway's mainstream media and political parties have been virtually silent on the matter. The online newspaper *ABC Nyheter* was alone in publishing an article, in which the named Norwegian cluster members denied involvement (echoing the response of those contacted in the UK). The Norwegian left-radical news blog, *Steigen.no*, having probed more deeply, was able to establish the likely involvement of those named.

Such diplomatic silence contrasts markedly with the media frenzy that followed unsubstantiated allegations of Russian interference in Norway. In February 2017, Norway's Police Security Services (PST) claimed Russia was behind an attempt to hack the Norwegian Labour Party, the Defence and Foreign ministries and the PST itself. Its allegations mirrored the FBI's equally bogus claims of Russian hacking of the US Democratic National Committee. Norway's biggest media outlets published the PST's allegations without question, with screaming headlines about a "Russian Hacker Attack against Norway" (national broadcaster NRK).

The PST's allegations fueled an ongoing media

barrage. Just days before, *Aftenposten*, Norway's largest circulation daily newspaper, was warning that "Russian hackers—with the support of the Kremlin—are in the process of influencing the major, important elections in Europe."

The Integrity Initiative leaks follow last year's "The Kremlin's Trojan Horses 3" report by the Atlantic Council, a US-backed partner to the II. The report alleged "Russian Influence in Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden" and denounced Kremlin "allies" among politicians, journalists and public servants. "[T]he Kremlin's tentacles do not stop in Ukraine, Georgia, or East Central Europe," the Atlantic Council claimed. "They reach far and deep in the core of western societies." The report targeted three Norwegian parliamentary parties—the Socialist Left, the Red Party and the far-right Progress Party—whose representatives had questioned aspects of US/NATO policy or were insufficiently hostile to Russia.

Norway was a founding member of NATO in 1949, but it prohibited foreign troops from being stationed in the country. Norway's post-war Labour governments cultivated an image of semi-neutrality, aligning with the United States during the Cold War, while eschewing overtly aggressive measures along its 106-kilometre north-eastern border with the Soviet Union. But the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991 and the eruption of US military efforts to encircle and confront Russia produced a fundamental shift. Norway is integrating ever more openly with US-UK provocations against Russia:

In 2016, Norway announced 300 US marines would be stationed at Vaernes military base in central Norway. This number has since doubled.

In 2017, Norway announced plans to join the US-NATO Missile Defence System (MDS) aimed at Russia. A global network of missile launchers, control centres, radars, airbases and sea-based missiles, the MDS is at the centre of US-NATO plans for a "winnable" nuclear war.

In 2018, Norway hosted Exercise Trident Juncture, NATO's biggest military exercise since the cold war, a display of force involving 40,000 soldiers and 10,000 vehicles.

Last year, Conservative Party Prime Minister Erna Solberg's government cut all funding to peace organisations, while boosting its defence spending

commitment to NATO. For this she was awarded a "Global Citizen Award" by the Atlantic Council. The opposition Labour Party has backed Norway's militarist trajectory, criticising the government for not spending enough on defence. Norway is one of the highest per-capita defence spenders in the world.

The actions of Norway's political establishment are sharply opposed to the anti-war views of the public. Fully 80 percent opposed the Iraq war, with mass protests in Oslo in February 2003 the largest ever held in the country. Public opposition saw Norway's government refrain from openly supporting the invasion. But Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik's Conservative Party government sent 150 troops in July 2003 as engineers and mine clearers operating under British command. A smaller number of Norwegian troops remained until 2006, and in 2015 Norway again sent troops as part of the international coalition "to counter ISIL."

The official left parties in Norway have opened the gates for Norwegian militarism. The Labour Party has been the staunchest supporter of Norway's military alliance with the US, exemplified by the seamless transition of its party leader of 12 years, Jens Stoltenberg, to become secretary general of NATO in 2014. The Socialist Left party likewise supported NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia and Libya, and, during its time as coalition partner in the Labour-led government of 2005-2013, dropped its previous opposition to the war in Afghanistan.

The public's well-founded "scepticism" in Norway towards "US/western politics" has nothing whatsoever to do with "Russian interference." It is fueled by the bloody reality of US-led wars and regime change operations from North Africa to the Ukraine. It is these sentiments that the UK's Integrity Initiative and the CIA-backed Atlantic Council have targeted as their chief obstacle to securing Norway as a frontline state in the West's offensive against Russia.



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