

# Labour Demand Government Explains £2m Taxpayers' Cash Funding Infowars Unit Which Smearred Corbyn and Labour

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Global Research, December 10, 2018

[The London Economic](#) 9 December 2018

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

*Emily Thornberry has responded to revelations today that around £2 million public money was funnelled to a charity in Scotland which posted disparaging stories against Jeremy Corbyn and other Labour figures.*

“It is one of the cardinal rules of British public life that official resources should not be used for party political purposes,” insisted the Shadow Foreign Secretary.

The Sunday Mail in Scotland uncovered the story when it was leaked documents showing a secretive infowars unit, funded with public money, engaging in social media campaigns, including social media attacks on Her Majesty’s opposition party.

The Institute for Statecraft is ostensibly a small charity based in a run-down Victorian mill in Fife.

But today’s revelations show that it ran a secretive programme called with absolutely no irony, the ‘Integrity Initiative’ – funded with £2m taxpayers’ money.

The programme with funds channelled through the Foreign Office was used to attack figures around the world associated with Russia. It was run by ex-military intelligence operatives.

[Leaked documents passed to the Sunday Mail](#) reveal the organisation’s Integrity Initiative is funded with £2million of Foreign Office cash and run by former military intelligence specialists to galvanise social media influencers against disinformation campaigns.

But the Sunday Mail found social media posts from the initiative’s social media account attacking Jeremy Corbyn, Seumas Milne and other Labour figures with smears.

“It is one of the cardinal rules of British public life that official resources should not be used for party political purposes. So, it is simply outrageous that the clearly mis-named ‘Integrity Initiative’ – funded by the Foreign Office to the tune of £2.25 million over the past two years – has routinely been using its Twitter feed to disseminate personal attacks and smears against the Leader of the Opposition, the Labour Party and Labour officials,” responded Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary.

“And this cannot be dismissed as something outside the Government’s control,

given the application for funding agreed by the Foreign Office last year stated explicitly that it would be used in part to expand “the impact of the Integrity Initiative website...and Twitter/social media accounts”.

“So the Government must now answer the following questions: why did the Foreign Office allow public money to be spent on attempting to discredit Her Majesty’s Opposition? Did they know this was happening? If not, why not? And if they did, how on earth can they justify it?”

The secretive programme tweeted from its official account newspaper reports that implied the approval of Jeremy Corbyn and Labour figures of Russian leader Vladimir Putin and his actions.

One tweet referred to an “alleged British Corbyn supporter” who “wants to vote for Putin”. Another, for instance, retweeted a newspaper story that said: “Milne is not a spy – that would be beneath him.

“But what he has done, wittingly or unwittingly, is work with the Kremlin agenda.”

Others have been quick to point out today that the Integrity Initiative had in the past tweeted about Conservatives’ questionable connections to Russian money.

The Integrity Initiative has also been attacked for backing Ukrainian politicians with worrying far right links and The Sunday Mail found evidence of it orchestrating a Twitter campaign against a Spanish politician believed to be friendly to Russia that resulted in him not being given a government post.

When Labour MP Chris Williamson asked Minister of State Alan Duncan about Foreign Office funding for the initiative in a parliamentary question, the Tory minister responded:

“The Institute for Statecraft is an independent, Scottish, charitable body whose work seeks to improve governance and enhance national security. They launched the Integrity Initiative in 2015 to defend democracy against disinformation.

“In financial year 2017/18, the FCO funded the Institute for Statecraft’s Integrity Initiative £296,500. This financial year, the FCO is funding a further £1,961,000. Both have been funded through grant agreements.”

Today the Labour MP for Derby North reacted:

“What the hell is going on?”

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Chris Williamson MP added:

“These Tories are using public money to subvert democracy.

“The irony of the govt’s response to my question about them funding this shady organisation is that they claim it’s ‘...to defend democracy against disinformation.’”

The Integrity Initiative responded:

“The Institute for Statecraft is a charity – see its other projects [here](#). The IfS started the Integrity Initiative to highlight disinformation and malign influence across Europe. We are non-partisan and highlight relevant stories whoever they feature.”



Screengrab from The Institute for Statecraft

Last month the organisation said it was hacked and documents posted online on Russian media.

A statement on its website said:

“The Integrity Initiative is a non-partisan programme of The Institute for Statecraft, a non-partisan charity which promotes good governance. The Integrity Initiative looks specifically at the use of disinformation and malign influence to undermine the values of democratic societies.

“Since the programme was set up in 2015, the UK and the democratic world in general have continued to be targeted by disinformation activity, including in

particular from Russia. For example, Russia put out various false stories about the shooting down of the Malaysian airliner MH17 over Ukraine in July 2014, even after the official enquiry reported that Russia was responsible. And despite the UK government pointing the finger of blame at Moscow for the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in March 2018, supported by many countries and which led to a mass expulsion of Russian diplomats, the Russian authorities issued at least 47 different versions as to what had happened.

“In sharing information about such malign activities, the Integrity Initiative uses Twitter as a key method of sharing knowledge. This includes the usual Twitter practice of re-tweeting and liking tweets. However, at no time has the Integrity Initiative engaged in party political activity and would never take up a party-political stance. Disinformation and malign influence from rogue states and certain non-state actors are a threat to democratic values and transcend any party political cause.”

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