

Left-wing British University Took Hundreds of Thousands of Pounds from British Military for ‘Cultural Advice’

Student group Decolonising Our Minds found at least £400,000 has passed between the military and the university since the end of 2016

By [Phil Miller](#)

Global Research, July 26, 2019

[Morning Star](#) 24 July 2019

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has paid a British university hundreds of thousands of pounds for “cultural advice” on how to operate in former colonies.

Students at the School of Oriental and African Studies (Soas) in London have slammed the payments as “outrageous.”

At least £400,000 has passed between the military and the university since the end of 2016, according to freedom of information requests filed by student group Decolonising Our Minds.

The money has gone towards academic staff delivering study weeks on the history and culture of people in Africa, Asia and the Americas, including many former colonies.

A little-known MoD body, the Defence Cultural Specialist Unit (DCSU), was at the centre of the payments.

The unit was formed in 2010 in response to the disastrous occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

It has at least 64 cultural advisers deployed across 22 countries around the world.

The US military runs a similar unit called the Human Terrain System, which was condemned by the American Anthropologist Association for violating the ethical imperative to “do no harm to those they study.”

Connections between Soas and the British military are at odds with the university’s reputation as a left-wing and anti-imperialist campus.

Soas staff involved in the scheme include Professor Gilbert Achcar, who has co-authored a book with Noam Chomsky.

Mr Achcar has given four days of training to the MoD about “Islamic fundamentalism” and other topics, Soas records from 2017 and 2019 show.

In February, a Soas anthropologist gave military personnel an overview of the “war in the Sahel.”

On Monday, Defence Secretary Penny Mordaunt announced that 250 British troops were being deployed to Mali as peacekeepers “in recognition of the increasing instability in the Sahel region.”

British special forces and three Chinook helicopters are already active in Mali.

A spokesperson from Soas Students’ Union said:

“We would like to join the Decolonising Our Minds collective in condemning Soas for supporting the militarisation of academia.

“It is outrageous that after recognising its complicity in past colonial power dynamics, the school is still engaging in such projects despite its institutionalised ‘decolonising’ agenda.

“Soas is furthering its hypocrisy and double standards when combating structural injustices.”

A Soas spokesperson told the Star:

“We reject any suggestion that we are ‘militarising’ higher education or perpetuating a colonial approach between the UK and other nations.

“We take a critical non-Eurocentric stance in relation to our regions, which challenges preconceived notions about politics, culture and society. It is right and important that such perspectives are brought to bear on bodies which are engaged with these regions.

“Soas University of London has world-leading expertise in our regions and provides research-informed training and advice to a range of international and national organisations, including United Nations, NGOs and government bodies.

“This is in line with best practice by all leading higher education institutions in the UK. Undertaking such work adds to capacity at UK institutions and enhances their ability to provide high-quality teaching to students.”

The MoD was approached for comment.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

The original source of this article is [Morning Star](#)

Copyright © [Phil Miller](#), [Morning Star](#), 2019

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Phil Miller](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca