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### *Whose Prospect?*

Solomon Hughes

*Prospect* magazine have confirmed a series of connections to the British secret state, including dinner meetings, seminars and taking on the son of MI6 boss John Scarlett as an intern. The links with the security services are a potential embarrassment for the magazine, which has been compared to *Encounter*, a centre left journal which suffered a crisis in 1967 because of too close relations with the CIA.<sup>1</sup> There is no suggestion here that *Prospect* has received money from the security services like *Encounter*, but *Prospect* editor David Goodhart accepted he met with secret state officials a number of times.

John Scarlett Junior, son of MI6 boss John Scarlett, worked as an intern at *Prospect* in late 2007. Goodhart told me: 'There was no connection with his father over his appointment.' However, Goodhart said that 'I did subsequently meet his father at a seminar and he thanked me for giving his son some useful experience.'

Goodhart also told me about 'meeting security service people at a couple of seminars' and 'one dinner'. Goodhart downplayed these meetings with MI5 officials, but added, 'Yes I support the security services, don't you?'

*Prospect*, founded in 1995, now has a healthy 28,000 circulation. Its generally centre left stance is punctuated by some surprising foreign policy positions: last year one *Prospect*

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed *Prospect* senior editor Susha Lee-Shothaman joked about being like *Encounter* on a *Prospect* blog which is no longer on-line but which was at <<http://blog.prospectblogs.com/2009/03/16/3689/>>

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editor wrote a long piece suggesting that Saddam did have WMD after all, but they were mostly spirited out of Iraq into Syria in a convoy of lorries driven by Russian Spetsnaz commandos just before the American invasion.

Did *Prospect's* security contacts steer the magazine towards Hassan Butt, the 'reformed Jihadist' who seems to have been nothing of the sort? Butt told the Manchester Police that he was actually a 'professional liar' who told journalist stories 'the media wanted to hear' and even stabbed himself to make it seem as if his former brothers were out to get him. One message Butt delivered was the claim that the Iraq war and foreign policy in general did not fuel British terrorist extremism.

*Prospect* carried a long interview with the 'terrorist' Butt and carried half a dozen pieces referring to the 'reformed ' Butt. Editor Goodhart told me that there were 'loose connections in your thesis' and stated he has 'never been briefed on security service views on Islamic terrorism.' Journalist Shiv Malik interviewed Hassan Butt for a long *Prospect* piece on the 7/7 bombing and editor Goodhart said that, 'I did once hear that the services regard the Shiv Malik piece on 7/7 as essential reading inside the "security state"' and added: 'a Pentagon official once said the same.'

Goodhart went on to say: 'if Hassan Butt has now been "exposed" as a liar and fantasist we were certainly not the only ones taken in – there was a big Newsnight interview - and big pieces in several nationals.'

*Prospect* recently received a financial boost of around £500,000 over three years from three financiers. Goodhart's senior editor is former Number 10 Downing Street official James Crabtree.

*Solomon Hughes is a freelance writer. His book War on Terror Inc. is reviewed below.*