

South of the border (occasional snippets from)

Nick Must

Donald Trump the *un*-intelligent agent

All this discussion about whether Donald Trump is an actual Russian spy! I'm not saying that I don't think he's capable of being a traitorous bastard, just that the evidence presented thus far is inconclusive. If anything, it's easier to decide – as a recent piece for *The Conversation* did – that the ex-President is 'more likely useful idiot than Putin's agent'.¹ On the other side of the argument we find, for example, the two books by Craig Unger on Trump's links to Russia.² Unger's main source (in the more recent book) is one Yuri Shvets, who is an ex-KGB officer – having quit in 1990 and then defected to the West three years later.³

If Mr Shvets is to be relied upon as to the fact that DJT is a *conscious* Russian asset, much of the supposed grooming of the potential 'spy' Trump took place after Mr Shvets left the employ of his birth nation's security service. Sorry, but 'that dog don't hunt': how could he be so confident in his assertions? I find it further to Mr Shvets's detriment that his autobiography, *Washington Station*,⁴ is a tortuously dull read. This is even though he claims in it that he had recruited an ex-member of President Jimmy Carter's administration as a source for the KGB.

Washington Station was initially supposed to be a novel, and it shows. Throughout the book, Shvets gives long conversational quotes as if he has remembered them verbatim. A review at the time of the book's original publication in what was *The Gate* (San Francisco) and is now SFGate.com, characterised it thus:

'The problem is that there is no way the reader can separate fact from fancy in Shvets' memoir. As he admits, he had no access to KGB files

¹ Kyle Cunliffe, 'Donald Trump spying allegations: more likely useful idiot than Putin's agent' at <<https://tinyurl.com/23vzrnwf>> or <<https://theconversation.com/donald-trump-spying-allegations-more-likely-useful-idiot-than-putins-agent-154300>>.

² *House of Trump, House of Putin* (New York: Dutton, 2018) and *American Kompromat* (New York: Dutton, 2021)

³ See <<https://www.apbspeakers.com/speaker/yuri-shvets/>>.

⁴ London: Simon & Schuster, 1994

while writing the book. All of the documents he quotes and the conversations he reconstructs are based on memory. So even if Shvets is given the benefit of the doubt, the result must necessarily be riddled with errors.’⁵

Add to this the fact that Mr Shvets touts his secret recruit (code named ‘Socrates’) as being an excellent catch, yet also paints a picture of him as quite mentally unstable. In the preface to the book, Shvets says: ‘Often enough, those who commit treason are . . . psychologically unstable even before they are approached by foreign intelligence officers.’ Perhaps he should have heeded his own advice? Shvets even has his melodramatically silly points, in one seemingly channelling John le Care:

‘I was taught the secrets of the trade by the covert heroes of the Cold War, the people who had stolen the U.S. atomic secrets, who had worked with the Rosenbergs, Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean. To the callow cadets they seemed majestic figures, beyond the reach of mere mortals’⁶

Washington Station is also peppered with expression like ‘fortunately’, ‘luckily and ‘as luck would have it’ – far too many for it to be actually true. This is the chief witness for the prosecution?

Case not proven.

In addition . . .

The Steele Dossier has also proven to be something of an unreliable source, due to its contents being based on hearsay. However reliable an intelligence source might be, hard evidence (such as a recording of a bugged phone conversation or a clandestine video) is always the clincher. Thus it is with the allegations of Trump cavorting with hookers in the presidential suite at Moscow’s Ritz Carlton. The loathsome Trump surely deserves the comeuppance that video of such an event would bring but, sadly, this has not emerged.

Interestingly, a guide on ‘How to Read the Trump Dossier’ was published in the *London Review of Books* in January 2017.⁷ This had been written by one Arthur Snell, whom the LRB described as having ‘worked for the Foreign Office

⁵ ‘Another Ex-KGB Spy Spills the Beans / Yuri B. Shvets claims he recruited a former Carter adviser’ – see <<https://tinyurl.com/3e34vjvd>> or <<https://www.sfgate.com/books/article/Another-Ex-KGB-Spy-Spills-the-Beans-Yuri-B-3041643.php>>.

⁶ This is early on, at page 15.

⁷ Arthur Snell : ‘How to Read the Trump Dossier’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 39 No. 1, 5th January 2017 at <<https://tinyurl.com/ash5j7j9>> or <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v39/n01/arthur-snell/how-to-read-the-trump-dossier>>.

for 16 years' – *hint, hint*.⁸ This is the only piece Snell has ever written for the LRB but it did achieve one important thing: in November of 2019, Arthur Snell joined Orbis,⁹ the Business Intelligence firm that produced the Steele Dossier!

Confirmation that our man was (at least willing to act as) a representative of MI6 comes from the transcript of the symposium 'The Mind of the Hacker - Insights from GCHQ, MI6 and Israeli Intelligence'.¹⁰ This shows the audience were told they would 'be joined on stage by Arthur Snell from MI6', an introduction that Mr Snell did not allude to in his contributions and also said nothing to deny.

But wait: there's more!

If you want to seek out some ex-spies on LinkedIn I'd recommend starting with the profiles for Messrs. Steele, Burrows and Snell from Orbis. Using LinkedIn's 'endorsements' facility, previous colleagues from the 'Foreign and Commonwealth Office' (i.e. MI6) can be discovered and many of them are also now working in corporate intelligence.

On his profile, Chris Burrows describes himself as having been First Secretary and then Counsellor at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from 1990–2009.¹¹ Arthur Snell shows himself as having joined the FCO/MI6 upon graduating from university in 1998, with various desk officer/second secretary/first secretary positions abroad starting (presumably after a spell of training) in 2001.¹² Chris Steele is the most circumspect and does not show any of his career before founding Orbis in 2009.¹³ His endorsements for topics such as 'Intelligence Analysis' and 'Counterterrorism', however, includes luminaries such as Clovis Meath Baker who spent,

' . . . 28 years in the Foreign Office during which he filled senior roles dealing with the Middle East, counter-proliferation and Iran, and regularly attended meetings of the National Security Council, the Joint Intelligence Committee, and COBRA. He was seconded to GCHQ as Director of

⁸ He has an extant profile page on the UK government's website and it details his involvement in 'counter-terrorism issues' <<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/arthur-snell>>.

⁹ <<https://tinyurl.com/b9h5yjem>> or <<https://www.intelligenceonline.com/corporate-intelligence/2019/11/13/arthur-snell-joins-burrows-and-steele-at-orbis,108381467-bre>>

¹⁰ Provided by telecommunications sector magazine *Telecomkh.com* <<http://www.telecomkh.com/en/internet/news/security/9324>>.

¹¹ <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/chris-burrows-66106a90/>>

¹² <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/arthursnell/>> His profile page also confirms him as having joined Orbis in November of 2019.

¹³ <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/chris-steele-87151a6a/>>

Intelligence Production from 2010-13.¹⁴

¹⁴ See the RUSI profile page for Clovis Meath Baker CMG OBE at <<https://rusi.org/people/meath-baker-cmg-obe>>.