

## South of the border (occasional snippets from)

**Nick Must**

*\*new\**

### **Stolen, not shared**

'MI5 joins Instagram to bust martini-drinking stereotypes' was a headline from BBC News online in late April.<sup>1</sup> The head of the Security Service, Ken McCallum,<sup>2</sup> was quoted from a piece he had written for the *Telegraph*, wherein he'd said: 'We must get past whatever Martini-drinking stereotypes may be lingering'.

But surely it's James Bond – and, by association, MI6 – that most people will associate (however tenuously) with Martini cocktails? Having been brave enough to venture over to the Torygraph website and, even more riskily, into the comments section below the article in question, I know that I am not the first person to realise this.

If the current chief of MI5 is keen to steal some thunder from MI6, it is somewhat depressing to see that the same attitudes that often hampered the conflict with the IRA in Northern Ireland are still alive and kicking in the ubiquitous 'war on terror'.<sup>3</sup>

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### **Dominic Cummings' particular brand of bullshit**

On 17 March, Dominic Cummings appeared before the Science and Technology Committee of Parliament. In his testimony he was given free reign to waffle about the grand plans for an 'Advanced Research & Invention Agency' (ARIA)

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<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-56840811>>

<sup>2</sup> I discovered that Mr McCallum had been MI5's anonymised witness at two inquiries following Islamic terrorist attacks in London. See my 'MI5 speaks to the nation!' in *Lobster 79* at <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster79/lob79-mi5-speaks.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, 'The supposed superiority of the UK intelligence agencies is a myth' by Mary Dejevsky for the *Guardian* in 2016 at <<https://tinyurl.com/p9ub54ph>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/01/mi5-mi6-myth-uk-intelligence-superiority>>.

that he has been heavily promoting.<sup>4</sup> This new creation would be modelled on the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), which was the research agency in the United States, during the 1960s, that later became the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

There had been much talk about ARIA, even before Cummings' testimony. The suggested annual budget for this new agency was the subject of some concern, with reports that 'MPs [had urged] government to clarify future of proposed £800m R&D unit'.<sup>5</sup>

One of the first things the Committee questioned Cummings about was the agreement that he claims was made between himself and PM Johnson – and which was crucial in terms of Cummings moving to work in Downing Street. It included the following: '[G]etting Brexit done and avoiding a second referendum' – I presume from this that he has no confidence that a 'leave' campaign would win a second vote – and, '[S]upport *me* in trying to change how Whitehall works and the Cabinet Office works' (emphasis added) – look out, folks . . . he's on a crusade!

This agreement was, apparently, made at Cummings' house – with the two of them alone together. So there is no third-party witness. This could well have been a deliberate tactic by Cummings, who will be well aware how little attention to detail Boris Johnson gives to discussions.

As for Dominic Cummings' own attention to detail, the transcript of the Committee's hearing shows that it is very patchy indeed. He waxes lyrical about the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) DARPA organisation and how the Cummings-envisioned ARIA would be more similar to the pre-DoD involvement ARPA. However, in doing so, he gets an important fact quite wrong. He says that the DoD took over the organisation and duly changed the name, from ARPA to DARPA, in 1975. But a quick glance at the DARPA website site, shows this actually took place in 1972.<sup>6</sup>

He positively rails against the 'bureaucracy' that he claims made (the post 1972) DARPA projects much slower and unproductive. In the Cummings version, the pioneering work on computer networking – the establishment and development of the ARPAnet – could never have happened in the DARPA version. But here, again, he has his facts completely wrong. Reference to the

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<sup>4</sup> See, '*Science and Technology Committee, Oral evidence: A new UK research funding agency*' at <<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1911/html/>> All subsequent references in this article to the testimony before this committee are taken from this document.

<sup>5</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/7npshu6f>> or <<https://www.publictechnology.net/articles/news/mps-urge-government-clarify-future-proposed-%C2%A3800m-rd-unit>>

<sup>6</sup> <<https://www.darpa.mil/about-us/timeline/arpa-name-change>>

DARPA website reveals that the vast majority of work on ARPAnet took place with the organisation designated as DARpA.<sup>7</sup> It is quite probable, in fact, that it was the embryonic ARPA work on computer networks that lead the DoD to take ARPA under its wings in 1972 and, thus, change it to DARPA:

'The ARPANET was established in the last months of the 1960s, but the first major demonstration of its networking capabilities took place in Washington D.C., in 1972. At this time, the Department of Defense (DoD) became interested in using computers for command and control.'<sup>8</sup>

It is clear, from his testimony, that Mr Cummings does not want to have as military-focused an approach for his ARIA as there is for DARPA.

'My version of it here would be, as I said, to accelerate scientific discovery far beyond what is currently normal, and to seek strategic advantage in some fields of science and technology for the United Kingdom. That is how I would define it. I would keep it broad and vague like that.'

But that would logically lead to a lack of focus. It is arguable that the defence imperative has been a major contributing factor in those DARPA projects that have been successful. Mr Cummings version will undoubtedly have a myriad of potential projects brought to it and be potentially swamped in the process – making it much more difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff.

He talks about sending out teams to go 'problem finding' rather than to go 'problem solving'. As he puts it: 'By definition, things like creating the internet in the 1960s are not obvious.' Well, no, it was not an obvious problem in the 1960s because computers were not then being thought of as a mass market item, aimed at personal usage. That only happened in the mid-to-late 1980s. Further, the original ARPAnet had a distinct and military-focused purpose: it was designed as an 'end of the world' fail-safe that would make sure military and governmental computer systems could still function in the event of a nuclear war.<sup>9</sup>

What Mr Cummings seems unable to admit to is that there have been a number of significantly successful projects that have emerged from the purely DARPA version. Examples of this are stealth technology, GPS navigation,

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<sup>7</sup> <[https://www.darpa.mil/attachments/ARPANET\\_final.pdf](https://www.darpa.mil/attachments/ARPANET_final.pdf)>

<sup>8</sup> See note 7.

<sup>9</sup> Oh, and those nuclear weapons? Cummings seems to think they are delightful. The Manhattan Project is repeatedly touted as being the gold standard of a value for money project. But, surely, he is discounting all of the associated *negative* factors - the horrific deaths suffered by many thousands of Japanese civilians at Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the truly ridiculous sums of money that was later wasted on the nuclear arms race.

driverless cars, automatic speech recognition and automatic speech translation. Somehow, all that happened in an organisation that Mr Cummings claims is completely bound up with extreme 'bureaucracy'.

Asked if an 'existential crisis' (e.g. the Second World War or the Cold War) were not the main motivating force that prompts a successful project, his reply was:

'That is a very good question. You are right that historically these things tend to be created and only given extreme freedom when faced with some kind of existential crisis. I would hope in a rational world that the disaster of last year ought to make the case for ARIA completely open and closed. Remember in February, March, April last year there was no entity in the British state – zero entities – including the Prime Minister himself, that could make rapid decisions on science funding minus horrific EU procurement, state aid, laws, et cetera, et cetera. There was no entity in the British state that could operate at scale and at pace. That was obviously disastrous.'

His claim that EU procurement rules hampered the effort to combat COVID-19 is simply untrue. On 1 April 2020, the European Commission published its 'Guidance from the European Commission on using the public procurement framework in the emergency situation related to the COVID-19 crisis'. This stated that 'In cases of extreme urgency' there could be 'negotiated procedure without publication [of a contract]'.<sup>10</sup>

This guidance, in response to the COVID pandemic, clarified that it was built upon the previous 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Public Procurement rules in connection with the current asylum crisis' – which had been released on 9 September 2015. That had, effectively, set a clear precedent in that it allowed for the swift, non-competitive, procurement in the event of 'extreme urgency' due to '[e]vents unforeseeable by the contracting authority in question'.<sup>11</sup>

Mr Cummings even acknowledged, 'You need to have an emergency process where an entity of the state can move at speed and scale to do all sorts of things – buying, procurement and whatnot'. So he should take comfort from the fact that the EU has established a process for that to take place – and

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<sup>10</sup> < [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020XC0401\(05\)>](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020XC0401(05)>)  
N.B. that, contrary to the impression Mr Cummings would give about endless and unnecessarily lengthy EU legislation, this was a massive five pages long!

<sup>11</sup> <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015DC0454>> This directive was huge in comparison to the one for 2020 one for COVID issues: it was 8 pages long.

that the UK is still allowed to take advantage of that process, even during the transition period.

The existence of the 'VIP fast lane for emergency procurement contracts related to [the government's] pandemic response'<sup>12</sup> shows the lie in what Dominic Cummings said. The widespread cronyism and outright corruption connected to this exclusive access channel for selected providers of PPE, etc., also indicates why there need to be at least some rules for procurement processes, even when there is an extreme emergency.

This was very poor scrutiny by the Science and Technology Committee but there have been two instances of a more forensic examination of Mr Cummings and his relationship with the truth about government procurement. The first came in November 2020 (i.e. even before the session of the Select Committee) from Sam Bright writing for *Byline Times* – the headline of which was 'Dominic Cummings failed to reform the procurement process and in doing so exposed his hollow intellectual posturing'.<sup>13</sup> The second came in an immediate follow-up on the day of his appearance before the Committee, by David Kernohan writing for *wonkhe.com* ('the home of higher education policy').<sup>14</sup> After reading those critiques, it simply eludes me why Dominic Cummings was ever chosen to give evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee.

Cummings cites Newton, Darwin and Turing as figures who would find it hard to get funding today. Would he be surprised to learn that those same three figures initially also found it difficult to get their ideas into the mainstream? Issac Newton faced opposition from the continent to his theory of gravity.<sup>15</sup> Charles Darwin himself 'knew his radical ideas would be met with stiff opposition'.<sup>16</sup> Alan Turing suffered setbacks throughout his career. Before he even joined the Government Code & Cypher School at Bletchley, Turing had to take the scholarship exam for Kings College, Cambridge, twice. Then, in the immediate aftermath of the war, his proposed design for a computer 'was regarded by most who considered the report as hopelessly over-ambitious and

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<sup>12</sup> 'UK government under growing pressure over Covid procurement', *Guardian*, 20 Feb 2021: <<https://tinyurl.com/22b57ry3>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/feb/20/uk-government-under-growing-pressure-over-covid-procurement>>

<sup>13</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/xv9ynz9u>> or <<https://bylinetimes.com/2020/11/23/dominic-cummings-role-great-procurement-scandal-not-a-mastermind/>>

<sup>14</sup> <<https://wonkhe.com/wonk-corner/dominic-cummings-on-aria-and-research-funding/>>

<sup>15</sup> See <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/newton/>>.

<sup>16</sup> See <<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/charles-darwin-most-famous-biologist.html>>.

there were delays in the project being approved'.<sup>17</sup>

The transcript of the committees session records – full credit where it is due – that the SNP MP Carol Monaghan ‘clapped back’ at Cummings, saying ‘I would just point out that Newton and Einstein’s ideas were sneered at whenever they first presented them’.

Lord help us, there are ‘rumours’ that Cummings might possibly be offered a top position within ARIA! In response to this he said:

‘I know there are some rumours around about that sort of thing, that No. 10 has asked me to do it, or whatever. I do not know if they are thinking about that, but, if it were suggested, I would certainly say no.’

With his particular brand of bullshit, let’s hope he keeps to his word.

### **. . . and another thing**

Cummings has recently set up a new company, with himself as sole director.<sup>18</sup> This has not gone unnoticed in the press, and it was Bloomberg who had an interesting take on the name of this new corporation – Siwah Limited.

“It is unclear what Cummings’s new project will entail. Wāḥat Sīwah is the site of a legendary oracle that proclaimed Alexander the Great as the Pharaoh of Egypt.”<sup>19</sup>

Those who can read between the not-too-subtle lines will, like me, probably see the reference to ‘Alexander the Great’ as a nod to Boris Johnson (whose first name is, of course, Alexander). However, I’m not too sure that this is the only possible interpretation. As the Lonely Planet website notes, ‘Siwa’s geographic isolation helped protect a unique society that stands distinctly apart’.<sup>20</sup> That’s no doubt how Cummings views the future of the UK outside of the European Union – or even how he sees himself and his camp followers. Others might well view them as disruptive, unlikeable gits, who end up getting chucked out of any club they join.

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<sup>17</sup> See <<https://mathshistory.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Turing/>>.

<sup>18</sup> Siwah Limited, incorporated on 25th February, 2021. See <<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/13226473>>. NB clicking on the first half of that URL produces a 404. Click on the second half and it works.

<sup>19</sup> See ‘Dominic Cummings Sets Up New Tech Consultancy Company’ by Giles Turner at <<https://tinyurl.com/s9mje9wh>> or <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-26/dominic-cummings-sets-up-new-tech-consultancy-company>>.

<sup>20</sup> See <<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/egypt/western-desert/siwa-oasis#introduction>>.

## 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'.<sup>21</sup> On the other side of the argument we find, for example, the two books by Craig Unger on Trump's links to Russia.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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*,<sup>24</sup> 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 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.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 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>>.

<sup>22</sup> *House of Trump, House of Putin* (New York: Dutton, 2018) and *American Kompromat* (New York: Dutton, 2021)

<sup>23</sup> See <<https://www.apbspeakers.com/speaker/yuri-shvets/>>.

<sup>24</sup> London: Simon & Schuster, 1994

<sup>25</sup> See <<https://tinyurl.com/3e34vjvd>> or <<https://www.sfgate.com/books/article/Another-Ex-KGB-Spy-Spills-the-Beans-Yuri-B-3041643.php>>.

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 . . . .' <sup>26</sup>

*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.<sup>27</sup> This had been written by one Arthur Snell, whom the LRB described as having 'worked for the Foreign Office for 16 years' – *hint, hint*.<sup>28</sup> 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, the Business Intelligence firm that produced the

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<sup>26</sup> This is early on, at page 15.

<sup>27</sup> 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>>.

<sup>28</sup> 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>>.



Steele Dossier!<sup>29</sup>

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'.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> Chris Steele is the most circumspect and does not show any of his career before founding Orbis in 2009.<sup>33</sup> 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 Intelligence Production from 2010-13.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/b9h5yjem>> or <<https://www.intelligenceonline.com/corporate-intelligence/2019/11/13/arthur-snell-joins-burrows-and-steele-at-orbis,108381467-bre>>

<sup>30</sup> Provided by telecommunications sector magazine *Telecomkh.com* <<http://www.telecomkh.com/en/internet/news/security/9324>>.

<sup>31</sup> <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/chris-burrows-66106a90/>>

<sup>32</sup> <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/arthursnell/>> His profile page also confirms him as having joined Orbis in November of 2019.

<sup>33</sup> <<https://www.linkedin.com/in/chris-steele-87151a6a/>>

<sup>34</sup> See the RUSI profile page for Clovis Meath Baker CMG OBE at <<https://rusi.org/people/meath-baker-cmg-obe>>.





