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SCL and the Phantom Contract

by Liam O'Hare

8 COMMENTS

22ND MARCH 2018



(https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/cambridgeanalytica1600_thumb800.jpg) In the second of our explosive expose of the SCL Group we ask: what is the phantom contract with the MOD from 2010/11 and what did the 'external training' a previous FOI revealed involve? The MOD is now contradicting previous

information it has given out under Freedom of Information laws. As a senior SCL executive admits to us that the company's future is in doubt, Liam O'Hare argues that the government has critical questions to answer.

Theresa May was yesterday forced into addressing the issue of links between the UK Government, the Conservative Party and a company at the centre of a scandal over data harvesting and dirty tricks.

However, instead of clearing up the issue – the response has raised urgent questions about the nature of SCL Group's (formerly Strategic Communications Laboratories) relationship to the highest echelons of state power in Britain.

SCL Group is the parent company of Cambridge Analytica. They share directors and practise and are for all intents and purposes part of the same organisation. Between them they claim to have influenced more than 200 elections across the world.

In an [article \(https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/20/scl-a-very-british-coup/\)](https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/20/scl-a-very-british-coup/) for this website, I revealed the extent of the links between SCL Group and the British establishment – in particular the Conservative Party. Directors include an array of Etonian educated Tory donors, former government ministers, and high-ranking officers in the British army.

These revelations led to the SNP's Westminster leader Ian Blackford questioning May about these links at Prime Minister's Questions yesterday.

Her response sidestepped the issue of connections between her own party and the organisation and emphasised that the government has no “current contracts” with SCL Group.

A Downing Street spokesperson later clarified that the government previously had three (<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-facebook-cambridge-analytica-britain/uk-had-three-contracts-with-cambridge-analytica-parent-company-idUKKBN1GX2ED>) contracts with SCL Group. One was with the Ministry of Defence between 2014-2015, one with the Home Office in 2009 and one with the Foreign Office in 2008-2009. Here lies a glaring inconsistency.

Last year, the MOD responded (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/576258/FOI2016-08132_-_Payments_made_to_named_Ltd_companies.pdf) to a freedom of information request on its links with SCL Group. In its response it detailed TWO contracts it had with the firm. One of these was in 2014-15, worth £150,000 and involving the “procurement of targeted audience analysis”. However, it also notes a second contract (not mentioned by the No 10 spokesperson) , in 2010/11 involving the “provision of external training” and worth £40,000.



Ministry
of Defence

Defence Resources Secretariat
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
London SW1A 2HB
United Kingdom

Reference: FOI2016/08132

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Date: 26 September 2016

Dear [REDACTED],

Your correspondence dated 28 August 2016 has been considered to be a request for information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000. You requested the following information:

Please send me

- Details of all payments made to Developing Markets Associates Ltd. since June 1st 2010
 - Please include amounts and what the payments were for
- Details of all payments made to SCL Group Ltd since June 1st 2010
 - Please include amounts and what the payments were for

[_ \(https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/wp-](https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/wp-)

Please find below the information you requested.

The MOD have no records of any direct payments made to Developing Markets Associates LTD since 1st June 2010.

The MOD have no records of any direct payments made to SCL Group Ltd since 1st June 2010 but the table below shows the recorded direct payments made to Strategic Communication Laboratories Ltd over this time period.

Contract Title	Fiscal Year	Net Payments (All)
PROVISION OF EXTERNAL TRAINING	10/11	£40,000
PROCUREMENT OF TARGET AUDIENCE ANALYSIS	14/15	£150,000

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 2nd Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-content/uploads/2018/03/f43b1fd-17ee-4990-a6ef-1569045f913e.png).

I put this major discrepancy to Downing St who insisted that there were only ever three government contracts with the group and suggested I speak to the Ministry of Defence.

Then when I questioned the MOD about the 2010/11 deal, it told me it had “one contract with SCL Group in 2014/15” and are “unable to provide any further information on this.”

The response is quite remarkable. The MOD is now contradicting previous information it has given out under Freedom of Information laws. That leaves two options. The first is that the initial information was incorrect and someone imagined a deal with SLC group for external training in 2010/11.

The second is that the MOD and Downing St are providing false information to journalists regarding their dealings with SCL Group. This possibility would open a pandora’s box of questions over what the government is seeking to hide and why?

It was revealed yesterday that Mark Turnbull of SCL Group and CA [advised](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/cambridge-analyticas-mark-turnbull-advised-foreign-office-on-data-lessons-from-trump-presidential-campaign-wilton-park_uk_5ab29563e4b008c9e5f39523) [\(https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/cambridge-analyticas-mark-turnbull-advised-foreign-office-on-data-lessons-from-trump-presidential-campaign-wilton-park_uk_5ab29563e4b008c9e5f39523\)](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/cambridge-analyticas-mark-turnbull-advised-foreign-office-on-data-lessons-from-trump-presidential-campaign-wilton-park_uk_5ab29563e4b008c9e5f39523).

the Foreign Office on lessons from Donald Trump’s election campaign. The title of his lecture was listed as “examining the application of data in the recent US Presidential election”. That raises questions over whether the British government was already aware of the mass harvesting of Facebook data which sparked this scandal.

Details are emerging about the worldwide activities of SCL Group and CA, touching almost every corner of the globe stretching from Brazil, to Nigeria, to Mexico and to India. But it has now emerged that in at least some of these these projects, CA coordinated with the UK MOD.

Working at the forefront of behavioural change communication for over 25 years, SCL has evolved into a multi-disciplined group of behavioural research and communications agencies.

Commercial

Helping brands build better relationships with their customers through psychographic targeting and data-driven communication strategies.

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Elections

A global election management agency, skilled in applying behavioural modeling and microtargeting solutions to political campaigns.

[Read more](#)

Social

Delivering communication strategies and behaviour change campaigns that really matter in the social, cultural and NGO sectors.

[Read more](#)

Defence

A leading practitioner of psychological approaches to conflict resolution, including population messaging and information operations.

[Read more](#)

(<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/1-z4utpqOJmsHayXqFegvSMQ.png>).

In Ukraine, SCL were hired to implement a data driven strategy designed to “erode and weaken” (<https://sclgroup.cc/projects/sord/>) anti-government opposition in the country and “win back control of Donetsk”. On their website the CA says it produced a project report to the President of Ukraine and intriguingly also “shared with the UK MOD”. It begs the questions, why is a private contractor involved in shadowy psyops working hand in glove with the UK MOD on foreign projects?

With a spotlight on the organisation, the group seems to be quickly trying to batten down the hatches. The [website](http://www.bdinstitute.org/) (<http://www.bdinstitute.org/>) for the Behaviour Dynamic Institute (BDI), the behavioural research arm of SCL group has mysteriously gone down.

Remarkably (although perhaps less so regarding how close SCL is to the British establishment) the institute is based at the home of British science and research, the Royal Institute. According to a [paper](http://www.naa.mil.lv/~media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/DSPC%20PP%201%20-%20NATO%20StratCom.ashx) (<http://www.naa.mil.lv/~media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/DSPC%20PP%201%20-%20NATO%20StratCom.ashx>) by the SCL director of defence Dr Steve Tatham, this makes it “almost unique in the international contractor community”. Quite.

Tatham is another interesting case. He was former head of psyops for British forces in Afghanistan as well as Special Information Operations project officer in the UK Ministry of Defence Operations Directorate.

Tatham went on to set up the training arm of SCL Group called IOTA-Global alongside SCL founder Nigel Oakes and delivered a \$1m NATO training course in Latvia aimed at “countering Russian propaganda”.

I contacted Tatham to ask if he would continue working with SCL group in light of the revelations, and he responded by saying “I suspect your question is academic as I can’t see SCL surviving this”.

In further messages, Tatham distanced himself from Cambridge Analytica, the offshoot from SCL Group, and insisted his activities were “ethical” and “truthful”.

“I have worked with SCL Defence on defence projects which is well documented, for example the NATO counter propaganda course in Latvia in 2015,” Tatham told me.

“In UK and NATO doctrine Psyops is ‘truthful and attributable comms with specific target audiences’ not the the appalling stuff CA (Cambridge Analytica) appears to have undertaken,”

“A point about what and who we train. Only NATO and friendly governments. And we only train truthful and attributable techniques. Why? Because our clients work with NATO and that is UK and NATO doctrine... as ex UK military senior officer I have strong personal ethics and that is why we are all so appalled at the revelations about CA”.

With founder Alexander Nix being suspended from Cambridge Analytica, a pattern seems to be developing that shifts all blame for the recent scandals onto the subsidiary as opposed to the parent company SCL Group.

However, with the links between the two organisations evident and further revelations emerging every day, it seems clear that this will not wash.

It’s now time for the UK government to come completely clean on exactly what ties it had with SCL Group and answer the following questions:

Was it aware of the data harvesting used in the US election?

What is the phantom contract with the MOD in 2010/11 and what did the 'external training' involve?

What did the other contracts that the government had with SCL Group involve and did it make any other payments to the group, outside of the contracts?

Was there coordination between SCL Group and the MOD in other countries as existed in Ukraine?

Why is taking so long for the Information Commissioner to get a warrant to search databases and servers of Cambridge Analytica?

Until these are answered, we can expect this scandal, which reaches the heart of unaccountable British power, to rumble on and on.

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Scotticus Caledonius

2 months ago

Nice one Liam. SCL and other behavioural manipulating right wing groups need to be below the radar and need to have the red herring of nasty Russians seeking to manipulate and control us all as the meme foe the brainwashed masses in the British media. I am sick to death of the right wing ideological abuse going on within the UK just now where hysteria everywhere has allowed the Westminster game of jingoistic right wing British nationalism to erupt where every lunatic jumps up and insults Russia more than the previous nutter to prove how loyal they are to Britain. No need to check any evidence. John Snow of all people even tried to hint that CA were linked to the Russian ambassador because he met one of them! The anti Russian smokescreen is simply that, a cover for the right wing rats at SCL to work on manipulating opinion and behaviour in this country and others to suit British and American financial interests. They need a villain to cover their own deceit. Most people in the U.K. don't even realise that Britain assisted the right wing USA money men to create a coup d'état in Ukraine. NATO is controlled by the USA and they are the lines surrounding Russia and being far more aggressive. Idiots like Boris Johnson could easily spark a major war with Russia as he is a dangerous clown playing populism. Sad that any Scottish leaders are falling for the Tory anti-Russian claptrap.

Reply (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/22/scl-and-the-phantom-contract/?replytocom=414454#respond>)

Ottomanboi

2 months ago

Ukrain...lets hear it for those squeaky clean pro-US oligarchs who control the commanding heights, including the arms trade, of the economy.

Reply (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/22/scl-and-the-phantom-contract/?replytocom=415436#respond>)

[Facebook suspends Cambridge Analytica - Page 10 \(http://politicalhotwire.com/current-events/190021-facebook-suspends-cambridge-analytica-10.html#post5796765\)](http://politicalhotwire.com/current-events/190021-facebook-suspends-cambridge-analytica-10.html#post5796765)

Alan

2 months ago

It should be noted that there's a bigger frame for this story. Cambridge Analytica, Facebook and their political users and friends are really not the problem. They are a symptom, one single symptom. This story is not the appearance of something novel and aberrant. Modern power works primarily through desire. It has worked this way for a long time but technology has made its operation vastly more efficient.

Desire is so much more effective than oppression! If you can't resist the seduction, what do you expect? If you wear a smart watch, use a mobile phone, use a Nest thermostat, use Amazon Alexa or similar devices, use Google, use Facebook, you made a deal with the devil. You are part of the problem. You are literally a walking bundle of sensors emitting a vast stream of data with which you can be manipulated. You have no right to be surprised when you get fucked over. That's the deal you made. That's the way it works.

See Bernard Harcourt,

[Exposed: Desire and Disobedience in the Digital Age \(https://www.amazon.co.uk/Exposed-Desire-Disobedience-Digital-Age/dp/0007180400\)](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Exposed-Desire-Disobedience-Digital-Age/dp/0007180400)

Reply (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/22/scl-and-the-phantom-contract/?replytocom=414509#respond>)

Willie

2 months ago

At the end of the day we should not be surprised at the collusion between big business, the military and the ruling elites in their manipulation of the masses.

The masses birthright is to be led, or in fact misled. To be lied to, and to believe it as your own is the game.

It was a game well played in Better Together which the majority, for one reason or another bought. And now they enjoy the fruits.

Will the farm animals ever learn or will they like the battery farmed chickens just come to accept their position.

Sadly I fear the latter. As society becomes more technological, as science enables the production of so much more, as human knowledge expands, we live in a country where the common lot for many declines as fuel poverty, low wages, reduced life expectation, becomes the ever increasing norm.

But at least we are free, and make our own decisions, in our great UK democracy.

Lifestyle choice really. Just like the battery hens.

Reply (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/22/scl-and-the-phantom-contract/?replytocom=414570#respond>)

Mathew

2 months ago

The main players at Cambridge Analytica plus Rebecca Mercer have already formed a new company called Emerdata.

Reply (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/22/scl-and-the-phantom-contract/?replytocom=414615#respond>)

Josef Ó Luain

2 months ago

Ian Blackford, ffs!

Reply (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/22/scl-and-the-phantom-contract/?replytocom=414624#respond>)

Dave

2 months ago

Given the type of behavioural sciences work undertaken by SCL, could the phantom contract of 2010/11 be related to the setting up of the Behavioural Insights Team which began inside No.10 in 2010?

Reply (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/22/scl-and-the-phantom-contract/?replytocom=415175#respond>)

Leon

2 months ago

I would of thought so Dave .

Reply (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2018/03/22/scl-and-the-phantom-contract/?replytocom=415850#respond>)

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