In a recent interview for the The Telegraph Damian Hinds, the British Minister of State for Security and Borders, named the most threatening states with which British politicians and secret service agents must contend. According to him, clear dangers are posed by Russia, China, and Iran.

That a representative of Britain’s present-day political and military elite is willing to speak in such hostile, specific, and repetitive terms comes as no surprise: ever since the 19th century London has been unsuccessfully attempting to “pacify” Russia and China, whose actions in Central Asia were supposedly a threat to the “domain of the British Empire” in the Near and Middle East. In Britain, this idea has long since become an obsession in the truest sense of the word. As such, official London misses no opportunity to demonstrate its anti-Russian and anti-Chinese bona-fides, working the media into a frenzied clamor of hostility and propaganda.

Under the cover of this popular hysteria, Britain made large-scale covert interventions in Central Asia meant to hinder the extension of Russian and Chinese influence in the region, shut their goods out of traditional markets, and take control of the trade-routes linking Moscow and Beijing to the Middle East across the Caspian and Aral regions.

For Britain, as indeed for other NATO powers, Central Asia is an area of long-standing strategic interest. To some extent this is due to the region’s significant mineral reserves, as well as its strategic location as a bridge between
Europe and Southeast Asia. For precisely this reason the West has been especially active there in recent years, trying to forestall any revival of Russian and Chinese strategic presence and to use this important bridgehead to exert pressure on both Moscow and Beijing. Secret intelligence organs have been actively employed in this effort. Thus, back in the autumn of 2005 American and British intelligence recruited elements of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (the IDU - banned in Russia) in the province of Kunduz to organize an attack on the southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan, although this operation was never actually carried out.

The appointment in June 2020 of Richard Moore, a former ambassador to Turkey, as head of MI6, Britain’s foreign intelligence service, was a move to strengthen the British position in the Central Asian theatre. He is not only a stalwart Russophobe, but also a fierce apologist for Great Turania: that is, the success of the pan-Turkist aspiration to create a state uniting the Turkic-speaking peoples in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and even for that matter in the Russian federal republics of the Volga region, the Urals, and the North Caucasus. Richard Moore has long nurtured this project. The key to London’s plans in this area is winning the support of Erdogan, president of the Turkish Republic Erdogan, and the now-head of MI6 worked to realize this aim during his ambassadorship in Turkey in 2014-2018. To this end Moore organized repeated visits to Britain where the Turkish leader met with representatives of its political-military establishment; always supported Erdogan’s course for Turkey in his official statements; and gave packing to his political party. Since the abrupt cooling of Ankara’s attitude to the USA and the EU following the failed coup of 2016, which involved partisans of the Islamist preacher Gülen and members the American secret service, Britain has practically become ‘Turkey’s leading ally in the West, with a central role played by Richard Moore. It was through Erdogan that Moore established a friendly relationship with the Azerbaijani leadership; through Erdogan that he actively observed the situation in the North Caucasus and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. British law enforcement and intelligent agencies showed a particular zeal for strengthening Britain’s position in Central Asia through their involvement with the elder daughter of Nursultan Nazarbayev and the disgraced daughter of the late Islam Karimov.

With Moore taking the helm, British intelligence has noticeably intensified its activities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Both pan-Turkist organizations have tame Islamist groups have been strengthened in order to neutralize the influence of Moscow and Beijing in the region. Turkey’s part in this great game is to serve as a kind of battering-ram for British interests.

A no less important role must be assigned to the British Council’s activities in the region: in Central Asia and elsewhere, this organization is a known front for British intelligence operatives. The British Council has covered all of Central Asia with its “projects”. Britain has extensive experience in using ethnic conflicts to broaden its influence from its imperial days, and this strategy is central to the work of British intelligence in Central Asia. Being well aware that the Ferghana valley is a potential hotbed of destabilising ethnic conflict in the region, especially for those states whose borders are entangled there, the British Council has thoroughly studied the situation there and established contacts with as many informal assets as possible: drug-barons, nationalists, and radicals are all being subjected to its “re-education”. For the last 30 years, under the banner of the so-called “Eastern Partnership” policy, the British Council has penetrated most of the state structures of the region and formed a powerful network of influence.

Under the cover of the Western coalition’s military campaigns in the Middle East against the terrorists of Daesh, British intelligence has also established contacts among several of the terrorist organizations now re-locating to Afghanistan. Daesh militants from among the citizens of Central Asian states and the Transcaucasus were given special attention as potential British assets. A clear example of this is furnished by the official confession by Dagestan native Azamat Ayvazov that he was recruited by British intelligence, who deceived him into travelling to Syria and joining the ranks of Daesh. From Ayvazov’s confession one can draw the conclusion that British intelligence operate a pipeline through which potential terrorists are moved between Turkey and Syria.

Further insight into the ties between the British secret service and terrorist groups is provided by the recent media reporting of a meeting on the Syrian-Turkish border in May 2021 between Jonathan Powell, a high-ranking representative of MI6, and the leadership of the Al-Nusra Front terrorist organization (the Jabhat al-Nusra; banned in Russia). Powell offered to remove this criminal militia from the list of terrorist organizations in exchange for its loyalty to the West. This organization is of special interest to Britain as emigrants from Central Asia fight in its multi-national ranks.

Britain has long been developing its own program for the countries of Central Asia. A full decade ago, the British parliament formed a working group for this region in which more than twenty members of the Lords and Commons took part. Its strategy was based on strengthening economic and military-political co-operation with the Central
Britain makes active use of NGOs working in the field of education to project London’s ideological influence. One of these is the University of Central Asia, founded by the Aga Khan Foundation (headquartered in London) and having branches in Kazakhstan (Tekeli), Tajikistan (Khorog), and Kyrgyzstan (Naryn). Aga Khan IV, spiritual leader of the Ismailis, is well-known for his and his family’s close ties to the British intelligence community, and himself takes an active part in advancing Britain’s political ends.

Vladimir Odintsov, political observer, writing for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.

Asian countries.