

Report reveals shocking scale of UK government's secret files on critics



London, November 20 (RHC)-- Fifteen UK government departments have been engaged in monitoring the social media activities of critics and keeping illegal "secret files" on experts to prevent them from speaking at public events, a British paper reveals.

According to a report by the Observer, the very scale of the UK government's secret files on critics is "shocking." Under the guidelines issued in each department, including the departments of health, culture, media and sport, and environment, food, and rural affairs, officials are advised to check experts' Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn accounts, the report said.

It also added that the departments are also told to conduct Google searches on those individuals, using specific terms such as "criticism of government or prime minister."

Any expert who was deemed critical of the UK government in the previous three to five years was blacklisted and not allowed to make speeches at British government-organized conferences and other events, it revealed.

The Observer has seen details of the monitoring guidelines used in several government departments.

The government's large-scale monitoring of the experts was uncovered by human rights specialists at the law firm Leigh Day, which is pursuing legal action against the government on behalf of at least two individuals.

"This is likely to have impacted large numbers of individuals, many of whom won't know civil servants hold secret files on them. Such practices are extremely dangerous," said Tessa Gregory, partner at Leigh Day. She maintains that creating such secret files on experts and then blacklisting them were illegal and run contrary to data protection laws and potentially violates equality and human rights legislation.

Dan Kaszeta, a chemical weapons expert, told the Observer this weekend that he knows of 12 others who have uncovered evidence of similar government blacklisting, most of whom are frightened of speaking out. In April, Kaszeta was disinvited from giving a keynote speech at a UK defense conference after officials found social media posts criticizing Tory ministers and government immigration policy.

"The full extent of this is shocking and probably not fully known. I was lucky enough to be given clear-cut, obvious evidence. It's truly awful," he said.

Kaszeta hired Leigh Day to take the government to judicial review, prompting the disclosure of evidence on its surveillance policies, and finally a confirmation in August that 15 departments had withdrawn these guidelines pending a Cabinet Office review. He received a public apology in July.

The British government has a long history of espionage on both local experts and foreigners alike. Earlier this year, Iran's Intelligence Ministry blamed the UK government for spying activities that led to the death penalty for a former military official.

The ministry said the execution of Alireza Akbari, a former Iranian official convicted of spying for the UK government was the "direct" outcome of a crime directed by the British spy agency.

In the early 1950s, working in tandem with the United States, British spies waged a devastatingly effective covert campaign using saboteurs, staged protests, false flag bombings, and assassinations, which ultimately overthrew Iran's then-Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq and his cabinet, putting the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi on a more brutal and dictatorial footing for the ensuing two and a half decades.

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