

Huffington Post renews smear campaign against UK Professor Piers Robinson

Julie Hyland

10 December 2018

A smear campaign against Professor Piers Robinson, chair in politics, society and political journalism at the University of Sheffield, has been renewed with an article in the *Huffington Post*.

Robinson is one of a small number of academics and independent journalists to challenge the official narrative around the “war on terror,” especially regarding the civil war in Syria. Along with Professor Tim Hayward (environmental political theory, University of Edinburgh) he is a founding member of the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media (WGSPM). Established to facilitate “rigorous academic analysis” of media reportage of the Syrian war, it investigates the role of propaganda more broadly in shaping public perception of conflicts and its connection to western geo-strategic objectives.

Earlier this year, on April 14, Robinson, Hayward and others were viciously attacked by Rupert Murdoch’s *Times* newspaper as “Apologists for Assad working in British universities,” and as “Assad’s Useful Idiots.” This was in response to the WGSPM shining the spotlight on the role of the western-backed Syrian White Helmets and its leading role in allegations that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was using chemical weapons in the conflict. Just hours before the smear appeared, Britain and France had joined the US in launching air strikes on Syria—citing one such alleged chemical attack in Douma on April 7.

Around the same time, the *Huffington Post* ran a series of smears targeting Robinson, Hayward and investigative journalist Vanessa Beeley—all penned by senior editor Chris York. In May, York again smeared the three as “pro-Assad activists” in an article on Labour-run Leeds City Council’s banning a Media on Trial event at which they were speaking. York implicitly approved the ban and noted that a *Huffington Post* report earlier in the week had “drawn attention to the event...”

An article by York, published December 4, is, if anything, even more craven and desperate than his earlier pieces in that it dispenses with any pretence of objectivity. Given the subject area of those under attack, York’s article is a case-study in embedded propaganda.

Under the headline, “This professor teaches journalism at a top UK University. He is also a 9/11 Truther,” York disparages Robinson as a supporter of “long-discredited conspiracy theories about the 9/11 terror attack.”

York does not explain what “long-discredited conspiracy theories” he is referring to. All he writes is that Robinson wrote, regarding the book *9/11 Unmasked* by David Ray Griffin and

Elizabeth Woodworth, that it represents “a serious challenge for mainstream academics and journalists to start to ask substantial questions about 9/11” in order to “search for the facts and speak truth to power.”

Robinson makes no specific claims on either 9/11 or on the substance of Griffin and Woodworth’s book. When asked by York about his own views on the 9/11 attacks, Robinson replied simply, “My position, as has been the case for some time, is that [conclusions detailed in *9/11 Unmasked*] demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that significant parts of the official narrative are very likely to be incorrect. It is no longer tenable for academics and journalists to avoid asking probing questions about the possible involvement of state actors in the 9/11 attacks. 9/11 requires further analysis and investigation and this is a position I share with many other academics.”

Robinson is being attacked for his research on Syria and not his opinion of *9/11 Unmasked* and the findings of the 23 individuals involved in the 9/11 Consensus Panel on which it is based. It is the raising of probing questions regarding the predatory aims and activities of imperialism underlying the “war on terror” that is verboten for the official propagandists for the state apparatus of Britain and the US—those whom internationally-acclaimed investigative journalist and documentary filmmaker John Pilger rightly described as “Vichy journalists.”

The Murdoch-commissioned smear had sinisterly declared that while a “society founded on Enlightenment principles of liberal rights and free expression treats untrammelled academic inquiry as sacrosanct,” for those with whom the *Times* disagreed—the “Assad apologists”—such principles did not apply. “The universities who unwittingly provide cover for these agents of disinformation and cheerleaders for despotism have a case to answer,” the *Times* asserted, effectively demanding the sacking of Robinson and his fellow academics.

The threats and slanders failed, so York has returned to the fray. “The University of Sheffield Department of Journalism Studies is one of the most prestigious in the country,” York states, before asserting that Robinson’s “work has been described as ‘conspiracy-theory driven’, ‘completely insulting’ and of having ‘no interest in truth or justice’ by academics speaking to *HuffPost UK*.”

York in fact cites just three academics to back up his claims—two in the US. Dr. Yasser Munif, at Emerson College, Boston, is quoted telling the *HuffPost UK*: “Robinson and people like him

are trying to transpose what happened in the Iraq War onto what's happening with the Arab uprisings of 2011-2 and are thereby denying the agency of the Arab population..."

Munif, originally from Syria, has condemned those on the "left" who oppose US action against Assad as holding a "kind of neutralist position... [which] is a form of tacit support to the Syrian regime because it has invited a number of different state actors, Russia and Iran and others, Iraq, and in a way, Lebanon to play a major role." Left opponents of regime-change are guilty of not recognising that the Syrian civil war involves a popular nationalist uprising and of "reducing all politics to a state-centric geopolitics."

Nader Hashemi, director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver, attacks Robinson and "his friends" as having "no interest in truth or justice... The administrators of the university that he teaches at have to be presented with this evidence. Someone who's supposed to be objective and teaching propaganda is himself a propagandist."

Hashemi's suggestion that a fellow academic should be dismissed for his teaching speaks volumes as to his attitude towards academic research and free speech. Hashemi himself proselytises in favour of the Iranian bourgeois opposition Green Movement, formed in support of Mir Hossein Mousavi. Defeated in Iran's 2009 presidential elections, Mousavi's movement was backed by powerful sections of the Iranian establishment and supported by Washington, the US media and the European powers as a potential "colour revolution."

Hashemi has argued that the US can be a positive force in Iran by elevating "the question of democracy and human rights, and plac[ing] it at the center of any future engagement with Tehran."

The other academic cited is Lydia Wilson, described as an Oxford and Cambridge research fellow and editor of the *Cambridge Literary Review*. She is even more forthright in her insistence that Robinson should be sacked. "It is ridiculous that Piers Robinson is teaching propaganda," she told *HuffPost UK*. "The most troubling thing for me is how did he get this job? It's not hard to uncover this man... It's dangerous to students—he's working in a journalism department and he can't analyse journalism sources." York fails to make clear that Wilson is a research fellow at the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict, University of Oxford, whose members work intimately with figures at the highest echelons of Middle East government policymakers in Britain, the US and Europe.

That York's piece is a McCarthyite smear is made clear in his complaint that "Robinson's lectures and public appearances are heavily critical of western governments and media, and he often appears on Kremlin-backed channels such as RT and Sputnik." Robinson is attacked for suggesting that anti-Russian propaganda is being used to "distract from the west's 'aggressive regime change strategy' in the Middle East."

While those probing British government policy are to be silenced, the *Huffington Post* rolls out the red carpet for arch proponents and facilitators of imperialist war. The other authorities cited by York as inveighing against "propaganda" are none other than retired US General Wesley Clark and former head of Britain's foreign intelligence agency MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove.

Clark was the commander in charge of Operation Allied Force, the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, in a war aimed at dismembering the country and destabilising the Balkans carried out under the banner of "humanitarian intervention." Dearlove oversaw Britain's secret service during the invasion of Afghanistan and the pre-emptive war on Iraq, funnelling what the Chilcot inquiry politely described as "flawed information" to justify war, such as the notorious September dossier and Iraq "dodgy dossier" justifying war based on lies that Baghdad possessed "weapons of mass destruction." This included using a description of Iraqi chemical weapons that its "source" drew directly from the plot of the movie, *The Rock*, a fact known by MI6 and concealed for six months prior to the 2003 war. Yet both Clark and Dearlove are quoted approvingly by York denying that their actions have anything to do with regime change and accusing Robinson of "wildly misinterpreting" them.

Robinson and Hayward have both noted in tweets that the *Huffington Post* article coincided with the WGSPM work on the Integrity Initiative (II), launched by the Institute of Statecraft in 2015. Documents leaked by internet hackers of Anonymous reveal how the supposedly independent think-tank is a Foreign Office funded black op, responsible for spreading fake news to further the geo-strategic interests of Britain's financial oligarchy.

Of note in the leaked documents are the descriptions of how the II operates "clusters" of like-minded politicians, military personnel, academics and journalists from Britain and through Europe—to spring into action against anyone deviating from the official line in favour of militarism and war. This is especially critical, not only with regards to the *Huffington Post* smear, but the *Guardian's* latest politically-motivated fabrication against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Its claims that Assange met with former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort were intended to bolster the spurious allegation that the framed-up journalist was a Russian stooge. The story has since been thoroughly discredited. While decrying "fake news", publications such as the *Huffington Post* and the *Guardian* are, in fact, busy manufacturing it.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)