

How International Organisations Became Tools of War

Today I'm talking to Dr. Piers Robinson, a political scientist, a former professor at the University of Sheffield, and currently the co-director of the Organisation for Propaganda Studies as well a research director at the International center for 9/11 justice. Dr. Robinson wrote a great article on Substack about the International Atomic Energy Agency—the IAEA— its actions in Iran, the similarities to the abused OPCW, and in general the role of “lying through institutions”, or, let's say, war-propaganda through third-party institutions. This is what we want to discuss today. Link: On the OPCW/Douma Issue: <https://berlingroup21.org> Substack Article on IAEA and OPCW: <https://piersrobinson.substack.com/p/the-iaea-and-opcw-watchdogs-for-peace> Homepage: <https://piersrobinson.com/> Twitter: <https://x.com/PiersRobinson1> Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.de/citations?user=lyN2ZZEAAAAJ>

#M3

The underlying logic and rationale of what we see with the OPCW and the IAEA, and what we saw back in the 1990s, is to create essentially a propaganda narrative that justifies Western belligerence and aggressive war fighting. And as you say—and of course, this is Mearsheimer's argument in "Why Leaders Lie"—in liberal democracies, you actually get more lying going on because populations have to be led to believe that their countries are doing the right thing.

#M2

Hello everybody, this is Pascal Lottaz from Neutrality Studies, and today I'm talking to Dr. Piers Robinson, a political scientist, former professor at the University of Sheffield, and currently the co-director of the Organization for Propaganda Studies, as well as the research director at the International Center for 9/11 Justice. Dr. Robinson wrote a great article on Substack about the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, its actions in Iran, and the similarities to the much-abused OPCW, and, in general, the role of lying through institutions—or, let's say, war propaganda through third-party institutions.

This is what we want to discuss today. So, Dr. Robinson, welcome. Good to be with you. Thanks for taking the time, because you looked into the IAEA a bit, but your main expertise is on the OPCW. You can maybe really help us shed a little bit of light, because what we've seen happening over the last couple of weeks is how this international institution—the IAEA—which is located in neutral Austria and is supposed to be a neutral arbiter, a watchdog on all things, has been used to create a propaganda case for war against Iran. Can you maybe lay that out for us?

#M3

Yeah, I mean, to start with the IAEA and the issues surrounding Iran and the attacks on Iran—well, you know, we're in these early stages where one needs to investigate this formally and from an academic point of view. But it certainly looks as though the IAEA has become caught up, essentially, in the propaganda drive to take America and Israel to war against Iran. So you had the statement being issued by the IAEA about non-compliance literally within hours of the Israeli strike on the country. You have, of course, all of this backdrop controversy over Palantir and the Mosaic platform, which were being used to harvest data and information, and which might well have been used to allow the IAEA to actually make this statement, strongly implying or suggesting non-compliance on the part of Iran.

So in a way, especially with the timing, this has all the hallmarks of a large, major watchdog body, as you describe, becoming caught up in essentially the propaganda drive to underpin the attack on Iran and what is, in fact, a long-standing regime change operation in relation to Iran. And for me—so, working on, you know, I have worked extensively on the issue of the OPCW, which is the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which is, you know, if the IAEA is a nuclear watchdog, this is the chemical watchdog. And, you know, the OPCW has been involved for many years in the chemical weapons allegations in Syria.

Um, and, you know, we have a big body of evidence documenting now the manipulation and, effectively, the corruption of parts of that organization in order to point the finger at the Syrian government in relation to alleged chemical weapons attacks, and really fitting in with a broader regime change operation against Syria—which, of course, has been successful now because the Syrian government fell in December 2024 to overthrow that country. And so, you know, in terms of what we've just seen with Iran and the IAEA, this clearly fits with what we know, and we can get into some of the details of the OPCW in a few minutes. But it fits with what we know about the OPCW. But, of course, it also fits with an even broader backdrop, going back to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and even before that, with the role of UNSCOM and UNMOVIC in Iraq, and with the weapons inspections and so on.

And there you have a similar pattern, essentially, of these organizations being used, manipulated, and if they're not allowing themselves to be manipulated, becoming sidelined, and so on. But essentially operating within this context whereby they're very much operating at the behest of Western foreign policy interests. So, you know—and I'll finish the summary here—this is a large sort of backdrop and pattern, or framework pattern, we can see now where these organizations, which of course are established to maintain international peace and so on, have actually become subverted to the interests of, in this case, Western regime change operations in the international system. And of course, it's a major issue because these institutions are effectively serving as propaganda for war. They do.

#M2

And they are supposed to do the opposite, right? They're supposed to be there in order to prevent escalation from happening. And now we see how they have systematically, over the past decades, been used. But can you maybe trace this back? I mean, going to the OPCW is the obvious thing to do, but you said there are also precursors to that. Since when do the levers of power use these international organizations in order to pursue regime change operations?

#M3

Well, I'm sure that I'll be criticized by some of my friends and colleagues for not going far back enough in time as to when this process of manipulation of international organizations starts. I mean, I guess one way of looking at this is to just apply some basic international relations theory, right? You know, we have the liberal interpretation of the international system, or the institutionalist interpretation, which perceives or argues that to some extent these kinds of organizations are reasonably autonomous, or autonomous to a degree, and can perform the role they're supposed to. But of course, the realists have never bought into that at all.

And the realists have always maintained this line that international organizations are a facade for realpolitik at the end of the day. And it has always been the case. Without getting ourselves bogged down in the long, deep history of the formation of the United Nations and so on, I think in terms of this very obvious use and abuse of prohibited weapons watchdogs, as it were, you can go back to Iraq in 1991, Operation Desert Storm over the invasion of Kuwait. After that, of course, you then had UN resolutions requiring Iraq to disarm its chemical, biological, and nuclear programs, etc. UNSCOM was the UN organization set up—the weapons inspectors—and of course, the famous Scott Ritter was part of UNSCOM for various phases.

And throughout the 90s, it became increasingly apparent that, on the one hand, you have the United Nations authority being stamped on this idea that Iraq must comply, it must disarm, and so on, following Gulf War I. And really, throughout the 1990s, it became increasingly clear, at least to the Iraqis and then to some observers—and I think Scott Ritter makes this argument—that in fact, UNSCOM was also, it wasn't just checking for verification, making sure that the biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons were being destroyed. It was also gathering intelligence and passing that intelligence to the CIA, or even that some of the people actually in the operation were CIA. And effectively, it was serving up intelligence which was going to be used as part of a regime change war, identifying targets to hit within Iraq.

And that was becoming more and more apparent during the 1990s. The second thing was this idea that whatever Iraq did in order to demonstrate compliance, new problems or errors in reports, etc., would be identified and used to present to the UN Security Council to say, "Look, Iraq is not in compliance. We need to maintain the sanctions." So this continual sort of search for weapons of mass destruction, with Iraq always saying, "Look, we've got rid of them all. We're not producing these things anymore," and then the inspectors throwing up bits of evidence and so on to show that,

well, there's an indication of noncompliance here—that was just being used to maintain the broader sanctions against Iraq.

So you can see how this strategy is designed ultimately just to maintain the pressure on Iraq. And that's throughout the 1990s, until the inspectors were withdrawn when Clinton bombed in 1998. And then they were withdrawn before they went in again in the run-up to the Iraq War, where the whole cycle started again, with Hans Blix, of course, being in charge of the inspections. And again, the Americans were pressing for confirmation of their intelligence that Iraq had WMDs. So I think that's a good starting point in terms of understanding how we get to where we are now, in 2003, in terms of some fairly well-documented and obvious corruption, manipulation, and use of, in this case, the UN weapons inspections in order to serve, in this case, US strategic interests against Iraq.

#M2

Yeah, and what you just said, you know, this constant pressure to actually then produce evidence for what the United States wanted to have as evidence and in order to use it publicly, that culminated in Donald Rumsfeld's famous, stupid sentence: "Absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence." It's like a logical fallacy in and of itself. But that was the pinnacle on which they pinned this "we have proof for WMD" claim, which later was, of course, completely, utterly, 100% deconstructed. And there's no question about it anymore, right? I was going to say, as well as the "known knowns" and so on that he came up with—"known knowns" and "unknown knowns," blah, blah, blah. But all of this, you know, this is a constant pyramid then of propaganda. And part of that, a big part, is built on a very thick layer of previous work through these institutions. And I think the OPCW is also a primary case. Can you maybe explain again what that whole scandal is about? Because the WMDs are well known, the OPCW less so.

#M3

Yes, I mean, for sure. I think you're absolutely right. I think it is well established, even from an academic point of view, that the WMD intelligence was manipulated and so on. There were not any there, etc. So you start to understand how the game was being played in relation to Blix and so on. But, of course, also in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq—and this is a segue into the OPCW—José Bustani, who was the first Director General of the OPCW, was forced from office, effectively at the behest of John Bolton. And I believe that José Bustani even claims that John Bolton intimated to him that "we know where your children live in New York." So a threat, clearly, to José Bustani. He was forced out of the OPCW principally because he wasn't playing ball with the American intelligence claims about Iraqi chemical weapons and so on. So he was forced out.

He successfully won an International Labour Organization investigation or complaint against the U.S. subsequently. So he was unfairly forced from his position as Director General. But that was a little indicator of what was then going to transpire, with the OPCW moving forward to 2011, 2012, where you have the start of the regime change war against the Syrian government, and against the

backdrop of the Arab Spring—which is a very questionable set of phenomena as well, as you well know. But you had then essentially an attempt to overthrow the Syrian government, and you then had, over a period of time, a buildup of allegations of chemical weapons use. This actually started quite early, in 2012, and the most prominent early alleged attack was in Homs. This actually kind of derailed because it was initially presented and sold as a nerve agent attack, but it quickly became apparent this wasn't the case at all.

And even the U.S. State Department backed away from the claim, saying, no, this seems to be people confusing riot control gas, etc., with sarin and so on. But then, of course, in 2013, you had the Ghouta mass casualty attack, which was all in the context where you had the Obama administration issuing a red line to the Syrian government, saying that any use of chemical weapons would be justification for the U.S. to launch a massive attack on Syria. That was in 2013. I don't want to get too much into the controversy around that—Seymour Hersh immediately argued that this was an attack carried out by opposition groups. The evidence from his contacts was that the sarin traces were, in fact, not from Syrian government stocks.

They were from opposition groups. Also, there's a kind of circumstantial evidence around August 2013: the Syrian government had actually invited in the United Nations and the OPCW to investigate an attack on their own soldiers. In March 2013, literally the day after a sarin attack on their own soldiers, they went straight to the United Nations Secretary General and said, "Look, our soldiers have been attacked. It looks like a nerve agent. We want you to come in and investigate." And then, when the OPCW-UN team finally got in to investigate in August of 2013, literally within a week or so of having arrived in Damascus, there was suddenly a sarin rocket attack in the suburbs of Damascus, right in full view of the UN-OPCW weapons inspectors.

So one is being asked to believe that Assad, having invited UN-OPCW teams in to investigate an attack on his own soldiers, then chose to launch a mass sarin attack in Damascus in front of the UN-OPCW weapons inspectors, which is an absurd proposition. But you had that event, and then you had the pressure for America to launch—for Obama to intervene. The Russians ended up brokering a deal with the Syrian government, saying, "Look, maybe the best way out of this at this point in time, even if you are not responsible for carrying out this attack, the best thing to do is just to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention." And that's what Syria agreed to do.

So it happened. Syria handed over all of its stockpiles of sarin, which were principally strategic stockpiles designed to counter the Israeli nuclear threat. And so you had Syria's accession to the CWC, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and you had the oversight of the dismantling and destruction of all of its missiles and sarin stocks and so on. End of the program—2013. Then in 2014, you suddenly have the emergence of allegations that chlorine gas cylinders are being dropped from helicopters on the population, and the Syrian government, having acceded and given up its sophisticated sarin stocks, had now decided to start dropping gas cylinders of chlorine from helicopters—the kind of gas that you have in swimming pools, for example, the kind of materials that you put into swimming pools.

And that's where the OPCW really started to become involved, because they were then tasked with responding to these allegations that the Syrian government had suddenly decided to start dropping chlorine gas cylinders. They set up what became known as the fact-finding missions, which were basically teams sent in to investigate alleged attacks. This was going on for many years—from 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, this was occurring. And this is—and I'm conscious of time—this is where the start of the problem with the OPCW begins, and you can see it quite clearly.

The fact-finding missions that were set up were not operating within the framework of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The fact-finding missions had no oversight from the scientific divisions of the OPCW. So, the Verification Division, for example, had no oversight or involvement in the fact-finding missions. They were all controlled from the Office of the Director General. So essentially, you had bureaucratic, or political, control of the fact-finding missions that were sent in to investigate these alleged attacks. There was no proper scientific oversight or management from the Office of the Director General. And, of course, as time went on—the Office of the Director General was staffed, for example, by someone who held a significant position in that office. It was then staffed by Sébastien Braha.

And both of those individuals—Sébastien Braha is a career diplomat from France, and Robert Fairweather is a career diplomat from the United Kingdom. So you had people who were essentially associated with countries that were belligerents in the war against Syria. Both France and Britain were involved in, for example, bombing Syria, etc. That's the heart of the problem with the fact-finding mission that was sent in. It wasn't until 2018 that the kind of problem this was creating, in terms of the distortion of investigations, became absolutely transparent. In 2018, there was an alleged chemical attack in Douma, a suburb of Damascus. The short story from that is that ultimately two of the scientists involved in the investigation effectively blew the whistle, revealing that the investigation had been corrupted in order to point the finger at the Syrian government.

And this came out through leaked documents in 2019. There was testimony from an OPCW official to a panel in Brussels detailing what had gone on. But perhaps the clearest and earliest example of the corruption of the investigation of the Douma alleged attack was the initial report that was produced and written by Brendan Whelan, one of the most experienced inspectors in the OPCW. The initial report on Douma essentially said—reading between the lines—this doesn't quite look right. The cylinders, which are supposed to have dropped from helicopters and smashed through roofs, don't have enough damage on them to confirm that that's the case. The 43 civilians who died in a building as a result of this attack don't appear to have died from chlorine gas poisoning.

Their symptoms are not consistent with that. And so this first report had all of these kinds of issues raised, which essentially painted the picture that actually this might well be a staged attack. If the civilians didn't die from chlorine, etc., if the cylinders weren't dropped from helicopters, for example, then you've got something else going on—not a Syrian government attack. Now, his report, which was agreed upon by all the team who went to Douma, was secretly altered at the last minute by

somebody—whose identity we still don't know, although we have our suspicions—in order to remove all of those doubts and essentially make the suggestion that the Syrian government had dropped chlorine gas on Douma.

And this was essentially the start of the internal bust-up within the OPCW, when Brendan Whelan, having discovered that the report had been doctored and changed by somebody, basically issued an internal protest. Those documents are now out in the public domain. So what you had there is—just to go back to where we started with the FFM—you have an investigation being carried out, the team writes the initial report—not the final report—the initial report raising lots of very serious questions. Then somebody else comes in, takes the report, rewrites it, and then attempts to publish it, creating a *fait accompli* so that the team—well, the report is out and there's nothing we can do now.

And that was the start of the sort of corruption within, or the corruption of, the Douma investigation. And, you know, it goes on and on from there. There have been many years now where I've worked alongside Hans von Sponeck, José Bustani, and Richard Falk, representing the OPCW whistleblowers. This is being discussed at the UN Security Council level; it's being discussed within the OPCW, and there's effectively a standoff at the moment between the Americans, the French, and their allies in the OPCW versus Iran, China, Russia, and so on, who are saying, "Look, these questions need to be addressed," etc. But this gives you a clear idea of how the investigations were manipulated.

You have political control of the investigations. And when inspectors start to find something that is inconvenient for the narrative you're trying to maintain, you have to alter their reports. In this case, when the whistleblowers effectively revealed what had been going on, the response, of course, was not—which would have been the reasonable response—to say, "OK, so we have lead members of the team raising questions about manipulation. Let's have a proper investigation." What the OPCW then did, led by the Director General, Fernando Arias, was to smear and condemn the whistleblowers—the scientists, his own scientists, and so on.

And he continues to do that to this day, and so on. So you can see that the OPCW is caught in this propaganda narrative in relation to chemical weapons in Syria. Inspectors try to do their job, and when they succeed in getting closer to the truth, they then get shut down. Their reports are sidelined, and then they themselves are smeared—at the behest of, in this case, the Director General of the OPCW. So he's complicit in the cover-up in relation to Douma and Syria. So that's a long, complex story squeezed into about 10 minutes or so.

#M2

Yeah, and you have to give the historical background of this because that's part and parcel of the whole thing, right? The whole game is to have a story that is so complex and so difficult that you actually need a fact-finding mission, so that you can then start manipulating the outcome of that, right? And you can engage in writing the history—the history the way that you need it to be in order to lead to intervention as being the only reasonable and also, like, good thing to do, right? The

morally right thing to do is to start a massive bombing campaign of Syria. And you can see how the OPCW and so on was also used by the hawks in the US to argue that Obama set red lines and then he didn't follow up. Darn it, we're so weak. Oh, so weak, so weak.

You're enabling more of these war crimes that then feed into this frenzy. And this is where I think it's really important to also discuss this nexus between propaganda and the manufacturing of events. I mean, these events are manufactured in order to justify things to the general public. Or do you see another reason? So I see the propaganda value as the main reason, because in liberal societies, you constantly need to explain why we need to go and bomb to smithereens other people's homes and the people in them, right? Because we have this urge to see ourselves as the good guys. We need to be the good guys. Therefore, we need to catch the bad guys red-handed. Is that the only reason why this is happening, or are there other issues at play?

#M3

Well, I think the way you described it is right on the money. What's the best way of describing this? The underlying logic and rationale of what we see with the OPCW and the IAEA, and what we saw back in the 1990s, is to create essentially a propaganda narrative that justifies Western belligerence and aggressive warfighting. And as you say—and of course, this is Mearsheimer's argument in *Why Leaders Lie*—in liberal democracies, you actually get more lying going on because populations have to be led to believe that their countries are doing the right thing.

So Western leaders are particularly motivated to engage in deception and lying, unlike authoritarian states and so on—so his argument goes. So this becomes a big part of Western democracies maintaining, as you say, this sense of moral legitimacy and superiority: we're the good guys, they're the bad guys. We follow international norms; they don't. And so within that framework, if you can then tell a lie that the baddies are using chemical weapons, nuclear weapons, etc., it becomes a powerful, legitimating rhetoric for your own populations and allows you to pursue essentially aggressive regime change wars and so on.

And I think that's the major reason: to maintain that facade of legitimacy and moral superiority, etc., as we're fighting these regime change wars, which have been going on for a long time and which we know about from Wesley Clark and from lots of other documents—that these were planned from the 1990s and so on. So that's a very important component. But it's not just publics; I think it's also about rallying global opinion as well. Because you see this playing out in the OPCW, in the Conference of States Parties, for example. You see it playing out in the UN Security Council, in the General Assembly, when these issues come up. The West is also trying to tell the world that these are the bad states, these are the good states.

If you want to be with us, you need to align against China, Russia, Iran. And actually, those countries all come up in the OPCW controversy. Russia has been accused of being involved in Syrian government mendacity surrounding alleged chemical weapons, etc. Iran has always criticized what

was done to the OPCW inspectors who blew the whistle, etc. But all these countries have to be identified as the enemy competitor states to the global audience, and so on. So when they're trying to pull over the big players in the international system—for example, India or Brazil—I think this is part of the game. The propaganda feeds into that sort of battle and discourse around trying to push and cajole powerful countries to come on board with our position in relation to any given conflict.

At haste and thread, we see the same playbook going on in Ukraine, of course, because the OPCW is being used to accuse the Russian Federation of using—well, in this case, yes, violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, but not sarin or chlorine; rather, I think it's riot control gases where the OPCW is going on this. But of course, that is part of the broader battle for the West to win hearts and minds in relation to Ukraine, Russia, and so on—again, using the same technique. So I think the audience is multiple: it's both the global, the diplomats, etc., as well as world public opinion, but also, critically, the population at home, who they have to either keep sort of hoodwinked or fully in support of the wars which are being fought.

#M2

Yeah, propagandizing at home, propagandizing abroad. But how big is the factor of, you know, let's say, a more direct military rationale or power-political rationale? Because, as you pointed out, the OPCW was also used to spy on Syria and to find targets. And we now have indicators that the IAEA did a very similar thing for the US when it comes to installations in Iran, right? So you can use it for intelligence. And then you can also, I don't know, you can use it to directly attack the other side. And you can use it in order to convince the other side to let down their guard, right? And basically even get rid of a couple of weapons that, if push comes to shove, might actually save them, right? So you have several—it's really, really convenient to have these tools of power implementation, isn't it?

#M3

Yeah, I mean, I think that's a very good point. I mean, in one sense, when I talk about propaganda, propaganda isn't just about sort of winning hearts and minds in the sense that it's purely discursive. It's always about trying to affect the real world. So the propaganda narrative, whether it's on Iraq or Syria or Iran, is about keeping the populations on board so that you can then attack the country, so you can carry out action in the real world. Now, as you just rightly pointed out, you see this clearly with the IAEA, that you have this direct link where you can use the information that you're gathering. The fact-finding missions, possibly—certainly in the case of UNSCOM—were being used to spy; certainly we have this evidence on the IAEA, etc. And that has direct military use and so on. And so clearly there's that component to it.

I think there's also understanding these essentially as false flag processes. After Douma, France, Britain, and America bombed Syria. After Khan Shaykhun—alleged nerve agent attack in 2017—the same countries bombed. You create these events in order to then allow, to create justification for

direct military action. And certainly with the IAEA in Iran, it seems to have dovetailed with a very concerted attempt by Israel and partially the US to overthrow the Iranian government. So that's the kind of military logic. And I think sort of false flag or manufactured war triggers are how these, as it were, fabricated or staged events feed into direct military action and so on. So, yeah, and again, I mean, in relation to Syria, without getting into too many of the details, but with the Syria alleged chemical weapons attacks, I mean, these are real things, right?

It's not that the whole thing has been fabricated. There are elements of fabrication around them, but you also have real attacks occurring. It's just that the attribution or responsibility for them is not the Syrian government; it's the opposition forces and so on. So you have real attacks being conducted, real people being killed. And in the case of many of the instances that we have looked at of alleged chemical weapons incidents in Syria, you have the paw prints of Western intelligence services in the background around these things. So, you know, these are intelligence-linked activities—not just about perception propaganda at home, but also about enabling direct military action as part of the regime change war strategy.

#M2

From your research, what would need to be done in order to prevent this? Because it seems that part of how this works is that powerful countries are able to install their people, right? Especially if you install them in the director general position and so on—a few key positions and you've basically got the thing under control. Now, we need an OPCW, we need an IAEA, we need international institutions because they're supposed to have this mediating function, right? Trust-building and so on and so forth. We shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater when we say, "Okay, we need to get rid of those things." But we need them to work. Can you think of an example of an international organization that actually does its job correctly and is not corruptible to that level? And what is it that creates this corruptibility?

#M3

Well, I'm not sure if I can think of an international organization which is doing a good job because I haven't been investigating them systematically. All I know a lot about is the OPCW and then, of course, the backdrop in relation to Iraq and now with Iran and the IAEA. I mean, in terms of how do you get these systems to function correctly? Going back to the point we made earlier, realists—the realpolitik analysis—they'd say it's never going to work. These things will never be more than window dressing for power politics. Now, of course, let's go with a kind of liberal idea that maybe these institutions can be made to work. I mean, some of this isn't overly complicated.

I would say the first thing is that trying to shine a light on what has been going on is the essential first step, which is, in a way, what I've been doing, along with Hans, Jose Bustani, and Richard Falk—trying to show what's been going on. Because if you take people—I know it sounds terribly complex when I'm talking about some of these cases—but actually, when you look at some of these alleged

attacks and you look at the reports, you see how manifestly absurd some of the claims are that are being made. You know, they don't put an awful lot of effort into these propaganda campaigns or these staged events, and if you look closely, you can actually see that these are flawed.

So gaining that transparency, finding a way of explaining to people what has been going on, I think goes a long way, because when they know that they're being watched and so on, that can start to modify behavior. After Douma, by the way, in 2018, there were no more alleged chemical attacks in Syria. So I think it's very plausible that the intelligence agencies who were orchestrating these attacks realized with Douma, now that there are scientists coming out from the OPCW saying this is not what's going on—what the British and American governments are saying—that they realized maybe time's up on this, that we can't carry out these attacks anymore, and so on.

So transparency helps, and it helps you move closer to having organizations that are going to be doing their job. But to gain proper transparency, you really need a functioning mainstream media that is going to report on the issues, and of course, we're up against that brick wall. There are multiple issue areas where the mainstream media doesn't do its job. I think, in more practical terms—and certainly this is what we argue in relation to the OPCW—simply bringing the fact-finding missions into the framework of the Chemical Weapons Convention would be a start.

OK, making sure that those investigations had oversight from the scientific divisions, for example, that their work had to be peer-reviewed, would be a huge step forward in terms of improving the quality of those investigations. Another thing—and this connects with the point about the involvement of intelligence and Western-linked actors—is that the OPCW fact-finding missions became completely reliant upon evidence being handed to them by essentially third parties, which in Syria ended up being the White Helmets, who were, of course, linked to the British government, set up by a former British military officer, James Le Mesurier, and so on.

So if you think about it from a scientific point of view, or even just from a legal or police investigation point of view, it's absurd to be relying upon essentially participants in a conflict for evidence, because it opens the door for that evidence to be corrupted and manipulated—which is exactly what you can see in many of these investigations: corrupted and manipulated evidence, etc. So, trying to simply take, say, the fact-finding missions onto a normal, as it were, scientific, objective footing, where you don't allow them to be fully reliant upon information coming from groups who are clearly aligned in the conflict—that would be a start. So, all of those kinds of practical things can be done. But this is the argument that Clare Daly and Mick Wallace made, because they produced a report for the European Union following the Douma controversy, and it was partially about that, but also partially about how the solution to this is: the Chemical Weapons Convention is good, just make sure you stick to it, and so on.

And so, in a way, greater adherence to the kind of regulations and norms that should be established would be one way to make these things effective. How you achieve that, I don't know. How you create political will for an area where international organizations don't get much scrutiny from

journalists and from the wider public, right? They are seen as rather abstracted from the reality of most people's lives. People know about UN Security Council meetings and so on—they get reported, and so on. But I don't think it's a particularly transparent, scrutinized, or even visible strata of governments in international politics. So, where you find the political will to get them to do their job properly is difficult to ascertain.

Having said that, I mean, you know, there's a lot of public engagement globally now in relation to what's happened—the genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. So, you know, there's always scope for, I think, scrutiny and attention to increase. I mean, Hans von Sponeck and Richard Falk—their Princeton book, which was out last year—is all about how do we rescue the United Nations. So, for those viewers who don't know, Hans von Sponeck was a former Assistant Secretary-General in the 1990s. He resigned over the Iraq sanctions policy. Richard Falk is an emeritus professor in the US. But both of them are very connected, obviously, with the United Nations throughout the course of their careers.

Their position in their book is that the UN is very broken. It's a thoroughgoing review of all the corrections that now need to be made in order to rescue the United Nations and get it back to its founding principles and what it was supposed to do when it was set up, which was to maintain international peace and security—because that was its primary goal—and to prevent genocide, of course. So I think there is a mammoth task there, but the solutions are not complicated. These aren't complicated problems, at least regarding the corruption we're talking about. I think the challenge is creating the political will, where people are willing to push through for change.

#M2

Yeah, but political will is only one part. The other is creating the mechanisms that prevent this kind of stuff from happening, right? I mean, I think the OPCW is a prime example of how you must not allow a Secretary-General to run independent investigations under the umbrella of the OPCW. You need to create an institution which itself has, A, transparency rules, and B, review mechanisms. I mean, we see international organizations where, because they are not corruptible, actually the United States had to checkmate them. I'm thinking of the World Trade Organization.

The World Trade Organization doesn't work because its review mechanism is now being blocked, but that's because the organization itself is set up in a way that actually gives different parties equal chances to escalate their cases. And obviously that's something that was missing in the OPCW, and apparently it's something that's missing in the IAEA. So the political balance within the system that prevents one party from taking over the entire organization and using it as a façade to the outside world is crucial. Do you think that the OPCW and the IAEA, the way that they work today, are reformable, or do we need to already write them off as, "Okay, it didn't work, we need to build something else?"

#M3

Well, I think the WTO is a good example. I mean, you're probably looking at the structures through which they were set up and established—those need a root-and-branch reform, ultimately. I mean, again, just going back to the last answer, the simple response is just to make sure that they operate within the framework of the agreed Chemical Weapons Convention.

#M2

Which is a good convention. It's a sound, solid convention.

#M3

Everybody wants it. Yeah, and you force adherence to that. I mean, for example, initially, the OPCW was meant to be everything—it had to be by consensus. Everyone had to agree. At some point down the road, they just dropped that, so it was then sort of majority voting rules that were brought in. But of course, that just becomes vulnerable to the kind of pressuring from the big players. And this is exactly what we see in relation to the OPCW Douma controversy, where you have the US basically muscling, rallying the countries in its camp to vote for it, and so on. And you just basically have, as is often the case at the States Parties' Conference now, countries trading political insults at each other, and so on.

So it's become highly politicized and so on. So I think, you know, is there a mechanism by which you can force these organizations to stick to the treaties? Well, no. In effect, there isn't, ultimately. I mean, you're not able to, for example, take legal action against international organizations if they're demonstrably corrupt. They're protected from that, and so on. So maybe that's something which should be changed. Maybe international organizations should be—for example, in the case of the OPCW whistleblowers, when they revealed the truth and then were basically smeared and had their careers ruined by the OPCW—whistleblowers should have a right to take legal action against the OPCW, the Syrian government as well, etc.

Maybe that's a road to go down to make sure that accountability can be forced through that mechanism. But I think with the OPCW, I mean, this has been going on a long time now. And of course, it's focused around Syria. But I think if you look at the way in which countries within the Western camp are pouring money into the organization, you see the Director General signing checks and so on, and submissions at the OPCW in terms of funding support for the next two, three years, etc. This thing is just so highly politicized and so clearly within the camp of, as it were, Western powers and not the rest of the world. I don't think it should just be ended, but I think you need to have a scale of investigation and reorganization which is essentially comprehensive of the organization.

I suspect with Syria, I suspect that you've got a lot of... You've not just got people who are co-opted by Western powers and the OPCW. I suspect you've also got intelligence people who have managed to get into the organization. It was certainly the case with UNSCOM in the 1990s. There's no reason

to think that isn't the case with the OPCW now. So when you've got an organization that is that corrupted, you've got an awful lot of work to do. But I think, you know, in the long run, yes, it should be maintained. These things, as with the United Nations, do potentially serve an important role to avert war and so on. But, yeah, an awful lot of work needs to be done to recover them. Yeah. So...

#M2

Yeah, no, I agree. I mean, we need these organizations. And if we don't have them, we need different ones. And then we just create the same problems again, right? So that's why this research is very important—so that we understand where these things fail. And one fascinating thing is, usually when we create institutions that fail, we usually create new versions of them. The UN is a new version of the League of Nations. The International Court of Justice is the successor of those structures. We know when we have a good idea. We know that we should make it work. We just don't seem to be there yet.

#M3

Yeah, and I know that some people say that you can never create a situation where these global-level organizations will ever do more good than harm. And I don't think I really go with that. I think these can be a force for good. I think you see it playing out in relation to, at least, the UN creates a platform for awareness about what's happening in Gaza. Yeah, okay, even though it's been ineffective at times, at least it gets it on the agenda and so on. And of course, you know, as part of the idea of the UN is this notion of dialogue and communication. So, you know, this is a worthwhile challenge to take on. Just because it's failed—like the League of Nations failed before—and just because the OPCW has failed so badly over the last 10 years, doesn't mean that we shouldn't at least hold on to some hope that we can get it right next time.

It's a continual struggle, right? Maybe we just have to go through phases where the institutions are set up, they work for a period of time, and then they become corrupted. Then you have to go through this kind of root-and-branch reform, and so on. So maybe you're in a continual battle against power, conceding some ground to the realists, and so on. So you never get there. You're not going to get to a UN, OPCW, or IEA that is perfect and doing its job absolutely properly. It's always going to be a battle and a struggle against nefarious actors who want to use them for their own ends.

#M2

Absolutely. And of course, the point is that power always seeks to gain more power. Therefore, they try to use every avenue they have. So, in a sense, the struggle will never end. Can we constrain them enough or not? Dr. Piers Robinson, where can people find you and your analysis?

#M3

I mean, as you said at the start, I'm involved in a number of organizations, which all have websites. I have my own Substack—it's really scattered everywhere. I think if people go to my Twitter handle—sorry, X handle, excuse me—Twitter, which is @PiersRobinson1, that really has all the links to either organizations I work with or my own personal writing, but also to things like Google Scholar, for example, so that my academic output can be accessed through there. So maybe going to my Twitter handle is the best place. I do have a WordPress site, Piers Robinson, which has a bio and also a summary of publications and appearances, and so on. So people can check the work out there. Sorry to not be more precise, but I tend to get involved in a lot of different things these days.

#M2

Perfectly fine. Better too many than too few. I'll put the links to everything you just mentioned in the description of this video below. Check it out there. Dr. Robinson, thank you very much for your time today.

#M3

Thank you very much.