



📷 The Finsbury Park mosque, north London, whose reputation Bob Lambert helped to turn around.
Photograph: Martin Godwin for the Guardian

The "[exposure](#)" of the former special branch officer Bob Lambert comes at a convenient time: it can serve as a distraction from the scandals that have engulfed the neocon tendency in the government. Lambert has been a staunch critic of the government's Islamophobic rhetoric and exclusivist policies. This, to a large extent, explains the excitement that has greeted disclosure of information about Lambert's past career among certain people.

These people seek to achieve two things: to assassinate Lambert's character and discredit his academic work. Both will fail.

Those of us who worked with him during the difficult decade after 11 September 2001 always knew he came from a police background, and specifically the special branch unit. It was no secret. If at any point he was involved in the infiltration of legitimate protest and political groups while being a special branch officer, then that was wrong. That being said, the political authors of such a policy should bear the full responsibility for it and not any single officer.

What has stood out about Lambert has been his commitment to peace, justice and social harmony. He was never as preoccupied with words as he was with deeds. Hence he entered into partnerships with almost everyone who was committed to these ideals.

I attended meetings with him in police stations with young men, exploring the best ways to keep them on the straight and narrow. Together, we shared a goal: to stop terrorists from undermining the achievements of British Muslims. Lambert knew that the Islamophobes were using the anti-terrorist agenda to exclude Muslims from politics. He believes this is wrong. He

argues that Muslim communities have legitimate grievances that should be not only acknowledged, but also channelled effectively through mainstream politics.

It was this approach to countering terrorism, his support for the Muslim community in their darkest hours and his stand against the rightwing politicians that made him unique.

Recently, the home secretary detained and issued a deportation order against [Sheikh Raed Salah](#), the leader of the Islamic movement in Israel. Lambert was one of the expert academics who testified against the order in court and spoke about his work in countering anarchy and terror on our streets. In his characteristically balanced statement he acknowledged the work of the [Community Security Trust](#), the group that lobbied the home secretary, in combating fascism. But, he pointed out that their analyses on Israel lacked balance and objectivity.

Academically, Lambert was very critical of the divisive and negative role played by the thinktank [Policy Exchange](#) and its influence on official policy - not just at home but also in foreign policy making. They have, for many years, targeted groups that particularly support Palestine, such as [Interpal](#). Lambert was one of those who took exception to this.

Speaking in a [recent BBC radio interview](#), Lambert criticised government policy on tackling terrorism. The policy, he said, "is demonising some of the most effective Muslim groups and organisations against al-Qaida."

In London, perhaps one of his most outstanding achievements was in turning around the Finsbury Park mosque, once a hub for followers of the notorious [Abu Hamza al-Masri](#). This mosque was a source of embarrassment for Muslims. Today it is a source of pride.

In Brixton, Lambert's work was pivotal in giving a sense of hope and direction to many youngsters. The vehicle was the [Strategy to Reach Empower and Educate Teenagers](#) (Street). This enterprise combats gang warfare in the Brixton area and helps to protect young Muslims from the lure of violent extremism. The [Centre for Social Justice](#), set up by former Conservative leader [Iain Duncan Smith](#), praised the constructive work of Street. Yet, the modest funds granted by the government have been slashed thanks to narrowminded thinking.

Those who smear Lambert have no such accomplishments. Unwittingly, though, they have vindicated him and emphasised the need for a real dialogue. If the government cannot listen to Lambert today, there is no likelihood they will listen to any Muslim tomorrow. The time for exclusion is over.

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