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# INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



**HARROGATE LIB DEM CONFERENCE REPORTS  
CANADA KASHMIR SOMALILAND**

# EVENTS

**16th June** LIBG Forum on Canadian General Election - *see page 28 - more details will follow.*

**17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> August** Young Liberals Conference, Cambridge

**20-23 September** Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference, Bournemouth

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**Cover Photo:** Culbaba Theatre – Ukrainian Women's Ensemble at Hastings Traditional Jack-in-the-Green 5<sup>th</sup> May 2025. They are an amateur refugee group aiming to keep Ukrainian culture alive, based in Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex.

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**Photographs** – Stewart Rayment, James Lewis, Phil Bennion, LDPF, Dennis Graf.

**Copy deadline for next issue 7<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

# Watson's World View

News of the Liberal victory in Canada's general election has heartened Liberals around the world. While just three months ago Canada's Liberals appeared on course for a heavy defeat, despite ten years in office under Justin Trudeau in which living standards having risen by almost every measure, new leader Mark Carney was able to lead his party to victory on a platform of opposition to the politics of the populist right. Similar signals for hope were seen in Austria's recent parliamentary election and in local elections in Vienna. While the new right remains a threat in many countries, where Liberals translate their global philosophy into local action it finds great appeal. Liberalism may often be most rejected when it is most needed but it remains nonetheless the most effective antidote to crony capitalism.

There is also increasing evidence that values can be the main determinant of success in a capitalist economy. As outlined in Mark Carney's eponymous book 'Values' and in the recent work of many other liberal economists, a market economy functions better where the application of Liberal values in government policies is effective. This gives the lie to arguments of growing economic servitude to great powers like China. It also provides a lodestar for the UK and its European and Commonwealth partners. Most of all, perhaps, it gives salience to Ed Davey's call this year for a UK initiative to entreat Canada, New Zealand and Australia into a new wider economic and security alliance with the EU.

There is however no cause for rejoicing at the pickle in which the USA finds itself. The principles of Liberalism and the rule of law are being re-asserted in the face of Trump's onslaught and may yet prevail. A world without a free USA as a counterforce to China and Russia would be far more dangerous for Liberals. Moreover, some historical context is needed. Though Trump's trade tariffs are deeply damaging at home and abroad, the USA has rarely been a nation which has sought to trade freely abroad (Presidents Reagan and Clinton being the obvious exceptions) and the impact of the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930 was similar in its club-footedness to Trump's recent actions. Neither have the EU, the UK or Canada been paragons of free trade beyond their borders.

What is needed is a return to a global, rules-based framework for international trading relations. Indeed, global rules-based frameworks to provide effective global governance and predictability in other fields of policy are also needed. The membership of the International Criminal Court needs to be boosted if its recent actions against Putin, Netanyahu and the leaders of Hamas are to bear fruit: the treaties of the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change are in need of shoring up; an initiative to outlaw the political abuse of religion such as that working its way through debate in the Council of Europe would be a useful addition to liberal armoury, as would the creation of a crime of ecocide.

Increasingly we live in a global village. Increasing, universal local democracy is required.

***Sir Graham Watson***  
**Chair, LI British Group**  
**May 2025**

very popular in Canada.





# Kashmir in Crisis: Navigating the Aftermath of the Pahalgam Attack

## Mo Waqas

I write from Pakistan, where I've been visiting family and reconnecting with my roots. What began as a peaceful visit has been overshadowed by two tragic events that have shaken the region and pushed tensions to the brink.

On 22 April 2025, militants from a group calling itself the "Kashmir Resistance" carried out a brutal attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir. Twenty-six tourists—25 Indian nationals and one Nepalese—were killed, and 17 others injured. The group claimed the attack was in response to what they view as demographic change and "outsider" settlement in the region.

Just weeks earlier, on 11 March, the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked the Jaffar Express, which was travelling from Quetta to Peshawar. Over 400 passengers were taken hostage. The standoff resulted in the deaths of 31 people—21 civilians and four security personnel among them.

These twin tragedies are not isolated; they are part of a deeper, escalating conflict across South Asia that risks boiling over.

### **The powder keg of South Asia**

This region is on edge. Fear is palpable. Each attack deepens distrust and fuels calls for retaliation. But this is not just another regional skirmish—it's a dangerous game involving two nuclear-armed states. Miscalculation could be catastrophic.

Retaliation is easy. Restraint, though harder, is the only way forward.

To New Delhi: direct your fury toward diplomacy, not retribution. To Islamabad: confront and curb extremism with sincerity, not just soundbites.

Military theatrics may please TV studios, but they don't bring back the dead. Nor do they bring peace to the farmer who works beneath the looming threat of war.

The global community, particularly the UN Security Council, must not be passive. Kashmir is not only a political flashpoint—it is a humanitarian crisis. Years of international neglect have allowed violence to fester.

### **Pakistan's power in uniform**

No conversation about Pakistan's stability is complete without naming the elephant in the room: the military. In Pakistan, the military is not merely an armed force—it is a corporate empire. From cereal to cement, sugar to steel, real estate to retail, its influence is staggering. The army owns more than any private conglomerate, while the average citizen struggles to keep lights on.

And where there's instability, there's opportunity. Conflict—even low-grade, chronic conflict—justifies bloated defence budgets, political interference, and unchecked power. The generals may not want all-out war, but they benefit from never-ending tension.

This diversion of resources and authority poisons Pakistan's civilian institutions and undermines democracy at its roots.

### **India's temptation — and its consequences**

India, too, must resist dangerous temptations. There have been growing murmurs in nationalist circles about weaponising the Indus Waters Treaty to punish Pakistan. Let me be clear: that would be a catastrophic mistake.

Water is not a tool of revenge—it is a human right. Interfering with Pakistan's water supply would not only violate international law, including the Geneva Conventions, but it would inflame tensions beyond control. Such a move would not be seen as strength—it would be seen as cruelty, and it would irreparably harm India's global image as a responsible democracy.

Instead of escalating, both countries must seek resolution. Real leadership means preventing the next war, not provoking it.

### Break the cycle

This cannot become the new normal: a tragedy, a blame game, a round of sabre-rattling, and then silence until the next explosion. Ordinary people—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians—on both sides of the Line of Control deserve better. They are not statistics in geopolitical reports. They are farmers, students, mothers, and workers, living with fear as a constant companion.

This cycle must end. Kashmir cannot remain a pawn in a regional chess match. Nor can Baluchistan's agony be dismissed as a fringe issue. These are human tragedies, not strategic talking points. We must resist the idea that war is inevitable. It is not. But it becomes more likely every time we choose provocation over prudence.

### A call to action

To the international community: do not look away. You have a responsibility—not just to mediate, but to act. Put pressure on both governments to return to meaningful dialogue. Insist on accountability, transparency, and justice—not retaliation.

And to the governments of Pakistan and India: rise above fury. You were elected to lead, not to lash out.

If we don't act now, we may soon be writing elegies for a region that once stood at the crossroads of civilisation.

Let us not let it fall into ruin.

### Mo Waqas

*Mo Waqas is Chair of the Liberal Democrat's Stockton branch and was the PPC for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East.*

This article first appeared on LibDem Voice Thu 24th April 2025





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# OBSERVING AS SOMALILAND VOTES

## Michael Grange

On announcing that I was selected to be an international election observer for Presidential elections in Somaliland I was asked several questions out of concern by family and friends. Including is Somaliland a country or is it part of Somalia, 'is it safe' and why do they need election observers. This article will address those questions and give my impression of Somaliland.

To understand modern day Somaliland, we need to step back into history. Prior to independence in 1960 it was called British Somaliland. It had been established as a British protectorate in 1884 when Britain formally took control from Egypt. The concept of a protectorate is interesting and involves an element of consent for protection against perhaps more malign actors.

Not everyone was happy to enjoy 'protection' in British Somaliland leading to the Dervish uprising in 1899. This was an anti-colonial movement rejecting the involvement of British, Italian, Ethiopian, and other forces in the affairs of Somalia people. This uprising was eventually suppressed in 1920 when the Dervish stronghold at Taleex was bombed.

### WIND OF CHANGE

For a brief period in World War 2 British Somaliland fell into the hands of Italy. After the war Britain resumed control. However, the international context had moved on. In February 1960 the famous Wind of Change speech was delivered by British prime minister Harold Macmillan to the Parliament of South Africa. Later that year the British Government announced that it would be prepared to grant independence to the then Somaliland protectorate. Finally, in June 1960 British Somaliland became independent. A few days later Italian Somaliland became independent on. The two newly independent states agreed to unite and form the independent Republic of Somalia.

Unfortunately, the new state fell under dictatorial rule from October 1969 until January 1991, ended by a very bloody civil war waged by clan-based guerrillas. In May 1991 Somaliland declared itself free from the Republic of Somalia. They argued that as they had joined Republic of Somalia as an independent country they could also exit as an independent country.

To answer the question of whether Somaliland is an independent country we can say de facto that Somaliland is independent since 1991 and is well run. It has its own army and can raise its own taxes. However, de jure it is not recognised by the international community as an independent state who view it as part of the Republic of Somalia.

It is a disadvantage for Somaliland not having independent recognition. They are hopeful that situation may change. One reason for this hope is the return of Trump to the White House.

Inherent in any trip abroad is a degree of risk. The overall security situation in a country needs to be considered and especially for travellers. Most people conflate Somaliland and Somalia. Somalia is considered dangerous to travel at all. While there appears to be some welcomed improvements in Somalia, the security situation remains dynamic.

In contrast the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) only discourages non-essential travel to Somaliland. Election observation is considered essential travel.

The security situation in a country is one factor that means it is safe or not. Given Somaliland is a developing country, travellers need to seek out medical advice. I went to a travel vaccination bureau in Dublin. I had a detailed consultation with a doctor who provided some essential vaccines and prescribed antimalarial tablets.

International election observers only attend elections where the government invites them. Credible

observer organisations comply with the UN Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

A key principle is that observers are neutral and impartial. Observers are required to obey the laws of the country and always operate to the highest professional standards.

The advantage to a country that runs clean and professional elections is that this is what election observers will see and report on. This is useful in attracting aid and investment. In the case of Somaliland, it can add to their argument that they should be recognised as the world's newest country.

Internally it can be useful to a country where levels of trust are low in the electoral system and where some parties may jump to the conclusion of election fraud to explain the outcome. If fraud was the issue that is likely to be detected and reported on by international election observers in their report. On the other hand, it can be reassuring for the losing side to know that democracy worked and rather than engage their energy in complaining they can focus on getting ready for the next election in four to five years.

Another advantage of the election observation process is it acts as a quality control highlighting good aspects and areas that could be improved in the future. While traditional international election observation was carried out in developing and post-communist countries there are solid reasons that all countries can benefit from it.

It might be useful to say what international election observers are not. They aren't there as advisors to the election authorities. I have been in situations around the world, where for example, the local election administration would ask whether a voter could vote or whether a ballot is valid. Tempting as it is to answer such questions, that was not my role and I would just suggest that they consult their managers.

I left Dublin Airport at 11 in the morning, after three uneventful Ethiopian Airlines flights I arrived in Egal International Airport, Hargeisa the capital of Somaliland. It is a small airport. After paying the visa fee of \$61



in cash, I was happy to collect my suitcase. Thankfully no luggage of observers went astray.

The election mission core team greeted us and ensured a smooth transfer to our hotel. The core team consist of a chief of mission and experts that deploy in advance of the arrival of short term observers - STOs.

Coming from Europe, I must confess shock with the state of the streets and roads. Thankfully we were transported in four-wheel drive jeeps. Somaliland is one of the poorest developing countries in the world and lacks the budget for good roads.

We freshened up and had lunch. All our meals were without alcohol as Somaliland is a strict Muslim country where the sale of alcohol is illegal. After lunch we went straight into training. Training for short term election observers is essential and follows a predictable format. There are sessions on the political and security situation, the election campaign to date, the electoral system and counting, details of deployment plans through the country and general administration.

The next morning our training continued. Later that day we were hosted by the Somaliland Election Commission to a fine presentation on their work and the electoral system. This helped reinforce our training.

The next part of the mission was the deployment of election observers to other parts of Somaliland. This is to ensure that as far as possible the election is observed throughout the country, so that overall balanced conclusions on the election would be reached.

I was deployed to remain in the capital to observe the elections there. As is common with all election missions, the observers who remain in the capital city envied those observers getting to see another part of the country while those observers envied those that remained.

The day before the election I was teamed up with observers from Italy and Spain. Short-term observers always deploy in pairs to ensure balance and a degree of security. We were introduced to our driver and a language assistant. We travelled to the location of polling stations and where possible we introduced ourselves to the polling staff. This groundwork allowed us to prepare a route plan for the polling stations we would visit. One piece of good news that we got was that normal cars were banned on election day, thankfully we had special authorisation for our jeeps. Not having to battle traffic cuts down travel time moving from polling station to station.

Finally on 13 November, election day arrived. We drove to our first polling station to see 'the opening' of the station to voters. My experience is that if a polling station gets off to a good start generally everything else goes well through the day. A good opening includes where all staff turn up, that they have all equipment and supplies that they need, and that staff are properly trained with a mix of experienced and new staff.

## SHEER ENTHUSIASM

The sheer enthusiasm of voters was remarkable. There were long queues of voters waiting to vote. One for men and the other for women. Somaliland is a traditional Islamic country, and all women wore head dress and had long dresses. Black was not in fashion rather lively colours were to be seen. Our female observers adhered to the dress code out of respect for the host country.

The processing of voters may have appeared slow by western standards, the emphasis seemed to be on doing it right rather than fast. Voters did not seem to mind the slowness of polling stations. Many voters greeted us asking where we were from. They all expressed a pride that they were citizens of Somaliland, that it was a democracy where governments changed at the ballot box.

There did not seem to be many older voters on the day. Tellingly the life expectancy in Somaliland is 50 years of age. We noticed lots of young voters, people can vote from the age of 15. The rationale is that at that age most have left education and are working.

For observers from the UK and Ireland there is a black swan moment when the polling station closes and rather sending the ballot boxes to a count centre they start to open and count the ballots. This again is a slow process. Our polling station did not finish counting and recording the votes until three in the morning.

Over the next few days, the national votes were all tabulated. This was also observed. The outcome was that opposition leader Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi<sup>1</sup>, won the presidential election. Power changed peacefully.

It was a pleasure to have observed the election in this youthful and resourceful country. I expect Somaliland will make great progress in the years ahead as a democratic country.

## Michael Grange

Michael Grange is a barrister and an election observer who works in the Irish civil service.

<sup>1</sup> Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi won with 64% of the vote. He is a member of the Xisbiga Waddani ee Somaliland, the Somaliland National Party, which Wikipedia describes as left economically, *defending the establishment of a universal healthcare system, public investment and doubling resources in education. It is progressive on issues regarding minority rights and fundamental freedoms, such as proposing a quorum of 30% of women in parliament. The party also supports greater decentralisation. Additionally, the party places great importance on Islamic moral and cultural heritage, and intends to give it a more important place in the education system and in the establishment of laws.*

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waddani>



# **Duterte arrested for crimes against humanity**

The bureau of Liberal International welcomes the arrest of former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on March 11<sup>th</sup>, following the issuance of an International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant for alleged crimes against humanity. This development marks a significant step towards justice for the victims of Duterte's controversial war on drugs, which resulted in possibly tens of thousands of extrajudicial killings.

We commend the Philippine government's decision to serve the ICC arrest warrant, signalling its commitment to uphold the rule of law and human rights. An ICC trial is essential to bring to light the extent of these summary executions/mass killings and to hold accountable those responsible for such deplorable acts. Is it also an important precedent of cooperation with ICC, as this is the first arrest in Asia.

Liberal International has consistently condemned the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines as a result of the war on drugs. While the fight against illegal drugs and criminality are valid state goals, law enforcement efforts must always respect the rule of law and the country's human rights obligations.

We echo the sentiments of former Philippine Senator Leila de Lima (LI Prize for Freedom Laureate), a vocal critic of the abuses committed during Duterte's "war on drugs." De Lima, who was wrongfully imprisoned for seven years on fabricated drug charges, stated, "Today, Duterte is being held accountable – not to me, but to the victims, their families, and a world that refuses to forget. This is not about vengeance. It's about justice being served."

The arrest of Duterte serves as a testament that no one is above the law and that justice eventually addresses impunity and blatant disregard for human rights. We remain hopeful that, at the conclusion of the ICC trial, justice will finally be served to the thousands of victims of the deadly drug war.

The ICC does not need to prove the exact number of extrajudicial killings in Rodrigo Duterte's drug war to charge him with crimes against humanity. ICC-accredited lawyer Gilbert Andres has stated that the prosecution must establish that the killings were part of a widespread and systematic attack under Duterte's leadership; that state policies enabled targeted violence. A single murder can qualify if it meets these criteria. The ICC's decision on whether Duterte will stand trial is set for September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## **A note from Front-line Turkey**

I was thinking this afternoon; it suddenly occurred to me that what is happening under Trump in the USA has actually happened under Erdoğan regime since 2010 in Turkey. It's all the same obviously it has a lot of similarities with the Nazi regime too. I went to the May Day demo. I had to walk half of Istanbul because of police barricades to get to where the demo took place and again when it finished had to walk all way back. It was like a city under invasion by a foreign force. More than fifty thousand police were stationed in Istanbul but nothing happened except few youngsters tried to get into Taksim Square and promptly arrested. I fear that there is going to be something very violent in near future over here.

# VE Day, why it is important.

## Guy Harris

Twenty years ago, I stood in St Mark's Square, Venice, with a small band of British WW2 veterans. They had last been in the Piazza in 1945, and their final flourish, after fighting Fascism in North Africa and Europe, was to land their Jeeps from lighters drawn up on the Grand Canal, and to drive them jubilantly around the famous square. They were remarkably silent in 2005, lost, I imagined, in their recollections. The black and white photos of that far off day depict amused Italian civilians watching the British soldiers, and children running excitedly behind the Jeeps.

Eighty years later, the veterans I knew have passed away, and today many of us struggle to imagine what the end of total war must have felt like: Relief whilst mourning loss; the slow draining away of mortal fear; the bracing of oneself to the immense works ahead...

And yet today, the spectre of ultra-nationalism, genocide and dictatorship is at large again... And this VE Day there is much to reflect deeply upon.

After WW2, Britain led the effort to build an international rules-based order to protect the hard-won peace that our Grandparents and Great Grandparents had literally fought and died for; that our country had been bombed into rubble for; that our coffers had been emptied for... Additional to these legal frameworks for justice, peace and human rights, Britain built the architecture of public health on the blueprint of the Beveridge Report, commissioned by the wartime coalition government. And we built homes fit for a nation of heroes so that ordinary families could live in dignity. We had won the war, and we endeavoured to win the peace.

We shouldn't let sentimentality or toxified nostalgia detract from the challenges and privations of the 1940s and 50s, but we should be clear what those sacrifices were made for: The laws, rights and values installed after WW2 are the memorials to British and Commonwealth dead, and they are the memorial to the millions exterminated in the Holocaust. They are the armour that protect us and our children from over-mighty government and from dictators far and near... Those protections are memorials not to our basest human instincts but to our highest human instincts. In times of inequality, poverty and uncertainty, those higher instincts are sometimes hard to muster. But the history of WW2 shows that they can be mustered, even in the face of fear and insecurity, and despite the siren voices of demented dictators and their cynical, self-interested disciples, who pose as patriots but are anything but...

Today, those who would demolish democracy and tear down our protections clearly do not understand what Britain's existential fight between 1939-45 was for. Nor do they really value it, other than as a cynical propaganda tool. When we recall the victory against Nazism on May 8th, we should remember that the names graven on the war memorials standing in our villages and towns mark individual human sacrifice in the fight against intolerance, hatred, racism and authoritarianism. Those sacrifices embody true British values, fought for by decent British men and women. As liberal democracy is tested at home and abroad, this May the 8th, let's remember what our forebears were fighting for and, in particular, what they were fighting against... And let's rise to their example in the coming years.

**Guy Harris**

*Guy Harris fought Hastings & Rye in the 2024 General Election, Guy has been a 'Good Samaritan' for the Burma Star Association for over 20 years and was a volunteer for the Welsh Guards Afghanistan Appeal amongst other military charities.*

# Harrogate Conference Reports

Ed Davey's speech to Conference had a strong international flavour; strong on support for Ukraine, strong on opposition to President Trump, which was also the subject of one of the main motions passed at Harrogate. The other emergency motion was Restoring International Development Assistance. As always, the Fringe was the home of vibrant international debate.

## UN Resolution 2758 and why it is important – Lib Dem Friends of Hong Kong Fringe at Harrogate

Since the United Nations General Assembly passed UN Resolution 2758 in 1971, People's Republic of China (PRC) abused it as the legal basis to exclude Taiwan from UN and its NGOs. When officials from PRC and America discussed about the Resolution before it was submitted to the UN General Assembly, they acknowledged the Taiwan question had not been resolved, since the resolution only recognised PRC to be the sole representative of China within the United Nations. After the resolution was passed, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime intentionally interpreted the terms of the resolution in their own way, and pressured UN to change its rules and internal guidelines to pursue its own One China agenda.

We are facing a turbulence time in terms of geopolitics. With the trade war between China and the United States went on, Western countries are once again tempted to review their relations with China. Yet after all these years, we all knew the threat of China to the liberal democracies and values in terms of national security, like other authoritarian regimes such as Russia. They were trying to take a balance of reconsidering doing business with China without compromising the national security. How should we tackle these challenges? What could we learn from the drama unfolded from UN resolution 2758?

In the Liberal Democrats Spring Conference 2025, we had held a fringe event titled "Lessons from UN Resolution 2758 – How Liberals must Protect World Institutes". We were honoured to have four guest speakers in our panel: Phil Bennion, our former MEP and Vice Chair of Liberal International; Neal Robbins, journalist, and the host of Taiwan Undaunted, an award-winning documentary; and Gray Sergeant, a specialist in Indo Pacific Geopolitics. We also had Raymond Sung to be our guest speaker who recorded a 10 mins video from Taiwan and will be played during the event.

During the event we had a meaningful discussion on the challenges faced by Taiwan when it came to admitting to the NGOs associated with the United Nations, and how China intentionally abused the UN Resolutions 2758 for sidelining Taiwan. The guests also raised some very interesting ideas on how to tackle the agenda promoted by the Chinese Communist Party through media, and what factors we should pay attention to when we observed the geopolitics in the APAC region. For example, Phil Bennion mentioned Taiwanese used humour to tackle against CCP propaganda on reunification, and Raymond Sung suggested the deeper engagement of civil society and party to party talks between Taiwan and the UK would be beneficial in developing a strategy on the matter.

One issue raised by the guest speakers was that how the inauguration of President Trump affected the dynamics of the diplomacy between Taiwan, China and the United States. Keep in mind the discussion was taken place before Trump's tariff wars, some guest speakers already expressed reservations on whether US under Trump administration would remain a reliable ally in the region, most notable regarding whether US remained committed to the security agreement if China took any military action against Taiwan. Some also expressed concerns over the inconsistencies of Trump decisions on his foreign policies, most notably the abolition of USAID and its diplomatic interactions with South East Asian countries to tackle the Belt Road Initiative.

This discussion is particularly important under the current geopolitical situation because even before the Trump tariff war, there are already some worrying signs on what Trump was trying to achieve. The lack of goals in the US foreign policies caused uncertainties, and its ally struggled to create any meaningful strategy to tackle the change of stance of the US while remaining its own agenda intact. For example, Japan was one of the key proponents in the US island chain strategy, and a staunch supporter of its Anti-CCP policy in the region since the Premiership of Shinto Abe; yet when Trump imposed tariff against all nations bar from a few, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba was in a very awkward situation: China already asked Japan for a co-ordinated response to the Trump administration on the matter,<sup>1</sup> and Japan had no guarantee on whether the trade deal negotiation would affect US commitment to the military cooperation between the two nations, just like when US negotiated the mineral deal with Ukraine.

The lack of diplomatic goal of the Trump administration was obvious during the trade talks between US and Japanese officials. According to the recollection of the former US Assistant Secretary of Defence Chas Freeman, 'Their experience apparently was they went to talk to the American leadership on this matter, and the American leadership said "what are you offering?" And the Japanese said "well, what is it that you want?" And the American could not explain what they wanted.' The Japanese ended up returning empty handed.<sup>2</sup>

Taiwan was in similar situation and President Lai Ching-te was well-aware of the danger. Without the security guarantee from the US, Taiwan did not have capability to defend itself in long term. Observing the Russo-Ukrainian war from afar, the regime under Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) understood the importance on maintaining its predominance in drones and defence system technology, in particular the chip manufacturing and its supply chain. Yet the US administration wanted to use the tariff war to force Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) to diversify its manufacturing facilities and supply chain to Taiwan (and buy more products from the US).

The tariff war and the inconsistency of Trump foreign policies created a void in geopolitics. The US may have changed its stance on trade and foreign policies, but the rest of the world did not. Trump administration had reduced the US authority in global politics, and there is no replacement yet. With the rise of China and India, both did not represent the interest of liberal democracy. The only alternative at the moment was European Union: Despite of its own weaknesses in terms of institutions and its ability reach to determination on the foreign policy, it is the most established institute which follows the principle of rule of law, enshrined liberal democracy, and with the most solid industrial and financial foundations. We need to cooperate with the EU for a more co-ordinated response on both China and the US and close our ties with the EU on trade relations. That was why during the Spring Conference 2025, our party passed the motion on UK response to Trump. In the motion we emphasised to 'take urgent and immediate action to boost growth by restoring the trading relationship with the EU, removing red tape imposed by the Brexit deal in line with our four-stage roadmap'.

**Larry Ngan**

'China urges Japan to help fight US tariffs together, Kyodo reports', Reuters, 22/04/2025

<sup>2</sup> Business Today Desk, "What do you want?": Veteran Diplomat says Trump Administration "could not explain what they wanted" to Japan during trade talks', Business Today, 27/04/2025.

## Liberal Democrat Friends of Ukraine

The Liberal Democrat Friends of Ukraine enjoyed a successful conference at Harrogate. A big thank you to members who helped to run our stall and to Steve Osbiston and David Lewis for organising it all. We talked to many people keen to support Ukraine in a variety of ways, whether through donations to Ukrainian organisations supporting the defence of the country or groups here supplying aid to Ukraine, through lobbying for more certainty for Ukrainian refugees facing renewal of visas this year and through advocating for improved air defence to protect the country. We also handed out a briefing on creating twinning arrangements with Ukrainian cities, towns or areas. Another 42 members were recruited taking us to more than 400! If you haven't joined yet and would like to do so or would like to receive a copy of our twinning briefing, please email us at [ldfriendsofukraine@outlook.com](mailto:ldfriendsofukraine@outlook.com).

We held an enjoyable social event for members with refreshments provided by local Ukrainians. Baroness Harris chaired our fringe event which concentrated on the issue of the uncertainty faced by Ukrainian refugees here in the UK and the detrimental effects this has on job prospects, tenancy renewals and mental health. Alina Luts, Alisa Gnydyuk, Michael Wang and Rosemary Thomas were on the panel and Lisa Smart MP also contributed to the session.

We were delighted that Sir Ed Davey's conference speech was highly supportive of Ukraine and that so many parliamentarians at the conference engaged with us and were so motivated to do everything they can to help Ukraine and Ukrainians through these extremely challenging times.

**Julia Fletcher**

*Michael Wang is congratulated in his performance in a May 1<sup>st</sup> by-election in Brighton & Hove - a battleground between the Green Party and Labour. He came third, but with a 16.1% swing to the Liberal Democrats, a portent for the battle for the mayoralty when Starmer imposes this across Sussex next year (or will he think again following the Reform UK and the less heralded Liberal Democrat performance on May Day?)*



# Hope for Gaza, Hope for Humanity

## Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine at Harrogate

LDFP's fringe event, 'Hope for Gaza, Hope for Humanity,' provided a space to hear powerful first-hand accounts from Palestinians impacted by Israel's continuing assault on Gaza.

**Nuha Shamallakh**, a business graduate and former Palestinian Red Crescent Volunteer, shared her experience of fleeing Gaza after her home was bombed by the Israeli military, offering a deeply personal perspective on the impact of the conflict.

**Saleem Lubbad**, an Oxford-based nuclear physicist, highlighted Israel's violations of international law and emphasized the urgent need for action and solidarity in the face of these breaches. As Saleem reminded us: *"We need to create hope. We can't stay silent. There can't be any peace, or solution, without justice."*

**Ehab Al Sharif**, co-founder of the British Palestinian Families Network, discussed the vital on-the-ground work of Children Not Numbers, a nonprofit organisation supporting Palestinian children affected by the conflict, and actions we can take to help and get involved as individuals.



### Informing policy discussions

Although, disappointingly, Palestine didn't feature as a major item on the conference agenda, the below amendment was added into a longer motion on the UK's response to Trump:

- i. Trump's reckless comments proposing that Palestinians be removed from Gaza and 'resettled' elsewhere - which would constitute a grave violation of international law - undermining the already fragile ceasefire and disregarding the legitimate right of Palestinians for their own state.

Foreign Affairs spokesperson Calum Miller condemned Trump's Gaza plan in his speech introducing the motion.

Additionally, in response to several questions from LDFP members during the Foreign Affairs Q&A, Monica Harding highlighted the destruction of medical facilities in Gaza and the West Bank, drawing attention to the recent surge in attacks and obfuscations of health care in the West Bank in particular.

*Lucia Messent*

## Ed Davey at Harrogate... the international bits

We meet at a time of great peril. For our continent, and for our country. Because Donald Trump is not only betraying Ukraine. It's not only their sovereignty he's selling out. It's our security. The security of Europe and the security of our United Kingdom. And that is unforgivable.

Putin might be able to fool Donald Trump into thinking that his ambitions do not extend beyond parts of Ukraine, but we know better. Just look at what he's already doing in Georgia, in Moldova, in Romania – undermining their democracies and seeking to extend his grip further into Europe.

Our brave Ukrainian allies are on the frontline. Fighting not just for their homes. Not just for their freedom. But for the freedom and security of people across Europe, including ours here in the UK. Their fight is our fight. So to our Ukrainian friends, on behalf of all Liberal Democrats, let me say once again – We thank you. We salute you. We stand with you. Today. Tomorrow. Always.

And of course, that solidarity must go beyond mere words. That's why I am proud that the United Kingdom has been Ukraine's staunchest ally right from the start. Why I am so proud of the tens of thousands of British families who welcomed Ukrainians into their homes. Showing the incredible warmth and generosity of the British people. Why I am proud of all the military assistance we have given to the Ukrainian armed forces – the tanks and training, missiles and drones to repel Putin's war machine. And it's why I was proud that the Prime Minister brought Europe and Canada together here in Britain to chart a way forward, the day after those appalling scenes of Trump and Vance ambushing President Zelenskyy in the Oval Office.

And Trump's so-called "special envoy" might dismiss British leadership as pointless posturing, but we know what it really is... Britain, leading in Europe again, as we have done at the greatest moments in our nation's history. And friends, it was good to see that again after such a long time, wasn't it? But now we must step up our efforts and do more. Much more. For the defence of Ukraine, for the defence of Europe, and for our own national defence too.

So we Liberal Democrats have led calls for far more support for Ukraine – funded by the tens of billions of pounds of Russian assets frozen in the UK, and the hundreds of billions of pounds frozen across the G7. We backed proposals for a new European Rearmament Bank, to finance a massive expansion of defence manufacturing here at home and across the continent. We pressed the Government to raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP – and now we are continuing to push for cross-party talks to get it to 3%, because the threat we face is existential.

To our east, a murderous dictator hellbent on building a new Russian empire – and committing atrocities on European soil in pursuit of it. And to our west, for the first time in my life, a President of the United States willing not merely to turn a blind eye to Putin's aggression – but actually to praise it. A President who has repeatedly demonstrated that he is not a reliable ally to Ukraine, to Britain, to Europe, or to anyone else.

So the fundamental questions we now face are these:

How do we deal with Putin? And how do we deal with Trump?

Well, let me tell you how not to deal with them. Just like any bully, you don't deal with them by curling up in a ball and hoping they'll leave you alone. You don't turn a blind eye as they attack your friends, praying that maybe they'll stop there. You have to stand up. Stand tough. Stand together with our friends. Make clear that an attack on one is an attack on all.

And that – for the vast majority of people in our country – is our instinctive response. Brits can't stand a bully. What Trump and Putin are doing offends our fundamental British values of decency, fair play, respect for national sovereignty and the rule of law. Almost everyone I speak to – in every part of our country – feels that way. But there is one man who thinks differently.

One lone holdout. Someone who simply doesn't seem to get it. A man who splits his time between GB News, Mar-a-Lago... and weirdly selling nappies on social media, apparently. A man who can even, legend has it, occasionally be spotted in the House of Commons and – if you wait long enough – in the town of Clacton-on-Sea. Nigel Farage.

Unlike you and me, Nigel Farage thinks Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin are great. Not in a "look, we have to be pragmatic and work with them" kind of way. More in a teenager with a celebrity crush kind of way.

Don't forget, when Farage was asked which world leader he most admired, his answer was Vladimir Putin. Yes, really. Now, to be fair, that was before Donald Trump became President – so I guess Putin might have slipped to number two by now.

A tyrant responsible for the brutal suppression of Russia's own people, and countless atrocities in Ukraine. Who has murdered thousands of innocent civilians. And abducted 20,000 children from their homes. Snatched them away from their families.

That, apparently, is the sort of man who wins Nigel Farage's admiration.

How despicable. How completely out-of-touch with British values. With human values. How unpatriotic. How deeply un-British. And this from a man who thinks he can be our Prime Minister. Not on our watch.

With war on our continent, an unpredictable President in the White House, and an increasingly volatile world... This is no time for a nationalist. We need real British patriotism instead. At home and abroad, our country has big problems to solve. And let's be absolutely clear: Nigel Farage is not the least bit interested in solving them.

If Farage had his way, he would turn our great country into little more than a Donald Trump tribute act. He has said it himself: he sees Trump as his inspiration. He wants to do to Britain what Trump is doing to America: All the division. The nasty culture-war nonsense. The economic self-harm of tariffs. Cruelty for the sake of being cruel. Siding with criminals and undermining the rule of law. And of course, limiting your access to healthcare. And making you pay more for it.

Farage doesn't like to talk about it much these days, but he has been very clear throughout his long political career that he doesn't believe in the fundamental NHS principle of universal healthcare free at the point of use. He's called for an American-style insurance-based model.

He says he's "open to anything" when it comes to the future of the NHS – including privatisation. Just like his idol Donald would want.

*More on Reform UK & the Conservatives...*

And here's the good news – Because I know it can feel like the tides of history are against us right now. I know that when you look at Trump in America, Le Pen in France, the AfD in Germany, Reform here in the UK – When the headlines are so often so bleak – It can be tempting to give in to despair.

Well the good news is this: What we can offer people is even more powerful than all their lies. All their false promises. The easy answers of the populist right. Even more powerful, and even more popular. Real hope.

And friends, how critical are our Liberal, internationalist values right now?

Not just on Ukraine and defending Europe from Putin – critical though that is. But on so many big, global challenges – from the rise of China to the threat of climate change to the risks of artificial intelligence.

These are challenges that no nation can afford to ignore. And challenges that no nation can tackle alone. Pulling up the drawbridge simply isn't an option. Like I said, this is no time for a nationalist.

What we need is a movement of proud internationalists – People who believe that our country and our people thrive when we are open and outward-looking. Who know that the UK can be an incredible force for good when it stands tall on the world stage. And stands up for what is right. Who recognise that the concerns of one nation inevitably become the concerns of all nations. A movement of proud internationalists and Liberal Democrats, that is who we are.

The only party that has consistently opposed the Conservatives' damaging Brexit deal from the start. The only party arguing for a new deal with the EU, with a Customs Union at its heart – putting us on a path back to the Single Market. The only party still championing international aid, after first the Conservatives and now Labour shamefully cut it.

And friends, we're the only party in British politics speaking up in defiance of Donald Trump. The only ones willing to state the obvious truth: that he is no leader of the free world. I mean, this is a man who stands on the White House drive, flogging Teslas for Elon Musk like a particularly bad used car salesman. It's hardly "Ask not what your country can do for you", is it?

And more despicably, this is a man who halted shipments of food, medicine and other essential aid supplies to people around the world who desperately need them. Locking whole shipping containers in port for their contents to rot. So much for Ronald Reagan's "shining city on a hill".

And remember – this is the man Nigel Farage calls his "inspiration". We're the only ones willing to say that Trump cannot be relied upon to play by the rules, or stick to agreements. That his presidency is a threat to peace and prosperity in the UK, across Europe, and around the world. And that we must deal with him as he is. Bullying. Narcissistic. Unpredictable. We must deal with Trump from a position of strength, not weakness.

Like on trade. If there's one thing we know, it's that Donald Trump loves tariffs. He says it's "the most beautiful word in the dictionary"...

Which, when you think about it, really is a very Donald Trump way of deciding your economic policy, isn't it?

Now, as Liberals, we profoundly disagree. After all, it was the Victorian Liberals who overturned centuries of protectionism and ushered in a new era of free trade and prosperity.

# The UK's Response to Trump

Policy Motion as passed by conference

**Mover:** Calum Miller MP (Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs)

**Summation:** Daisy Cooper MP (Spokesperson for the Treasury and Deputy Leader).

Conference notes that in November 2024, Donald Trump was elected as the President of the United States for a second time.

Conference expresses profound alarm at:

- i. Trump's disregard for democratic institutions, exemplified by his false claims that the 2020 US election was 'stolen', his involvement in the January 6th Capitol attack, and his decision to pardon those imprisoned for the attack.
  - ii. In January 2025, the US Department of Justice Special Counsel reported that had Trump not been re-elected, he would have been convicted for illegally trying to overturn the 2020 US election.
  - iii. Trump's suspension of military aid to Ukraine, and lack of commitment to NATO.
  - iv. Trump's failure to rule out using military force to seize control of the Panama Canal and Greenland and his threat to annexe Canada as the US 51st state.
  - v. Trump's reckless comments proposing that Palestinians be removed from Gaza and 'resettled' elsewhere - which would constitute a grave violation of international law - undermining the already fragile ceasefire and disregarding the legitimate right of Palestinians for their own state.
  - vi. Trump's plans to implement tariffs which will damage the UK economy in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis.
  - vii. The continued attempts by Trump ally and incoming US government official Elon Musk to interfere in UK politics, including reports of potential future donations.
  - viii. Trump's lack of commitment to international climate action and his plan to withdraw from the Paris agreement.
  - ix. Trump and the Republican Party's pursuit of policies which are deeply damaging for American women and minority groups.
  - x. Donald Trump's personal conduct, as the first US President to be a convicted felon, and to have been found liable for sexual assault.
  - xi. Trump's cancellation of USAID, which could lead to China increasing its influence in the Global South.
  - xii. The disgraceful verbal assault by Trump and Vance on President Zelensky in the Oval Office on 28 February 2025.
  - xiii. The Trump Administration's actions to roll back the rights of LGBTQ+ people in the US, in particular towards trans people, as well as those of women and ethnic minorities.
- Conference is also deeply concerned that the second Trump presidency comes at a time when Putin's forces are still waging their illegal war in Ukraine and we see unprecedented attempts at foreign interference by Russia, including in Georgia, Moldova and Romania.

Conference believes that the United Kingdom must now lead in Europe to ensure support for Ukraine, to secure NATO's future and strengthen trade and defence cooperation with our European allies.

Conference welcomes the Government's decision to raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP, but expresses concern that doing so by cutting Official Development Assistance will ultimately make the UK less secure.

Conference further believes that it is more urgent than ever for the UK to fix its broken relationship with the EU and that enhancing economic ties with the EU, including by cutting red tape and boosting trade links, is essential for insulating the UK from Trump's unpredictability as well as growing our economy.

Conference reaffirms the Liberal Democrats' longer-term objective of UK membership of the EU and our four-stage roadmap to restore ties of trust and trade as set out in Policy Paper 144 *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe*.

Conference deeply regrets the continued refusal of the Labour Government to entertain the prospect of membership of the Single Market or the Customs Union, especially given the uncertainty and unpredictability threatened by the second Trump presidency.



Conference accordingly calls on the Government to:

- A. Ensure that Ukraine is supported no matter what, by holding a European leaders summit to seize the frozen Russian assets in the UK and Europe and giving them to Ukraine.
- B. Ensure Ukraine's participation in peace negotiations as an equal partner to safeguard against a coerced and detrimental peace settlement.
- C. Take urgent and immediate action to boost growth by restoring the trading relationship with the EU, removing red tape imposed by the Brexit deal in line with our four-stage roadmap and, as the culmination of the third stage in our roadmap, negotiate a new UK-EU Customs Union by 2030 at the latest.
- D. Rule out any UK-US trade deal which lowers British environmental and health standards.
- E. Ensure that the UK is a world leader on climate in the US's absence, including by restoring the international development budget to 0.7% of national income with tackling climate change a key priority for development spending.
- F. Strengthen the UK's defences in the light of US isolationism and Putin's aggression by:
  - a. Reversing the 10,000 Conservative troop cut, with an ambition of returning the Army to 100,000 troops.
  - b. Committing to spending 2.5% of GDP as soon as possible - to be funded by raising the Digital Services Tax from 2% to 10% - and holding cross-party talks to agree a consensus on how to reach spending 3% of GDP on defence.
  - c. Maintaining the UK's nuclear deterrent with the four Dreadnought-class submarines providing continuous at-sea deterrence, while pursuing global multilateral disarmament.
- G. Deepen cooperation on defence and security with our allies, including by:
  - a. Providing further investment in the Joint Expeditionary Force, including convening a summit of JEF leaders in the UK to discuss how the JEF should respond to Trump's election and his remarks regarding Greenland.
  - b. Building on existing UK-French and UK-German cooperation arrangements, including the Lancaster House Treaties and the Trinity House Agreement.
  - c. Developing closer cooperation with EU agencies and member states over defence, intelligence and cyber-security.
  - d. Support the creation of a Rearmament Bank, together with our European and other allies, to enable greater access to finance for defence programmes.
- H. Protect the UK from foreign interference from overseas oligarchs and hostile state and non-state actors by:
  - a. Making protecting our democracy a national security priority.
  - b. Taking big money out of politics by capping donations to UK political parties.
  - c. Working closely with European and other democratic allies to coordinate our response to Russian interference.

## Restoring International Development Assistance

You may recall that it was Michael Moore's Private Members Bill of 2013 that committed the UK Government to devote a minimum of 0.7 per cent of its national income to international aid, during the Coalition. This brought us into line with a United Nations General Assembly resolution of 1970. The Tories used the Covid pandemic as an excuse to make a 'temporary reduction' to 5% in 2020. Nobody told them that viruses do not respect national boundaries. But it took the mean spirits of the Labour party to reduce it to 3% of GNI; the Internationale clearly does not unite the human race. The emergency policy motion passed by conference was submitted by the Green Liberal Democrats.

Conference notes:

- i. The Liberal Democrats were the first UK political party to commit to meeting the OECD target of spending 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on Official Development Assistance (ODA) and enshrined this target in law whilst in government.
- ii. On 25th November 2020, Rishi Sunak announced a 'temporary' cut to 0.5%; this resulted in thousands of preventable deaths and cuts to vital programmes.
- iii. The current Labour Government's manifesto committed to restoring development spending at the level of 0.7% of GNI "as soon as fiscal circumstances allow"; despite this, on 25th February 2025, Keir Starmer announced an immediate cut from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI.

iii. The international development budget has been further eroded by the large increase in in-donor refugee costs due to the decision of the previous Conservative government to pause asylum approvals – as well as leaving thousands of people trapped in limbo, these costs have occupied an increasingly large share of ODA.

Conference believes that:

a. While there is an acute need to increase defence spending to support Ukraine and ensure the UK's future security, this can be met through fair measures such as a digital sales tax and does not require yet another cut to ODA.

b. The government's cuts to ODA will cost lives and are completely unjustified. UK aid provides desperately needed support to the most vulnerable people in the world, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states, and is a key tool in meeting our climate commitments.

c. The UK's commitment to development has been one of our most effective foreign policy tools in recent decades and is a key pillar in ensuring our future security.

d. Sudden cuts to ODA fall disproportionately on the most vulnerable – those affected by humanitarian crises – due to annualised budget cycles being easier to cut.

Conference calls for:

1. The immediate restoration of UK aid spending at 0.5% of GNI and a roadmap to restore 0.7% of GNI as soon as possible within this parliament.

2. A halt to the charging of asylum hosting costs to the ODA budget, freeing up billions for global poverty reduction, climate action and humanitarian response.

3. The Government to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP as soon as possible – based on funding plans outlined by the Liberal Democrats – and to hold cross-party talks to agree a consensus on how to reach 3%.

**Applicability:** Federal.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-provisional-uk-aid-spend-2023/statistics-on-international-development-provisional-uk-aid-spend-2023>

## International Abstracts

### Liberator 428

Around half of this issue is dominated by international matters, like the rest of the media, most of relating to Trump's second presidency. From Commentary, onwards, Nick Harvey, a Defence minister during the Coalition, calls for a European Defence Force. Rebecca Tinsley laments America's retreat from soft power, and Martha Elliott looks at Trump's attacks on the US constitution and the separation of powers. Michael Grange writes on the elections in Somaliland, the functioning part of Somalia; we could cut a lot of crap by recognising its government, if only on an interim basis as a step towards stabilising that country.

### Trump

Here Are the Attack Plans That Trump's Advisers Shared on Signal, by Jeffrey Goldberg & Shane Harris. The Atlantic, March 26, 2025.

*For the record, not that there is anything we don't know.*

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2025/03/signal-group-chat-attack-plans-hegseth-goldberg/682176/>

The Fascism Expert at Yale Who's Fleeing America, by Keziah Weir. Vanity Fair, March 31, 2025

*Yale philosophy professor Jason Stanley is leaving the US for Canada, because he believes Trump's America is "pretty far along" in the grips of fascism.*

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/the-fascism-expert-at-yale-whos-fleeing-america>

*Rumeysa Ozturk & Mahmoud Khalil, mentioned in the article, are pro-Palestinian student activists, arrested under Trump's executive order to combat antisemitism.*

# It's wake up time in the True North

## Rebecca Tinsley

"Whenever I saw someone flying the Canadian flag on their car or their house, I dismissed them as morons, nut jobs, conspiracy theorists," says a voter in southern Ontario. "But then Trump began to show the world what true populism could do to our country, and Canadians united to preserve our sovereignty. We're still not united on many issues, but now we're resolute in keeping our country. Thank you, Donald Trump, for waking us up."

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, a week after riding to an unexpected victory on the back of opposition to Trump's demeaning threats, Canadian leader Mark Carney told Trump that "some places are not for sale. Canada is not for sale."

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, the Liberals, under the newly minted leadership of the former Bank of England governor, won 169 seats out of 342 ridings (three seats short of forming a majority administration in Ottawa). The New Democratic Party and Greens collapsed as the national campaign became a straight choice between a previously-Trump aligned Conservative Party and the Trump-hostile Liberals who were seen as better placed to defend Canadian independence.

Until Trump's diatribes about the "51<sup>st</sup> state", the Tories had been leading in the polls, capitalising on Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's unpopularity, the cost of living, migration, a chronic housing shortage, and anger about environmental policy.

### **Cometh the Davos Man**

When the Liberals dumped Trudeau in January, Carney swiftly emerged as the favourite to replace him. Some, however, worried that the Grits (as the party is known) would repeat their previous mistake when they chose the otherworldly Harvard professor Michael Ignatieff, who failed to inspire the voters in 2011. Yet, clever political ads featuring Carney hanging around a hockey rink with Canadian comedian Mike Meyers dispelled fears that the ultimate Davos Man would be too elitist to stomach.

For some years, Tory leader Pierre Poilievre had been mimicking Trump's crude rhetoric, but once the US president began belittling Canada, Poilievre became toxic. In the event, he lost his own riding.

Some Conservatives now criticise Ontario's popular Tory provincial premier Doug Ford who failed to campaign for Poilievre. Ford, who nurtures his bulldog persona, is outspoken about punishing Americans by cutting the power Canada sells to several states, and encouraging consumer boycotts of US goods. He is thought to have his eye on the Conservative Party leadership, although members might not forgive him for distancing himself from Poilievre.

Dramatic and impressive as Carney's victory is, he faces profound structural issues in Canada. He must dirty his hands with far more than defending Canadian sovereignty, as he did, calmly but clearly, when he met Trump in the Oval Office on May 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **Canada's January 6th**

In 2022, a "Freedom Convoy" of truckers occupied the Canadian capital for three weeks, bringing Ottawa to a standstill. They were protesting a federal Covid-19 vaccine mandate for truck drivers crossing the US-Canada border. But their voices were soon echoed by the provinces whose economies were threatened by Trudeau's environment policies. In turn, the famously migrant-welcoming Canadians began grumbling about the numbers of overseas students arriving in Canada and the rocketing cost of real estate. Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act – the first time the law had been used – allowing police to clear the streets of demonstrators.

As an NDP voter in small town Ontario commented, "This was our January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection. It brought out the chasm between Canada's provinces, the resentment of the so-called liberal elite in Ontario and Quebec, and the resource-based economy of Alberta where no one wants green restrictions." Alberta's grievances are based on a myth that it subsidises the rest of the Canadian economy. In fact, Ontario leads by generating 38% of GDP, followed by Quebec with 22% and Alberta with 17%.

For decades, Canadians celebrated the arrival of striving migrants, acknowledging the way in which they boost the economy with their skills and hard work, and enjoying their cuisine. It is a sign of how chronic the housing shortage has become that inhabitants of the True North have soured on inward migration. Trudeau's government reacted too slowly to the misuse of overseas student visas, throttling back on the numbers entering the country and then vanishing after a few weeks of college. Their presence would have been tolerated, not least because they do jobs many locals avoid. However, it was the strain on the housing supply which turned the debate poisonous. It hasn't helped that half of Shanghai pushed condo prices in Vancouver through the roof as they purchased bolt holes in case President Xi comes after their money.

## **A History of Hatred**

Many Canadians are reeling at the unleashing of American aggression as inarticulately articulated by Trump since his January 2025 inauguration. Trump has two reasons to dislike Canada. First, his properties in Vancouver and Toronto were disasters. At a time (2012) when 400 condo towers were successfully built in Toronto, only one failed, and that was the one with Trump's name on it. "It's pretty hard to make a mess of real-estate investment in Toronto," according to a lawyer representing minority investors who launched a lawsuit claiming they were misled. Meanwhile, in 2020 Trump's name was removed from a development in Vancouver that eventually closed. Added to which, Melania was pictured drooling over the photogenic Justin Trudeau on at least one public occasion.

For Canadians, it is surreal to contemplate an American president ordering a military attack on Canada if bringing the Canadian economy to its knees through tariffs fails. Yet, they shouldn't have been surprised by the arrogance and insensitivity of the elephant to the south: even educated Americans known to your correspondent cannot grasp why Canadians don't welcome the chance to become the 51<sup>st</sup> state. Americans are raised to unquestioningly believe theirs is (to quote a West Coast professor) "the greatest country ever in the history of the world". They assume every citizen on earth wants to be like them. Bear in mind that many Americans believe that owning a passport is unpatriotic.

Americans have never grasped that the reason Canadians continue to embrace the monarchy, albeit sniggering at the House of Windsor's antics and disasters, is that it distinguishes them from the States. Americans fail to appreciate the cultural differences between the two societies. For instance, although Canadians own guns in the same numbers per head as Americans do, they refrain from slaughtering each other with the same enthusiasm. Whereas Americans hire an attorney to sue people with whom they have a dispute (if they haven't shot them, that is), Canadians set up a committee or have a conversation. See Michael Moore's documentary *Bowling for Columbine*: he compares the level of gun violence in placid Windsor Ontario - which is literally the other side of the bridge from Detroit - and the former motor city, now auditioning for the role of Hades.

What is clear is that Canadians will never again trust America. Snowbirds are selling their homes in Florida, South Carolina, Arizona, and California, while Canadians are cancelling vacations south of the border, flight routes are being cancelled, and Canadian media feature horror stories about visitors being shackled and humiliated at the US border. The city of Palm Springs has lined its streets with Maple Leaf flags, hoping to repair the damage, and California governor Gavin Newsome has sent friendly messages north. But, in the words of an Ontario voter who regularly popped across the border to attend rock concerts in Buffalo, "Screw them and the Tesla they rode in on. It's too late. This whole thing reveals the real face of America."

## **Carney's "To Do" List**

Celebrating his victory on election night, Carney acknowledged: "We need to think big and act bigger." That means removing the quaint cross-provincial trade barriers and bureaucracy, making it easier to build affordable housing, and opening up investment opportunities. It also means closer ties with the EU and UK. Yet, there are more structural issues facing the world's second largest nation.

Since the 1960s, Canadians have bemoaned the fact that although the country is rich in minerals (zinc, uranium, aluminium, gold, nickel, copper, cobalt, iron ore, platinum, cadmium), they are sent elsewhere for processing. Far more Canadians work in service industries than in manufacturing, meaning that Canada misses an opportunity to refine and process its natural resource wealth before exporting it to the rest of the world. 58% of Canadian exports are agricultural, energy, forestry and mining. This makes up 30% of the nation's GDP. America takes 73% of those exports, meaning it has the leverage to cripple the Canadian economy if it chooses.

In addition, productivity lags the USA, as do levels of investment in research, and patenting rates. Carney's challenge is to nudge Canada into investing in high tech manufacturing, rather than trying to recreate the metal bashing-dependent 1950s Grand Rapids (as Trump dreams of doing in the USA).



In addition, a quarter of the Canadian workforce is employed by the government at federal, provincial or local level. That compares with 17% of the workforce in the UK, 14% in the USA and 11% in Germany.

On an anecdotal level, only one member of my extended middle-class Canadian family works in the private sector: the rest are government employees, retiring young and drawing a generous pension. Another anecdote based on conversations with recent arrivals in Canada, reflecting a view I heard sixty years ago: “It’s really easy to make it in this country because the locals are so laid back.” Perhaps this contributes to a unique Canadian phenomenon: the passionate and vocal enthusiasm of New Canadians for their adopted home. “They’re here six months and they’re boring you to death with how wonderful the damn place is,” says a resident of Vancouver. “All except the weather, of course.”

Canada still has much going for it: ambitious skilled immigrants from around the world want to go there (my African friends once favoured the USA but now say it is “full of racists”); its social security safety net is admired; it has a reputation for minimal corruption, and it is a more equal society than south of the border, with low levels of income disparity.

Although Trump denies it, the US needs Canada for more than the electricity and oil it supplies: their northern neighbour is the biggest export market of thirty-five American states. 23% of US exports go to Canada, which is twice what the US sells to the EU.

And Canada really is better at hockey.

### ***Rebecca Tinsley***

Rebecca Tinsley was born in Toronto and still holds a Canadian passport.

## **The Challenges Facing Bangladesh - LIBG meeting on April 14th**

Our meeting about the recent momentous changes in Bangladesh marked the first time a professional opera singer has spoken at a LIBG meeting. Monica Yunus, who was a soprano at the Metropolitan Opera in New York for years, is also the daughter of Nobel Peace Prize winner Professor Mohamad Yunus who now leads Bangladesh’s transitional government. Throughout 2024, Monica campaigned to keep her father from being imprisoned on trumped up charges by Bangladesh’s ruler, Sheikh Hasina. Monica was then at her father’s side as young people led a popular uprising that Hasina’s regime used disproportionate violence against. The protests continued until August 2024 when Hasina and her Awami League governing party were driven from power. During the LIBG meeting, Monica showed a short video about the uprising and the brutality of Hasina’s security services.

Professor Yunus now oversees the transitional government, including 11 commissions drafting a new constitution, and examining the justice system, public administration, anti-corruption, police reform, electoral system reform, among other areas. Professor Farhana Sultana spoke of the challenges facing the transitional government, including a legacy of corruption and a relentless campaign of daily disinformation spread by the Awami League and its backers overseas. She said there was evidence that the Indian government spreads falsehoods about Muslim attacks on the Hindu minority.

Professor Sultana touched on Sheikh Hasina’s crimes, the UN investigation report on the unrest in 2024, and how justice is being denied as India refuses to extradite Hasina. There are also targeted attacks on Professor Yunus and the interim government, deliberately diverting social media attention from the injustices and corruption of the Hasina regime. This means the interim government is forced to constantly debunk disinformation and clarify false accusations, while trying to build democracy. It also creates tension with India, although Bangladesh has repeatedly stated it wants good relations with India. Professor Sultana believes India wants Bangladesh to be a vassal state it can control geopolitically, financially, resource-wise, and ideologically, all of which it lost with the fall of Hasina. China is taking advantage of this to open friendly relations with the interim government.

Maher Sattar is an award-winning journalist and senior editor at the Fuller project in the States. He has published research on the way in which the central role of women in the 2024 uprising has been downplayed, with women marginalized. He has also highlighted the treatment of women in Bangladesh’s massive garment industry – an industry that now faces crippling tariffs on its exports thanks to the Trump administration.

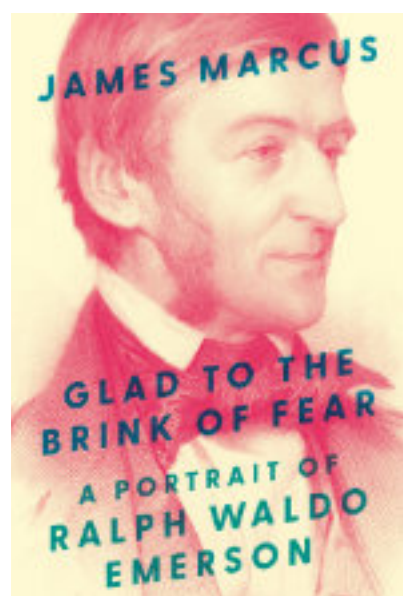
Mumtaz Hussain is the first British Bangladeshi to be elected to Birmingham City Council. She represents an area with a significant British Bangladeshi population, and where supporters of the Awami League remain active. She admitted she didn’t follow events in Bangladesh closely, busy as she is working for the people who she represents in Birmingham.

# Reviews

**Glad to the Brink of Fear: A Portrait of Ralph Waldo Emerson, by James Marcus.**  
Princeton University Press 2024 £25.00 isbn 9780691254333

“Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson, who in his most famous essay “Self-Reliance” and others, penned sayings that endure to this day. “In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.” But in the same essay on nonconformity, Emerson poured scorn upon associations, even those which were obviously worthy, including groups of well-meaning philanthropists and abolitionists. His attitude was to change over the years.

“Glad to the Brink of Fear: a Portrait of Ralph Waldo Emerson,” by James Marcus, is a scholarly study that reads like a magazine article. Marcus, a writer and translator, injects himself frequently into this work, with an informality of style “I am writing these lines on a December afternoon” . . . “I walk down the steep road to the lake . . . I set off around the lake” that at first surprises, but ultimately charms the reader. Marcus describes himself as a secular Jew who likes to watch Joel Osteen, the American preacher and college dropout who preaches “Prosperity gospel” to a massive following. He tells of how he discovered Emerson during a vulnerable period in his own life.



Mentioning how Emerson, whom he refers to as “Waldo,” wrote that he read “for the lusters,” for the high points, the key passages in books, Marcus relates that this study of Emerson similarly focuses on the most revealing episodes, “the essays and lectures that electrified me the most.”

Part of a long line of Unitarian ministers, Emerson had been destined for the pulpit. But in 1832 he realised that he believed that he could no longer honestly celebrate the Eucharist, not believing in the Real Presence in the elements of bread and wine. He gave a sermon in which he tried to justify his position, preaching that “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” The Society of Proprietors decided to dismiss him anyway. Soon afterwards Emerson went away on a trip to Europe. He had lost a secure position as pastor but would take on the professions of writer and lecturer.

The many contradictions in Emerson are noted: the man who could write “The only reward of virtue is virtue; the only way to have a friend is to be

one” turned against his younger friend and protégé Henry David Thoreau, shutting him out after first welcoming and encouraging him. Thoreau would write sadly of Emerson as the “one other with whom I had ‘solid seasons’ . . . but I had no more society there.” Like Emerson’s father, his first wife and his brother John years before, Thoreau died young of tuberculosis. Although grieved by the loss, Emerson managed in a funeral oration to give a tribute to Thoreau that sounded at times less like praise than blame: “as for taking his arm, I should as soon think of taking the arm of an elm-tree.”

A more important Emersonian failing was his failure at first to endorse the work of the Abolitionists. In the 1830s he was under pressure to speak up against slavery, but resisted until he was shocked into making a “watery and unsatisfying address” by the murder of Elijah Lovejoy, a minister and abolitionist newspaper editor. In this speech he likened the sins of the North to those of the slaveowners, and in his journal he denounced antislavery rallies.

A change came in 1844. Emerson had been asked to address the Women’s Anti-Slavery Association of Concord, and in preparation he studied Thomas Clarkson’s *History of the African Slave Trade*. Emerson could not help but be moved by its stories of the brutal treatment of slaves, its fold-out illustration of how 454 Africans had been crammed below decks on a Liverpool-based slave ship.

His speech on August 1, 1844, condemned slavery and also blamed the Northern consumer, ironically stating:

“The sugar they raised was excellent: nobody tasted blood in it. The coffee was fragrant; the tobacco was incense; the brandy made nations happy; the cotton clothed the world. What! All raised by these men, and no wages? Excellent! What a convenience.”

After that for Emerson there was a slowly increasing commitment to the Abolitionist cause, interrupted by a long stay in Europe in 1847 and 1849, a time when Chartists were rebelling in Britain, mobs driving out King Louis-Philippe in France. Emerson both admired and feared revolution. Great change was happening in his own country, with the Mexican-American war giving the U.S. an excuse to annex land that would later become Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, a change that he predicted would end badly, "Mexico will poison us."

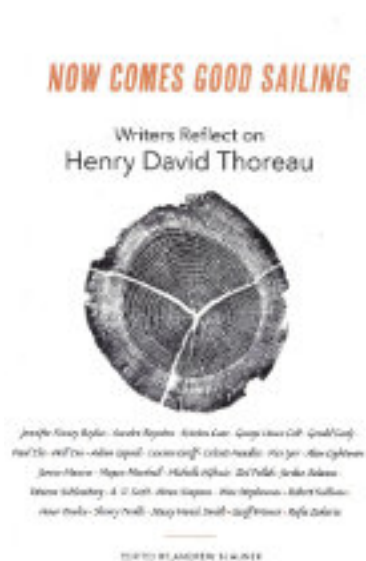
Nothing was more influential in committing Emerson to the Abolitionist cause than the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, requiring that U.S. marshals and their deputies in Free states assist in the return of escaped slaves or pay a large fine. Emerson regarded runaway slaves as heroes, and this law as barbarism. His address of May 3, 1851, described negro slavery as the "greatest calamity in the universe," and charged that the usual assumptions about his countrymen as being freedom-loving was "hollow American brag." He followed this up with major addresses in New York and Philadelphia. He welcomed the Civil War, when it broke out in 1861, as an effort to finally end slavery.

The last decade of Emerson's life was marred by increasing dementia - the biographer suspects Alzheimer's disease - which according to his daughter began during the 1860s, when he was in the height of his lecturing career. He had to read texts where he had once spoken off the cuff; Ellen would sew the pages of his addresses together to keep him from getting them muddled, writing "Poor man, how he struggles for words! The simplest escape him."

In 1876 he responded to an invitation with "an old man fears most his best friends... I have grown silent to my own household & cannot afflict dear friends with my tied tongue." Death, when it came, was from pneumonia, brought on by a walk in the rain. Family and friends came to say goodbye, but only family was with him at the end.

**Christine Graf**

**Now Comes Good Sailing, writers reflect on Henry David Thoreau,**  
**edited by Andrew Blauner.**  
**Princeton University Press 2021**  
**isbn 978069121522**



Back in the more optimistic days of the early 1970s the Young Liberal Movement reprinted a pamphlet by Henry Thoreau, *On Civil Disobedience*, with an introduction by Martyn Everett. Hippy trippy as we were, we had, of course, heard of, if not read *Walden*. By the late-70s Martyn was drifting towards anarchism; we caused some trouble at a Librarians for Social Change conference, 1975-76, by splitting off and organising a group on worker control in public libraries. The socialists who ran LfSC didn't expect the proletariat to be better organised than them and we produced the most pragmatic paper to come out of the conference. Harold Wilson had just set up the *Committee of Inquiry on Industrial Democracy* under Lord Bullock, in response to the European Commission's *Draft Fifth Company Law Directive* and the session attracted many of the more senior librarians present; not part of Trotsky's transitional programme at all. Martyn went on to write several well received works on anarchist history.

Lauren Groff, a novelist, *Wild Apples*, and Stacey Vanek Smith, an economist journalist, *Dolittle's Rebellion*, both cite *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, but only in the sense of being paired with *Walden* in the editions they own; the citations are from *Walden*. I wonder why the YLM dropped 'duty' from their title? After all Mazzini's *The Duties of Man* is a seminal Liberal text.

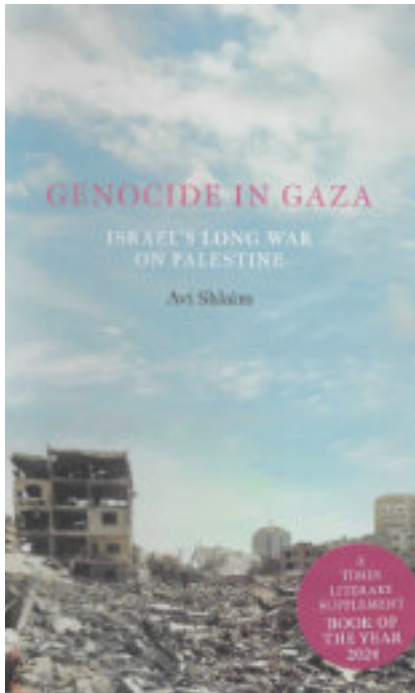
Groff has her own 'Walden', the Oracle, and there she spends a summer inter-relating with the book. Stacey Smith urges readers not to give up on Walden's long opening chapter *Economy*. Though it is many years since I read the book, I think I concur with her.

I would have liked a summing up of this book. Not instead we end with *Walden at Midnight, three walks with Thoreau*, by Wen Stevenson. Stevenson is a former editor of *Atlantic*, his first walk is an escape from the 2020 presidential election; would that we could escape from the 2024 election. Instead of summary we have more eloquent prose, but we are at last confronted with *Civil Disobedience*. In 2019 Stevenson was

amongst protesters blocking the transit of West Virginia coal to the Merrimack power station at Bow, New Hampshire, the last coal burning power plant in the region. Granite Shore, the owners of the power plant say that coal burning will be phased out by December 2025; let us hope that this remains the case and that the action of Stevenson and his colleagues has had some success. To all of us engaged in environmental and climate change activism, he reminds us that for Thoreau *the past and present, human and wild, coexisted in the eternal flux of the here and now.*

You can enjoy this book for its own sake, whether you have read Thoreau or not, you may be tempted to (the Collins Classics edition combines both). One wonders what Thoreau might now make some of the opening lines of *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, abbreviated by myself? *This American government... has not the vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend it to his will.* Thoreau wrote this in the context of the Mexican war but it has a certain irony today.

**Stewart Rayment**



**Genocide in Gaza: Israel's Long War on Palestine by Avi Shlaim**  
**Irish Pages 2025 £18.00 isbn 9781739090227**

Avi Shlaim is a proud Arab Jew. He is also one of the most distinguished historians Israel has produced. He was born in Baghdad in 1945, and at the tender age of five was taken to Israel when his family's life in their native Iraq was ripped apart by the clash between aggressive forms of Zionism and Arab nationalism. He grew up an Israeli but his secondary schooling was in London at the Jewish Free School in Camden. As an adult he made this country his home and rose to be professor of international relations at Oxford and director of the prestigious Middle East Centre at St Anthony's College. After his work received widespread acclaim in academic circles, he was elected a fellow of the British Academy.

He is one of the Israeli "new historians" who in the 1980s demolished myths about the history of the state of Israel that are no longer tenable, although they are still repeated *ad nauseam* by Israeli government spokespeople. His own particular contributions concern Israel's relations with Jordan (the so-called "best of enemies") and, above all, pointing out with unimpeachable scholarship that the failure to make peace lies

primarily at the door of Israeli governments and the Zionist ideology that underpins the state, although he does not by any means exculpate Palestinian and Arab politicians from blame either. The sad course of this history, which has sown so much hatred, is charted with impressive, forensic detail in his magisterial work *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, which he published in 2000 and updated in 2014.

In 2023 he published *Three Worlds: Memoirs of an Arab Jew*, which tells the story of his life until, on finishing the sixth form, he returned to Israel from London to do his national service before going to Cambridge to study history. The three worlds of the title are Iraq, Israel and Britain. In this book he also comes as close as can be done at the present time to clearing up a significant historical controversy. Did Israeli agents encourage Iraqi Jews to leave their country to come to Israel by planting bombs aimed at Jewish targets in Baghdad? Shlaim comes to the firm conclusion that on three occasions they did. His work corroborates the suspicions of some Zionist historians, including the late Sir Martin Gilbert and Shlaim's fellow Jew from Iraq, Elie Kedourie.

Now, in *Genocide in Gaza: Israel's Long War on Palestine*, Shlaim turns his attention to the horrific events that began on 7 October 2023. These led to leaders of both Hamas and Israel, including most notably Bibi Netanyahu, being indicted by the International Criminal Court, and to Israel being taken to the International Court of Justice by South Africa for alleged contravention of the 1948 Genocide Convention.

*Genocide in Gaza: Israel's Long War on Palestine* is essentially a collection of essays. A foreword is supplied by Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and the book concludes with a Coda by Blinne Ni Ghraíleigh KC consisting of her address to the ICJ in the Genocide Convention Case in which she asks the court for provisional measures to prevent genocide. In between, there are twelve articles by Shlaim, one of which ("*Israel's Road to Genocide*") is written jointly with Jamie Stern-Weiner. Two articles are on Operation Cast Lead (the bloody Israeli incursion into Gaza in 2008-9). 1



There are also reports submitted as expert evidence to the ICJ and the ICC. The former is on diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli conflict 1967-2023, while the latter is an overview on Israel, Hamas and the Conflict in Gaza written in 2019. Apart from an article on the Two State Solution from 2021, the other pieces are all written after 7 October 2023.

Inevitably, there is a degree of overlap between the essays, but that only serves to reinforce the points Shlaim wishes to make. In *Three Worlds* Shlaim had written, "for all its sins, Israel has not engaged in genocide". *Genocide in Gaza* shows that he no longer considers this to be so.

In the article *Israel's Road to Genocide*, there is a quotation from the distinguished human rights authority William Schabas that "genocide is the last refuge of the frustrated ethnic cleanser." Shlaim and Stern-Weiner write that the early stages of the Gaza war showed that Israel was intent on "systematically destroying the prerequisites for human civilisation in Gaza while corralling its desperate population into unliveable encampments along its southern border". The "hope" was to force them over the border into Egypt, but Egypt did not let this happen.

What did Israel do next? It continued its attacks on the civilian population, including depriving them of water fit to drink, and using starvation and the withholding of food and aid as weapons of war. Shlaim quotes the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of genocide which he says provides "a more intuitive grasp of the concept" than the Genocide Convention. This is "the deliberate and systematic killing or persecution of people from a particular group identified as having a shared ethnicity, nationality etc...with the intention of partially or wholly destroying that group."

After its hope of pushing the Palestinians of Gaza into the Egyptian desert was frustrated, Israel doubled down on making Gaza uninhabitable, including bombing those areas which people were unable to leave. How, Shlaim and Stern-Weiner ask us, can such a policy be described as anything except "a deliberate and systematic killing or persecution" intended "partially or wholly" to destroy the people of Gaza? Many of these attacks were and are unrelated to attempts to free the hostages or to destroy Hamas's military capability. They thus have no legitimate objective and are consistent with the implementation of genocidal rhetoric used by figures in the Israeli leadership from Netanyahu downwards. Some of that rhetoric is catalogued in the book, including material dating from long before 7 October.

Such, in a nutshell, is Shlaim's charge against Israel. He also has harsh words for the roles of Britain and America in creating and facilitating this nightmare. He writes that an "unbroken thread of duplicity, mendacity and chicanery connects British foreign policy from the Balfour Declaration to the Nakba to the present day". He is particularly scathing about Joe Biden, the leader who could have stopped what was happening in Gaza but chose not to.

The book is valuable for putting what is happening in Gaza in context in a way that a historian with Shlaim's detailed knowledge is best placed to do. As well as telling the story from the British Mandate onwards, he takes the reader through earlier Israeli assaults on Gaza. These, too, included attacks on civilians with no legitimate military justification. He makes two points about Hamas that are all too rarely made: Hamas has, generally speaking, a much better record of observing cease-fires than Israel; and it has showed itself more open to compromise than it is given credit for.

That is not to deny that its founding charter contains viciously antisemitic language or that it has tried to frustrate peace initiatives, but Shlaim places Hamas's struggle in the context of a fight against a colonial occupier that denies the legitimate rights of a colonised people. That is why today Israel has no political solution to the problem of Gaza or that of the long-suffering Palestinian people, and why it has repeatedly spurned diplomatic initiatives and preferred the use of naked force. Everything for Israel's current government is a zero-sum game, which makes the continuation of war and violence inevitable. Shlaim argues persuasively that Israel's wars in Gaza may purport to be in self-defence, but in reality they have political objectives: to obstruct the Palestinian right of self-determination and to continue to consolidate Israel's occupation of the territories it took in 1967.

Shlaim shows that Netanyahu shares the same objectives as his ministers Smotrich and Ben-Gvir and is equally deserving of the epithet "far-right". This book should be required reading for all who still subscribe to the view that there is no need to look behind the atrocities of 7 October in order to understand what Israel is doing in Gaza. Politicians, please note.

### **John McHugo**

John McHugo is a former chair of Lib Dem Friends of Palestine and of Putney Constituency Party. He has written three books about the history of the Middle East and Islam and is currently working on a book about the context of the Gaza war: *Another Road to Hell: Islamism, Zionism and October 7*.

**Bordering on Indifference, by Irene I. Vega.**  
**Princeton University Press 2025 £100.00**  
**isbn 9780691262093**

People in my neighbourhood are afraid to walk their children to work, are afraid to go out to restaurants. . . . These are people who have contributed to our economy, who have paid taxes—many of them run businesses that pay taxes and employ people. So we are in crisis right now. There is a presumption of criminality that puts communities at risk, and puts their families at risk, and undermines, again, the strength of our economy.

—Senator Cory Booker, interviewed by David Remnick in *The New Yorker*, April 27, 2025

In recent weeks, an alarming and increasingly familiar sight on American television has been of masked ICE agents seizing residents in the U.S., supposedly “gang” members, shaving their heads, chaining them together, and forcing them onto military transport planes on a one-way trip to a particularly notorious prison in El Salvador. And Americans have seen their President receiving Nayib Bukele, the dictatorial president of El Salvador in the Oval Office of the White House with noticeably more courtesy and respect than he extended to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky a few weeks earlier.

So, who are the people who enforce what seem like arbitrary decisions where men have been seized and deported without a hearing, without access to a lawyer or even a chance to inform their families? ICE agents are anonymous, they operate behind masks; here in the North, we generally do not see the Border Patrol, who work close to the border with Mexico. In her book *Bordering on Indifference*, Irene I. Vega introduces the reader to these men and women who have decided to serve their country in this way. She focuses her study on ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agents and those in the Border Patrols, the people whose work in Trump’s first months as President have helped to create the climate of fear to which Senator Booker alludes.

In her research, Vega interviewed 90 immigration agents between 2014 and 2016. She notes some glaring contradictions: earlier, back in the 1980s and 90s, Border Patrol agents were primarily White working-class men: now, about half of the Border Patrol and a third of ICE agents are Hispanic. When Vega discussed politics with them and the impact of various Presidents, most immigration agents came out strongly in favor of Trump. This is remarkable, considering that all of the Latino agents, except for four, were of Mexican descent, and Trump’s campaigns have been based upon a promise to deport Mexicans, whom he depicted as criminals, or to prevent them from arriving in the first place: “I will build a wall.”

With the new administration and the draconian application of anti-immigrant laws, the pro-Trump attitude is changing in the Latino community as a whole: as Cory Booker went on to say in the same interview, “Even [people] who voted for Trump never imagined this [current situation] and have expressed regret that they voted for Donald Trump.”

But with the agents whom Vega interviewed, Obama was less popular than Trump. One of their complaints was that although President Obama strongly enforced border restrictions and became known informally as the “Deporter in Chief,” his Priority Enforcement Program limited the number who could be deported. There were humanitarian exceptions. Trump has largely eliminated these exceptions, making the work of the immigration agents less complicated.

She examined the question of how Hispanic men and women would enter a profession that would seem to go against their own traditions and values. What she found was that in many cases the men and women she interviewed had originally had dreams of entering the “caring” professions: teaching, nursing, social services. What stopped them were higher educational requirements, sometimes the need for income to support a family, and the lack of support to enable them to finish a 2 year or 4 year degree program. Compared to this, the minimum requirement to be an immigration agent is a high school diploma and U.S. citizenship. Another incentive is the financial: federal immigration enforcement agents are well paid and enjoy good benefits. Within 5 years they can be making over \$100,000 a year, easily double the median salary in most of the communities they serve.

Vega explored agents’ attitudes towards their work. She found that as fledgling agents, those concerned with protecting the border tended to start out with a typically law-enforcement-attitude towards their work,



expecting that the people they encounter will be “bad guys”, like gang members and drug traffickers, with only a few “good guys.”

After a while they find that the issues are not simple: many crossing the border are economic migrants who cannot make a living back home, others seek asylum from war, and yet others have been affected by climate change.

Certain agents whom Vega interviewed considered the tracking of migrants a challenge that has its own rewards. They “sign cut,” looking for disturbances in the desert, footprints, clothing fibers, branches broken off brush. Some consider this work an adventure. As one related, “You can’t beat that rush . . . There’s no hunting like the hunting of man. And once you’ve done that, you’ll never go to anything else...”

Some justified their work in the Border Patrol by considering themselves, especially if they’re fluent in Spanish, as a humane alternative to colleagues who might be harsh and callous. This did not give them the power to stop deportations, but they felt they could bring some light into an otherwise dark experience. Occasionally an arrested illegal will accuse an Hispanic agent of being a traitor to his people; a common response is that a White colleague would treat him worse. Some will appeal to the agent “Well, if you’re Mexican, let me go. Come on, man.” These appeals for mercy are routinely ignored, but Vega found that racial minorities expected more empathy from Hispanic agents than from Whites. Whether they received it or not depended on whether the agents perceived the need to protect their own safety and authority by remaining distant and professional.

An agent she identifies as Mauricio Burgos related a story that he couldn’t forget. When on patrol in the desert he found a man, his wife and 2 kids. The father explained “there is nothing for us in Mexico. Only here are we able to survive with work.” He pleaded to be allowed to go.

Then, as Burgos told it, the father did something most uncharacteristic for a Mexican father in front of his children: he got to his knees and begged, “Please”, and his kids started crying. Burgos couldn’t let them go, but he couldn’t forget them either.



In “Bordering on Indifference,” Vega has made an important contribution to the literature relating to control of the border, an issue which successive administrations have failed to solve. For the general reader, her writing suffers from being clogged with academic jargon, but her interviews with agents, how they got where they are and how they feel about their work, opens up a generally ignored aspect of the story.

Now, more than ever, when the Trump administration has decided that deporting immigrants back to their own country is not enough, that they should be “disappeared” into foreign prisons, this study of the agents themselves is of particular interest. And that may not be all. As Jonathan Chait wrote recently in *The Atlantic*, “Trump is attempting to open a loophole in the Constitution that would let him jail any person, criminal or not, citizen or not, in an overseas prison without recourse to American law.”

**Christine Graf**

**A People Betrayed, the role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide, by Linda Melvern.  
Zed Books 4th edition 2024 (2000) isbn 9781350409637**

It is easy to despair of the United Nations while mass atrocities occur around the world. However, Linda Melvern’s authoritative study of the 1994 Rwandan genocide reminds us that it is the individual states on the UN Security Council that choose to prevent it from enforcing its own resolutions. In the case of Rwanda, diplomats representing the UK, US and France actively stopped its own peacekeeping force from taking effective action that might have prevented the slaughter before it began.

For months, General Romeo Dallaire, the UN peacekeeping force commander in Rwanda, warned UN HQ about arms caches, hate speech, discriminatory laws, militia training and lists of opponents being compiled. The UK high commissioner in neighbouring Uganda reported to London on the increasing violence, as did

aid agencies. Thirty years later, Bill Clinton continues to pretend his administration had not receive a stream of detailed intelligence about the military buildup in Kigali. For decades, the French denied that they trained the Hutu Power killers, armed them throughout the 100 days of slaughter, and protected them when they lost ground to themainly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Army of Paul Kagame.

In the case of the Bisesero massacre, French troops enticed 1,000 Tutsi out hiding, promising to rescue them. The French then disappeared, allowing the Hutu Power genocidaires to “finish their work.” France continues to give refuge to 100 ideologues who masterminded the genocide and committed mass murder. The UK protects five genocidaires on the grounds that they would not receive a fair trial in Rwanda. Yet, under universal jurisdiction, those five could be tried in the UK, if the British government chose. (Using this legal mechanism, Germany has recently convicted a member of Islamic State for the slaughter and enslavement of Yazidis in northern Iraq).

Melvorn has just updated her magisterial study of the genocide. This book provides meticulously researched detail on the complicity of the international community in the death of an estimated 800,000 members of the Tutsi minority and Hutu moderates. Before the killing began, General Dallaire daily asked the UN to allow him to seize the massive Hutu Power arms caches. This was refused because in Somalia, in 1993, American soldiers died trying to seize illegal arms supplies (featured in the film, *Black Hawk Down*).

Dallaire asked for reinforcements, believing an international show of force would deter the Hutu Power killers from continuing with their genocidal plans. The commander thought that just 5,500 troops could have achieved this aim. Diplomats from the US, UK and France denied Dallaire troops or resources, choosing inaction. It took weeks for them to even allow Rwanda to be discussed. America refused to jam the radio station broadcasting instructions to the Hutu militia on the grounds that it would be against free speech.

There is no reason to believe the international community learned from its mistakes in Rwanda. The deliberate targeting and attempted elimination of ethnic and religious minorities continues in Sudan, Myanmar, Nigeria, China, the DRC, India and Pakistan, to name but a few places where the UN seems toothless. Yet, as Melvorn makes clear, it is not for the want of UN resolutions.

The UK has learned nothing: the Foreign Office recently reversed itself by no longer calling the 2003-6 slaughter in Darfur a genocide. Lord David Alton has repeatedly proposed legislation allowing the UK to make an initial genocide determination by referring mass atrocity situations to the High Court. The Conservative government insisted that only an international court could make such a determination. Yet, in *Catch 22* fashion, the UK would not refer any case to a competent international court, presumably for fear of offending trading partners. Let us hope the Labour Government takes a more enlightened view.

*Rebecca Tinsley*

## **LIBG Forum: The Canadian General Election 18.30 Monday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

Canada's election on 28 April brought the Liberal Party back to power for fourth successive term - just short of an overall majority, and with a new leader in Mark Carney. Join us on Monday 16 June at 6.30 PM UK time to discuss what happened, why it happened, and what it means for Canada, not least for its relationship with the US and its place in a changing world. Chaired by Sir Graham Watson, our panel will include: [Mario Canseco](#), Vancouver based President of Research Co. and leader in public opinion research and Canadian politics; along with a member of the Board of the Canadian Ditchley Foundation.

**Join the meeting by Zoom at**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83396804492?pwd=EoWZa5ZeqyhsPEnesoMN2Fb8f2ULGs.1>

Meeting ID: 833 9680 4492 Passcode: 20314