



2025-06 October

INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



**LIBERAL DEMOCRAT FRIENDS OF HONG KONG SAY 'YES'.
BOURNEMOUTH CONFERENCE REPORTS**

EVENTS

6 October LIBG Forum: The Arctic & European Security. With LI Vice Presidents Astrid Thors of Finland and Henrik Bach Mortensen of Denmark. Zoom details: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87391589013?pwd=I6FpF1t63UPXeuQqCiaH0UmSOiwtAD.1>
Meeting ID: 873 9158 9013
Passcode: 264710

10-12 October Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru/Welsh Liberal Democrats Conference, Wrexham.

18 October 2025 Scottish Liberal Democrats Conference, Radisson Blu, Glasgow.

25 October 2025 Isaiah Berlin Lecture: Prof. John Gray on Liberalism, Populism and the Sense of Reality. National Liberal Club & online.

Registration: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/liberalism-populism-and-the-sense-of-reality-tickets-1661027781809?aff=oddtcreator>
Background info: <https://liberal-international.org/isaiah-berlin-lectures/>

21-23 November 2025, 209th LI Executive Committee, The Hague, The Netherlands

For bookings & other information please contact LIBG at
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1 Brook Gardens, Barnes, London SW13 0LY

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Comments and articles can be sent to Lockhart & Hastings, Intellectual Properties Consultants, 29 St Helen's Crescent, Hastings TN34 2EN, email lockhart.hastings@outlook.com

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Photographs: Stewart Rayment, Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine.

Cover photograph: Liberal Democrat Friends of Hong Kong promoting their motion F34 on the steps of the Bournemouth International Centre



**More Conference Reports in the next issue.
Deadline 11th October.**



LIBG Forum



"The Arctic & European Security"

Fierce competition for minerals, military bases and commercial maritime routes have accelerated the strategic importance of the Arctic. Environmental challenges are simmering in the background while major players are looking elsewhere.

Superpower ambitions are potentially shaking up the future of Canada and Greenland. Russia and China have found a new partnership. Both are keen to get economic and military advantages.

What does it all mean for western European security and to the UK?

We are delighted to invite you to a panel discussion exploring the recent developments and the future of the Arctic region.

Our panel:

Astrid Thors, a lawyer, a Finnish politician, former MP and member of European Parliament, the former Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities (2013-2016), former minister of Migration and European Affairs in Finland. Deputy President of Liberal International.

Henrik Bach Mortensen, former Chairman of the Danish Institute of Parties and Democracy (DIPD). Vice President in ALDE (2016-2023). VP Liberal International

Adrian Hyyrylainen-Trett, chairing the meeting, Deputy Chairman LIBG

**Monday 6th October,
7.00pm – 8.00pm by Zoom**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87391589013?pwd=l6FpF1t63UPXeuQqCiaH0UmSOiwtaD.1>

Meeting ID: 873 9158 9013

Passcode: 26471

Isaiah Berlin Lecture

Liberalism, populism and the sense of reality



Delivered by Prof. John Gray

Wednesday, 22 October, 2025 | 18:30

David Lloyd George Room, The National Liberal Club, London

The lecture, titled "**Liberalism, Populism and the Sense of Reality**," will explore the enduring legacy of liberalism in light of today's political challenges. Drawing inspiration from Isaiah Berlin's seminal essay *The Sense of Reality*, Professor Gray will examine the tensions between liberal ideals and contemporary populist movements, offering a thought-provoking analysis rooted in both historical tradition and modern political dilemmas.

About the Speaker:

John Gray is Emeritus Professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics and a former Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford. A leading political thinker, he is the author of numerous influential works, including *Straw Dogs*, *False Dawn*, *Seven Types of Atheism*, and *The New Leviathans* (2023).

Facilitated by:

Lord John Alderdice, President of Honour of Liberal International and President of the National Liberal Club. Leader of the Alliance Party from 1987 to 1998, he played a key role in negotiating the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and served as the first Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Since 1996, he has sat as Liberal Democrat in the House of Lords speaking on international affairs. He also has academic positions at Oxford and Cambridge universities and is the UK Trade Envoy to Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

Register here:



Wake Up and Smell the Cordite: LIBG Fringe Meeting at the Bournemouth 2025 conference.

Is Donald Trump an aberration or the new normal in America? Is confrontation with Vladimir Putin's Russia inevitable or should the West continue to appease him? As a packed LIBG fringe meeting considered these depressing themes, one attendee remarked that the event should be taking place in the main auditorium, so serious and relevant was the subject.

Becky Tinsley, a part-time US resident, argued that America is fundamentally conservative, deferential and conformist, with race at the core of so many political issues. Trump has a 98% approval rating among his voters because he continues to articulate their grievances. His supporters don't expect delivery on his promises; they don't trust America's institutions; and they are suspicious of what they see as the elite. The Democrats continue to give the voters civics lessons, remote from widespread anger about the 2008 banking crisis or the waste of life and money in Iraq.

Edward Lucas warned that the West is in peril through decades of complacency since the end of the Cold War. He said the clock was at five past midnight, rather than five minutes to midnight. Putin has an accurate assessment of our unwillingness to rearm and confront his expansionism. Britain in particular is woefully unprepared to deter an attack from Russia or to defend our European neighbours. Decades of under-investment in our military capabilities, or procuring the wrong hardware, have left us feeble. Each day, Russia tests our resolve with cyber-attacks and cable cutting. (Edward's contribution follows this report).

Calum Miller MP, the Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesperson, stressed the importance of working with our European partners and supporting Ukraine. He said that one of the things that was lacking at the moment is clear and decisive leadership and that one of the challenges that the UK is facing right now is adapting to the change in approach from the USA, though pointing out that this predates Trump, with Obama tilting toward the Pacific and Biden increasingly moving the US from free trade agreements. Speaking of meetings with Japanese and other politicians Miller said I don't see this government, to my regret working hard enough to look outwards and to look to other countries which might establish alternative relationships. He saw the Labour government following the Tories lead in chipping away at institutions of soft power, the British Council and the BBC World Service. Speaking of sanctions against Russia, whilst there are many, many things that I disagree with Donald Trump about, I actually think is completely right that Europeans need to get together and cut off the revenue stream to Russia and I hope... we could work with Hungary, Slovakia and others to achieve that goal.

Helen McGuire MP spoke about the parlous state of our armed forces and equipment. She said she spoke frequently to various ministers on helping the UK understand that this threat is real and there needs to be some sort of campaign that explains to United Kingdom and what is actually going on because you see what's happened to Heathrow, we've seen other cyber-attacks and this is happening on a daily basis. Her experiences of the people of Estonia brought this home to her with urgency.

As Edward Lucas had put it, this is not five-to-midnight, it is already five-past-midnight.

The meeting was superbly chaired by WKP

Rebecca Tinsley



Calum Miller MP,

Wendy Kyrie Pope,

Edward Lucas,

Rebecca Tinsley

Russia's war on the West.

Edward Lucas

In my remarks today I am going to look at the dangerous gap between words and deeds. We are at war not only in Ukraine, but also here in the rest of Europe, in countries that have not known armed conflict in living memory. These are attacks that expose weaknesses in our defence, our deterrence and in our decision-making. We don't have answers, and our lack of answers means that these attacks are going to get worse. We systematically underestimate the threat we face and overestimate our own security.

In Ukraine, there are no illusions. High explosive rains down from the skies. Russian glide bombs pulverise frontline positions while missiles and drones reduce homes, schools and hospitals to rubble. Nothing the West has done so far is enough to turn the tide of that war. Nor have we given Vladimir Putin any reason to stop his attacks on us, overtly with rule-busting warplanes and cable-cutting ships or covertly with anonymous drones, hackers and hired thugs. Make no mistake, we are in the middle of an escalating Russian attack on Europe. It exposes the gaps in our defences, the lack of a deterrent, and most of all and most immediately the gaps in our decision-making.

Plugging those gaps will require deeds. Hard choices, real money, painful sacrifices, shouldering real risks. Instead, we have words.

President Trump, fresh from meeting Volodymyr Zelensky in New York, posted on social media that Russia is a vastly overrated power; a “paper tiger” with an increasingly weakening economy, and that Ukraine can win back all its territory or even more. He has also said that NATO should shoot down Russian warplanes that intrude into our airspace.

These words may not be game-changers. But they are certainly eye-openers. Not necessarily comforting ones, too.

The first point to make is that these words are encouraging chiefly because what has come before them has been so dreadfully depressing.

For months we have heard from the president the language of moral equivalence, or worse –insulting falsehoods that Ukraine has “no cards”¹, while Russia is so much greater and stronger than Ukraine'; “ten-times more”¹ in one of his more memorable moments. The rest of the noise machine around Trump amplified this doom-laden message. Ukraine had to give up territory, we have been repeatedly told by JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Steve Witkoff, as well as Trump himself.

What we might call the Russian steamroller narrative has been monotonously restated among media, academic commentators and the so-called analytic community. Russia's strengths have been systematically overstated, and Ukraine's weaknesses exaggerated and its successes underplayed.

The Russian steamroller has been a staple of the populist movement in Europe and the USA, amplified by Viktor Orban², Marine Le Pen³, Nigel Farage⁴, amongst others.

As my friend and colleague Phillips O'Brien of St Andrews University points out in his must-read Substack newsletter this narrative has been a killer for Ukraine—literally. It has been used to justify the ending of US military aid and the slow-walking of any weapons sales. It has been used to pressure the Europeans to accept the US vision of a “peace” deal, and it has been used to browbeat the Ukrainians themselves. It has damaged international support for Ukraine and through that almost certainly increased Ukrainian casualties.

Elsewhere in the world the story is of stalemate. A hideously costly war that nobody can win, which must be brought to an end at whatever cost. As a German commentator once said, epitomising the strain of sanctimonious self-indulgence that even today features too prominently in her country's *Weltanschauung*, “even the worst peace is better than the best war”.

Ukrainians don't feel like that. They know what the worst peace looks like. It's the peace of the slaughterhouse, of the empty bedroom belonging to a kidnapped child, of a looted museum and a ruined hospital. That's why they are still fighting

The truth of course is that the war is dynamic. It has many dimensions, and though neither side is winning decisively, both the steamroller and the stalemate are inaccurate even as shorthand depictions of what is happening.

Other people here have better and more first-hand knowledge of the situation in Ukraine, so I will make only a couple of brief points on this subject, before turning to my main field of expertise, Russia's war on the rest of Europe.

But it is clear that Russia's ten-day war is in great and probably increasing difficulty. The autumn offensive has stalled, its highlight only one significant breakthrough which was followed by an effective Ukrainian counterattack. Drone strikes on Russian refineries are causing fuel shortages. Crimea, Putin's great geopolitical trophy, is looking vulnerable as air defences there are pummelled. Ukraine continues to innovate with startling success, producing weapons, especially drones and missiles, that are cheaper, more effective, produced faster and in greater numbers than anything the arms manufacturers in the rest of Europe or North America can manage.



These setbacks are not pushing Putin to the negotiating table. Instead he is cranking up attacks on Ukraine's European backers. Intrusions this year into Norwegian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Estonian and now, it seems, Danish airspace highlight weaknesses in our defence, deterrence and most of all in our decision-making. The initial responses are confused, clueless or unsustainably costly. Then we huff and puff. Undeterred, Putin continues.

Russia is innovating with its hybrid, sub-threshold, active measures, shadow war, call it what you will. New tactics, new combinations of tactics. When something stops working, you try something else or try it differently.

Russia's also innovating on the battlefield. One big lesson for our countries from the Ukrainian battlefield is that NATO is far behind not just the Ukrainians but also the Russians. As a military confrontation with "

Russia becomes increasingly likely, the huge gaps in our defence and deterrence should be a cause of great concern to all of us. A recent military exercise in this region — I won't name the country because it's still technically a secret — ended with the visiting NATO force being slaughtered by a handful of Ukrainian drone pilots. The NATO general in charge, when confronted with the disaster at the end of the exercise summed it up with some military jargon so technical that I hesitate to use it even here in the Royal Danish Military Academy. His exact words were "Oh shit. We're fucked."

But let's get back to what seems like a change in rhetoric following weeks of Russian stunts and provocations.

Trumpology is as uncertain and unscientific a discipline as Kremlinology, so it would be unwise to speculate what prompted this new mood of hawkishness, or how long it will last.

The real point is talk is cheap and the words are hollow. Just to finish with Trump. The most significant part of his remarks was not the wounded ego, the evident resentment that Putin has given him the middle finger.

Nor was it the dawning realisation that Ukraine is not a loser, and may be a winner, to use the binary, simplistic language of reality TV.

The most important part of Trump's remarks was disengagement. He was not pledging support to Europe. He was wishing Europe luck, in the language you use for a customer who is buying your products, not for an ally.

This matters, because in the past we relied on the US for those three Ds, Defence, Deterrence and Decision-making. Without the US, Nato is just a gleaming fossil in suburban Brussels. In the past, in the decades that everyone in this room grew up in, any bout of mischief brought not just stern talk but high-level visits, military reinforcements and sanctions. Think of the way the US intervened in the ex-Yugoslav war, trivial by the standards of today's European security crisis.

I stress, Trump's newly hawkish words are welcome. Imagine what he could have said.

But his stance bears little comparison to Ronald Reagan's "evil empire" speech of 1983, signalling American resolve to win the cold war, or to John F Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech in 1963, which signalled American resolve to protect West Berlin at the height of the Cold War

He offered neither aid for Ukraine nor sanctions on Russia. Worse, we can't be sure that he means it. Trump's inconsistent, loose-lipped style means that views in Europe on US trustworthiness now differ sharply: another useful division for the Kremlin to exploit. Some European allies still hope against hope that the Atlantic Alliance is salvageable. Others are grimly aware that it is not.

It's not just Trump. A NATO spokesperson called⁵ the Polish airspace intrusion "yet another example of reckless Russian behaviour and Nato's ability to respond".

The first part of that sentence grossly underplays the threat. This is not Russian "reckless behaviour". That is the language used to condemn drunk drivers and teenage hooligans. The Kremlin is systematically, brazenly taunting the alliance. The second part of the sentence should more accurately read: "NATO's inability to respond."

The first big takeaway for the Kremlin from this is that the US has in effect disengaged from NATO. On the political level, the initial silence from the White House was deafening. Under any previous administration, the US would be spearheading NATO's reaction to a provocation of this seriousness. Indeed there are still fears that the US is not just missing in action. It is actively undermining its allies' defences. A heavily sourced report in *The Atlantic* reveals⁶ that the US is now blocking sales of sensitive military equipment to Europe. The gap between words and deeds is growing.

While we talk, Russia acts. It grinds away in Ukraine. And it attacks us.

I do not believe that Russia is planning a full-scale war against NATO. It can't. And it doesn't need to. If it can destroy NATO politically, it does not need to confront it militarily

Yes, military tactics are part of the political attack. But they are the means to an end.

Russia's aim is to sow division, both between countries and within them. If Nato members do not believe allies will help them when they are attacked, they think less about how to help others. If helping Ukraine brings the systematic disruption of daily life, many Europeans may find the price too high. Our energy, communications, payment and transport systems are designed to cope with amateur vandalism, not systematic state-sponsored sabotage. Nor can we keep every individual or institution safe from Russia's hired thugs. Paid via cutouts, they may be oblivious to the identity of their taskmasters and their targets.

Building proper defences against these threats will take too long and cost too much. In the meantime, we must make Putin believe his stunts in Europe have become prohibitively costly and risky.

European allies have many options. One is to change the rules of engagement, giving authority to commanders on the spot to shoot down intruders, be they drones or warplanes, without having to check with higher authority.

As Minna Alander points out Since the latest Russian long-lingering airspace violation above Estonia a couple days ago, the European debates have been plagued by the flawed comparison with the 2015 incident when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet that violated its air space.

But the Turkish downing took place in quite a different context: 2015 tensions had been rising between Turkey and Russia over Syria, and it wasn't the first time Russia violated Turkish air space. Nevertheless, the Russian-Turkish relations were back then, and are even more so today, of a very different nature than the relations between countries around the Baltic Sea and Russia. When Turkey shot down the Russian jet, it was like punching your annoying buddy in the face. If Poland shoots down a Russian jet, it may mean something very different – and be interpreted very differently by Russia – given that the Polish-Russian relations are not exactly chummy. In short: the Turkish approach is neither available nor to be recommended to European NATO allies.

Second, it is particularly unfair to compare 2015 Turkey with the 12-minute-long air space violation of Estonian air space. The decision to shoot down the Russian jet was made nationally by Turkey and did not automatically involve the rest of NATO. Estonia, like the other two Baltic states Latvia and Lithuania, does not have an own air force and relies on NATO's air policing for the security of its skies. Hence, even if Estonia wanted to, it does not have the national option to shoot down a Russian jet without involving all of NATO. The immediate escalation level is therefore higher than in the Turkish case.

The latest air space violation is a very typical military signalling move by Russia, and Estonia was likely chosen for the very reason outlined above – that its air space is a NATO responsibility. Also other Baltic Sea states are used to frequent Russian air space violations. To give but a few examples: Russia often uses

NOTAMS in northern Norway⁷ for intimidation purposes, simulated attacks on Sweden in 2013⁸, and violated Finnish airspace in 2016 with two Su-27s⁹ to express displeasure regarding Finland's intention to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the US on defence cooperation. NATO Baltic Air Policing intercepted Russian aircraft more than 300 times in 2023¹⁰ alone (all of the incidents did not lead to air space violations, of course). While it is important not to normalise this unacceptable Russian behaviour, understanding that it is not new nevertheless gives important context.

Third, even in the case of Baltic Sea NATO allies that have their own air forces, such as Finland, Sweden, or Norway, there are a number of considerations that differ from Turkey. Finland has an 800-mile land border with Russia and is located close to important and sensitive Russian mainland military and civilian areas, such as St. Petersburg in the south as a main population centre and the Kola Peninsula in the north that harbours Russia's nuclear second-strike submarines. The latter applies to Northern Norway as well, whereas the Swedish island Gotland is close to the Russian exclave Kaliningrad. It is therefore not unreasonable to consider the possibility that Russia would take it in a different way if e.g. Finland were to shoot down a Russian fighter jet in its air space close to the Russian border. A tit-for-tat response from Russia would be conceivable, using the first suitable occasion to shoot down a Finnish plane (military or civilian) close to the Russian border with some kind of an excuse that it allegedly was about to or already entered Russian air space.

Fourth, the Baltic Sea is an extremely congested space both at sea and in the air, with constant civilian traffic and frequent military activity. The rules of engagement therefore reserve shooting down foreign aircraft as the very last resort: the first reaction is always to intercept and escort intruders out, and only in case of unwillingness to cooperate are the next steps taken – contacting to give warning, flying close to force exit, warning shot or flares, and finally, use of force. Japan used flares against Russian air space incursions¹¹ after the aircraft in question ignored their warnings in September 2024. Starting to shoot down flying Russian objects would mean a significant risk to civilian air traffic (and the civilian population more broadly depending on where a downed jet would land) and require closures of air space whenever such measures were deemed necessary.

Russia's main interest in upping the ante in Europe is probably to test US reactions: does the US get involved? So far, the US (apart from the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, SACEUR, who is an American general) stayed out of the direct response in Poland and does not intend to contribute to the Eastern Sentry¹² mission that increases NATO presence along the eastern flank. It was established two days after the larger-scale drone incursion into Poland and a number of European countries (among those Denmark, France, Germany, and the UK) have already deployed their contributions.

It is entirely possible that Russia will force a European country to shoot down a Russian jet if it feels confident that it would lead to a final and open abandonment of Europe by the US. Donald Trump's latest statement, recommending NATO to shoot down Russian intruders, may cause some momentary concern in the Kremlin, but what really counts is whether the US follows up with action and participates in the NATO efforts in Europe.

For most European air forces, the use force in case of hostile air space incursions is an option within their rules of engagement. It is also possible, if not even likely, that it becomes necessary sometime soon. But we should not simply assume that shooting down a Russian jet once will definitely make Russia stop violating our air space.

But a narrow, localised military response risks falling into a Kremlin trap. Russia is trying to plant corrosive, highly specific dilemmas in our minds. Are we really willing to risk World War Three and nuclear obliteration to protect faraway, hard-to-defend places of which we know nothing? Targets for Russian aggression, past or pending, include pub-quiz puzzlers such as the Swedish island of Gotland; the northernmost Estonian island of Vaindloo; Norway's Arctic Svalbard archipelago; and the Suwałki-Alytus land bridge between Poland and Lithuania. We should not allow Russian stunts to turn these into special cases. The Kremlin is threatening all of Europe. If someone stamps on your little toe, it is an attack on you, not on your digitus quintus pedis.

Nor do we need to respond with tit-for-tat toe-stamping. Our asymmetric deterrence can use the breadth of the alliance, and the whole array of our political, economic, financial and military potential. We could ban all Russian energy imports and make life far more difficult for the "enablers" — bankers, lawyers,

accountants, insurers and the like — who help dodge sanctions. Accelerating the seizure of Russia's frozen central bank assets, estimated at £240 billion, to fund Ukraine's war effort, as proposed by the EU and now the UK, would apply a £20 billion penalty for each of the 12 minutes Russian jets spent in Estonian airspace. Britain could add the £2.5 billion, still scandalously unused, from the forced sale of Chelsea Football Club.

As Michael Weiss noted today. Europe has ample runway here. Act as if Trump means it even if he doesn't. The eight Nordic-Baltic countries plus Poland alone have a bigger GDP than Russia. If they wanted to, they could plug any financial gaps left by the US and buy whatever American weapons they need. Add Germany and other countries into the mix and European camp looks even bigger, and its failure to deal with the security challenge still more pitiful.

The "Eastern Sentry" air defence system promised for NATO's borderlands would have even more effect if deployed to give respite also to western Ukraine. We can also invoke Ukraine's formidable capabilities for sabotage and other attacks deep inside Russia.

The Kremlin will not take these responses lightly. Until it learns to take us seriously, it will seek to intimidate us with threatening words and alarming deeds. That is the price we pay for decades of complacency, timidity and inaction. But the alternative is to accept the disintegration of our alliances and to allow Russia to reshape Europe in its own interest and image. Escalation is unavoidable now. Better on our terms than Putin's.

Edward Lucas

Edward Lucas's expertise includes energy, cyber-security, espionage, information warfare and Russian foreign and security policy. Formerly a senior editor at *The Economist*, the world's foremost newsweekly, he is a senior (non-resident) adviser at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), a thinktank based in Washington, DC. He writes a regular column in the *London Times*.

In 1992, he co-founded an English-language weekly in Tallinn, Estonia: the *Baltic Independent*. For many years a foreign correspondent, he was based in Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Moscow and the Baltic states. In 2008 he wrote *The New Cold War*, a prescient account of Vladimir Putin's Russia, followed in 2011 by *Deception*, an investigative account of east-west espionage. He has written three other books. An experienced broadcaster, he is a regular contributor to the BBC's *Today* and *Newsnight* programmes, and to NPR, CNN and Sky News. He is the recipient of numerous awards and decorations. He was deported from the Soviet Union, arrested, beaten up, interrogated and spied on by communist secret police agents behind the Iron Curtain. He studied economics at the London School of Economics and speaks five languages — German, Russian, Polish, Czech and Lithuanian.

¹ https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-ukraine-war-russia-military-aid-intelligence-gaps-defense/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

² https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-pm-orban-says-ukraine-cannot-win-battlefield-2024-10-08/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

³ https://caliber.az/en/post/marine-le-pen-we-are-pushing-ukraine-into-unwinnable-war?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

⁴ https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-nigel-farage-ukraine-cant-win-war-russia/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/nato-member-estonia-says-three-russian-jets-violated-its-airspace-2025-09-19/>

⁶ <https://www.theatlantic.com/national-security/archive/2025/09/arms-sale-europe-trump-colby-ukraine/684274/>

⁷ https://sjms.nu/articles/10.31374/sjms.133?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

⁸ Vi bygger om! Vissa funktioner kan skilja sig åt mellan olika sidor. [Läs mer här](#)

⁹ https://yle.fi/a/3-9217707?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

¹⁰ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_221598.htm?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

¹¹ https://apnews.com/article/japan-russia-military-airspace-flares-cd3b8071ec72a65f221662f4aed52831?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

¹² https://shape.nato.int/news-releases/eastern-sentry-to-enhance-natos-presence-along-its-eastern-flank?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email



LIBERAL DEMOCRAT FRIENDS OF PALESTINE AT BOURNEMOUTH

From the 20th – 23rd September 2025, Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine (LDFP) attended the Liberal Democrats Party Conference in Bournemouth, hosting and supporting a series of well-attended events on Palestine.

Saturday 20th September – Cllr Zuffar Haq in conversation with Arwa Damon

On the opening day, LDFP supported a fringe event organised by Councillor Zuffar Haq featuring Arwa Damon, former CNN Correspondent to the Middle East. Attendees were visibly moved as Arwa shared her experiences of working on the ground in Gaza and spoke about the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the Strip.

Sunday 21st September – Topical debate and LDFP fringe event

On the morning of 21st September, Conference held a topical debate entitled “Ending the Israel-Palestine war and Britain’s response to it.” The debate was proposed by LDFP Chair Anne-Marie Simpson and summated by the party’s Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Calum Miller, with additional interventions from Manuela Perteghella MP, Andrew George MP, Alistair Carmichael MP, and Richard Foord MP. Speakers called for wider sanctions and a full arms embargo to pressure Israel to change course and prevent UK complicity in the Gaza genocide. The debate also drew attention to the thousands of Palestinians held unlawfully under Israel’s administrative detention system, amid credible reports of torture and other ill-treatment.

That evening, LDFP hosted a packed-out fringe event, titled “Israel-Palestine: Rebuilding a Pathway to Peace.” The panel featured Tayab Ali, Director of ICJP and Head of International Law at Bindmans LLP; Ben Jamal, Director of Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC); Emili Stevenson of Na’amod’s Strategic Leadership Team; and Ehab Omar, Co-Founder of British Palestinian Families. Panellists set out the urgent steps the UK and political parties such as the Liberal Democrats must take to confront Israel’s genocide in Gaza and end its wider campaign of ethnic cleansing, mass displacement, and dispossession across Palestine.

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Lucia Messent



Peter Brookes at the Watts Gallery, 11 September – 23 November

Our favourite political cartoonist, Peter Brookes is exhibiting at one of the country's lesser-known gems, the Watts Gallery, if ever you needed an excuse to visit it.

Chris Beetles Gallery and Peter Brookes CBE, the award-winning political cartoonist for *The Times*, bring an exhibition of over 40 cartoons to the Watts Museum, covering the major political events and figures from the turbulent last 18 months – from war in Ukraine and the Middle East, to the churn of British politics and, of course, the cult of Trump. Works can be purchased but are going fast.



Founded by G F and Mary Watts, the Watts Gallery is set in 18 acres of beautiful Surrey woodland. After viewing the exhibition, Limmerslease, the home and studio of G F and Mary Watts and the Watts Chapel are also open, or just stroll the idyllic grounds.

George Frederic Watts might be regarded as an artist transitional from the Pre-Raphaelites to Symbolism. I don't recall Peter Brookes basing a cartoon on one of his works (Rembrandt features); The Watts Gallery also has a lovely gift shop and delicious food and drink in the tea shop.

The Watts Gallery, Down Lane, Compton, Surrey, GU3 1DQ

<https://www.wattsgallery.org.uk/collections/george-frederic-watts>
[Peter Brookes: Political Cartoonist of The Times](#) | [Chris Beetles](#)

Ed Davey responding to the Manchester Synagogue Attack

"I am horrified and appalled by the attack outside Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation Synagogue on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

"My thoughts are with the victims, our brave emergency services and the entire Jewish community."

<https://x.com/EdwardJDavey/status/1973694010402185461>

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Reviews

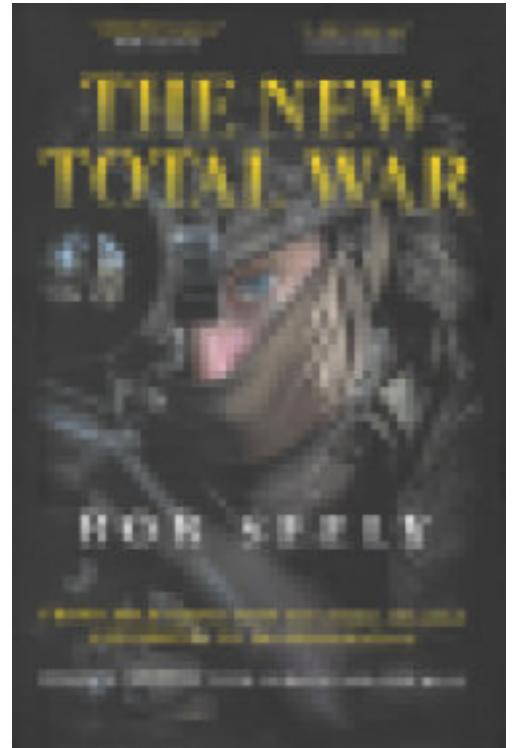
The New Total War, by Bob Seely
Biteback 2025 £25.00
isbn 9781785909481

Former Conservative MP and journalist Bob Seely has written a rousing call to arms for Ukraine. He argues that Vladimir Putin has used his twenty-five years in power to prepare Russia for total war in an attempt to reclaim the geopolitical greatness frittered away by his feeble-minded predecessors.

Total war includes the covert cyber operations that target what Putin sees as dilettante, weak, woke Western society, as well as the more conventional meat grinder approach evident on the front lines in Ukraine. Cutting undersea cables, financing media outlets that spread disinformation, and supporting extremist Western politicians, Putin has geared the Russian state and its economy to fulfilling his historic mission to reclaim the vassal states lost at the end of the Cold War.

None of these tactics are new (except targeting cables) as Seely points out. "...spies and blackmail, assassination, propaganda and disinformation, fake organizations, political 'fronts' and paramilitary groups, politicians and opinion-formers being knowingly or unknowingly manipulated by their adversaries, the use of economic and other forms of power, including language and religion." Putin's strategy is permanent struggle. Not much has really changed since The Bolsheviks, then.

Seely rehearses the reasons Putin cannot coexist with a free, democratic Ukraine flourishing under a pluralist system. Russian thinking and theory could not tolerate the fact that a people's uprising in 2004 banished Putin's stooge. But the author also points out that being in a state of perpetual war suits Putin's needs for control of the Russian population.



What is to be done, Seely asks? Even if Ukraine is victorious, Putin will not stop using "active measures" to undermine its survival. Ukraine's weakest link is its corruption which can be exploited by Russia. He urges membership of NATO "in everything but name", he wants Ukraine to use Russian language Ukrainian media to win hearts and minds, and he wants the West to support Russian voices offering a sane alternative to endless total war. He acknowledges that Putin will use negotiations to delay any progress toward an end of hostilities, relying on the gullibility of Western diplomats who take him at his word. For Moscow, a happy byproduct of the war is sowing division among the democratic nations.

Seely's shopping list includes partnerships between Western and Ukrainian defence firms, using the interest on frozen Russian assets, updating Western military practices as well as equipment, and protecting our own citizens from Russian active measures

Seely intersperses his observations and recommendations with stories of astonishing bravery and resilience among the Ukrainians he interviews as he travels around the country. Although his tone is sometimes rather like a sergeant major barking orders at a dim squaddie, his narrative is gripping and well intentioned. The only disappointment is that the author stops short of endorsing the use of Russia's frozen assets to buy Ukraine the weapons it needs.

Rebecca Tinsley

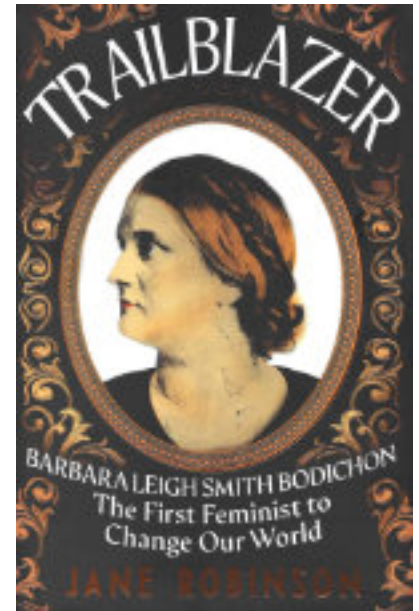
Trailblazer, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, The first feminist to change our world, by Jane Robinson. Doubleday, 2024 isbn 9780857527776

Bodichon, by Mary Upton. Tradewinds Publishing, 2024 isbn 9781399987295

Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon; it's a bit like waiting for a bus, 27 years since Dr. Pam Hirsch's biography¹ was published, then two turn up in 2024. Not quite the same, Jane Robinson's *Trailblazer* is a conventional biography, whereas Mary Upton gives us a fictionalised account (mercifully without the need to sensationalise).

I would commend both. Mary Upton's work weighs in at 243 pages, covers the main details of Bodichon's life, drawing from family papers provided by Charlotte Moore as well as Pam Hirsch's biography. It has a readable style but benefits from a background in Barbara Bodichon's life. Jane Robinson provides a more thorough reading, a core 338 pages and another 30 plus of notes, bibliography etc. I regret not reviewing oh earlier *Bluestockings: The remarkable story of the first women to fight for an education*, where she possibly first became aware of her subject; I could not think of a reliable reviewer at the time.

There are probably three main reasons why Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon is not as well-known as she ought to be. First, activities and friendships were wide-ranging (a recent biography of George Eliot does not mention her, though they were best friends). Secondly, after her marriage she spent part of the year in Algeria, detaching herself from the ongoing work she was supporting. Finally, there was the question of her legitimacy, her mother and father did not marry, something of a taboo in Victorian society, where in promoting causes (her father ensured her independence) she might be better kept in the background.



Her grandfather William Smith and father, Ben Smith, were both Whig MPs of progressive views, Robinson treats us to brief biographies of both of them, especially as her father's interacts with Barbara. She enjoyed a much wider education than most women of her class at that time. She married Dr Eugene Bodichon, a French radical Deputy. By this time, she was already promoting women's causes, from her own experience as something of an outcast. Early work was *A Brief Summary of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women*, which led to her working with John Stuart Mill to change the laws relating to married women's property. This followed with petition to Parliament for the enfranchisement of women property owners. Around these projects the first feminist organisation in Britain grew. Concerned with women's education, she provided much of the funds to establish Girton College in Hitchin, later Cambridge. Alongside all of this she was a practising artist, who although a woman of wealth, she should earn a living.

I struggled a little with Robinson's style, where she interjects 21st century and was thus more comfortable with Upton's account; however, you really need the one to inform the other; Hirsch's style is perhaps, more academic. I am interested in Bodichon on many counts, filling the gap (with Harriet Martineau & Harriet Taylor Mill) between Mary Wollstonecraft and Millicent Fawcett, alongside more local reasons - the late Richard Moore was a descendant of her brother. Barbara Lee Smith Bodichon deserves to be better known, and I hope you will enjoy this flurry of interest in her; there is much more to say than is in this brief review.

Stewart Rayment

¹ Dr Pam Hirsch: *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon 1827-1891: Feminist, Artist and Rebel*. Chatto & Windus 1998

Kingmaker, secrets, lies and the truth about five prime ministers, by Sir Graham Brady.
Griffin Books, 2024 £12.99 isbn 9781804188279

When Sir Graham Brady took his realm to be the Chairman of the 1922 Committee (1922), no one would expect Britain facing the political drama all the way towards his resignation. 1922 had been in the middle of the storm of the political drama, since they played a major role in Brexit deal legislation, and electing five Conservative Prime Ministers during that period. So, what did Sir Brady witness while all these dramas unfolded?

His autobiography *Kingmaker: Secret, Lies and the Truth about Five Prime Ministers* told us a lot of the behind-the-scenes stories, from his background all the way till the last 1922 Executive Meeting. It was just the day when Rishi Sunak called the GE2024 when the rain poured. Regrettably, it should not be treated as post mortem examination of the failure of the Conservative Party, but he did make some reflections on the state of the Conservative Party.

One could argue he was trying to defend the legacy of the Conservative government, but he made a lot of critiques on the shortcomings of the vote of confidence system, nomination process, and of course, how the Conservative Party (CCHQ) operated in the last 20 years. Therefore, his reflection, in general, remained rather balanced.

For example, on page 72, he criticised ‘the Conservative Party did away with internal democracy a long time ago... simultaneously removed the democratic federal structure that existed before.... The Conservative Party board is now technically sovereign, but in reality is too big and unwieldy to be effective.’

But on page 289, he explained the Conservative is not ungovernable because ‘I always found that the parliamentary party tended to support its leaders and give them benefit of the doubt. MPs think many times before calling for a confidence vote to be triggered. When the dam bursts, it has been in response to intense pressure and often considerable provocation.’

Despite his political stance (For being pro Brexit and right wing on social and educational agenda), Sir Brady provided a unique insight on the dynamics of the Conservative Parliamentary, and the media works. In this autobiography he explained extensively how 1922 actually ran, and what kind of influence they can exert, in particular when the Tory leader was in trouble.

One key feature of the book was to trace how many letters of no confidence he would receive at different stage of political drama, and how the no confidence vote would actually trigger (Not only based on the letters received, but also depending on the current events, such as National Day Celebrations). When he explained what happened in the final days of Theresa May Premiership, he said:

‘Then on 23 November, another letter was taken out... 45; 28 November... down to 44. It turned out to have been a good call to snatch a few days away; things were about to get very interesting. On 5 December, one of the earlier withdrawals were resubmitted. On 10 December, two more took back to 47. My nerves were shredded.’ (Note: The no confidence vote would be triggered if there are 48 or more letters submitted at that term of parliament)

His way of storytelling was a mixture of fact, his recounts of dialogues with previous Prime Ministers, and his personal observations based on his experiences in 1922. Because of this, Sir Brady recounted some interesting conversations on a range of political drama. For example, he recalled he had suggested to David Cameron they should provide the third option for ‘renegotiating the terms of EU membership’ on the referendum ballot papers; and how the attitude of No. 10 changed from the ‘Brady amendment’ during the vote of Theresa May’s Withdrawal Agreement. In the last chapter, he made a reflection, based on his knowledge on the characters of all 5 prime ministers he served, on how things would play out differently if it was Boris Johnson to be PM in 2016 while Theresa May to be PM when COVID started, the Conservative Party would be a lot more successful.

Having said that, there are some limitations on his observation due to his position in the party. He was technically a backbencher with senior positions in the parliamentary party, and he had his own political agenda (Such as his focus on Education and EU policies), there is a lack of context on how some key political decisions being made. Of course, he did mention his experience on providing advice on policy changes in other time, but it was more like reporting the sentiment of parliamentary party to the Prime Ministers. If you are expecting the book to explain how dramas unfolded during the decision-making process (Such as how Kwasi Kwarteng’s mini budget went wrong, or how Theresa May organised her famous Chequers Deal meeting), you would be disappointed.

To understand British politics, we have how all three major parties operated. Different parties have different party organisations, so do their dynamics. There is no doubt Sir Brady had significant influence within the Conservative Party while he was chairing the 1922 Committee; for being a backbencher, as Rishi Sunak saw him as ‘embodying the stability of the Tory Party’. His autobiography provided a very useful account from the point of view as being a backbencher but having the influence as a frontbencher. For those who want to understand how Tory parliamentary party operated, this would be the book for you.

Larry Ngan

International Abstracts

Journal of Liberal History Issue 128 Autumn 2025

At first glance thin on international content, unless you count the response of the five Manchester Liberal MPs to the treaty with the Soviet Union promoted by the Labour government of 1924. Up to this point neither the Liberal Party nor the Conservatives had been willing to recognise the Soviet Union, necessary though that might be, so it was left to the first Labour government. Whilst unhappy with the treaty, it was the Campbell Case, where the acting editor over the Communist Workers Weekly was accused of incitement to mutiny amongst the armed forces that brought down the government, but whilst reliant on their votes, Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald went out of his way to exclude Liberal MPs from the decision making processes; not the first Labour Prime Minister to do so,

The article *What Influences Liberal Democrats* cites several international events in framing the views of respondents, Suez, the collapse of the Soviet Union and conflicts in the Middle East rated highly. The review of the History Group’s fringe meeting at Harrogate focuses primarily on joining Europe and their meeting, *A new economic policy for the Liberal Party*, primarily on Keynes. John Curtice offers an analysis of the Liberal Democrats and the 2025 local elections, warts and all.

USA

Economically Tone Deaf and Selectively Outraged, by Jennifer Rubin. The Contrarian 11th September 2025

Space omitted this article from interLib 2025-05; an immediate response to the tragic death of Charles Kirk (of whom it is noted, our regular American correspondent wasn’t previously aware).

[Economically Tone Deaf and Selectively Outraged](#)

The Contrarian <contrarian+publishers-roundup@substack.com> covers wider issues of interest to those concerned with the wider fightback against Trump and the MAGA movement generally.



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