



2026 no. 3 June

# INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



**Israel Osman Kavala UK–Ukraine Pact  
Liberal Democrats York Conference Reports  
Time for a D7**

# EVENTS

8<sup>th</sup> June LIBG Forum on Iran & the Middle East – by Zoom

10<sup>th</sup> June Deadline for early-bird discounts to Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference, Brighton  
<http://www.libdems.org.uk/conference>

7<sup>th</sup> September London Security Conference. National Liberal Club, London

19<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> September Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference, Brighton

3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> November LI Congress Bangkok

5<sup>th</sup> November travel to Taipei

6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> November LI Congress Taipei

*For bookings & other information please contact LIBG at*

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**Photographs:** Stewart Rayment, Larry Ngan, Phil Bennion, Rose Raymen, York Art Gallery/Maidstone Museum

**Cover photograph:** Culbaba Theatre– Ukrainian Women's Ensemble based in Bexhill at the Hastings May Day Jack-in-the-Green





# LIBG FORUM

8<sup>th</sup> June



## The War with Iran; misguided, reckless, or a necessary grasping of the nettle?

The unpredictable situation in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz has affected the world economy, while discerning President Trump's motives and objectives there remains opaque. What are the long-term consequences?

LIBG has organised an online forum meeting with James Moran, Mohammed Nosseir and other speakers to be added at 7pm UK time on 8 June, chaired by new LIBG chair Larry Ngan.

**James Moran** is a diplomat and economist. He served as EU Ambassador to Egypt 2012 to 2016 and has held many other diplomatic postings in the Middle East. Married to a Palestinian, he is also father of Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran.

**Mohammed Nosseir** is an Egyptian liberal politician who was a member of the higher committee at the Democratic Front Party from 2007 to 2012, and of the political bureau of the Free Egyptian Party till 2013.

He is also an author, writing articles on marketing strategies and sociopolitical reforms published in a number of global and regional magazines & newspapers such as Gulf Business, Arab News and Le Monde Diplomatique,

**7.00pm UK Time 8<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

Please use this Zoom link to join the meeting.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81200442784?pwd=5cJfwsDAFARYyV6bKd8xRBHB02cIaM.1>

# Larry Ngan elected as chair of LIBG

I am honoured to be elected Chair of the Liberal International British Group (LIBG).

I am originally from Hong Kong and moved to the UK in 2006. I joined the party in 2017. The Brexit negotiations and the Hong Kong protests in 2019–2020 helped me understand how internationalism can make a difference in our world, and since then I have dedicated myself to foreign policy and international relations.

Before being elected Chair of LIBG, I served as Chair of the Liberal Democrats Friends of Hong Kong and as an elected member of the Federal International Relations Committee over the past three years. In the past, I worked on Hong Kong and China policy for our party. More recently, I have shifted my focus to foreign interference and democratic resilience.

As an affiliated organisation of Liberal International, LIBG aims to promote liberal values internationally, including human rights, social justice, democracy, and the rule of law. We believe in pro-Europeanism and therefore promote closer relations with the European Union and other pan-European institutions. To achieve this, we work with like-minded parties inside and outside Europe and encourage engagement through publications (including our journal, *interLib*), conferences, and regular fringe events.

With the rise of the alt-right across the global political spectrum, this is a challenging time to take over as Chair of LIBG. We are facing national security threats from authoritarian regimes such as China, Russia, and Iran. Working with like-minded countries to protect our democratic institutions and liberal values has become vital to our survival.

I had personal experience of this at the Liberal International Congress in The Hague last year, where I had several very interesting discussions with representatives from our sister parties, particularly on the issue of donations from authoritarian regimes to political parties and non-governmental organisations. These interactions were extremely valuable to my work in the Policy Working Group on foreign interference.

Through this experience, I have come to understand the importance of the work carried out by Liberal International. As the newly elected Chair of LIBG, I very much look forward to leading our affiliated organisation to further success in the years ahead.

*Larry Ngan*



# What Is Better for the State of Israel: Miserable Palestinians or Dignified Citizens? Mohammed Nossier

A conflict that has lasted nearly eight decades may require an approach different from the recurring cycles of war that all parties have pursued. The war in Gaza following the October 7 attack demonstrated that making life unbearable for Gaza's civilians will not end this long-standing conflict. On the contrary, it has strengthened Palestinian resilience while generating unprecedented global disapproval of the State of Israel. The crisis demands a new approach — one grounded in offering Palestinians a dignified life rather than continual hardship.

Ironically, Israel's prime minister, whose foremost responsibility is to protect his citizens, failed to prevent the October 7, 2023 attack by HAMAS instead of being held politically accountable for this failure, he successfully positioned himself as a wartime leader determined to destroy the attackers — a goal that remains unfulfilled for more than thirty months later. Politicians often act to preserve their political survival, and the continuation of the Gaza war has enabled Benjamin Netanyahu to remain in power while postponing legal and political challenges. This dynamic has been reinforced by unwavering Western support, particularly from the United States.

Since its founding, Israeli citizens have sought a secure state accepted by the hundreds of millions of Arabs surrounding it. Successive Israeli governments, despite possessing advanced intelligence capabilities, sophisticated technology, and military superiority, have failed to achieve this objective. Instead, partial diplomatic arrangements — such as the Abraham Accords — have created the appearance of regional normalization without realizing a true peace. Perhaps what Israel requires today is not military escalation but a fresh mindset.

Understanding the middle east dynamics is essential. Israel is a new state, yet technologically advanced one, and its need for stability and security is indisputable. Meanwhile, many Arab societies face socioeconomic challenges marked by marginalization, poverty, political exclusion, and widespread frustration. Such conditions can easily fuel spontaneous unrest, especially in an era shaped by unrestricted social media narratives. Whereas governments on both sides have been exploiting their hardliners to justify repression of their adversaries and continue conflict.

Moreover, there is a fundamental difference between the doctrine of the Israeli army and that of Palestinian resistance groups. Israeli soldiers are citizens temporarily mobilized to defend their country and ultimately wish to return home to their normal lives. Palestinian resistance groups, however, have a liberation mission, one for which individuals are willing to sacrifice their lives — an Ideology that strengthens their endurance. Offering Palestinians, a dignified, self-ruled state — rather than externally imposed political arrangements, such as Trump's Board of Peace — will certainly weaken the appeal and legitimacy of militant resistance.

In essence, opposing factions need one another to offer a sustainable solution. It may therefore be necessary, at least temporarily, to marginalize leaderships that have offered little beyond violence escalation. A bottom-up approach could instead focus on citizens themselves: persuading Israelis that a dignified and self-ruled Palestinian state would enhance Israel's long-term security, while conveying to Palestinians that their statehood is subject to a permanent termination of violence. If widely embraced by both societies, such a vision could eventually induce political leaders to adopt it.

Western nations often frame the world in terms of good versus evil, seeking to eliminate what they perceive as evil. Yet these definitions may appear reversed in other cultural contexts. The real challenge, therefore, is not to destroy what is labeled as "evil," but to transform it into something constructive through peaceful means. Moreover, it is unrealistic to expect that Western nations will be able to uplifting the economy of millions of Arab citizens through promises tied solely to normalization with Israel — a fragile proposition that frequently benefits engrained interests and crony networks more than ordinary people.

Some argue that Israel's territorial expansion since its founding demonstrates strategic success. In purely possessive terms, this claim may hold. Yet, it has come at the cost of enduring conflict, enormous civilian suffering, and growing international isolation. Israel's complete regional integration won't happen until true peace is realized—similar to its most durable peace agreement with Egypt, which was achieved through the complete withdrawal from occupied Egyptian territories.

Meanwhile, regional wars—such as the current attack on Iran—are intensifying the normalization of violence in the Middle East. Renewed military confrontations risk deepening hostility toward both Israel and the United States, reinforcing the dangerous belief among many that violence is the only remaining path to resolving the Arab–Israeli conflict. Dismantling Israel’s illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem — widely considered violations of international law under multiple UN resolutions — would enable the Palestinians to establish their state on these territories. Such a step could also significantly help reduce regional tensions, particularly in volatile arenas such as Lebanon, Iran, and Yemen.

The hardship imposed on Palestinians has fostered a condition in which many feel they have nothing left to lose—a reality that prolongs resistance rather than eliminates it. Establishing a self-ruled Palestinian state capable of providing dignity, stability, and job opportunities would create something worth protecting. This proposition must incorporate security arrangements designed to ensure Israel’s long-term safety. Such a transformation could offer a genuine pathway toward resolving one of the world’s most enduring crises. It is essential to demonstrate to Israeli citizens that they are better off living alongside dignified Palestinians.

*Mohammed Nossier*

Mohammed Nossier is an Egyptian liberal who advocates advancing political participation & economic freedom.

## **Osman Kavala awarded Liberal International’s 2025 Prize for Freedom**

Osman Kavala was awarded Liberal International’s 2025 Prize for Freedom in recognition of his enduring commitment to human rights, civil society, and democratic values despite years of imprisonment in Turkey. The award was accepted on his behalf by his wife, Ayşe Buğra, during a ceremony in Berlin, Germany organised in cooperation with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF).

In his opening remarks, Professor Karl-Heinz Paqué, President of Liberal International made it clear that the LI Prize for Freedom is not awarded lightly, but honors those who demonstrate “the courage to stand up for human dignity, even at great personal cost.”

The evening was marked by a conversation between Liberal International Deputy President Astrid Thors and Ayşe Buğra. This dialogue covered Kavala’s years in prison, resilience and hope of him and his family. Buğra remarked that there is no other choice than continuing this fight and noted the importance of international solidarity towards Kavala’s case.

In his acceptance letter, Kavala said: “To receive the Prize for Freedom is a great honour for me. I thank Liberal International for their decision. This prize has become a source of strength and motivation for me” – also noting his belief that “new political dynamic led by liberal values could make a better world possible.”

Osman Kavala, human and civil rights activist, philanthropist and successful businessman, emerged as a key player in Turkish civil society starting in the 1990s. In 2002, he co-founded the Anadolu Kültür Foundation, which brings together the arts, business, and civil society to support local initiatives, to highlight cultural diversity and inter-cultural understanding, and to strengthen international collaboration.

At the beginning of the 2010s, he came into President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s crosshairs because he criticised his increasingly illiberal, authoritarian-style government policy and the resulting division of the Turkish civil society. Osman Kavala was accused of financing the protests against the planned demolition of Gezi Park in 2013 and has been jailed in the notorious Silivri prison on the outskirts of Istanbul ever since he was detained on 18 October 2017.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) called for Kavala’s immediate release twice in 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019 and 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022 because of Turkey’s blatant violations of international obligations. Its decision said Kavala’s imprisonment aimed to silence him and other human rights defenders and wasn’t supported by evidence of an offense. However, after his criminal conviction to life imprisonment in solitary confinement without the possibility of parole in April 2022, Kavala’s appeal to the Istanbul Court of Appeal was turned down on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2022. The judgement has been final because the Turkish Court of Cassation upheld the aggravated life imprisonment sentence for Osman Kavala on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

06/05/2026

# **The UK–Ukraine Century Pact: a long-term investment in liberal institutions**

## **Volodymyr Kistianyk**

The One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom and Ukraine, signed in Kyiv on 16 January 2025, marks a significant step in formalising a long-term strategic relationship between the two countries. It builds on earlier frameworks of cooperation and sets out a broad agenda focused on defence, economic cooperation, and democratic development. At its core, the agreement is intended to strengthen Ukraine's security and institutional resilience, while deepening cooperation in areas such as energy, technology, and other sectors.

In this context, the United Kingdom has positioned itself as a leading diplomatic supporter of Ukraine, working closely with France and a broader “Coalition of the Willing” of more than thirty countries to advance long-term security guarantees. In early 2026, these efforts included reaffirming commitments to Ukraine's future security and signing a trilateral Declaration of Intent relating to the deployment of multinational forces in the event of a ceasefire.

At the same time, the UK–Ukraine 100 Year Partnership, launched in 2025, is deepening cooperation across key sectors such as defence, technology, and trade, reflecting a shift toward sustained, strategic engagement. London also maintains active bilateral dialogue with Kyiv and leverages international institutions—including the United Nations, the OSCE, and the International Atomic Energy Agency—to condemn Russian aggression, counter disinformation, document human rights abuses, and address nuclear safety risks, particularly at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Together, these efforts illustrate a comprehensive UK approach that combines coalition-building, long-term partnerships, and multilateral diplomacy to support Ukraine's sovereignty and future security.

Moreover, the importance of this pact becomes clearer when placed in the context of Ukraine's current reality. As the war continues, the humanitarian and economic pressures on the country remain immense. Ukraine's losses from the full-scale war are staggering in both human and material terms. According to the United Nations, approximately 10.8 million people in 2026 require humanitarian assistance, reflecting the scale of disruption to daily life and basic services. Civilian suffering has been particularly acute near the front line, where nearly 90% of strikes and more than half of civilian casualties occur within a 20 km zone, devastating entire communities and critical infrastructure such as homes, hospitals, schools, and energy systems. The economic toll is equally profound: as of 31 December 2025, the World Bank estimates that reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine will cost around \$588 billion over the next decade. Together, these figures illustrate not only the immediate humanitarian catastrophe but also the long-term structural damage inflicted on Ukraine's economy, society, and state capacity.

It is precisely in this context that the UK–Ukraine partnership acquires practical meaning. Beyond its declarative commitment to shared values, the agreement provides a framework through which sustained defence support, long-term investment, and institutional cooperation can be delivered. Strengthening maritime security, supporting energy resilience, and promoting anti-corruption measures are not abstract policy goals, but responses to immediate and concrete needs arising from the war.

Meanwhile, according to information from the European Commission, Ukraine continues to maintain and reform its democratic institutions under conditions of martial law. While elections have been postponed, parliamentary activity and institutional reforms continue, highlighting an ongoing commitment to democratic governance even in wartime. This underscores a central point: Ukraine is not only defending its territory, but also actively sustaining the political system that the partnership with the UK is designed to support. In this sense, the One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement should be understood not simply as a symbolic alignment of liberal values, but as a long-term instrument aimed at addressing the real and pressing challenges facing Ukraine today.

One of the most fitting references in this context is a quotation from John Stuart Mill, taken from one of his seminal works, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861): "A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a nationality if they are united among themselves by common sympathies which do not exist between them and any others—which make them co-operate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves, or a portion of themselves, exclusively."

In this light, the UK–Ukraine Century Pact can be seen not only as a strategic agreement, but as a practical expression of the very principle articulated by John Stuart Mill. Ukraine's continued resistance and

institutional resilience reflect a society bound by shared purpose and a clear commitment to self-government, even under extreme conditions. The partnership with the United Kingdom therefore goes beyond policy alignment—it reinforces a national project grounded in collective identity, democratic continuity, and the enduring aspiration to govern as a united political community.

Building on this, the United Kingdom's support for Ukraine also reflects the very logic identified by John Stuart Mill: that durable political communities—and the governments they sustain—depend on shared commitments, active cooperation, and the defence of self-rule. By supporting Ukraine, the UK is not only helping a country resist external aggression but also reinforcing its own role as a defender of democratic values, the rule of law, and international cooperation. The agreement's emphasis on accountability for violations of international law, democratic reform, and deeper economic ties embodies a form of liberal internationalism long associated with British political thought. At a time when questions of political trust and electoral integrity persist even within the UK, such engagement underscores that democracy cannot be taken for granted—it must be continuously upheld in practice. In this sense, the pact serves a dual purpose: it supports Ukraine's struggle for self-governance while allowing Britain to reaffirm its global influence and demonstrate that liberal principles remain not only relevant, but actionable.

These dynamics resonate within the United Kingdom itself, where concerns over electoral security and public trust highlight the fragility of democratic systems even in long-established states. The findings of the First Special Report of Session 2024–26 HC 1709 underline this reality, pointing to growing risks faced by candidates, MPs, and voters alike. In this context, the UK–Ukraine partnership gains additional significance: it reflects a shared recognition that threats to democratic integrity are not confined to conflict zones, but are part of a broader, persistent challenge to the liberal order—one that requires continuous vigilance, cooperation, and institutional resilience on both sides.

To sum up the conclusions, one may find oneself in agreement with the rather insightful remark as noted by William Ewart Gladstone during his speech in Edinburgh. Although his words may have echoed through the halls of history some time ago, they remain remarkably relevant today. As he famously put it, "Whatever we may say amidst the clash of arms and amidst the din of preparation for warfare in time of peace—amidst all this yet there is going on a profound mysterious movement, that, whether we will or not, is bringing the nations of the civilised world, as well as the uncivilised, morally as well as physically nearer to one another, and making them more and more responsible before God for one another's welfare."

Taken as a whole, the One Hundred Year Partnership between the United Kingdom and Ukraine is best understood not as a conventional treaty, but as a long-term framework for sustaining liberal resilience amid geopolitical instability. It translates political solidarity into enduring cooperation across defence, reconstruction, and democratic consolidation, reflecting a modern form of liberal internationalism in which security and state-building are inseparable. For Ukraine, it anchors survival in a trajectory of recovery and institutional strengthening. For the United Kingdom, it reaffirms a foreign policy identity rooted in coalition leadership and democratic solidarity. Ultimately, the pact signals that liberal democracy endures not through declarations alone, but through sustained, structured cooperation over time.

***Volodymyr Kistianyk***  
Attorney at Law, PhD in Law  
Kyiv, Ukraine



# Time for a D7

## Rasmussen proposes D7 in response to the Carney speech Phil Bennion

Liberal International Vice President Phil Bennion took part in the 2026 Copenhagen Democracy Summit on 12<sup>th</sup> May, where in response to the call from Canadian PM Mark Carney for the middle powers to cooperate, former NATO Secretary General and Liberal Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen called for the urgent launch of a Democracy or D7. The link to the Carney speech was explicit from the beginning. We were going to be discussing how to get this project underway. Essential components of the idea pre-date the Carney speech as I remember discussing something similar with Yang Jianli<sup>1</sup> in Geneva around three years ago.

Rasmussen said that he had been trying to persuade the US not to abandon its leadership of the free world for the last 10 years, but the rupture in the post WW2 order has happened. “The US no longer has the will to lead and from the perspective of Greenlanders, the global policeman has gone rogue”. He went on to point out that there is no point in lamenting what is lost; we have to build what comes next. “My challenge today is to democratic middle powers. These countries are not hegemonies like China or the United States, but they still have the muscle, the might and the money to matter. Collectively these middle powers must grasp the torch of freedom and the burdens that come with it. Today I will propose a Democracy 7; a D7. A group of like-minded nations that can build an Alliance of Democracies”.

Rasmussen proposes an initial core of the EU, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. This should not be a closed shop and he believes that it should reach out initially to India, Brazil, Taiwan and South Africa to take things forward, but the initial core needs to be quickly formalised so that it can act and not just be a talking shop. Hence it should develop active partnerships in the areas of trade, countering economic coercion, emerging tech, defence, global investment and critical raw materials.

Danish PM Mette Frederiksen discussed the idea with Rasmussen and gave “absolute support”. She welcomed the UK and Canada drawing closer to the EU and Japan taking part in NATO summits. She also commented on the rearmament of Europe and said that 3.5% of spending on defence by 2035 was too slow and was needed by 2030 at latest. Too many Europeans haven’t moved on in terms of Russian aggression and think they are still operating in peacetime. She thinks Russia is preparing to attack another European country and quipped that “a coalition of the waiting is a disaster”. She also said that Ukraine is now a major player in Europe’s security architecture, drones have changed everything and Ukraine should have been welcomed into NATO from their first request. At the end of the conversation she made a serious but mischievous overture to Rasmussen that Venstre should join with her in coalition in Denmark.



A more in-depth discussion on the D7 proposal followed later with Chrystia Freeland (former Deputy PM of Canada under Trudeau) and Taro Kono, former defence minister of Japan. Freeland pointed out that economic dependency on countries that don’t share our values e.g. regarding human rights, was dangerous. She thinks the D7 proposal is very important in terms of mutual support. Kono pointed out that organising defence without the US was much easier in Europe, with 20 NATO members and land-based transport was much easier than in the Pacific, where the US was irreplaceable. Rasmussen and Freeland quickly agreed that the alliance would maintain the best possible relations with the US and Japan would not have to choose. Kono also pointed out the need to work closely with the global south in terms of trade and investment. Rasmussen replied that he envisages one project of D7 to be the creation of investment in and economic partnership with the global south through a joint equivalent to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. All three speakers were concerned that the Trump visit to China to meet with Xi held considerable risks that they would pursue a G2 approach of dividing the world. At the end of the debate the Japanese speaker was as enthusiastic about the project as .

the other two and also called for NATO to take a more global approach and to welcome Japan as a member.

Francis Fukuyama gave the view from the US that much depends on whether the US continues on its isolationist path. However, if democracies don't have an alliance, the autocracies will pick them off. He also suggested that a stronger Europe in defence terms could be the foundation for a rebirth of the transatlantic relationship. Overall he was optimistic for democracy following the election in Hungary and was hopeful in the US that change would start from the mid-terms in November.

There were also a couple of sessions on emerging tech and the threats or otherwise of AI to democracy. I took part in the breakout session chaired by my former MEP colleague Silvana Koch-Mehrin, where I was able to feed back what I had learned from Puma Shen in Taiwan and Leni Robredo regarding her experience with a deep fake false television interview where her virtual-self contradicted her actual positions.

I was able to talk to ALDE Vice President Eva Kjer Hansen between sessions and spent some time with our Vietnamese friends in exile from Viet Tan, who were well represented.

My overall impression was that the concrete proposal of a D7 as an initial group to move things forward is an idea that has legs. It was welcomed by delegates in or close to power from around the world. We should not allow inertia to stymie progress. Liberal International has a role in helping this project towards a swift reality.

### ***Phil Bennion***

Phil Bennion is a Vice-President of Liberal International. In the photograph, Phil Bennion is with representatives of Việt Tân, a Vietnamese party largely in exile who are full members of CALD and intending to apply to LI this year.

<sup>1</sup> Yang Jianli, Chinese dissident, a leader of the student protest in Tiananmen Square, now mathematician & political scientist at the Harvard Kennedy School.

# **London Security Conference 2026**

London Security conference 2026 is a flagship initiative to be held at the National Liberal Club in London on September 7, 2026, bringing together policymakers, security experts, civil society leaders, academia, and youth voices from across Europe and its neighbourhood. The initiative organised by LI, EGI, ELF, and Radikale Venstre, responds to urgent security and resilience challenges in Europe's most exposed regions – the Arctic, Ukraine, the Balkans, and the Caucasus/Black Sea – shaped by Russia's aggression, China's growing influence, hybrid threats, and democratic backsliding. It aims to develop actionable liberal policy recommendations to strengthen collective security, democratic resilience, and regional cooperation.

Across five thematic panels and an interactive workshop, participants will explore shared and region-specific challenges spanning military threats, hybrid warfare, cyber insecurity, disinformation, economic vulnerability, and democratic erosion. The conference will capture key insights through video interviews, and a final publication compiling policy recommendations and expert contributions. By fostering UK–EU cooperation and building a long-term liberal network, the initiative seeks to establish an annual platform for strategy, dialogue, and practical solutions for Europe's frontline regions.

## Liberal Democrat's Friends of Hong Kong at York and their AGM 2026

Before I report what we have done during the Spring Conference, I first need to explain what happened since January 2026. In March 2026, I was invited by the Chair of FIRC to be co-opted onto the committee again for another term, in recognition of our knowledge and experience regarding Hong Kong and China policy within the party. It is a great privilege and recognition of our work, and I was very pleased to accept.

With that in mind, here is the summary of what we had done during the conference:

### 1. **Exhibition stand**

As a tradition of our AO, we organised an exhibition stand in the conference, as we do for every Federal Conference. As we were responses to the consultation papers (which I will explain later), the theme of our exhibition stand this year was more about interaction with party members and promoting my co-option back onto the Federal International Relations Committee. Despite an unfortunate misspelling on our poster, we had a lot of interesting interactions with party members and built up some meaningful connections.

### 2. **Consultation sessions**

During this conference, there are three consultation papers which contained policies related to China. In the Policy Paper 'Thriving Economy', there are sections related to trading relationship with China; while in the 'International Security' Policy Paper, there are extensive sections related to supply chains and defence policies against authoritarian regimes, or in the other words, 'Democracy Resilience'.

For the Policy Working Group I was selected into, The 'Defending and Strengthening British Democracy', we have a major section in measures against foreign interference, moral standards on public office holders and donations regulations. With the hindsight of the Mandelson scandal and Chinese Embassy Complex case unfolding, this consultation section became very important.

As a member in the Policy Working Group, we proposed a wide range of questions to be raised in the consultation paper, which will be the foundation of the consultation session to be held during the Spring Conference. The questions included crypto donations, the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS), and measures to tackle misinformation campaigns, including reforming our education curriculum, and running public advertising campaigns to raise public awareness.

The Policy Working Group held the consultation session on the Conference Saturday evening, and we had a great attendance from party members. There are some interesting discussions and our input on misinformation campaigns had been acknowledged.

Since we were occupied with preparing the consultation sessions, we were unable to hold the Annual General Meeting during the conference. Indeed we hold our AGM on 7th April 2026.

First I would like to say thank you for those who could make it to the AGM. All our Executive Committee members reflected on the organisation's work over the past year, including our fringe events, conference stalls, policy engagement on Hong Kong and China, and relationship-building across the party. We also noted a small increase in membership, alongside the continuing need to strengthen recruitment and ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the organisation.

We have also elected our new Executive Committee for a two-year term. The newly elected officers are as follows:

Chair: Larry Ngan

Vice Chair: Michael Wang

Membership Secretary: Arthur Wu

We had a candidate for the treasurer as a co-opt member of the Executive Committee (Nicholas Chan), and his candidacy will be approved during the first executive committee meeting which will take place on 27th April.

Congratulations to those who are elected, and once again thank you for your support. We look forward to working with you in the coming term.

If you are interested in our work, please email us to [info@friendsofhongkong.org.uk](mailto:info@friendsofhongkong.org.uk), or visit our website <https://www.libdemshk.org.uk/> for details. The link to the membership form is <https://www.libdemshk.org.uk/take-action> if you are interested in becoming a member.

*Larry Ngan*

## Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine at York

On 14<sup>th</sup> March 2026, at the Liberal Democrat Spring Conference in York, LDFP hosted a packed-out fringe event featuring journalist and author Peter Osborne in conversation with Layla Moran MP about his new book, *Complicit: Britain's Role in the Destruction of Gaza*.

Peter summarised the book's key findings, in particular how Britain's political and media establishment backed and enabled Israel's Gaza genocide through uncritical repetition of Israeli narratives, a failure to explicitly acknowledge Israel's illegal actions, and the stigmatisation or criminalisation of pro-Palestinian voices in the UK.

He welcomed the Liberal Democrats' principled stance on Palestine, drawing parallels with the party's historic opposition to the Iraq War, but suggested the party could go further by supporting broader economic and cultural sanctions on Israel to increase pressure on its government to change course.

Peter also condemned the ongoing unilateral and illegal US-

Israeli war on Iran and subsequent Israeli assault on Lebanon. He argued that Israel is the driving force behind this escalation, and that Gaza – the war crimes, the sense of impunity, and the complicity of Western states – was the preliminary stage for the wider international law violations now unfolding.



Like LIBG & the Friends of Hong Kong, the **Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel** didn't have a fringe meeting at York. There is so much to discuss. The Conference Committee really must do something out the cost of events for Liberal Democrat party bodies, or allow advertising for out-conference events... meet the public, don't be scared. Is that a new banner that we spy? Nice!



# International Abstracts.

Journal of Liberal History Issue 130 Spring 2026

Alan Mumford's examination of the last four Liberal Prime Ministers concludes with Asquith and Lloyd George. Later Liberal leaders are remembered, Jo Grimond and Ming Campbell. Greg Simpson expands on Ming's internationalism. Nigel Lindsey provides a biography of Henry Roberston, industrialist, engineer and Victorian MP. The report of January's meeting on Free Trade focusses on the last century onward and outlines some of the difficulties, apposite under the Trump administration. Reviews of the work of Jonathan Parry, and Matthew McManus give much food for thought.

## Liberator 434

Kiron Reid reports from the front lines near Zaporizhzhia in *Ukraine Stands Its Ground* and Rebecca Tinsley calls out the democratic deficit in the Gulf region and its impact on conflict elsewhere. Content is otherwise domestic.

## Liberator 435

Liberator 345's international content is dominated by Europe; what we used to regard as parish council business before the Brexit referendum a decade ago. Marianne Magnin looks at France's municipal elections directly shape national politics and show a fragmented landscape before the presidential race, in *Where Local Elections Really Matter*. It took a rainbow coalition to oust Hungary's authoritarian Orban regime as *Hungary Heads Back to Democracy*, with Rupert Slade reporting from Budapest on how it was done. *A Pact that goes beyond Ukraine* by Volodymyr Kistianyk appears in this issue as *The UK-Ukraine Century Pact*. Keeping with the big noises, in *Waterloo comes to the White House*, Martha Elliott cites corruption, hubris, the Epstein files and Iran war as signs that Donald Trump may lose Congress this year, whilst on the quiet side in *Happy Days for War Criminals* Rebecca Tinsley tells us that perpetrators of war crimes are rejoicing as attempts to hold them to account remain failures. Otherwise, there is introspection around May's round of elections in the UK and the Liberal Democrats' messaging... the Tortoise may win the race, but the Hares weren't napping in that scenario. Roz Savage MP writes on Compass and Rosemary Runswick on the far right Restore Britain.

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## USA

Meet the New Leader of the Free World, by David French. New York Times 26<sup>th</sup> April 2026

*The sentence that resonates is this one: "For the foreseeable future, America's allies will reasonably fear that they may be one election away from abandonment and betrayal."*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/26/opinion/zelensky-ukraine-trump-nato-leader.html>

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# Reviews

**A Hymn to Life - Shame has to change sides, by Gisèle Pelicot**  
**Penguin 2026**  
**isbn 9798217181322**

A Hymn to Life is the memoir of Frenchwoman Gisèle Pelicot who was drugged and raped by numerous men at the behest of her husband, and who waived anonymity at his trial, taking a stand against the shaming of women who have suffered abuse.

The publicity surrounding this book has been immense – many interviews and press articles, most prominently an interview at the Royal Festival Hall by Samira Ahmed - so those who haven't done so may think it is not necessary to read the book. But they should.

At the very least it helps us to understand why and how a woman could be so deceived as to think that she had a happy marriage and family life whilst being subjected to the most revolting abuse perpetrated by her husband for ten years. Perhaps to my mind the even greater abuse than the physical was the betrayal and cynical duplicity – Pelicot even took his wife to the doctor when she was complaining of blackouts. (It's no surprise to any middle-aged woman that her concerns were dismissed by the medics.) Most people would have been crushed by this catastrophe but she came out on the other side filled with optimism and positivity.

Was her husband motivated by envy of her successful career, her position as the main breadwinner in contrast to his business failures? That would be the simple answer but his record of past sexual assault and the sexual harassment that was his downfall suggests he was a bad 'un all along. Also, there were his increasingly unorthodox sexual demands. Should she have guessed something was wrong? No, don't make any of this her fault.

It is important to realise that it took four years for the case to come to trial – a period within which Gisèle had begun the mental healing process, decided that she did not want to be cast as the victim but that the men who had raped her should be the ones feeling shame. Thus she waived her right to anonymity.

Gisèle attributes her stoicism based at least partly on her nurture – France in the post-war period wasn't easy to live in - I dimly remember how backward it seemed in the 1960s – and especially her unhappy home life after the early death of her mother. She was never a 'feminist' as such – she accepted a future of being married with kids. She married Pelicot as he seemed a kindred spirit also from an unhappy home. She seemed somewhat surprised that she succeeded in forging a good career but she was an unlikely future feminist heroine. Like many of her generation, the lack of a strong education and traditional assumptions meant her ambitions were largely confined to the home and family.

In addition to this she clearly has a basically robust and positive character – her overriding motivation has been to reject the conventional position of abused women as shamed, wanting to be hidden away, terminally embarrassed by their experience. The theme of her campaign is that women who have been abused by men should not be the ones who need to feel ashamed.

The extraordinary support that Gisèle received from other women, most notably those who appeared at the Court where her case was tried, fundamentally bolstered her ability to cope with the stress of the case and the publicity.

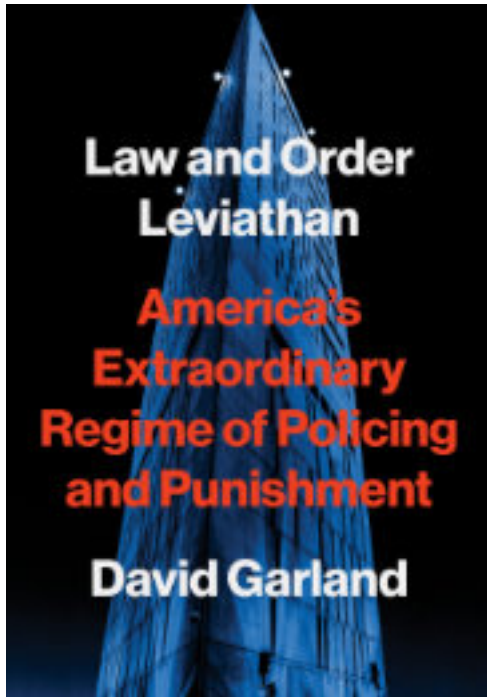
My strongest impression from the book, apart from Gisèle's astonishing courage, is the sheer awfulness of the men who abused her – her husband and all the others. Almost all the other rapists refused to plead guilty, apparently failed to acknowledge they had done anything wrong (despite the clearest possible evidence that they had), and some even appealed their sentences. What can we do as a society with so many men whose attitude towards women is so vile? How could they even consider having sex with an unconscious, snoring sixty-something year-old woman? Perhaps as Kathy Burke has said 'Most men would fuck a ham sandwich'. If only they would confine themselves to picnic food. It is not exactly liberal to say so but is there any alternative to locking them up for ever? Dominique Pelicot at least is unlikely ever to be freed from prison.

(It should be said that there are other men in the story who are real heroes – the police who led the prosecutions, the security guard who caught M. Pelicot 'upskirting', Gisèle's sons and her new partner

Jean-Loup. And she herself says she is 'unable to set me against women; we are meant to live side by side'.

Most of the people who read this book will probably be women, though the ones who need to read it most are men.

*Gwyneth Deakins*



**Law and Order Leviathan: America's Extraordinary Regime of Policing and Punishment, by David Garland**  
Princeton University Press 2025 £28.00  
isbn 9780691271194

Garland begins from the well-known fact that the United States is an outlier for its levels of violent crime and incarceration compared to other affluent countries. His theory is that that this is not a surprising outcome in the 'land of the free', but an inevitable consequence of a political economy which has limited social protection and prioritises business growth.

According to Garland, the US model of capitalism has led to fractured and unstable communities, where violence is common and is further exacerbated by racial inequality. In response, the state has not decided to address the root cause by introducing welfare programmes or protecting workers' rights, but instead it has created a similarly-aggressive police and prison system to deal with the consequences. Therefore, individual liberty is an illusion - in reality, corporations have freedom to grow whilst individuals suffer the economic fall-out and get caught in the criminal justice system.

The theory draws on a number of studies and historic analyses as evidence of link between, for example, unemployment and crime, and public support for punitive measures. It would also have been helpful to have some international comparisons to test the theory that the US really is unique in this regard. For example, do countries with stronger workers' rights have lower rates of unemployment and/or violent crime? Whilst Garland's argument is plausible, it is not entirely clear that one thing causes another. Nor does Garland consider the benefits of US economic success, which may have reduced other types or causes of crime.

The most interesting point made in the book is that trying to 'save money' by having a limited welfare state has not worked out, as even more money is then spent on the criminal justice system. All the coercive measures that are introduced to deal with 'emergency' issues become permanent, and the power (and cost) of policing only ever increases. Being 'tough on crime' is not a logical electoral choice for the fiscally-conscious voter.

Additional research on how the political economy and criminal justice system interact in other places would be welcome.

*Eleanor Healy-Birt*

### **Making Waves: The Art of Japanese Woodblock Print – York Art Gallery**

Making Waves: the Japanese woodblock prints exhibit at York Art Gallery is absolutely a masterpiece! Celebrating 300 years of Japanese printing mastery the exhibit was packed some truly amazing pieces - including Hokusai's famous *Kanagawa oki nami-ura - The Great Wave off Kanagawa* - not only was the content phenomenal it had well written information, great feng shui and the building is located in the centre of York so there are loads of spots for tea or a light lunch afterwards.

The exhibition tells you a story in the way it was organised between rooms, starting out in the royal court with many prints of courtesans and daily life and then branches out into natural wonders, war and grief.

My personal favourites documented life in Japanese brothels and streets. I couldn't get enough of the way fabric and textiles were expressed through print; the movement of garments was captured so beautifully, and I love that in the majority of the prints of women they are just doing mundane things like putting on



*Gaijū kaisei - Fine wind, clear weather*

because they are always around during the harvest, this one made for the Year of the Rat in 1900. The first recorded outbreak of Bubonic plague in Japan seems to have been a year earlier, perhaps making the rat less culturally threatening,

The exhibition offers you the chance to make their own print of *The Great Wave of Kanagawa* and show that you have understood the artistic printing processes involved. What more could you ask for?

The exhibition runs until 30<sup>th</sup> August 2026 giving you the excuse to go back to York if you spent too much time in the conference chamber.

**Rose Rayment**

makeup or just sitting. They had some gorgeous, hand embroidered wedding kimonos which had some insane details in the handiwork.

The room dedicated to natural beauty was fantastic, truly mesmerised by Hokusai's *Fugaku sanjūrokkei*, Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji; *Gaijū kaisei - Fine wind, clear weather* and *Sanka hakuu - Lightnings below the summit* were some of my favourite pieces from the whole exhibit. The *Great Wave* comes from this series.

It is easy to get a fixation on Hokusai but all of the Ukiyo-e masters were well represented along with many less familiar. Here is Ogata Gekko's Rat on the mallet of Daikokuten, one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune; the rat is a symbol of abundance

