



2026 no. 4 September Conference Issue

INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



A Carnival Tribute to David Attenborough

The Israel/US War with Iran US Midterms Transborder Crime in Nigeria
Nicaragua

EVENTS

19th-22nd September Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference, Brighton

24th September Gladstone's last speech on Armenia – 1896 – lunchtime meeting NUR restaurant, Robertson Street, Hastings. Contact 07968 845426 if interested in joining.

3rd-4th November LI Congress Bangkok

5th November travel to Taipei

6th-7th November LI Congress Taipei

For bookings & other information please contact LIBG at

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Photographs: Stewart Rayment, Anna Beria, Chris Beetles Gallery

Cover photograph: A Tribute to David Attenborough, who celebrated his centenary this year, at Hastings Old Town Carnival, 8th August 2026.



Deadline for next issue – reports of Liberal Democrat conference events etc. by 4th October 2026 please.



LIBG at BRIGHTON



No More Loopholes: Closing the Door on Foreign Interference

13:00 - 19th September 2026

Consort Room, Grand Hotel

Strengthening democratic resilience in a dangerous world. Our panel examines the new challenges UK democracy faces from China and Russia — and asks what today's malign state interference demands of us. Is it time to toughen UK law against foreign meddling?

Liberal International British Group and Liberal Democrats Friends of Hong Kong have organised a hybrid forum meeting with Lisa Smart, and other guest speakers, chaired by Larry Ngan.

Guest Speaker profile:

Lisa Smart has been the Member of Parliament for Hazel Grove in Greater Manchester since 2024. Since her election, she has served as the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Home Affairs and Women and Equalities. She currently serves as the Liberal Democrat Cabinet Office Spokesperson in the House of Commons and is actively involved in the Policy Working Group on "Defending and Strengthening British Democracy".

She is currently focusing on the party's forthcoming *Representation of the People Bill*, particularly the provisions relating to foreign interference.

Tom Gordon has been the Member of Parliament for Harrogate and Knaresborough since 2024. He has been a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights since his election. His focus within the Committee included China forced labour within UK supply chain, Russian attack on UK infrastructure and Chinese espionage activities in the UK.

Fan Yun has been the member of the Legislative Yuan since 2020. Before entering parliament, she was a long-standing leader in Taiwan's pro-democracy movement, campaigning for democratic reform and gender equality. She is currently the Non-Executive Vice-President of Liberal International, the Co-Chair of Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, and works with global lawmakers to counter transnational repression, resist authoritarian influence, and support democratic resilience.

Edward Lucas is an experienced journalist, specialised on national security and foreign interference in the United Kingdom. He was the non-resident Senior Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis. In the 2024 general election he was the Liberal Democrats candidate for Cities of London and Westminster



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

LIBG FORUM 8th June

[Larry Ngan - chair] 19:05:05

My name is Larry Ngan, the new chair of the Liberal International British Group and I'm the host of the events tonight. Tonight, we will talk about Iran and the Straits of Hormuz. We are more than honoured to have three very good guests, very knowledgeable on this subject. First, we have Myrna Mneimneh, a member of the Political Bureau and International Secretary of the Future Movement. She is the president of Al Hurriya Liberal Network, and President of the Arab Youth Alliance for Freedom and Democracy, and the founder of WoMENA, Women in Politics in the MENA. We also have James Moran, a diplomat and economist; he served as EU ambassador to Egypt between 2012 and 2016, and has held numerous other diplomatic posts, the dramatic hosting in the Middle East, and of course, he's also the father of our MP, Layla Moran. We also have Mohammad Nossier, the Egyptian liberal politician who was a member of the Higher Committee of the Democratic Front Party from 2007 and 2012 and of the political bureau of the Free Egyptian Party until 2013. He writes regularly for *interLib* as well as global & regional journals and newspapers.

[Myrna Mneimneh] 19:08:37

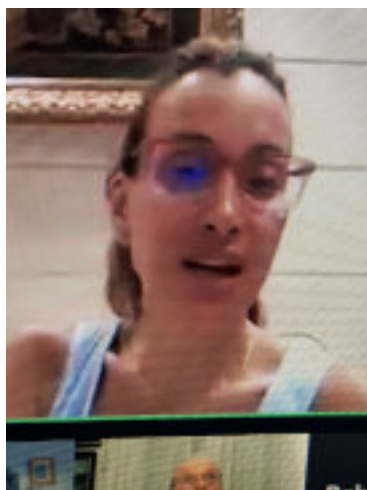
I'm from Lebanon, so of course you know that we are facing a very critical situation there where one-fifth of the geography of Lebanon is under attack. But to start with, I would like to make three remarks.

The first one is, of course, we know that we are facing lots of losses, but as an advocate for human rights, I would like to say that the human losses are irreversible and what we are may be less talking about is the loss of lives and limbs. In Lebanon just starting March 2nd till today we have 15,000 killed and injured due to the war.

The second remark is that we are witnessing a violation of human rights charters every day, and unfortunately, it's not on the screen. No one is really shedding light on what's happening in Israel, in Lebanon, in Iran, with the civilians. The third is that we are witnessing the weakening of the global liberal order and the weakening of the global institutions that are made to prevent wars. We are in the second round of war between Iran, US and Israel and it is a spillover of October 7th.

We have economic repercussions everywhere in the world. Iran now is acting as an ideology, not as a state. That's why we are facing this weaponising of the Strait of Hormuz, the weaponising of the energy and oil because they are limiting the access to the Strait of Hormuz. They are controlling the oil production, the oil prices, and the transit itself. That's why Iran now is acting as a power of and controlling the economy of the world. We all know that 20% of the oil and oil products should go through the Strait of Hormuz, and 24% of the LNG is reaching the market via the Strait of Hormuz. One third of nitrogen that is an important component for the fertiliser is going through the Strait and they are all blocked because of the blockade. That Iran is faced by another blockade by the U.S. without trying to solve the problem. What we are seeing is everyone trying to solve this war by diplomatic means but not arriving to an end of it. Why? Because, Iran is not acting as a state. It's acting as an ideology. And because we have Israel from one side and Iran from the other side.

Let's just talk more in details about what means that Iran is not acting as a state. Iran is well known with its axis of resistance, for its non-state actors that are in Iraq and Lebanon, through Hezbollah, in Gaza, through Hamas and in Yemen through the Houthis. So, they have been disrupting the stability and the security of four countries and before the collapse of the Assad regime, it was like five countries, because they were controlling Syria as well, where Hezbollah from Lebanon intervened to protect the regime of al-Assad. Now, with the collapse of the Iranian regime, Hezbollah has been deprived from its main corridor of arms from Iran. They are weaponising the Shia community in Lebanon.



So, we are having a war that is trying to first try to topple the Iranian regime. Second, to end the nuclear program to stop the production of ballistic missiles and to decapitate the axis of resistance, which means the non-state actors and the Arab countries. Unfortunately, none of the four goals that were put by Israel/USA has been unfolding to this moment. We know that Iran has been weakened, and we know that they have decapitated the head of the regime and the first level, second level, and third level from its political system, but they are still alive. The system is still alive, and they are still able to manipulate countries like Lebanon through Hezbollah. Hezbollah has opened two worlds since 2024, one to help Hamas in 2024, the second one is to revenge for the killing of the Mullah.

Both wars have till now has resulted into a full destruction of the southern part of Lebanon. One fifth of the geography of Lebanon is erased. 1.2 million displaced and with no hope of a return because there are no more

villages that exist on this territory, and 600 square kilometres are occupied by the Israelis. In return, we are having direct negotiation with Israel under the patronage of U.S. We have had four rounds with no ceasefire till now, all that we had is less fire.

Myrna spoke of the impact of the war on other countries, she then turned back to the MENA region. Iran sees the economic success of Dubai or Saudi Arabia, or Qatar as a threat. So, on the first day after the war, they hit those Arab neighbouring countries more than they hit Israel.

So, what is needed now for the economy to recover? First is stability, certainty, and a new geopolitical landscape based on respect of human rights, respect of neighbouring countries, respect of rule of law, and of course, not having a political agenda behind the wall, that means that we don't want Iran to interfere into the internal political situations in countries that Iran would like to have a say into. For now, Iran is trying to get strategic and tactical goals from my point of view, I see that they did not gain anything except the resilience of the Iranian people.

The economic portfolio worldwide will be affected. I would like to give some figures regarding the losses and consequences of that have happened in our region before this war. In Syria, we have 216 billion of economic losses; in Gaza, 40 billion. In Lebanon around 10 billion of losses, all that the Arab countries, the Gulf Arab countries needs now is to restore their image of safe and secure countries, to get the confidence to get more investors, because as we know, the only the Arab Gulf countries are able to do all the reconstruction. Unfortunately, the main factor of their economy is oil, and they have to diversify their economy, to go more to renewable economy, to technology, to AI, because as we see, the oil factor is not safe.

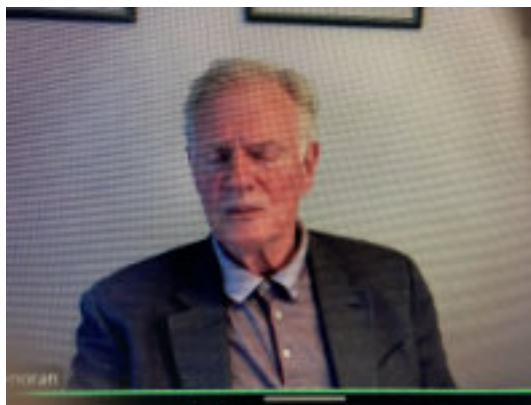
So for now, we have to count only on diplomacy because diplomacy will influence the market. Stability will influence the growth and security will influence investment and the economic consequences of wars travel rapidly. That's why we see that it has affected the world even for countries that are very far away from the battlefield. The Arab Gulf countries and countries in this area where the war is happening right now and the war of last year, have witnessed calm and peace after the Iraq-Iran war, the second Gulf War. They have lived in prosperity and they have developed models of modernity and stability and security that have collapsed because of this war. Thanks for listening.

[jamesmoran] 19:29:59

Looking at the Iran war as a whole, I think probably most people would agree, it's an illegal war. It certainly is not under any UN rubric that you can imagine, and it's a war of choice. History is full of examples of wars of choice that don't end very well. Trump is in a quagmire. You'd be forgiven for thinking that the US would have learned a few lessons of history, but Mr. Trump is not known for his expertise in that particular area.

What was the motivation of the Trump administration? For me, the most important thing to remember is that Israel has a huge influence on the United States. Mr. Netanyahu has been trying to involve the US and Iran for over 30 years. I met him a few times when in his early days, and I remember him everlastingly trying to take the conversation back to the importance of resisting Iran. He's never stopped and I don't think he ever will. Mr. Netanyahu is facing elections very soon and is trying to run as a war president; he faces

Israel also has extraordinary influence in its involvement in the American political scene. We have the American election coming up later this year, which don't look good for the Republicans. The Israelis are working, with IPAC, the Israeli lobby America, and that is a very important factor for Republican candidates. Mr. Trump knows it and I think that is also playing into what has been happening in the Gulf.



Those that want to argue that this was an attempt to reshape the Middle East and Gulf have something to say. The weakness of Iran after last year's attacks prompted many Israeli-inspired hawks in the US to think it was now or never to bring an end to the Islamic Republic. The expansion of the Abraham Accords, agreements with Arab states to normalize relations between Israel. There are four, with Morocco, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and with Sudan. And of course, the great prize is Saudi Arabia, but it's becoming clear that these hawks were woefully wrong. Saudi Arabia today is more unwilling than ever to forego its commitment to a Palestinian state in terms of

happen. The war has made life even worse for those who want to have that because of the consequences for the Gulf countries, the lack of any prior consultation with the Gulf countries and Iran's retaliation against the U.S. bases there.

Traditional growth analysts are now more sceptical than ever of United States support, and have begun looking elsewhere for security partnerships. China prefers to stay out of it and keep its focus on commercial relations. China is suffering but wants to keep distance. The Russians are seen as unreliable, especially after their involvement in Syria. India is not ready to get involved on security matters at this time. The EU and the UK lack military credibility and capability.

The Gulf Cooperation countries have a lot of disagreements, not least now between Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, and it makes them difficult for them to speak with one voice on security. They have a very high dependence on US military equipment, on American training, and on American intelligence. So there really isn't much alternative in the short term. But as a result of the Gulf War, they've begun to think seriously about other alternatives, and that's an unintended consequence for the Americans of this action.

The third thing I want to talk about is commercial considerations. Some will argue that the inevitable boost in oil and gas prices would benefit the world's largest exporter, which is the United States itself; that has turned out to be something of a double-edged sword, given the gas price rises in the US domestic market. The only major player who's happy about all of this is Mr. Putin, who has benefited greatly from oil price hikes, and in some cases, from the easing of sanctions. In Europe are obviously among the main losers, together with Asian countries and non-oil African countries; Latin America, too, to some extent. Fertiliser costs for everyone have risen precipitously, and a blighted prospects for much needed growth together with the oil markets

I would also argue that Israel's own security will be made worse by this war. Arab distrust already running high onto Gaza and the genocide there has been worsened by its current aggression in Lebanon will, if anything, be deeper when the guns fall silent and the much-prized goal of normalisation will have suffered perhaps a fatal blow?

Whenever peace deal emerges, the IMF and others have warned that it will take a year or probably more, for the global economy to readjust.

The Israeli election could see the demise of Mr. Netanyahu but never underestimate this man's ability to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Public opinion and most opposition parties in Israel seem to favour a military solution, no matter how much of a fantasy that may be. So, the prospects for real change in Israel are not that great.

In the wider context, I would point to a few outcomes that mostly are negative. First, this war has highlighted the dangers of dependence on Gulf oil and gas. On the other hand, may give a boost to the green transition. That said, we'll all need fossil fuels for some time to come, and higher prices, could endure for a very long time, perhaps the rest of the decade.

Second, and given the reliability of the United States as an ally, European confidence in its transatlantic relationship is already frayed and has been seriously damaged even further. It's unlikely we'll see a decoupling between Europe and the US anytime soon, Trump or no but this conflict gives a further boost

Fourth, the Gulf states will continue to look for ways to reduce their dependence on the US, and they will continue to look very sceptically now at normalisation with Israel. Lastly, perhaps most concerning of all, Iran's quest for nuclear capability might be put on hold for a while but absent of a comprehensive agreement like the JCPOA Accord that Trump recklessly threw out of his first term, the Islamic Republic may well return to it sometime in the future. With Israel being a nuclear power itself, the only one in the region, the danger of some kind of nuclear exchange is unlikely, but it will remain unless a future administration in the US, and hopefully a better coordinated governments here in Europe, return to the negotiation table in a meaningful way. At the moment it's all about short-term deals, not about long-term strategic positions.

[Mohammed Nosseir] 19:44:44

Let me start first with some key characteristics of the Middle East. Number one, we have to differentiate between Arab rulers and their citizens. Arab rulers have their own policies. Citizens have different desires. The Middle East is mostly ruled by autocratic regimes. So, they're not representing their perspective. I would criticise some sort of agreement like Abraham Accords or Trump Peace Board. I doubt there are citizens of the United Arab Emirates or Bahrain or Morocco are truly happy about this kind of peace agreement on contrary to the peace agreement with Egypt and Israel that was a really solid agreement because the majority was happy to have true peace between the two nations.

Arab citizens have been frustrated for a long time, because of Gaza, because of Lebanon, because of Iran, the economy is not doing well, we don't have peace, we don't have prosperity. And this kind of frustration, frankly speaking, the only option the vast majority of Arab citizens can do is violence. There is no real political party. We have to learn also that it is almost impossible to change any autocratic regime by external forces, especially the United States. Change has to emerge within and will take its own time I will encourage Western nations at large and other nations to promote democracy, promote peace, promote freedom, but not decide suddenly we would like to change the regime in Iran, and doing it by force, and will succeed. No.

If you ask any Arab citizen, are you happy with your own autocratic regime or United States, most of them are saying, no. We don't want the United States or any other country to interfere in our internal politics, especially by bombing this country. I don't believe that the majority of Iranians will be able to rid themselves of their autocratic regime after being bombed by the United States.

Arabs would certainly welcome the opportunity to change their own ruling regimes and transform their countries into democratic nations. Nevertheless, in country like Lebanon, which consists of multiple sectarian communities, we have to understand that we need some sort of political consensus. We cannot force a single solution on its own citizens, we have to go and work hard with all the politicians, all the sects. European people have a better understanding of the Middle East dynamics more than the United States, but they don't want to get truly engaged.

Now let me go through the lessons learnt from the war with Iran. Lesson number one is being a superpower nation does not mean that the country can win each single war and achieve its strategic objective. The United States that did not put a clear objective from day one and kept changing its objective.

Second issue is United States failed to give a comprehensive and full security to the Gulf states. The Gulf states were under the impression that inviting the United States to have a war with Iran would lead to getting rid of the Iranian regime and move on. This did not happen and the Gulf states need to reconsider if it is having exclusive security protection from United States. Is it good enough for them or not.?

Third lesson is that we underestimated the Iran military capabilities. The Gulf states are not the safe haven they you used to be, and Iran can attack anytime, even with the military bases of the United States in the Gulf countries. I would assume that even the United States may be allowing this kind of drone or attacks to their countries to tell them, okay, you need more of security. Many American scholars now labelling the Iran war as defeat for the United States.

A last comment, Israel appears to be pulling the region into repeated cycle of conflict, with no real power is able to stop Israel. I mean, we need some countries to tell Israel, like Spain, for example, telling them, no, we don't agree about this kind of war.

Moving forward I would recommend four issues. Issue number one is to work and have a better understanding of the Middle East dynamics, to understand what is really workable, what is not workable.

Second point is we need to improve the living condition of the Palestinian people, giving them some hope, giving some life, giving them better economic situation, giving them something to protect, the incentive to have it much better. Suffering, people think, the only option for me is engage in violence. So we need to improve their living condition.



The third issue is the Gulf countries, they have to understand that Iran's threat will remain with them forever. The Gulf countries have to accommodate Iran, not fighting Iran. If the Gulf states ask me for my opinion, I would say replace the United States with Russia; Russia in good terms with Iran, they are friends, they need the money, Russia may be able to protect you without having any bases there to protect you from Iran.

Last point, I would say is that the international legal order has been deteriorating for many years. Trump is accelerating this kind of decay. We need to think about how the world should be run in the future, empowering more United Nations or empowering other agreements, but we have to reconsider and with organisations like you, I would encourage you to put some issues and solution for this kind of ideas. Let me stop here. Thank you, Larry.

FORUM QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

[Larry Ngan] 19:54:17

When the Iran war started, Iran started to blockade the Straits in order to prevent the Gulf states transporting the crude oil through the Straits. This goes against the principle of free market and international maritime law, where does the panel see this going?

[Mohammed Nosseir] 19:56:00

Well, Larry, that's a question for me. I think the Strait of Hormuz is a temporary issue. I don't think the Iran will be able to put a toll on boats moving there, but it is a leverage they are using here and using for the time being until it make a deal, but I am not expecting that this will be permanent.

[jamesmoran] 19:56:56

It's pretty clear for me. This is something which impacts on the freedom of navigation, a fundamental principle of international law, and would never ever be accepted by anyone. The precedent that it would create is extremely dangerous. So who's next? No, the answer must be no, and a very firm no from everyone in the international community.

[Myrna Mneimneh] 19:57:46

Yes, I totally use both, but I'd like to say that it was a weapon and a very effective weapon. It stopped the war. Iran used it to first as a way to put pressure on the world to go and ask for a stop of the war. Now you are seeing a sort of agreement with Oman that they will let their tankers pass by the Strait of Hormuz, and not with the UAE, for example just because the UAE has signed the Abraham Accord, they consider the UAE as one of their enemies.

[Rupert Potter] 20:00:04

I'd be interested on perspectives on the Sunni Shia side?

[Mohammed Nosseir] 20:01:12

Okay, sure. I mean, for me as a liberal, I often argue that put your religion aside and let's talk politics. It does not happen in reality, but we have to put it aside. In Egypt, the majority are Sunni. We don't confront

this problem. Problem maybe exists in a nation like Lebanon, perhaps in Iraq, in Iran. I would say that we need to work on the positive side by promoting that that shouldn't be an issue, and the issue is our political debate.

[James Moran] 20:02:39

I agree with Mohammed. I think here the Sunni issue is important to understand the dynamics of some of this, and here in the West, we often are very ignorant of that. We need to be a little bit more sensitive to the differences in the Islamic religion, but I don't think it's at the top of people's agendas when it comes to explaining what they're doing. It is, at the end of the day, essentially a political matter. Of course, we shouldn't underestimate the ideological side of this, especially in Iran when it comes to its resilience and so on, and it's something which is very widely prized by the people of Iran, and to some extent exploited by the Revolutionary Guards in the West. But to better understand resilience and so on in Iran you do well to sort of have a little deeper understanding of the Shia mentality and how they feel about other sides of the religion.

[Myrna Mneimneh] 20:04:06

Every time when we have a conflict in Lebanon, they mainly describe it as a Sunni-Shia conflict, because actually because of the presence of Hezbollah, which is an old militia that has played a major role in toppling governments, and the Prime Minister in Lebanon is a Sunni so, you take this political pressure or political tension into a sectarian one. But as Mohammad has said as, I belong to a liberal political party, we take it as not as a confessional or sectarian problem rather than a political different political agenda. Of course, Hezbollah is linked to Iran, so they have the same ideology. But I give you what we have now in Lebanon.

You know that Hezbollah is facing Israel in the south, so we had a poll recently in Lebanon and we asked people if they want peace with Israel, or they prefer to the resistance way. So what Hezbollah is doing. And the polls came out with 50-50. 50% of the population wants peace with Israel, but they don't understand the peace as normalising with Israel, as having the peace agreement like Jordan and Egypt, what they want, what they understand by peace is a session of hostilities. And the 50% that are with the continuation of the war are saying that we are defending our territory, our villages, and our people are the militants, they are paying with lives just to defend the country. Of course, they don't say we are defending our ideology that is related to Iran. At the same time, the problem in Lebanon is related to the Shia constituents. They are not just political, they are an armed militia, they have a political presence in the government and a political presence in the parliament. And sometimes they use their representation to stop every reform, to stop every project for the sake of the country and unfortunately, they have played a very negative role in the Lebanese political spectrum. So that's why but of course the political discourse in Lebanon is trying to get away from this tension and to preserve the unity of the country, because it's going to take us to another civil war. The last one has lasted for 15 years and of course, we will not... we don't want to get into another one soon.

[George Cunningham] 20:08:10

I'm looking at how Egypt is responding to try to shore up its position with the Gulf states by what kind of support is President Sisi giving to UAE and others to fend off attacks by Iran and is there any sign of any kind of compensation for that coming from the Gulf?

[Mohammed Nosseir] 20:09:24

There has been in a very good relationship with the Gulf states, and they have been helping Egypt economically. President Sisi has been always giving them some sort of promises to protect them in case they're getting attacked and so on but in reality, once they got attacked by Iran, he did not do too much. The war we see it in Egypt, it is a war between an Islamic country and Israel and the United States. The majority of Egyptians are pro-Iran, not because they are happy with the Iranian regime, because it is an Islamic country and attacked by Israel and the United States. We see that the Gulf states have been somehow, and this is rumours, inciting the United States to attack Iran under the impression they will change the regime very quickly and didn't happen. Sisi sent some troops. I think for symbolic reasons, it's not a real one. I don't think they have any function. We are somehow reluctant to help them in this kind of war. The Gulf states are getting close to Israel and the United States. Egyptians and the Egyptian government, not that happy with this kind of alignment.

[jamesmoran] 20:11:56

To add to what Mohammed was saying, on the diplomatic track, of course, the Egyptians have been quite active. They've been collaborating with Pakistan and others on trying to get some sort of negotiation going. As regards, Gulf money to Egypt and all of that, President Sisi has taken huge amounts of loans, they're not just grants, they're loans from the Gulf and in fact, it's getting a bit difficult for the Egyptians to manage that because I think the debt level, when I arrived in Cairo in 2012 was at around about 35% of GDP. It's now up to about 90% plus. And the Emiratis in particular are asking for some of their money back, which is putting a lot of pressure on the Egyptians. But that's more a bilateral affair between Egypt and the government, and I think they'll probably come to some accommodation. The usual view in the Gulf is that Egypt is too big to fail. They don't want to put too much pressure on Egypt, given the possible fallout from that to the rest of the region.

[Mohammed Nosseir] 20:14:21

The Gulf people, the Gulf states are not happy with Egyptian ruling diplomacy. They're saying, no, we don't want you to talk to Iranians. We want you to send some troops, we want you to help us to protect our country.

[David Chalmers] 20:14:59 - chair of the Federal International Relations Committee for the Lib Dems.

What would you ask us to do? What do you think that we as Lib Dems at the moment can do to help the situation?

[Myrna Mneimneh] 20:16:36

We need the Europeans to get a better understanding of the political dynamics of the MENA, and especially in countries that are in conflict, which means Lebanon, primarily. Syria, especially in the aftermath on the collapse of the Assad regime; and most importantly, the difference you have to distinguish between the Arabs themselves. We have countries that are very dependent on oil, markets and oil production that are rich countries and you have the other countries; there is a wide difference between the two groups.

The first difference is that they don't have a touching point with Israel, they don't have borders with Israel, and they are far away from the conflict with Israel.

Second, all the Arab countries that I'm talking about have had wars in their history. The Gulf countries are new, established countries never faced any war except the war between the Gulf War, Iran-Iraq War and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. That was in the 1990s and they have recovered; they are disconnected from politics. So, even the civilian citizens of the Gulf countries are not very much interested in the political discourse that is happening. They have a different agenda, they talk more about economic development, about prosperity, about innovation, about the success of the model of their countries.



Times cartoonist Peter Brookes seems to have the last word on Iran over the years. Review on page 22.

And one other point. There were no Arab Spring in the Gulf countries. So, they have never witnessed what we are... they have different issues politically speaking. Second, they don't believe in democracy; if you have a good life, you don't have to, let's say, reclaim your right and deciding your future, your representation in parliaments, etc. So, a better, deep understanding, like a field visit, talking to people, having, hosting, politicians from these countries talking to them, hosting them, and talking about different topics would be great, and thank you for the initiative. That's from my side.

[Mohammed Nosseir] 20:20:36

Well, there are too many conflicts in the Middle East. There is war in Sudan, some conflict in Libya, Tunisia, Iran, Iraq, and so on. I would encourage liberal international LibDems to pick up one of them and start working to address the real conflict.

We have to achieve peace. Normalisation has evolved over time, it could happen, and if it doesn't happen, it's no big deal. But Israeli and United States are pushing for normalisation, and they really don't care about peace. Normalisation should be a consequence of peace, not the opposite.

[jamesmoran] 20:22:48

David, the best thing you can do in talking to your counterparts in Europe is to emphasize the need to hold Israel to account. In Europe, we have been remiss on that score. Europe, as ever is pretty well divided on this issue.

So long as the Israelis are behaving in this way, which is, frankly speaking, for me, the behaviour of a rogue state. This is not the Israel we once knew. This Netanyahu regime is completely different from what went, before and a lot of Israeli friends in the peace community would agree with this. It's time to send a clear message to the Israelis, stop this. And if you don't stop it, then there will be consequences, trade preferences, for example.

I'm not pointing the finger only at Israel. Of course we have Islam, we have a lot of other elements going on. It's an extraordinarily complicated region, as this discussion, I think, has brought out very well. But the main problem for me is that I say, you have a rogue state, it is probably the major danger to stability in the region right now, it needs to be brought back to the negotiating table in some way, shape or form. And words will not do it.

[Larry Ngan] 20:26:34

I can't see any hands up, so I assume that we are satisfied, all the comments and the feedback. And thank you very much for all the guest speakers, really good conversation, and very insightful.

The full text of this Forum appears on the LIBG website. This report seeks to capture the central points and hopefully not distort them.

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The A-Z of Stealing the U.S. Midterm Elections

Mark S. Bergman

Why does President Trump seem so unconcerned about the fast-approaching midterm elections? He is deeply unpopular, yet he dismisses widespread anxiety about the war with Iran, “affordability,” higher prices, tariffs, diminished access to healthcare and the trade war with Canada, which will contribute to inflation. It is as if he is living in a bubble, which he may be.

It is by no means irrational or hyperbolic to fear that Trump is not interested in how voters feel because he sees other paths to ensure he does not face a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives or the Senate, or both, on January 3, 2027.

It is not hard to imagine a tiered Republican strategy for the midterms:

- win at the polls, with the help of redrawn maps and turbo-charged gerrymandering, voter suppression tactics and disinformation campaigns – all familiar though amplified;
- prepare to use federal emergency powers and other instruments of power to reduce access to voting in places that will underpin Democratic victories; and
- prepare to contest the election results in the House via the certification process at the state level and in Congress to avoid seating a majority of Democrats on January 3, 2027.

There is little doubt that the elections will be subject to significant external pressures. We just do not know which tactic or swarm of tactics candidates, state election officials, election workers, the courts, law enforcement, civil society and, ultimately, voters will need to confront and counter over the coming months. House and Senate Democrats, election officials and administrators, civil society groups, among others, all have conducted tabletop exercises to identify and evaluate the threats and vulnerabilities by voting district, understand how countermeasures will need to be deployed; and once voting starts, monitor where threat actors are operating and deploy appropriate countermeasures.

There is no American playbook to follow. While voter suppression has been a feature of our system for some time, what is new and worrying is that we have a federal government that, having seized unprecedented executive power, is the single greatest threat to free and fair elections. We know the threat is not hypothetical as we already have seen myriad election-related efforts undertaken in plain sight to subvert the midterms.

Surveying the landscape, Trump and/or his administration:

- ***Pivoted from one tactic to the next.*** When the Supreme Court pushed back on Trump’s deployments of National Guard (suggesting, though not ensuring that they would not be deployed during the midterms), and as his mid-decade redistricting effort largely failed to ensure the Republicans would hold the House, he directed his Attorney General to seize ballot boxes, with varying justifications. Is this just about showing there is little that can stop him, while seeding doubt in the minds of American citizens about election security and privacy of voting decisions? Or let’s drill deeper and consider the following: the seizure of specific voting machines in Georgia and Puerto Rico, ostensibly to prove the machines were vulnerable to foreign interference, are deemed vulnerable and decertified, forcing election officials to count ballots manually.
- ***Called for voter ID for the midterms, “whether approved by Congress or not!”*** Trump went on to say, “the People of our Country are insisting on Citizenship, and No Mail-In Ballots, with exceptions for Military, Disability, Illness, or Travel.” He then issued a second post threatening to act by Executive Order.
- ***Called on Republicans to “nationalize” elections and “take over voting” in 15 unspecified locations.***

- ***Continued to repeat the baseless claim that the 2020 election was tainted by massive and widespread fraud***, and in June called for the appointment of a special prosecutor - “The evidence is MASSIVE and OVERWHELMING. A Special Prosecutor must be appointed. This cannot be allowed to happen again in the United States of America! Let the work begin!” Trump continues double down on the debunked allegations that the 2020 was “rigged and stolen.”

- ***Moved to curtail mail-in voting***. Last summer, Trump resurrected his quixotic campaign against mail-in ballots (after toning it down last year at the request of Republican candidates, who ended up benefitting from mail-in ballots and early voting), reportedly after speaking with Putin. Let’s pause on that for a moment – recall Trump at the Helsinki summit took Putin at his word that Russia did not seek to influence the 2016 election, going against at the time the unanimous views of the U.S. intelligence community. And now he is taking election security advice from Putin!

First on social media and then during an Oval Office question-and-answer session with reporters, Trump pledged to “lead a movement” to eliminate “corrupt” mail-in ballots and voting machines ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. He exclaimed, “Mail-in ballots are corrupt; you can never have a real democracy with mail-in ballots. It’s the only way [Democrats] can get elected.”

Trump issued an Executive Order to rein in mail-in voting. As the Brennan Center for Justice noted, the Constitution explicitly empowers only Congress and the states to set the rules for elections. The Executive Order seeks to sidestep that limitation and displace states’ mail-in voting laws by transforming the U.S. Postal Service “from a neutral mail carrier to an arbiter of who may cast a ballot by mail.” The order also requires DHS to build and give to each state a list of citizens eligible to vote, and given that federal databases are out-of-date and unreliable, this risks mass disenfranchisement of eligible voters.

Administration efforts responsive to the Executive Order have been challenged in the courts, and injunctions to block implementation of the order are now before the Supreme Court.

- ***Moved aggressively to seize voter rolls in states***. The administration is pressing state election officials across the country to provide sensitive information about voters. The requests include copies of statewide voter registration lists and ballots from prior elections, as well as access to voting equipment. Department of Justice has sued more than 20 states and D.C., for not complying. As the Brennan Center has noted, the requests cover sensitive, private information such as driver’s license numbers and partial Social Security numbers. These demands raise privacy and security concerns and may violate state and federal laws. They are unprecedented and a clear encroachment on the power of states to run elections as set out in the Constitution. As Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly set out in her ruling, the Constitution gives “no role at all to the President” in setting election rules. To date, DoJ is 0-23 in its efforts to get states to turn over voter rolls, though it is appealing rulings at pace.

- ***Pushed aggressively to get the Senate to pass the SAVE America Act***, which would have mandated proof of citizenship (a passport or birth certificate) to register or register to vote.

- ***Weaponized the DoJ to serve his own ends***, including by gutting the Civil Rights Division. Political appointees have removed all the senior managers in the voting section and ordered the dismissal of every major active voting rights case, including lawsuits challenging restrictive voting laws and gerrymandered maps in Arizona, Georgia, and Texas. The head of the Division, Harmeet Dhillon, has shifted the Division from countering racial discrimination in voting to prioritizing Trump goals of voter suppression in the guise of “preventing illegal voting, fraud, and other forms of malfeasance and error.”

- ***Set up new task forces*** – DoJ’s Weaponization Working Group, the New Jersey U.S. Attorney’s Office Election Integrity Task Force and the D.C. U.S. Attorney General’s Special Unit: Election Accountability that can target voters, election officials, perceived political adversaries and journalists in search of alleged widespread voter fraud, which does not exist, and thereby enable election interference through investigations of perceived opponents, targeting of election officials for just doing their jobs and casting doubt on election systems.

- ***Repeatedly threatened to prosecute election officials and to target nonprofit organizations*** involved in voter engagement, election monitoring and litigation to protect access to voting.

- ***Rewarded election deniers*** with key appointments in the administration, including positions with oversight of election security. An election denier involved in efforts to challenge the 2020 election, Honey Heather, was appointed to the newly created role of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Election Integrity, and the CISA Director of Public Affairs is Marci McCarthy, a former Georgia GOP Party official who questioned the integrity of the 2020 election and claimed that January 6th was “set up and orchestrated by the FBI.” Trump installed election denier Harmeet Dhillon as chief of the Civil Rights Division, for decades DoJ’s primary instrument for protecting voting rights. Dhillon has refocused the motion toward investigating election officials rather than protecting the rights of voters. Over the summer, Dhillon sent letters to election officials across the country, threatening them with criminal prosecution if they facilitate noncitizen voting. New Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin relied on flawed data to assert widespread noncitizen voter registrations.

ProPublica estimates that at least 75 people across several federal agencies who were involved in safeguarding the 2020 election have been reassigned, been fired or been forced to resign. In their place, around two dozen have been installed, ten of whom, including those identified above, worked actively to reverse the 2020 election outcome and the others were associates of the first group.

- ***Sidelined key law firms***, diminishing the resources available to voters whose voting rights have been abridged or denied and the voting rights groups championing their causes.
- ***Ordered criminal investigations*** of those who have tried to hold him accountable.
- ***Questioned free speech*** of those who criticize him or his policies.
- ***Pressured social media platforms*** to do away with content moderation and thereby allow disinformation to flow far more freely, all in the guise of protecting free speech and countering the “censorship industrial complex” purportedly deployed against conservatives.
- ***Bullied news outlets*** through a combination of lawsuits and Federal Communications Commission pressure.
- ***Ordered DoJ to investigate*** ActBlue, targeted former head of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Chris Krebs in an Executive Order, and set the ***stage for the targeting*** of pro-democracy, voter registration and GoTV groups;
- ***Severely hampered the Election Assistance Commission***, which was established by Congress after the 2000 election to assist states in administering elections.
- ***Dismantled the federal government’s capabilities to counter foreign and domestic interference***, by gutting election security/disinformation units at CISA, Department of Homeland Security and Federal Bureau of Investigation. Election security teams at CISA and assistance to local election officials have been cut back, increasing the risk of chaos and doubt about the security of voting systems and the ability to counter election-targeted disinformation. The CISA work force is down an estimated 1,000 staffers (approximately one-third).
- While there have been no ***arrests of officeholders or candidates*** for office, the administration is investigating Sen. Adam Schiff and charged Rep. LaMonica McIver with assault. Just before the Democratic mayoral primary, ICE agents arrested Democratic candidate Brad Lander as he was escorting a migrant out of a New York City court. DoJ has pursued two criminal cases against each of former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James.
- ***Created a force potentially answerable only to him*** – ICE. And while ICE ostensibly is tasked with immigration enforcement, who knows how they might otherwise be deployed. For those watching from afar, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, Trump will not cancel the midterms – he has no basis for doing so and history tells us that authoritarian leaders tend to embrace elections, no matter how subverted to provide legitimacy.

Second, there is absolutely no evidence of widespread voter fraud in the United States (whether noncitizens, dead or fake voters, rigged vote count and so on).

Third, the administration of elections is a matter for the states not the federal government.

Fourth, what happens after election day up to January 3, 2027 (when the next Congress is seated) will be as critical as what happens up to and on Election Day.

And, finally, it is hard to imagine that efforts will not continue to be made at scale through the spread of disinformation to sow doubt among Americans as to the security of election systems.

Will Trump declare a national emergency as a basis for deploying active-duty military, National Guard units or federal law enforcement agents (such as ICE or Border Patrol) to polling places and as a pretext for seizing ballots and voting machines? DoJ has already said it will deploy 1,000 election monitors to polling places. Will we see an uptick in efforts to intimidate election administrators and election workers via federal agencies or local malign actors?

Just as there is a playbook for the threats, so too is there a playbook for countermeasures. At the state level, governors, secretaries of state, attorneys general, and election officials have been gearing up for the midterms. Networks of lawyers, media organizations, lawmakers, tech platforms, civil society networks, campaigns – all know they will have critical roles to play.



Ultimately, it will be up to the voters, and if there is a lesson from the recent Hungarian election, it is that there is no more effective an antidote to election interference than overwhelming voter turnout and overwhelming majorities.

Mark S. Bergman
Principal, 7Pillars Global Insights, LLC

Transnational Banditry In West Africa

Inwalomhe Donald

Transnational banditry in West Africa refers to highly organized, economically motivated criminal networks operating across Nigeria's borders with Niger, Chad, Mali, Cameroon, and Benin. These heavily armed groups primarily terrorize Nigeria's North-West and North-Central regions through kidnapping for ransom, arms smuggling, cattle rustling, and systematic extortion of rural communities. There is nobody today at Nigeria's border that is preventing armed groups from entering Nigeria. Millions of people have been displaced as a result of armed attacks by bandits in West Africa. Internally displaced people camps have been created across Nigeria.

Armed groups, bandits, and foreign jihadist elements from Mali, the Niger Republic, Chad, Sudan, and Cameroon frequently operate in Nigeria. The crisis is heavily driven by deeply porous borders and the transnational movement of militant networks. Terrorist factions and bandits from the Sahel—most notably elements linked to Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) and the relatively new Lakurawa group—have infiltrated northern Nigeria. These groups utilize ungoverned spaces and have been known to cross international boundaries, merging with local bandits and kidnapping syndicates. The tri-border areas of Nigeria are heavily affected by cross-border militants. Factions such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) operate across Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, making the entire basin a hotspot for violence. Many large-scale bandit cells operating in Nigeria's northwest are composed of individuals from neighbouring West African and Central African nations. For example, notorious militia leaders have commanded networks stretching as far as Mali, Senegal, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic. Economic Community of West Africa States must rise to eliminate transnational banditry in West Africa.

External recruitment of bandits and foreign armed groups into Nigeria is highly active, primarily fuelled by the country's porous 1,287-kilometer northern border, the broader security vacuum in the Sahel region, and lucrative transnational criminal networks. Recently, about five men were arrested in Lagos who are

nationals from Niger Republic, Chad and Sudan. Few days ago the court in Sokoto sentenced a Nigerian to death for banditry and killing of innocent Nigerians.

While traditional domestic “banditry” in Nigeria’s Northwest and North-Central regions initially emerged from localized farmer-herder conflicts, it has dramatically evolved into a transnational crisis. Foreign fighters and jihadist networks are increasingly embedding themselves within, or recruiting directly from, Nigerian criminals.

Foreign bandits have increasingly infiltrated Nigeria, taking advantage of the country’s highly porous international borders to exacerbate the country’s ongoing security crisis. While the roots of armed banditry are primarily local, security experts, local officials, and communities state that a significant transnational wave of armed mercenaries and criminal networks from neighboring Sahelian countries (such as Mali, Chad, Sudan and Niger) has actively entered the country. The dynamics of foreign banditry in Nigeria involve several critical layers.

The Epicenter: The North-West zone, particularly Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and Kebbi states, remains the hardest hit by these non-state armed groups.

The Spread: While historically concentrated in rural areas, these networks have expanded into highways (e.g., the Abuja-Kaduna and Lagos-Ibadan expressways) and urban centres to abduct prominent figures and travellers.

Transborder Movements: Weak border management and porous frontiers in the Sahel allow these groups to evade security forces, cross into neighbouring West African countries to hide, and smuggle small arms and light weapons into Nigeria.

Banditry is described as a multifaceted crime encompassing acts such as armed robbery, murder, rape, kidnapping, cattle rustling, armed attacks, and raids targeting local communities. Perpetrated by groups defined as ‘highly fragmented’ and diverse in terms of their capabilities and degree of organisation, violence arising from banditry has increasingly become both more widespread and lethal, spreading from the North-West to other regions and affecting remote villages, towns, and cities.

During 2024, Nigeria Watch reported an increase in fatalities arising from rural banditry, cattle rustling and related government operations (1,452 deaths, compared to 892 in 2023), with most fatalities recorded in Katsina, Zamfara and Kaduna. In mid-2025, a further ‘significant surge’ in violence linked to banditry was reported, particularly across Niger, Katsina and Zamfara.

Early 2024 saw a rise in kidnappings for ransom across the country including hundreds of abductions in various parts of northern Nigeria in February and March 2024. According to a February 2024 study by the Nigeria-based polling agency NOI Polls, the prevalence of kidnapping was highest in the North-Central zone, followed by the South-West, North-West, and South-East. According to the consulting firm Nextier, 2,452 individuals were kidnapped during the year 2024, a 31% rise over the 1,878 victims of kidnapping recorded in 2023. At the same time, abduction-related fatalities dropped in 2024, according to Nigeria Watch (425 deaths, compared to 536 recorded in 2023). 2025 saw continued large-scale kidnappings and killings of abductees with kidnappings remaining a ‘pervasive threat’ across multiple states as of mid-2025. Urban and rural areas, along with national highways, have emerged as vulnerable locations where kidnappings occur. Victims of kidnappings included villagers, travellers, political figures, large numbers of schoolchildren and IDPs/businesspeople.

Knowing the ingredients of the problem can help in the quest to find an enduring solution.

Inwalomhe Donald

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This article was originally published at <https://newscrackersng.com/transnational-banditry-in-west-africa/>

Liberal Democrat Friends of Ukraine at Brighton and around

In September we will be 3 years old. As the War in Ukraine has continued, our membership has grown, we have surpassed 400 now and will be sharing some of their work and experiences at the LDForU Stand at Conference in Brighton.

Anna Beria, Secretary of LDForU, earlier this year went on her second visit to Ukraine, this time travelling in the West and North of the Country. She shares her experience with us and the good deeds of the people she met.

A Week in Ukraine: Witnessing Resilience First-Hand

In late April, I travelled to Ukraine for the second time, part of a small international delegation of nineteen people from Sweden, France, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom. What we witnessed over seven days was sobering, humbling, and ultimately inspiring.



Maidan Square memorial to fallen heroes

Our first stop was Lviv, where I met Borys Bodnar — a Leicester-born, Ukrainian-raised humanitarian worker who has become a central figure in the international relief effort. From his base in Lviv, Borys coordinates a major aid distribution hub, directing emergency generators, food, medical supplies and water purification systems to communities devastated by four years of Russian aggression.

From Lviv we travelled north to Chernihiv, close to both the Russian and Belarusian borders — one of the first cities in the crosshairs of the 2022 invasion. Unlike cities in the east, Chernihiv was never captured; its residents and defenders held firm, earning it the title of Hero City of Ukraine. We visited surrounding villages that bore the full force of the Russian advance before it was repelled, and met Artem Rakitim, a local hero who organised the evacuation of 25,000 civilians during those desperate early weeks. We also visited a modern military hospital — a symbol of the determination to rebuild and endure.

Our final destination was Kyiv — a beautiful, defiant capital that refuses to be defined by the war being waged against it. There, as in every city we visited, we met grassroots civil society groups: some raising funds to supply frontline troops with non-military essentials, others supporting the building and testing of drones for Ukrainian forces, and still others providing financial and psychological support to children who have lost one or both parents to the war.

In Kyiv, I also met people rebuilding lives from the ground up — including efforts to provide modular homes for families whose houses were destroyed in the fighting, and grassroots campaigns supporting local schools, hospitals and summer camps for young people affected by the war.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is now in its fifth year. The loss of life and destruction of civilian infrastructure continue unabated, and the suffering is palpable everywhere — but so is the determination of the Ukrainian people. Rotary, here in the UK, in Ukraine, and around the world, remains deeply committed to standing alongside them in their struggle to preserve their independence and their identity. For my part, I am determined to do everything I can to support the Ukrainian people — both the refugees who have found safety in our country, and those who stayed behind to fight a powerful, merciless enemy.

Slava Ukraini. (Anna Beria)

Over the last 2 years the Liberal Democrats have welcomed many Ukrainian delegations to the UK. Servant of the Peoples Party, Zelenskyy's party, considers the Liberal Democrats as its partner in Europe. We have seen a number of Peoples Deputies at our Conferences over this time.

Liberal Democrats have a close affinity with the centralist parties in Ukraine and in particular we have established strong links with the Servant of the Peoples Party. All the major political parties support what Ukraine is doing to protect democracy and freedom of speech.

As well as donating to Ukrainian Aid causes and providing material donations many of our LibDem members regularly travel to Ukraine to provide the aid, delivering cars, ambulances and fire engines loaded with different items that are vitally needed, particularly medical equipment.

A large number of the members of LDFoU have sponsored Ukrainians by opening up their homes to provide places of sanctuary. As Ukrainians face the reality of another harsh winter with limited power due to the intensification of strikes against Ukraine's energy infrastructure, more Ukrainians are seeking sponsors in the UK. If this is something you wish to consider contact Steve Osbiston, the Vice Chair of LDFoU

steveukr@outlook.com

Come and visit us on H7, meet the Exec and discuss what things you can do to support Ukraine.

As I write in early September, Kyiv has just endured its 7th night in a row of bombardment. 40% of the time in those 7 days residents have lived under Air Alert. It is not just Kyiv but many other cities and the energy infrastructure is also under attack, and we haven't even reached winter yet.

In recent weeks there has been a surge in Ukrainians seeking sponsors in the UK. It is not something you will read about in the news, nor will Government announce a call for sponsors. **We are!** Please come and talk to us about sponsorship.

Steve Osbiston,

Steve Osbiston, is Vice Chair of LDFoU



Ortega ends democratic elections in Nicaragua

Liberal International bureau strongly condemns President Daniel Ortega's declaration that there will be "no more elections" for Nicaragua's democratic opposition and the legislative measures that would effectively abolish meaningful democratic elections in the country. Together, these actions make clear the Ortega-Murillo regime's intention to extinguish any remaining prospect of a peaceful democratic transition and entrench one-party authoritarian rule, moving Nicaragua closer to the model of a single-party state such as Cuba.

LI stands in full solidarity with its member parties in Nicaragua – Ciudadanos por la Libertad (CxL), full member party, led by President Kitty Monterrey, and Ruta del Cambio, observer member party, led by President Félix Maradiaga – and with all Nicaraguans who continue to peacefully advocate for democracy, freedom and the rule of law. Despite systematic persecution, both parties continue their democratic work through members and supporters inside Nicaragua as well as in exile. After years of dismantling democratic institutions, imprisoning and exiling political opponents, revoking citizenship, closing civic space, and presiding over the deterioration of the country's economic and social conditions, the regime is now seeking to eliminate the final constitutional pathway to democratic change.

LI has consistently warned of the Ortega-Murillo regime's systematic destruction of democracy. In 2021, together with RELIAL, LI condemned the dissolution of Ciudadanos por la Libertad, warning that the

regime had “criminalised democracy”. In 2023, the Executive Committee, meeting in Ottawa, adopted a resolution condemning the regime’s escalating repression and reaffirming its solidarity with Nicaragua’s democratic forces. Today’s announcement marks the culmination of that authoritarian trajectory.

The Bureau calls on the Nicaraguan authorities to reverse these measures, restore constitutional order and fundamental freedoms, and create the conditions for a genuine democratic transition leading to free, fair and internationally observed elections.

Luz Poblete, Vice President Liberal International (Evopoli, Chile), said: “By declaring an end to meaningful democratic elections, Ortega has abandoned even the pretence of democratic legitimacy. His regime is determined to silence dissent and rule indefinitely without the consent of the Nicaraguan people. Liberal International stands firmly with Ciudadanos por la Libertad, Ruta del Cambio and all democratic forces working peacefully for a transition to democracy. The people of Nicaragua deserve freedom, pluralism and genuinely free and fair elections.”

24/07/2026

Why Publishing in interLib Makes a Difference

The Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference 2026 will be the eighth annual conference that I have attended. Every year, party members, myself included, do our best to ensure that our campaigns are heard. This can be particularly challenging when the issue is important but highly technical. I especially sympathise with newcomers, who may not yet know how to broaden the appeal of their campaign and can easily become lost in the sea of party politics.

Today, we can convey our messages through social media, but these platforms have their limitations. Either there is a word limit, or restrictions to photos only, or the messages will pop up to the trend only for the matter of days, if you are lucky.

Effective political campaigning requires detailed analysis before ideas can be transformed into policy—or, at the very least, into a well-reasoned political position. Without that foundation, we risk falling into the trap of populism.

Some people may think that publishing an article is the end goal. To me, however, it is only part of the process. An article often becomes the foundation of a speech that I will deliver at conference or the blueprint for a campaign that an Affiliated Organisation (AO) intends to promote.

InterLib, the journal of the Liberal International British Group, provides an excellent platform for publishing thoughtful political



analysis and serves as an ideal starting point for a campaign. It is particularly valuable during conference season. When I wrote articles on behalf of Liberal Democrats Friends of Hong Kong, I would ask my colleagues to review each draft and debate its content before it was submitted for publication. That process helped us develop robust, well-considered policy positions and ensured that we were better prepared to respond to criticism.

This will be my first Autumn Conference as Chair of the Liberal International British Group, and I am delighted to see our editorial team continuing their excellent work in providing such a valuable platform for campaigners like myself. To everyone who has contributed to this edition, I would like to say, thank you. I hope the articles in this special conference edition will not only inform readers but also inspire meaningful debate, strengthen our policies, and contribute to the advancement of liberal values both within our party and beyond.

Larry Ngan

International Abstracts

Journal of Liberal History Issue 131 Summer 2026

This is an issue that you will need. It opens with news of the death of Michael Meadowcroft, MP for Leeds West. Ideologue of Community Politics, president of the Liberal Party, before and after Merger before finally joining the Liberal Democrats. The obituary is a combined effort by Duncan Brack, Gordon Lishman and Mark Smulian; there is also a memoir by York Membery. The impact of the General Strike of 1926 on the Liberal party is also covered in an article by Alan Yates and a review of David Torrance's *The Edge of Revolution*. There is a report of the York Conference fringe meeting on Liberals and Local Government. Duncan Brack writes on the Lib-Lab Pact. Finally something international – Tom Trafford writes on *The Manchester Liberal Union's response to the South African War (1899-1902) anti-war majority versus pro-war minority*.

The other reviews are mini articles in themselves. William Wallace on Alan Wager's *Cross-Party Politics in Britain 1945-2019*. The remark 'amateurism and lack of preparation by Liberal leaders and their party' applies way beyond the 1970s. Eugenio Biagini reviews George Crowder's *Isaiah Berlin in the 21st century*. Vernon Bogdanor reviews former Young Liberal chair, John Leston's *Battles at the Ballot...* on the contested by-elections of the First World War, focussing on the campaigns of Horatio Bottomley and Noel Pemberton-Billing. Most welcome is the second volume of Richard O'Brien's biography of Margaret Lloyd George – *The Woman Who Helped Win the War...* one hears much of the mistresses of the Welsh Wizard and so much in the background, hardly knew he had a wife; Russell Deacon and O'Brien redress that balance.

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International content is thin in this issue, almost limited to viticulture in the former Yugoslavia. Radical Bulletin reports on problems with Germany's FDP and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. Gordon Lishman writes an inspiring obituary of Michael Meadowcroft, and Peter Johnson of Flick Rea, both of whom had associations with the magazine. The Labour leadership 'battle' brought articles on Andy Burnham and what turned out to merely be a stalking horse, Wes Streeting. There is the usual soul-searching, the NHS maternity crisis and local government concerns. Lord Bonkers holidays at Trescothick Bay, no doubt enjoying some beach cricket with the well-behaved orphans aside from his commentary.

You can download Liberator for free at: <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/recent-issues/> and it's also where you can also sign up to be emailed when each new issue of Liberator comes out.

The LI Wrap July 2026

This month, the LI Bureau condemned Ortega's attempt to end democratic elections in Nicaragua, while the Human Rights Committee called for dialogue amid India's crackdown on youth protesters. Marking 75 years since the adoption of the Refugee Convention, LI Deputy President Astrid Thors highlighted the enduring importance of international protection, while LI Treasurer Lennart Salemink condemned the hateful attack on Berlin Pride. Anne Applebaum explored how liberals can build a coalition capable of confronting authoritarianism and populism - a must-watch!

Monika Zajkova, leader of LI full member the Liberal Democratic Party of North Macedonia, was elected Vice President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, while a delegation from Ukraine's Servant of the People met with the UK Liberal Democrats and LI in London.

There are also details of the forthcoming Bangkok-Taipei LI Congress. please visit the Congress webpage: https://liberal-international.org/asia_2026/

London

How Chinese Money Disfigured London, by Caroline Knowles. The London Standard 11th June 2026

Reviews

Tsai Ing-wen and Taiwan: An Assessment of the First Administration 2016–2020, edited by Sabella Ogbobode Abidde
Bloomsbury Publishing 2026 £56.70
isbn 9781978762343

It has been ten years since Tsai Ing-wen was first elected President of Taiwan. Her presidency weathered major geopolitical shifts and the COVID-19 pandemic, while enabling Taiwan to play a more prominent role on the international stage. Professor Sabella Ogbobode Abidde and her team have published this timely volume, *Tsai Ing-wen and Taiwan: An Assessment of the First Administration 2016–2020*, which provides a balanced assessment of President Tsai's legacy.

Recognising the limitations of a single author covering such a broad range of subjects, Professor Abidde chose to compile a collection of essays written by specialists in their respective fields rather than writing the entire book herself. The volume is divided into two main sections: Domestic Affairs and Foreign Affairs. In the first section, the contributors analyse Taiwan's socio-economic circumstances when President Tsai took office and examine how her administration sought to address these challenges. The second section shifts its focus to Taiwan's diplomatic isolation before Tsai assumed office and explores how her government broadened Taiwan's international appeal and strengthened its global presence, despite the fact that many countries still do not officially recognise Taiwan as an independent state.

One of the common challenges facing edited volumes is maintaining consistent quality across contributions written by authors from different academic backgrounds. Fortunately, this collection contains a number of outstanding chapters. One notable example is Dr Phyllis Wei-Lih Yeh's chapter, *Analysing Regional Revitalisation Policy in Taiwan: Rethinking the Implementation of Regional Revitalisation Strategies During the Tsai Government*. It provides a detailed account of how President Tsai's administration drew inspiration from Shinzo Abe's regional revitalisation policies in Japan while adapting them to Taiwan's own circumstances. Dr Yeh further illustrates the effectiveness of these policies through the case study of the Xiwei Peninsula Antenna Shop, demonstrating how regional revitalisation supported local businesses and communities while helping to reduce the economic imbalance between Taipei and the rest of the country.

Other contributors adopted different research approaches. Rather than relying on case studies, Dr Young-Im Lee's chapter, *Gender Matters in Tsai Ing-wen's First Term: The First Woman President, the Cabinet Appointments, and Same-Sex Marriage in Taiwan*, draws upon fieldwork and survey findings to explain the rationale behind Tsai's first presidential campaign and to explore why progress towards gender equality during her first term was slower than many had anticipated.

My favourite chapter is *Taiwan's Public Diplomacy and the Relations with Southeast Asian States from 2016–2020* by Dr Yung Lin. Rather than simply describing Taiwan's diplomatic policies, Dr Lin analyses the language used in official diplomatic press releases and government statements. Through quantitative analysis of changes in wording, the study seeks, as Dr Lin explains, "to find the correlation between conflict and resolution and public diplomacy: how Taiwan's government has been framing the public diplomacy strategies and whether this strategy is related to the development of conflict relations from 2016 to 2020." The research team also conducted fifteen interviews with Taiwanese experts based across Southeast Asia to investigate public perceptions of conflict and evaluate the effectiveness of Taiwan's public diplomacy through the respondents' lived experiences. The chapter concludes that, through the effective use of social media and positive public diplomacy, Taiwan successfully reshaped international narratives in its favour, while the Tsai administration significantly increased global awareness of Taiwan.

As with most edited volumes, maintaining consistency across chapters is challenging. Unfortunately, this is perhaps the book's greatest weakness. In the Acknowledgements, Professor Abidde explains the difficulties she encountered in recruiting contributors:

"I approached more than two dozen Taiwanese scholars, at home and aboard, to help examine the first administration of President Tsai Ing-wen (2016–20). The vast majority declined, and a handful told me that they didn't want to be seen 'criticizing our president'."

As a result, some chapters were not written specifically for this volume but were reprinted from

previously published academic journals. Examples include Dr Young-Im Lee's chapter mentioned above and Professor Frank Tian Xie and Dr Shu-Chen Tsao's chapter, Economic and Trade Interdependence between Taiwan (ROC) and China (PRC).

This inevitably creates a degree of inconsistency across the collection. Professor Xie and Dr Tsao's chapter, for example, aims to explain the economic interdependence between Taiwan and China using economic data. However, the data presented only extend to 2015, with little discussion of developments during President Tsai's first term. Although the chapter provides valuable historical context prior to Tsai's presidency, it feels disconnected from the broader purpose of the volume and differs noticeably from the other contributions.

Overall, this edited volume provides a comprehensive analysis of Taiwan's socio-economic and diplomatic development during President Tsai Ing-wen's first administration. It demonstrates how her government set Taiwan on a different path by promoting economic development, strengthening

Taiwan's international standing, and helping the country avoid the worst effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a timely and valuable collection that will be of particular interest to readers seeking to understand Taiwan's recent political development.

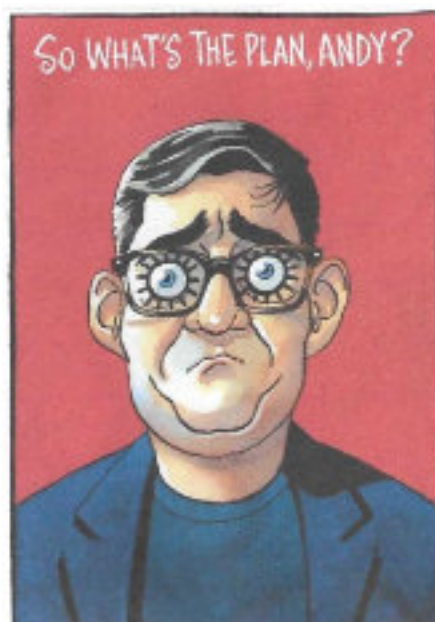
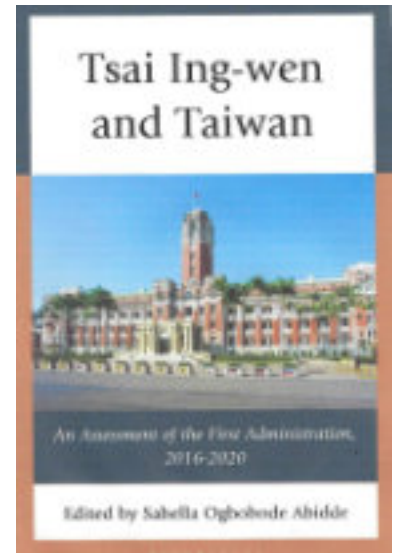
Larry Ngan

Beyond Parody: Matt & Peter Brookes at Chris Beetles Gallery

There was an air of disbelief when Chris Beetles announced that the last time Peter Brookes & Matt Pritchard were both at his gallery was before COVID in 2017; they have exhibited singularly on many occasions. Peter now produces his cartoons twice a week for The Times and has worked from home since COVID, Matt appears daily in the Telegraph, increasingly working from home with fewer distractions – he is expected to offer 5 or 6 cartoons a day for editors to choose from.

Matt's cartoons aside, the Telegraph has been unreadable since the Brexit battle; it could be the next major casualty amongst newspapers – street sales are down but online subscriptions rise and they can be monitored as to what the punters actually read. Once read for the international content, despite the Tory affiliation, those days are long gone.

Did our cartoonists miss the golden days of the aftermath of Brexit, May, Johnson, Truss & Sunak? No, Trump's second term has it all. Then, as the blurb put it *The political temperature rises as the heatwave continues. War intensifies with conflagration, destruction, invasion and overthrow ... and that's just the Labour Party.* Neither Matt nor Brookes thought much of Kier Starmer, nor much of his successor... for how long? Contrast Matt's empty chairs with Brookes' Burnham unmasked. The international scene is a constant source for Brookes who seems to have the last word on Iran.



The exhibition ran from 18th-29th August but the work can be viewed online – Peter Brookes at [Beyond Parody | Chris Beetles](#) Matt at [Matt \(Matthew Pritchett\) | Chris Beetles](#) Brookes' cartoons – water colours, are available at £1,750.00. Matt's cartoons range from £250.00 unmounted to £350.00 framed. Sadly Ed Davey didn't make it in the exhibition - must try harder... but he did make the cover of the late August Private Eye.

Stewart Rayment

The Answers Are There: Building Peace from the Inside Out, by Libby Hoffman. Blue Chair Press 2022 isbn 9798986203010.

This could be a community politics manual, written for a divided British region in the 21st century. But it isn't: it's the story of how people in Sierra Leone repaired their communities following the civil war (1991-2002, 50,000 dead) and Ebola (4,000 dead). The success rests in the belief that local inhabitants, and not national politicians, academics, NGO experts or officials, know what is best. It is grounded in people's capacity to re-establish trust in each other when they have the agency to determine their future.

Whether in post-Brexit Britain or post-war Sierra Leone, it would be optimistic to think one can easily rebuild trust in institutions. Yet the prevailing think-tank-dogma persists, cutting communities out of the picture, assuming some top-down solution can be imposed. In the African or Cambodian or Latin American context, this neo-colonialist arrogance endures, with international initiatives filtering through corrupt or disinterested national officials, arriving as meaningless jargon at district level.

The well-intentioned ICC and ad hoc tribunals, and the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commissions in Cambodia and elsewhere have been astonishingly expensive, yet often resulting in few convictions, and performative "closure". Too often, national political interests determine how people tell the truth about what happened during conflict, with survivors feeling enormous pressure to forgive perpetrators. At its worst, it is theatre to appease the international community – and it is bankrolled by the same countries which failed to fulfil their international obligations under the Genocide Convention (1948) and the Responsibility to protect Doctrine (2005). As with *Eleanor Rigby*, "No one was saved," and far too few participating in these national spectacles feel they have achieved a kind of justice that resonates within their culture.

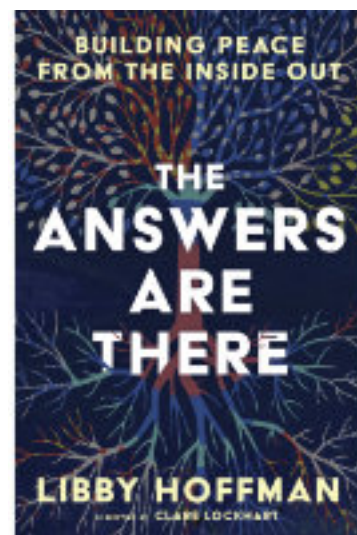
The approach used by Sierra Leone's People's Planning Process and Peace Mothers starts with using traditional settings to try to re-establish trust between people. Decisions are devolved to the lowest possible level, literally sitting around bonfires and speaking openly about issues that have divided people. These centuries-old ceremonies are adapted to include people traditionally silenced (women, youth, the disabled).

In a less individualistic, more communal society like Sierra Leone, many perpetrators embrace the chance to be re-admitted to their community, having confessed and apologized to their victims. Every village contains men who joined with one war lord or other, committing atrocities such as amputations and rape. In poor countries, where thousands took up arms, often only the masterminds were sent to prison. Having gone through communal healing, the informal structures created then become the vehicles for planning how to develop the village economy. Reparations can take the form of joining in a communal farming project or soap-making, earning and saving money together in village loans schemes. Activities like football matches and dances cement these connections. The People's Planning Processes then send delegates to the district level, advocating for improvements and investment in their area. This is especially empowering for women who have traditionally been excluded by the "big man" culture.

Once the trust is established, the process can be used to prevent election violence and to mediate in future disputes beneath designated Peace Trees. Consultation is an ongoing process, and it requires months of work to get to the point when cleansing processes such as traditional ceremonies can be considered. These are not quick fixes of the type favoured by the international community. It has also required outside investment by Libby Hoffman's US NGO Catalyst for Peace, hiring three or four respected local people in each district to make it happen. What they have created has enough credibility in the eyes of survivors and perpetrators that the same process has rolled out across 2,500 villages at a total cost of \$2m. Meanwhile the Special Court for Sierra Leone cost \$300, with nine people found guilty.

Rebecca Tinsley

Rebecca Tinsley's NGO, Network for Africa provides trauma counselling for survivors in Sierra Leone



Keynes For Our Times, by Robert Skidelsky.
Yale University Press 2026
isbn 9780300286830

Back in 2015 I reviewed Penguin's collection *The Essential Keynes*, edited by Robert Skidelsky¹. I wrote *I had hoped that this would be a useful handbook for Liberals in government, but that is not to be so*. I was realistic about the outcome of the next General Election from the moment the Liberal Democrats entered the Coalition with the Tories. My experience of Irish politics told me that it would be a massacre. The Progressive Democrats, short-lived Irish Liberal party, were wiped out completely for their coalition with Fianna Fail, as I think were the Irish Green party. To come away with 8 MPs was a miracle by which the Liberal Democrats could slowly claw back – there's still a long way to go.

The economics of the Coalition were a mistake – I concluded my review with Keynes' quote from *The Time of 1937*, he quipped 'The boom, not the slump, is the right time for austerity at the Treasury'. As junior partner we were saddled with George Osborne's austerity (shouldn't Vince Cable have been Chancellor, rather than that nonsense of a 'Deputy Prime Minister?') Our coalition-seasoned European allies wept at the speed at which the deal was done. Inexperience was one thing, but those Orange Bookers had swallowed the neoliberal pill and let's face it, Hayek, Friedman et al were liberals, if of a different hue, and I would add, lost their way.

But what of Robert Skidelsky? A Social Democrat but did not merge; took the Tory shilling for a place in the Lords and unsurprisingly, was disillusioned and ended his days on the Cross Benches. He already had some celebrity when I attended some of his lectures; he'd already cut his teeth on a biography of Oswald Mosley, a bold subject but one that got you noticed – proto-Keynesian? We speculated on what would be the magnum opus, Lloyd George? A crowded field; we got three fat volumes of biography on Keynes and a number of shorter volumes espousing his works.

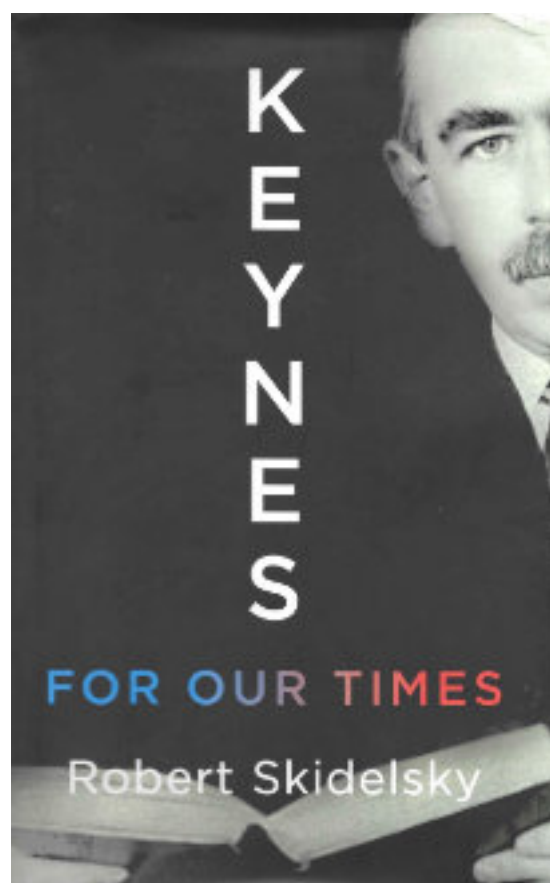
Here we have the final chapter – Skidelsky's championship of Keynes. Economics writing even more than political writing is of its day and practically unreadable beyond that (I know), so a distillation of Keynes' central ideas is useful to those picking up the banner to go forward. But this is not to be taken carte blanche. Andy Haldane's opinion 'Is Keynesianism dead?' in the 5th September's *Financial Times* raises many questions. Haldane, former chief economist at the Bank of England, with a catalogue of interesting stances, on the labour market, for instance, has reputedly been advising Andy Burnham campaign prior to scaling the greasy pole.

We are at a Munich moment, sad to say. Even without Trump there are doubts about the future reliability of America; self-reliant alliances are needed and it is clear where they are, with government spending priorities at home. If Trump puts punitive tariffs on our cars etc. look eastwards at what is needed and invest there.

Skidelsky clearly knew what he was doing in his last book. We cannot take an economist who died 80 years ago verbatim, but we can build on his ideas (as effectively, we do on those throughout the progressive liberal canon). A final word, which I think would appeal to Keynes as an aesthete – I love the cover... the idea of John Maynard peeping around the door at us is a hoot.

Stewart Rayment

¹ interLib 2015-03 page 24



The First Emancipation: The Forgotten History of Abolition in Revolutionary France,
by Jeremy D. Popkin.
Princeton University Press 2026 £35.00 - \$39.95
isbn 9780691246925

In 1789, French revolutionaries declared that "men are born and remain free and equal in rights." It took them five more years to decide whether that sentence meant what it said. Jeremy Popkin's *The First Emancipation* is the story of that hesitation — and of how quickly, once the answer finally came, France found reasons to take it back.

Popkin, a historian of the French and Haitian Revolutions, is well positioned to tell this story. His book traces the tangled path from the Declaration of the Rights of Man to the National Convention's 1794 decree abolishing slavery throughout the French empire — the first such act by a Western power — and then to Napoleon's 1802 attempt to reverse it. Reading through the book's account of "the abolitionist cause in jeopardy," what stands out is not villainy so much as evasion. Revolutionary leaders who could describe liberty as a natural, universal right in the abstract kept finding reasons to defer it in the particular: economic dependence on the colonies, fear of civil war, the political expedience of not alienating powerful planter interests. Robespierre and Mirabeau appear less as principled abolitionists than as men who let the logic of their own founding document outrun their willingness to act on it. The 1794 emancipation, when it finally came, reads less like the fulfilment of revolutionary ideals than like a decision forced on Paris by events already underway in Saint-Domingue — an emancipation ratified more than it was chosen.

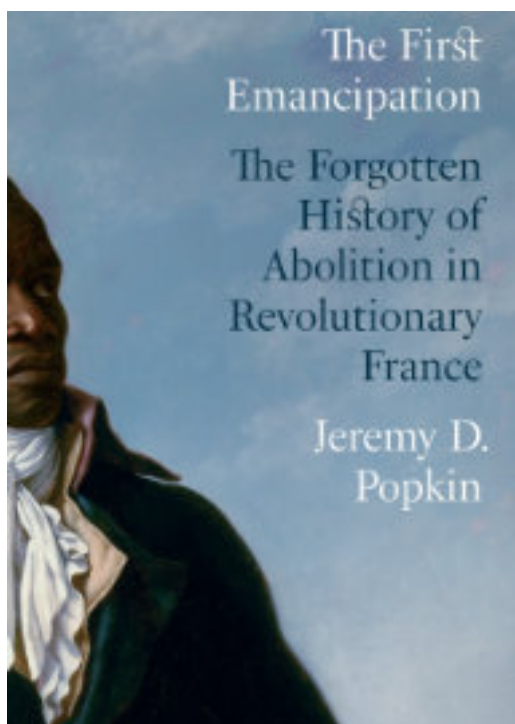
That gap between the ideal and the act is the real subject of this book, and it is why the phrase "forgotten history" in the subtitle carries some weight. France likes to remember 1789 as the moment it exported liberty to the world. It remembers 1794 less well, and it has worked hard not to remember 1802 at all.

Napoleon's decision to send an army to restore slavery in the colonies — and the catastrophe that followed — is where Popkin's book does its most consequential work, and where my own reading interest sharpened. The expedition to Saint-Domingue cost France tens of thousands of soldiers, provoked the war that produced Haitian independence in 1804, and left slavery reimposed everywhere else in the French empire, where it would persist until 1848. The revolutionary forces in Saint-Domingue held the French empire's feet to the fire, literally and figuratively: they launched and won the only successful slave revolt in human history, defeating Napoleon's massive expeditionary army in the process. Haiti won its freedom on the battlefield. It has been paying for that victory ever since. In 1825, France demanded 150 million gold francs from the new nation as "compensation" for the loss of its human property, backed by warships anchored off the coast. Haiti did not finish paying — through a debt refinanced, resold, and compounded by French and American banks — until 1947. By some economists' estimates, that money, left in the Haitian economy instead, could be worth over \$100 billion today. Popkin's book does not chase that thread all the way to the present, but it doesn't need to. It lays the foundation clearly enough that the reader can see where the line leads: from a revolution that briefly meant its own words, to an empire that punished the one nation that held it to them.

That is the largest reason this book feels urgent rather than antiquarian. Nations are fond of mythologizing their revolutionary moments — the instant when the old order fell and the new ideals were born — while quietly editing out the years afterward, when those ideals were traded away for stability, profit, or power. France is hardly unique in this. It is a pattern visible wherever a founding declaration of universal rights outlives the political will to honour it, and it has obvious resonance now, as democracies across the world flirt with the same trade: security and order offered in exchange for rights once treated as non-negotiable. Popkin's book is, among other things, a case study in how fast that trade can happen — eight years, in France's case — and how long the bill stays outstanding once it's made.

The First Emancipation does not offer tidy lessons, and it is better for it. But it leaves a reader with a genuine question, not just a historical one: what does a nation owe, generations later, when its founding promises were kept for some and revoked for others? France has never fully answered that question for Haiti. Popkin doesn't pretend to answer it either. He does something more useful — he makes it impossible to pretend the debt was ever paid.

There are, at least, live proposals for what an answer might look like. Haitian officials and diaspora advocates have spent two decades pressing France for restitution, and 2025's bicentennial of the 1825 indemnity brought the issue back into view at the UN, where speakers called for the debt's value to be repaid



or forgiven outright. France has taken smaller steps before — a 2004 pledge, quickly abandoned amid political upheaval in Haiti, and a 2025 presidential commission tasked with examining the historical record — but has stopped well short of financial restitution. Historians and economists have also proposed debt relief on Haiti's current obligations as a proxy for reparations, and joint investment in the infrastructure and institutions that indemnity payments prevented Haiti from building in the first place. None of this is simple, and Popkin's book is honest enough not to pretend otherwise. But it makes a case, by sheer accumulation of evidence, that "it's complicated" has functioned for two centuries as a way of not deciding — and that a nation which once found the will to abolish slavery in a single vote can presumably find the will to reckon with what it did next. The real value of returning to 1794 now is not nostalgia for a revolution that briefly kept its word. It's a reminder that the failure to keep it wasn't inevitable, and that what was chosen once can, in principle, be chosen again.

Sherly Fabre

Suing The Kremlin: The Battle for Putin's Billions, by Martin Sixsmith. Swift Press 2026 isbn 9781800755062 ebook 9781800755079

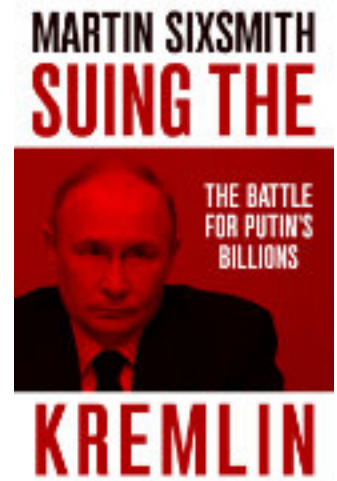
This is the story of Vladimir Putin's crushing an oligarch who defied him and his state stealing Russia's most profitable oil company, Yukos, to the personal enrichment of his circle, and the story of the directors and lawyers who fought to get justice and compensation. It is a factual political and legal thriller, a thriller in which lawyers are some of the main heroes, and some of the villains too. It is a story of Russia in its immediate post-Soviet Wild West days, of Vladimir Putin's quest to seize control of assets, and of resistance by some oligarchs but also by ordinary professionals committed to the rule of law and supporting a modern business economy.

Knowing my interest in Ukraine the *Law Society Gazette* asked me to review this book. Martin Sixsmith's writing is very good, and it is readable, with at the end a helpful timeline, a list of characters, and extensive notes (many of them to original Russian sources, as well as numerous personal interviews with primary characters), plus an index. I found these necessary as the twists and turns (and who dies in prison or suspiciously or is jailed on trumped up charges) is pretty confusing. Sixsmith is open that he is friends with Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the oligarch founder of Yukos who was jailed for ten years and is a leading pro-democracy critic of Vladimir Putin. He was also proposed to write the biography of Boris Berezovsky, before he was found hanging in his house near Ascot in 2013. The oligarchs backed Boris Yeltsin and his successor Vladimir Putin, believing that they could control him. Roman Abramovich features in several places, as someone who tries not to cross Putin but appears to keep a sense of humanity and better judgement than those running the Russian state. When Russian directors are targeted, Yukos appoints British lawyers to act as directors. British tax lawyer Stephen Curtis died in a suspicious helicopter crash and Tim Osborne, Nick Keeling and Kevin Bromley take up positions. Osborne leads the fight for compensation for the next twenty years. Emmanuel Gaillard and Yas Banifatemi are the French arbitration lawyers who find the ultimately successful strategy of claiming breach of the Energy Charter Treaty.

The American, British and European law firms acting for the Kremlin (until the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022) do not come out of this well. Most scorn is reserved for PwC who allegedly under pressure from the Kremlin disavow years' worth of their accounts for the oil company and does not give evidence in arbitration proceedings. This enables the Kremlin to allege fraud and persecute Yukos employees. "Osborne insisted that PwC had always had a complete, first-hand knowledge of everything that was going on at Yukos, including the tax mitigation schemes that appear to have been the object of the Kremlin's 'new information'." In 2007, PwC said it was misled about related parties, payment structures and payments to related companies. In 2009 PwC's director of European public affairs told Sixsmith "The withdrawal of our audits was not done lightly. We were confident of the new information we received."

As someone unfamiliar with arbitration the very introductory explanation of international commercial

arbitration proceedings is clear and helpful, including excerpts from Schultz & Grant, *Arbitration: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP). Apart from the vengeful campaign of victimisation by Vladimir Putin's henchmen, the most shocking thing is how slow arbitration and compensation proceedings are at each stage. Every step seeming to take six months or a year leading to proceedings lasting ten years and another ten. The flaws in the book are political. While it is made clear that the oligarchs obtained their money mostly by dubious means, and kept the money tied up in tax minimising structures in Russia and offshore that complied with the letter of the law if not its spirit, the clash with the Kremlin is presented as being between free market economy supporting democrats, and ex KGB apparatchiks. The latter is fair, but suggesting that the big businessmen, even once legitimised, supported free markets seems rather a leap. Yukos is supported by interviews or statements by many of the bright young reformers who were close to Boris Yeltsin by his former advisers to try and sin. Many British public libraries have copies of a book *A man of change a study of the political life of Boris Yeltsin* donated by the Yeltsin Center. This was written by his former advisers to try and put their side of the story. Yeltsin is usually presented as a comedy figure in 'the West' but Sixsmith illustrates that there were genuine attempts to create a functioning market economy – albeit disastrous in execution for many Russians. Sixsmith does convince though that Yukos directors supported the rule of law. The warning for lawyers is that this does not in reality exist in the Russian Federation.



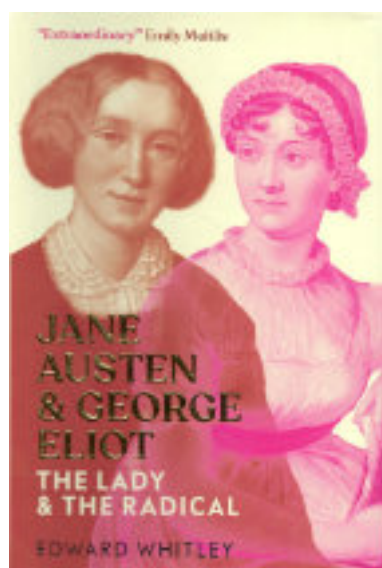
Kiron Reid

**Jane Austen & George Eliot, the lady and the radical, by Edward Whitley
Biteback 2025 isbn 9781785909542**

Jane Austen & George Eliot, the lady and the radical but which is which? In 2017 we reviewed Jane Austen *The Secret Radical*, by Helena Kelly (*interLib* 2017-05 pages 34-35) and were quite convinced by her arguments. I equally don't doubt that Mary Anne Evans, whose pen name was George Eliot was a lady; her radicalism is more widely testified. Within her career she was at one time assistant to the philosopher Herbert Spencer, then a sub-editor at *The Economist*. Luckily, she established herself at the outset of her literary career before too many Victorian scruples could be ruffled.

Eliot might be said to use a broader brush than Austen, whose works encompass on a narrower section of society. Eneas Dallas summed this up in his review of *Felix Holt, the Radical* in *The Times* of 26th June 1866: *Hitherto Miss Austin has had the honour of the first place among our lady novelists, but a greater than she has now arisen... George Eliot undertakes to set forth the issues of a more tumultuous life, to work out deeper problems, and play with torrents where Miss Austin played with rills*. I would not, myself, make claims as to a hierarchy of novelists, what price Mrs. Gaskell or the Brontës? But the that broad brush was recognised in Eliot's day.

Edward Whitley has a bit of form as an environmentalist aside his writing, his love of the works of Austen and Eliot stemming from his days at Oxford. We're dealing with someone who enjoys his subject matter and



seeks its depths. He would restore Miss Austen from the portrait painted of her by relatives after her death. As you explore our authors with him, you are empowered to reread, or read, their novels with greater depth. With luck you could get through Austen's novels recovering from a bout of flu over the winter - Eliot's would be more of a challenge. What did Whitley's banking experience tell him of financial matters that bedevilled Austen's family?

Their burials are of note; Austen got her own back on the Anglican Establishment, her tomb is in Winchester Cathedral. Eliot fell afoul of their Victorian scruples and is in unhallowed ground at Highgate Cemetery.

Stewart Rayment

BRIGHTON... the international bits

Saturday 19 September

Conference

11.35–11.50 F7 Speech: Al Pinkerton MP Liberal Democrat Spokesperson (Europe)

12.50–14.10 Lunch break and fringe

Liberal International British Group and Liberal Democrat Friends of Hong Kong *No More Loopholes: Closing the Door on Foreign Interference*

www.libg.co.uk

Grand Hotel, Consort Room

Liberal Democrat Christian Forum *How can Lib Dems challenge the rise of populism and Christian nationalism?*

www.ldcf.info Liberal Democrat Christian Forum Facebook/Instagram

Brighton Centre, Meeting Room 1B

Social Liberal Forum: *The Problem of Vision and Purpose series. Fringe No 1 Launch of SLF Strategy. Reawakening Liberal Moral values in a fractured World*

For full details www.socialliberal.net

Grand Hotel, Alexandra Room

Conference

14.10–16.00 F9 Policy Motion: **Strength, Resilience and Partnership: Securing Britain and Defending Liberalism in Turbulent Times** (International Security Policy Paper)

Fringe Saturday mid-evening 20.15–21.30

Liberal Democrat Friends of the Armed Forces *How should the UK prepare in case of War?*

Join James MacCleary MP and military experts to discuss what we should do.

Grand Hotel, Consort Room

LibSTEMM - Who Holds the Power? AI, Data and Democracy

Panel: Lord Clement-Jones and special guests.

Grand Hotel, Regent Room,

Sunday 20 September

Conference

10.15–11.50 F17 Policy Motion: **Defending Democracy** (Democracy Policy Paper)

Fringe Sunday early lunchtime 12.15–13.15

Chester Zoo, WWF & LDs for Nature & Climate *Development and Deforestation: A Liberal Internationalist Response*

Join Monica Harding and Pippa Heylings to discuss how Liberal Democrats can lead the fight against deforestation and support global conservation organisations tackling the climate and nature crisis.

Grand Hotel, Alexandra Room

Fringe Sunday early lunchtime 12.15–13.15

Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine *Palestine and Israel: liberal perspectives on the future* Speakers: Ori Givati (B'Tselem), Jewish filmmaker Gillian Mosely, Knesset Member Aida Touma-Sliman and historian Ilan Pappé (invited).

www.ldfp.org.uk

DoubleTree by Hilton, Balmoral Room

Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel *Beyond Abbas and Netanyahu, what hope for peace in the Middle East?*

An in depth conversation between Foreign Affairs Lead, Calum Miller MP, and LDFI Hon. Chair, Gavin Stollar OBE.

DoubleTree by Hilton, Churchill Room

Best for Britain: *Bold or Cautious ? The Lib Dem dilemma on Europe*

How to balance being pro- European while targeting Leave voting seats. With Charlie Maynard MP, Baroness Julie Smith and Best for Britain's Naomi Smith.

DoubleTree by Hilton, Buckingham Room

Fringe Sunday late lunchtime 13.45–14.45

Liberal Democrat European Group (LDEG) *Will the EU have us back?*

Join Baroness Julie Smith (ALDE Vice-President), Prof. Anand Menon from KCL, and European Liberal leaders to understand how we can reintegrate with Europe.

www.ldeg.org

DoubleTree by Hilton, Buckingham Room

Fringe Sunday mid-afternoon

14.30 – 15.30 Liberal Democrats in International Development LDID: *International Development in an Age of Populism*

Mercure Brighton Seafront, Hotel Ballroom

15.15 – 16.15 Muslim Liberal Democrats Reception

The Brighton Centre, Meeting Room 1A

15.45 – 16.45 Liberal Democrats in International Development LDID: *The Role of Hunger in Driving Instability and Conflict*

Mercure Brighton Seafront, Hotel Ballroom

Conference

15.45–16.30 F20 Report: Federal Board F21 Report: Federal International Relations Committee

Fringe Sunday late afternoon 17.00 – 18.00

Liberal Democrats in International Development LDID: *G20 Priorities*

Mercure Brighton Seafront, Hotel Ballroom

Fringe Sunday early evening 18.15–19.15

More in Common *Brexit, Trump, and Britain on the World Stage*

Join foreign affairs spokesperson Calum Miller MP to discuss how voters want the party to approach Britain's role on the world stage. Using exclusive polling, this session will explore issues ranging from Brexit's legacy to relations with President Trump's administration.

Brighton Centre, Meeting Room 1B

Fringe Sunday early evening 19.00–22.00

Liberal Democrats in International Development LDID: *Drinks and Canapés Reception*
Mercure Brighton Seafront, Hotel Ballroom

Fringe Sunday mid-evening 19.45–21.00

Medical Aid for Palestinians *Medical Aid for Palestinians Reception*
Brighton Centre, Meeting Room 1A

The Future Governance Forum *The Refugee Convention 75 years on: retirement or renewal?*
Join us to consider how governments can uphold their international commitments while restoring public trust in asylum.
www.futuregovernanceforum.co.uk Substack, LinkedIn, X, and BlueSky.
Grand Hotel, Consort Room

Liberal Democratic Movement of Cyprus *The Nicosia Airport to open as a symbol of unity of Cyprus. SRA need for reform of an authoritarian body.*
The meeting will explain the problems of the members of public in not being able to proceed at the court because of the enormous costs of barristers and solicitors.
DoubleTree by Hilton, Churchill Room

Liberals and Democrats for Nature and Climate (LNDC): *The Climate and Nature Reception*
Grand Hotel, Alexandra Room

Monday 21 September

Fringe Monday early lunchtime 12.15–13.15

His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar *Reconnecting with Europe*
Lord Purvis chairs a discussion with Dr Joseph Garcia MP, Deputy Chief Minister, and Leader of the Gibraltar Liberal Party, and Al Pinkerton MP. Further panellists to be confirmed.
www.gibraltar.gov.gi
Grand Hotel, Alexandra Room

Tony Blair Institute Beyond Brexit – A New Relationship with a New Europe
Speakers: Al Pinkerton MP, Tone Langengen, Ailbhe Rea (Invited),
Grand Hotel, Empress Room

Westminster Foundation for Democracy x Liberal Democrats *Strengthening European Liberalism - International Perspectives on autocracy, European integration, and fighting illiberalism*
www.wfd.org/liberal-democrats www.linkedin.com/company/wfd-democracy/
Grand Hotel, The Pavilion Room

Fringe Monday late lunchtime 13.45–14.45

Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) *Britain's place in a changing world*
Explore the Liberal Democrats' approach to foreign policy and discuss where the UK should focus in a chaotic international context to achieve progressive goals at home and internationally.
With Calum Miller MP.
Brighton Centre, Meeting Room 1C

His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar *His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar Reception*
The Hon Dr Joseph Garcia MP, Deputy Chief Minister of Gibraltar and Leader of the Gibraltar Liberal Party, will host the annual reception on behalf of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar.
www.gibraltar.gov.gi
Grand Hotel, Alexandra Room

Fringe Monday late lunchtime 13.45–14.45

Centre for European Reform *Strengthening a rules-based world order: beyond power politics*

Monica Harding, MP for Esher and Walton; Al Pinkerton, MP for Surrey Heath; Jukka Salovaara, Ambassador, Delegation of the European Union to the United Kingdom; Chair: Ian Bond, Deputy Director, Centre for European Reform.

www.cer.eu

Grand Hotel, Charlotte Room

British Future *A Decade After the Brexit Vote: How Close Should the UK Get to Europe Now?*

Grand Hotel, The Pavilion

Fringe Monday late afternoon 16.45-18.00

16.45 – 19.30 Reception for Palestine Lib Dems Friends of Palestine(LDFP), the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) and Islamic Relief UK *host the annual Reception for Palestine.*

Refreshments will be served, including halal options.. **Speakers from 17.15 to 18.30** include H.E. Husam Zomlot, Palestinian Ambassador to the UK, Calum Miller MP , Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, MK Aida Touma- Slima, Israeli Knesset Member, Tayab Ali, Director ICJP, Zia Salik, Interim Director of Islamic Relief UK. **Double Tree by Hilton, Clarence Suite**

17.00-18.00 Port of Dover *The Great British Trade Exchange*

Join the Port of Dover to explore how driving smart, seamless and sustainable trade through decarbonisation, investing in smart infrastructure, and leveraging technology can overcome barriers, drive growth, and secure Britain's future as a global trading powerhouse.

Brighton Centre, Meeting Room 1D

Conference 17.10 – 18.00

Emergency Motions or Topical Issues *(Content to be selected via a members ballot during conference)*

Fringe Monday early evening 18.15–19.15

EU Delegation *EU Ambassador's Reception*

Reception hosted by the Ambassador of the European Union to the United Kingdom. Speakers: Calum Miller MP, Foreign Affairs Spokesperson; Al Pinkerton MP, Europe Spokesperson (tbc). For information and to register, please email

delegation-united-kingdompolitical@eeas.europa.eu

Grand Hotel, Alexandra Room

Smith Institute *Are we ready for climate change?*

Pippa Heylings MP (Energy Security/Net Zero spokesperson), Wera Hobhouse MP, Clare Young MP (TBC), Cllr Martin Horwood, Local Authority Pension Fund Forum, Gideon Amos MP (chair).

Grand Hotel, Empress Room

Fringe Monday mid evening 19:15-20:15

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) International Reception

Reception for international and diplomatic guests supported by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party and hosted by ALDE Vice President Baroness Julie Smith.

www.aldeparty.eu

Grand Hotel, Alexandra Room Invitation only

Fringe Monday late evening 22.00-01.00

Glee Club

Join us for the ultimate end-of conference celebration! Pick up your copy of the Liberator Songbook and come 'raise the roof'!

Grand Hotel, Alexandra and Empress Rooms

Tuesday 22 September

Conference

09.00–10.00 F34 Emergency motions or topical issue discussions

10.00–10.40 F35 Policy Motion: **Sovereignty in the Age of AI**

12.10 – 12.50 F39 Policy Debate: **Feeding Britain: A Food Security Emergency**

Fringe Tuesday lunchtime 13.00–14.00

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Europe *Lifting the Fog in the Channel – The Future of UK–EU Relations*

Join liberal voices from both sides of the Channel to discuss realistic opportunities for closer collaboration on shared European challenges.

Brighton Centre, Meeting Room 1A

The ONE Campaign *How can the Liberal Democrats push for a progressive agenda on global health and international development during the UK's G20 Presidency?*

Join Foreign Affairs spokesperson Calum Miller MP, the ONE Campaign, the Institute for Development Studies and others to discuss how the UK's forthcoming G20 Presidency is an opportunity to push for a progressive agenda on global health and international development.

www.one.org

Brighton Centre, Meeting Room 1C

*Now fruitful autumn lifts its sunburnt head,
The slighted Park few cambric muslins whiten,
The dry machines revisit Ocean's bed,
And Horace quits a while the town for Brighton.*

Horace Smith, 1843