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INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



Remembering the 25th January Revolution – 5 years ago!

Egyptian Liberal youths transferred to police station in a police van, prior to the revolution by few months. Their courage lead to momentous events.

SYRIA, THE SYRIA DEBATE & REFUGEE CRISIS

EGYPT

BURMA

EVENTS

5th-7th February Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Welsh Liberal Democrats) Spring Conference, Cardiff School of Management, Cardiff Metropolitan University.

14th February Lib Dem Youth St Valentine's Day

18th February Chinese Lib Dems Lunar New Year Banquet, New Loon Fung Restaurant, 42-44 Gerrard Street, London W1D 5QG. 7:00pm-10:30pm see page 12

22nd February Isaiah Berlin Lecture. Chatham House. 6.30pm -7.30pm see page 19

26th-27th February Scottish Liberal Democrat Spring Conference, Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh.

29th February Diplomatic reception. NLC page 19

11th-13th March Liberal Democrat Spring Conference, York.

14th March LIBG Exec.

18th July LIBG AGM, NLC.

17th-21st September Liberal Democrat Federal Conference, Brighton.

For bookings & other information please contact the Treasurer below.

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Why civilian protection is a must in Syria.

Yasmine Nahlawi

The conflict in Syria is not a ‘Syrian problem’, nor is it a ‘regional problem’. Rather, the Syrian conflict represents a global crisis, one which is felt even here in the UK. We have spent approximately [£1.1 billion](#) – tax-payers’ money – for humanitarian efforts, making us the second largest single humanitarian donor to the conflict. We have also [pledged](#) to accept up to 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020, with many other refugees entering the country through alternative routes such as Calais. And, of course, in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, we are concerned with the threat of a terrorist attack happening on UK soil, with an [estimated](#) 500 British foreign fighters already having travelled abroad to Syria to fight.

As a global crisis, the Syrian conflict requires a global response. Unfortunately, the international community has thus far failed to tackle the Syrian conflict from its root (a brutal dictatorship), focusing instead on its symptoms (including the refugee crisis and the threat posed by terrorist groups). The result has been a host of ineffective policies (including an international coalition against Daesh and failed peace talks) that to date, have not yielded any results.

The only way to 1) alleviate the humanitarian crisis; 2) tackle the refugee crisis; and 3) reduce the threat of extremism in Syria is to ensure civilian protection. We must address the root cause of the conflict – in which the Assad regime’s indiscriminate attacks have taken the lives of over two hundred thousand civilians and have displaced over half of the population – if we are serious about tackling its symptoms.



Yasmine Nahlawi

According to the [Syrian Network for Human Rights](#) (SNHR), the Assad regime was responsible for well over two-thirds of civilian deaths in Syria in 2015. Daesh, upon which our military efforts are currently focused, was responsible for little over eight percent of civilian casualties. While both sides are culpable of war crimes and crimes against humanity, clearly one of them carries the larger share of the blame for the mass atrocity situation.

It must also be recognised that the Assad regime’s indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilian areas is the primary driver behind the refugee exodus from Syria. Seventy percent of Syrian refugees in a recent [survey](#) in Germany said that they were fleeing Assad. To alleviate the refugee crisis, therefore, we must begin by ensuring the safety of Syrians inside their country.

Even alleviating the threat of terrorism emanating from Syria must begin by ensuring civilian protection from the Assad regime, which has been responsible for both the emergence and the continued growth of groups such as Daesh in Syria. For example, it is common knowledge that Assad [released](#) prisoners in 2011 who had known militant extremist tendencies with the knowledge that they would contribute to the

militarisation of the conflict. Many of these prisoners can now be found among Daesh or al-Nusra leadership in Syria. Simultaneously, the Assad regime has systematically detained academics and non-violent activists, thus silencing many of the voices of moderation within the conflict.

The Assad regime has also overwhelmingly failed to attack Daesh targets, striking instead opposition-controlled areas or civilian areas within Daesh-held territory. This was most blatantly highlighted in an Amnesty International [report](#) documenting the Syrian regime's use of air attacks on the so-called Daesh capital of Raqqah. Such continuous and indiscriminate bombing, which leads to destruction, chaos, and anarchy, contributes to the [radicalisation](#) of the people on the ground and has served as a recruiting tool for groups such as Daesh.

For the above reasons, our current Daesh-only approach will not work without incorporating it into a wider strategy of ensuring civilian protection from the Assad regime's brutality. This goes without saying: the international community has already been bombing Daesh for over a year with [limited results](#). To the contrary, foreign intervention has perhaps fanned the flames of terrorism and has legitimised Daesh in the eyes of those who mistakenly believe that it is being unjustly targeted. As a result, Daesh now [controls](#) more territory in Syria than when the Coalition began its military campaign. It is high time we realise that we have been pursuing a flawed strategy.

Civilian protection in Syria will bring about two crucial changes, both of which are needed in order to effectively defeat Daesh. Firstly, it will provide civilians with some breathing space, allowing Syrians themselves to resist Daesh ideology and to protect their sons and daughters from this group. Secondly, it will allow moderate opposition groups to become more effective in their fight against Daesh. Currently, there are a host of Syrian opposition groups serving as ground forces in the fight against Daesh. However, their effectiveness is diminished because of Assad and – more recently – Russian air attacks. Protection from Assad's bombs will therefore help to free up ground opposition forces which are necessary to combat Daesh.

Some policy makers make the flawed argument that civilian protection from the Assad regime can be guaranteed through a political track such as the ongoing Geneva III talks, which they claim can supplement the military campaign against Daesh. However, although these talks are only just getting started, Syrians are already certain that they are set to fail since there is no indicator that the international community will be able to enforce their outcomes.

Indeed, achieving a political solution remains a fantasy as long as previous resolutions, including Security Council Resolutions [2118](#), [2191](#), and [2254](#) continue to be ignored and blatantly violated by the Assad regime. In direct contravention to these resolutions, Assad continues to use barrel bombs and chemical weapons, and continues to prevent humanitarian access to besieged areas and other areas in need. In this respect, the High Negotiations Committee (main Syrian opposition bloc) is justified in threatening to [boycott](#) these talks unless civilian protection from the Assad regime's bombing and use of starvation can be guaranteed.

It is high time that we recognise and call out our flawed Syria strategy. It is also vital that we understand that our national interests in alleviating the humanitarian and refugee crises in Syria and in eliminating the threat of terrorism go hand in hand with the Syrian people's interest in civilian protection. As for how civilian protection can be achieved, there are a number of options on the table, including implementing a [no-bombing zone](#), providing opposition groups with means of self-defence, and conducting air drops of food parcels on besieged areas. Whatever policy option we choose, we need to make sure that it is met with support by Syrians on the ground, adheres to basic safeguards, and adequately ensures civilian protection. Only then can we begin to resolve the Syrian conflict and all of the manifestations that emerge from it.

Yasmine Nahlawi

[Advocacy & Policy Coordinator](#), [Rethink Rebuild Society](#)

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Authorising military action is the toughest decision

any MP can be asked to take...

Tom Brake

Saturday's conference was an important opportunity for party members to discuss the war in Syria generally and more specifically the decision taken by me and a majority of my fellow Lib Dem MPs to support an extension of RAF activity in Iraq to Syria.



Tom Brake addressing the Syria Conference.

Authorising military action is the toughest decision any MP can be asked to take and members were entitled to understand not only why we reached this decision but also why the timing of the vote made consultation prior to any decision very challenging.

I was on my feet, speaking, at our local party AGM on a Monday some weeks ago, when I was informed that the PM had just announced that a vote on extending UK military action would take place two days later on Wednesday. I am fortunate in having an experienced team, including interns and volunteers. Thanks to our combined efforts, I was able to email thousands of local people on the Tuesday for their views and concerns and analyse their responses. Their concerns, particularly about the risk of civilian casualties, needed to be addressed as a priority. And I felt the evidence from Iraq, where according not just to the MOD, but also Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, there has been no evidence the RAF have caused civilian casualties addressed that concern. There can be no guarantees that the RAF will never cause civilian deaths, but all the procedures to ensure a zero civilian casualty approach are in place and appear to have worked so far in Iraq.

The United Nations' demand that any country with the capacity to take action against Da'esh must do so, combined with the request for support from one of our strongest allies, France were deciding factors for me, along with an assessment of the 5 tests, in backing limited RAF strikes in Syria.

It was obvious that some party members felt that the 5 tests set out by Tim had not been passed with a large enough margin to warrant backing the Government. A clear majority of Lib Dem MPs took the opposite view.

This is my assessment of the tests.

The first test, is action legal? This was satisfied once UN Resolution 2249 was passed. The second test, is there an international diplomatic effort underway? This was passed because of the establishment of the Vienna talks. The third test, is there a concerted attempt to put pressure on the Saudis and others to tackle extremism? More needs to be done to fully satisfy this test as the emerging initiative only involves Sunni states. The fourth test, is there a post-Da'esh plan? This is the area requiring the most effort. The international talks about Syrian humanitarian aid in February in London, could provide a test-run for future re-construction post-Da'esh/post-Assad talks. Finally, the fifth test, is action being taken to address extremism in the UK? Good progress has been made with the release of the report into the Muslim Brotherhood and the undertaking by the PM that a wide-ranging report into the funding of extremism in the UK will be produced.

As a party we will continue to monitor these tests and hold the Government to account on them. So I can report that since the 5 tests were announced, the campaign to try and convince the PM that the UK should receive 3,000 unaccompanied orphan children gathers pace, with an all-party letter dispatched to the PM pressing him to show compassion.

Decisions about taking military action will always be highly controversial, but the recent track record of the Liberal Democrats, whether it was for taking military action in Kosovo or rejecting it in Iraq, has been a credible one. I hope our decision in Syria will eventually be seen to have maintained this pedigree.

Tom Brake MP
Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs Spokesman



And why I took it...

Tom Brake

Syria is an issue over which I agonised for days. I spent many hours weighing up the pros and cons, speaking to colleagues, constituents, friends and experts including from the MOD, MI5 and the National Security Advisor. In the end, my decision came down to a judgement based on the available facts.

It was certainly not a decision taken in haste. Indeed two years ago when we debated taking action in Syria, I voted to leave open the option of the UK taking military action. Parliament rejected that option. Whilst we will never know what difference UK involvement might have made, we do know Syria has descended into a state of anarchy, hundreds of thousands have been killed, four million have fled Syria and millions more are displaced within Syria. Assad is murdering his people with barrel bombs and Daesh are throwing gay people from the top of buildings, raping and enslaving women and girls and beheading Syrians and foreigners alike.

I was very aware that when making my decision, many others would disagree with me. I respected their viewpoint, but after reflecting deeply, I decided that military action in Syria was the right course of action. It was an incredibly complex and difficult decision to reach.

There were also many conflicting opinions within the Liberal Democrats, for both members and within the Parliamentary Party. Our party has a very proud record of taking the moral and legal stance regarding military involvement in international conflicts since opposing the Iraq War, and leading the calls for action in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s under Paddy Ashdown when that was the right, moral call to make.

As a Liberal, I cannot do nothing and sit there and watch people's suffering and I believe that it is morally right that the UK proceeds with air strikes within Syria as we are doing already in Iraq.

Crucially, as an internationalist I believe we must support our neighbours and be united against this terror. We have seen bloodshed very close to home through the abhorrent attacks in Paris, which sent an emotional shockwave through the British public. It saddens me to say this but the more Daesh consolidate their power, the more likely it is that we will see a similar attack in our own country, meaning that the time to put a stop to them is now. Before the vote we had also seen Daesh attacks in Lebanon, Ankara and elsewhere too, which reinforced my view that we must seek to reduce the risk of these attacks as well.

Like many of my constituents and fellow Lib Dems, at the forefront of my mind is that we must ensure that civilians do not lose their lives as a result of UK military intervention. The UK strategy is to ensure zero civilian casualties. This is the approach that has been adopted recently in Iraq. The issue of civilian safety is of utmost importance and strikes right at the heart of why people are against military intervention. Yet if we did nothing directly to tackle Daesh, then we would not be helping these civilians and would instead be putting them in grave danger.

As members of the Liberal Democrats know, our party set out five points which we said the Government had to meet for us to consider supporting the resolution to join our allies in France and America with their campaign against Daesh in Syria. I believed that before the vote, the Government met some of the points and gone some way towards meeting others.

We firmly stated that we had to have a sound legal basis to justify military intervention. The UN Security Council resolution 2249 provides this authorisation for action against Daesh and indeed requires it. Let me be clear, this is not a repeat of the Iraq War. The international community is in agreement and there is legal basis for action.

I am confident that we will see cooperation in the fight against Daesh from the different countries in the Middle East along with Russia, Iran, Turkey and Western countries. I believe that through further negotiations we will see a larger, multi-national effort to degrade Daesh and remove their influence from the Middle East. This is starting to happen in the Vienna talks, with Iran and Saudi Arabia, implacable foes, sitting together at the same table. It is true that since the vote we have seen a freezing of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran (as a result of the execution of Sheikh al-Nimr al-Nimr, which myself and my Liberal Democrat colleagues condemned Saudi Arabia for) but both states do have the shared opinion that the threat of Daesh must be addressed.

The world is already united in its commitment to degrading Daesh and degrading Daesh must be the first step towards finding peace within Syria. The long term aim is of course to create a stable and democratic Syria. Limited UK air strikes in Syria will not bring democracy to Syria, however they could help buy time for the Vienna talks and their objective of finding a diplomatic and political solution for Syria.

I also believe that the Prime Minister is starting to understand that if the UK is to be involved in military intervention in Syria, then we must also step up to the plate and provide a safe haven for more of the refugees who are fleeing the terror facing them in Syria. This is an issue which I have continued to fight for vehemently since the vote.

The Liberal Democrats did not give unconditional support for our Government to carry out military intervention within Syria over the next few years; if we believe that the UK Government are making mistakes in Syria then I will do my duty as a Member of Parliament and as a proud Liberal and hold the Government to account.

No one should ever want war, which explains my scepticism over military intervention in Syria over the months before December. But the circumstances changed.

We must be realistic with our predictions for the future and only hindsight will tell if I have made the right decision to support these air strikes. What I do know however is that I feel that our party made the right decision, based on what we knew at the time of the vote.

Tom Brake MP

The Right-Liberties-Justice, Liberal International and LibDem Christian Forum joint conference "**The Syria Vote and Beyond - Radical Ideas for Difficult Problems**" was held on Saturday 9th January 2016 in Bermondsey Village Hall.

Simon Hughes, Graham Colley and John Walker (of Southwark Mediation).



Not in My Name

David Grace

I sat through the House of Commons day-long debate on Syria pretending to work but actually listening to the endless and repetitive arguments. I can sum up the hours of debate in a simple syllogism:

“Something must be done. This is something. Therefore, this must be done.”

I listened in vain for a convincing argument that the addition of a few RAF bombers would achieve anything useful. Nobody made the case. Most speakers contented themselves with describing how awful Da’esh is (as the speeches wore on, it became usual to say Da’esh and not ISIS although I understand that Da’esh is the abbreviation in Arabic for the same concept as ISIS is in English).

Hilary Benn even lived up to Godwin’s Law, not by actually naming Hitler but by comparing Da’esh with the Nazis. It was fine rhetoric but not one word of it explained why British bombers were the answer to the horror. Tim Farron, in the few minutes the speaker now permits to Liberal Democrats, spoke of the Syrian child refugee landing in Lesbos who turned to his father and asked, “Are ISIS here?”

I don’t doubt that is what the interpreter told Tim but I wonder if the translation was correct. It is widely acknowledged that most Syrian refugees are fleeing from Assad, who has been bombing his own citizens all over the country for several years. Most Syrians suffering terribly under Da’esh simply cannot flee, although those nearby may well have chosen to do so. In any case, the same question applies, “Why would British participation in the bombing make a useful contribution to the situation?”.

Since the decision, I have read and listened to Tim and other Lib Dem MPs make other points. The UN Security Council resolution 2249 asked us to bomb, they say, so it’s legal.

Actually the resolution called upon: “Member states that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law, in particular with the United Nations Charter, as well as international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, on the territory under the control of ISIL also known as Da’esh, in Syria and Iraq, to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL also known as Da’esh as well as ANF, and all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the United Nations Security Council ... and to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria;”

“All necessary measures” is well understood to include military action but neither specifies

what kind of military action nor excludes other measures.

Of the five tests set by Tim Farron in a letter to the Times legality was only one and he picked up on the need for other measures: a wider diplomatic network including efforts towards a no-bomb zone; pressure on Gulf States for increased support; an exit strategy and post-ISIS plan; investigation into foreign funding for terrorists in the UK and increased acceptance of Syrian refugees.

LITTLE EVIDENCE

There is little or no evidence of any of these conditions having been met. A no-bomb zone is a non-starter since it would involve us in stopping Syrian and Russian planes flying over the zone. There is no sign of any pressure on Gulf states. According to David Davis in the Guardian, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have a history of enabling financial support for any jihadi group that attacked the Shia – including Da’esh. Turkey has facilitated the sale of up to a billion dollars of Da’esh oil and held open the border for jihadi groups while their intelligence agency has supplied arms to jihadis in Syria.

The parliamentary debate revealed that there is no exit strategy and no post-ISIS plan. Cameron has made no concessions on accepting more refugees. Indeed, when I saw these conditions I did not expect them to be fulfilled in time for the vote on bombing.

I was then flabbergasted when Tim announced “It is my judgement that, on balance, the five tests I set out have been met as best they can.” This is some new meaning of “as best they can” which I had not come across before, a euphemism for “hardly at all”.

I have heard one of our MPs (Chatham House rules, OK) repeatedly describe the choice in the vote as action or no action, as if only the item on the order paper counted as action, ignoring all the actions our own five tests called for. There could be useful military action such as cutting off Da’esh supply lines through Saudi Arabia and up the Euphrates River into Syria and lines through Turkey. We could help the Kurds and Iraqi Government in Baghdad cut Da’esh lines to Mosul. Why was this not on the order paper? Because it can’t be done without diplomatic pressure on Gulf states, Turkey, and Russia. Oh yes, that was included in our tests, wasn’t it ?

Two other arguments were advanced on the decision. “This isn’t the same as Iraq in 2003”. Well, it isn’t the same as Suez in 1956 either but that is not an argument for supporting it. The fact that other decisions to fight were made on bad grounds doesn’t mean that this one isn’t also. Indeed, Cameron imitated Blair’s absurd 45 minutes claim with his own declaration that 70,000 soldiers stand ready in Syria to fight Da’esh on the ground. Actually the Syria decision does have something in common with the Iraq one in 2003: there is no political endgame and no military plan to achieve it.

The second argument caused hollow laughter in my household. We must respond because “our strongest ally, France, has asked us to”. Quoi? Zut alors! When has any British

politician previously described France as our strongest ally? Certainly not the Tories. Of course if France had invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, we would be obliged to help. This article commits each member state to consider an armed attack against one member state, in Europe or North America, to be an armed attack against them all. It has been invoked once by the USA after 11 September 2001. France did not invoke it and, thank goodness, nor has Turkey yet. The USA used to be described as our closest ally and in the 1960s was desperate for the UK to fight in Vietnam. Fortunately Harold Wilson was prime minister and not Tony Blair and we kept out. OK, France is an ally and has suffered a terrible attack in Paris but that of itself does not explain why British planes bombing Syria is the answer.

What it does explain is the timing of the vote. Cameron knew he could get a majority in the aftermath of the Paris shootings. As Matthew Parris wrote in the Times, the bombs-away brigade were on auto-pilot. He added: “There is no right time for an unwise decision,” but of course there is a right time to call a vote in the Commons.

How then did our minuscule parliamentary party reach this decision? First, let’s remember that Norman Lamb and Mark Williams voted against the motion. From what I can discover the line entitled on the party’s website “Liberal Democrat position on Syria” is no such thing. A meeting of defence and foreign affairs spokesmen and their much reduced staff from Lords and Commons decided the line and MPs were invited but not whipped to support it.

In a Liberal Democrat Voice poll 67% of respondents opposed bombing. A YouGov poll showed 43% of LibDem voters for bombing and 39% against.

As everyone acknowledged this was a hard decision, perhaps the very occasion for our hard-pressed MPs to consult the wider party. Apparently, I’m told, the party does not have the resources to consult its members, so only to send out repeated demands for money then? Also, it was argued, there wasn’t time – only 48 hours between the tabling of the motion and the vote. We know the Commons is an archaic and executive-dominated assembly but this issue was rumbling for weeks before that motion.

Of course, as a party we have democratic mechanisms for establishing policy. Tim could have consulted the Federal Policy Committee but he didn’t. He could have taken the advice of the International Relations Committee but he didn’t. It’s a hard life for a group of eight MPs in Westminster. The speaker rarely calls them; the media don’t invite them; the public doesn’t know who they are or care very much. During the coalition years many of us experienced the scorn of the army of special advisers and other bright young things who surrounded and protected our ministers and MPs from the demands of the amateurs, the voluntary party. We were told we didn’t understand real politics; we didn’t know how government works; they knew what was best.

OPTIONAL EXTRA

Now if ever is the time for parliamentarians not to treat the thousands of members, new and old, as an optional extra, as an afterthought to be consulted when resources allow. Now is the time to learn that we are the resources. Our party is full of experienced people from all walks of life. If Tim goes on ignoring members, he will soon have fewer to ask.

I am not a pacifist but I do set a high bar for military action. I am not a Christian but I follow the doctrine of the just war. War is a great evil and should only be undertaken to overcome a greater evil. The means used must be proportional to the objective. Those turning to war to overcome evil must have a reasonable chance of success, otherwise as Yeats says: "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere The ceremony of innocence is drowned;"

No-one can deny that Da'esh is great evil and that war will be needed (and other things) to overcome it. Our few bombers are not proportionate to the end and, worse, the end is undefined. I see no chance of success in this action. No doubt Hilary Benn is pleased that we are "doing our bit" but this is not the Desert War against Rommel; it's not the 1940s.

No-one has made the case for this former imperial power to dive into the quarrels of the Middle East. There are not two sides here - good and bad - but a maelstrom of conflicting forces, none of which are friendly to British interests. There is neither a moral imperative nor a pragmatic necessity to bomb. If we must drop something, let it be food and medicine. Otherwise, not in my name.

David Grace.

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective; he was the Liberal Democrat candidate for Clacton in the 2015 General Election.



Chinese Lunar New Year

This year we will usher in the Year of the Monkey, which begins on Monday, 8th February 2016. All over London there will be celebrations. The *Daily Telegraph* tells us that the 'biggest New Year celebration outside Asia will take place in London' and Chinese Lib Dems will be part of that. Their special lunar new year's banquet and auction will be held at the New Loon Fung Restaurant, Gerrard Street, on Thursday, 18 February 2016, where we will be treated to a delicious 8-course meal, including wine. Caroline Pidgeon, MBE, AM will be our guest speaker and the Rt. Hon Sir Simon Hughes, will act as auctioneer. We are very fortunate to have them both. Funds raised from the auction will go towards the Mayoral and London Assembly elections in support of our vice-chair, Merlene Emerson, who would be the first British Chinese Assembly member if elected. Tickets cost £50, and you can get tables of 10. Please let us know if you are able to donate a raffle prize or something for the auction. This is our most important fundraising event of the year, so please be generous! RSVP at: info@chineselibdems.org.uk

Why the January 25 Revolution was the Most Authentic Political Event in Egyptian History!

Mohammed Nosseir

Personally, I expected it to be a demonstration of only a few thousands that would be dispersed in a matter of hours! However, I was pleasantly surprised to see millions of Egyptians, in all governorates, demonstrate spontaneously in a revolt against the Mubarak regime, overcoming the barrier of fear and genuinely risking their lives for the sake of having a better country! I am talking here about the ‘Day of Anger’; January 28, 2011.



On the eve of the ‘Day of Anger’, I was in a meeting with the leader of our party, the Democratic Front Party discussing the best method for launching a newspaper that would oppose Mubarak’s regime, when a couple of youngsters briefed us on their political attempt, planned for the following day. As party leaders were busy contemplating tiny risks and calculated moves in opposition of a regime that used to frame and manipulate all political parties, our party’s youth, and a few other political organizations, had categorically refused to play by the regime’s rules of the game and decided to revolt against it.

A few months prior to January 25, 2011, I witnessed a conversation between one of our party’s leaders and a young political activist who had spent a few days in prison for illegally demonstrating against the Mubarak regime. The party leader was trying to persuade him against further involvement in demonstrations, explaining that the party would not be able to beg the State Police to release him again! Our activist replied that he would keep demonstrating and that the party should not worry about his imprisonment. I realized then that Egyptian youths have a different mindset than that of our traditional political leaders; they are willing to give up their lives for the sake of reforming our country.

I was not the only citizen who realized that Egypt will be changed by its youth. The ruling regime has been closely monitoring thousands of youth activists, doing its utmost to prevent them from organizing demonstrations. The harsh measures employed in dealing with young people and the false accusations of espionage leveled against them are examples of the many attempts being made to marginalize youth in our society and to blame them for our country’s persisting deficiencies.

The 25 January 2011 revolution was a genuine, spontaneous attempt to change Egypt by establishing freedom, justice and dignity, while the events of 30 June 2013 (whether defined as a revolution or a military coup) were well planned and fully secured. Egyptians were allowed to demonstrate against the Muslim Brotherhood with the complete backing of the media. The June 30 demonstrations had an almost carnival-like atmosphere – whereas everyone who took part in the January 25 revolution was fully aware that they were risking their lives!

The June 30 demonstrations that aimed to get rid of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood regime were completely successful, on all counts. They not only managed to remove the Brotherhood from power, but also to outlaw them, dismantle their organization, political party and even the Brotherhood NGOs that had been registered and active during the Mubarak era. In contrast, it is fair to label January 25 as a failed revolution that concluded in additional deterioration of justice, freedom and national economy.

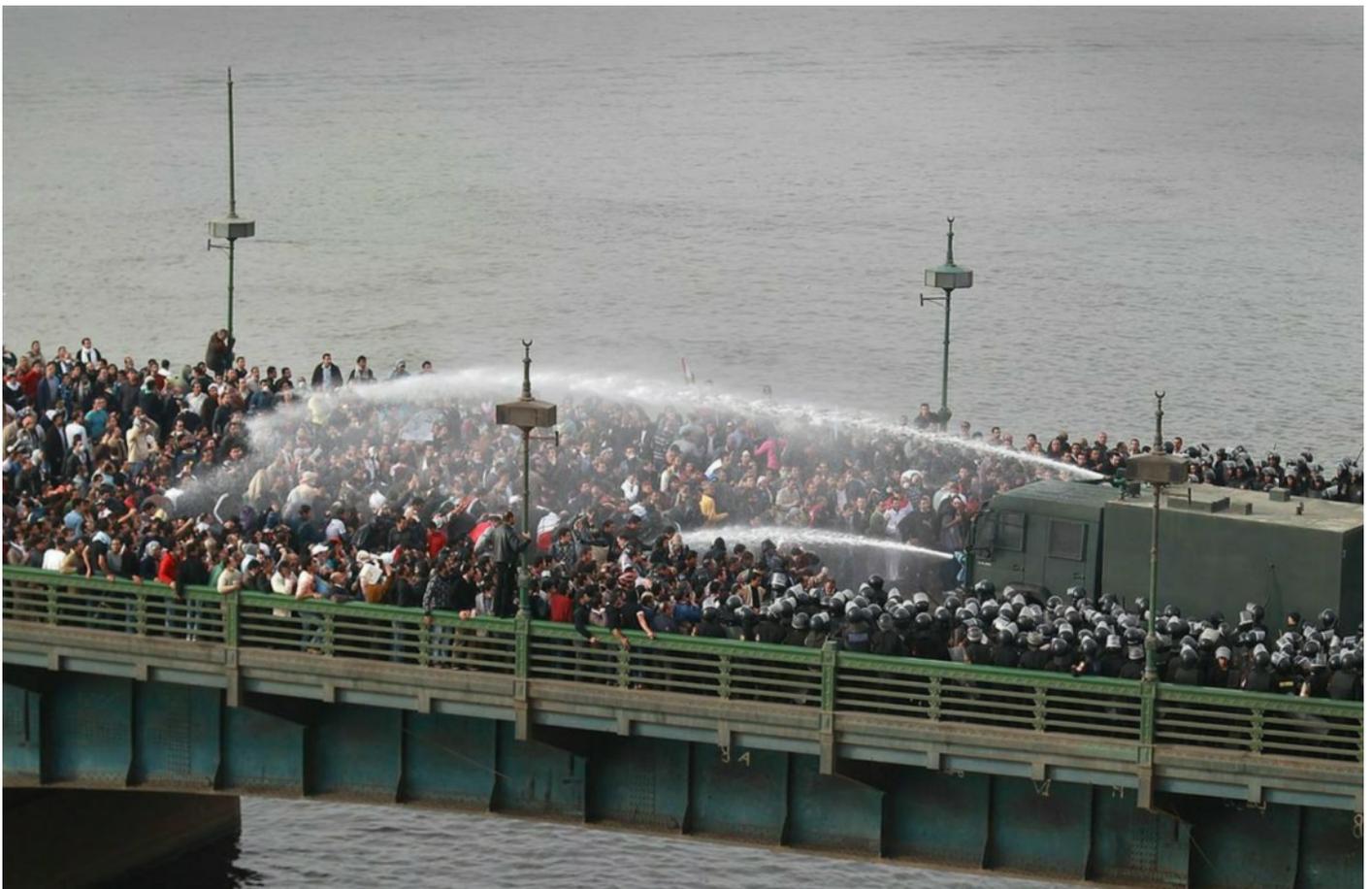
I used to blame youth revolts for making a few, unintentional, mistakes that may have contributed to our revolution’s failure. However, after observing the loose political attitudes of National Salvation Front

politicians that were, somehow, leading the June 30 political event, attitudes that resulted in the loss of any real reforms, I came to sympathize with and appreciate the genuine attempt of our youth to make Egypt a better place.

Not one of our youngsters has ruled Egypt for a single day, yet many Egyptians, unfortunately, blame them for the errors committed by the ruling regime. Egypt has been and, to great extent, still is vulnerable to many unpleasant scenarios. Nonetheless, this does not justify blaming a segment of the society that demands the application of true democratic values and providing excuses for our ruler, who is repeating the mistakes of his predecessors.

‘Will the youth revolt again?’ is a question that is often raised by many people! As long as the original demands of the revolution are not met, Egyptians will certainly revolt again. Unfortunately, nobody is expecting the next revolt to follow the same peaceful path that we witnessed five years ago. Far from preventing our youth from revolting, the repressive methods and tools employed over the past few years will, on the contrary, enhance their motivation. In a country where youth accounts for two-thirds of the population, their energy and desire for change are certainly much powerful than the regime’s brutal ruling methods. It is only a matter of time before another revolutionary wave erupts!

Mohammed Nosseir is an Egyptian Liberal Politician working on reforming Egypt on true liberal values, proper application of democracy and free market economy.



Myanmar's Road to Democracy: the 2015 Elections

Kishwer Falkner and Natasha Rachman

In November 2014, I visited Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy in Myanmar in order to explore how UK Lib Dems might assist NLD in their forthcoming elections. At the time it was evident that they would do very well as the groundswell of public sentiment was supportive of her, but it was thrilling to see a year later that NLD had secured an absolute majority in winning 80% of contested seats. This was the first general election Aung San fought since her 1990 victory which the Junta promptly annulled, imprisoning her and numerous members of her party. This time, since the 8th November victory both sides have been locked in private negotiations. Earlier this week, on 1st February Myanmar opened its new parliament, swearing in the new speaker Win Myint, an NLD MP close to Aung, and the deputy speaker T Khun Myat, an army-affiliated Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) member. However, the government will not be formed until the end of March when the new president takes over from Thein Sein. Candidates for the presidency have yet to be announced.

This election is the high-water mark of the very gradual process of liberalisation that the Junta has pursued since it started the process with a referendum on a new constitution, elections in 2010, the release of political prisoners (including figures from the 1988 student demonstrations, monks who participated in the 2007 protests and ethnic minority activists). It also decriminalised gatherings of more than 5 people, legalised labour unions, allowed private ownership of the press, signed ceasefires with several armed ethnic groups, and released Aung San from house arrest. They subsequently allowed her to enter parliament as an MP in a by-election in 2012, setting in place a process which continues to bring about a transformation of Myanmar's politics.

The western response to the reforms has been cautiously positive. In April 2012 the EU lifted its remaining trade, economic and individual sanctions - except those on arms sales. While the US took similar action in September 2012. But Burma's reforms have not been without flaws, or backtracking; sectarianism is still present, and the enormous popularity of Aung San may, in the long term, prove problematic, particularly due to as the lack of an evident successor.

EU Observers for the 2015 election were generally positive about the vote itself commenting on the "generally well-run polling process" and respect for the secrecy of the ballot and "nearly entirely peaceful" election campaign, and the subsequent reaction of the Junta has been promisingly conciliatory. This was against a backdrop of a worsening pre-election environment in 2014 when the then UN Special Rapporteur for Burma reported "worrying signs of possible backtracking" including "intimidation, harassment, attacks, arrests and prosecution of journalists for reporting on issues deemed too sensitive or critical of those in power" and April 2015 saw multiple newspapers displaying black front pages in protest against the imprisonment and harassment of journalists.

But will the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people be met through the incremental moves to date? Significant constitutional hurdles remain. Twenty-five per cent of parliamentary seats are reserved for army nominees, and it retains a veto over constitutional change, and as well as control of the key portfolios of interior, defence and border affairs. Moreover, the ban on the President having a foreign spouse or children was designed expressly to deny Aung San the top job. There are, nevertheless signs for optimism. Last June a vote in Myanmar's parliament failed to remove the army's veto. But given the large number of votes in the secret ballot in favour of removing the veto suggests that numerous USDP MPs voted for the change, indicating a loosening of the Army's grip on the party. Similarly, comments by army chief General Min Aung Hlaing that "I think the current government cannot fulfil people's desires. Now that people have selected a person who they think can fulfil their needs, the next thing is for the elected person to fulfil their desires". He was coy about whether he personally expected to see Aung San as president merely stating that

“the parliament must discuss any amendment to the constitution. I am not directly responsible for that”. But these remarks themselves are an advance. After all, who would have guessed 8 years ago that Burma would look like this?

But while the elections have delivered some gains, there is still unfinished business. Voting was cancelled in parts of Shan and Kachin areas due to on-going fighting, large swathes of the Muslim population of Myanmar were disenfranchised and parties, including the NLD, declined to field Muslim candidates. Promisingly the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army who hadn’t signed previous ceasefire agreements are now open to negotiation with the NLD government. And Aung San has stated that a peace process will be one of the central tasks of the new



Kishwer with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in November 2014

government. Disappointingly, she has retained a low profile on the ongoing Rohingya issue in Rakhine state. This predominantly Muslim group have been subject to consistent violence, forcible displacement and internment by Buddhist extremists and government forces. When I pressed her on her silence on the Rohingya at our meeting, she retreated to very general statements about the need for peace, and politics being ‘the art of the possible’. She told the BBC that Buddhist fear was borne of “a perception that global Muslim power is very great” denying that the events themselves constituted ethnic cleansing, commenting “I think there are many, many Buddhists who have also left the country for various reasons”. This quiescence may be borne of pragmatic considerations about not antagonising the Junta, or the mainly

Buddhist electorate, but given the election result her judgment appears to have been vindicated. The mix of ethnic, religious and identity conflict in Myanmar makes democratic change even more challenging in her book. This may not enthrall her liberal critics, but the Burmese people seem content to see graduated change after a 25 years of authoritarianism.

A longer term concern for NLD is the role of Aung San herself. Her age (she is 70), the absence of any obvious successors and the lack of internal democracy within the NLD all point to future weaknesses. The sacking of Thein Lwin from the NLD's auxiliary Central Committee due to his support for student protests which she opposed, and non-selection of prominent activists from the '88-generation of political protestors caused controversy among some in Burma. Since the death of Win Tin, a close aide of her, there has been less to counterbalance Aung's magnetic personality.

Aung San's recent statements that the elected president of Myanmar "will have no authority, and will act in accordance with the decisions of the party ... because in any democratic country, it's the leader of the winning party that becomes the leader of the government" and that she will be "above the president" all point to the lack of internal strategy about how to deal with the Presidency issue. The more the NLD becomes a vehicle for Aung San's personal charisma the less resilient it may be in the face of her decline or demise. Myanmar, one of the poorest nations in Asia, has a potentially bright future ahead, but it deserves a pluralistic democracy to go with it. The question is how long it will take before that form of democracy becomes the norm.

Kishwer Falkner and Natasha Rachman

Kishwer, Baroness Falkner of Margravine, is a Vice-President of Liberal International and Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords.

Natasha Rachman is a Researcher for Baroness Falkner, and an intern to William Wallace, Lord Wallace of Saltaire.

Kishwer Falkner met NLD post holders and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in November 2014 (see interLib 2014-08 for report at the time).

International Abstracts

Limits of War, by Rev. Nadim Nassar. South China Morning Post. 5th December 2015 - Syria
http://www.awareness-foundation.co.uk/pdfs/20151205-News_insight.pdf

Intolerable bias in Irelands Schools. New York Times 29th January 2016

No surprises this side of the water, but interesting that the normally Fenian Yanks should be shocked by the discovery. Fine Gael shaping up for the next round with the Vatican, it seems. Where does Fianna Fail stand on this?

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/29/opinion/intolerable-bias-in-irelands-schools.html?ribbon-ad-idx=6&rref=opinion&module=Ribbon&version=context@ion=Header&action=click&contentCollection=Opinion&pgtype=article>

Liberator 375

This a meaty issue of Liberator from an international perspective. David Grace (Not in My Name - which also appears in this issue of interLib) and Sue Simmonds (Reassembling Syria) join a piece in Radical Bulletin on the war in Syria and the problems that this has provoked for the Liberal Democrats. The cover pokes a satirical gest at the dilemma. Christine Graf (Power of the Gun Owners) writes on the problems of gun ownership in the United States from a personal perspective. Marjan Mihajlovski, international secretary of the Liberal Party of Macedonia, writes on the Macedonian elections (Down from a Mountain), and Gillian Gloyer (Lines on a Map) draws contrasts between Albanian local government and Scotland in the absence of pluralism.

ALDE proposes seven emergency measures to get a grip on the refugee crisis.

ALDE Group leader Guy Verhofstadt and VP of the European Parliament Alexander Graf Lambsdorff have presented an emergency plan to get a grip on the refugee crisis. Liberals and Democrats consider that Europe is in an emergency situation and call on the European Council to adopt seven emergency measures the 18th of February:

1. Immediate action to manage the border between Turkey and Greece:

Create a European Rapid Refugee Emergency Force (ERREF) with 2000 Border guards composed of European and national civil servants to manage the Greek border, the registration and screening of the refugees and to provide them with decent living conditions.

2. Fast-track the setting up of European Border and Coast Guard (ECBG), multiply the budget for the border protection by five and overhaul Europe's budget in 2017 to focus on solving the refugee crisis. The ERREF will be integrated in the ECBG.

3. Take away the incentives to undertake dangerous journeys to Europe by agreeing on a new deal with Turkey: Two billion euros of direct financial assistance to refugees, one billion to the UNHCR to improve living conditions and education facilities in the camps. Make it possible to apply for humanitarian visa and asylum in the camps outside Europe.

4. Upgrade hot spots to reception centres managed by the ERREF: which will function as transit zones, in which a distinction is made between refugees and economic migrants. Migrants with no perspective of international protection will return to their home country.

5. Once previous actions have taken effect: Replace the Dublin Regulation with a new single European Asylum Procedure and put an end to discrepancy between Member States.

6. Create a single European Blue Card for economic migration to allow migrants to cover the EU's need for skilled and unskilled workforce.

7. A European Peace Plan plus Marshall Plan for Syria, united European action to fight Assad and IS, with full support to democratic Syrian opposition forces.

Guy Verhofstadt, president of the ALDE Group, said: "All of our policies have failed so far. The only solution government leaders have come up with is to suspend Schengen for two years, to reintroduce border controls and to turn Greece into one big refugee camp against its will. It is the ultimate demonstration of political weakness, devaluing both our economy, European solidarity and our hard won European liberties."

"Europe is in state of emergency and this requires emergency measures. Let's not wait another three months to get a grip on the border between Turkey and Greece; Europe has to manage it now with an emergency force of 2000 border guards."

"Instead of demanding that Turkey stops refugees crossing the border, we should instead work to remove the incentives people have to undertake dangerous journeys to Europe in the first place. A new deal with Turkey: two billion euros for direct financial assistance for the refugees, one billion for the UNHCR to improve the conditions in the camps and the possibility to apply for visas and asylum in the camps, is the best way to manage the influx."

EP Vice-President Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (FDP, Germany), added: "In order to address the current refugee crisis, we need to take bold steps. A truly common European approach is key to secure our external

borders. Therefore, a full-fledged European Coast and Border Guard has to be established immediately. At the same time, we need to intensify our diplomatic efforts to end the devastating war in Syria and find a stable political solution for the country."

You can read the full ALDE "Roadmap to get a grip on the refugee crisis" at <http://www.alde.eu/nc/press/press-and-release-news/press-release/article/alde-proposes-seven-emergency-measures-to-get-a-grip-on-the-refugee-crisis-46689/>

Howard Dean to deliver 2016 Isaiah Berlin Lecture.

This year's lecture will be delivered by the former US presidential candidate, Governor, and election strategist, Howard Dean. In 2003 Dean denounced the Bush-Blair invasion of Iraq.

Liberal International's annual Isaiah Berlin Lecture which takes place at 18.30-19.30 on Monday 22nd February 2016 at Chatham House.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Emil at Liberal International on: emil@liberal-international.org - Spaces are limited.

Be a Diplomat for a night!

Liberal International British Group's annual Diplomats Reception on 29th February allows members the chance to meet diplomats from around the world and discuss international issues with them in an informal setting.

The reception will be at the National Liberal Club from 6.30-8.30pm. Admission is £25.00 on the door or advance bookings can be made by sending a cheque for £25.00 payable to LIBG to: Wendy Kyrle-Pope, 1 Brook Gardens, London SW13 0LY



Tim Farron at last year's Dips Reception.

reviews

**Classical Confucian Political Thought – A New Interpretation, by Loubna El Amine.
Princeton University Press 2015
isbn 9780691163048
eBook isbn 9781400873944**

Confucius 孔夫子 lived during the Spring and Autumn Period of China, preceding the Warring States Period, at a time when China was divided. His teachings first recorded in the Analects, circa 5th century B.C., have been widely studied over the last 2 millennia. It is therefore a bold claim by the author, Loubna El Amine, that she has come by a new interpretation of the great classical works.

El Amine, an assistant professor of government at Georgetown University, makes clear the aim of her book to “reconstruct the political vision offered in the early Confucian texts”, rather than comment on the application of Confucianism to politics today.

However, with recent revival in interest in Confucianism evidenced by the proliferation of Confucius Institutes around the world, the publication of this book is both timely and relevant. Notably, President Xi Jin Ping has referenced Confucius in recent speeches, and turned to the sage as inspiration for the role of the Chinese state in fulfilling the Chinese Dream.

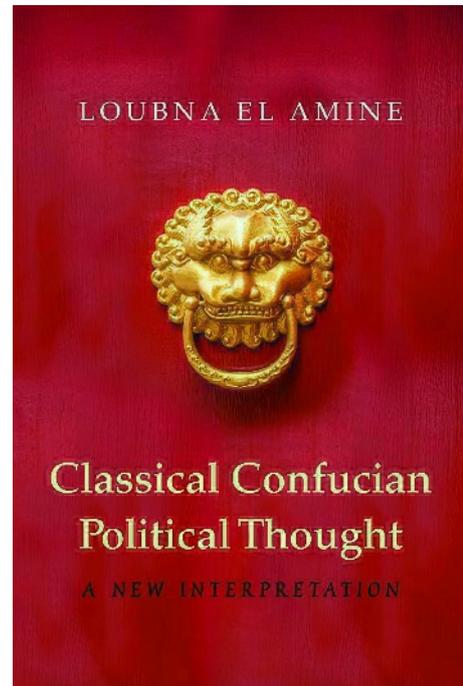
Through analysis of 3 main classical texts: the Analects, the writings of Mencius 孟子 and of Xun Zi 荀子 (not to be confused with Sun Tze 孙子), El Amine explores the relationship between ethics and politics, the importance placed on a harmonious society and the justification for political order.

Of particular interest is the chapter on the “Ruler and Ruled” and the ideal qualities of a political leader: to be correct and trustworthy and with a love for the people. If only we could select our leaders in the West based on those credentials as well! However, with few checks within the system and a tendency towards incumbency and stable succession, there are not many avenues for change nor empowerment of the ruled.

This is where the role of ministers come in, and even today we refer to our civil servants as Mandarins. Chosen through rigorous methods of selection based on merit, the ministers are the ones to deal with everyday affairs and in maintaining order within society through regulations.

It has been said that it is impossible to understand East Asia today without understanding Confucianism. The classical works have lent legitimacy to the upholding of traditional values, respect for one’s elders and authority, and for forging national identities and unity. El Amine’s academic work places Confucianism in its historical context by distinguishing it from other schools at the time, such as “Legalism” and “Mohism”. Confucian rule does have the merit of being tempered by the concept of “ren” 仁, a Confucian virtue meaning “kindness”, which requires a government to look after its people.

Viewed largely as a philosophy rather than a religion, Confucianism provides a guide to the cultivation of virtues within society and in government. But one cannot easily dismiss references to the metaphysical in the classical texts, such as to Heaven and its mandate. In the last chapter, El Amine concluded that Confu-

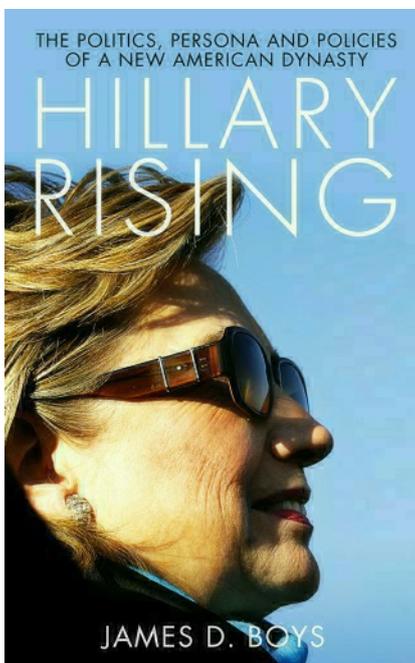


cians accept that “tian” or heaven imposes limitations on human action, and success is where we have done our duty and not from deriving a certain outcome. In some ways this sounds fatalistic and El Amine admits that it is beyond the scope of her book to examine if there were elements of the sacred or the religious in early Confucianism.

This relatively slim book of 196 pages belies a wealth of thought and study into some of the most well known Chinese classics and is peppered with references to other academics in this field. El Amine has undertaken the challenge of analysing the 3 classical texts thematically and in a clear objective style teased out their underlying political theories.

It would be easy to cherry pick the odd Confucian quote to substantiate any point of view or action, but far more ambitious to revisit the classics to answer the perennial question of how to order society and maintain peace. For this we can only compliment her for departing from the usual focus on virtues and ethics and seeking out evidence on more mundane institutional mechanisms such as rituals, regulations and punishment in achieving a harmonious society.

Merlene Emerson



Hillary Rising, by James D. Boys
Biteback 2016 £14.99
isbn 9781849549646

I found it fascinating that a deeply racially divided society such as the United States of American would rather elect their first black president than their first woman president. I have counselled all of my Democratic friends not to piss around in the primaries, select Hillary and use the money saved with the real battle against the Republicans – that you might say, would be playing their trump card. The rottenness of the US body politics is so bad that a third Democrat presidency is necessary, even if one doesn't have too many hopes for what it might achieve (the vested interests are as deeply entrenched there as in the GOP).

Boys is rich in gossip. I particularly note the communiqués between Clinton and Sidney Blumenthal, whom she wanted to engage as an advisor as Secretary of State, was blocked and subsequently had input through the Clinton Foundation. What might this bode for the future?

'rather than eager to be Obama's poodle, Cameron would be superficially friendly, but privately scornful. Class has a lot to do with the contempt. A Cameron government would be more aristocratic and even narrowly Etonian than any Conservative government in recent history'. Further, *'in economic policy the UK is no partner and no bridge to Europe'...* *'at no other time since World War II have the US and UK governments been at odds over international economics'*. Blumenthal might appear at odds in his partisanship to the advice of the State Department (he was close to Labour), but don't some of these attitudes ring true have reflection in subsequent events?

We then skip through the years as Secretary of State – tantalisingly little on Israel – could that be said of the Obama administration in general? the Israelis may well come to regret not seizing the initiatives – it will be some while before they open up again, one fears. Libya – I wouldn't lay at her doorstep – a much wider failing in American policy making, that if anything Clinton's smart-diplomacy sought to redress. From an international perspective, the most interesting part of the book.

A hagiography with doubts? But doubts that nonetheless have to be overcome, so the book plays on her conservatism, which is well founded, rather than the radicalism we might have hope for.

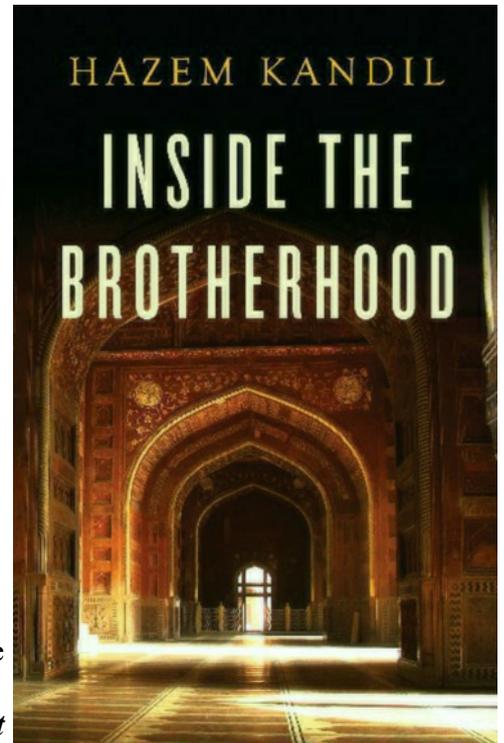
Stewart Rayment

Inside the Brotherhood, by Hazem Kandil
Polity 2015 isbn 9780745682914

Hazem Kandil is an Egyptian based in the UK – he lectures at Cambridge. Amidst a sudden wealth of books on the Muslim Brotherhood, Kandil's stands out for its analysis of the movement – how it recruits and maintains its membership. It is rather sad. Rather than seek those who would develop their ideology it seeks those least likely to question it, thus favouring those from rural backgrounds, and if intellectuals, from the sciences rather than the humanities. This would tell when they reached the pinnacle of power under Morsi. What is more astounding is their expectation (at a senior level) of divine intervention when overthrown. Understanding how the Brothers reached this situation is essential to the discussion of where they go from here and Egyptian Liberals might show them the light.

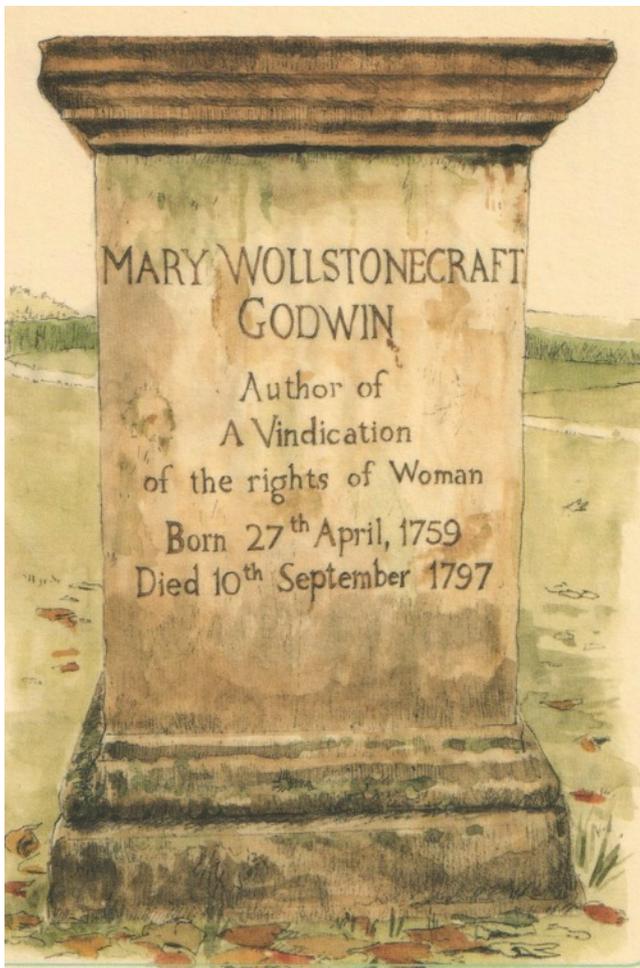
In fast moving times, there is also a round up of the state of Islamism, which at root derives from the Brotherhood, throughout the Arab world.

Stewart Rayment



Mary Wollstonecraft

Lawrence Fullick kindly reminds us that Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin is no longer buried in St Pancras Old Church cemetery (2015-07 page 34). Her remains and those of her husband William Godwin were transferred in the nineteenth century to St Peter's churchyard Bournemouth and are in one tomb with those of their daughter Mary Shelley and the heart of Percy Bysshe Shelley. The memorial at St Pancras was also



moved from its original location, when the Victorians drove a railway through the cemetery. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* remains a seminal Liberal text. William Godwin, along with his disciple Shelley, provide an early British anarchism; Godwin also provided an alternative test to that of Bentham, for Utilitarianism.

Inside St Peter's, Bournemouth, there is a plaque recording William Gladstone's last communion in church; he took communion later at home in Wales. Something which ought to be commemorated next time the Liberal Democrats are in Bournemouth.

The exhibition: *Death and Memory: Soane and the architecture of Legacy*, which drew our attention to the cemetery, runs until 26 March 2016 at Sir John Soane's Museum, 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, WC2A 3BP
Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 10am-5pm. Last entry 4:30pm Admission: Free. www.soane.org

Tibet's Secret Temple, body, mind and meditation in Tantric Buddhism. The Wellcome Collection, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE.

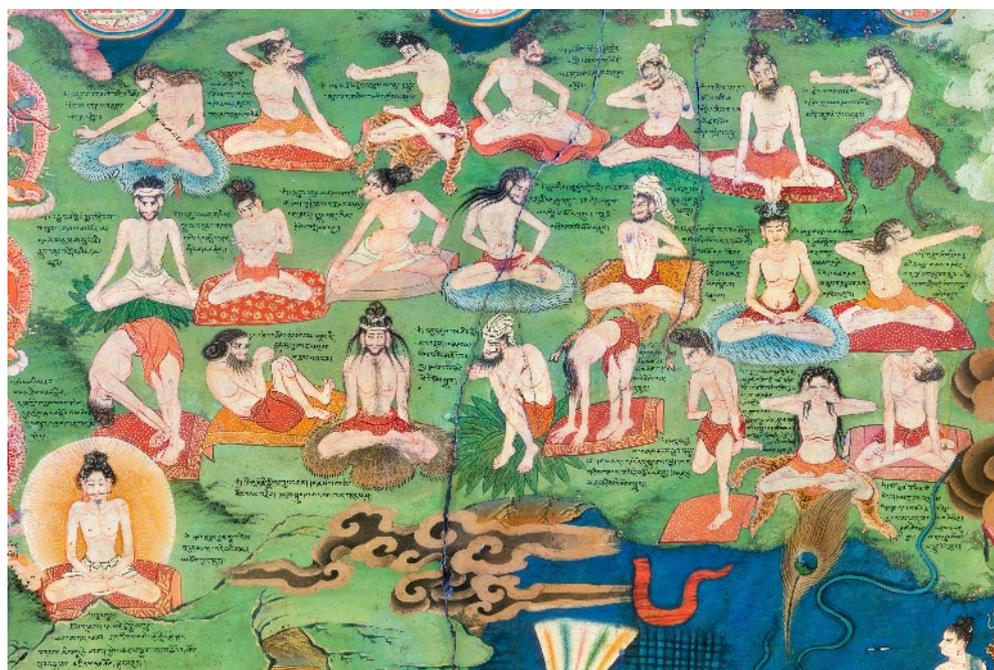
This is an exhibition that challenges you on several levels. Most centrally, we take our western world view for granted to the extent that we forget that there are other ways of looking at things. So I am somewhat amazed to find an exhibition that revolves, in part, around Tibetan medicine in the home the Big Science Wellcome Trust; could they be coming to realize that we don't have all of the answers? I was assisting my daughter with her geography project – we'd chosen last year's earthquakes in Nepal, following Margaret Lally's article (*interLib 2015-06*). The earthquake's effects were worse in the Kathmandu valley because it sits on up to 2,000 feet of sedimentary rocks, laid down by the infilling of a lake. Funnily enough, the Buddhist scripture, Swayambhu Purana, says that Kathmandu valley was a big lake inhabited by Nagas (Snakes) and that Manju Devacharya cleared up the water by destroying the forests of Kuruwa, Chabaha, Suryaghat and Gokarna and established a city, then called Manju-pattan. So, there you go; psycho-geographers and ethno-mythographers take heart.



Padmasambhava taming a lu (naga) - detail from the murals of the Dalai Lama's private meditation chamber, Lukhang. © Thomas Laing, 2015

The core of the exhibition lies around the Lukhang, the Temple to the Serpent Spirits, which is situated on an island on a lake below the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Prior to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the 17th century building, which reflects Tibetan, Chinese and Mongolian architectural styles (itself a reflection of the complexity of the politics of the region), was private sanctuary of the Dalai Lama. The art that fills the building is an aid the realising spiritual enlightenment. The murals themselves have been digitally recreated, but one can sense this from much of the other work on display, in particular, the joy of realisation expressed through dance.

Magical Movements (trul khor) detail (above). © Thomas Laing, 2015



Entering the exhibition there is a short video putting the Lukhang and the associated works into a context of contemporary Tibet; interesting in itself in not dwelling on political oppression. It is worth watching this, if only to step out of the London street, as it will draw you into the works that follow. Focussing primarily on one building and its message is also helpful, since there is much to absorb and this approach is more effective than the Royal Academy's Wisdom & Compassion (1990), for example, where the scale of the exhibi-

tion combined with its otherness made this more difficult. At this scale we have a mind opening experience.

The exhibition is partly based around the book *The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple* by Ian A. Baker, with photographs by Thomas Laird, and also the photographs of David Bickerstaff, taken in Tibet last year. I wondered to what extent the Chinese occupying authorities were in that respect?

Tibet's Secret Temple, body, mind and meditation in Tantric Buddhism. The Wellcome Collection, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE runs until 28th February 2018.

The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple, Tantric Wall Paintings from Tibet, text by Ian A. Baker, photographs by Thomas Laird. Thames & Hudson, 2011 £24.95 isbn 9780500289617

Comrade Corbyn, by Rosa Prince. Biteback 2016 £20.00 isbn 9781849549967

Reading the preface to Rosa Prince's book, I almost thought I knew all that I needed to know about Jeremy Corbyn after a few paragraphs. 'Corbyn believes that the personal is irrelevant; the political is everything' seems to say it all. Reading on, we have a middle class Trot, immersed in the detail of politics, almost two-dimensionally. I've bumped into Corbyn a few times, mostly at Middle East focussed events – Palestine, Iraq. The main thing that struck me was that he seemed at a slight distance from George Galloway – the main cheer-leader of the Labour left at those meetings.

The subtitle of the book 'A very unlikely coup: how Jeremy Corbyn stormed to the Labour leadership' is the meat of, what for the time being, must be an open sandwich, but we have an ample illustration of how Corbyn positioned himself for this, and too an extent how he will proceed. I find the trivial character assassination of the man in the press unpalatable, and have by and large stopped reading it.

Rosa Prince writes for the Daily Telegraph as her day job – you may recall her more potted biography of Tim Farron in the run up to the Liberal Democrat's leadership election (16th July 2015)

In the 1980s & 90's I was at the coalface of the class war; it was Liberals who were fighting for the working class, and still are. Corbyn and his ilke were, and remain, the enemy. Their socialism is alien to the British experience. Corbyn and I might say the same, or very similar things – as an internationalist, this is very likely; we are likely to mean something entirely different. Know your enemy.

Stewart Rayment



9 Feb - 6 March

A & R Theatre In association with Waterloo East Theatre

Whistleblower the story of Edward Snowden

By Richard Roques

Hero or Traitor? Edward Snowden is holed up in a hotel in Hong Kong. He has left his life in Hawaii, abandoned paradise, for a life on the run. Tortured by thoughts of his girlfriend, his mother and father and the fate of other whistleblowers in prison, he waits. But will the CIA or the National Security Agency find him first?

'Whistleblower is always watchable. Events unfold with a thriller-like momentum...' *Lyn Gardner The Guardian 11 July 2014*

'What's impressive is the theatrical ballsiness of this London fringe production' *Kate Basset The Times 11 July 2014*

'Glad to see Whistleblower is coming back. It sticks closely to the events as they unfolded in Hong Kong and does justice to Edward Snowden's revelations about the scale of state surveillance.'

Ewen MacAskill the journalist who broke the story for the Guardian.