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# INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



*Kira Rudik on the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*

USA Rwanda Policy Cameroon

Nicaragua Horn of Africa

# EVENTS

**28<sup>th</sup> June** - LIBG/LDEG Forum – The French Elections – see page 3

**30<sup>th</sup> June-3<sup>rd</sup> July** – 63<sup>rd</sup> Congress of Liberal International, Sofia, Bulgaria.

**10<sup>th</sup> September** – National ReJoin March: 12-4pm London – Park Lane to Parliament Square

**17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> September** - Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference at the Brighton Centre.

**28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> October** – Scottish Liberal Democrats Conference, Town House, Hamilton.

**1<sup>st</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> November** - UNFCCC Climate COP 27 Egypt (Sharm El Sheikh)

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Cover Photograph – Kira Rudik



# **Forum on the French general elections**

## **June 28, 2022 6:30pm by Zoom**

In the midst of geopolitical and economic upheaval enveloping most of the world, French citizens went to the polls four times. On 24 April, they re-elected Emanuel Macron to the Elysée Palace, and on 19 June they cast their votes in the second round of the parliamentary elections. Ensemble! won only 245 seats on Sunday: 44 short of a majority. Macron may have won the presidency, but there can be no doubt his position is weakened. For the coming five years, he will be facing pressure from both the Far Right and the newly united Left. Never before in the 64-year history of the Fifth Republic has a newly (re)elected president been deprived of a legislative majority to this degree.

To make sense of this new political landscape and to tell us what this means for Europe, the balance of power in the EU and the relations with the UK, we are delighted to welcome François deCoster, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and Renew Europe, to a joint LDEG and LIBG event on 28 June. Other speakers to be announced.

This meeting will be held online. Details on how to register for the Zoom link contact [https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYtc-ugqj8rH9yzaw\\_HzIcNPUZvFjQsOvZP](https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYtc-ugqj8rH9yzaw_HzIcNPUZvFjQsOvZP)

# KIRA RUDIK ON THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

Kira Rudik, leader of our sister party in Ukraine, Golos, dropped by the National Liberal Club after Davos on 27<sup>th</sup> May to brief Ed Davey and Layla Moran about developments in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. She was joined for a public Q&A session by Dániel Berg, of Momentum, the Hungarian member of ALDE, who is a Vice-President of ALDE & Mayor of Budapest, and Phil Bennion, chair of the Liberal Democrats International Committee.



*Kira Rudik, Dániel Berg, & Phil Bennion*

On the current situation in Ukraine, Kira said that the Russian focus had switched from Kyiv to the south-east of the country. She thanked people for their support but saw a problem that the world may grow weary of the war in Ukraine. Three months in (from 2014 actually) it was going to be a long war which could only end in a military victory or the collapse of Russia. Ukraine could not cede territory because the Russians would simply keep coming back. There was a sense of urgency in the acquisition of weapons. This would involve defending ourselves and hitting Russia back. Sanctions were necessary but action was needed – they would take at least six months to take effect. Economic help & support is needed, countries have been great in their response – Poland opened her

borders within one hour. Funds are needed for rebuilding and replacing infrastructure.

At Davos she found support for Ukraine was not universal – many former colonies in Africa and Asia do not recognise Russia's colonial history in Ukraine. A new world security system is needed. Ukraine is the world's leading supplier of grain, sunflower oil and tomatoes. African countries are the ones who our struggling with shortages now.

If anyone thinks that Putin will become more moderate or nicer in the Autumn they are wrong.

**Phil Bennion:** I said back in March that Putin had weaponized oil & gas and his invasion sought to weaponize grain; one of the problems with the war is when we start to see photographs of starving people in Africa. This might be a threat to keeping sanctions going and is a threat that we still have to meet. Wendy Kyrle Pope – Would Putin's death change Russia? Grain & oil are not coming out of Ukraine. How much does that affect Russia as well as the rest of the world?

**KR** – We are talking about a collective Putin, the people around him are the same. (there was a loud bang from near-by building work – Kira's reaction told us much about the day-to-day conditions of many Ukrainians). It may allow for better negotiations, but even opposition leaders there are not talking about the returning Crimea etc. Russia is stealing goods from the occupied territories. Putin has been saving for the war since 2014 – they know it is going to be a long haul.

**Man in blue suit** – spoke of colleagues & refugees from Ukraine & business in Ukraine

**Woman** – What is going to happen on the Hungarian position on banning Russian oil (Davos).

**KR** – Sanctions will be voted on, question of time, delays and the price that Hungary is asking for – room for negotiation. Every delay helps Putin.

**Dániel Berg,**— It is shameful how Orbán is using the events to extort from the EU, he remains Putin's Trojan Horse within the EU.

**Irina von Wiese** – A problem of war becoming business as usual. What is a victory for Ukraine & what is Putin going to do if he feels he is losing – nuclear? More & more troops? How are politicians going to respond to problems in their own countries and starvation elsewhere?

**KR** – Valid concerns – can Putin use nuclear weapons – yes, can we influence him – no. Nothing that the world or Ukraine have done will change his plans. Even Putin acknowledges the salami technique of taking the country piece by piece. There is no organisation in the world that will make Putin keep his word, a fight to the end is only alternative. As one Russian General put it 'We have 140 million people, a million of the would definitely want to die for their country'

**PB** – We've already seen the cost-of-living crisis and the price of heating oil for homes – needs political leadership, with Putin we have a gangster regime, if you give into them you just get a bigger demand later. Our political leaders are not being straight in explaining that this has to be a fight to the finish and we have to win this battle, and that we are going to have to suffer this cost of living crisis because it will be a worse cost of living crisis coming down the road if we don't – we need political leadership to explain that we have a wartime situation even if we don't have the war here.

**Victor Chamberlain** –Leader of the Liberal Democrat group on Southwark Council – Spoke of how support for Ukraine had been channelled through the link Odessa Street, London SE16 and Odessa . What is it like for women and minority groups in Ukraine? Equality must not be forgotten and we must support diverse communities. How can we support Ukrainians taking sanctuary here?

**KR** - Liked the approach – Southwark supporting Odessa was less likely to fall foul of corruption – you know where the money is going. Golos backed the LGBT community – first party to do so in Ukraine, in a very conservative country. LGBT people were openly joining the army – saying they don't want to be hanged on the street as we would be in Russia. Ukraine very paternalistic but women now have wider choices than men – they can fight or not fight. Speaking to survivors of Bucha on its liberation she had spoken to women, who spoke of rapes by Russian troops – there are peoples' lives behind these things, they are still going on in Donbas – even Hitler hid his crimes, Putin is advertising them.



**PB** - The International Criminal Court had 28,000 war crimes collated so far. This is in the widest public domain in this country, but difficult to bring people to justice.

**Speaker on Education** - International House – was involved in an early 1990s programme set up under Soros Open Society organisation - how is the education system coping with people leaving Ukraine and with recruiting and keeping teachers.

**KR** - Covid helped a lot, because children got used to doing things online, the situation is terrible but not devastating. Soldiers fighting, doctors healing and teachers teaching – everybody doing their part. Children are suffering trauma but teachers very much involved in their support. I'm trying to be positive, the situation is bad, but because of the teachers themselves etc., education has not completely stopped... we are taking children out of bombarded cities - teachers introduced the turtle game to help children cope – you hear an explosion and go the floor, hands above your head like a turtle. I was talking to a former President and he told me 'There is no handbook in the world that teaches you to be a president in wartime; there is no handbook that teaches you to be a MP in wartime; there is no handbook that teaches you to be a parent in wartime; you just do whatever you do, a little bit better every day, hoping that it will all get a cumulative result, this is what we are doing.'

**Mr Scott** – My question is about President Zelenskyy, he says he has to negotiate with President Putin, but also that he is not going to give up any land, isn't this a fait accompli in the sense that it will be a fight to the very end?

**KR** – Yes it will be a fight to the very end. Negotiations with the Russians are only to exchange people and get people out cities.

**Mr Scott** – Do the majority of Ukrainians support President Zelenskyy's view of not ceding land.

**KR** – Yes – three months into the war we have had a poll, I think 85% don't want us to give up any land and intend to fight to the end, but this is the first poll, things may change once the Autumn starts, for now resilience still high.

**PB** – the danger of a truce is that if Putin thinks it is a good time to hold talks he will not give up any land that he has taken and take this as a de facto position, and then the danger is that in five-year's time, even less, when he has regrouped, he attacks again; he's already started talking about Moldova and that would mean a next push to grab the whole of the Black Sea coast through into Moldova and that would be his next move. This is why I think it is quite reasonable to say that we would not, at any time, support a truce, because I can't Putin doing anything but using it to his advantage.



***Dániel Berg, Phil Bennion, Layla Moran, Kira Rudik and Ed Davey***

**KR** – As politicians we need to be realists, but there is so much that I haven't shared with you that is amazing and positive. First, Putin did plan to take over Ukraine in five days and it is now three months, three months more than anybody in the world expected, I'm so proud of my people for standing for that. I'm sure you've heard of the Ukrainian babushka who hugged a Russian soldier and put sunflower seeds in his pocket, and when he asked her what she was doing, she said that when he lay in Ukrainian soil she wanted sunflowers to grow, and I think of how she woke up in the morning and she prepared those seeds and picked that particular soldier from the crowd, she thought probably, this is the weak one. I'm also thinking of all the support that we are getting from everybody, on the first day of war ALDE was the first organisation that called me and asked what they could do. I'm grateful for whatever people are doing, supporting on Facebook,

sending humanitarian aid, whatever it is, you can't win a war alone... We do need support but we will continue fighting

**PB** – We have been ahead of the game in pushing the government towards your requests, we were at least a week ahead in pushing the government to provide the right weapons. We do have a reasonably good relationship with Ben Wallace, the Defence Minister in the government, we might not get on particularly well with Mr Johnson but we think a lot of what the government has done is down to the Defence Minister, rather than the Prime Minister. We've been entirely on your side throughout and will continue to be; we are your allies and friends.

**KR** – Thank you.

*This is a loose transcription of the proceedings, accurate in detail but not word perfect. The meeting was held at the National Liberal Club on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022.*

# Despair in Blue State America

## Rebecca Tinsley

While Donald Trump was in the White House, Democrats assumed Americans living in the red (Republican) states would see the error of their ways and would never again vote for a belligerent, ignorant, right-wing populist. Now, they know the opposite is true: many believe America will elect a Trump-like demagogue, if not Trump himself, in 2024. Culture wars will be weaponized, shifting the focus from the legitimacy of the 2020 vote to trans rights, abortion, gay marriage and contraception. And the Democrats don't appear to know how to stop it.

For the last three decades, I've spent three months each year in the USA. During April, May and June this year I talked to dozens of Democrats about the future. Despair was the universal response.

During the chaotic Trump years, my Democrat friends were certain that what they think of as the real America (generous, moderate) would reemerge as people were repelled by the hyperbole, hatred and distortions of the MAGA (Make America Great Again) mob. But since Biden was elected, Trump's popularity has not waned, and otherwise level-headed Democrats are now predicting civil war, while buying second homes in Costa Rica.

Psychologists say many voters got an addictive mental rush each time Trump articulated their fury about "white replacement" (the rise of women, immigrants, gays and those who they feel police the words they use). They became hooked on the sour rhetoric illuminating their grievances and perceived marginalization, romanticizing a golden 1950s America that afforded the white male Caucasian the status he felt he deserved. Never mind that Trump did nothing about those grievances, sticking to the traditional Republican agenda: cutting taxes, turbocharging deregulation, intensifying the hollowing out of the middle classes, exacerbating inequality.

Yet, a recent Wall Street Journal poll showed the silent majority of Americans want gun control, are generous toward migrants, think racism is a very serious problem, recognize there is discrimination against Black people, accept gay marriage and transgender rights, want vaccines in schools, and don't want Roe v Wade overturned. They should be keen to elect Democrats: but they aren't.

### Blame the messenger and the message

Here is the crux of the Democrats problem: they believe that if only the voters have the data, they will see the error of their ways. When I asked Democrats what needed to be done to counter conspiracy theories, they recommend education, using earnest think tanks to disseminate the truth. Yet, their data only confirms the Trump mob's prejudices, validating their fury against the metropolitan elite who sneer at less educated, less urban, older people. They will not believe facts because they do not accept the messengers are credible. Only "their" messengers (Fox News, local and regional talk radio blowhards) are authentic, so well-intentioned attempts to counter disinformation will fail.

Twenty million Americans may be watching the congressional investigation of the January 6<sup>th</sup> riot but they are not Republicans. The process only confirms the Trump view that the Establishment rigged the system. To quote Rod Steiger playing Al Capone, "If I wanted a lecture, I would 'a went to college." The best hope for Democrats is that the revelations boost Democrat turnout in November, as may the Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v Wade, and Congress's inability to tackle gun crime.

The Democrats' touching belief in the persuasive power of proven facts goes back to the 2000 election when the party treated the hanging chads melodrama in Florida as a civics lesson, rather than a bareknuckle fight to which they should have brought a baseball bat. The Supreme Court prevented all the votes being counted in Florida in 2000, and the Democrat response was, well, nothing. No riots, no marches on Washington, no mass pickets outside the homes of Supreme Court justices. And no understanding that the constitution will be selectively utilized whenever it suits the Republicans.

Political commentator Jordan Bollag highlights the continuing sway of “the tyranny of civility” and corporate interests on the Democrats. Party activists I encountered are consumed with transgender rights and identity issues while failing to campaign on the concerns of working class Americans (low paid jobs, inflation, polluted drinking water, crime, drugs, and having inadequate or no health insurance).

Others point to “process issues”: the voting system, gerrymandering, how few contests are competitive, and the influence of Trump activists and lobbyists driving Republican candidates to the right. At a local level, Democrats have stood by in many places as Republicans fill influential school boards, councils, voter registration bodies, and water district boards.

A knee-jerk progressive response to all this is holding marches, rather than talking to voters. A Democratic activist in Maryland argues that painstakingly registering voters and getting them to the polls is more effective (but less fun). Only 20% of voters participated in California’s primaries in June, despite having postal ballots mailed to every home, a sobering thought.

### **A Shellacking in November?**

Democrats repeatedly praise Joe Biden as “a decent man.” “It’s such a relief. No more daily drama in the White House.” “He understands how Washington works.” “If only people saw all the things Biden is achieving.”

Eventually, I encountered a 92-year-old Democrat activist who snarled, “I don’t want a decent man as president. I want Lyndon Johnson. I want someone who gets things done.”

But how can Biden emulate LBJ or FDR’s New Deal without their supermajorities in Congress? Biden is constantly undermined by his own senators, Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema.

“A series of less ambitious, voter-friendly, family-orientated policies to regenerate the economy and incrementally tighten gun ownership might have succeeded,” said a moderate Texas Democrat who blames the party’s left for creating mammoth and divisive wish list bills. As of November 2022, when the Democrats will “get their clock cleaned”, Biden will be unable to get anything done.

A party insider in Washington is sure Biden will run again, to the dismay of most Democrats. No one wants Vice President Kamala Harris, and although Pete Buttigieg is charismatic and clever, there is concern that an openly gay man will not win in the south or with ethnic minorities. The potential candidate most often cited is Amy Klobuchar, but a primary challenge to a sitting president would be a disaster.

The Democrats are also losing support by assuming there is a monolithic “Hispanic vote.” People whose parents came from Cuba do not hold the same views as migrants from Guatemala. Republicans are appealing to ethnic communities where their family values message resonates with Catholics and evangelical people of Latinx background.

A failed experiment?

Feminists in their 60s and older are watching their lifetime’s achievements shredded. One LA woman who spent decades making campaign videos on abortion and contraception told me sheepishly, “Can’t we talk about my grandkids instead?”

This despair was shared by every Democrat I met. The chancellor of a law college put it this way: “From the time of its revolution, America has been an experiment in government and statecraft. If the American people elect Trump in 2024 (or a Trumpite clone) then the experiment has failed.”

*Rebecca Tinsley*

# RWANDA POLICY: DUMB, DUMBER AND... NOT SO DUMB?

**Nick Silver**

I have never been to Rwanda, but my company has done quite a bit of work there, which I oversaw, many of my colleagues have spent some time there, including one of them who lived there for a number of years. The logical argument of the government's policy is that if people knew that they would be flown to Rwanda if they are caught, this would deter them from crossing the channel and illegally trying to enter Britain. This deterrence would be enough to stop them trying, which would therefore cure the problem and the untold misery it brings.

Given that these people are willing to risk their lives to try to enter Britain by crossing the channel in small, overcrowded dinghies, their risk tolerance is pretty high, and therefore for the Rwanda policy to be a deterrent there would have to be a very high chance that they would be caught and sent to Rwanda. According to the BBC in 2021 about 30,000 migrants tried to cross the channel to enter Britain. For argument's sake, let's say the policy would have to potentially send, say half of the people to Rwanda to be credible enough to deter people (the blocked flight had 30 people on it).



*Rwandan refugees in Goma, DR Congo, during the civil war - 1990-1994.*

Rwanda is a small, poor, landlocked country – it has a population of 13 million and its human development index is 160<sup>th</sup> in the world (out of 200 – it's GDP per capita is 1/25<sup>th</sup> of the UK).

If we sent 15,000 migrants, nearly all of them would end up in Kigali, a city of less than a million people, and this would represent 1.5 per cent addition to Kigali's population, every year – the equivalent of London suddenly getting 150,000 people. Why Kigali? Basically, if you dumped someone from, say Syria, in a rural African setting, they would not survive.

For an African country, it is relatively well run and not corrupt – my colleagues commented that unlike most African countries, the streets are clean and services work. Another feature is many top jobs are filled by women. However, it has a dictatorial government who frequently locks up opponents, and has a generally poor human rights record.

It's an eight-hour flight to Rwanda – I have just checked on Expedia that a one-way flight cost £750 -that's £11 million just to get them there (if you think that it's cheaper for the government to fly 15,000 unwilling people there then buy a commercial airline ticket, think again).

Kigali, like most African cities, has problems housing its existing population, land is scarce; houses in Kigali are surprisingly expensive. To accommodate more than a few, Rwanda would have to build accommodation for them. Like most African cities, Kigali has limited infrastructure, so it would also need to build transport links, water, electricity and other infrastructure to make sure they are fed, have access to basic medical services, police etc.

Just because Rwanda is poor does not mean that it is cheap to build there, quite the opposite. To build this infrastructure you need skills and equipment, and unlike here Rwanda doesn't have a supply of skilled Eastern European builders to do the work.

To build this infrastructure will be super expensive, if possible, at all. Worse, to get the infrastructure built will require the British government paying the Rwandan government to do it, the British government are bad enough at building our own infrastructure, if they give the Rwandans money, they will require all sorts of monitoring of how the money is spent, which adds a whole new layer of costs.

The British government may not care about the welfare of the migrants, and will just be happy to pay the Rwandans a load of money to get rid of them. However, the Daily Mail will care, not about the welfare of the migrants, but because the British government will have paid over hundreds of millions of pounds of tax payers' money to the Rwandans to build a load of infrastructure, which won't be being built, and maybe a lot of it will be pocketed by various officials.

Even so, I am actually given the policy too much credit, it will not happen – Rwanda just will not be able to accommodate and process 15,000 people every year; it had a similar deal with Israel which did not work out. I assume the Rwandan government sees this as an opportunity of getting money off the British with few strings attached (Rwanda has been the recipient of a great deal of development aid, however its worsening human rights record is making it more difficult to get this money).

I expect most people have heard of Rwanda in relation to the 1994 genocide, an event that overshadows its history. Do the Rwandan government really believe they are going to have to accommodate 15,000 young -and unhappy – males? This will cause a great deal of disruption to a fragile society, I doubt its controlling government would contemplate this, I would conclude that it just doesn't believe it will happen.

As the threat of sending a significant enough number of people to Rwanda is non-credible to me and Paul Kagame, it will also be non-credible to the migrants themselves and therefore won't put them off crossing; to deter them you would actually have to ship off a significant number, which as I have just argued is non-viable.

But yesterday the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) stopped the first flight, and I can imagine the eyes of ERG members lighting up at the news.

So, my first thought is perhaps the whole policy is actually a false flag operation to get the ECHR to react, giving the government an excuse to pick a fight with them to rally the troops and distract from their terminal domestic problems.

But then I remembered that its Priti Patel's policy and doubt she is smart enough to have dreamed that up.

But... the moment this policy was announced the *ExpressMail* were already blame "lefty" lawyers for its future failure, so perhaps this policy has never been about stopping migration at all, and is really about stoking the cultural war, the intervention of the ECHR was just an added bonus.

Given the current state of this governments, that seems by far the most likely explanation.

***Nick Silver***

Nick Silver is a trustee and executive member of Radix. This article was first published by Radix on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

<https://radixuk.org/opinion/rwanda-policy-dumb-dumber-and-not-so-dumb/>

## **OFFSHORE PROCESSING OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN RWANDA – STATEMENT FROM LD4SOS 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

The Conservative Government plans to send asylum seekers to have their claims processed in Rwanda. Liberal Democrats have campaigned for years, often with colleagues in other parties and alongside NGOs, for a fair, efficient and less harmful asylum system.

We are disgusted by this Government's inhumane treatment of people whose right to seek sanctuary in this country had been accepted even by its own stringent rules. It is not and never has been illegal to claim asylum. Under the Refugee Convention individuals with a well-founded fear of persecution have the right to go to other countries claim asylum – and that right is not conditional on how the person arrives in the country

The real issues are the lack of safe and legal routes for asylum seekers to enter this country – forcing them to put their lives at risk through dangerous channel crossing, and poor decision making. Rather than introducing this cruel policy the Government should be focusing on creating safe and legal routes for people to get there and reforming decision-making.

It is unbelievable that the Home Secretary, herself an immigrant, could introduce the idea of off-shoring asylum seekers (possibly women as well men) to have their legitimate claims determined in Rwanda without any substantive interview first! This is a nightmare scenario reminiscent of a deluded game of snakes and ladders where you climb the ladder to arrive in the U.K. only to land on a snake which sends you to a country in Africa which has a poor human rights record where you will have to stay even if your claim for asylum is upheld. If the claim fails, we understand there will be no right of appeal – in the UK 40% of the cases initially turned down are upheld at appeal. The experience from Australia suggests that as well-being inhumane and dangerous (there was widespread abuse in the offshore centres used) it was also very costly.

The detention for immigration purposes ie: detaining people without trial in prison like conditions has been condemned by the United Nations (UNHCR), HM Inspectorate, cross-party Parliamentary Groups, and a growing number of MPs of all parties. The UNHCR advocates the replacement of immigration detention by a more efficient, faster, and better resourced and more cost-effective system of assessment of claims and decision making in the community.

Apart from being cruel, expensive, discriminatory, and unjust this policy is not going to deter a single genuine asylum seeker from trying to reach our unwelcoming shores.

These 'unwelcome' migrants include people who already have family members resettled here but who are not quite closely related enough (eg: spouse, child, dependent parent with proof of dependency). They could be young men from Syria not considered vulnerable enough for a resettlement scheme but at risk of conscription to be forced to kill their fellow countrymen (including many civilians). They could be lawyers, professional women and others fleeing for their lives from the Taliban in Afghanistan. They might also be Rwandans with every reason to avoid returning to an unstable country.

Our country is not overrun by asylum seekers. The relatively prosperous countries of Western Europe receive far more applications than we do, and it is common knowledge that the vast majority of refugees settle in neighbouring countries hence Syrians stay in Jordan and Lebanon.

As Liberal Democrats campaigning for justice, compassion, and efficiency in our asylum system we demand that this current agreement with Rwanda is abandoned, and future proposals removed from the Government's legislative programme. The tens of thousands of UK residents who are opening up their homes to welcome Ukrainian refugees must also be appalled at the double standards of a government, which seems to welcome some who seek safety here and force others to endure months and sometimes years of insecurity.

It is now time that all MPs examined their consciences and values and hold the Government to account. Parliament should resist populist policies designed to appease certain parts of the electorate legislate for sound and humane policies which we can all admire.

# Naming and Shaming the Bad Guys

## Rebecca Tinsley

The Cameroon Anglophone crisis has led to thousands of displaced persons, kidnapped, and others killed to great indifference from the international community.

Many African leaders decline to pick sides in the new Cold War between Russia and the West. Some may be reciprocating the Soviet Union's solidarity during their liberation struggles against colonial powers, while others are repelled by the hypocrisy of the USA, UK, and France, who overlook their global allies' records of repression and corruption.

It is particularly difficult for African leaders to denounce a Russian dictator committing war crimes and other human rights abuses when they are also guilty of them. Further, African elites tend to support Russia's (and China's) trade and development agenda, despite the negative impact of foreign mercenaries, debt traps, and vanity projects on their populations. However, if Pan-Africanism is to mean anything, then African autocrats giving tacit support to Russia's Ukraine invasion and to Russian tactics on the continent should be named and shamed for their own rights atrocities and corruption by those inside their countries and across the continent.

Outsiders have been interfering in the continent's affairs since Arab slave traders began stealing Africans, followed centuries later by Europeans. Colonial bureaucracies extracted from African colonies while denying public goods to citizens. Yet, in a number of nations, upon independence, a local elite merely replaced exploitative colonial rulers. In case after case, unrepresentative and discredited leaders are stifling their countries' human and economic potential due to poor governance.

Too many African populations live in repressive states where they have rights on paper but no power to enforce them. Their nations are mismanaged by a selfish minority favouring their own group. Vote-winning machines are too often based around leaders' ethnicities rather than their ideas or ideologies. A blatant example of this manipulation of citizens through hate speech is in South Sudan, where President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar's battle of egos is destroying what could be a prosperous nation.

Traditionally, the continent has turned a blind eye when elites steal from or persecute minorities. African Union summits are most animated when presidents demand immunity from prosecution. Time and again, African leaders avert their eyes from the slaughter happening next door, be it in Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Eritrea, or the DRC. No one rocks the boat, and no dirty linen is displayed.

Yet fostering peace and prosperity across African countries requires naming and shaming leaders, *together*. Many countries on the continent face common challenges and opportunities. Effectively denouncing the authoritarian, nepotistic, and kleptocratic leaders ruining their countries is a crucial form of showing solidarity with those beyond one's borders.

One ideal of Pan-Africanism is that citizens of 54 countries should care about the injustice and incompetence blighting the lives of their fellow Africans. It means they are informed about human rights abuses occurring at home and in the region. It is true that many Africans are too busy with the politics of daily life and politics of survival, and that millions live in countries where it is too dangerous to express dissent. It is therefore the responsibility of citizens in African nations where it is possible to challenge the status quo in repressive states to speak up.

It is why the RFK Human Rights Award 2022<sup>1</sup> was given to two courageous human-rights defenders from the country of Cameroon on June 7 in Washington, DC, Madame Maximilienne Ngo Mbe<sup>2</sup> of REDHAC and

Barrister Felix Agbor ‘Balla’ Nkongho<sup>3</sup> of CHRDA. African civil society leaders who lead the charge in standing up to abuses against citizens of the continent must be recognized and supported by Africans, as well as the West.



**Maximilienne Ngo Mbe**

In fact, Central Africa’s Cameroon provides an example of an authoritarian country’s leadership which has been insufficiently shamed by other African leaders or international bodies. President Paul Biya, age 89, has been in power since 1982. He refrains from criticizing fellow African leaders and in return attracts no opprobrium for his poor human rights record, rigged elections, underdeveloped infrastructure, or incompetence at solving his country’s deadly “Anglophone Crisis.” His Francophone ruling elite has marginalized the Anglophone minority for decades, including using disproportionate force since 2016 to crush peaceful dissent, thereby fuelling a violent separatism which turned into an armed conflict more pressing than fending off Boko Haram incursions in Cameroon’s Far North or rebels crossing from the Central African Republic border. Biya is to blame for countless atrocities committed by his forces against Anglophones, yet absurdly, Cameroon just presided over and sits on the AU Peace & Security Council, and

has a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. No Anglophone African leaders utter sufficient words of concern about the persecution of English-speakers in Cameroon. If no African institution will denounce Biya after five years of worsening conflict, then perhaps Pan-Africanism is effectively dead.

However, where top leaders have failed, there remain thousands of impressive civil society groups, activists, journalists, and lawyers across Africa campaigning against corruption and misrule, as the RFK award recognizes. Often, they are persecuted by their own governments, as are Africa’s intellectuals who dare to challenge the ruling elites. Africans should not need outsiders to fight these fights: there is plenty of talent and courage on the continent, and brave campaigners deserve to be funded by fellow African institutions. Surely by now, it is known that foreigners usually have an agenda, benign or otherwise.

African leaders should examine the resource-plundering motives of Russia (and China), its mercenaries, and what it perpetrates on countries it no longer likes. They would do well to remember that love, not hate toward portions of their citizenry, is likely to create a more peaceful and prosperous society over time. To exploit and oppress your own population is to deserve naming and shaming by your African peers.

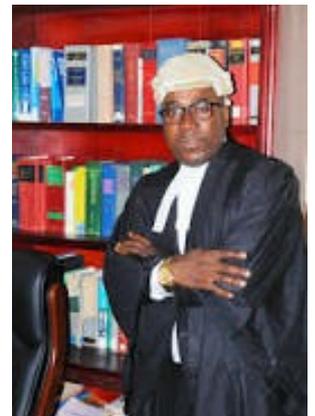
**Rebecca Tinsley**

[https://panafricanvisions.com/2022/06/naming-and-shaming-the-bad-guys/?fbclid=IwAR06s-R\\_JVPjwqhbBwnJVMRY6fV3VVYNxfrGpsOVnutoSx2kc5Svc0EkIII](https://panafricanvisions.com/2022/06/naming-and-shaming-the-bad-guys/?fbclid=IwAR06s-R_JVPjwqhbBwnJVMRY6fV3VVYNxfrGpsOVnutoSx2kc5Svc0EkIII)

<sup>1</sup> Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/awards/human-rights-award-2022>

<sup>2</sup> Maximilienne Chantal Ngo Mbe is a Cameroonian human-rights campaigner. She leads the Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale (REDHAC). She was given the International Women of Courage Award in 2021. *Wikipedia*

<sup>3</sup> Agbor Nkongho aka Balla is an Anglophone Cameroonian human rights lawyer who is the president of the Fako Lawyers Association, vice president of the African Bar Association in charge of Central Africa. CHRDA, the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa is a human rights organisation documenting human rights violations and promoting human rights improvements in Africa, with a particular focus on Cameroon, where the organisation started. *Wikipedia*



**Felix Agbor ‘Balla’ Nkongho**



# Nicaragua

The Nicaraguan opposition continues the fight for freedom, calling on the international community to demand a democratic transition in the country.

The state of democracy and civic freedoms continues to deteriorate in Nicaragua in the aftermath of the presidential elections held in November 2021. With opposition candidates being harassed and jailed and political parties being dissolved well before, the Sandinista regime ensured that there was nothing free and fair about the elections, which were largely boycotted by the Nicaraguans who refused to take part in the electoral farce.

Ahead of the elections, the Liberal International Bureau expressed alarm at the escalation in authoritarian actions by Daniel Ortega's government, in a statement to the UN Human Rights Council. LI and RELIAL also issued a joint statement in August when our Nicaraguan member party Ciudadanos por la Libertad was dissolved and its leader, LI Vice President Kitty Monterrey was stripped of her Nicaraguan citizenship.

Kitty Monterrey, who spoke after the last LIBG AGM, is currently living in exile, where she continues fighting for a democratic transition in Nicaragua. In a newly released mini-documentary by the news agency 100 Noticias Nicaragua, together with experts and civil society activists, she explains how Daniel Ortega, step by step, eliminated all democratic elements of the elections, by imposing a series of legislative reforms effectively criminalising any dissent.

Watch Mini-Documentary “Nicaragua 2021, elections without competition”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8QPLxIEcHA>

As a response to these measures, the opposition joined forces to collectively challenge Ortega, by creating the opposition alliance, Alianza Ciudadana.

“When Ortega realised what we were doing, he started the crackdown, jailing the opposition candidates one by one, starting with Cristiana, later Arturo, afterwards Felix and Juan Sebastian, one by one, until all of them were accused of betrayal to the homeland.” – Kitty Monterrey

The elections were hoped to become an opportunity for a transition to democracy through peaceful, constitutional means. Instead, they became a pantomime election where the winner had been decided well in advance. While the Nicaraguan opposition and civil society now continue their fight for democracy and freedom in their home country, they call on the international community to provide support for local pro-democracy movements, and to loudly demand a transition to democratic rule.

Ortega enjoys considerable support within the Labour party in the UK, their councillors expressing support from time to time. Liberals must rise to this challenge when ever it occurs.

# Why Events in the Horn of Africa Matter

## Rebecca Tinsley

Conflict, global warming and famine in the Horn of Africa will drive thousands of people to seek a more secure future in Europe. Violence in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan is of geopolitical importance, even if the media largely ignores the region.

As climate change turns grazing land into desert across the middle band of Africa, from Mauritania to Djibouti, herders and farmers compete for rapidly shrinking agricultural space. If their governments were responsible, they would improve education and infrastructure, offering their citizens 21<sup>st</sup> century livelihoods. Sadly, many ruling elites in the region are incompetent or corrupt, so they stir up residual ethnic and religious grievances, arming proxies and ethnically cleansing scapegoated communities.

### Sudan's dream of freedom goes sour

For decades, the Islamist regime in Khartoum marginalised and discriminated against its non-Arab citizens living in the country's periphery. In Darfur, a region the size of France, there were only 6 miles of paved road when I visited in 2004. As the Sahara crept south, the elites along the Nile armed the Arab tribes in Darfur, supporting their genocidal campaign against African villages with systematic bombing. The international community did not keep count of the dead for fear of offending Omar Bashir's ruling junta. When the UN reported that Khartoum was disguising its bombers in UN livery in order to woo Darfuris out of hiding, it quickly apologised to Bashir and withdrew the report. The peacekeeping mission (UNIMAD) was so poorly resourced that there wasn't enough petrol to investigate attacks on civilians. I met Rwandan peacekeepers who had been given 1 bread roll and a small pot of yoghurt to survive on each day. The moment UNAMID withdrew, in December 2020, the violence resumed and continues now, virtually unreported.

Over the years, Sudan has signed numerous peace agreements but there has never been the political will to make the regime faced consequences for breaking its word within hours of the diplomats departing Sudanese airspace. Go to [www.WagingPeace.info/our-work-the-childrens-drawings/](http://www.WagingPeace.info/our-work-the-childrens-drawings/) to see how Darfur's children experienced the conflict.



The world's Islamic leaders evidently considered Darfuris the wrong kind of Muslims ie: Black and African. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Russia and China continue to be stalwart supporters of the military, keen to ensure that no functioning democracy takes root there, as well as benefiting from Sudan's resources.

During the Bashir years, the UK was training Sudan's security forces in a programme that had to be terminated when its students were implicated in atrocities against civilians. The EU continues to pay

and Khartoum to prevent refugees reaching the Mediterranean. Mass graves and slave markets in Libya have been documented by reputable human rights groups.

The non-Arab, non-Muslim population in the south of Sudan lost two million people in its struggle against Khartoum's Arabisation campaign, but the world's Christians exerted sufficient pressure on Khartoum to eventually secure an independence referendum for what is now South Sudan.

For decades, the slaughter of Sudan's non-Arabs made little impression on the self-identifying Arab population of Khartoum. However, the regime's economic incompetence and corruption eventually exploded into a revolution in late 2019, led by the professional classes, marching (very bravely) under the banner of the Forces for Freedom & Change. Bashir was ousted and the military agreed to a power-sharing transitional government, leading eventually to full civilian rule.



However, in October 2021, there was a counter coup, putting the security services back in charge. They have stopped investigations into their web of corrupt businesses, locked up lawyers, journalists and opposition activists, closed the civil space and unleashed a campaign of rape and violence toward women protesters. Protests are met with brutality, including spraying tear gas in hospital operating theatres.

The international community is trying to keep the transitional process on track, but many of the opposition groups do not trust the military to keep their promises, (understandable, given their track record). The USA has suspended \$700m of aid and sanctioned the Central Reserve Police and individuals implicated in atrocities.

But the UN's current painstaking consultation process may not be enough to convince either the military or the civilians that it is in their interest to compromise.

At the end of March, the UN envoy for Sudan warned that the country is heading for economic and security collapse. Does this matter to the UK or Europe? It should do, because, to be hard-headed, thousands of people may conclude they have no future there if the military remains in control. They will head for Britain, the former colonial power.

What should we do? It is vital to apply consistent and serious pressure on Sudan's security services to release political detainees, to stop the violence against demonstrators, to unite and reform the security services, to establish transparent justice mechanisms, and to ensure that the transition to civilian rule happens. But recent history tells us that the international community has never cared enough about Sudan to ensure that there are consequences for decades' worth of broken promises.

**Rebecca Tinsley**



Rebecca Tinsley spoke at the LIBG Forum Where Next for the Horn of Africa on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. Her novel about Sudan, *When the Stars Fall to Earth*, is available in English and Arabic from Amazon.

# ALDE Congress Dublin June 2022

Whilst most of you were celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee last weekend, a number of us travelled to Dublin, as part of the Lib Dem delegation to the ALDE Congress taking place from 2nd to 4th June - the first physical meeting of our liberal and democratic sister parties from across Europe since our last get together in Athens in October 2019.

As expected, it was really great to be back in person meeting old friends and making new ones. The Irish did not disappoint in their hospitality - the main reception was held in the Guinness Factory - and Dublin impressed us all, as a vibrant cosmopolitan city that appears to be taking full advantage of Brexit, with many international corporations having beefed up their presence in Ireland. It was my first visit to Ireland for 20 years and I certainly noticed the change in the look and feel of the Capital.

There was much political debate over the weekend - with some inspiring speeches from Micheal Martin - the Irish Taoiseach, Kira Rudik, the Leader of our Ukrainian sister party Golos, Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Margrethe Vestager, the Danish European Commissioner for Competition, Stephane Sejourne, the Leader of the the Renew Group in the European Parliament and many others. I was reminded in just how many European countries one of sister parties is the governing party or part of a governing coalition, which highlights the growing influence and relevance of our liberal policies.

Baroness Sal Brinton was re-elected as Vice President for a second term to the ALDE Bureau, which will enable us to maintain our party's influence in our European liberal family. The other successful Vice-Presidential candidates were Annelou van Egmond (D66 Netherlands), Svenja Hahn (FDP Germany), Kira Rudik (Golos; Ukraine) and Dániel Berg (Momentum; Hungary).

Timmy Dooley (Fianna Fáil Ireland) and Ilhan Kyuchyuk (Movement for Rights and Freedoms, Bulgaria) standing on a joint ticket were elected unopposed as joint Presidents of ALDE. Both Timmy and Ilhan have spoken at LDEG events in the past and are old friends of the Lib Dems.

There was a strong presence at the Congress of the French Renaissance party of President Macron ahead of talks on exploring merger possibilities between ALDE and the European Democrats. Such a merger would have clear advantages as it would put our Group much closer to the conservative EPP in size and power, but there are reservations on the possible weakening of liberalism in a merged entity. I am sure we shall see more on this topic in the coming months. LDEG and LIBG are hosting a joint online briefing on the French National Elections, which will take place on 28 June, to which all LDEG members will be invited. Several members of LDEG's Exec, alongside myself, were part of the LibDem delegation and were involved in preparing amendments to the motions submitted, which when adopted help guide the policies of our sister parties across Europe. We were also authors of motions on Afghanistan and the Northern Ireland Protocol, the latter submitted jointly with Alliance and Fianna Fail. Additionally, we cooperated in the drafting and co-signed motions with FDP Germany on World Trade and with the Green Liberals Switzerland on cooperation on research, education and innovation.

Several of the motions related to European security in the wake of the war with Ukraine. President Zelensky's Party, Servant of the People was officially admitted to ALDE as a full member and in addition to the Ukrainian Liberal Party, Golos, which was already a full member of ALDE, we saw a strong display of solidarity with Ukraine at the Congress. The resolutions dealt with armaments, sanctions, refugees, and wider effects such as food security. A stand-alone motion on reducing fossil fuel dependence and ensuring energy supply also referred to overdependence on Russia, as well as focusing on the longer-term transition to renewables. There was a clear rejection of any moves which might lead to Putin continuing to occupy the territory taken since February 24th. We also confirmed support for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova to be promoted to EU candidate status, a decision to be taken shortly by the EU, but accession would remain dependent upon meeting the Copenhagen Criteria.

The motions on European defence and security were not ultimately supported by our delegation, despite containing much that we agree with and having had the elements incompatible with NATO deleted by our own and Swedish amendments. ALDE have just set up a Policy Advisory Group to look at security issues in detail - I am the Lib Dem representative - which will be able to take expert advice on what is required going forward.

A comprehensive resolution on asylum policy was also passed. The proposal is to replace the Dublin system with one that shares the asylum seekers between EU member states on the basis of population and GDP, hence replacing the first country rule. It also gave clear guidelines on uniting families and using other support networks, as well as integrating refugees into the workforce. The resolution introduced the concept of climate change refugees.

Our motion on the Northern Ireland Protocol which after consultation was proposed jointly with the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland and Fianna Fail of Ireland, condemns the British Government's plans to scrap the Northern Ireland Protocol ( a Lib Dem press release on this matter has already been issued) and was passed by Congress without a single vote against.

The Lib Dems co-signed a motion on safe and legal abortion with D66 Netherlands, which tried to set a basic principles, which was also passed by a large majority. There were three other health related motions, on post COVID cooperation on health innovation, mental health and a harm reduction approach to drugs. A notable turnaround in ALDE was the adoption with 85% in favour of a resolution from our Italian sister party on biotechnological crops. It seems that the EU is preparing a revision and this vote will give Renew a mandate to change.

European rule of law (addressing the Orbán of Hungary problem), a call for investment in European railways, a condemnation off the death penalty in Belarus and an internal motion on ALDE Party discipline made up the rest.

Dublin will also be remembered for an initiative which is very close to my heart. Alongside 33 of our sister parties, Baroness Brinton, Adrian Hyyrylainen-Trett and myself signed the Dublin Diversity Declaration on behalf of the Lib Dems, which aims to support and encourage greater LGBTQI+ political representation at all levels of government. Baroness Brinton in her speech to Congress reaffirmed our party's commitment to diversity and indeed the LibDems will be running an LGBT+ focused training programme throughout the summer for senior officials from many of our sister parties in Eastern and Central Europe.

All in all it was a very successful, enjoyable and inspiring few days in Dublin and I would like to thank all those members of LDEG who gave up their time to participate in the LibDem delegation.

*David N Chalmers*

David Chalmers is chair of LDEG.

## **In Memoriam: Madeleine Albright**

The global liberal family is sad to learn of the passing today of the first female US Secretary of State and Chairperson of LI cooperating organisation National Democratic Institute.

Born in 1937, at a time of unprecedented political upheaval in Europe, her wisdom today as the democratic world faces down another threat of historic proportion will be sorely missed by liberal-democrats from Ukraine to Taiwan.

Commenting on Secretary of State Albright's death, LI president Hakima el Haité recalled, "Madeleine was one of the first people to call me after I was elected president of Liberal International. She insisted that with my election our shared values must be expressed not only with words but in action."

Secretary of State Albright was an inspiration for the advancement of the women's rights priority of LI's human rights committee and LI is proud to have partnered with Ms Albright to advance the role of women in politics worldwide over many years.

'I will remember Madeleine as a most remarkable human being', reflects LI President of Honour Neyts-Uyttbroeck

Madeleine Albright passed away in Washington D.C. on 23 March 2022. Her passing is a great loss for all those who have known her personally, and for the institutions and causes for which she worked so hard through her long and dynamic life.

I met her for the first time during the International Visitors Programme that NDI, the National Democratic Institute, had organised in the framework of the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1992 if my memory serves me right. At the time, she was the US Permanent Representative to the UN, the first woman to hold this very senior diplomatic position. I vividly remember how she was very direct, sometimes almost cuttingly frank, in the Q&A on foreign policy. It also quickly became clear that she didn't take fools lightly.

Through her hard work as permanent representative to the UN and later, as Secretary of State, she never lost sight of the issues closest to her heart: women's rights as an essential component of human rights (and not as mere afterthoughts) and democracy as an indispensable precondition of human welfare the world over and not as a western import.

She worked relentlessly for the advancement of these causes during her tenure and afterwards.

I had the honour to be invited to participate in the launch of the Win with Women project and we used that framework in Liberal International to organise seminars on the advancement of the political participation of women in Europe, Central America, Africa and Asia, assessing time and again that the road would still belong. Madeleine Albright however remained the constant inspiration.

As I said, she could be severe: she was disappointed by the slow pace of European unification and said so, but she was equally dismayed (to put it mildly) by some developments in the foreign policy of her country of choice which she so passionately served and she said so.

She taught me some invaluable lessons, which I'll continue to hold dear; but above all, I will remember her as a most remarkable and integral human being.

### ***Annemie Neyts-Uyttbroeck***

Minister of State, President of Honour of Liberal International



# Dennis Erwin Graf

Dennis Graf was a frequent contributor on American politics to interLib and Liberator - his contributions will be much missed by our readers. Fascinated with American Conservatism and NeoConservatism (on which much of what is described as NeoLiberalism can be blamed), reading his posts one could guess the way the Iraq War would go long before it had started.

I first met Dennis at one of Arthur Maud's concerts at St. John, Bethnal Green in London's East End. Dennis was fascinated by the gangsters Reggie & Ronnie Kray, and I took him to The Blind Beggar pub, scene of their undoing. Dennis & Christine later reciprocated in Paris, where I was given the arduous task of reviewing restaurants - coffee in the Jardin du Luxembourg whilst we decided which bistro to visit, then a saunter across the Latin



Quarter to our choice... what a slog. It is about time the publishers requested a new edition, but *Paris by Bistro* is strong on the haunts of the American colony à Paris of the last century, so doesn't date in that respect. I particularly remember Dennis tickling the ivories on Cole Porter's piano after the service in the American Cathedral. A bon viveur, Dennis enjoyed London's National Liberal Club, as I enjoyed taking him there.

*The following is from the Star Tribune*

Graf, Dennis Erwin of St. Paul, Minnesota, died April 1, 2022, after a brief illness while in Tucson, Arizona. Born in Worthington, Minnesota, on July 9, 1937, Dennis studied at Wheaton College, McGill and Rutgers, doing graduate work in history and library science. He worked in libraries in Minnesota and Iowa throughout his career. A gifted photographer, Dennis seized every opportunity to travel; out of long stays in Paris came well-reviewed books co-written with his wife Christine, notably "Paris by Bistro," illustrated with his photographs. From those stays came close friendships on two continents. Photography was his passion, closely followed by deep interests shared with his wife; music - from the jazz piano of Bill Evans through Mozart - and antique collecting. He is survived by his wife Christine and many friends. Services at St. Clement's Episcopal Church to be announced.

*Published on April 10, 2022*

<https://www.startribune.com/obituaries/detail/0000422200/?fullname=dennis-erwin-graf>

## Chinese LibDems EGM Monday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Join us on Monday 27 June 2022 for our all-important EGM to adopt a new Constitution and to agree to become an Affiliated Organization of the Liberal Democrats under new party guidelines. It will not all be administrative proceedings as we will also be joined by a guest speaker, our Vice-President Amna Ahmed who will update us on her work championing diversity and inclusion within the party. The meeting is open to all Liberal Democrat members and supporters though only CLD members will be eligible to vote. Not too late to sign up as a member either! Please register to attend here.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/chinese-liberal-democrats-egm-tickets-363538422207>



# International Abstracts

## **Liberator 412**

Liberator 412 was dominated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Kiron Reid's prescient 2019 article on President Zelenskyy, Ukraine's Comedian President is no comic (*interLib* 2019-04 pages 14-15), was reprinted, along with an anonymous article - What you need to know about Ukraine. Carol Weaver's The Meaning of Z, which featured in *interLib* 2022-04 followed, with the argument broadened by Rebecca Tinsley's Russia's Götterdämmerung goes Global, focussing Russia continuing its Cold War links with dictators in the global south and their use of mercenaries to keep them in power. Andrew Edlin looks at who will benefit Stateside, in Who will Putin help in America? Commentary also looks at the Tory's financial ties to Russian oligarchs. Otherwise, Mark Pack seeks justification of the reduction in size of the Liberal Democrats' Federal Board, David Grace discusses Extinction Rebellion and direct-action tactics, and Sue Copper looks at Liberal Democrat & Green party cooperation in South Oxfordshire. There is an obituary of the late lamented Erland Watson.

## **Liberator 413**

Ukraine still prevails. Rose Stimson shares her problems (HMG) in trying to offer sanctuary to Ukrainian refugees. Iryna Barlit and Vladyslav Bandrovsky argue that the language problem of Russian speakers in Ukraine is an invented grievance. Phil Bennion looks at the war's disruption of the global food supply in When the Wheat Runs Out. Rupert Slade writes on the Hungarian elections, drawing parallels between Orban and the UK's Tories in Delusions of Grandeur on the Danube. Marianne Magnin's How Macron Won Again his re-election in France. Otherwise there is coverage of the UK's May elections, Partygate and British republicanism raises it's head for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

## **Journal of Liberal History, Issue 114 Spring 2022**

A special issue on the Liberal party and the American Civil War, is introduced by Eugenio Biagini. Duncan Andrew Campbell writes on the Palmerston government's policy; Mr. Punch, on the cover is most apposite, Shannon Westwood on John Bright's contribution and Tim Larsen on that of John Stuart Mill. Not Gladstone's best moment, as Tony Little reveals, but he admitted it, whilst Graham Lippiatt explores why William Shaw Lindsay and Lord Acton backed the Confederacy. Alastair Reid looks at the role of the British women's movement. A complex issue, and not of the first importance to British politicians at the time, the myths have built up and here, are competently challenged.

## **France**

Unpresidented, Arun Kapil. London Review of Books, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022

*Arun Kapil is an American political scientist at the Institut Catholique de Paris. His blog gives you the basis statistics of the recent elections in France.*

[https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2022/june/unpresidented?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=20220622blog&utm\\_content=20220622blog+CID\\_b6630c878758a04f5183901b0f47b970&utm\\_source=LRB%20email&utm\\_term=Read%20more](https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2022/june/unpresidented?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20220622blog&utm_content=20220622blog+CID_b6630c878758a04f5183901b0f47b970&utm_source=LRB%20email&utm_term=Read%20more)

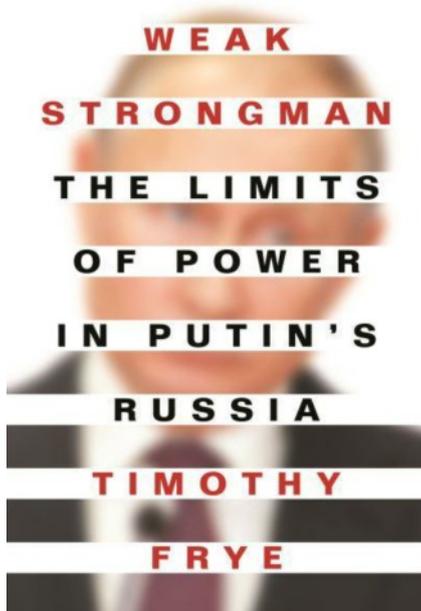
# reviews

**Weak Strongman: the limits of power in Putin's Russia, by Timothy Frye**  
Princeton, 2021 £20.00  
isbn 9780691212463

*"In democracies, we expect an informed public to guide policy makers and hold them accountable. This is not possible if the public holds opinions untethered from reality."* (p. vii)

In this quote Timothy Frye is referring to the American public's knowledge of Russia, but the statement could equally apply to a public's knowledge of its own government's policies and actions.

*Frye does not consider Russia to be a democracy – not even an illiberal one – and makes the above remark because he is concerned that American scholars and commentators living in a democracy need a deeper understanding of Russia.*



*Weak Strongman* (2021) is about President Vladimir Putin and the amount of personal power he has over Russia. It focuses on the domestic rather than on foreign policy though the two are intertwined. As with all academic books on politics, events will have moved on, though not usually as tragically as with the current invasion of Ukraine by the eponymous Putin. This is why the main value of the book is its theoretical content or its challenges to current ways of thinking about Russia.

Whilst Frye hopes this book will be more accessible to non-specialists by including many interesting anecdotes from his years spent in Russia, he includes both theory and challenges. He advances the premise that we can understand Russia and Putin more easily if we regard that country as an autocracy like many others and its leader as a weak strongman with associated constraints. By challenging what he regards as current US thought on the matter, he believes he can go down the comparative route, rather than regarding Russia as *sui generis*.

*For European liberal democrat readers in 2022, regarding Putin and some other leaders of authoritarian countries, as 'personalist autocrats' could well be the best takeaway from this book, which is well-written, relatively short and interesting to read.*

A 'personalist' autocracy is one which is dominated by one person, usually the leader, rather than by one party or the military. Examples of other such states could be Belarus, Turkey or Venezuela. Frye suggests we can even see it in Orbán's Hungary, a so-called democracy within the European Union. He posits that 'personalist' autocracies are less able to survive economic shocks than other types of autocracy and that they are usually more corrupt.

Something for us to take note of in the UK is Frye's fear that "as long standing democracies become increasingly dysfunctional and less attractive as a model", someone comes to power via a coup, rigged elections or populism then sets about dismantling any democracy by taking over the courts, the media and the legislatures. Opposition leaders are branded as foreign agents. Future elections are not *free and fair*.

Of course, no individual can do this alone, and strong institutions such as military, church or organised political groups could overthrow them when they reach power, so there is an incentive for the leader to keep them weak. In Russia, Putin has kept his inner circle and oligarchs competitive with each other. They are

replaceable if they cause problems. However, the *siloviki* (described by Frye as ‘members of the state security agencies’ but might include politicians arising from these) have great influence and help with repression of any opposition. But they often disagree with each other and have no leader other than Putin who has gradually built a ‘vertical of power’ with himself at the top.

So why then does Frye call him a ‘weak’ strongman? Is it because, although he can keep the elite under control to a large extent, this does not necessarily apply to the public, many of whom are willing to protest despite severe consequences? Is it because no-one believes in Putin’s promises of economic recovery any more or because the wealthy do not invest in Russia? Is it due to *Putin fatigue*?

His theory is that personalist autocrats need to constantly keep the balance, for example between pleasing elites and the public, also between having strong forces to oppress the public but not so strong they could overthrow him. Autocrats need popularity as well as a ‘big stick’ and Frye asserts that Putin’s popularity has been genuine although it sank to its lowest level in 2020. Previously, it was mainly based on the economy or rallying around the flag. The president benefitted from high oil prices and the low-risk annexation of Crimea. Now the future could be bleak.

Turning to foreign policy (FP), Russia is in a more unique position when compared to other autocracies for various reasons. Looking at history, including the time of the Tsars and the Soviet Union, Russia has always felt the need for military dominance in its neighbourhood and to keep its great power status. One constant in recent Russian FP is regarding the US and its allies (NATO) as a threat and, amongst Putin’s political advisors, hard-liners have ‘ruled the roost’ since Putin returned as president in 2012.

But autocratic rulers face difficult trade-offs in foreign policy as well as domestic policy. It is difficult to square an open economic policy with an assertive FP that benefits those who are against reform such as hard-line security agencies. One example of FP failure is how a divided Ukraine was brought together by their opposition to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. And whilst the Russian people were pleased with this event at the time, economic sanctions have been in place ever since and Ukraine was pushed towards the EU and NATO.

Behind the scenes, there is growing awareness that Putin will not stay on for ever and there is jockeying for influence due to this succession question. More importantly for us is that Russia should change the rules of the game rather than just the leader. We cannot assume that removing the leader will make things better. Personalist autocracies are more likely to choose another non-democratic regime. However, in Russia a generational change could give us more optimism as Russians are generally better educated and wealthier than in other autocracies.

So, in 2022, we can see that the limits of power in Putin’s Russia are currently being tested out. Russia and the rest of the world are being affected in many ways. In his Ukraine war of 2022, Putin has failed to keep the balances all personalist autocrats need to keep and there is an air of desperation in the extent of propaganda at home and the actions being taken in Ukraine.

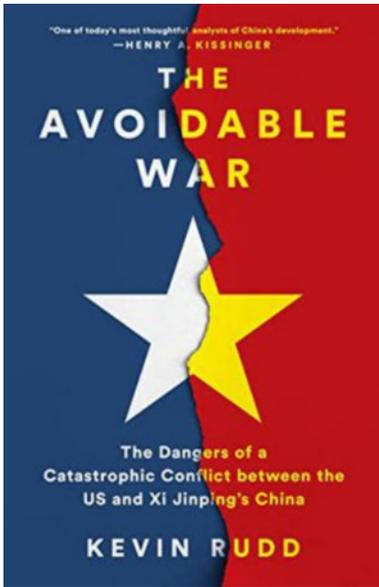
### ***Carol Weaver***

Dr Carol Weaver is the author of *The Politics of the Black Sea Region*, Ashgate, 2013.

**The Avoidable War: the dangers of a catastrophic conflict between the US and Xi Jinping’s China, by Kevin Rudd. Public Affairs 2022 £25.00 isbn 9781541701298**

As the title of the book suggests, the author believes meeting jaw to jaw would be far better than catastrophic conflict and war between the US and China. He also lays out in painstaking detail no less than 10 different scenarios, as a “cautionary guide” to policy makers navigating the dangerous waters in the decade ahead.

Would America have their Waterloo moment with China taking over Taiwan militarily or will it relive a new Korean stalemate with protracted military conflict and large-scale casualties on both sides? Of course, ideally China and the US could also find themselves within a new world order without the need for military



confrontation (Xi's Optimal Plan).

At an interview last month following the launch of his book in Washington, Rudd said that writing the book was like “giving birth to an elephant”. Indeed, the book is no light reading from a heavy weight Sinologist, former PM of Australia and current President and CEO of the Asia Society think tank. Yet I raced through the chapters without too much effort, finding the tone and style flowing and engaging. Rudd also managed to dissect complex issues into bite sized chapters, shedding light on China’s concentric circles of concern and influence.

The kernel that lies within the *first* concentric circle is of course the Chinese Communist Party and the politics of staying in power. Rightly or wrongly, Xi and the leadership believe that China needs strong central leadership lest it dissolves into bickering camps or breaks up like the Soviet Union had in 1991. With Xi Jinping thought now embedded in the Chinese Constitution

and the removal of 2 fixed terms of the Presidency, the next 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in the second half of 2022 is likely to deliver the result he wants.

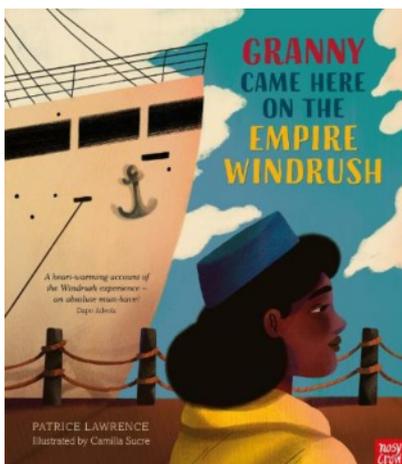
Other concentric circles panning out from the centre range from Ensuring Economic Prosperity (3<sup>rd</sup>) to Modernizing the Military (5<sup>th</sup>), to Managing China’s Neighbourhood (6<sup>th</sup>) and the Belt and Road Initiative (8<sup>th</sup>). It is not till the 9<sup>th</sup> Circle that China’s Strategy Towards Europe is mentioned in conjunction with Africa and Latin America.

The book was written before the invasion of Ukraine, so we lack Rudd’s insights as to how global perceptions would have shifted since this major intervening event. Nonetheless the theories and analysis still hold true in terms of the author’s recommendations that the global powers build a workable framework for “managed strategic competition” and multilateral diplomacy to achieve a balance of power and, ultimately, avert further conflict and war.

### Merlene Emerson

**Granny came here on the Empire Windrush, by Patrice Lawrence, illustrated by Camilla Sucre. Nosy Crow 2022 £7.99 isbn 9781839942310**

This book will bring tears to your eyes, not because you know of the evil that the Conservatives do to this day, as we have to live in the shame that they bring upon all of us with their racism. It will bring tears to your eyes because it is such a lovely story. Amy has to dress up as someone she admires for school the next day. Granny suggests Trinidadio Winifred Atwell – I wonder how many of you grooved to her *Coronation Rag* over the Platinum Jubilee? - Mary Seacoal and Rosa Parks, but Amy chooses to go as her Granny, who had come to England on the Empire Windrush. The story doesn’t pull any punches on the problems faced, if not the more recent ones, so helps with our wider understanding.



I couldn’t get the QR code to work, but look forward to hearing the story in a Trinidad tongue. The story is beyond the 2-5 range for self-reading, a 25-year-old with a Sun reading age might still enjoy One of Camilla Sucre’s excellent images intrigued me... as they are sailing towards England, one of the characters on the upper deck intrigued me – to one side in his overcoat, he is not part of the in-crowd, his eyes tell us that. Trinidad has been a multi-ethnic community since shortly after Columbus landed, the Francophone elements are clear in the text; perhaps of east Indian origin? A great book, it should be read beyond the Afro-Saxon community, though it is good to see them getting the books they deserve... on which subject... Pat Shaw, I’m still waiting for that Covid book that I told you to write.

**Stewart Rayment**