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INTERLIB

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Pigeons of Peace on the Royal Artillery Monument, Hyde Park Corner

The Syria Debate

Israel & Palestine

Ashraf Fayadh

EVENTS

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

8th February LIBG Forum: to be determined. NLC. 7.00pm

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

29th February Diplomatic reception. NLC

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

For bookings & other information please contact the Treasurer below.

NLC= National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE
Underground: Embankment

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UK Military Action in Syria

Parliament voted to extend British action against Islamic State from Iraq to Syria by 397 for to 223 against. Tim Farron had previously set 5 Tests for Liberal Democrat support of the government's motion. One of these, the UN Resolution 2249, is clearly met. There is some scepticism about the rest, but Farron feels that Cameron's answers were adequate. The French request for support was a further factor to consider.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington), Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland), Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam), Tim Farron

(Westmorland and Lonsdale), Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) and John Pugh (Southport) all voted for the motion.

Mark Williams (Ceredigion) and Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) voted against the motion.

A large, and vocal proportion of the Liberal Democrats' membership is not in line with most of their MPs. Public opinion is also split, perhaps more evenly; according to YouGov's poll 48% of voters approve, down from 59% last month.

The Liberal Democrat Position on Syria

Tim Farron

Tim Farron explains why he will be voting in favour of extending Britain's operations to allow airstrikes on ISIL in Syria.

When the government asked MPs to support military action in Syria against Assad in 2013, I refused to provide that support. I was not convinced our intervention would be effective, nor that it was fully backed by a diplomatic effort to establish a lasting peace, nor would it prevent more suffering than it caused.

In response to that deep-rooted scepticism last time I wrote to the Prime Minister last week, together with Nick Clegg, Paddy Ashdown, Ming Campbell, Kirsty Williams and Willie Rennie, setting out five principles against which the Liberal Democrats believe the case for military action should be based.

It is my judgement that, on balance, the five tests I set out have been met as best they can at this moment, and I will therefore be voting in favour of extending our operations to allow airstrikes on ISIL in Syria.

I have written in more length about how I have reached my decision below.

I am well aware that many in the party will disagree with me. I hope that, even if you cannot support me, you can support the approach I have taken, and recognise that I have taken this difficult decision after the fullest consideration.

ACTION AGAINST ISIL

Having considered the five principles I set out last week, having read the Foreign Affairs Select Committee report and the government's response, having listened to the Prime Minister's case for action, having listened to impassioned arguments for and against supporting military action from inside and outside the party, I am clear that this conflict is very different to Iraq in 2003 and I think it is important I explain why I believe that.

THE ILLEGAL WAR IN IRAQ

In 2003 a 'dodgy dossier' was used in an attempt to convince us that Saddam Hussein represented an imminent threat to international peace and security. In 2015 there is no dodgy dossier.

Instead, ISIL murdered 129 people on the streets of Paris. In restaurants, at a concert, on the pavement, those killed could just as easily have been here in Britain, in London, already a top target for ISIL.

This is before even considering how ISIL is threatening the security and stability of Iraq, a sovereign nation that has requested the help of the United Nations in protecting itself.

Unlike 2003, ISIL's evil is apparent to the world in the beheading of journalists and aid workers for a worldwide audience, the rape and enslavement of tens of thousands of women, the summary execution of gay men and women, its brutal occupation of vast tracts of Iraq and Syria, and the terrified exodus of humanity we see in refugee camps from Lebanon to Calais.

THE UNITED NATIONS

The role of the UN Security Council should matter to us. In 2003 it was impossible to secure support for a further UN resolution to legitimise action. It was the crux of our argument against the illegal Iraq war.

On this occasion, the UN Security Council has not simply supported a passive resolution, it has made an active call for action "to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria".

UNSCR2249 was passed with the support of France and without objection from Russia and China. As members of an internationalist party that has placed great store on the framework of international law established by the United Nations, I urge you to read the text of that resolution which can be found on pages 7 & 8.

I would also ask you to consider that Article 51 of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter provides countries with the right to take military action in collective self-defence.

Iraq has asked for help in defeating ISIL, now commanding its operations from Syria. Just earlier this month, ISIL launched a savage attack on our closest neighbour and ally in Europe. We know, too, that so far this year seven terrorist attacks by ISIL against the UK have been thwarted. ISIL is a direct threat to the UK, our allies and to international peace and security. We are being dishonest if, already engaged against ISIL in Iraq, we pretend that inaction now in Syria somehow makes us safer.

In 2003 there was the thinnest veneer of international support for action in Iraq. In 2015 there is a wide-ranging coalition of nations who are committed to the eradication of ISIL, including states from the region who understand the threat ISIL poses to their

security and stability. Those same nations recognise that it is crucial there is a strategy for Syria beyond air strikes.

In 2003 there was no thinking about the post-conflict situation in Iraq. The result was a disgraceful corporate free-for-all that paid no heed to Iraq's infrastructure and prioritised corporate greed ahead of reconstruction.

It is not just Iraq we should learn from. Similar criticisms have been levelled at the UK and her allies over Libya and Afghanistan. In 2015 we have a diplomatic process in the Vienna talks aimed at ensuring the world remains engaged with Syria through this period of conflict and beyond, supporting the Syrian people to rebuild in a post-ISIL, post-Assad Syria.

REFUGEES

Earlier this year I went to Calais. More recently I went to Lesbos. I saw young children exhausted and terrorised as they'd made the dangerous crossing across the Mediterranean. I heard through an interpreter a terrified seven year old boy's first words as he landed on the beach from his rickety life raft: 'Daddy, are ISIL here?'

I saw elderly women huddled beneath thin blankets as the evening came to the camp and the temperatures dropped below zero. I saw broken and desperate people who had witnessed horrific things in their own communities including the murder of loved ones. They pretty much all had one thing in common: they were fleeing for their lives from Syria and Iraq and in particular from ISIL.

So I came home from Lesbos and I angrily tore in to the Prime Minister for his callous refusal to take any of these desperate refugees. I proposed that we take three thousand orphaned refugees from the camps, and that the UK plays its full part by accepting Others. I am personally enormously moved and angry about the plight of these desperate people, who want nothing more than to return home to a Syria and Iraq that is safe and stable and where they can live the lives they wish to in their own country.

Airstrikes alone of course are not going to resolve the hugely complex political situation in Syria. But I am clear that unless something is done to remove ISIL from Syria, from where it is coordinating its actions, there is no hope of progress towards that goal of a safe and stable Syria. And there is no hope for a home for refugees to go back to.

CONCERNS

Of course I have tremendous concerns.

I have pressed these directly with the Prime Minister. I believe it is critical that the Gulf states are vocal in their condemnation of ISIL. I believe much, much more must be done to cut off the funding and supply routes for ISIL.

I think that we have not paid enough attention to the way in which extremists here in the UK have been funded.

It is imperative that everything possible is done to minimise the likelihood of civilian casualties.

I have been crystal clear that the future of Syria, after any action, must be at the forefront of the minds of all those asking for support for airstrikes, here in the UK and also amongst our international partners.

I realise, too, there is great uncertainty over the ability to command and control disparate ground forces which will be necessary to hold territory recaptured from ISIL inside Syria. All of these are reasons to question action.

None of them in and of themselves are reasons not to act.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

There is no doubt that military action means diplomatic failure, and the formation and spread of ISIL is the ultimate display of our failure as an international community over the last five years.

We cannot undo the mistakes of the past, but we have the chance now to take action against an organisation that cannot be reasoned with and that does not obey international borders.

There is no quick fix solution for dealing with ISIL, nor is there an easy route to peace and stability in Syria, and it would be wrong of me to pretend otherwise. The military action we are supporting is just one part of a long process that will be needed to make that happen.

I cannot promise you that this will succeed. What I can promise you is that in supporting this action, in no way am I giving my unreserved and uncritical support to the government.

I can promise you that we will be holding the government to account on their strategy that I will be ensuring that they continue to act in the national

interest and in the interests of the millions of Syrians and Iraqis who deserve a stable home in a peaceful country.

The Prime Minister has set out what I believe is a comprehensive motion which gives us the ability to take action against ISIL in Syria and also restates our commitment to a long term solution in Syria. Those of you who disagree with this decision may find little comfort in this, but it is my commitment to you as leader that if at any point these objectives are no longer possible I will not hesitate to withdraw support.

CONCLUSION

I am instinctively inclined towards peace. I am deeply sceptical of the ability of military action to achieve positive political outcomes. But I am not a pacifist. Just as I was proud to stand with Charles Kennedy against the illegal war in Iraq, so I was proud to stand with Paddy Ashdown as he was a lone voice calling for military intervention to stop the massacres in Bosnia and Kosovo.

As a Liberal Democrat I am an internationalist. I believe in acting collectively with our friends and allies, and in responding to threats to our security within a framework of international law. I believe that our decision-making should be governed by what we consider to be in the long-term interests of the UK.

I believe we should not take action without considering the long-term objectives of that action for Syria. And I believe we have a moral duty to the people living in the despair of Calais and Lesbos, who want a secure and stable future in Syria, to take the necessary steps to attempt to bring that about.

It is my judgement that, on balance, the five tests I set out have been met as best they can.

I believe it is right to support a measured, legal and broad-based international effort to tackle the evil regime that has helped trigger the wave of hundreds of thousands of desperate refugees, fleeing for their lives.

I will therefore be asking my parliamentary colleagues to join me in the lobby to support this motion. I am well aware, too, that many in the party will disagree with me. I hope that, even if you cannot support me, you can support the approach I have taken and recognise that I have taken this difficult decision after the fullest consideration.

Tim Farron

Why the Liberal Democrats backed action in Syria

Tim Farron

Last week I wrote to the Prime Minister, together with Nick Clegg, Paddy Ashdown, Ming Campbell, Kirsty Williams and Willie Rennie setting out five principles against which the Liberal Democrats believe the case for extension of military action against ISIL in Syria should be judged.

It is my judgement that, on balance, the five tests I set out have been met as best they can.

1. Legal

Military intervention must follow an international legal framework. We believe this has been provided by UN Resolution 2249 which urges members to take “all necessary measures” to defeat ISIL.

This is the instrument with which all those opposed to ISIL have the means to coordinate military action to defeat them, including regional actors on the ground.

CONCLUSION

UN resolution 2249 calls for all necessary measures to be taken to defeat ISIL. This is not a passive statement of approval, it is a clear call for all those who can act to do so. The core legal base cited by the Prime Minister in his response to the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) for UK military action in Syria is collective self defence of Iraq, with the individual self-defence of the UK and collective self-defence of other states as additional legal bases.

2. Wider diplomatic framework including efforts towards a no-bomb zone to protect civilians

Any military action by the UK must be part of a wider international effort involving all who have an interest in defeating ISIL, as a prelude to ending the conflict in Syria, including Russia, Iran and Turkey.

The UK Government should use all efforts to ensure that the Vienna talks succeed in bringing together the broadest possible support for action to end the war in Syria and effect political transition.

In addition, we call on the government to explicitly work towards ending the Syrian regime’s bombing

of civilians with a no-bomb zone to maximise civilian protection and allow for an upscaling of humanitarian access.

CONCLUSION

The Government motion clearly places this military action within the broader strategy of bringing peace to Syria. And in his comments the Prime Minister has made a strong effort to stress that his plans are part of a wide diplomatic framework which seeks to ultimately destroy ISIL and ensure political transition and an end to the war in Syria.

The key countries that are needed for this to happen are involved- either in the Vienna talks, in the fight against ISIL, or in both.

Civilian protection is the ultimate aim of a ceasefire, which is clearly stated as an aim in the motion. We call for a stronger commitment to this as part of the Vienna talks, but we believe that the plan outlined in the talks is currently the best platform on which civilian protection can be delivered.

3. UK led pressure on Gulf States for increased support in the region

The UK should lead a concerted international effort to put pressure on the Gulf States, specifically Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, to stop the funding of jihadi groups within the region and worldwide and do much more to assist in the effort to defeat ISIL, establish peace in Syria and help with the refugee situation. They are currently doing very little, despite claiming to be part of the anti-ISIL coalition.

ISIL is not just a Western problem, and this is one way of preventing them from framing the situation in that way.

CONCLUSION

The UK government has confirmed the support of the key regional states

We call on the government to pressure all regional states to be more vocal in their support of the aims of the coalition and in their condemnation of ISIL.

The Government's motion commits to cutting "ISIL's sources of finance, fighters and weapons" but we believe more needs to be said about the role of specific states on this, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and will be pressing for further action from the Government on this.

4. Post-ISIL plan

The government must be absolutely clear on what Syria and Iraq will look like post-ISIL, and what post-conflict strategy (including an exit strategy) they propose to give the best chance of avoiding a power vacuum. This must be linked to the above diplomatic framework which will outline steps for ending the wider conflict in Syria.

CONCLUSION

There is significant detail in the statement and the response on how the UK is part of various initiatives to ensure a comprehensive reconstruction in post-war Syria.

The Government has pledged at least £1 billion to go towards reconstruction, and we welcome the planned conference for the discussion on this in London in February

Critically, the Prime Minister has stressed that they will not repeat the mistakes of Iraq and will not attempt any dismantling of the Syrian state, nor will they use foreign funding to support international corporations to replace any state institutions

The Vienna talks are currently proposing a transitional government without Assad to be established in the first six months of 2016, following by elections within the next 18 months.

5. Domestic

We acknowledge that the fight against ISIL is not just in the Middle East: it is within Europe and it is here in the UK. We call on the government to immediately publish its 2014 investigation into the Muslim Brotherhood and also call on them to conduct an investigation into foreign funding and support of extremist and terrorist groups in the UK

We call on the government to step up its acceptance of Syrian refugees, and opt in to Save the Children's proposal to re-home 3000 unaccompanied refugee children from with Europe.

CONCLUSION

The Prime Minister has confirmed that the Muslim Brotherhood report will be published in the next two weeks, and has agreed to commission a wider report into the funding of jihadi groups in the UK.

The government has also agreed to look carefully at the proposals to take 3000 unaccompanied children from within Europe, which is a big step, given they previously wouldn't even accept that there were unaccompanied children.

Tim Farron

Tim Farron's statements of 1st December 2015 are taken from the Liberal Democrat website.

UN Resolution 2249

The full text of resolution 2249 (2015) reads as follows:

"The Security Council,
"Reaffirming its resolutions 1267 (1999), 1368 (2001), 1373 (2001), 1618 (2005), 1624 (2005), 2083 (2012), 2129 (2013), 2133 (2014), 2161 (2014), 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2195 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2214 (2015), and its relevant presidential statements,

"Reaffirming the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations,
"Reaffirming its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and unity of all States in accordance with purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter,

"Reaffirming that terrorism in all forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations, whenever and by whomsoever committed,

"Determining that, by its violent extremist ideology, its terrorist acts, its continued gross systematic and widespread attacks directed against civilians, abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, including those driven on religious or ethnic ground, its eradication of cultural heritage and trafficking of cultural property, but also its control over significant parts and natural resources across Iraq and Syria and its recruitment and training of foreign terrorist fighters whose threat

affects all regions and Member States, even those far from conflict zones, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh), constitutes a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security,

“*Recalling* that the Al-Nusrah Front (ANF) and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida also constitute a threat to international peace and security,

“*Determined* to combat by all means this unprecedented threat to international peace and security,

“*Noting* the letters dated 25 June 2014 and 20 September 2014 from the Iraqi authorities which state that Da'esh has established a safe haven outside Iraq's borders that is a direct threat to the security of the Iraqi people and territory,

“*Reaffirming* that Member States must ensure that any measures taken to combat terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law;

“*Reiterating* that the situation will continue to deteriorate further in the absence of a political solution to the Syria conflict and *emphasizing* the need to implement the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 endorsed as Annex II of its resolution 2118 (2013), the joint statement on the outcome of the multilateral talks on Syria in Vienna of 30 October 2015 and the statement of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) of 14 November 2015,

“1. *Unequivocally condemns* in the strongest terms the horrifying terrorist attacks perpetrated by ISIL also known as Da'esh which took place on 26 June 2015 in Sousse, on 10 October 2015 in Ankara, on 31 October 2015 over Sinai, on 12 November 2015 in Beirut and on 13 November 2015 in Paris, and all other attacks perpetrated by ISIL also known as Da'esh, including hostage-taking and killing, and *notes* it has the capability and intention to carry out further attacks and *regards* all such acts of terrorism as a threat to peace and security;

“2. *Expresses* its deepest sympathy and condolences to the victims and their families and to the people and Governments of Tunisia, Turkey, Russian Federation, Lebanon and France, and to all Governments whose citizens were targeted in the above mentioned attacks and all other victims of terrorism;

“3. *Condemns* also in the strongest terms the continued gross, systematic and widespread abuses of human rights and violations of humanitarian law, as well as barbaric acts of destruction and looting of cultural heritage carried out by ISIL also known as Da'esh;

“4. *Reaffirms* that those responsible for committing or otherwise responsible for terrorist acts, violations of international humanitarian law or violations or abuses of human rights must be held accountable;

“5. *Calls 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-Qaida, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the United Nations Security Council, and as may further be agreed by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and endorsed by the UN Security Council, pursuant to the statement of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) of 14 November, and to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria;

“6. *Urges* Member States to intensify their efforts to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Iraq and Syria and to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism, and urges all Members States to continue to fully implement the above-mentioned resolutions;

“7. *Expresses* its intention to swiftly update the 1267 committee sanctions list in order to better reflect the threat posed by ISIL also known as Da'esh;

“8. *Decides* to remain seized of the matter.”

Nick Clegg

Nick Clegg highlighted the importance in making up his mind of the fact that France asked for help:

“*[France] are an incredibly important ally of ours. If that had happened in London and we asked the French, I think we would want the French to try and help us out as one of our closest, nearest neighbours.*”

Greg Mulholland and the Government's Motion

I am clear that this is not about “bombing Syria” or even just about dropping a few bombs on ISIS/Daesh targets. I agree that alone would not do much to alter either their position or the civil war. The actual motion we are voting on is not “should we bomb Syria”, it is a commitment by the United Kingdom to be part of – and play a full part in – an international wider diplomatic and military solution, so it is wrong to misrepresent what we are voting on. The actual motion MPs will be voting on is:

“That this House notes that ISIL poses a direct threat to the United Kingdom; welcomes United Nations Security Council Resolution 2249 which determines that ISIL constitutes an ‘unprecedented threat to international peace and security’ and calls on states to take ‘all necessary measures’ to prevent terrorist acts by ISIL and to ‘eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria’; further notes the clear legal basis to defend the UK and our allies in accordance with the UN Charter; notes that military action against ISIL is only one component of a broader strategy to bring peace and stability to Syria; welcomes the renewed impetus behind the Vienna talks on a ceasefire and political settlement; welcomes the Government’s continuing commitment to providing humanitarian support to Syrian refugees; underlines the importance of planning for post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction in Syria; welcomes the Government’s continued determination to cut ISIL’s sources of finance, fighters and weapons; notes the requests from France, the US and regional allies for UK military assistance; acknowledges the importance of seeking to avoid civilian casualties, using the UK’s particular capabilities; notes the Government will not deploy UK troops in ground combat operations; welcomes the Government’s commitment to provide quarterly progress reports to the House; and accordingly supports Her Majesty’s Government in taking military action, specifically airstrikes, exclusively against ISIL in Syria; and offers its wholehearted support to Her Majesty’s Armed Forces .”...

Of course I understand the concern and the views of those who say we should not extend our military involvement in Iraq to Syria. However I have heard no realistic alternative strategy of how we take on this monstrous anti-democratic, murderous and grotesquely intolerant, illiberal force. So in the end, I am voting to support concerted action rather than doing nothing, because doing nothing will not stop ISIL/Daesh and stop them we must.

Norman Lamb MP: Statement on military action in Syria

It was with a heavy heart that I took the decision to vote against air strikes in Syria.

In the so-called Islamic State, or Da’esh, we face the greatest threat to peace and democracy in our time. The atrocious attacks in Paris confirmed that this terrorist organisation is not constrained by any shred of mercy, humanity, or reason. Its sole barbaric aim is to perpetuate a state of chaos and fear through indiscriminate murder. It must be confronted, and it must be defeated. I am as committed as anyone to achieving this.

At the outset of yesterday’s debate in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister was absolutely right to emphasise that the question is not about whether we fight terrorism, but about how best we do that.

This week, I attended a high-level briefing for Privy Councillors on the merits of extending strike action across the border from Iraq to Syria. I have also read the key documents including the report by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee and the Prime Minister’s response.

Yesterday’s debate was measured and well-reasoned on both sides of the House.

I do not have the certainty on this highly complex dilemma that some people profess, and I readily admit that this was one of the toughest decisions I have had to make as a Member of Parliament. I listened closely and weighed up the evidence at length, as I believe every MP has a duty to do on matters of such profound national and international importance. The arguments in favour of military intervention were persuasive. The question was whether bombing from the air made sense. Many of you will be aware that the majority of Liberal Democrat MPs voted in support of the Government’s plans, and I respect the view taken by my colleagues.

In the end, I was not convinced by the Government’s case. With the absence of ground forces and no clear long-term plan, there are serious doubts about whether air strikes will be effective as a means of degrading Da’esh. My belief is that this old-fashioned and blunt instrument is not an appropriate response to a new and sophisticated threat. The force we seek to combat is dispersed in a civilian population, clandestine, and difficult to target with air strikes.

A bombing campaign is extremely likely to lead to large numbers of civilian deaths, greater instability in the region, and fuel the radicalisation of young people in a vulnerable population. These factors tie in with the apocalyptic narrative and recruitment strategy of Da'esh. Critically, I could not be confident that the kind of action proposed by the Government would make people safer at home or in Syria.

I am not a pacifist: I firmly believe we must take decisive action to eliminate terrorism. But I concluded that this step was not the answer we need. The House reached a different conclusion, which I respect, and I fully back our military personnel who risk their lives on active service in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the battle against terrorism.

Norman Lamb

LDV Members' Survey on Syria – 67% oppose airstrikes now BUT... (and it's a big but...)

By Caron Lindsay Mon 30th November 2015 - 6:59 PM

Lib Dem Voice has polled our members-only forum to discover what Lib Dem members think about whether Liberal Democrat Mps should support air strikes against Daesh in Syria. 975 party members responded – thank you – and we're publishing the full results.

We wanted to test feeling in the party about whether and in what circumstances members would back airstrikes in Syria. Over two thirds said that they would oppose them in current circumstances, with less than a quarter in favour. However, when we looked at a Syria where there was a real post war plan, or a more coherent army of ground forces to support, that changed radically, with most members who expressed a preference supporting using UK air power to defeat Daesh. Only 10.7% of people agreed that we should never back airstrikes, with 75% answering “no” to that question.

There is very strong backing for Tim Farron's Five Tests, with two thirds of members saying that they were “about right.”

Here are the answers in full:

Do you think that Liberal Democrat MPs should vote to back UK airstrikes in Syria in the following circumstances:

Before a wider solution to the Syrian Civil War is in place (ie now)

Yes 24.31%

No 67.18%

Don't know 8.51%

As part of an agreement with other states to end the war

Yes 56.51%

No 31.28%

Don't know 12.21%

Only to support a wide coalition of ground troops

Yes 46.46%

No 35.28%

Don't know 18.26%

Never

Yes 10.67%

No 75.28%

Don't know 14.05%

Do you agree with the Five Tests outlined by Tim Farron and others as preconditions for Liberal Democrat support?

Too strong/too high a bar 9.95%

About right 66.56%

To weak/too low a bar 17.23%

Don't know 6.26%

Please indicate whether you agree with the following statements (tick all that apply)

We should be doing more to support the rebels 30.15%

Assad is the better of two evils 22.36%

Taking action in Syria will reduce 'jihadi terrorism' with Europe 16.41%

As the rest of the world is taking action we shouldn't stand back 27.18%

UK involvement, particularly the use of the Brimstone missile, will make airstrikes more effective and minimise civilian casualties 27.79%

There are insufficient measures to protect civilians 54.46% (Interestingly, when you look at the responses of women alone, this rises to 74%)

At present, there is little evidence that the various factions fighting in Syria could be brought together to make a coherent state. 75.59%

We wanted to find out what people felt about previous British military interventions:

Do you think the following UK military interventions were justified in hindsight?

Iraq 1 / Kuwait

Yes 69.33%

No 20%

Don't know 10.67%

Iraq 2

Yes 3.49%

No 91.38%

Don't know 5.13%

Bosnia

Yes 84.31%

No 5.54%

Don't know 10.15%

Kosovo

Yes 82.05%

No 6.05%

Don't know 11.9%

Libya

Yes 26.46%

No 56.10%

Don't know 17.44%

In 2011, when we asked members whether they supported these airstrikes, 73% were in favour. At that time, Ghadaffi had basically told Benghazi's people

that they were coming after them and it felt like there was a very urgent, humanitarian need for intervention. Nick Clegg said on 21st November that he regretted not doing more to secure the peace once Ghadaffi had gone.

Airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq

Yes 50.46%

No 27.38%

Don't know 22.15%

Would attacks on Assad have been justified in 2013?

Yes 29.23%

No 51.9%

Don't know 18.87%

In 2013, just before the parliamentary vote during which the government's proposal was defeated, our members were similarly nuanced in their response as they are today.

So what does all this mean?

While members are opposed to military action under current circumstances, it seems that if things changed so that there was more chance of a coherent post Daesh plan and clear international commitment to deliver that, and if there was a co-ordinated ground effort, members would be much happier about backing action. If Tim Farron and the MPs were to decide to back military action, they would have to convince members that those things were more likely.

What happens now?

The parliamentary parties are having a joint meeting tonight. With the vote on Wednesday, we are unlikely to have long to wait to find out what choices they have made. They will have to be extremely sensitive about the way in which they communicate their decision to the party, giving a detailed assessment on whether each of the five tests have been met.

Given that only a slim majority of members back military action in limited circumstances, that leaves a large proportion who don't. Whichever way he goes, Tim Farron will have a significant group of people to reassure. This will be the first serious test of his undoubted communication skills since he became leader in July. He's been enjoying a bit of an extended honeymoon as he has pushed the government hard on refugees, visiting Calais and Lesvos, he's spoken

with great passion and knowledge on housing and he has made some cracking speeches that have warmed members' hearts. Whatever decision he makes now will upset some people. It'll be interesting to see how he handles that.

- *2,200+ Lib Dem paid-up party members are registered with LibDemVoice.org. 975 completed the latest survey, which was conducted on 29th and 30th November 2015*
- *Please note: we make no claims that the survey is fully representative of the Lib Dem membership as a whole. The surveys are, though, the largest independent samples of the views of Lib Dem members across the country.*
- *We have been able to test the LibDemVoice surveys against actual results on a handful of occasions. It correctly forecast the special Lib Dem conference would overwhelmingly approve the Coalition Agreement in May 2010. In the 2008 and 2010 elections for Lib Dem party president, it correctly predicted the winner. However, in the 2014 election it didn't.*
- *The full archive of our members' surveys can be viewed at www.libdemvoice.org/category/ldv-members-poll*

* *Caron Lindsay is Editor of Liberal Democrat Voice*

So: What do we do about Da'esh? Steve Yolland



Our "Collateral Damage Is People" t shirt is consistently one of our most popular.

As readers of my blog know, we are profoundly against the current bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria, believing that the cost in innocent civilian casualties will be too high. We have long raged against the sanitisation of civilian casualties being sanitised as "Collateral Damage". Collateral Damage is people, as the t-shirt says.

But everyone with half a brain supports preventing Da'esh from behaving as they do. And people often ask, quite reasonably, "What else can be done besides bombing them?"

Well, there are no neat solutions, but here are some we should surely consider:

Stop selling arms and ammunition to Da'esh – and to those who on-supply them to them. If we starve the group of armaments then they will find it harder to terrify their local population, and eventually become much easier to defeat with local forces.

The problem with this solution is we are not entirely sure who IS arming Da'esh. Certainly they have some heritage armaments supplied to them by the West when they were fighting Assad and before they morphed into what they are now. These may have been supplied to them directly, or to other rebel groups that they have since defeated or subsumed. They may have been supplied through Saudi Arabia. The study by the London-based small-arms research organisation Conflict Armament Research documented weapons seized by Kurdish forces from militants in Iraq and Syria over a 10-day period in July. The report said the militants disposed of "significant quantities" of US-made small arms including M16 assault rifles. It also included photos showing the markings "Property of US Govt."

The report further found that anti-tank rockets used by Da'esh in Syria were "identical to M79 rockets transferred by Saudi Arabia to forces operating under the so-called "Free Syrian Army" umbrella in 2013.

Iraqi Army soldiers fleeing Da'esh attacks literally dropped most of their weapons. These weapons have now become part of the Da'esh arsenal. The largely Shia soldiers were not well trained by US, and this duly led to their wholesale retreat from the rampant Sunni Da'esh. Clearly, local forces need to be better trained, and above all armaments must not be allowed to fall into Da'esh hands.

Lastly, criminal gangs of armament suppliers are illegally supplying Da'esh with weaponry. A much

more concerted effort needs to be made to cut off this supply chain and prosecute those involved.

Cut off their financial support. Da'esh receives money from a variety of sources in the Arab world, even from Western allies such as Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. This is because these countries see them as a bulwark against Shia influence in the region, specifically Iran. This financial support is not official, but nor is it officially interdicted effectively. Heavily leaning on our "allies" to stop having a bet each way as far as Da'esh is concerned is long overdue.

There have been continual allegations that countries such as Turkey are profiting from an illegal trade in Da'esh-controlled oil. (Which is why the first UK bombing attack was on an oil field.) It should also be noted Turkey denies these criticisms. But Da'esh is selling their oil to someone ... and that trade needs to be interdicted urgently.

But the simple fact is that many of the things we find so objectionable about Da'esh – the subjugation of women, cruel executions for things we do not consider crimes, and a badly organised and chaotic legal system – are also features of much of the rest of the Arab world. Little wonder they do not seem as distressed about those matters as the West is.

Make the price of our trade and engagement with the Arab world that they take concrete and meaningful steps to sort out their own differences. The Sunni v Shia conflict is a very old one. It flares up, it flares down. Yet Sunni and Shia Muslims have lived peacefully together for centuries. In many countries it has become common for members of the two sects to intermarry and pray at the same mosques. They share faith in the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed's sayings and perform similar prayers, although they differ in rituals and interpretation of Islamic law.

As the Council on Foreign relations said:

Islam's schism, simmering for fourteen centuries, doesn't explain all the political, economic, and geo-strategic factors involved in these conflicts, but it has become one prism through which to understand the underlying tensions. Two countries that compete for the leadership of Islam, Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran, have used the sectarian divide to further their

ambitions. How their rivalry is settled will likely shape the political balance between Sunnis and Shias and the future of the region, especially in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen.

The dispute is currently in a "hot" phase, largely driven by the Wahhabist philosophy that has held sway in certain parts of the Sunni Middle East since the 19th century, exported by Saudi Arabia.

We need to make it clear that we expect the Arab world to sort its own troubles out. That will not happen while we are always half-pregnant as regards military involvement in the region, veering from full-blown invasions to dropping a few bombs from on high.

We also need to make it clear that we will not engage, as if they are the same as our estimation of a state, with any state that places religious belief or theocracy above basic civil rights. So, for example, we would maintain cool but not aggressive relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia and so on until they internally reform and cease their mutual jaw-boning.

If the Arab world wants to live in a medieval manner and a semi-permanent state of conflict then that's

their business. We will simply wait it out as best we can. Eventually, all conflicts exhaust themselves. Developing our own energy independence – as the USA has done – and improving our investment in non-fossil fuel technologies would be a good start. What is certain as of today is that Da'esh wishes us to bomb them, knows that we will slaughter civilians – gay and straight – in the process, and that we could do nothing better to help them recruit and maintain control in their areas. There are other courses of action, even though they might be complex, more difficult to organise, and slower to take effect.

Nevertheless, they deserve serious consideration.

Please consider these arguments as you see Western bombs raining down on innocent civilians, or witness the next terrorist outrage on Western soil. We are being conned. By Da'esh, by the countries of the region, and by our own short-sighted and incompetent political leadership.

Steve Yolland

<http://wellthisiswhatithink.com/2015/12/04/so-what-do-we-do-about-daesh/>

Extending Air Strikes to Syria; Should the Lib Dems have voted No?

Phil Bennion

A week before the House of Commons was asked to vote on extending air strikes to Syria, I was involved in a fierce debate with our European sister parties on the same issue at ALDE Congress in Budapest. The draft resolution presented to us was exceedingly bellicose with no mention of using diplomatic effort alongside military means. I got together with Paul Reynolds, an expert in international politics, to thresh out our position on the day before the vote. Paul was both trenchant and dogged during the debate and between us we were able to impress on our allies the importance of diplomatic efforts, not with Islamic State, but with all of the other players. This will not be a simple task. However the resolution was right in saying that IS would only be defeated militarily. It is not going to come to the negotiating table.

After the vote Tim Farron appeared on Russell Howard's Good News and explained the vote saying that IS are about the most evil bunch of people since the Nazis and we could not stand by and do nothing. Not the most nuanced statement, but appropriate for the audience. Tim has also told me that he sees IS as a millenarian movement engaged in a final showdown with the forces of Rome. This is largely true. They seek a global Islamic caliphate, a theocracy that demands absolute obedience to a religious leader. Democracy is part of the western decadent culture that has to be destroyed. Movements of this nature depend on continual momentum for their success. If their invincibility starts to look shaky, they could crumble very quickly. Many Liberal Democrats I have spoken with point out that other radical terrorist groups will spring up in their place if they are defeated. Of course this is true, but IS is a different beast. It holds territory as a base, has a military force and is seeking to extend the area it controls and its activities worldwide.

So what is the nature of the diplomatic task and is it making sufficient progress to pass the test? Firstly it is important to convince Turkey to play an unequivocal role in the alliance. The ending of the ceasefire with the PKK earlier in the year has made this difficult. Turkey has been attacking Kurdish camps in Syria and Iraq and thereby hampering the ground war against Islamic State. This week, however, talks

between Erdogan and both the Iraqi federal government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) have taken place in Ankara and I am told by the latter that progress has been made. This is important because Turkey is training local militias in the Mosul area and the KRG Peshmerga are engaged militarily in pushing back IS forces in the same area. Turkey is still at loggerheads with the Russians as well as failing to accept Kurdish forces in Syria as allies. The Russians are still attacking anyone who stands in the way of the Assad regime, even if they are effective against IS. Putin will be an unreliable ally as he has different outcomes in mind. He will also take any opportunity to score points against "The West". The Iranians and their local partners need to understand that anti IS Sunnis can be part of the alliance. The UK, US and France must put heavy pressure on the Saudis and some other Gulf States to close off supplies to and oil outlets for IS to squeeze its ability to buy arms and pay its militias.

Clearly there is a long way to go, but some of the Vienna process deserves support and some of these aims will not be achieved quickly. I know that the level of progress has been for many Liberal Democrats a defining factor on the way they would have voted had they been MPs. Many in the "No" camp feel that insufficient progress has been made. I tend to agree, but unfortunately we were not in control of the timing of the vote. Would "on balance, NO at this point" have been a sensible vote given that Cameron probably had his majority in any case? If he had not got a majority there would certainly have been leverage here to push the Vienna process harder and to delay the vote by a few weeks. Such a delay would also have given Lib Dem members more time to come to terms with the possibility of a YES vote, as well as more time for the alliance to solidify.

The Test concerning Safe Zones has certainly not been met, but it is problematic. In advance of pushing Islamic State out of large areas of territory, it is difficult to ascertain where in Syria they can be. Turkey has proposed one in the Turkish speaking areas near their border, but is this just a pretext for annexation? Turkey has too much interest in the Kurdish Region, and Russia has its air force operating across the area held by the regime as well

as attacking the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in the areas it holds. This will mean different members of the alliance enforcing no fly zones against each other. More specifically, NATO will need to enforce against Russian planes, not just Assad's planes. Tim Farron's response to my question here was less convincing. Indeed the whole of Syria needs to be a "safe zone" in due course, but if they can only be created following a successful campaign to defeat IS, they can surely not be a prerequisite for mounting such a campaign.

Are there credible ground forces for our air power to support? Yes but not in Syria. The KRG Peshmerga are asking for both heavy weapons and air support to deliver the ground campaign against IS. They are actively trying to cut the IS held territory in two by cutting the road from Mosul to Raqqa. It seems that Turkey is now being more helpful in this effort and Iraqi federal forces are still fighting. In Syria itself the FSA is under pressure from both the Regime and the Russians and it will be highly risky to give them any air support. Again there is too much risk of NATO and Russian planes confronting each other. However, the ground forces in Iraq will need support if they cross into Syria. Tim Farron rightly points out that the non-Assad ground forces are diminishing and delaying could see them weaken further. Many I have spoken to believe that NATO will end up having to put in some ground forces at some point.

My own main level of scepticism was that air strikes would not be limited to strategic targeting of supply lines and support of allied ground forces. Experience tells us that authorisation to use air strikes does not necessarily mean that they will be used judiciously. It will not take many schools, hospitals or wedding parties to be hit to discredit their use entirely. Had I been in Parliament myself, I would have been seeking strong assurances along the lines of limitations. Bombing residential areas in towns like Raqqa will not deliver anything other than increased radicalisation in Muslim communities across the world. Tim has given an undertaking to hold the government to account on this and other facets of the engagement at the quarterly parliamentary reviews of the action. However, I am still not ready to trust either our government or our military strategists to show appropriate restraint.

Is the action legal? I have consulted (Lord) Jonathan Marks on this question. The UN Resolution 2249 calls for governments to "take all necessary measures within International Law" to defeat Islamic State, but also calls for a diplomatic process and political tran-

sition to a new government. However it does not invoke article 7 so is not explicit how this should be done. It leaves a risk of accidental conflict between Russia and NATO. In this sense those Lib Dem party members who equate the action with the Iraq War need to re-assess. As Jonathan said concerning military intervention "If not now, when?" The resolution was unanimous, but Russia has a very different endgame in mind to the rest of the Security Council members. The Russians aim is to restore the whole of Syria to the Assad regime, whereas all others see no long term role for Assad in the political process. This is of course poses a risk that unresolved, this difference of opinion could lead to confrontation between Russia and NATO as the endgame nears. It is of vital importance that this question is not left until the last minute and that diplomatic efforts are intensified to convince the Russians that Assad cannot be left to rule over Syria after the conflict. Neither the moderate Sunnis we need to engage nor the Kurds would be happy with this outcome.

The case for voting "YES" was also strengthened by the European context. Tim Farron and Jonathan Marks both told me that France invoking the EU's mutual defence clause was very important. Germany is even sending ground personnel, even though non-combatant, and a number of other EU states are responding in the same way as the UK. As one of the two major military powers in the EU, the mutual defence agreement is meaningless if either the UK or France were to ignore it. My own view is that it is vital for the security of Europe vis-a-vis Putin's Russia that the clause has credibility. The Baltic States rely on it.

Finally what are the political consequences of the vote? I spoke to Teena Lashmore to get her view from the streets of less well-off urban Britain. She tells me that people cannot understand how the government can suddenly find money for a military adventure when it is in the midst of an austerity drive that threatens public services. She tells me that there is a strong feeling against the vote in the BME communities of London. I am aware of similar feelings in Birmingham. She also points out that there had been no information justifying the decision, such as what efforts are being made to cut off finances and oil sales by Islamic State/Daesh, cut off their arms supplies and also to help get more of the poor out of Syria before we attack. She also said that Lib Dems in her area were presuming that the party's MPs would vote NO, so more should have been done to explain why the thinking was changing.

However, perceptions differ across the country and in different settings. Lib Dems in rural areas and smaller towns may take a more robust view of military action. My own local party discussed it at their “Pub Monday” last night and were in favour of the YES vote.

I also spoke to Gareth Epps, who was even less convinced than myself on the substantive issue of the vote itself, and highly critical of how the party has dealt with it. I will quote Gareth directly:

“Many people are asking what the point of the Liberal Democrats is after most of the rump of Lib Dem MPs agreed to vote to prop up David Cameron's latest attempt to bomb Syria. As a Liberator Collective colleague put it.... 'I have no idea where to start - I fluctuate from anger to despair. Even if you put the arguments about Syria themselves to one side...'. And on the basis of the tests by which the Lib Dems said they would decide whether or not to back air strikes in Syria, they have absolutely not been met. In particular, there is no post-Da'esh plan that would even fill the back of a fag packet, and no sign of British efforts to lead an international diplomatic consensus.

Tim Farron and Nick Clegg have changed their tune in barely two months. Take Clegg (no - please, please do.) In October he wrote in the Evening Standard that 'dropping bombs on a country without a workable military approach on the ground made little strategic sense. On the substance on which we based our collective decision in 2014, nothing has changed. If anything, the evolving circumstances make air strikes less justified. All there is on the ground in Syria is chaos, blood and anger. We would simply be throwing more bombs into a furnace.....playing catch-up with other people's bombing raids is hardly the most effective way of doing so.' Now he jumped the gun on the whole party (wrongly in terms of Norman Lamb and Mark Williams, it turned out) by blurting out to Sky that it would back the Tories, as if he were still leader. I am told that colleagues were furious. My response is that his behaviour is at least consistent for him.

The damage to the Liberal Democrats, however, is political. An all-member email (the only form of communication unless you read Lib Dem Voice) failed to send to a large number of members due to an error at HQ. Unlike previous sensitive situations, the elected party committees weren't communicated with at all. It took a motion from me to redress that situation; but too late for a large number of people

who have resigned from the party. That number may still include me”

Gareth's anger is almost tangible. Whereas I agree with him entirely that failure to consult the relevant committees (Federal Policy Committee and International Relations Committee) was a serious failure, most of the substantive arguments are balanced. Having said thus, we elect our MPs to make their own decisions; they do not have to seek a mandate from party members and activists on their voting intentions. I agree that the Tests have not been met, but I have already argued that some of the Tests were framed such that they could only be met post-conflict. Is there a credible diplomatic effort from the UK to find a consensus; probably not led by the UK but the Vienna process moves forward. The Liberal Democrats have been talking with allies such as our sister party in the Kurdish Regional Government to make some sense of what is happening on the ground. There are credible ground forces that we can support, although not yet active in Syria. Other ground forces in Syria such as the Kurds, FSA and other allies may be freed up by negotiation with the Russians and the Assad regime. They are begging us for help. The Iraqi government has invited both NATO (US/UK) as well as Russian forces to come to its aid. Is there a post conflict plan? Certainly not one that the Russians will yet sign up to. The Russians will play cat and mouse with the west for political reasons. My view is that we will simply have to keep pressing on this. If a single plan that all agree is a prerequisite, then we either have to accept the Russian plan, or stay out, as the Russians will not yet accept ours. By making this condition we effectively give the Russians a veto over our engagement. It will take time, but the French believe that the Russians will eventually come around to the idea of a Syria without Assad, as long as they retain influence with the successor regime.

There would also have been political damage from a NO vote. Despite a clear UN mandate and our historical responsibility for the political geography of the Middle East and despite the invocation of the EU mutual defence pact, we would have voted against action. We could easily have been painted as pacifists.

How do we sum up? Were the Lib Dem Tests met? Certainly not, but progress was and still is being made. We have to understand that the tests were a useful political device to obtain assurances and we should not be pedantic in assessing how far they have been met. Certainly the timing of the vote

seemed rushed, but that was only in Cameron's gift. He feared losing the opportunity to get the vote through. In my view the vote was premature and more evidence was needed on diplomatic progress and credible allies on the ground. Much has emerged in this respect since the vote. All three political parties were split on the issue, even the Tories, whose parochial nationalist wing were always going to vote against. It was a judgement that had to be made on balance, so Liberal Democrats should not be resigning from the party over this. We are not a pacifist party and indeed, most that were against the vote were so on qualified rather than absolute grounds. In other words, the case for the vote was not adequately made. There will be no resignations in the Tory and Labour parties due to their internal splits on this issue. For myself I would have needed stronger assurances on the limitations of the strikes to vote YES, but that may have been achieved, or I may have been convinced by the quarterly review process. As we were not participants in the vote and what led up to it in the House, this is pure conjecture. However the strong European solidarity in taking resolute action against Islamic State would have been difficult to deny. The consultation process with important party committees failed, but the individual MPs themselves made their own judgements in good faith. We have a responsibility as their collective position was a YES with strong reservations. We as party members should now join them in holding the government and our military to account as the conflict unfolds.

Phil Bennion

Phil Bennion is chair of LIBG and a member of the Liberal Democrat's Federal Policy Committee. He wrote this piece after the FPC's meeting with Tim Farron to discuss the issue.

We hadn't anticipated producing an 8th interLib this year, but the traumas of the vote on Syria seem to warrant it. Hopefully it will assist readers in their deliberations on the matter. We wish readers a Happy Christmas, Dongzhi, (belated) Hannukah, Human-Light, Kwanzaa, Modraniht, Newtonmas, Pancha Ganapati, Winter Solstice and Yule, or anything else they wish to celebrate over the coming days, or simply happiness.

Fighting for Liberalism at Home and Abroad: International Office Highlights of 2015 Harriet Shone

With the current turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa and the rise of nationalism across Europe, the need for a liberal voice in politics has never been greater. It is the goal of the Liberal Democrat International Office to support liberal parties to champion liberalism in their home countries and strengthen our relationships with the party's international partners. Our work ensures the Liberal Democrats remain at the forefront of the battle for liberalism both at home and abroad.



The International Office team (left to right: Harriet Shone, Isabelle Pucher, Nick Thorne, Derya Ozgun and Iain Gill) at the ALDE Congress in Budapest, managing Baroness Ros Scott's successful election campaign as ALDE Vice President

2015 has been a busy and successful year for us, despite closing in April and May to campaign actively during the General Election. And with Head of the International Office, Iain Gill, appointed as project manager of the LibDem EU referendum campaign, we are heavily involved the movement to keep Britain in the European Union. Across our projects in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, we have continued to deliver cutting-edge technical support to liberal sister-parties overseas, strengthening the Party's ties with our international partners and forging new relationships. Building on a long tradition of engaging with sister parties at LibDem Conferences, we hosted two international delegations this year. At the Spring Conference in Liverpool, the International Office brought a delegation of 20 campaigners from sister-parties around the world. After taking part in a series of trainings and masterclasses, the participants put theory into practice and actively campaigned in Watford, Maidstone, Sutton, Carshalton and Wallington. In Bournemouth, we brought 8 young liberal rising stars from countries including Ghana,

Palestine and Georgia, for a leadership programme designed to empower them as political candidates. 2015 has also been a landmark year for the Africa Liberal Network (ALN), originally established with Liberal Democrat support in 2003. With 44 member parties across 30 countries, the ALN has grown to become the largest and most influential political network on the continent. After three years as ALN Coordinator in which she achieved huge progress in professionalising the network, Aimee Franklin moved on to work for the Democratic Alliance in South Africa. We now have a new ALN Coordinator in Luke Akal, managing the Secretariat in Cape Town. In just a few months Luke has already organised the first ever ALN election observation mission in Tanzania, and made preparations for the upcoming ALN General Assembly which will be held in Johannesburg from 27 to 31 January 2016.

In Serbia, we worked with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to promote rights for the LGBTI community, building on our previous work with them to reach out to women and youth. This year we reached a major milestone as we helped the LDP to set up a Human Rights Council (HRC), formally launched in February, as a vehicle for advancing LGBTI rights, the first of its kind in the Balkans.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we worked with our sister-party, Nasa Stranka, to promote gender equality in politics. To this end, we are providing technical support to female councillors and candidates ahead of the municipal elections in October 2016, working on public speaking, policy development and testing out campaign techniques to engage with voters on the streets of Sarajevo.

Meanwhile in South Africa, we continued to work with the Democratic Alliance through the long standing Young Leaders Project (YLP), with the aim of creating a pool of knowledgeable, articulate and emotionally intelligent individuals who can one day lead the party and country at senior level. This year we reached another landmark with the development of an alumni programme for top graduates of the YLP, with the long-term aim of establishing an Advisory Youth Council to lead on youth issues within the Africa Liberal Network.

In September we launched a new joint project with VVD, one of our Dutch sister-parties, and the Republican Party of Georgia (RPG). To prepare for the national elections in 2016, the Liberal Democrats have assisted the RPG in carrying out polling to identify the key issues on which the party will campaign.

The Liberal Democrats have also continued to be active within the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party in Brussels. At the 2015 ALDE Congress in Budapest, Baroness Sal Brinton led the LibDem delegation in the policy working groups, and we successfully campaigned for the election of Baroness Ros Scott as ALDE Vice-President, ensuring that the Lib Dems continue to play an influential role in the ALDE party. We look forward to supporting Ros in her new role next year!



The International Office team (left to right: Nick Thorne, Isabelle Pucher, Harriet Shone, Derya Ozgun and Luke Akal) at the Liberal Democrats' Autumn Conference in Bournemouth

With the upcoming EU referendum and elections for many of our liberal sister-parties in countries including South Africa, Ghana, Bosnia and Georgia, 2016 is shaping up to be another important year for liberals around the world. Through sharing ideas and strategies, liberal parties can learn from each other to grow and gain strength within their respective countries.

A huge thank you to all who have worked with us in 2015, and we look forward to continuing our projects next year!

Harriet Shone.

Israel/Palestine: two states or one? Britain's decisive role.

Sir Vincent Fean

Yesterday was the first Sunday in Advent. Christians turn their minds towards Bethlehem, Christ's birth-place, and good Christian men and women rejoice. Right now on the ground there is precious little to rejoice about. The missing commodity is hope – hope for a better future between Israelis and Palestinians.

Diplomats do not speak for themselves. They speak, as they should and must, for their Foreign Minister, and for the ministry which pays their salary and gives them a line to take on just about everything. As an ex diplomat in this country I am free to say what I think, so I will aim to do that now, on the basis of 39 years in the Diplomatic Service, the last three of them in Jerusalem as Consul-General, responsible locally for Britain's relations with East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza – the Palestinian Territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 War, and held ever since.

I will try to do three things: give my personal impression of the situation now on the ground; discuss whether two states – Israel and Palestine – or one – let's call it Greater Israel – is a better outcome for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and for us, and what we here can do now to restore hope and make a just and lasting peace more likely. It will not last unless it is just. While I was working in Jerusalem, I reported to Foreign Secretary William Hague, for whom I had and have great respect. I knew very well that Deputy PM Nick Clegg was taking a sustained and well informed interest, and striving to achieve a balance, restoring hope. I was glad of that.

Where are we now?

We are in a bad place, with hope of a negotiated peace any time soon – any time, ever - at its lowest ebb. Israel, through its 48 year Occupation, controls the Palestinian people in almost every conceivable way. That strict control is exercised ostensibly on security grounds, among others. The Occupation does not guarantee Israel security, as we see all too often these days with murderous individual attacks on Israelis both in the OPTs and in what is known as Green Line Israel – within the borders of Israel from before the 1967 War. The Israeli closure of Gaza since 2007 has not guaranteed Israel security either.

There is currently a truce between Israel and Hamas, which controls Gaza militarily – but that truce is fragile and highly unpredictable. Israelis expect a strong measure of security from their political leaders, and PM Netanyahu majors on this by word and by deed – lately he said publicly that Israel will always live by the sword, a very sobering remark – but in Israel, fear and unease remain.

As for the Palestinians – the Occupation deprives them of rights which we here in Britain take for granted. But ironically, the Palestinians have been deprived of them for so long that we tend to accept their status quo without question. The exception to our acceptance is Gaza, locked down since 2007. Last year the world witnessed the third Gaza – Israel conflict in six years, and the bloodiest. We can debate who started the fighting last year. Militarily, Israel was the certain winner – Hamas is not, and never will be, a strategic threat to the state of Israel. But there is no doubt in my mind that Israel was the loser in terms of her international standing, as the world witnessed saturation bombardment of highly populated areas of Gaza for 51 days. All areas of Gaza are highly populated, so nowhere was safe. There was nowhere safe to go. Today, reconstruction in Gaza has yet to take shape. This winter will be severe, with the same risks of child mortality that occurred last winter. It matters greatly that the Gaza power station should function fully, that people in Gaza can get clean water to drink, and that the Rafah and Erez crossings, into Egypt and across Israel respectively, should be reliably open and effective outlets for the 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza. This is not the case. The international community regularly asks Israel to allow legitimate travel and trade between Gaza and the West Bank. But the closure continues – indeed, the Egyptian Government's enmity towards Hamas means, perversely, that the outlet to Egypt is also closed – making the closure complete. Palestinians in Gaza today are in a far worse position than they were in the time of Mubarak.

If Gaza is in a truly terrible plight, the Palestinians in the West Bank face routine deprivation of rights to free movement and economic development. Today there are 650,000 illegal settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank – 10% of the voting population of

Israel. There are four settlers in Mr Netanyahu's cabinet. There is no freeze on settlement expansion, and Mr Netanyahu tells us that there will be no freeze – not just because that would bring down his governing coalition, but because he is against a freeze, a stance which puts his government at odds with the entire international community, including Israel's closest ally, the United States. The Palestinian right to work their own land is compromised by the creation of illegal settlements on Palestinian land, and by the Separation Barrier or Wall that chops 9% off the Palestinian West Bank and puts it on the "Israeli" side of the Wall. That right to work the land is flouted by the Israeli planning process imposed on Palestinians living in the countryside of the West Bank, such that if they want to develop a farm or build a factory in 60% of the West Bank, including the fertile Jordan Valley, they need Israeli planning permission, which is withheld. Sometimes Palestinian applications are rejected. Sometimes they go into the pending tray, and never come out of it. Last year, guess how many Palestinian applications to build on what is by common accord their own land were agreed by Israel? One. Small wonder that Palestinians sometimes build an extension to their house in the Occupied Territories without Israeli permission – and wake up to find an Israeli demolition order has been slapped on them. They are told that it will cost them less in Israeli fines if they themselves knock down the building they have just constructed on their own land. If the Israeli government hires a contractor to demolish it, then the Palestinian family has to pay the contractor's fee – so they pay to destroy what they have built, or they destroy it themselves. It's cheaper that way.

What I have just described is mostly not new. But it is incremental. The ratchet never goes back – it goes on ratcheting up. So much so that many Palestinians – particularly the young – and two generations now have known nothing but the Occupation – have concluded that the solution of two states is no longer viable. They look around them and see Israeli control, Israeli soldiers, Israeli settlers – some of those settlers ideologically opposed to any Palestinian presence on Palestinian land, and all too ready to use violence to move them off it. It is no surprise that the solution of two states living side by side in mutual security is dying or dead in the minds of Palestinians. It is neither what they live, nor what they hear from the political leadership governing in today's Israel – the people who actually control Palestinian lives to a vast extent, certainly wielding far more power over the Palestinians than does President Abbas in Ramallah. With power comes responsibility.

Where are we going, and what's for the best?

I said earlier that we are in a bad place. I fear that we are drifting fast towards a worse place. I think there are three choices, three possible outcomes – two are bad. The third entails risk and effort by us and people like us, but contains the seeds of hope. Let me address the two bad choices together. They are perpetuation of the status quo, or the outcome of one state from the Sea to the River, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. It is possible to take those two outcomes together because they have one shared result: that there will not be an independent Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. Let me say here that I believe in the right of Israel to live in peace and mutual security with all her neighbours, first and foremost her nearest neighbours, the Palestinians. If you agree with that premise, then the question becomes not whether Israel will be there or not, but what kind of Israel will be there. I fully expect Israel to be there long after I have ceased to trouble the scorers, for however long the Good Lord allows me to keep going on this earth. And I much appreciate the kind Arabic wish – May God extend your life; I sincerely trust that He will.

The words "status quo" have a certain superficial attraction, at least to an ex civil servant like me. They bring to mind continuity, a degree of predictability, something we know we can handle because we have handled it before. In the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict, however, the words "status quo" are a false friend. This status quo is not static. It is dynamic, and is taking us all to the destruction of the prospect of two states which has been the foundation of the policy of the international community for 25 years and more. The status quo has several aspects which the British Government and our



Sir Vincent Fean.

partners deem unacceptable – but to which we have grown accustomed. One aspect is violence – be it the violence of the terrorist or the violence of the armed forces of the state. I do not seek to equate the two – my point is that we have got used to both, and should not continue to be used to them. Another dynamic aspect is illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem – condemned by virtually all of Israel’s friends, but continuing and accelerating. I was there when Nick Clegg accurately described settlement construction as “vandalism” back in 2012. Today there are even more settlers; the numbers are up to 650,000, which equates to 10% of the Jewish voting population of Israel today. Mr Netanyahu says that there is no settlement construction freeze, and that there will be no freeze. Some Ministers in Mr Netanyahu’s cabinet – which includes 4 settler ministers – are aiming to raise the numbers to a million, by increasing the number of housing units and the scale of existing state subsidies which make it cheaper for an Israeli to live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories than in Israel itself. Add to the status quo the perpetuation of the Israeli lock-down of Gaza, preventing normal legitimate movement between those two parts of Palestine, and you will have done enough, over time, to destroy the viability of that second state in the two state solution. What does that leave? A mess, certainly. Frustration and disillusion among Palestinians living the Occupation, certainly. The risk of further violence, certainly. And Israel will continue to lose altitude and respect internationally, which is good for nobody.

There are some in Mr Netanyahu’s cabinet who wish to annex the countryside of the Palestinian West Bank, including the Jordan Valley – which is as far away from Israel as it is possible to get without trespassing into the Kingdom of Jordan itself. Proponents of this policy include Israel’s Education and Justice Ministers. They want Greater Israel without lots of Palestinians attached. The way to get there, they think, is to annex the less populated areas and leave the Palestinian towns and cities to their own devices, their populations surrounded by Israel in a way bearing an uncanny resemblance to the bantustans in the South Africa of yesteryear. Without dwelling on this comparison, I believe that both the status quo and the Greater Israel scenario have one outcome in common – the demise of the two state solution and with it the end of hope for the non-violent coexistence of two peoples with equal rights.

The two state solution

Before I talk about that two state possibility, and

whether indeed it is still possible, I would like to take apart and examine one assessment which I believe to be well-intentioned but wrong. It is the one that goes “We cannot want a solution to this conflict more than the two parties to the conflict”. To quote President Obama out of context, Yes we can! First, this conflict is truly asymmetrical. The stronger party is much more relaxed about the status quo which it has shaped than is the weaker, occupied party. Nothing surprising there. The fact that they do not agree on a changed future does not mean we can switch off and wait. If we wait, things get worse. Second, we in Britain have our own values and interests to defend and promote. The values we proclaim are rooted in upholding the law, including international law. Our interests lie in an equitable resolution of this conflict, not in a toxic mess. In my view, the conflict is about power, land and security, not primarily about religion. It is very strongly in the UK interest that it should not lapse into a religious conflict. There is a serious risk that it could. For these reasons we need a UK policy which is both effective and transparently fair. So I ask that of our politicians, and hope you will, too.

So what remains of the two state solution? By which I mean a sovereign, independent state of Israel on 78% of the land of Palestine as we left it in 1948, and a democratic independent state of Palestine on the 22%, made up of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza – the Palestinian Territories occupied by Israel in 1967. I believe that this is still the best available outcome for both peoples, giving each equal status in the eyes of the world, giving each people reason to invest peacefully in their homeland, with the aim of creating a better life for their children. Yasser Arafat recognised Israel on those pre-1967 borders in 1988. Mahmoud Abbas maintains that recognition, just as he maintains close security cooperation between his Palestinian Authority and the Israeli security forces. Security is paramount: the Israelis wish to strengthen their security in a very turbulent region, while the Palestinians wish to end the Occupation and thereby obtain their own security as a state. It can be done. Ask US General Allen, who worked on the detail of mutual security as a key member of John Kerry’s team until the spring of last year. His proposals leading to the “full, phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Occupied Palestinian Territories” were not accepted by PM Netanyahu, and remain confidential. I am led to believe they were fair and realistic. It is self-evident that Israeli troops cannot continue to occupy an independent state of Palestine. Occupation and Independence do not go together. In the same way, Palestinian Independence and

Palestinian violence do not, and must not, go together. It is vital that the West Bank and Gaza be reunited on the basis of non-violence under the authority of the PLO, which Israel acknowledged fully 20 years ago as the sole legitimate representative of all Palestinians. Hamas should respect all undertakings given by the PLO, and should enter the PLO on that basis, declaring that it will not initiate violence. The damaging stand-off between Fatah and Hamas needs to end. With our European partners, we can do more to bring about peaceful Palestinian reconciliation. Our influence is real, as key donors to the Palestinian Authority.

Britain's decisive role

Today the effort to resolve this unmanageable conflict is at an impasse. President Obama has concluded that a further Herculean US effort to find common ground between the parties will not work. I have argued that the status quo is rolling rapidly in the wrong direction. What helpful role can Britain play, and why Britain?

To answer the second question first – we have “form” on this conflict, going back beyond the Balfour Declaration 98 years ago. Then, HM Government looked with favour on the creation of a national home in Palestine for the Jewish people – “it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”. Unfinished business begun in our name, I submit. I commend to you the work of a diligent group of British academics in the Balfour Project (www.balfourproject.org), now shedding light on a dim corner of our shared history with this region. There followed 28 years of British Mandated rule in Palestine, until 1948. In 1967, Britain drafted UN Security Council Resolution 242, still a reference framework for the entire international community. In 2009 Britain drafted UNSCR 1860, at the end of the Gaza War two before last, called Cast Lead.

We are relevant. Elements of our Government's policy are also relevant, including our DFID financial support for the Palestinian Authority and for Palestinian refugees through UNRWA. Both are important and right. Ironically, our money directly subsidises the Israeli Occupation, including the man-made humanitarian crisis and collective punishment which is Gaza. It means that Israel conducts her Occupation on the cheap. We should think about that, and what it means for the Israeli cost-benefit analysis of the Occupation. Less relevant is our habit of waiting for a US lead on this conflict – we now know that there will be no US lead before

2017, if then – and we know that there is urgency.

So - what more should we do, or what should we carry on doing but in a different way? Here are some ideas. We should

Uphold the International Humanitarian Law we wrote after World War 2, by which I mean showing the political will to give effect to that Law without fear or favour – particularly on the responsibilities of the Occupying power not to transfer its own population into the territory it has occupied, and not to inflict collective punishment on the occupied population. That way, we also rebut the accusations of Western double standards which form part of the Da'esh/"Islamic State" propaganda smokescreen

Now recognise the state of Palestine on 1967 lines – under Occupation – on the basis of the European Union's established policy on this conflict. Sweden became the 130th state to recognise Palestine a year ago. British Government recognition, simultaneously with France, Ireland, Italy and Belgium, will act as a wake up call to both sides that the two state solution lives on, and changes our mindset: we regain our own balance, and change the balance of influence inside the UN Security Council and the European Union. I remember Mr Clegg saying on the radio in March this year that if PM Netanyahu meant it when he said “No Palestinian state on my watch”, the British Government must recognise Palestine. PM Netanyahu did mean it, and still does. Our present Government's policy needs to adapt to that fact, and to the new reality of US non intervention. We can and should do things which are right, and in our own interest, but which the US is constrained from doing. Recognition of Palestine on the basis of 67 lines takes nothing away from Israel that belongs to Israel. It validates the second state in the two state solution we advocate, and in no way delegitimises the first state, Israel.

Establish a framework for an equitable outcome to the conflict in a new UN Security Council Resolution, cosponsored with France and our other EU partners, using words which the US will have no reason to veto because they express established US policy.

Acknowledge that illegal settlements are not just a matter of illegal construction: clearly the buildings there on Palestinian land are illegal, but so are the settlers who elect to live there, as is everything they do on the Palestinian side of the pre 67 Green Line.

Tell Hamas not to initiate violence anywhere in Palestine or Israel; if Hamas agrees, lead our EU

partners in engaging, on the basis of PLO agreements.

Encourage Abbas to end the West Bank Gaza split, moving rapidly to free and fair elections across East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza – and undertake to respect the result.

To conclude: while the two state solution is in clear and present danger, it is the best outcome for both peoples. We here can want a solution to the conflict more than at least one of the parties to it. Our country has a singular responsibility to uphold the prospect of a peaceful end to the 1967 Occupation, and has the means to make a positive difference at a time when the US is stepping back. This is both a moral and a political challenge. We should do what we know to be right, in the long term interest of both Israel and Palestine – and prevail upon our Government to act in accordance with well informed and balanced British public opinion. Our Government is very well informed about this conflict, and about the negative impact of the Occupation on the Palestinian people and on all Israelis ordered to conduct that Occupation. It demeans both Palestinians and Israelis. It's time our Government regained our balance on our behalf.

Sir Vincent Fean was British Consul-General, Jerusalem, 2010-14, is a trustee of Medical Aid for Palestinians and patron of the Britain-Palestine Friendship and Twinning Association.

The LIBG Forum on Israel & Palestine took place on November 30th at the National Liberal Club.

Questions and Answers

Phil Bennion, chair of the meeting & LIBG stated that Sir Vincent Fean's views were very much those of the Liberal Democrats and ALDE. He added that as a farmer he could understand how a Palestinian farmer would feel about their land being taken for settlements. As a history student he could see that the Israeli status quo was not sustainable, nor the One State solution – there would be an inevitable democratic breakdown.

Geoff Payne (Hackney Liberal Democrats) said that the status quo depended on the unconditional support of the USA. Hence the Israelis were a regional super-power; did they seek to force out the Palestinians by over-whelming military power?

Sir Vincent replied that the USA was indispensable to any outcome. The experience of US Secretary of State John Kerry's valiant effort to find common

ground in 2013- 2014 showed the limits of the USA being dispassionate. The US did not set out a framework for an outcome, because Netanyahu didn't want to be bound by the international consensus (ie: 1967 borders). The two sides talked past each other. The talks broke down.

He added that in our day - 2015 - force cannot be used to engineer a mass expulsion of people.

John Ireland (Oxford West & Abingdon Liberal Democrats) said that the majority of Palestinians saw the Two State solution as a step on the way to One State – No Israel. He accused the Palestinians of not negotiating, and President Abbas of incitement, particularly with regard to the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Sir Vincent replied that on the question of Incitement, in his view the actual power of Abbas to influence anything in the Palestinian Territories was low. Yes, he was in his eleventh year of a four year term and has said that he will not stand again. Sir Vincent encouraged HM Government to press for elections across East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza – and to undertake in advance to respect the democratic outcome and work with whoever the Palestinians chose. To his great credit, Abbas has continued security cooperation with Israel.

Recognition of Palestine would not of itself lead to negotiations but it would buttress the prospect of a Two State solution that we are in danger of losing, not by Palestinian obduracy but by Israeli activity – illegal settlement activity in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and the closure of Gaza. We could legally recognise Palestine tomorrow – like the rest of the international community, the British Government regard the Palestinian Authority as the legitimate authority in the West Bank and Gaza, so the current split between the two does not prevent recognition; we should recognise Palestine stipulating that we do so on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) commitment to non-violence. 130 countries have already recognised Palestine, including Sweden (in October 2014), but the UK and France are key players and would have real weight both in the EU and in the UN Security Council in making this move – ideally simultaneously.

On the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, Israel has permitted hundreds of Jews to go up the Temple Mount. What was once a very marginal view that the Temple should be rebuilt where Al Aqsa is, has become more mainstream. This is very dangerous –

the al Aqsa mosque is the third most holy place in Islam.

On incitement – while Sir Vincent did not defend every word Abbas says, in practice there are two kinds of incitement, by word and by deed. The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) nightly conducts random searches of Palestinian homes in Hebron- making their presence felt – intimidating the community. That was incitement in action, repeatedly.

A lady raised the question of settlements being clearly against international law, but no legal action being brought against Israel

Sir Vincent said that there is a lack of political will. Which court would you take the matter to? The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has declared the separation barrier – the Wall - illegal wherever it crosses the Green Line (the 1967 border) – 9% of the Palestinian West Bank is now on the “Israeli” side of the Wall, but unless and until the UN Security Council acts, there is no comeback. It has yet to act. In 2011, the USA vetoed a draft resolution condemning illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The UK, France and Germany voted for that resolution. Because of the US veto, nothing happened, and settlement expansion continued with impunity.

Baroness Jenny Tonge (Independent Liberal Democrat, House of Lords) thought it extraordinary to call Hamas genocidal and homicidal; they had had been elected in 2006 by the Palestinian people. Abbas prevented elections. The young people in the West Bank would become what (John Ireland) said if there is no action, not just on settlements, check-points etc., being beaten up and shot at. There is no action because of the power of the Israeli lobby in the USA and Europe; when I raise this question I get into trouble. Did Sir Vincent have any insights into how the present crisis in Syria might draw attention to the Palestinian question?

Sir Vincent replied saying that the 600,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria were now two-time or three-time refugees; their plight is, if anything, even worse than that of the Syrians themselves. Jordan had closed its doors to the Palestinians from Syria, so the unfortunate Palestinian refugees moved elsewhere in Syria – displaced persons – or sought refuge in Lebanon, where they were forbidden to work to earn a living. But for many reasons, the issue of Palestine was fundamental to the future of the Middle East. Resolving the Israel/Palestine conflict is key to

restoring peace with justice in the region, through two states.

Graham Jones (Oxford East Liberal Democrats) spoke of despair at the number of illegal settlements, occupying the highest points, monopolising the water aquifers, taking the best land, including that in the Jordan valley. Would the children of settlers have a right to be in the place of their birth, he supposed? He asked if the West Bank was economically viable as it is. In 1996 Palestine had applied to join the Commonwealth, was it time to revive that? Was the West Bank economically viable?

Sir Vincent replied ‘No, not as it is now’. It would always need to have a strong economic relationship with Israel to supply much of its energy, water and much else. There needs to be a change of relationship from Occupier/Occupied to economic partners, each of whom has an interest in the economic well-being of the other. Israel’s economy continues to be strong. The Arab Peace Initiative has been on the table since 2002; it provides great incentives for Israeli trade and investment with all Arab/Muslim states, but Israel hasn’t taken it up. The West Bank would continue to be dependent on aid until Palestine is a genuinely independent state consisting of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

The Commonwealth? A charming idea, but bilateral recognition of the state of Palestine was the gateway.

Bernard Silver (Westminster Liberal Democrats) said that he had only been told of the forum and a meeting of the Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel the night before; he was shaken by the nature of the meeting [there was uproar in the Club]; the question of the legality of the settlements – under what law? He accused the meeting of being one-sided. [Phil Bennion explained the previous publicity of the meeting and Bernard was shown it advertised in the September print issue of interLib (2015-06) – he was not on the email circulation list]. Amongst the points that he raised were that the Palestinians had moved to the West Bank from Jordan.

Sir Vincent replied ‘International law – the 4th Geneva Convention after World War Two had been signed by Israel. Article 49-6 said that an occupier did not export its people to an occupied territory. There were 650,000 Israeli settlers illegally transferred into Palestine.’

Where did the West Bank Palestinians from? They were certainly not from Jordan, as Mr Silver suggested. Some came from Green Line Israel as

refugees in 1948, some already lived in the West Bank, and some of these were now displaced. It was a myth that Israel came into being in 1948 in an empty land, this just wasn't true. What is needed is peaceful co-existence between two peoples: two states.

A man asked 'What is needed to revitalise the negotiations process? Sanctions to make Netanyahu comply?'

Sir Vincent said that John Kerry's efforts had been real, but he didn't delegate enough, did not set out clearly what he saw as the fair outcome, and nothing came of them. Revitalisation needs a change from without, a third party. It is a matter of the strong vs. the weak; the role of the international community is essential to say what is fair, and to make it happen. The status quo is not in the long term interests of Israel.

EU Labelling was a consumer choice issue, though with political implications. France and Germany etc can decide at national level on a labelling regime – West Bank Palestinian products or Israeli settlement products. Then people can exercise their free choice to buy or not to buy. In my view the settlements are illegal; the settlers are acting illegally by being there, on the wrong side of the 1967 Green Line, and anything they do or make there is, in logic, illegal. Today, HM Government does not agree, and declines to use economic sanctions to counter illegal actions.

Howard Henshaw (LIBG North West) Since the US role is essential, could the new Trudeau Liberal government in Canada be prevailed upon to persuade Obama?

Sir Vincent replied that Stephen Harper, the former Conservative Prime Minister of Canada, had given every impression of being more pro-occupation than Mr Netanyahu. Trudeau was renewing Canada's traditional position as internationalist, but probably can't persuade Obama. Kerry is still talking to both Israel and the Palestinians, but nothing serious is likely to come from Washington before 2017, after the next US Presidential elections – if then.

Bill Mather (Social Pioneers) noted that Palestine does not have one voice, there is not one Palestine. Gaza is separated purposefully by the Israeli government from contact with the West Bank. Sir Vincent was not allowed to talk to Hamas - will the UK government's position change on this?

Sir Vincent replied that it is our Government's policy not to talk to Hamas. So as a Government official, he never did. *But in his considered opinion*, is important to talk to all sides. Hamas leader Khaled Mish'al talks of a Two State solution on occasions. It is important to press Hamas to make a move now to stop initiating violence. Under international law an Occupied people has a right to resist Occupation - but violence is futile. It would be right for Hamas to announce that it will renounce the initiation of violence – and call upon Israel to do likewise.

The turmoil in the Middle East means that there is less focus on Palestine, but it remains key to stability and justice in the region. The best way to persuade is not through violence; futile murderous acts don't move the political process forward. Rather, they generate hatred. There is a security solution which safeguards both states from violence from over the internationally agreed border. The international community should offer security guarantees to Israel and to Palestine; close control of Israel's borders, with US/NATO monitoring. It is possible now to defend Israel without having Israeli troops in the Jordan valley; whilst they are there, the Occupation of Palestine continues, and there is no peace.

Mark Birch (Islington Liberal Democrats) asked a question to which Phil Bennion replied that in his view as a former MEP the power of the Israeli lobby in the EU was more balanced than in the USA.

John Kelly (Warwick & Leamington Liberal Democrats): Russia is a long-standing member of the Quartet, but is not vocal. What is their likely view post-Syria?

Sir Vincent replied that Russia matters, but that the Quartet is a creature of the USA. Russia had proposed an international conference in Moscow, but had not said what it was for. Russia talks to Netanyahu – there are 1 million ex Russians, now citizens of Israel. It is a complex relationship. On Israel/Palestine, Russia has a serious role to play – but hitherto, no new ideas.

Margaret Lally (Islington Liberal Democrats) mentioned changes in Israel – do we have to wait until Netanyahu stands down?

Sir Vincent said that we can't afford to wait for Netanyahu to go and cannot dictate whom Israel elects. The problem is too big for any one leader. The values and best interests of the UK should guide

our policy. That means pushing hard for an equitable two state solution.

A man from Richmond Liberal Democrats said that during a church visit to the Holy land he had been amazed at the Israeli community's arrogance towards their guide, an Israeli Arab Christian. Did Israel have a strategy to take over the West Bank?

Sir Vincent said that strategy or not, Hamas was taking a negative path, not one to be followed. They could not fulfil that doctrine of eliminating Israel, and knew it – whatever their rhetoric. Was there a strategy for Israel to allow the West Bank to drift into Israeli control? Israel wishes to sustain and increase settlements, but the Two State solution would disappear if that was the case. He asked 'Is that a strategy?'

Wasim Yunis (Brent Liberal Democrats) said that Palestine was the only country required to guarantee the security of its occupier, and was called anti-Semitic. Why not sanctions? They had been brought against South Africa and Russia – why is Israel different?

Phil Bennion replied that sanctions have to be imposed at the EU level, where a consensus among the 28 member states is required - and that Germany is a strong supporter of Israel. EU action of any kind is constrained by differing views among the member states.

On sanctions, Sir Vincent said that the western countries regard Israel as part of the western democratic club. With power and club membership come responsibility. If Israel is a member of our club it has to meet higher standards than it is now doing: its conduct of the Occupation demeans both those Israelis who have to implement the orders, and the Palestinians who suffer under Occupation. For the good if both, the 1967 Occupation needs to come to an end.

Jonathan Fryer thanked Sir Vincent Fean on behalf of LIBG

A few years ago, I made a documentary in the West Bank which focussed on two young families: a Jewish couple and their small daughter, who had immigrated from Australia because they believed it was God's will that they should be part of Jewish "re-settlement" of Judea and Samaria, and a Palestinian businessman (and his teacher wife), whose business was basically going down the pan because of the continued Israeli occupation. These two families

were physically separated by only a couple of kilometres, yet they were worlds apart and seemingly irreconcilable. The temptation for many of us therefore is to give up on trying to find a peace settlement in the Middle East and just accept the status quo. But as Sir Vincent has said, the status quo in this case is not static; it is dynamic and the movement is going dangerously in the wrong direction, which will ultimately probably lead to catastrophe unless something is done to change it.

One attendee tonight said he could not understand how Liberal Democrats today speak so differently about Israel than Liberals used to when he first joined the Party; at the time, every single Liberal MP was a member of the Liberal Friends of Israel. The answer to that query is contained in one word: occupation. Nearly 50 years of often brutal occupation, coupled with ever increasing Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, has shifted liberal opinions radically. I know that because it is a journey I have made myself. As a teenager I was a keen supporter of Israel, thought the kibbutzim movement was fantastic and when Arab states attacked Israel I was out in the street protesting. But what has happened since 1967, with the persistent violations by Israel of the Geneva Conventions and other instruments of international law, has made me a passionate champion of justice for the Palestinians. That must include recognition of the Palestinian state (as 130 countries have already done). There can be no true negotiations between parties as unequal as Israel (the occupying power) and the Arab people of the occupied territories.

Britain has a moral duty to further this cause, both for historic reasons (as the mandatory power of Palestine from the end of the First World War until 1948) and because of its position on the UN Security Council. The Obama administration appears to have given up hope in trying to promote a settlement, so as Sir Vincent has argued, Britain and other EU countries should take a lead. The two state solution is dying, indeed it is almost dead. But we must make a last, determined effort to resuscitate it before it is too late, in the interest of both the Palestinians, who suffer so much injustice and humiliation on a daily basis, and of Israelis, who understandably desire to live in security

Jonathan Fryer

Ashraf Fayadh

Ashraf Fayadh, a 35-year-old poet and artist, has been sentenced to be executed by Saudi Arabian authorities for his art.

On 17 November, the General Court in Abha, south-west Saudi Arabia, found Ashraf guilty of ‘apostasy’ – renouncing Islam – for his poetry and sentenced him to death.

Arrested for poetry and pictures on his phone

Ashraf was initially arrested on 6 August 2013 following a complaint registered against him by another Saudi citizen, who said that the poet was promoting atheism and spreading blasphemous ideas among young people. Ashraf was released the following day, but then rearrested on 1 January 2014, when he was charged with apostasy – he had supposedly questioned religion and spread atheist thought with his poetry. He was at the same time charged with violating the country’s Anti-Cyber Crime Law for allegedly taking and storing photos of women on his phone.

On 30 April 2014, Ashraf was sentenced to four years in prison and 800 lashes for the charges relating to images of women on his phone. The General Court accepted Ashraf’s apology for the charges of apostasy and found the punishment to be satisfactory.

However, the court of appeal recommended that Ashraf should still be sentenced for apostasy, and his case was sent back to the General Court, which in turn sentenced him to death for apostasy.

Throughout this whole process, Ashraf was denied access to a lawyer – a clear violation of international human rights law, as well as Saudi Arabia’s national laws.

A death sentence for ‘apostasy’

Apostasy (Riddah, in Arabic) is the renouncing of Islam.

Saudi Arabia follows Sharia (Islamic) law, and ‘apostasy’ can be punishable by death.

Yet ‘apostasy’ is not a crime – it is a violation of someone’s right to belief or choose our own religion. It should never incur punishment.

In addition to that, the death penalty, according to international law, may only be used for the ‘most

serious crimes’ (recently interpreted by UN experts to refer to ‘intentional killing’). Apostasy is not a crime at all, let alone a serious one.

The death penalty is a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment – it violates our right to life and our right to be free from torture. At Amnesty, we believe the death penalty should never be used.

What we’re calling for

Quite simply, we’re calling for Ashraf to be freed. He has committed no crime, and as such should not be imprisoned, let alone face execution.

Amnesty International is asking the Saudi Arabian authorities to drop Ashraf’s conviction and all charges against him. We’re also asking for them to stop executing anyone for ‘apostasy’.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/ashraf>

Canada

Two errors were spotted on John Pindar’s article on the Canadian General Election in *interLib 2015-07*.

John’s name was spelt wrong, for which we apologise, and the polling figures at the beginning were wrong. They should have read LIB 30 CON 30 NDP 30, not LIB 30 CON 20 NDP 30.

International Abstracts

The Refugees & the New War Michael Ignatieff - New York Review of Books, December 17 2015.

The former Canadian Liberal leader makes a well-thought assessment of the Syrian situation. If you don’t have time to read the full article, the first line tells you all that you need to know.

European Union or Commonwealth? It’s a false choice, by Catherine Bearder MEP, New Statesman 2nd December 2015

<http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/business/2015/12/european-union-or-commonwealth-its-false-choice>

Under fire from the GOP, Obama defends response to terror attacks, by Peter Barker & Gardiner Harris. The New York Times 17.12. 2015
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/world/middleeast/president-obama-national-counterterrorism-center.html?action=click&contentCollection=Opinion&module=MostPopularFB&version=Full@ion=Marginalia&src=me&pgtype=article>

review

Paradoxes of Liberal Democracy, Islam, Western Europe, and the Danish Cartoon Crisis,
by Paul M. Sniderman, Michael Bang Petersen,
Rune Slothuus & Rune Stubager.
Princeton University Press 2014 isbn
9780691161105

Paradoxically, in the wake fundamentalist attacks in Beirut and Paris, and to a lesser degree, Leytonstone and California, it is an appropriate time for this overdue review. In 2005 the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a series of cartoons which some said mocked the prophet Mohammed. This led to demands by some Muslims that religious faith should take precedence over freedom of expression and provoked a reaction from the street to government levels; the events are well-known. What didn't happen was a backlash against Muslims in Denmark; the proud tradition of tolerance of the ordinary Danish people held strong. The authors sum it up thus:

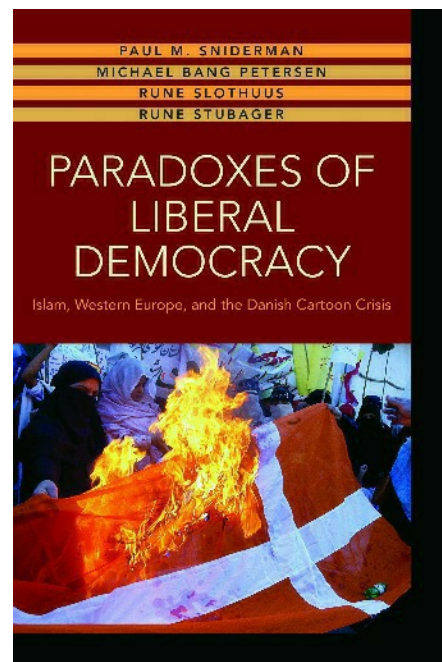
When it counted most, when the clash was most intense and the outcome uncertain, a decisive majority of ordinary citizens stood behind the civil rights of Muslims; in fact, they gave them fully a much support as they did fellow Danes like born again Christians.

It so happens that the research that underpins this book had already started when the Cartoon Crisis erupted. This enabled the researchers to refine their tests to the developing scenario. Whilst sociological evidence that *the shallowness of voters' understanding of public affairs and democratic values* is said to be 'unassailable', the results were surprising and from a Liberal perspective, encouraging.

The surprise is the strength of Tolerance in the community. Tolerance has, the authors argue, has lost much of its emphasis as a great political idea over time. The point is to restore the concept to John Locke's understanding, to support, nourish, maintain, sustain, preserve. This harks back to earlier, even proto-Liberalism, but echoes, in for example, Morley's writing on the Whigs. The authors call for an inclusive tolerance.

What does this say to Islam? Muslims in the West can think the unthinkable, so far as, say, their counterparts in Wahhabist Saudi Arabia are able to express. Some of this will be unpalatable to us as

Liberals, but out of it was can hope for developments that will blossom in the liberal elements of the religion. Look at the nonsense it our terms that was spouted in Christian writings around the Reformation and Counter Reformation, culminating in (but not ended with) the Thirty Years War.



The downside of the book is the presentation of the sociological data, which isn't always easy on the eye. Yet Liberalism claims to be an empirical philosophy, so why complain when the evidence is presented. If this is your bag there is much to be gained from it, otherwise it isn't difficult to distil the essence of the arguments.

Stewart Rayment

**Humble & Epic, Ben Gregor,
Herrick Gallery, London.**

Sometimes you walk in off the street and think that something is pretty mega. That is hard to do with London galleries, because they are not, generally, the most inviting of places, unlike their Paris counterparts.

Ben Gregor is a film maker, best known probably for *All Stars*, a couple of years ago, which if you haven't seen, I commend – street kids versus local government – Gregor invites the community to fight back against the age of austerity (though that isn't what the evil machinations of Cllr. Tarrington are about – he wants to build a car park on a youth centre – must have been watching *Curious George* too much). As an aside, we let a community group take over a pretty run-down park in Bromley-by-Bow back in the 1990s and they've made a stonking job of it; that was not about austerity, or cuts as it

was called then, it was about community empowerment.



This however, is Ben Gregor's first exhibition in a gallery, comprising 68 skateboards, etched with the names of people who were important to him – I was drawn in by Wei Wei (who doesn't give a fuck, but does – quite so). Slavka fought the Gestapo in her native Czechoslovakia, and later made tea for Ben. Skateboarding has always been important to Gregor, so when he was down in the dumps he returned to it. The totality is, as I've said, impressive, but you can buy individual boards or commission your own – you could put the wheels back on and really enjoy them. The exhibited boards cost £250 and bespoke boards are £300 – see links to the gallery online shop below. The boards can be purchased or bespoke boards ordered beyond the dates of the show.



10% of the proceeds go to the charity Skateistan, which uses skateboarding to bring kids on in Afghanistan, Cambodia and South Africa (www.skateistan.org) – a much more potent weapon than a bomb or a drone. The exhibition runs until mid-January, but is closed Christmas to New Year – next door to Palmerston's old gaff at 93 Piccadilly.

Stewart Rayment

Humble & Epic, Ben Gregor, Herrick Gallery, 93 Piccadilly, London W1J 7NQ nearest tube Green Park

www.herrickgallery.com www.humbleandepic.com

<http://www.herrickgallery.com/shop/humble-epic-exhibition-boards>

<http://www.herrickgallery.com/shop/humble-and-epic>

A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien,
edited by Stuart D. Lee.
Wiley Blackwell 2014 £120.00
isbn 9780470659823

If there was a Tolkien, and we know there was, what confidence it gives us to assert that there was a Homer, a Taliesin, that something around the Arthurian caucus happened, and all manner of others who created what Tolkien styled as '*a body of more or less connected legend*'.

Tolkien set himself the task of creating an English mythological tradition. He lamented the too disparate nature of the Arthurian cycle we must presume, though anyone glancing through Graves can hardly find the Greek caucus less disparate. Is England's lack of a mythology an aspect of systematic destruction or our modesty?

Of this we have a fusion of pagan and Christian myth, the truths of one reinforcing the truths of the latter – this being Tolkien's perspective, C S Lewis famously wrote - Tolkien seemingly resolves the dilemma of the Christo-Arthurian cycle by removing the apple. But how does he square trees? In *Mythopoeia* Tolkien says '*in all my works I take the part of trees against their enemies*'. As good a basis for anyone to root their political philosophy as any.

Answers to these, and many other questions spring from this rounded assessment of Tolkien's work – if your Young Liberal branch was anything like mine, you'll be wanting this in your Christmas stocking.

Stewart Rayment

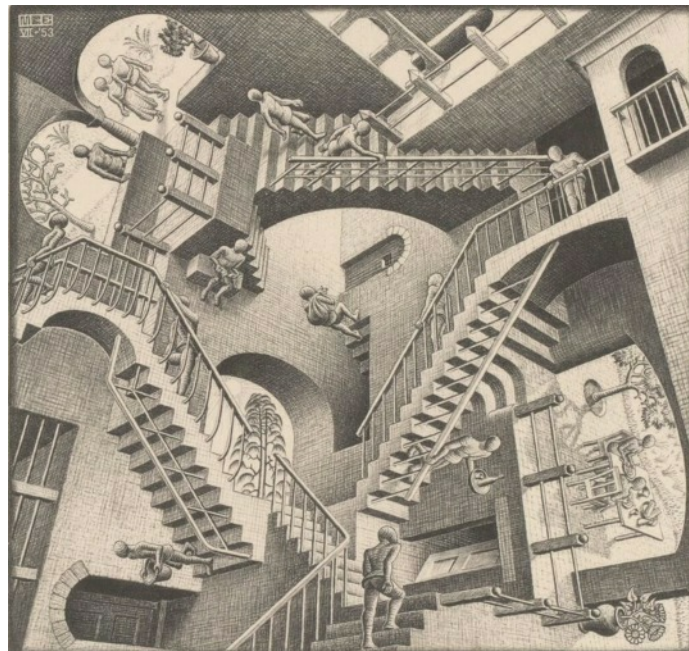
The Amazing World of M C Escher Dulwich Picture Gallery.

I first got the idea of what Escher was getting at whilst knocking up during the St Marylebone by election in 1970 – the building I was in was somehow Escher. Most of us are probably familiar with his work through posters and books, but the exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery, and previously at the National Gallery of Scotland, is the first time we've been able to see Escher's work in situ in a major gallery in the UK. The Tate reputedly only has one piece.

There is a tremendous snobbishness in the world of art, and Escher's early decision to work in graphic media was looked down on. Coming from a comfortable and supportive background, Escher didn't give a

damn, and just got on with his own work. The Surrealists missed him entirely, though he may have known, certainly admired Magritte. His work drew on earlier Low Countries masters – Bosch, Bruegel, Van Leyden, whose work often finds echoes in his own. Indeed, he was better known in scientific and mathematical communities than in the art world. I first encountered him in the context of impossible geometry, which had a vogue in the mid-1960s. However, as E.H. Gombrich, an early supporter, opens his *Story of Art*, there really is no such thing as Art, there are only artists.

Seeing Escher's work in the context of its preparatory drawings and his earlier work confirms that, fantastic as it is, it has a very real base. That said, he will manipulate scale as proportion to his own ends – you wouldn't actually see such a view in the La Mezquita in Cordoba for instance. Escher mastered perspective and refined it with the aid of new friends and acquaintances in the field of mathematics. His encounters with tessellation in the Islamic architecture of southern Spain was the other great inspiration, but there after is an unbounded imagination.



Relativity, 1953

Of his politics I know little, except that he left Mussolini's Italy because he didn't want his son wearing the Fascist youth movement uniform, and that he produced relatively little major work during the Nazi occupation of Holland, except the rather dark *Encounter*. Perhaps, tellingly, his notes to *Self Portrait in Spherical Mirror* say, on the centrality of the eyes, that "the ego is the unshakeable core of his work."

Stewart Rayment

The Amazing World of M.C. Escher runs at Dulwich Picture Gallery, Gallery Road, London SE21 7AD until 16th January 2016.

**Lewis Carroll, the man and his circle,
by Edward Wakeling.
IB Tauris, 2015
isbn 971780768205**



Hand with a Reflecting Sphere, 1935.

I was introduced to Alice at a young age. I don't know who's or what version. Disney did not help, but then, in a psychedelic haze came *The Annotated Alice* and the BBC film. This year is the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It was hastily withdrawn by the author, the edition being beneath the standards that he set himself. The story had been conceived, during a boat trip down the Thames, three years earlier and committed to manuscript (at Alice Liddell's request) as *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* shortly after.

All this is widely known and as the author says in his preface, the last hundred years have seen enough

biographies of ... Carroll... to make another seem superfluous. What better person to write one than, than Edward Wakeling, editor of the ten published volumes of Dodgson's diaries? Having previously focussed on Dodgson as a photographer, a pamphleteer and his illustrators, Wakeling draws on the wealth of his editorial role to show the man through his family, friends and acquaintances. I need not say any more; if any book makes you feel more at home with Carroll, this is it.

Stewart Rayment

1956 the year that changed Britain,
by Francis Beckett and Tony Russell.
Biteback 2015 £20.00

I started school in 1956, but don't have strong memories of the year. With six MPs in Parliament, the Liberal party does not get a mention in this book, despite the Jo Grimond's accession to the leadership, perhaps distracted by his taking the reins on the day that British & French troops took Port Said in the Suez crisis. Clement Davies doesn't get a mention either.

The year is mostly remembered for Suez and Hungary, but culturally it was the year of Rock Around the Clock and Elvis Presley.

Like Tony Blair, Winston Churchill hung on as Prime Minister rather too long. Anthony Eden was past his sell-by date when he became PM in 1955, and of course, resigned over Suez in January 1957. He misjudged Eisenhower, with whom, up to that point, he'd had a good relationship with – Eden was highly regarded in international relations. Ministers used to Churchill's loose rein, and found Eden more of a control freak – not least because he would phone them when a matter occurred to him, no matter how late into the night. Suez was an almighty mistake, echoing a decade on as I became interested in politics. Aspects of it undoubtedly seemed right at first – the canal was seen as vital to Britain's economy – Grimond initially supported the action (will Farron rise phoenix-like out of a similar indiscretion?). Tied up with Cyprus, another foreign adventure was the last thing we needed, especially in the Yanks weren't on board – or worse, against us.

It is probably the case that Russia took advantage of the chaos of Suez to crush the Hungarian uprising – it certainly made it pretty much impossible for the west to do anything about it. I don't particularly see Eden's fall as a game change for the Establishment – MacMillan was cut of the same cloth.

One can't shed any tears for the Communist party, though perhaps one can for individual Communists. 1956 was certainly an *annus horribilis* for the comrades, with Khrushchev's revelations of some of Stalin's abuses, followed by the invasion of Hungary. Poor old Harry Pollitt – wasn't trusted to be in on the secret speech (Khrushchev delivered it in a closed session), asks after an old flame, Rose Cohen, in the almost certain knowledge that Uncle Joe had killed her.

1956 was the end of the road for Communism in Britain, the New Left would supplant it. The patrician Conservative party and all it stood for? I'm less sure, but the seeds of change were there for an end of deference – rock'n'roll significantly giving the young a voice. For the Liberals things might have been starting to look up – in two years we would win Torrington, and ups and downs, but we've never looked back. This is a good read, with plenty to reflect on sixty years hence. *Stewart Rayment*



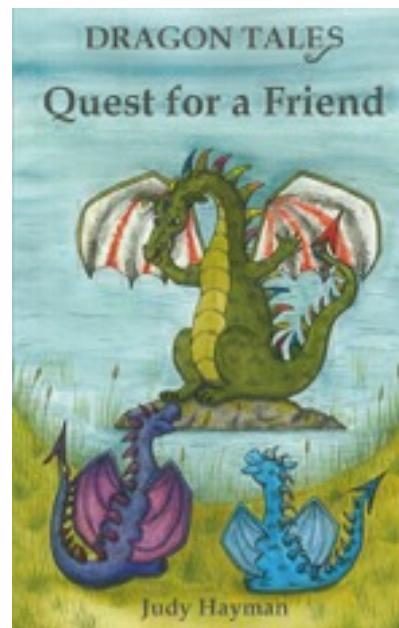
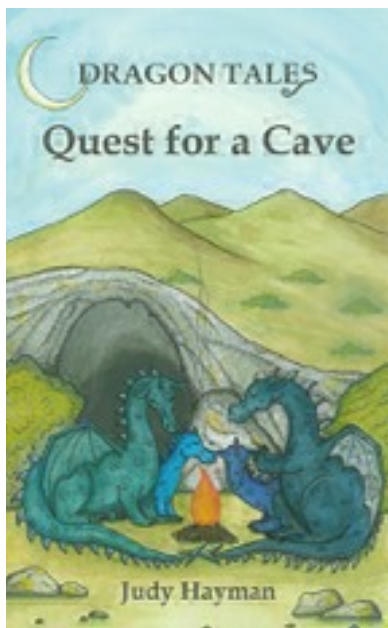
Cover photograph: The Royal Artillery Monument, Hyde Park Corner, London. Charles Sergeant Jagger & Lionel Pearson. Pevsner says of it 'A moving work, now recognized as a masterpiece of British C20 sculpture. Jagger had served with the regiment, and his work explores the limits of what public art could then show of the disasters of war. The culmination is a blunt-nosed 9.2 in. howitzer, realistically portrayed in stone. Around its pedestal stand three bronze gunners, with a fourth lying dead under a greatcoat. The details, e.g. the nails in the dead gunner's boots, have the directness of documentary photographs. In contrast with this realism and stasis are four angular, flattened reliefs of desperate battle on the sides. Pearson designed beautifully lettered pedestal and podium, on which no mouldings or architectural carving appear. The steps at the south end were replaced in 1949 by a flat plinth with bronze tablets, by Darcy Braddell.'

The Dragon Tales Chronicles

by Judy Hayman
illustrated by Caroline Wolfe Murray

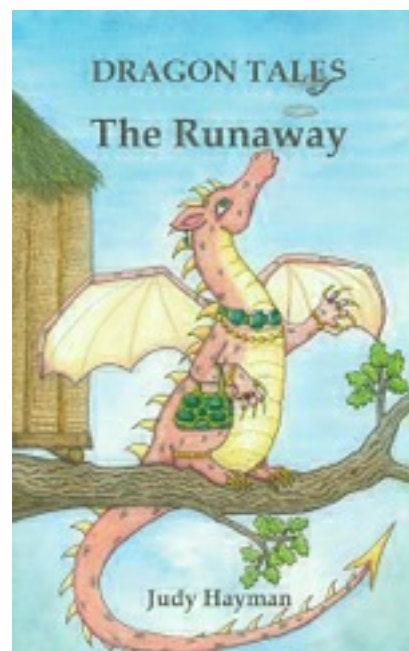
BOOK I Quest for a Cave

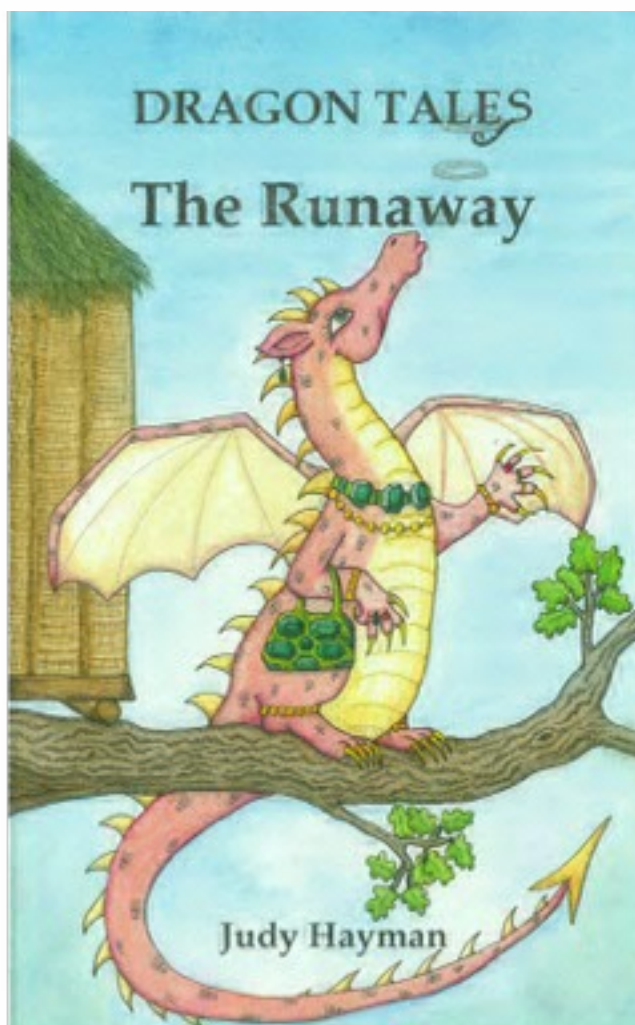
BOOK II Quest for a Friend



BOOK III Quest for Adventure

BOOK IV The Runaway





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The fourth of Judy Hayman's Dragon Tales Chronicles, *The Runaway* is now available.

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