

The view from the bridge

Robin Ramsay

Ukraine and NATO

The best writing on the background to the Ukraine conflict I have seen recently is two essays by Lord Robert Skidelsky in which he tries to unpack Russian actions and counter 'the Russians are coming' line now dominant in Western Europe defence circles. In the first of them¹ he notes comments by former Defence Secretary Lord George Robertson:

[Robertson's] presentation of the Russian threat is weird. He presents Russia as economically failing, militarily inept ('advancing one millimetre at a time' in Ukraine), and demographically imploding ('the younger generation being eliminated'), while simultaneously arguing that Russia is an existential threat not just to its neighbours but to Europe as a whole (the UK is 'directly in the crosshairs').

These two claims cannot both be true. A state suffering acute demographic decline, a stalled military, and a failing economy cannot simultaneously constitute a multi-theatre threat to Europe.

Skidelsky also comments on the (unstated) rationale for massive European-wide rearmament that

. . . is being justified through the language of security, yet in practice functions as an attempt to revive Europe's weak productivity and failing industrial base—an industrial strategy masquerading as a defence imperative, in effect a post-pandemic and post-stagnation strategy of military Keynesianism. From this perspective, the insistence on an existential Russian threat functions not simply as a strategic assessment but as political cover for a massive industrial mobilisation that EU leaders hope will restore European economic competitiveness.

His critique of the West's involvement in Ukraine does not mention the

¹ <<https://robertskidelsky.substack.com/p/ukraine-the-delusion-of-the-warmongers>>

The second piece is a response to critics of the first:

<<https://robertskidelsky.substack.com/p/follow-up-to-ukraine-the-delusions>>.

Skidelski is still best known for his biography of J. M. Keynes.

American activities leading up to the arrival of the pro-NATO president Victor Yushchenko in 2005. (Perhaps he takes for granted that his readers understand this.) I was reminded of these events when I came across in my files a yellowing hard copy of a two page spread in the *Mail on Sunday* in 2005 by Mark Almond: 'If the Cold War is over why did the CIA buy the Ukraine election?'² Almond stated: 'The Americans alone gave pro-Yushchenko groups at least £50 million'. Nor does Skidelsky mention the evidence showing that the massacre on the Maidan Square, which was the immediate cause of the downfall of the pro-Russian government, was the work of the Ukrainian far-right.³

Looking at Skidelsky's Wikipedia entry,⁴ the man has had a complex political journey. A founder member of the SDP, he moved to the Conservative Party. At one point he was appointed a Conservative spokesman in the House of Lords but was dismissed by then Conservative leader William Hague for publicly opposing NATO's bombing of the then Yugoslavia. In September 2015 Skidelsky endorsed Jeremy Corbyn's campaign in the Labour Party leadership election, writing in *The Guardian*:

Corbyn should be praised, not castigated, for bringing to public attention these serious issues concerning the role of the state and the best ways to finance its activities. The fact that he is dismissed for doing so illustrates the dangerous complacency of today's political elites. Millions in Europe rightly feel that the current economic order fails to serve their interests. What will they do if their protests are simply ignored?

And finally we are told he was 'a non-executive director on the board of Russian oil company Rusneft'.

*

I saw this from John Ward:

He [Putin] negotiated openly with NATO in 2014 to end the bloodshed between Russian speakers and others in The Ukraine. NATO and Washington agreed 'Not to move a millimetre towards the RF border with Ukraine' then placed a series of biowarfare centres directly

² *Mail on Sunday* 2 January 2005. Alas not on-line, as far as I can see.

³ Ivan Katchanovski, 'The "snipers" massacre" on the Maidan in Ukraine'.
<https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4628852>

⁴ Some people – notably Nick Must, who writes for *Lobster* – do not trust and will not cite Wikipedia. In this instance everything I quote from the Wiki entry on Skidelsky is third party sourced.

along that border – while bankrolling the Pentagon creature Volodomore Zelenskyy to break the 2014 ceasefire at every opportunity.⁵

How much of this is true? I looked at the biowarfare centres allegation. Such Russian claims have been universally poo-pooed as disinformation in the West. (Well, they would be, you may be thinking.) The Russian charges were presented to the UN in 2022 in a letter.⁶ The evidence supporting the claims is apparently contained in two files at the end of the on-line version of the letter. Alas, neither link worked when I tried them.

While searching for evidence of said biowarfare centres I came across JATEC, The NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre, officially inaugurated in February 2025. On JATEC's site⁷ there is this:

JATEC's Role

JATEC, as one of the important pillars of the NATO-Ukraine evolving jointness, is to provide for the NATO-Ukraine interoperability, to contribute to the development of NATO's and Ukraine's transformation in deterrence and defence, crisis prevention, crisis management and cooperative security. JATEC identifies and supports to apply lessons from Russia's war against Ukraine. . . . JATEC will support Ukraine in their objective to be able to conduct joint activities with NATO on all levels.

So we have 'interoperability', 'evolving jointness' and 'joint activities'; but we don't have Ukraine actually joining NATO. This may be how the US and Ukraine will meet one of Russia's central demands in the coming peace deal: that Ukraine does not become a member of NATO. JATEC offers membership in everything but name.

Epstein

The Epstein documents released so far are on-line.⁸ I put Tony Blair into the search box there and found a reference to him being the chair of 'JPMorgan's "international council" of senior advisers'. I asked Google how much Blair would earn and got this:

In 2008, it was reported that former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair could

⁵ <<https://therealslog.ghost.io/crying-wolf/>>

⁶ Letter text at <<https://docs.un.org/en/A/76/785>>.

⁷ <<https://www.act.nato.int/jatec/>>

⁸ <<https://www.justice.gov/epstein>>

earn \$1 million per year for his part-time advisory role, which included joining the council.

And there are still people in the Labour Party who yearn for his return . . .

Not the Soviet terror network

An anonymous correspondent asked me if I had seen Daniela Richterova's *Watching the Jackals: Prague's Covert Liaisons with Cold War Terrorists and Revolutionaries* (Georgetown Studies in Intelligence History).⁹ I hadn't; but from the Amazon summary it sounds rather interesting:

Richterova unveils the story of Prague's engagement with various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization as well as some of the era's most infamous terrorists including Carlos the Jackal, Munich Olympics massacre commander Abu Daoud, and the Abu Nidal Organization. Richterova explains why terrorists and revolutionaries had long gravitated towards Prague, why Prague benefitted from the attraction, and why Czechoslovakia's powerful security and intelligence apparatus – the StB (Státní bezpečnost) – felt ambivalent about these unpredictable groups.

There is one essay by Richterova, a book review, on-line and free.¹⁰ Its subject matter is clearly related to her new book. In it she discusses the work of academics working in the state-intelligence relations field who show in detail, country by country, that reality differed greatly from the view that Soviet intelligence directed all the Warsaw Pact agencies.

As for the 'terror network' theory invented by those around Ronald Reagan, she writes:

. . . the 1980s saw a number of prominent American journalists, practitioners, and politicians advance ideologically driven interpretations of state-terrorism. Most famously and controversially, some argued that Moscow and its satellites were supporting a worldwide terror network aimed at destabilising Western democratic societies. The so-called 'terror network theory' found ardent supporters within the Reagan

⁹ <<https://shorturl.at/QGozG>> or <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Watching-Jackals-Liaisons-Terrorists-Revolutionaries/dp/1647125146/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0>

¹⁰ 'Reconnecting the dots: state-terrorist relations during the Cold War' at <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02684527.2021.2001956>>. Richterova is at King's College, London, which is partially funded by the Ministry of Defence. It is the only university I have been to which had an armed guard on the door.

Administration, not least Secretary of State Alexander Haig and CIA Director Bill Casey who spent considerable energy and taxpayer money trying to substantiate this narrative.

There were a fair few on the liberal/left around at the time who knew the whole thing was a scam;¹¹ and I don't suppose very many professional intelligence analysts believed it, either. But hey, the US military-industrial-complex needed a new 'threat' to generate arms spending and one was duly manufactured.

Related to which, the US's desire to constantly expand NATO is largely driven by the same thing: weapons spending. New NATO countries buy US weapons and/or communications systems when they join.

Brexit

I look at the *Morning Star* website from time to time and saw this in an editorial on 30 December 2025

Labour must not reverse Brexit. At least one of the reasons for working-class support for Brexit was creating the space for state-led economic intervention to bring jobs, in manufacturing above all, back to former industrial districts. People well understood that the EU's neoliberal rules rendered such a return to social democracy impossible.¹²

I didn't pay much attention to the Brexit referendum: like Prime Minister Cameron, I assumed 'Remain' would win comfortably. Influenced by Larry Elliot at the *Guardian*, I voted 'Leave' for the reason expressed in the last sentence above: the EU's neo-liberal rules would make rebuilding the British domestic economy difficult. But looking at the issue now, what manufacturing could be brought 'back to former industrial districts'? From where? Funded by what, to make what? Most of the British economy is now owned by overseas companies.¹³

¹¹ Including this journal, of course. See the 1990 'Truth Twisting: notes on disinformation' in *Lobster* 19 at <<https://shorturl.at/aUzYj>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/19/truth-twisting-notes-on-disinformation/>>. Re-reading this I was struck by the sheer crudity of the disinformation being pumped out by the anti-left forces in the UK.

¹² <<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/labour-must-not-reverse-brexit>>

¹³ Angus Hanton in his *Vassal State*, writes that 56% of British shares are now owned overseas. See the review by John Booth at <<https://shorturl.at/TrHHT>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/89/vassal-state-how-america-runs-britain-by-angus-hanton/>>.

Dallas again

1) a correction

In the previous issue, in this column under subhead **Israel and Dallas**, I stated 'All we know for sure is that Angleton's department of the CIA was reading Oswald's mail in America after his return from the USSR'. This is wrong. You might think that after 40+ years of doing this that I would have learned not to trust my memory – especially in a field as complex as the Kennedy assassination. Alas I hadn't, and in this case my memory was wrong. That *isn't* all we know for sure. In fact there were three sections of the CIA monitoring Oswald after his return from the Soviet Union.¹⁴ This makes no difference to my conclusions in that essay but still . . .

2) Rob Reiner

The murder of film director Rob Reiner and his wife got much mainstream media attention, in none which did I see any reference to his work in the Kennedy assassination field. This is described by Dick Russell¹⁵ and James DiEugenio who both worked with Reiner on the assassination.¹⁶

Are spies important?

This question arose again with the death of CIA officer Aldrich Ames in prison in early January. His obituary in *The Times* carried his comment, made during his sentencing for espionage in 1994, that spying was 'a self-serving sham carried out by careerist bureaucrats who managed to deceive policy-makers and the public about the necessity and value of their work'.

This proposition was considered in my review of Philip Knightley's *A Hack's Progress in Lobster* 34.¹⁷ Knightly quoted Ames and added that he had attended an historical conference on intelligence in Germany in 1994.

I challenged a panel that included Sergei Kondrashov; his colleague the former head of the KGB Leonid Sherbarshin; former head of East German intelligence, Markus Wolff; and former head of West German intelligence, Heribert Hellenbroich, to name a single important historical

¹⁴ See chapter 2 of Bill Simpich's *State Secret* at https://www.maryferrell.org/pages/State_Secret_Chapter2.html.

¹⁵ <https://dickrussell.substack.com/p/rob-and-michele-reiner>

¹⁶ <https://shorturl.at/k2AU0> or <https://www.kennedysandking.com/john-f-kennedy-articles/eulogy-for-rob-and-michele-reiner>

¹⁷ <https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/34/are-spies-useless/>

event in peacetime in which intelligence had played a decisive role. No one could do so.

I thought then that Knightley was being harsh. I wrote:

By asking for a 'decisive role' played by intelligence Knightley is asking for too much. Even during the Cold War there have been occasions when the intelligence services, the CIA and SIS for example, actually did provide intelligence of substance. The first that springs to mind was the Cuban missile crisis, when the information from the Soviet intelligence officer Penkovsky about the actual accuracy of Soviet missiles did appear to play a major role in the outcome of the crisis.

The second was the role of Oleg Gordievsky in explaining Soviet policy and thinking just at the point when the Soviet Union was cracking up, thus smoothing the way for the Gorbachev relationship first with Thatcher and then with the Americans. 'Decisive' – maybe not; but not insignificant.

. . . or get off the pot

I have distrusted Andrew Neil since he was editing the *Sunday Times* in the late 1980s and early 1990s and ran MI5 disinformation in its columns. These days, as well as a weekly programme on Times Radio, he writes a column for the *Daily Mail*. On 27 November its headline was:

This is a watershed moment in our economic history that will consign Britain to a Lost Decade.

Six weeks later, 1 January, the column was headed:

The evidence suggests this will be a year of economic revival that could lift Britain out of its gloom

Well, come on Mr Neil, which is it: a lost decade or revival?