

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE

**WILL THE NUMBER
8 BE LUCKY FOR
MILORAD DODIK?**

**The 8th president of
the Republika Srpska**



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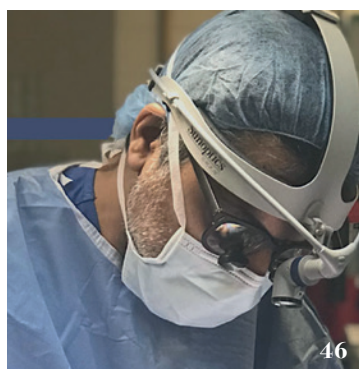
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EDITORIAL

THE SUPREME LEADER, THE PRESIDENT AND THE REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS

Implacable cogs in the Iranian repressive machine

Since the death of Mahsa Amini on 16 September 2022 by the 'morality police' for "inappropriate wearing of the headscarf" and despite violent repression, the uprising in Iran continues.

The anger and determination of the demonstrators against the Iranian rulers and for regime change has reached an unprecedented intensity

And each dramatic event has further strengthened the people's resolve to put an end to the authoritarian clerical model. When a ten-year-old boy is shot dead by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, it is his mother who points the finger at the regime's leadership at his funeral.

The mullahs have denied the facts and accused the protesters of treason. But they have lied too often, too long and too consistently to retain even a shred of credibility in front of an angry crowd.

It is almost the beginning of the fourth month of social and political unrest in Iran. At the time of writing, at least 470 people have been killed since the protests began, according to the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA). Among the dead are 63 people under the age of 18, and the authorities have arrested more than 15,000 people.

The demonstrations are causing great concern to the regime, which is stepping up repression and arrests. Two young men have already been executed on the flimsy charges of "enmity against God" or "endangering national security". Now Taraneh Alidoosti, a famous Iranian film actress and ardent women's rights activist, has been arrested along with other filmmakers, musicians, lawyers and journalists.

"Taraneh Alidoosti was arrested for publishing false information and content and inciting chaos," the official Tasnim news agency reported, without naming the location of her arrest. Taraneh Alidoosti has been a figure in Iranian cinema since her teenage years. Her best-known role was in Asghar Farhadi's film 'The Salesman', which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 2017.

The actress was arrested at the same time as Mohammad Ali Kamfirouzi, the lawyer of Iranian journalist Elaheh Mohammadi, who reported on the death of Mahsa Amini. She is not the first

voice of Iranian cinema to meet such a fate. Jafar Panahi, whose last film 'No Bear' was released on 23 November, is currently serving a six-year prison sentence.

He was arrested in July 2022 along with filmmakers Mohammad Rasoulof and Mostafa Al-Ahmad. They were both accused of "having links to anti-government groups and committing security violations". According to Reuters, they had signed a call asking security forces to lay down their weapons during protests in May following a building collapse.

Paying the price

On Instagram, Taraneh Alidoosti had repeatedly expressed her support for the demonstrations sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini on 16 September. On 8 December, the 38-year-old actress denounced the execution of Mohsen Shekari, who had been accused of "war against God". *"Any international organisation that stands by and watches this bloodbath without reacting is a disgrace to humanity,"* she wrote on her Instagram page.

In November, she promised to stay in her country, "pay the price" it will cost to defend her rights and stop her work to support the families of those killed or arrested.

A meteoric rise

The Supreme Leader, the President and the Revolutionary Guard Corps form the three main pillars on which the Iranian regime rests

The Iranian president "elected" in 2021, nicknamed "the Executioner", owes his meteoric rise to his frightening talent for condoning the worst abuses. A ruthless personality much appreciated by the Revolutionary Guards, the armed wing of the regime, which continues to remove from its ranks those elements who are a little too "moderate" for its taste.

It is a story full of blood. In tracing the life of Ebrahim Raïsi, one must first count the dead that have underlined his ruthless rise. The 62-year-old Ebrahim Raïsi was among the clerics who established the new power and did not participate in the Islamic revolution or the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), like most of the

regime's bigwigs. He also lacks charisma and political savvy. In light of all this, his colourful career raises questions.

How could he, at such a young age, become one of the most important cogs in the apparatus of oppression that was later to become a machine from hell? Was it his radicalism that seduced the Islamist power base as it began to shift all its weight to Iran, eliminating one by one the leftist parties fighting to overthrow the Shah?

Is it simply because he was the factotum of his protectors, Ayatollah Khomeini, and later of his successor, the current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei? Some researchers even speak of a "pawn sacrifice". One thing is certain, however: Ebrahim Raïsi has always been a hard man and has condoned the worst abuses of the regime, with the tireless support of the Revolutionary Guards.

The Ayatollah's conspiratorial speech

After remaining silent since the beginning of the revolt, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei finally spoke out on 3 October in his first reaction to the death of the young Mahsa Amini.

And his speech, like those of senior figures before him, testified to the weakening power of his government. He used accusatory and conspiratorial rhetoric against the United States and Israel as the only justification for the demonstrations. *"I say clearly that these riots and insecurity are the work of America, the usurping Zionist regime and its paid agents, with the help of treacherous Iranians abroad".*

After more than 40 years, the Grand Bazaar in Tehran and markets in other provinces have gone on strike, a sure sign that the revolt is gaining ground. Although the main owners of Tehran's bazaar were considered reliable supporters of the government, they are now joining the protest movement, just a month and a half after Ali Khamenei's speech in which he called on those in his government to take a clear stand against the ongoing protests.

But it is clear that Ali Khamenei's behind-the-scenes efforts to get the regime's influential figures behind him have failed. These people are probably afraid to link their fate with that of the Supreme Leader... they do not want to back a horse that is already dead!

Interpreting the signs

Media coverage of events in Iran is poor in imagery compared to what we saw during the 1978-79 revolution that led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the founding of the Islamic Republic

What the viewer - and especially the internet user - can see are videos taken on the spot by the demonstrators themselves. But at least they are more authentic than the images that Western reporters would have provided, given the visual tricks and other manipulations that were sometimes detected during the last war in Syria, for example.

In addition to these videos, there are also images of demonstrations organised by Iranians in Western countries. These images in their entirety - whether taken in a peaceful context in Paris, London or New York, or at the risk of being shot or arrested in various Iranian cities - force us to interpret the silent signs that can be seen in them.

These silent signs often say more than the commentaries that accompany them; so it is a matter of engaging in a kind of interpretive exercise.

Of course, it is impossible to say whether the revolt will be long-lasting, since the theocratic regime of the mullahs, firmly established for 43 years, has so far always triumphed over internal dissent.

A striking example is the demonstrations following the rigged re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009, in which more than 150 civilians died

The regime has remained in power despite the economic crisis. Moreover, this protest movement has not designated a leader, which has made it vulnerable. The revolution of 1978/79, in which the so-called "blacks and the reds", i.e. the Islamists and the communists, joined forces, had the advantage of being led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

But nothing prevents us from trying to discern various signs in events. As for Mahsa Amini's Kurdish origins, it should be noted that the flag of her people has often been mixed with those of the angry Iranians.

And another thing: the flag waved by the demonstrators is very often the old Iranian flag from before the 1979 revolution, dating back to the Qajar dynasty, with a golden lion in the middle holding a sword and passing in front of a rising sun. The flag of the Islamic Republic features a stylised script of the word 'Allah' in the shape of a red tulip.

This makes it possible to tell from a photo which camp the demonstrators belong to. There are those who are called upon by the regime to support it in large counter-demonstrations and those who have chosen to express their anger not only by burning their veils and cutting off a lock of hair, but also by daring to raise a flag that is the ultimate provocation in the eyes of the regime.

Of these three signs of opposition, the third goes far beyond the simple demand for the right to show one's hair; it symbolises the desire to overthrow the Islamic Republic itself.

Does this mean that the protesters who want to go all the way want to restore the monarchical institutions that were overthrown forty-three years ago? This is where it gets complicated, because it is very difficult to clearly analyse events that are only indirectly captured by smartphone videos on social networks

Reading the signs does not work wonders either when it comes to correctly interpreting events on the ground, but it is still an advantage that cannot be neglected.

It is difficult to predict the future of these protests and their impact on the Supreme Leader and the government of Iran. What is clear, however, is that the situation in the country remains tense and volatile, and that Ali Khamenei and his government will continue to be closely watched by the international community and Iranians themselves.

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WILL THE NUMBER 8 BE LUCKY FOR MILORAD DODIK ?

**How will life turn out
for the 8th president of
the Republika Srpska?**



Milorad Dodik and
Vladimir Putin

According to the late Sir Terry Pratchett, in his Discworld fantasy series, the number eight is lucky and slightly dangerous. The stories are set on a round, flat world, the Discworld, supported by four elephants who in turn stand on the shell of Great A'Tuin, the Sky Turtle, flying endlessly through space. Eight is the number of magic, Pratchett wrote (with his tongue in his cheek). It's not always good magic: in his books wizards and witches can be evil as well as good. If you remember your childhood fairy tales, you'll recall that some witches were good, some were wicked, providing enchanted spinning wheels as well as enchanting princes (and princesses). And we mustn't forget goblins, ogres and other things that go "bump" in the night. It's the same with wizards, fairies and pixies. However, in Chinese numerology, it seems, the number 8 predicts wealth and an abundance of good fortune. When the number 8 works its magic in your life you can expect to find that money flows easily towards you. How lovely; I wish it would for me! I had elderly relatives who were superstitious about numbers, although mainly it was the number 7, thought to be lucky because there are supposedly Seven Wonders in the world, Snow White, if you recall, met up with seven dwarfs, there are seven notes in a musical scale and there are supposedly seven deadly sins. Then, of course, there's the number 13 (unlucky because, it seems, it was supposedly the number of diners at the Last Supper of Jesus). Unless you're very superstitious, I can't imagine numbers play a large part in your life.



Milorad Dodik kissing the flag in front of Honour Unit at the Republic Day parade 2018 in Banja Luka

What do we know about Milorad Dodik and what does the number eight mean to him? Well, he was born in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, is married to Snježana Dodik, and was elected the eighth president of Republika Srpska in November 2022, after serving as the 7th Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, effectively the federal head of state, from 2018 to 2022. Given that the job must sometimes seem to be something of a poisoned chalice. It's puzzling that anyone wants it at all. Dodik was born in March 1959. He studied political science at the University of Belgrade and from 1986 he was President of the City Council in his hometown, Laktaši, then, in 1990, he was elected to parliament in the first parliamentary elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a candidate of the Savez reformskih snaga Jugoslavije (SRSJ, Union of Reform Forces of Yugoslavia). Later on, he became a member of the parliament of the Republika Srpska, where he found himself in opposition to the ruling Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) of Radovan

Karadžić. Clearly not satisfied with the country's political system, in 1996 he founded his own party, the Stranka nezavisnih socijaldemokrata (SNSD), the Party of Independent Social Democrats, which soon afterwards in 2002, merged with a smaller party to form the Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata (SNSD), Alliance of Independent Social Democrats. Dodik has been chairman of the SNSD consistently since 1996. That takes courage, especially in a volatile country such as his.



Radovan Karadžić

Dodik attracted particular attention with his positions on the 1995 Srebrenica massacre carried out by the army of the Republika Srpska, in which thousands of adult and adolescent Muslims were murdered. In an interview for his Wikipedia entry on December 2, 2007, Dodik confirmed that there had been "a genocide" in Srebrenica: "Well, I know exactly what happened. It was a genocide in Srebrenica. This was decided by the court in The Hague, which is an indisputable legal fact." In April 2010, in an interview with the Belgrade newspaper Novosti, he denied this genocide, as condemned by the UN and the EU, for example. He also claimed that the number of victims was 3,500 and not, as generally accepted, about 8,000. That makes it seem that the deaths of 3,500 people is a mere statistic and not important.



His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III and Prime Minister of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik in 2010

Not very saintly?

We must bear in mind, however, that Dodik is inclined to set his sails to suit whichever wind will serve him best. This means whichever one will best serve his ambitions. He told the MSN news website, for instance: “I was elected president of Srpska for the third time at a very difficult time,” before affirming that he will seek cooperation with the European Union, as well as with Russia, China and the United States, although he stressed that he will not let his country be a member of NATO. He is clearly not just “cutting his coat according to the cloth”, as the old saying has it, but also seeing if he can squeeze an extra pair of trousers, a smart jacket and even a hat out of it, too, if he can. Some call that prudence, others have less complimentary words for it, although for those of a biblical turn of mind, it’s not really very different from what St. Paul supposedly wrote in his letter to the Corinthians: “For though I be free of all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.” Paul’s letter goes on to explain his somewhat ruthless tactics. “And unto the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law.” And so he continues, explaining how he



plans to win over other groups, advocating the sorts of methods familiar to and much used by extremists with a point of view to get across and by people trying to sell you double glazing. There are certainly people who use such tactics all the time, of course: politicians, few of whom we would call “saintly”.

The Sarajevo Times reported on a press conference of Dodik’s in which he responded to one journalist’s question by saying: “The Reform Program was adopted, which foresees a certain form of cooperation with NATO. That’s fine, that’s not a big deal. What will not happen is NATO membership. We are not the ones who share programmatic values with other political parties.” But, of course, Dodik’s government is very new and untested, although he has held positions of power before, and not without controversy, for instance serving as prime minister of Republika Srpska, the Serb-majority entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina

from 1998 to 2001, and then again from 2006 to 2010. He later became president of Republika Srpska itself from 2010 until 2018. Dodik has also been serving as the president of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) since it was first created in 1996.

When he first came to power, Dodik was seen as a moderate thinker and a reformer, a long way politically from the ultra-nationalist Serb Democratic Party, but since those early hopeful signs, he and his SNSD party have drifted increasingly towards the ultra-nationalist and separatist camp, demanding the right of Bosnian Serbs to self-determination. They have also moved closer politically to Serbia and Russia, effectively, demanding the right to be on the political right, which is where he has remained, although he was popularly viewed around the world as a moderate. His recent statements suggest otherwise. As he was being sworn in as President of the part of Bosnia-Herzegovina that is under Serb control, he told his audience in Banja-Luka that he would continue to pursue “good ties with Russia, China and other like-minded countries”, which presumably means countries that do not permit a political opposition to exist and which take a very tough line with political opponents. During the inauguration ceremony Dodik said that Bosnian Serbs can now boast that: “We have our Serbia, our Russia and our (other) partners in Hungary, China.”

Whose side are you on?

The elections themselves were extremely controversial, with the EU/US High Representative taking the very unusual step of demanding immediate changes to the manner in which the Croatian representative in the country’s tripartite presidency is elected. Populists immediately seized on this as an example of interference by the international community, which it undoubtedly is, however much most people might see it as necessary, although it drew criticism in Germany, too. However, the ultimate outcome was an electoral rebuke for the hardliners, however much external meddling was done. As for Dodik, he was initially thought to have suffered defeat amidst allegations of voter fraud and corruption, but he just managed to return to the presidency of Republika Srpska, scraping a narrow (and not uncontroversial) victory. He used his win as a platform from which to accuse Germany and the United Kingdom of working against the interests of Bosnian Serbs. Dodik has the support of the Kremlin; Putin appears to enjoy the unrest he causes, which distracts international attention from Russian brutality (and embarrassing setbacks and defeats) in Ukraine.



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Sarajevo

Dodik has said quite recently that violence is not the way to solve cross-border crises, according to the newspaper Balkan Insight. It seems unlikely, based on past evidence, that he really thinks this way. Dodik, in his role as the Serbian member of Bosnia and Herzegovina's tripartite presidency, visited Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Ankara to discuss the region's on-going problems. Dodik has said in the past that only Erdoğan can prevent a flare-up. Dodik had previously threatened to withdraw all Bosnian Serb officials from state-level institutions and recreate a full Bosnian army, which brings with it the fear of Bosnia collapsing and of inevitable armed conflict. Dodik did sound one conciliatory note, however, insisting that dialogue is needed on all open issues that involve Serbia, Croatia and Turkey. "The goodwill of [Serbian President Aleksandar] Vucic, Erdoğan and [Croatian President Zoran] Milanovic can be useful, but everyone else should agree on that," Dodik said, adding that there is no alternative to peace and "the threat of force cannot solve any problem". In the Balkans, talk of peace is vitally important, even if it's only talk, a beautiful flower that never blooms.



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Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Srpska President Milorad Dodik

At the closed meeting, held in Turkey, Dodik and Erdoğan talked about bringing together the leaders of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia, for a meeting that would get Serbia's Vucic, Croatia's Milanovic and the leaders of Bosnia's main Bosniak, Croat and Serb parties, Bakir Izetbegovic, Dragan Covic and Dodik sitting around the same table. That would be quite an achievement. Dodik said before the meeting that he would like the opportunity to explain the situation to the Turkish president, complaining that the information Erdoğan had received so far had been "one-sided". Dodik praised Erdoğan as "a man who is not prepared to do anything in Bosnia and Herzegovina that would be harmful for Serbs and Croats". The leader of Bosnia's main Bosniak party, the Democratic Action Party, SDA, agreed to the idea of talking things through, with Alija Izetbegović telling the N1 TV channel that Erdoğan could lead a mediation process, defining him as a genius. That may not be a view shared by everyone.



© NRF

Chairman of Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH's) Presidency Milorad Dodik, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2019

It would not be correct to imagine constant conversation and negotiation, or, indeed, the basic notion of fair play. I think that occasional house parties with the neighbours would have been unlikely, too. Think of it more like constant bickering with occasional threats and menaces. I'm afraid the Balkans has always been like that. If you want peace, harmony and fair play, you should go elsewhere. The region's fragmented identity owes much to the turbulent years of Ottoman conquest as well as to its mountainous terrain, that keeps closely neighbouring districts and towns apart. In this case, geography plays a very large part in history. If you look up the names of the many different tribes inhabiting the area during what the rest of Europe called 'the Dark Ages', you're in for a long read. They are listed, broken down into different ethnic categories, with names like the Agrianes, the Coelaetae, the Sycæboæ, the Coertoboci and also the Koistobokoi and Koistobokoi Montanoi. There are many, many more: a bewildering variety of ethnic variations. The fact that they seemed to spend so much of their time fighting each other really isn't surprising. Today's occasional flare-ups among Bosnians, Bosniaks and Herzegovinans, Serbs and so on are hardly surprising. It's like whose "gang" you were in at school (often dictated by your parents' address or what football team you (or your farther) supported) really becoming a matter of life or death, with quite a lot of violence in the process. It's no surprise that there have been (and still are) so many ethnic divisions in the Balkans and that the people living there seem not to like each other much. The surprise would

be if they all lived peacefully side-by-side. It reminds me of the song performed by the satirical songwriter and performer, Tom Lehrer, back in the 1950s and 60s. His song “National Brotherhood Week” neatly sums up how it’s almost always much easier to hate each other than it is to develop any sort of affection for each other.



President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, President Alija Izetbegovic of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and President Franjo Tudjman of the Republic of Croatia initial the draft of the Dayton Peace Accords

Invading venus, anyone?

Indeed, the Balkans have few happy memories to look back on. Take Albania, for instance – which is something Benito Mussolini tried to do, of course. Albania’s first ruler, the wonderfully-named King Zog was overthrown by Mussolini when he invaded the country in 1939. Then Adolf Hitler came along, using Albania as a kind of jumping-off point from which to launch his invasion of Greece. Hergé, the cartoonist who created Tintin, based the figure on his elder brother, the physical resemblance being so strong that the brother in question suffered bullying when he joined the army. No prizes for guessing the poor man’s nick-name. Tintin had a dog, too, called Toto. My childhood cartoon hero, in the boys’ comic ‘The Eagle’, had weird eyebrows, so nobody could actually closely resemble him. He was called Dan Dare. I don’t think he ever visited the Balkans, either, but his arch enemy, the evil small green homunculus called the Mekon, riding on a floating platform, would have been very easy to spot. The Mekon certainly didn’t resemble Dodik, either, while Dan Dare’s best friend and companion was a working-class chap from Lancashire, called Digby, plump and often humorous but courageous.

But this doesn’t bring us any nearer to life in the Balkans and its series of leaders of varying kind, such as Enver Hoxha, an Albanian Communist who ruled Albania in an authoritarian manner from 1944 until his death in 1985. His statue was pulled down, the head cut off and then urinated on by demonstrators, who appear not to have liked him much. He had not been a popular leader, clearly. The poison that permeates Balkan politics keeps being recirculated, largely because of a perceived lack of justice under successive leaders down the many years. It’s been almost three decades since the Dayton peace agreement was reached in November 1995 by Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, ending the war that broke out in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

There is little point in referring to any particular decade in particular as having been overshadowed by evil and wickedness. They all were. And in many ways, history is constantly repeating itself, and for much the same reasons as before. Certainly, Albanians suffered in the Second World War, a fact conceded by Hoxha: “The sacrifices of our people were very great,” he said at a public meeting at the end of the War. “Out of a population of one million, 28,000 were killed, 12,600 wounded, 10,000 were made political prisoners in Italy and Germany, and 35,000 made to do forced labour; of the 2,500 towns and villages of Albania, 850 were ruined or razed to the ground; all the communications, all the ports, mines and electric power installations were destroyed, our agriculture and livestock were plundered, and our entire national economy was wrecked.” Not that Hoxha had much to be proud of either, looking back at his isolationist reign. By the time he died in 1985, Albania was officially the third poorest country in the world, with a GNP of €14.48 per month. The country was starving, largely because forty years of collectivism had failed, while isolationism meant that farmers were still using technology from the 1920s. So, while Hoxha was bemoaning the sorry state of his country, Albania, and his people’s extreme poverty and hunger, he was the man who’d caused it. Even the Mekon might have laughed.



The government building in the centre of Sarajevo burns after being hit by tank fire during the siege in 1992



© INTELLIGENT CHALLENGE EU

Sarajevo

It was Britain's wartime leader Sir Winston Churchill who spoke about the tendency of Balkan affairs to spill over into neighbouring countries. He said that they: "produce more history than they can consume." There is a distinct tendency for their troubles to get spread around. It was Otto von Bismarck who said: "If ever there is another war in Europe, it will come out of some damn silly thing in the Balkans." What's more, of course, the very word 'Balkanization' means to break up a country into ever smaller and very often mutually hostile units. In fact, the official definition is to break a country up into: "ethnically homogeneous parts," but as we've seen, they're very often not. Dodik, too, is a prickly individual, always ready to take offence. He recently accused US President Joe Biden of trying to humiliate him and his country by sending a greeting to him to mark Statehood Day, which is not celebrated in Republika Srpska. Or it could simply have been that Biden didn't realise that Statehood Day isn't recognised there. It doesn't sound like much of a provocation; I mean, you wouldn't hit somebody for wishing you a happy birthday when it wasn't your birthday. Like I said, even the mildest incident can quickly turn nasty in the Balkans. As it turned out, Dodik argued that only the Muslim populations of Bosnia and Herzegovina celebrate Statehood Day, which in his view made Biden's greeting a deliberate provocation, intended to humiliate Dodik's people. It really does get that silly there.

What a state for statehood to be in

Several countries celebrate Statehood Day in one way or another. In Slovenia it's the 25 June,

in Bosnia and Herzegovina it's the 25 November, while Croatia celebrates on the 30 May. Serbia marks the occasion on 15 February, to celebrate the uprising of 1804 when the people threw off rule by the Ottomans. Statehood day – the actual day varying from country to country – is not to be confused with Independence Day, which is most often celebrated on a different day and for a different reason.



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The Battle of Mišar fought between Serbian revolutionaries and an Ottoman army, from 12 to 15 August 1806 during the First Serbian Uprising

For Montenegro, for instance, Statehood Day is on the 13 July and celebrates the country's recognition as a state by the Berlin Congress in 1878, while Independence Day, on 25 May, commemorates the date of the referendum that established actual statehood in 2006. Political history is a complicated subject, and one country's special day of proud celebration probably won't be the same as that of the country next door. But while Dodik feels insulted by President Biden, we may console ourselves with the thought that his annoyance may have more to do with the sanctions the US has imposed on him, on a television station under his control and on a couple of his officials for alleged corruption and what Washington

calls “destabilising activities”. The sanctions, including asset freezes and visa bans, are rooted in Dodik’s threat to withdraw Serbians from the Bosnian national army and other institutions, while seeking to destroy the Dayton peace accord. Dodik clearly isn’t going to be seen as “flavour of the month” in the White House. He’s seen instead as a troublemaker who loves to cause trouble.



Ratko Mladić, former commander of the Bosnian Serb Army, at his trial judgement at the ICTY on 22 November 2017

What’s more, Dodik is regarded as the most pro-Putin leader in the region. He’s also an ultra-nationalist, it seems, keen to extract his Republika Srpska from the rest of Bosnia. Dodik has been manoeuvring to secure enhanced rights for the region he calls home and stirring up moves towards ultimate secession. He led his supporters in street demonstrations to mark a banned public holiday to mark the creation of a separate Serbian parastate. His supporters sang nationalist and Islamophobic songs whilst carrying the Serbian flag alongside banners supportive of Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian general accused of genocide. The EU condemned the event and threatened to consider imposing sanctions unless things improve. The problem is a lack of unity on the EU’s part, with Hungary supporting the separatists.

According to the highly informative Politico website, there is quite a lot to worry about. It quotes Florian Bieber, a professor of southeast European politics at the University of Graz. “The big problem is that Bosnia’s international observers have a very short attention span,” he said. “When there’s a crisis, they see it as a window of opportunity for something to get done. And to get it done as fast as possible, they bypass all the institutions and talk to the ethnic leaders outside the institutional framework.” As it is, Dodik has made moves towards an

independence referendum before, even though it would have been illegal under the Dayton Accords. Dodik has plenty of supporters, too, among the country’s nationalists, with 99.8% of voters supporting a proposal to create a Day of Republika Srpska, as if it needs one. The EU too often takes its eye off the ball and right now the outcome could prove deadly. Bieber said that it’s like having pyromaniacs as firefighters.

Bieber doesn’t accept the EU’s excuse for inaction, that the system is “too complicated”. He points out that it has been like this for some 26 years, largely with the same politicians involved. The Dayton Accords brought to an end some three-and-a-half years of war and set up a single sovereign state known as Bosnia and Herzegovina which had two parts: the Serb dominated Republika Srpska and the mainly Croat and Bosniak populated Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With the benefit of hindsight, it’s easy to see this was unlikely to last, although it did end the fighting at the time. Then a law was passed in 2021 making it illegal to deny genocide, which Dodik and his supporters constantly do. Perhaps not surprisingly, Dodik himself has the support of Hungary’s far-right prime minister, Viktor Orbán, a man who seems to enjoy juggling lit matches in a firework factory.



Florian Bieber

Can the Balkans scrape through a few more years (or even months) without yet another armed conflict ruining their lives? It’s what most people want, but they may not get to choose. Whatever peace moves may be progressing, Dodik and his pals, Orbán and Vladimir Putin, may well be examining what possible advantages may be offered by killing a few more people and scarring the landscape with ordnance. It seems certain that whatever Dodik does or says, and whomsoever he may talk to, peace certainly isn’t his long-term goal. There must be a solution to this mess, but so far nobody has found it.

T.Kingsley.Brooks@europe-diplomatic.eu

T. Kingsley Brooks

NEWS IN BRIEF

ALSTOM TO SUPPLY 18 ADDITIONAL X'TRAPOLIS BATTERY-ELECTRIC TRAINS FOR IRISH RAIL



© ALSTOM DESIGN & STYLING

Alstom's new X'Trapolis model

- The further order, valued at around €160 million, is part of a ten-year framework agreement signed last year
- Irish Rail is ordering 18 battery-electric multiple units (BEMUs), aiming to boost the sustainability of Ireland's busiest commuter belt

Alstom has signed a further order with Irish Rail (IE) for 18 more five-car X'Trapolis trains and an extension to the 15-year Technical Support and Spares Supply agreement under the ten-year framework agreement announced in December 2021. This further order, valued at around €160 million, will see 18 battery-electric multiple units (BEMUs) added to the initial firm order of 19 five-car X'Trapolis trains – thirteen of which were battery-electric and six electrics – made in 2021.

In total, Irish Rail has now ordered 37 five-car X'Trapolis trains which will deliver more capacity and decarbonisation benefits in advance of electrification of the extended DART+ network.

Alstom UK & Ireland Managing Director Nick Crossfield and Alstom Ireland Managing Director Piers Wood joined Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan T.D., Chief Executive of the National Transport Authority, Anne Graham and Irish Rail's Chief Executive, Jim Meade at Irish Rail's Connolly Station headquarters on Friday morning to formally sign the new order.

The ten-year framework agreement allows for up to 750 electric and battery-electric rail cars to be procured for the DART+ network which is planned to open in 2025. In addition to the fleet, Alstom will provide a range of services solutions, including a Technical Support and Spares Supply agreement for the first 15 years of the fleet's operation, deploying its HealthHub and TrainScanner technologies for

predictive maintenance, and providing three train simulators to support driver training. The expansion of the DART fleet as part of the DART+ Programme is funded by the National Transport Authority under the National Development Plan 2021-2030.

Due to enter service in 2025, the 37 trains with 31 five-car battery-electric multiple units (BEMUs) and 6 five-car electric multiple units (EMUs) now ordered will be capable of journeys of more than 80 kilometres outside the electrified DART network under pure battery power, thereby taking older diesel rolling stock off those non-electrified lines. These X'Trapolis trains will comprise the first modern battery fleet in Ireland, contributing to the widening of Ireland's carbon reduction efforts through public transport.

According to Irish Rail, today's 18 battery-electric multiple units (BEMUs) order will benefit Maynooth/M3 Parkway and Kildare line services, delivering more capacity for commuters in advance of electrification.

Energy stored in the battery system will be replenished via fast charging stations at chosen terminus locations and by recovering braking energy while the new battery-electric trainsets are on the move. This will enable, for example, the new battery-electric fleet to deliver Dublin to Drogheda return services, with fast charging at Drogheda Station.

DART+ is the transformative programme that will ensure train travel is at the heart of Ireland's sustainable transport network. Funded under the National Development Plan by the National Transport Authority, DART+ is an investment that will double the capacity and treble the electrification of the Greater Dublin Area network, facilitating sustainable mobility and development to enhance quality of life in the capital and its surrounding counties.

Alstom X'Trapolis for Ireland

Alstom's highly successful, modular X'Trapolis commuter train platform, with over 6000 railcars sold worldwide is manufactured as well in the European Union and will be specially tailored for the DART+ programme.

Each 82-metre DART+ train will have space for 550 passengers with wide, walk-through gangways, low-level floor, and an automatic retractable step to maximise accessibility for all passengers. Other features include dedicated cycle and family areas, enhanced passenger features such as charging facilities for mobile phones, e-bikes and e-scooters; and advanced CCTV systems throughout the train, to enhance safety and security for customers and employees.

Alstom will also continue to support the DART+ fleet for a period of 15 years, providing technical support and spares, and deploying its HealthHub and TrainScanner technologies for predictive maintenance.

Alstom is the pioneer of sustainable and smart mobility with a full portfolio of green mobility solutions, including the world's first hydrogen train, the Coradia iLint, which is already in passenger service in Germany as well as battery electric trains already sold in Germany (Coradia Continental BEMU).

NORTHROP GRUMMAN AND THE US AIR FORCE INTRODUCE THE B-21 RAIDER, THE WORLD'S FIRST SIXTH-GENERATION AIRCRAFT



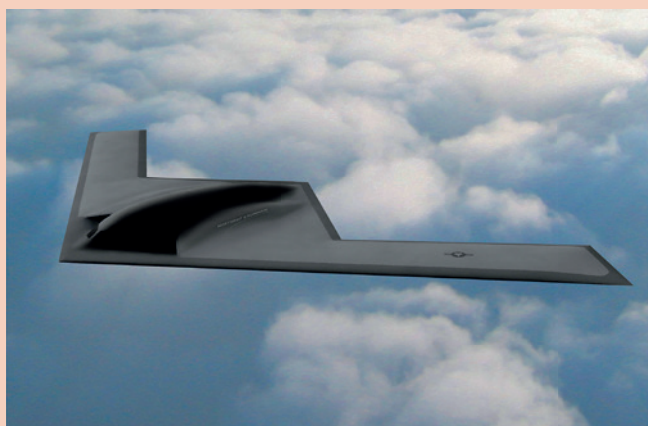
The B-21 Raider

Northrop Grumman Corporation (NYSE: NOC) and the U.S. Air Force has unveiled the B-21 Raider to the world. The B-21 joins the nuclear triad as a visible and flexible deterrent designed for the U.S. Air Force to meet its most complex missions.

"The Northrop Grumman team develops and delivers technology that advances science, looks into the future and brings it to the here and now," said Kathy Warden, chair, chief executive officer and president, Northrop Grumman. "The B-21 Raider defines a new era in technology and strengthens America's role of delivering peace through deterrence."

The B-21 Raider forms the backbone of the future for U.S. air power, leading a powerful family of systems that deliver a new era of capability and flexibility through advanced integration of data, sensors and weapons. Its sixth-generation capabilities include stealth, information advantage and open architecture.

"The B-21 Raider is a testament to America's enduring advantages in ingenuity and innovation. And it's proof of the Department's long-term commitment to building advanced capabilities that will fortify America's ability to deter aggression, today and into the future. Now, strengthening and sustaining U.S. deterrence is at the heart of our National Defense Strategy," said Secretary of Defense



Lloyd J. Austin III. "This bomber was built on a foundation of strong, bipartisan support in Congress. And because of that support, we will soon fly this aircraft, test it and then move into production."

The B-21 is capable of networking across the battlespace to multiple systems, and into all domains. Supported by a digital ecosystem throughout its lifecycle, the B-21 can quickly evolve through rapid technology upgrades that provide new capabilities to outpace future threats.

"With the B-21, the U.S. Air Force will be able to deter or defeat threats anywhere in the world," said Tom Jones, corporate vice president and president, Northrop Grumman Aeronautics Systems. "The B-21 exemplifies how Northrop Grumman is leading the industry in digital transformation and digital engineering, ultimately delivering more value to our customers."

The B-21 Raider is named in honor of the Doolittle Raids of World War II when 80 men, led by Lt. Col. James "Jimmy" Doolittle, and 16 B-25 Mitchell medium bombers set off on a mission that changed the course of World War II. The designation B-21 recognizes the Raider as the first bomber of the 21st century.

CONTINENTAL EUROPE'S LARGEST ENERGY STORAGE PLANT INAUGURATED IN DEUX-ACREN, BELGIUM



The plant can store 100 MWh of energy in lithium-ion batteries with a capacity of up to 50 MW and thus regulate the frequency of the European electricity transmission grid. The commissioning of this plant is the culmination of several years of collaboration with Tesla, Yuso and InnoVent, the initiators of the project.

Energy storage systems help stabilise electricity grids by ensuring a balance between generation and consumption. Today, this function is performed by oil- or gas-fired power plants, making the European electricity grid dependent on fossil fuels.

The storage power plants connected to the public electricity grid provide "services" to the grid operator to ensure the stability of energy distribution. These services have various functions: Regulating the grid frequency, balancing the fluctuations of renewable energies and storing energy at times of low consumption in order to feed it back in at times of high consumption.

Energy storage: the key to EU energy independence

Today, it is crucial for the European Union to be able to control its energy production and thus its costs. Storage power plants are not only economical, but can also be built in less than a year and respond quickly to the energy crisis.

“As a pioneer of energy storage in France, CORSICA SOLE has been operating this type of plant on the French islands since 2015,” emphasises Michael Coudyser, the company’s Managing Director. “This project is an important step for the development of electricity storage solutions in Europe. We have financed this project with our shareholder Mirova Energy Transition 5, without any public subsidy. By showing that large-scale battery deployment is economically viable, we are proving that we can build a world based on renewable energy combined with energy storage”.

With this project, CORSICA SOLE is changing the scale and becoming one of the European leaders in this sector.

As a player committed to the energy transition, CORSICA SOLE is convinced that renewable energies are an important answer to the fight against climate change. The company’s mission is to accelerate the energy transition towards a world that is 100% renewable and 0% fossil fuel. By planning, building and operating renewable energy generation and electricity storage facilities, CORSICA SOLE helps regions make the best use of their natural resources to achieve energy sovereignty.



SECURITY UNION: COMMISSION PROPOSES NEW RULES ON ADVANCE PASSENGER INFORMATION

The Commission is proposing new rules to strengthen the use of Advance Passenger Information (API) data. This proposal is one of the key actions identified in the EU Security Union Strategy. The EU continues its progress in strengthening its overall security architecture, which aims to enhance EU citizens’ protection, as shown also in the Fifth Security Union Progress Report. The report highlights three years of solid progress in implementing the Security Union Strategy. It shows that significant steps have been made in strengthening the protection of critical infrastructures from physical, cyber and hybrid attacks, in fighting terrorism and radicalisation, as well as in the fight against organised crime.

Information on travellers has helped to improve border

controls, reduce irregular migration, and identify persons posing security risks. Every year, over a billion passengers enter, leave or travel within the EU. The new rules will improve the use of API data to perform checks on passengers prior to their arrival at the external borders. The new rules will also enhance the fight against serious crime and terrorism within the EU. This will close an important gap in the current legal framework, while upholding EU standards for data protection and transmission.

The Commission is also today reporting on three years of solid progress in implementing the Security Union Strategy and proposing a new Action Plan on Trafficking in Cultural Goods, which remains one of the most lucrative forms of business for organised crime groups.

The new rules on API will introduce:

Uniform rules on API data collection. The new rules include a closed list of API data elements, the means to collect API data, and a single point for the transfer of the data.

Mandatory API data collection for the purposes of border management and combating irregular immigration on all flights entering the Schengen area. This will facilitate the travel of people travelling to the Schengen area, with reduced times at disembarkation and at the physical border checks. Mandatory API data collection for law enforcement purposes for all flights to and from the EU, as well as on selected flights within the EU. API data for such purposes is collected in full respect of EU personal data protection rules.

Better quality API data, as air carriers will have to collect API data by automated means only.

Streamlined transmission of API data by air carriers to national authorities through a new router, which will be managed by an EU Agency, eu-LISA. This technical solution is compliant with personal data protection safeguards as it will only transmit and not store any API data.

Next steps

It is now for the European Parliament and the Council to examine the proposal. Once adopted, the rules will be directly applicable across the EU. These proposals complete other EU systems and initiatives in the area of border management and security, and that are being rolled out in the course of 2023 (such as the Entry Exit System and the European Travel Information Authorisation System). The new rules on the collection and transfer of API data are expected to be applied in full as of 2028. Once the router is developed, which is expected to be the case by 2026, public authorities and air carriers will have two years to adjust to the new requirements and test the router, before it becomes mandatory.

41 ARRESTS FOR SELLING POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS HORSE MEAT

Operation leads to seizure of horse meat unfit for consumption

The operation, developed jointly by Europol and the Spanish Civil Guard (Guardia Civil) targeted the illegal sale of horse meat unsuitable for consumption. The criminal network involved in this illegal sale is linked to a number of crimes including food fraud, money laundering and document fraud. The untraceable meat was sold on the

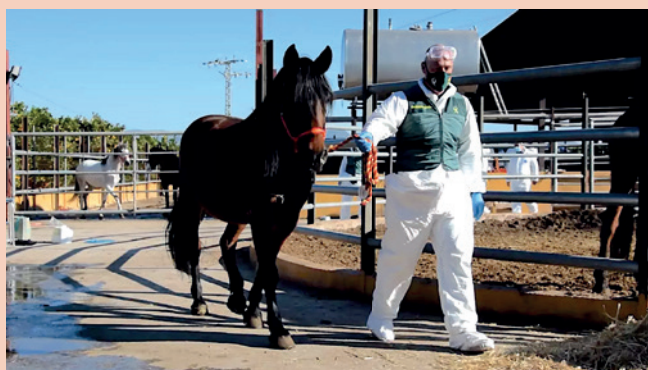
Spanish, but also Belgian, German and Italian markets.

The investigation uncovered a large criminal network, which was altering the traceability of horse meat by falsifying transfer and identification documents. During the operational activities, national authorities arrested 35 individuals, including the heads of the network, while targeting 6 companies linked to the criminal organisation. During the raids in Spain, authorities seized half a tonne of horse meat unfit for consumption.

Active international cooperation, facilitated by Europol, enabled the dismantling of the criminal scheme with six other arrests made by the Belgian Federal Police. The suspects involved in the criminal network had different functions: from the ones who slaughtered the animals without the necessary controls to the individuals dealing with the transport, the veterinarians providing false documents and the butcher facilities, which sold the meat unfit for consumption.

Animal abuse generating millions in illegal profits

The suspects acquired horses from across Spain for free or by paying up to 100 euros per animal. Due to several factors, these animals were not destined for the food market and the potential illegal profit was substantial. Once the leader of the criminal network acquired enough livestock to activate the illegal scheme, they set up a complete cattle exploitation facility in 2019 and started exporting the meat to other European markets. Spanish officers raided the clandestine facilities and uncovered 80 horses, which had been abused and were suffering from various untreated diseases due to the lack of veterinary control.



This lack of supervision posed a significant risk for the development of zoonotic diseases transmittable to humans. Moreover, the animals endured poor conditions in the cattle facilities, a lack of food and water, as well as permanent stress situations during transport. Even a single illegal shipment generated 35 000 euros for the transporters, with an estimated turnover of EUR 4.5 million in turnover on the logistical side. The criminal network turned dirt into diamonds: horses, that were written off and worth only EUR 100 each, generated illegal profits of about EUR 1.5 million.

Europol coordinated the operational activities, facilitated the information exchange and provided analytical support to national law enforcement authorities. During the action days, Europol deployed experts to Belgium and Spain to cross-check operational information against Europol's databases in real time and provided leads to investigators in the field.

NO LAUGHING MATTER — NEW REPORT SHOWS RISE IN RECREATIONAL USE OF NITROUS OXIDE



© HANS MULLER

Used nitrous oxide whippits (N2O) near a secondary school in Utrecht-West

A rise in the supply and recreational use of nitrous oxide ('laughing gas') is the focus of a new report out today from the EU drugs agency (EMCDDA). The publication — *Recreational use of nitrous oxide: a growing concern for Europe* — points to the risks and harms associated with the drug, which is now widely available, cheap and popular among some young people.

Nitrous oxide has a variety of legitimate medical, industrial, commercial and scientific uses (e.g. as a food additive or anaesthetic in medicine). For over 200 years, it has also been used for its psychoactive effects, including feelings of euphoria, relaxation and detachment. In the last decade, there has been a large increase in its recreational use in many regions of the world. In some European countries, particular concerns have been raised since 2017–18, when the drug became more widely available and in larger quantities.

'The growing popularity of nitrous oxide might be explained to some extent by its easy availability, low price, short-lived effects and a general perception by users as a relatively safe drug', states the report.

The analysis examines the current situation, risks and responses to the recreational use of the gas in Europe and reviews its chemistry, pharmacology and toxicology. Seven case studies are also presented in the report from: Denmark, Ireland, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

EXERCISE CYBER COALITION 2022 CONCLUDES IN ESTONIA

NATO has concluded its largest annual cyber defence exercise, Cyber Coalition 2022, which involved more than 1,000 cyber defenders from 26 NATO Allies, invitees Finland and Sweden, as well as Georgia, Ireland, Japan, Switzerland, the European Union, and participants from industry and academia. This year's event took place between November 28th and December 2nd in Tallinn, Estonia, as well as remotely.

"The best part about this exercise [...] is that it is a collaborative and cooperative environment and it is not a competition," said Commander Charles Elliott, Cyber Coalition 2022 Exercise Director, United States Navy. *"Building on the success of this year, we will incorporate more real-world lessons learned as we go into next year,"* he added.

The NATO's Allied Command Transformation-led annual exercise Cyber Coalition tests and trains cyber defenders from across the Alliance in their ability to defend NATO and national networks.

Cyber Coalition 2022 is a perfect venue for experimentation, driving cyberspace warfare and capability development. It is used *inter alia* to test and validate concepts, capture requirements or explore Emerging and Disruptive Technologies, in support of military operators and commanders. Cyber Coalition 2022 experimentation campaign included experiments on the use of Artificial Intelligence to help counter cyber threats, on the standardization of cyber messages to foster information sharing, and on the exploitation of Cyber Threat Intelligence to inform Cyberspace Situational Awareness. Cyber Coalition experimentation campaign is coordinated by Allied Command Transformation and conducted yearly in collaboration with stakeholders from NATO organizations, nations, industry and academia.

Cyber Coalition 2022 is based on a challenging, realistic scenario where a powerful threat actor tries to compromise a NATO mission by conducting advanced and sophisticated cyber operations. These operations trigger the coordination and collaboration of participating NATO, Allied and partner cyber defenders. The scenario helps prepare cyber defenders for real-life cyber challenges, including attacks on critical infrastructure as well as disruption of NATO and allied assets while in operations.

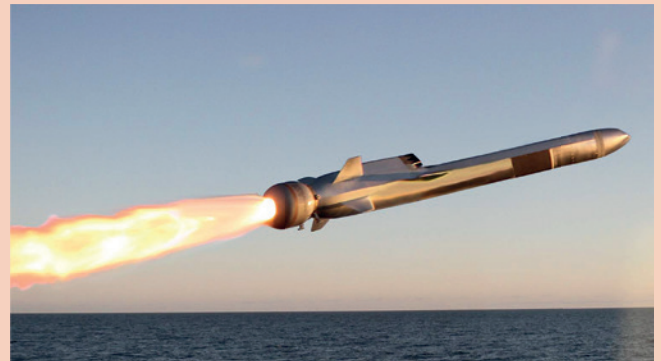
"Malign actors seek to degrade our critical infrastructure, interfere with our government services, extract intelligence, steal intellectual property and impede our military activities. Allies are committed to protecting their critical infrastructure, building resilience and bolstering their cyber defences. We will continue raising our guard against such malicious cyber activities in the future, and support each other to deter, defend against and counter the full spectrum of cyber threats, including by considering possible collective responses," said Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, General Philippe Lavigne, French Air and Space Force.

Cyber Coalition is NATO's flagship annual collective cyber defence exercise and one of the largest in the world. It is planned and conducted by Allied Command Transformation under the governance of the Military Committee.



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UNITED KINGDOM'S ROYAL NAVY SELECTS KONGSBERG'S NAVAL STRIKE MISSILE



UK and Norwegian have announced that they have agreed to further strengthen existing defence ties. The Royal Navy will receive the Naval Strike Missile (NSM), outfitted on Type 23 frigates and Type 45 destroyers, in a collaboration with the Norwegian government.

The collaboration will result in more ships equipped with the highly sophisticated Naval Strike Missiles which in turn will contribute in enhancing the security in our common areas of interest. Replacing the Harpoon surface-to-surface weapon, due to go out of service in 2023, the world-class anti-ship missile will be ready for operations onboard the first Royal Navy vessel in a little over 12 months.

"KONGSBERG is very pleased to welcome the Royal Navy as a member of the NSM User Group. We proudly support the strengthening of defence ties between our nations by integrating the NSM on the Royal Navy's vessels," says Executive Vice President in Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace Øyvind Kolset.

The NSM is a very flexible system, which can be launched from a variety of platforms against a variety of targets on sea and land.

The airframe design and the high thrust to weight ratio give the NSM extremely good manoeuvrability. The missile is completely passive, has proven its excellent sea-skimming capabilities and with its advanced terminal manoeuvres, it will survive the enemy air defences. The Autonomous Target Recognition (ATR) of the seeker ensures that the correct target is detected, recognized and hit, at sea or on land.

The Royal Navy has ordered its first crewless submarine

In just two years' time Cetus – named after a mythological sea monster – will move stealthily through the oceans, monitoring hostile activity, listening out for ships or submarines which may pose a threat to the Fleet, or to key national infrastructure such as deep-sea cables and pipelines.

The Royal Navy has experimented with – and in some cases operated – autonomous underwater systems for more than a decade. Most are small, off-the-shelf technologies, largely used in minehunting.

The £15.4m Cetus is in a different league: the length of a bus, it will be the largest and most complex crewless submersible operated by European navies, designed and built specially for the Royal Navy by Plymouth-based tech

firm MSubs, creating ten specialist jobs and supporting 70 more.

At 12 metres long and 2.2 metres in diameter, the 17-tonne submarine can fit inside a shipping container and be transported around the world to wherever the Fleet needs it.

The unarmed battery-powered craft will be able to dive deeper than any vessel in the current submarine fleet and cover up to 1,000 miles in a single mission.

Acting as an operational demonstrator, the goal is for Cetus – and its successors – to work side-by-side with traditional crewed submarines, such as the current Astute-class hunter-killers, or independently.

The crewless submarine is the latest step taken by the Royal Navy into the world of autonomy.

Autonomous minehunting systems are already operating in Scotland, driverless Pacific 24 sea boats are undergoing testing, numerous aerial drones are employed by ships both for reconnaissance/intelligence gathering and target practice for air defence.

ROLLS-ROYCE AND EASYJET SET NEW WORLD FIRST



Rolls-Royce AE2100 Hydrogen Test at Boscombe Down, UK

Rolls-Royce and easyJet confirmed they have set a new aviation milestone with the world's first run of a modern aero engine on hydrogen.

The ground test was conducted on an early concept demonstrator using green hydrogen created by wind and tidal power. It marks a major step towards proving that hydrogen could be a zero carbon aviation fuel of the future and is a key proof point in the decarbonisation strategies of both Rolls-Royce and easyJet.

Both companies have set out to prove that hydrogen can safely and efficiently deliver power for civil aero engines and are already planning a second set of tests, with a longer-term ambition to carry out flight tests.

The test took place at an outdoor test facility at MoD Boscombe Down, UK, using a converted Rolls-Royce AE 2100-A regional aircraft engine. Green hydrogen for the tests was supplied by EMEC (European Marine Energy Centre), generated using renewable energy at their hydrogen production and tidal test facility on Eday in the Orkney Islands, UK.

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial

Strategy, Grant Shapps, said: "The UK is leading the global shift to guilt-free flying, and today's test by Rolls-Royce and easyJet is an exciting demonstration of how business innovation can transform the way we live our lives.

"This is a true British success story, with the hydrogen being used to power the jet engine today produced using tidal and wind energy from the Orkney Islands of Scotland – and is a prime example of how we can work together to make aviation cleaner while driving jobs across the country."

Grazia Vittadini, Chief Technology Officer, Rolls-Royce, said: "The success of this hydrogen test is an exciting milestone. We only announced our partnership with easyJet in July and we are already off to an incredible start with this landmark achievement. We are pushing the boundaries to discover the zero carbon possibilities of hydrogen, which could help reshape the future of flight."

Johan Lundgren, CEO of easyJet, said: "This is a real success for our partnership team. We are committed to continuing to support this ground-breaking research because hydrogen offers great possibilities for a range of aircraft, including easyJet-sized aircraft. That will be a huge step forward in meeting the challenge of net zero by 2050."

Following analysis of this early concept ground test, the partnership plans a series of further rig tests leading up to a full-scale ground test of a Rolls-Royce Pearl 15 jet engine.

The partnership is inspired by the global, UN-backed Race to Zero campaign that both companies have signed up to, committing to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

RUSSIAN PARAMILITARY GROUP WAGNER

The Russian paramilitary group Wagner has just opened its first headquarters in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of this army of mercenaries, announced the opening of this office in a statement published on a website.

Last month, Yevgeny Prigozhin finally admitted to having founded the group, while the Kremlin has always denied any link with this paramilitary group.

The building

"The mission of the Wagner PMC Center is to provide a comfortable environment to generate new ideas to improve Russia's defense capability," said Yevgeny Prigozhin in his statement.

The building, a glass tower, shows a big « Wagner » sign on top.



The new Wagner Center in St Petersburg

Opacity, crime, and impunity. This is how the Wagner Group, a private army of mercenaries working on behalf of Russia, could be defined. They are found in countries around the world, where they are employed - officially - as security personnel. Some of their abuses have reached such a degree of violence that the highest international authorities have voiced concern. Especially since journalists who sought to investigate this occult, private army have been murdered.

The Wagner Group has been accused of human rights abuses, including torture and killings, in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Mozambique.

WHO AND THE EU RENEW PARTNERSHIP FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE



The World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Commission have agreed on reinforcing a decade-long collaboration to accelerate the achievement of universal health coverage. The letter of intent foresees an additional contribution from the European Union (EU) of €125 million for the continuation of WHO's assistance to its Member States over the next five years, implemented through the Universal Health Coverage Partnership (UHC Partnership). This will focus on strengthening health systems to make them more resilient and responsive to natural, climate or human-made disasters.

"Health is a fundamental human right, and universal health coverage is critical for achieving that right. The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating evidence that Universal Health Coverage is the foundation to resilience and sustainable development for all. That's true for individuals and families confronting a life-threatening illness, and it's true for countries – and the whole world – in the face of epidemics and pandemics. I am grateful to the European Union for its strong leadership and longstanding commitment to helping the world achieve Universal Health Coverage," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

The partnership with WHO is a key deliverable of the new EU Global Health Strategy adopted by the European Commission yesterday. Strengthening health systems and advancing universal health coverage worldwide is one of the three key priorities of the Strategy.

"I am delighted to sign today with Dr Tedros a new contribution of €125 million EU contribution for the period 2023–2027 to our Universal Health Coverage Partnership with

the World Health Organization. As COVID-19 dramatically highlighted, resilient health systems and equitable access to health care are key to ensuring individual well-being and identifying and managing public health threats effectively," said Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen.

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The UHC Partnership was established by WHO in 2011 with support from the European Commission to help catalyze action at country level to make health for all a reality. From supporting seven countries in its inception phase, the initiative has seen steady expansion, with the European Commission remaining as a leading contributor. With consolidated funding from eight donors, 130 health policy advisors have so far been deployed across 120 WHO country offices covering more than 4 billion people. Health policy advisors play a crucial role in bringing WHO's technical expertise in fostering policy dialogue, national health planning, health security, addressing noncommunicable diseases and more. The Partnership also provides funding for catalytic projects and helps engage partners to enable effective development cooperation.

Today, the UHC Partnership is regarded as one of WHO's largest platforms for international cooperation on Universal Health Coverage and primary health care. As a source of mostly flexible funding, it supports the Organization in delivering assistance that is responsive to evolving priorities, including in the context of health emergencies such as disease outbreaks and conflict.



President Joe Biden signs the “Inflation Reduction Act of 2022”, on August 16, 2022, in the State Dining Room of the White House

FREE TRADE HITS A ROADBLOCK

**How US climate
legislation could wreck
the EU's economy**

It bears an acronym that would be bound to upset anyone from the UK: it's called the IRA. Many in Britain recall the bombings and shootings over a great many years linked to the bid for greater Irish freedom, most of them organised by the IRA – the Irish Republican Army, a terrorist organisation. The two have no connection, of course, but it's being suggested that while the IRA of previous years did terrible damage to lives and livelihoods, this latest manifestation could wreck Europe's economy. So, the letters "IRA" could again stand for destruction. In this new case, IRA stands for Inflation Reduction Act which sounds innocent enough, and whose intentions are to make the US economy greener. That's the official version. "The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 makes the single largest investment in climate and energy in American history," says a US government website for the Department of Energy, "enabling America to tackle the climate crisis, advancing environmental justice, securing America's position as a world leader in domestic clean energy manufacturing, and putting the United States on a pathway to achieving the Biden Administration's climate goals, including a net-zero economy by 2050." Sounds great, doesn't it? Not to some of America's trading partners, including the EU. "We are very concerned about the likely significant impact of the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act on the EU's manufacturing base," said Jozef Síkela, the Czech Minister of Industry and Trade, after a meeting of EU trade ministers. He has predicted that in a battle over the IRA subsidies, the only winner will be China. "A subsidy rally is a very dangerous game," Jozef Síkela told reporters in Brussels. "The winner might then sit on [another] continent — not in Europe, and not on the American one," he said. The Czech Republic currently holds the presidency of the Council of the EU, which is why Síkela also chairs the EU Trade Council. A spokesperson made it clear that Síkela was referring to China.

A mild disagreement among confirmed allies? Well, it's a bit more than that, with EU officials accusing the US of profiting from the war in Ukraine over the cost of gas and also of weapons sold to Ukraine by the United States.



Jozef Síkela, the Czech Minister of Industry and Trade

It's reported in Britain's right-leaning Daily Mail newspaper that one senior European official said during an interview with Politico that America is the country "that is most profiting from this war." EU officials are already worried about the green subsidies that President Joe Biden has introduced because they fear that they could damage EU economies. President Biden and his team have denied that this will happen, but Biden's "buy American" provisions could do severe damage to a number of EU countries in the year ahead.



Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice-President for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age and Competition, European Commission

Biden's \$430-billion (€415.27-billion) act includes state aid for certain sectors, such as the automobile industry, but it is conditional upon a product having components that were designed and made in the United States. The EU's antitrust chief, Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice President of the European Commission for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age, has warned that taken together with soaring energy prices it could mean the end of the line for some European businesses, such as automotive manufacturers. The generous subsidies Washington is offering to its own manufacturers creates a very uneven playing field, in which the parts trodden by European companies seem to be studded with mines. For instance, a new electric vehicle manufacturer called Arrival is moving the focus of its production to the US in order to benefit from the tax credit system that is part of the IRA. Vestager, who is a European Commission vice-president, said the issue was crucial for the 27-country bloc. "We consider this a very important question. Because it is not just a question of some individual businesses also benefiting from the subsidies that is enabled by the Inflation Reduction Act," Vestager told a European Parliamentary hearing. "It is a combination of the energy crisis and the way that the Inflation Reduction Act is working that puts at risk part of the industrial base in Europe."

European experts are keen to ensure that the disagreement, serious though it undoubtedly is, does not grow into a full-blown trade war. That would benefit nobody. Officials in Brussels fear that a laudable attempt to curb the use of fossil fuels will have the effect of shutting out European manufacturers, while benefiting their American rivals, who will enjoy an unfair advantage. Some EU experts say it may even be in breach of international law by interfering with fair competition. Euronews reported on its website that Biden's determination to emerge as a "champion of American industrial ingenuity and protector of American interests" (as the Democratic Party puts it) will inevitably create friction with his European allies. The website

quotes Jacob Kirkegaard, a Senior Fellow at Germany's Marshall Fund, who warns against permitting upset and annoyance to spark a trade war. "The last thing we want to do right now, the dumbest thing we can do, is to start a trade war because we're in a weak position," Kirkegaard said. He suggests that, instead, the EU should consider the case for Europe to allow the limited and carefully targeted use of public subsidies "towards the green transition to ensure that it happens as soon as possible and to ensure that European businesses are able to fully compete."

Well-done is better than well-said

It was Benjamin Franklin who came up with that little truism. It's remarkably true in this case. That is why an EU-US task force has been negotiating possible exceptions for European companies, but there is some doubt that a compromise can be reached or is even possible, although the EU side insists it only wants "fairness" (don't we all?). "We want and expect European companies and exports to be treated in the same way in the US, as American companies and exports are treated in Europe," he said. Yet again, it's Russia's unwarranted aggression that is complicating the picture, because the EU has become very dependent on the US where it involves supplying weapons to Ukraine and for liquified natural gas to compensate for the lost supplies from Russia. Attempts to overcome the difficulty are ongoing. On 25 October, Bjoern Seibert, Head of Cabinet to EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, held talks in Berlin with Mike Pyle, the US Deputy National Security Advisor, to discuss the issues arising, which include the reconstruction of Ukraine. Together they agreed to launch a "Task Force" on the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which seems only to benefit Europe's Trans-Atlantic friends (and rivals).

According to the Commission, the Task Force will address



President Joe Biden walks with French President Emmanuel Macron, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the G7 on June 26, 2022, in Krün, Germany

specific concerns raised by the EU with regard to the IRA, with both parties agreeing to work in "close coordination: and to try to support what are seen as sustainable and resilient supply chains across the Atlantic, including to build the clean energy economy." Laudable plans, certainly, but not much help in the short term

for European manufacturers facing intense competition from heavily subsidised American rivals. As part of the talks, Seibert will continue to have high-level discussions with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, the National Economic Council Director, Brian Deese, and with John Podesta, the Senior Advisor for Clean Energy Innovation and Implementation. It was Mark Twain who said: "Actions speak louder than words but not nearly as often." There is so far no sign that this troublesome issue can be easily resolved, if it can even be resolved at all. Failure to come up with a solution that satisfies everyone could impact on global international relations. Not every country reads the same signs in the same ways.



National Economic Council Director, Brian Deese

You only have to look at the immediate aftermath of Russia's vicious and unprovoked attack on Ukraine. Reactions on both sides of the Atlantic brought the rapid imposition of sanctions by both Europe and the United States. There was talk at the time of a "silver lining" as the joint action brought the two closer together. Beijing, however, refused to criticise Russia and said that Beijing's friendship with Moscow had "no limits". China refused to condemn the invasion and EU leaders have agreed to view China more as a competitor than a partner, with Europe seeking to reduce its reliance on the Chinese economy.

China has since promised to hold "neutrality" over Russia's senseless land-grabbing war, but Europe doesn't seem convinced. As the South China Morning Post reports, most EU countries really don't want to have to choose between Beijing and Washington.

The US believes that the IRA will encourage other nations to follow suit, introducing their own green systems to encourage more climate-friendly system of manufacture. "We expect the Inflation Reduction Act to have a wide range of positive impacts for both our customers and for Ford," said Jim Farley, Ford's CEO. He, like others in the motor manufacturing business, is delighted with the incentives that the IRA provides. Speaking at a meeting about the company's Third Quarter

Earnings call, Farley mentioned the new battery-production tax credit, which he estimated to be worth some \$45 (€43.46) per kilowatt-hour for Ford itself and for its battery-making partner, SK On. Britain's Autocar magazine points out that the world's cheapest electric vehicle battery up to now, which is made by China's CATL company, costs an estimated \$134 per kilowatt-hour. That makes the American product much more competitive and, Farley believes, inevitably more attractive. "I think this will have a dramatic impact on the adoption of the EV (electric vehicle)," he said. "This will help our profitability quite a bit, even next year." Autocar also mentions General Motors, who have indicated that the subsidies the IRA provides could add between 5% and 7% to the company's profit margin. It's always about money in the end.



General Motors Detroit-Hamtramck assembly plant

Driving everyone off the road

Not surprisingly, Europe's car makers are very unhappy with this aid to success that no European car maker can match. Their representatives believe that incentives for electric vehicles should be more evenly balanced. The European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA) has expressed its disappointment with the scheme. "The scope of the incentives for electric vehicles needs to be far more inclusive in order to achieve the rate of positive environmental change that our sector is committed to," it said in a statement, and it called for all such EV incentive schemes to "be applied in a fair and equitable manner." A number of firms involved in the EV industry – such as Arrival, now contemplating a move to the United States, as mentioned earlier – are looking hard at their production plans, aware of the impact the IRA could have on them and their competitors.

The Irish Times reported the Czech minister Jozef Síkela, saying: "What is important for us is that the US is aware of our concerns and the taskforce has to work out a solution which will be acceptable for both parties." As the situation gets increasingly complicated, Síkela explained: "We will focus on having certain solutions in place for the TTC (Trade and Technology Council) on December 5th," he added. By the time you are reading this, that date will have passed and I don't expect any breakthroughs, do you?



A BMW i4 production plant in Munich, Germany

The issue is of greater concern than much of the popular press has reported. But the whole issue has somehow become mixed up with Russia's "energy weapon". The Economist magazine highlights the threat very neatly. "The fear has been amplified," it says, "by America's economic nationalism which threatens to draw activity across the Atlantic in a whirlwind of subsidies and protectionism. President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act involves \$400-billion (€386.29-billion) of handouts for energy, manufacturing and transport and includes 'make-in-America' provisions." The Economist likens the measures to some of those employed by China for several decades, supposedly to protect its economy. It also warns of a possible outcome that could be unfortunate: "As the other two pillars of the world economy become more interventionist, Europe, with its quaint insistence on upholding World Trade Organisation rules on free trade, looks like a sucker." The Economist reports that companies around Europe are already taking measures of their own to counter what is clearly (if not exactly intentionally) a threat. Northvolt, a promising Swedish battery start-up, the magazine warns, has already said it wants to expand production in America. It also mentions the Spanish energy company, Iberdrola, which is now investing twice as much in America as it is in Europe. Even the German chemicals giant, BASF, has announced plans to downsize its European operations.

America is also getting annoyed that with American support for Ukraine so much greater than Europe's, it's no surprise that President Emmanuel Macron of France has called on Europe to "wake up", while Germany's economy minister, Robert Habeck, has accused America of "hoovering up investments". The whole thing is exacerbating existing trans-Atlantic tensions, with America growing increasingly annoyed that the EU isn't putting its money where its mouth is. The Economist points out in its editorial that Europe was "staggeringly naïve" about Russia's aggression while the EU annoyed Washington by not paying for its own security. NATO members have not even met their goal of spending 2% of their GDP on defence. Even so, Biden must see how his protectionism (which is what the IRA is)

threatens to drain Europe of its capacity – and its will – to tackle Russia. The best solution, in the view of *The Economist* is to make European firms eligible for the assistance being given to American manufacturers through the IRA.

Our motor industries were always very different, and largely driven by the differing road conditions and requirements.



US President Joe Biden and the First Lady at a private dinner with French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife during Macron's official visit to the US in November 2022

Old-style economics

Biden's measures would have received a warm welcome from the great British economist, John Maynard Keynes, who also became the First Baron Keynes. He believed that it was the state's rôle to build a connecting bridge between the economy's potential and its actual output during a financial crisis.



The World Trade Organisation

As a UK government website points out, however: "The European Community's founding Treaty generally forbids State-funded aid that would favour certain businesses or goods production." But, of course, such rules don't apply to goods produced in the United States. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is somewhat ambivalent on state aid and protectionism. "The WTO is sometimes described as a 'free trade' institution, but that is not entirely accurate," says the organisation's own website. "The system does allow tariffs and, in limited circumstances, other forms of protection. More accurately, it is a system of rules dedicated to open, fair and undistorted competition." Note the word "fair", which the IRA conspicuously is not.

So yes, the WTO supposedly promotes fair competition, or tries to. However: "The issues are complex, and the rules try to establish what is fair or unfair, and how governments can respond, in particular by charging additional import duties calculated to compensate for damage caused by unfair trade." Is Biden merely encouraging moves towards a greener future? He says so, but as the WTO points out on its website: "the temptation to ward off the challenge of competitive imports is always present. And richer governments are more likely to yield to the siren call of protectionism, for short term political gain — through subsidies, complicated red tape, and hiding behind legitimate policy objectives such as environmental preservation or consumer protection as an excuse to protect producers." I think that catches Biden both going and coming. Whatever sound reasons the US government claims in explanation, the WTO would clearly have its doubts: "Protection ultimately leads to bloated, inefficient producers supplying consumers with outdated, unattractive products. In the end, factories close and jobs are lost despite the protection and subsidies. If other governments around the world pursue the same policies, markets contract and world economic activity is reduced. One of the objectives that governments bring to WTO negotiations is to prevent such a self-defeating and destructive drift into protectionism." However, in the short term, as long as you're not concerned about harming your competitors and stirring up international tensions with your "friends", it works.

For the European Union, of course, Biden's IRA is a massive threat. Thierry Breton, the EU Commissioner for the Internal Market, has pointed out in a Tweet that: "Impact of the energy crisis & US IRA on EU competitiveness is a real concern," He then suggested his own possible solution: "We need a strong coordinated response for a resilient single market. More than ever, we need a mobilized EU business community". He is seeking the thoughts of Europe's various industry associations, but no-one has yet put forward a coherent plan that pleases everyone and promises



Thierry Breton, EU Commissioner for the Internal Market

a working riposte to American (intentionally or unintentionally) anti-free trade measures. Several prominent Europeans have mentioned how the IRA discriminates to the detriment of European companies and to damage Europe's economy. One leading businessman said that the United States is "possibly discriminating against European companies through its Inflation Reduction Act, which gives tax credits for each eligible component produced in a US factory, which would take away potential investment from Europe." Writing in EU Observer, Milan Elkerbout expressed the growing concern in Europe over a policy it could have welcomed, were it not potentially so damaging. "At long last, the Americans pass legislation that, arguably, constitutes a federal climate policy," wrote Elkerbout, "But the road taken by the US is different from the EU's. The world's premier capitalist powerhouse is taking the path of state intervention through subsidisation and industrial policy, under the guise of fiscal policy." Elkerbout knows what he's talking about. He's a Research Fellow and Head of the climate policy programme at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). He accepts, too, that Biden's IRA puts the EU into a difficult position since it is, in effect, a federal climate policy, which the EU has called for in the past.



© CEPS EU

Milan Elkerbout, Research Fellow and Head of the climate policy programme at CEPS

"The tax credits offered through the IRA are a powerful incentive," writes Elkerbout. "They provide a direct revenue stream immediately improving the investment case for certain low-carbon technologies, such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) and hydrogen." Elkerbout goes on to describe the response of some European manufacturers – to shift production to the US for the sake of the subsidies – as a "politician's nightmare". There's little sign of them waking up any time soon, either. But Elkerbout is not calling for retaliatory measures, quite the reverse. "The



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French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire and US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen at the 2021 IMF Autumn Meeting

EU and US should use the current tensions to revitalise the WTO," we writes in EU Observer, "including by staffing its appellate body fully. For the US, the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) may have unwelcome protectionist elements, while the EU is similarly concerned about the IRA's 'buy-local' requirements." Elkbout wants, naturally enough, a peaceful solution. "Rather than attacking each other's policies — both supporting essential industrial emissions reductions — the EU and US should seek ways to cooperate, such as through clubs or alliances, that can further strengthen green investment on both sides of the Atlantic."

The row doesn't seem to be harming the Americans. During the third quarter of this year the US economy grew faster than predicted and its gross domestic product rose at an annualized rate of 2.9%. Economists had predicted 2.7%. Growth may slow in the fourth quarter, however, because of inflation and interest rate rises imposed by the Federal Reserve. And, of course, there's that Inflation Reduction Act, the IRA, that is scaring European businesses so badly. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire has said that the IRA was a major threat to European companies and that the EU had to stand firm against it. "We must clearly tell our US partners that it is a major problem for us," he told BFM TV in an interview. "It is not acceptable. It could create a major shock on European industry." Indeed, it seems to be driving some European companies to relocate to the United States. This is not what the Biden administration wanted to achieve, one must assume, but the whole mess is stirring up conflict in other areas.

For instance, back in September, Germany angered its European Union partners by announcing a plan to support households and businesses with funds worth up to €200-billion, an amount few other countries can match, and which critics say threatens fair competition within the EU's single market. Other EU countries have also announced support plans, but inevitably smaller, according to a report in Al Arabiya News. As time begins to show how big an effect small changes can have, most political leaders are, as the saying goes, "sticking to their guns". But there is an old Icelandic saying that's worth remembering: "A wise man changes his mind, a fool never will." Meanwhile expect a lot of negative comment and angry responses. Politicians will always find ways to give their home-grown products an advantage over the competition if they can, and even rules and signed agreements won't stop them.

martin.gardiner@europe-diplomatic.eu

Martin Gardiner

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JUSTICE RENDERED

**The MH17 criminal trial's
final act – Guilty !**

Following a long delayed trial in absentia in the Netherlands, two Russians and a Ukrainian separatist were found guilty of murdering all 298 people onboard flight MH17 by shooting it down. The Dutch court also ruled that Russia was in control of the separatist forces fighting in eastern Ukraine at the time. The Court also left no doubt: “there is an abundance of evidence” that shows that MH17 was shot down with a Russian Buk missile”.

Following the announcement of the guilty verdict, the Presiding Judge Hendrik Steenhuis said: “It will not take away the suffering of the relatives, but it may offer some relief”.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said it was regrettable that the court “disregarded the principles of impartiality in the MH17 case” calling the ruling politically motivated

The District Court of The Hague delivered the following judgment:

Leonid Volodymyrovych Kharchenko

The court finds that it has been proven legally and conclusively that the accused Kharchenko:



1. on 17 July 2014 in Ukraine (in Donetsk oblast), together and in association with others, intentionally and unlawfully, caused an aeroplane (namely flight MH17) to crash, by firing a Buk missile by means of a Buk TELAR (near Pervomaiskiy), although this was likely to endanger the lives of the occupants of said aeroplane (of whom the 298 names are set out in the annex to the indictment), and said occupants were killed as a result;
 2. on 17 July 2014 in Ukraine (in Donetsk oblast), together and in association with others, intentionally and with premeditation, took the lives of the occupants (of whom the 298 names are set out in the annex to the indictment) of an aeroplane (namely flight MH17), by using a Buk TELAR to fire a Buk missile at that aeroplane (near Pervomaiskiy), which caused the aeroplane to crash and said occupants to die.
- The court sentences the accused to life imprisonment. _

Sergey Nikolayevich Dubinskiy

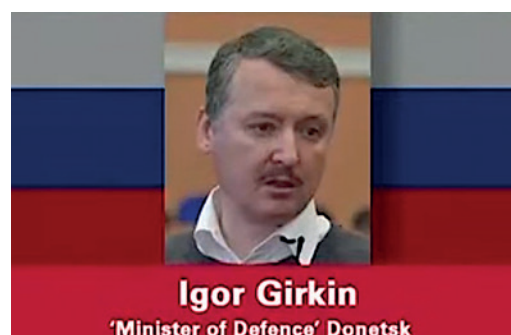
The court finds that it has been proven legally and conclusively that the accused Dubinskiy:



1. on 17 July 2014 in Ukraine (in Donetsk oblast), together and in association with others, intentionally and unlawfully, caused an aeroplane (namely flight MH17) to crash, by firing a Buk missile by means of a Buk TELAR (near Pervomaiskiy), although this was likely to endanger the lives of the occupants of said aeroplane (of whom the 298 names are set out in the annex to the indictment), and said occupants were killed as a result;
 2. on 17 July 2014 in Ukraine (in Donetsk oblast), together and in association with others, intentionally and with premeditation, took the lives of the occupants (of whom the 298 names are set out in the annex to the indictment) of an aeroplane (namely flight MH17), by using a Buk TELAR to fire a Buk missile at that aeroplane (near Pervomaiskiy), which caused the aeroplane to crash and said occupants to die.
- The court sentences the accused to life imprisonment. -

Igor Vsevolodovich Girkin

The court finds that it has been proven legally and conclusively that the accused Girkin:



1. on 17 July 2014 in Ukraine (in Donetsk oblast), together and in association with others, as functional perpetrator, intentionally and unlawfully, caused an aeroplane (namely flight MH17) to crash, by firing a Buk

missile by means of a Buk TELAR (near Pervomaiskyi), although this was likely to endanger the lives of the occupants of said aeroplane (of whom the 298 names are set out in the annex to the indictment), and said occupants were killed as a result;

2. on 17 July 2014 in Ukraine (in Donetsk oblast), together and in association with others, as functional perpetrator, intentionally and with premeditation, took the lives of the occupants (of whom the 298 names are set out in the annex to the indictment) of an aeroplane (namely flight MH17), by using a Buk TELAR to fire a Buk missile at that aeroplane (near Pervomaiskyi), which caused the aeroplane to crash and said occupants to die.

The court sentences the accused to life imprisonment.

Oleg Yuldashevich PULATOV, who was also indicted has been acquitted by lack of evidence

Wanted - Reward 100.000 \$

The Ukrainian government has offered a one hundred thousand dollars reward for the man or woman who enables the capture of Igor Vsevolodovich Girkin, aka "Igor Strelkov", sentenced "in absentia" to life to life imprisonment. Girkin has been spotted in occupied Ukraine wearing a uniform and fighting along the Russian army.

Girkin is a Russian army veteran and former Federal Security Service (FSB) officer who played a key role in the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. Girkin, was charged by Ukrainian authorities with terrorism. He has been sanctioned by the European Union, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Canada, Switzerland, and Ukraine for his leading role in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The GUR poster (Ukrainian Military Intelligence) reward guarantees

The doomed flight



Video reconstruction of the moment of the missile explosion. Taken from the JIT presentation

THE FACTS

The flight took off from Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam on the 17 July, 2014, carrying 283 passengers and 15 crew, bound for Kuala Lumpur

Whilst flying over Eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatists were fighting Ukrainian government forces, a Russian missile destroyed it in mid-air, killing everyone on board. Contact with the aircraft, a Boeing 777-200ER, was lost some 50 kilometres from the Ukraine-Russia border and its wreckage showered down over the contested Donetsk region. It broke up into six parts, the remains of which landed across six separate sites. The Dutch Safety Board and a Dutch-led Joint Investigation Team (JIT) investigated the tangled parts scattered over the ground and concluded that it had been brought down by a Russian Soviet-era Buk surface-to-air missile, launched from rebel-controlled territory. Other members of the JIT are Australia, Belgium, Malaysia and Ukraine. The JIT's researchers suggested that the missile, belonging to the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of the Russian Federation, had only arrived from Russia on the day it was fired.



This blue VW minivan is the same one that was photographed and filmed escorting Buk 332 throughout the day of the MH17 downing. Additionally, this blue VW minivan served as an escort to a different convoy of Russian-separatist military equipment two days before the downing



Part of the BUK-TELAR rocket that was fired on the MH17 is displayed during a JIT press conference



Image of 9M38M1 surface-to-air missile showing the approximate location of three of the parts recovered

A transporter was allegedly seen by a journalist just 16 kilometres from the crash site later the same day. Other international journalists reported seeing the Buk and that it was operated by a man with a Russian accent wearing an unknown uniform. The JIT announced that Russia was primarily responsible for the attack on MH17 and for the loss of the 298 people on board at the time. The crew had all been Malaysian but just over two-thirds of the passengers had been Dutch, the rest being Malaysian, Belgian and Australian. Even on the eve of the trial opening, a spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, dismissed the suggestion of Russian involvement as “propaganda”.



Vladimir Putin awarding Maria Zakharova, Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, with the Order of Friendship

It's arguable that the aircraft should not have chosen that route. Eastern Ukraine was a war zone where military aircraft were deployed and where some had been shot down in the preceding weeks. The International Civil Aviation Organisation had issued a warning to airlines that there was a degree of risk for commercial flights. Three days before MH17 was brought down, a Ukrainian Air Force Ilyushin Il-76 military aircraft, carrying nine crew and forty soldiers had been shot out of the sky as it approached Luhansk Airport. On that same day, a Ukrainian Air Force An-26 transport flying at 6,500 m (21,300 ft) was also shot down. American experts gave the opinion that it, too, had been brought down by a Buk, and that it had been fired from Russian territory. Russia denied it, but the day before the Malaysia Airlines tragedy, a Ukrainian Sukhoi Su-25 close air support aircraft was shot down, too, also supposedly from Russian-controlled territory.



On 30 July 2015, the Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Security Council, was the only one to vote against creating a tribunal under the UN's auspices in order to hold accountable those implicated in the MH17 flight crash

Who has the missile?

Later that same month, Russian news agencies reported that a Buk had been seized by rebels from a Ukraine military facility they had overrun. On that same day, rebels of the Donetsk People's Republic claimed in a Tweet that they had obtained a Buk missile system; they deleted the Tweet just hours later, once it was clear that a civilian passenger jet had been downed. Indeed, just after the missile struck, the separatists boasted that they had brought down a Ukrainian military aircraft, but that claim was also promptly withdrawn when the truth emerged. Some 37 international airlines were still flying over the area when MH17 went down, despite a warning from the Ukrainian government, issued just three days before the attack, to all European countries.

The warning was reported in the Dutch newspaper, De Telegraaf. On the day of the attack, however, it was reported that a Ukrainian Antonov An-26 had been due to carry paratroopers along more or less the same route, if at a lower altitude, on their way to the battlefield. It seems possible that the rebels' radar mistook the Boeing for the anticipated military flight. The mists of battle, though, have been deliberately fogged by those not wanting the truth to be exposed. And an attack on civilians, even in a state-to-state war is illegal. An attack by rebel groups is murder.



© DUTCH SAFETY BOARD

Part of the right hand side of the cockpit Source Dutch Safety Board | Flight data recorder without Underwater Locator Beacon | Cockpit Voice Recorder

Which brings us to the trial, which began only on 9 March. You may not have heard much about it; news in every medium at the moment seems to have been completely taken over by the corona virus. Covid-19 is all anyone wants to talk about. On trial, but not actually present in the Dutch courtroom, are Vsevolodovich Girkin, Sergey Nikolayevich Dubinskiy, Oleg Yuldashevich Pulatov (all Russians) and Leonid Volodymyrovych Kharchenko, a Ukrainian.



They stood accused of having obtained and subsequently deployed the Buk TELAR (transport erector launcher and radar) system with the intention of shooting down an aircraft. Their guilt or otherwise is what the court had to decide. They were not accused of having deliberately targeted a passenger jet, but for rebel forces to deliberately bring down any aircraft is an offence under international law. Girkin is the former 'defence minister' of the self-declared 'People's Republic of Donetsk'. The war was not official, between two sovereign nations, and 'combatant immunity' cannot apply to acts of wilful murder. The Netherlands Chief Prosecutor, Fred Westerbeke, says he would summon all four to face two specific charges. Firstly they would be accused of "causing the crash of flight MH17, resulting in the death of

all persons on board, punishable pursuant to Article 168 of the Dutch Criminal Code". Secondly, the charge listed "the murder of 298 persons on board MH17, punishable pursuant to Article 289 of the Dutch Criminal Code". So, the four were accused of deliberately bringing down the aircraft and of the culpable homicide of all those on board. None of the accused attended the court, although Pulatov was represented by his lawyer and finally acquitted.



The airplane was perforated by hundreds of high energy objects shaped like cubes and bow-ties. Many preformed fragments were in the bodies of the crew seated in the cockpit

Westerbeke spoke of "the Russian Federation's active efforts to obstruct the investigation" and the risks of retaliation faced by local witnesses. The JIT looked at other possible causes of the crash, such as that MH17 crashed because of an unexplained onboard explosion, that it was shot down by fighter aircraft and even that it was shot down by Ukrainian armed forces. The evidence presented at the trial included documents provided by the Russian Federation. But the JIT investigators reached certain firm conclusions, according to Westerbeke "that flight MH17 was not shot down during a military exercise or by armed forces who believed that they were defending their country from a perceived attack," he told the court in his opening statement, "The Buk-TELAR that downed flight MH17 should never have been in Ukraine, and no-one should have fired a missile there, whether aimed at a civilian or military aircraft. This made the assessment of this case fundamentally different from cases where errors of judgment during a legitimate military operation result in the loss of civilian life. Second, the parties responsible for downing flight MH17 have taken no responsibility whatsoever for their actions."

And, to be honest, nor are they likely to, although, as Westerbeke said, an effective investigation, openness about the findings and, where possible, the punishment of those responsible, are not merely a moral obligation. "They are also a legal obligation under international human rights conventions." But that is not all;

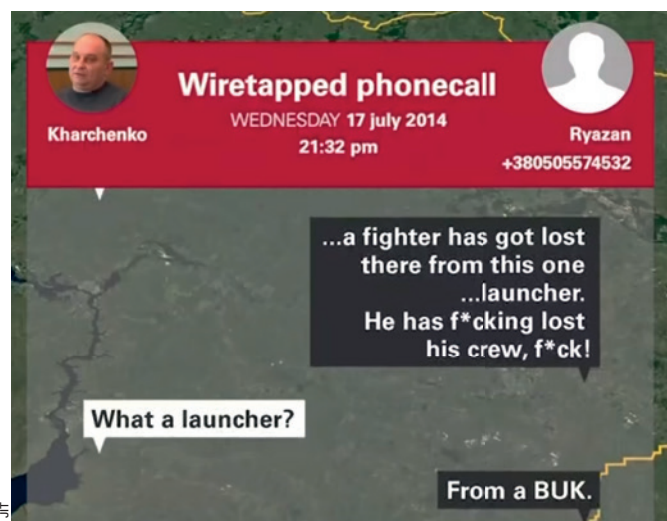
the Public Prosecution Service admitted that many people have questioned the point of holding a trial at which the accused are unlikely to appear and when it's questionable that the defendants, if found guilty, would face punishment. "The possibility that the defendants in this case may not face punishment, even if convicted," the Prosecutor told the court, "is not, in our view, a reason to forego a trial."



Representatives of the member countries of the JIT investigation team. (From left to right) Mohammed Hanafiah Bin Al Zakaria, Solicitor General of the Malaysian Attorney General's Chambers, Prosecutor General of Ukraine Yuriy Vitaliyovych Lutsenko, Federal Prosecutor of Belgium Frédéric Van Leeuw

Snapshot of a disaster

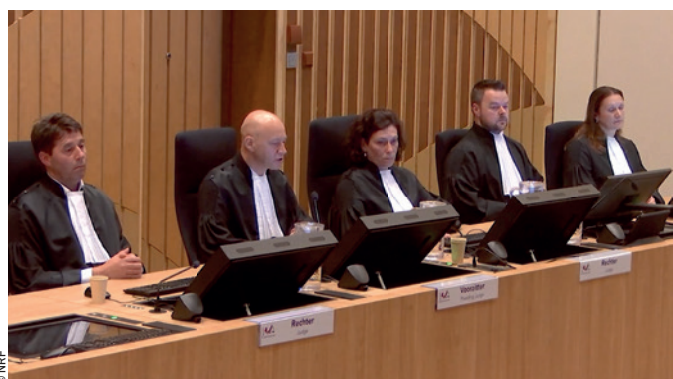
In the end, it all comes back to what actually happened on that fateful day. The flight plan showed that MH17 was due to fly over Ukraine at 33,000 feet (10,060 metres), then change course and altitude to fly over the city of Dnipropetrovsk on a flight path called Airway Lima 980, flying over the city itself at 15:53 local time. Dnipropetrovsk Air Traffic Control asked MH17 to climb to a higher flightpath to avoid possible conflict with a Singapore Airlines flight, but the crew declined and the Singapore Airlines flight changed altitude instead. At 16:00 local time, the crew asked to deviate 20 nautical miles (37 kilometres) to the north because of thunder storms in the area, which was approved. At 16:19, Dnipropetrovsk ATC noticed the flight was 6.7 kilometres north of the approved flight path and instructed the crew to correct this before asking the Russian ATC at Rostov-on-Don to take over responsibility. The Russians agreed but when Dnipropetrovsk ATC tried to notify MH17 there was no response. The flight had simply vanished from the radar.



Intercepted phone conversation between Kharchenko and one of his military on the field some hours after the downing of the aircraft

There have been many claims of intercepted calls between various suspects that suggest complicity, but the JIT fears some have been tampered with or else took place too close to the event to have any significance. As the Prosecutor said, the case must be completely watertight, without any room for question or doubt.

The JIT investigation continued during the long trial period and is there is still some investigation to find out if other individuals who may have played a part. Some have blamed the authorities for not doing enough, but as the Prosecutor said, "the question of whether public authorities could have done more to prevent a murder can never absolve the murderer". It was only following an extensive investigation over an extended time period that the JIT was able to conclude that "flight MH17 was shot down by a Buk-missile launched from a farm field near the town of Pervomaïskyi, to the south of the town of Snizhne; that a Buk-TELAR of the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of the Russian army had been used for this purpose; and that this Buk-TELAR system was transported from the Russian Federation on the night of 16-17 July 2014 and the remaining three missiles on the launcher were transported back to the Russian Federation shortly after the downing of flight MH17."



The Dutch judges during the sentencing

Russia has not been at all helpful to the investigation; there have even been allegations that Russia manipulated images to obscure the truth. In July 2015, Malaysia proposed that the United Nations Security Council set up an international tribunal to prosecute those found responsible for shooting down the aircraft. The Malaysian resolution gained a majority on the Security Council, but it was vetoed by Russia, which then proposed its own rival draft resolution, pushing for a greater U.N. role in an investigation into what caused the crash and demanded justice, but the proposal stopped short of setting up a tribunal: no trial, no verdict, no punishment. Russia's lack of cooperation prompted Tony Abbott, the Prime Minister of Australia at the time of the incident, to say that "With MH17, Russia has demonstrated that there's a touch of evil at the heart of their government."

I Inexplicable events

Since then, the Dutch Public Prosecutor's office have sought the extradition of a Ukrainian, Volosdymyr Tsemakh from the Russian Federation, although it has not been decided if he would face prosecution. The evidence against him is not so strong as the evidence against the four accused. Even so, many feel it was odd that Ukraine, willingly or unwillingly, surrendered Tsemakh to Russia in a prisoner exchange in September last year at Russia's insistence, especially as he was a key witness in the investigation and part of the legal proceedings. Australia expressed its deep concern about the prisoner exchange.



Left: Volosdymyr Tsemakh at Savur-Mohyla, south of Snizhne, dated 27 May 2018.
Right: One of the post-arrest photos of Tsemakh in 2019 that has appeared online

The Australian government wanted Tsemakh to be questioned by the JIT and for Australian federal police to be involved, while recognising the pressure Kyiv was in from Moscow to do the deal. Australia's Foreign Minister, Marise Payne said "Australia is disappointed, however, that Mr. Vladimir Tsemakh, a person of interest in connection with the downing of MH17, was included in the exchange." Payne believed that it would be harder to bring justice to Tsemakh while living in Russia.

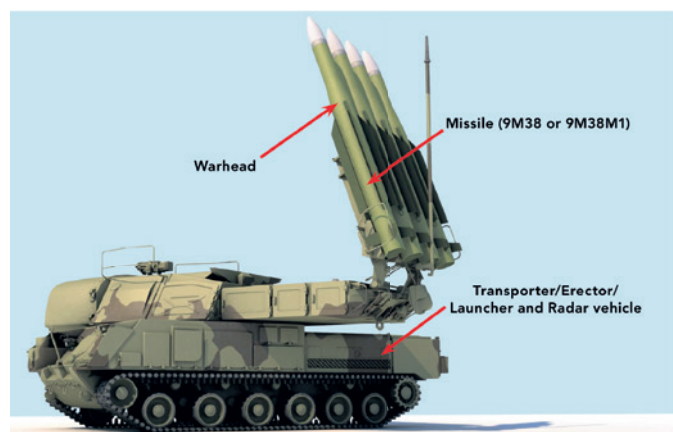
Another colleague of the accused has also been mentioned, Igor Bezler, who, in an intercepted telephone conversation on the afternoon of 17 July, 2014, told the person to whom he was talking (not identified) that a 'bird' was coming his way.



Igor Bezler

This was just before MH17 was brought down, but investigators were unable to establish a definite connection. Two other suspects are only known by their codenames, 'Orion' and 'Delfin', both thought to be high-ranking Russian officers who were involved in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In an intercepted telephone conversation on 14 July, 2014, Orion was heard to say that 'they' now have a Buk and are going to shoot down aircraft. Investigations have shown, though, that in the days prior to 17 July, various people and groups were trying to obtain a Buk and Orion's conversation may have referred to a Buk-TELAR brought across the border from Russia but which then caught fire accidentally before it could be used.

As to the actual impact, the Dutch Safety Board has made very clear the sequence of events as they believe it to have taken place. Forensic research has shown that a 9M38-series Buk missile was fired, carrying a 9n314M warhead, which was surrounded by 800 iron fragments, intended to spread very rapidly, even lethally, on detonation. The missile had a proximity fuse, designed to detonate when the distance to the target is less than a pre-set amount. It detonated just above and to the left of the cockpit, the fragments tearing through the cockpit and business class sections of the aircraft. Some of the fragments - mainly small metal cubes or what were described as 'bow tie shaped' pieces of metal - were found in the bodies of the cockpit crew. I have seen similarly-shaped fragments - shrapnel - that had been part of Russian anti-personnel mines dropped in Afghanistan during Russia's war with the Mujahideen.



Buk missile system is a family of self-propelled, medium-range surface-to-air missile systems developed by the Soviet Union and its successor state, the Russian Federation

They are designed to do the maximum possible damage to human tissue. Coupled with the explosion, this shower of fragments sucked air out of the body of the plane, causing it to break up into six sections which all came down to earth separately. The JIT's description of what happened is based on the accounts of eyewitnesses who claim to have seen the missile being fired, on remnants of the aircraft and of the Buk missile found at the crash sites, on satellite images and data from radar and even on photos and videos of the missile being transported to Donbas, which is held by pro-Russian separatists and from where it was fired.

I Who's who

The problem with cover-ups is that they have to be cohesive, consistent and persuasive, and the JIT do not believe this to

have been the case with the MH17 disaster. They have published material that was recorded with the participation of militants and a senior Russian official, made in July 2014. The official in question allegedly stated that “men are coming from Shoygu (Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu) and that they “will kick the local warlords out of the units”.



Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu

The same official is claimed to have said to the person being quoted, “you will report to our Minister of Defence. Our Minister of Defence is Strelkov (*the codename of Vsevolodovich Girkin*), and our Commander-in-Chief, like any other President or Prime Minister, is Borodai.” (*Aleksandr Borodai, a Russian*) According to the investigators, a few former militants told them that the Russian Security Service (FSB) and the Military Intelligence Service (GRU) were deeply involved in running the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), one of them reporting that the leaders of the DPR regularly travelled to Moscow to consult both the FSB and GRU.

JIT investigators were convinced that at least some of the leaders of the DPR had been sent there by Moscow. Some witnesses had said that they came from inside the Russian Federation. Just after MH17 was brought down, Girkin announced to Borodai that he was leaving to “return to HQ”. In August that year, both Girkin and Borodai travelled to Moscow. In an interview in 2017, it's claimed Girkin said “I was ordered to pass the command to Zakharchenko”. Germany has repeated a call for Russia to start getting involved in the investigation. “Those responsible for this crime, the destruction of MH17 flight aircraft,” said German Foreign Office spokesperson Maria Adebare, “must be identified and brought to justice, and, of course, Russia should co-operate constructively in the investigation of this crime.” That might seem like wishful thinking, with Russia appearing not to take the whole thing seriously, variously accusing Ukrainian ground troops, a Ukrainian fighter jet and even, on one bizarre occasion, suggesting that what had been

brought down was an aeroplane full of dead bodies supplied by the United States and put aboard an otherwise empty flight just to blacken Russia's name. Few outside Russia believe that, especially the relatives of the murdered passengers and crew.

So who allegedly is to blame? Prosecutor Westerbeke made that clear in his opening statement where he believes all the evidence points. “Among the DPR fighters,” he told the court, “we view Girkin, Dubinskiy, Pulatov and Kharchenko as leading players in the downing of flight MH17. Girkin and Dubinskiy were top military leaders of the DPR. Pulatov and Kharchenko were Dubinskiy's direct subordinates. Together, these four men took delivery of the Buk-TELAR from the Russian Federation and deployed it as part of their own military operation, with the aim of shooting down an aircraft.” Others, Westerbeke said, may have played lesser rôles, instrumental in shooting down the aircraft, but the responsibility rests with the four accused. “The crew of the TELAR pressed the button,” said the Prosecutor, “but according to the indictment it was Girkin, Dubinskiy, Pulatov and Kharchenko who directed the employment of this weapon in order to serve their own interests. They were in command of others; they directed the Buk TELAR to the launch location; they talked during intercepted communications about the need for a Buk to serve their cause and whether ‘their’ Buk had done its job; they noted with delight that an aircraft had been shot down; they directed others in the delivery of the system to the launch site and they organise the removal of the Buk-TELAR to the Russian Federation. When it comes to evidence and responsibility, as of now no other suspects in the investigation are in the same position as Girkin, Dubinskiy, Pulatov and Kharchenko.” It is the wish of the JIT that the minor players who have been named - the alleged button-pressers, the guards who watched over the TELAR and others - should face justice in Ukraine itself.



Judicial complex, Schiphol

Later in the speech, Westerbeke concedes that the murders of innocent foreign civilians may not have been the aim, although it was the effect. “It is perfectly conceivable that the true intention of these defendants was to shoot down an aircraft of the Ukrainian armed forces.” Bear in mind, they may be cleared of all charges, of course. In fact, he went on to say that some of the evidence uncovered by the JIT points towards what he called “this error scenario”. But that makes no difference under Dutch law. To clarify, he told the court that there is a guiding principle: “wars are fought between combatants, and that civilians are not

involved in any way. When despite this principle civilians in Ukraine use violence against Dutch, Malaysian, Australian and Belgian citizens, this violence falls under the scope of the ordinary criminal laws of these countries.” He said it didn’t make any difference if the perpetrators used a rifle or an advanced rocket system and also regardless of whether the intended victims were civilians or combatants. “Our preliminary conclusion,” he said, “is therefore that the suspects were not entitled to claim combatant immunity in July 2014, and that they had no right or excuse to use violence in Eastern-Ukraine,”

The strong lance of justice



Boudewijn van Eijck and Sabine ten Doesschate Dutch lawyers assisting one of the four men who are being prosecuted for the MH17 plane crash

The opening session of the court was held behind closed doors because of the corona virus scare, although that’s not the reason for the hearing to have been suspended. It’s the sheer volume of the evidence: 36,000 pages of files and other material; Pulatov’s lawyer, the only defence figure taking part in the proceedings, told the court he needs time to study everything. The judge agreed. “The court suspends the examination of the Pulatov case until June 8th, 10am,” said Presiding Judge Hendrik Steenhuis, “and the defence will be able to speak at that time.” Supporters of the victims’ families placed 298 empty chairs outside the Russian embassy in the Hague as a reminder of those who died, many bearing white roses and photographs of the dead. Embassy officials declined to comment but Putin, while saying he would await the outcome before giving his opinion, cast doubt on the likely objectivity of the trial, saying the evidence gathered is ‘biased and politically motivated’. Although none of the accused were expected to appear - Russia never extradites its citizens and even though Kharchenko is a Ukrainian citizen, it’s thought likely he now holds a Russian

passport - relatives of the victims believed the trial could bring some comfort to them. Those who lost loved ones, though, still see it as more than just symbolic. Meanwhile, Girkin and Kharchenko were placed under a visa ban and had their assets frozen by the European Union, which has also imposed asset freezes on several Ukrainians who held positions under the pre-2014 regime and who stand accused of ‘looting the country’.

Westerbeke, in his opening speech, quoted the Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who once said “Violence has no way to conceal itself except by lies, and lies have no way to maintain themselves except through violence.”

Some 13,000 people have died in the conflict, not counting the passengers of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. The Dutch court was determined to ensure that their deaths will count, or at least come under detailed scrutiny, however obliquely.



Covid protected MH17 Tribunal



Due to the numerous delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the hearings only resumed on 1 February 2021.

But it must not be forgotten that besides Pulatov, Girkin, Dubinsky and Kharchenko as the suspects, the Russian Federation as a state is also being prosecuted, in particular under the Terrorist Financing Convention, following Ukraine’s lawsuit against that country in the International Court of Justice.

jameslookwood@europe-diplomatic.eu

James Lookwood



A convoy of funeral hearses carrying the remains of the victims of the MH17 plane crash from the airbase in Eindhoven to Hilversum, the Netherlands



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CURING A HEALTH SERVICE

**How Britain's much-admired
National Health Service is in
a serious condition and not
getting better**

How did this come about? Britain's flagship National Health Service (NHS) is very ill and getting worse. We have seen ambulances queuing up outside Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments with their patients inside because the A&E department itself is full to overflowing and has no beds available. In other instances, we have had the unedifying sight of patients being admitted to hospital but then being left on trolleys in corridors for hours because no beds are free for them in the relevant wards. It gets worse as patients get older, too: more than 100,000 elderly patients are ready to be discharged but there is nowhere for them to go, so they remain, taking up space that could be needed for real emergencies. It's known as "bed-blocking" and it happens a lot. It's one of the reasons why surgical operations that have been scheduled are often cancelled, quite frequently at the very last minute, because there are no operating theatres available and too few surgical staff. It's not always like this, of course. When, on separate occasions, my wife and I needed emergency help an ambulance was at our door within fifteen minutes and we were driven to hospital, receiving treatment in A&E immediately, despite living in a village some distance from the nearest town. When it works, it works extremely well.

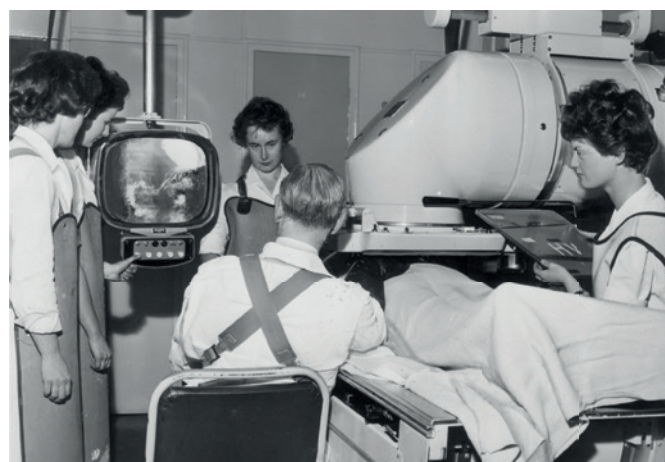
I have a deep affection for Britain's ground-breaking National Health Service, which is just three months younger than I am. It came into being on 5 July 1948. It was a concept of Britain's post-war Labour government and the nation's doctors – general practitioners – were totally opposed to it from the start. The British Medical Association, which in the UK is the doctors' trade union, opposed the plan and in the early days its secretary, Dr. Charles Hill, was accused of attempting to strangle it at birth with a campaign of sabotage, although even right-leaning newspapers and periodicals did not support him.



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Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health, on the first day of the National Health Service, 5 July 1948 at Park Hospital, Davyhulme, near Manchester

Much of the hard spadework in setting up the system fell to Aneurin "Nye" Bevan, a Welsh Labour MP, serving as Britain's Minister of Health. He was a tough-talking man from the Welsh valleys, the son of a coal miner, and he had played a part in Britain's General Strike in 1926. In setting up the NHS, he often complained that he didn't get as much support as he would have liked from either his cabinet colleagues or from the prime minister at the time, Clement (Clem) Attlee. Bevan's determination saw it through, however. The doctors, according to John Bew in his fascinating biography of Attlee, "Citizen Clem", were not on Bevan's side. "A majority of GPs," he wrote, "refused to cooperate with the scheme – demanding freedom to practise in the area of their own choosing, more control over their salaries, and other employment rights – until the last few months before it came into being." Bew wrote that Attlee admired "Bevan's idealism and force of character and the crucial role he played in the formation of the National Health Service." Bevan had created something that won worldwide admiration and became a model that some other countries copied.



© LEICESTER MERCURY

A TV monitor in the X-ray department at Leicester Royal Infirmary in 1961

Bevan warned the British people that they would not see overnight improvements. There were no additional resources available so soon after the Second World War, and no additional doctors or nurses queuing to get involved. It did change the way people paid for their health care: instead of paying for their treatment at the point of delivery, fees were paid by taxpayers, making treatment free for the patient. In that way, accessibility was immediately and enormously improved. The Times newspaper wrote at the time that "the masses" had joined the middle class. It meant rich and poor alike were treated in the same way.

Of course, the existence of the NHS did not prevent terrible diseases from occurring. Poliomyelitis, for instance, normally referred to simply as polio, became a terrifying reality in the 1950s. Strangely, it spread quickly because of improved hygiene. It's a viral infection and is passed on by infected water, among other things. It had become so common in previous centuries that mothers developed a kind of immunity which they passed on to their children. But polio has two stages, and without maternally inherited immunity, it can move on from having the mild influenza-like symptoms of stage 1 to a much more aggressive stage with an agonising headache, nausea, fever and muscle ache that can turn in 48 hours into paralysis. I remember children at my school with elder siblings who were forced to use a wheelchair.



The NHS delivering the first mass vaccination programme, with all under 15s vaccinated against polio and diphtheria

Eventually a vaccine was developed and in the UK's case administered by the NHS. Other diseases that were horribly common back then included scarlet fever and diphtheria. Scarlet fever was most common among children under the age of 10. It was highly infectious, and it was caused by bacterium called *Streptococcus pyogenes*, the same virus that can also cause impetigo. Its symptoms include a sore throat and a rash, and it can sometimes be confused with measles. Then there's diphtheria, which is mercifully rare in the UK these days because children have been routinely vaccinated against it since the 1940s. Diphtheria is a highly contagious bacterial infection, spread through contact with an infected person and by coughs and sneezes. Outbreaks of all three – polio, scarlet fever and diphtheria – were a challenge to the new NHS back then. We have, however, had the arrival of coronavirus disease, 2019, normally shortened to COVID 19, a virus which causes severe acute respiratory syndrome. Supposedly originating in China, in our closely-connected world, it quickly spread across borders. It is spread when someone with the virus breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes. They release small droplets containing the virus. With care, and with sensible people taking sensible precautions the pandemic is being mainly contained. Even so, not everyone in British politics is convinced, with Jeremy Hunt (currently the Chancellor of the Exchequer – finance minister – but previously Secretary of State for Health and Social Care) describing the response to the pandemic as “one of the worst public health failures in UK history”.

I The funding illness

These days, the biggest problem facing the NHS is funding. According to the Department for Health and Social Care in Britain, the planned spending for 2021-22 is £190.3-billion (€219.06-billion). In England, most of it is passed on to NHS England to cover the cost of improving health services.



Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt celebrating the 65th anniversary of the founding of the NHS in 2018

In the same period, £33.8-billion (€38.91-billion) was to cover the cost of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff, as well as vaccine and test-and-trace measures. The delivery of PPE equipment has not been without controversy, with massive contracts going to friends of government ministers. Experts have already warned that the extra money pledged is only around 50% of what is actually needed. There is never quite enough in the kitty. That's why there is still an issue with health inequality, obesity, addiction and a workforce that is not in the most robust good health, despite all the television advertisements for devices “guaranteed to make you healthier”. A body called The King's Fund monitors the NHS and reports on its success or otherwise. In one recent report it said: “The NHS will only be able to clear elective backlogs, deliver the NHS Long Term Plan and fight Covid-19 if it has the workforce it needs” (a workforce that is far broader than the tightly prescribed workforce commitments in the government's manifesto). A recent international poll asked the public for the biggest problems facing their health care systems. The answer most frequently selected in Great Britain was ‘not enough staff’. The public aren't wrong. The problem is finding enough money to bridge the shortfall. For instance, the NHS is not able to fund a drug that would help to protect some half a million people suffering from immunosuppression, when their bodies' natural protective measures are ineffective and they are therefore vulnerable to COVID-19.



The general practitioners profession is demoralised

According to Jeremy Hunt, in his final report as chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, things are looking far from rosy. “Currently the profession is demoralised,” he

warned. “GPs (general practitioners) are leaving almost as fast as they can be recruited, and patients are increasingly dissatisfied with level of access they receive.” He blames this situation on a simple shortage of GPs. He points out that in May of 2022, there were 27.5-million appointments in general practice, more than in 2019, but at the same time, the number of fully qualified, full-time GPs has dropped by almost 500. The result is that the GPs who remain are being forced to work harder, often dealing with a tangled mass of complicated cases. Hunt has come up with a range of possible measures to address the problems, such as limiting patient lists to, say, 2,500 people, reducing over the next 5 years; government action that would allow senior doctors to carry on working without attracting massive tax bills; better ways to fund deprived areas; and changing how general practice is managed, with less official interference. Now he’s become Chancellor, the answer to the question of whether or not these ideas can be funded will be down to him.

When the NHS was first set up its structure was three-fold: firstly, there were hospital services, organised into regional hospital boards, which took care of administration. Then came primary care, with doctors, dentists and opticians working as independent contractors, their fees paid by the government whilst not being on the government payroll. Finally came the community services, which included maternity, child welfare, vaccinations, and the ambulance service. A report prepared in 1980, rather appropriately called ‘the Black Report’, showed that despite the NHS being for everybody, poorer people had a shorter life expectancy and higher infant mortality rates. Clearly this was not the intention when Bevan set up the NHS. The NHS was always difficult to fund but never more so than now, with new and ever-more-expensive treatments for which the money must be found by the government, not the patient. And yet, with a shortage of nurses, the NHS has had to fall back on hiring “agency nurses” to bridge the gap. They stand in for the non-existent staff nurses, but are, of course, much more expensive. One Member of Parliament, who chairs the Conservative Policy Forum, has written to the Times newspaper to raise what are much the same policy issues as outlined in the Black Report more than 40 years ago: health inequality, poor housing standards, an unhealthy workforce, very long waiting lists for treatment, the low level of recruitment...the list goes on. The letter asks why these problems are being routinely and consistently ignored. Nothing much seems to have changed, although costs are, of course, rising. Britain’s nurses are proposing strike action in a bid to achieve the sorts of pay rise that the government says cannot be afforded. Recruiting agency nurses, however, inevitably costs more. It’s a conundrum.



Uk nurses protesting

In 2021, most members of the Royal College of Nursing – effectively the nurses’ trade union voted to reject a 3% pay rise. 89% said they’d be prepared to take action that falls short of a strike, but 54% expressed a willingness to go out on a real strike. Understandably, perhaps, nurses feel they cannot accept the government line that a pay increase for nurses is not affordable, when the agency nurses they’ve been hiring cost so much more. The spending of the Department for Health and Social Care in England (the four countries that make up the United Kingdom are assessed separately) is £33.8-billion (€38.97-billion) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, that money including the cost of providing PPE equipment for staff, test and trace systems, programmes of vaccination and improving the process for the discharge of hospital patients. The vaccination system worked extremely efficiently; I have experienced it, of course, and was very impressed with the efficiency and kindness of those involved.

The money also includes funding for delivering the government’s manifesto commitments. Making people healthier has never been a cheap option. There is even talk now of scrapping some of the targets imposed on health workers. In an interview for Sky Television, Health Secretary Steve Barclay spoke of “scaling back” some of those targets. Currently, hospital trusts can be penalised if diagnoses and referrals are not completed within certain time frames, which Mr. Barclay thinks may be too optimistic. “There is a place for targets,” he told his interviewer, “But if everything is a priority, nothing is.” He admitted the health service “is under huge pressure” but he placed the blame squarely on the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Schedule of NHS Costs suggests things are rather more complicated than that with community health care in England priced at £6,401,520,524 (€7,375,254,389) while accidents and emergencies cost £15,387,524 (€17,730,361). Planned spending in England for 2021-22 comes to £190.3-billion (€221.66-billion) in 2021/22, according to analysis of UK Treasury data by The King’s Fund. Keeping a country’s people well and treating them when they’re not is an expensive business. For the pen-pushers and bean-counters of Whitehall it means a massive headache. Aspirin, anyone (if we can afford one)



British nurses protesting

I Creaking joints

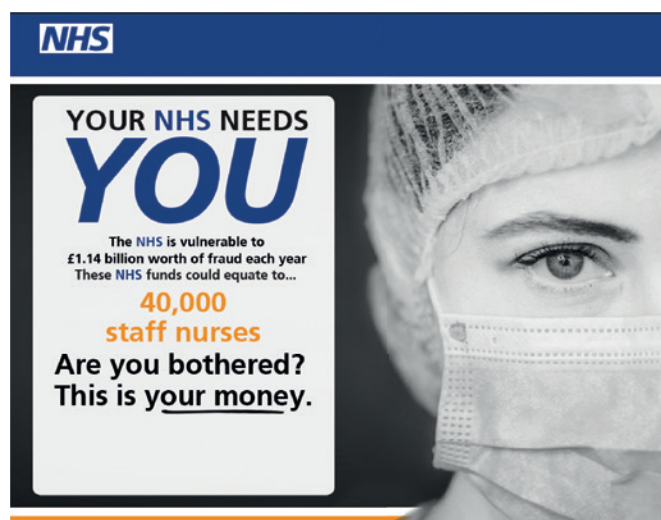
Some senior figures in government and the NHS are starting to raise questions about its sustainability. Certainly, keeping it in existence at all is a joint responsibility. After all, just as Nye Bevan intended, it belongs to every citizen of Britain. As Douglas Fraser, the Business and Economy Editor for BBC's Scotland website wrote, "International comparison shows the NHS has relatively low management costs, but at a price of less flexibility, and some worse outcomes than comparable countries," going on to add a truth that may not prove popular: "Not many in Britain admit it, but perhaps there are lessons to be learned from the way other systems are funded." Fraser makes the point that the current system is "creaking", as he puts it, and that: "there's frustration within the top echelons of management that political leadership is not addressing the seriousness of the NHS's problems." Fraser argues that the spread of "radical ideas for reform" into the public domain shows that there's a growing awareness of problems, for which, he says, "money can only be part of the solution." In February 2022, Audit Scotland, a governmental body, reported that: "The NHS in Scotland is operating on an emergency footing and remains under severe pressure." In this instance, most of the blame does rest with the infamous SARS-CoV-2 virus, the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are still backlogs to address while budgets get ever tighter.



The economist Sir Andrew Dilnot

The economist Sir Andrew Dilnot said that pulling back on the promised reforms would be "deeply regrettable", because urgent change is needed. Sir Andrew headed a review into the future funding of social care and proposed a cap on care funding – limiting how much can be paid for treatment, in other words. He says the government's proposed reforms, while less generous than he had originally proposed, must go ahead as scheduled. These reforms are meant to include an £86,000 (€100,173.66) cap on personal care cost

contributions, and "an expanded means test that is more generous than the existing one, to come into effect from October 2023." Good health costs money. Lots of it. The UK's Health and Care Levy is now estimated to raise £13-billion (€15-billion) a year on a UK-wide basis (rather than the £12-billion (€13.8-billion) a year as proposed in the Build Back Better project). This, plus updated forecasts of inflation, cost pressures and compensation for the NHS from additional employer costs of the levy, mean NHS England's budget is now £2.5-billion (€2.88-billion) a year higher over the 2021 spending Review period (in cash terms) than was indicated in the Build Back Better announcements. This means that over this Spending Review period, NHS England's resource spending will now rise by an average 3.8% every year. This projection includes the pre-announced £8-billion (€9.21-billion) to tackle elective backlogs over the next three years and a 30% increase in activity by 2024/25.



NHS anti-fraud campaign

Funding overall for health services in England totals £190.3-billion ((€221.66-billion) in 2021-22, according to the Department of Health and Social Care, of which £136.1-billion (€156.67-billion) will be going to NHS England and NHS Improvement for spending on health services. What's left is allocated to other national bodies to spend on things like public health (this includes grants given to local authorities), training and development of staff, and regulating the quality of care. It includes the £33.8-billion (€38.91-billion) for the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds come from general taxation. Unfortunately, the number of hospital beds available to patients has been steadily declining over the last three decades as an increasing proportion of treatment and care now takes place outside hospital. According to The King's Fund, of the Health and Care Levy, roughly 18% of the budget for the next 3 years will be directed towards adult social care, to support reforms and how people in England pay for their care services. This leaves £24.9-billion (€29-billion) of funding for health services over the three years. That may be optimistic: health spending tends to rise by 3.6% above inflation. However, the spending review proposal is now estimated to raise £13-billion (€15.14-billion) a year across the period in view. This, plus updated forecasts of inflation, cost pressures and compensation for the NHS from additional employer costs of the levy, mean NHS England's budget is now £2.5-billion (€2.88-billion) a year higher over the 2021 spending Review period (in cash terms) than was indicated in the Build Back Better announcements.



Over this Spending Review period, NHS England's resource spending will now rise by 3.8 per cent each year on average. This includes the pre-announced £8-billion (€9.21-billion) to tackle elective backlogs over the next three years and increase activity by 30 per cent by 2024/25. "Build Back Better" was the name given to a project, overseen by the UK Treasury, to get the economy moving after a series of unanticipated disasters, including the pandemic. The measures proposed include stimulating short-term economic activity and enhancing long-term productivity through enhanced investment in infrastructure, including broadband, roads, rail networks and cities as part of the Treasury's capital spending plans, amounting to £100-billion (€115.11-billion) in 2022.

NOTHING TO BOAST ABOUT (OR SPEND)



Former UK Prime Minister Attlee

Back in the early part of the 20th century, according to the Bagehot column in *The Economist* magazine, the five giants that had to be slain in those distant days were want, ignorance, squalor, idleness and disease. Bagehot is not impressed with our progress since then. He (or it could be 'she' under such a pseudonym) claims that Britain is now in the worst of all possible worlds; "a libertarian's nightmare", says the columnist, "with the state expanding to 45% of GDP" and the tax burden "likely to creep towards levels not seen since Clement Attlee," the Labour prime minister who put Beveridge's and Bevan's plans into practice. Bagehot points to what now exists as a sort of minimalist welfare state, doing the least it can get away with.

Unemployment benefit, the column points out, is set at £80 (€92.09) a week, which is around 14% of average earnings. It's roughly half what it used to be in equivalence terms in the 1970s. The column points out that unemployment benefit in the Netherlands begins at 50% of whatever the last payslip shows. You won't get rich on it, but neither will you starve to death. Bagehot writes that "the NHS is the only adequately-funded part of the British state, and then barely." The message is: don't get ill in Britain. By the way, current waiting lists have reached the historic peak of around 7.1-million, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). The NHS target for maximum waiting time is 18 weeks, but the actual figure is beyond that and still rising. Now the nurses are planning to go on strike for the first time in the history of the NHS and it's for more pay.



The NHS was facing pressures and strains that were hard to manage or control even before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the IFS: "The waiting list for elective treatment (non-urgent treatment) had grown by 50% since 2015; just 83% of A&E patients were seen within four hours in February 2020 (down from 92% in February 2015); and the estimated cost of eradicating the 'high-risk' maintenance backlog had quadrupled since 2010." After ten years of annual budget increases, health spending grew in real terms by just 1.6% per year, lower than in any decade since the NHS began. The NHS couldn't afford to grow. When the pandemic began, there were 39,000 vacancies for nurses in England. There were also fewer

doctors, fewer hospital beds and fewer CT scanners per person than in many similar countries, while public pay restraint meant pay cuts for a lot of NHS staff.



A 2022 NHS flu vaccination campaign

“Following a decade of big budget increases, between 2009–10 and 2019–20 UK,” reports the IFS, “government health spending grew at an average real-terms rate of 1.6% per year – lower than any previous decade in NHS history.” The average pay for consultants in 2021 was 9% lower in real terms than it was in 2011. What’s more, it’s 4% lower for junior doctors and 5% lower for nurses. The IFS says that: “In our central scenario, we estimate that the English NHS will need £9-billion (€10.36-billion) in 2022–23 (an increase of 6.4% relative to pre-pandemic plans), £6-billion (€6.91-billion) in 2023–24 (4.1% on pre-existing plans) and £5-billion (€5.76-billion) in 2024–25 to deal with pandemic-related pressures. These are substantial, but manageable, sums. These estimates are highly uncertain and sensitive to assumptions about the future course of the pandemic but are broadly similar to those reached by other organisations.”

There is, clearly, no shortage of people requiring treatment for various illnesses. There is a relatively severe shortage, however, of money with which to do it. The new Health and Social Care settlement announced in September 2021 provides an additional £11.2-billion (€12.89-billion) for the Department of Health and Social Care in the period 2022–23 and £9-billion for 2023–24, of which £1.8-billion (€2.07-billion) is set aside each year for social care, leaving some £9-billion (€12.89-billion) of additional funding in 2022–23 and £7-billion (€8.06-billion) in 2023–24 to cope with health-related pressures connected with COVID-19. The IFS thinks that should be enough for the following two years, but not enough in the medium term.

The IFS has calculated that the combined cost of meeting the COVID-related direct pressures could be around £5.2-billion (€5.99-billion) in 2022–23, falling to £2.0-billion (€2.3-billion) in 2023–24 and £0.9-billion (€1.04-billion) in 2024–25. However, the indirect costs and pressures associated with the pandemic could be greater and more persistent than the estimates to date suggest. “Millions of people missed out on NHS care during the pandemic,” reports the IFS. “Much of this care will need to be delivered eventually and waiting lists are likely to rise rapidly as these ‘missing’ patients come forward. We estimate that the NHS could need £2.5 billion (€2.88-billion) per year between 2022–23 and 2024–25 if it is to catch up on missed activity.” It is not a

pretty picture and so far nobody is suggesting a way to get over the many, many issues.

The University of East London held an inquiry into the problems facing the NHS in the hope of coming up with possible solutions. Previous evidence to the group of MPs involved in the project mentioned poor workforce planning, weak policies and fragmented responsibilities contributing to “a workforce crisis, exacerbated by the lack of a national NHS workforce strategy”. It has been estimated that by 2030–31, up to almost half a million extra health care staff would be needed to meet the pressures of demand and to enable the NHS to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. That is equivalent to a 40 per cent increase in the workforce. What’s more, only a quarter of nursing shifts have the planned number of registered nurses on duty, according to a new survey of more than 20,000 frontline staff. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), representing nurses, reports that most nurses have warned that staffing levels on their last shift were not sufficient to meet the needs of patients. Some nurses are now quitting their jobs as a result.

No serious British politician would suggest scaling



back the NHS; it is still the “jewel in the crown” for a caring society. Can it be saved? The question is not relevant; it WILL be saved because it HAS TO be saved, by some means. There is an old Jewish proverb: “When you have no choice, mobilise the spirit of courage.” The question is: does any current British politician have that courage? There is very little sign of it. The NHS is in a mess, but it remains an essential element of life in the UK. It can’t be abandoned but nobody can afford to fix it. It will take a huge leap of imagination to come up with a working solution, and none has been suggested – at least, not seriously – by any of the current crop of British MPs, nor by the newspapers, even though they’re not bound by promises they cannot afford to break. Britain’s NHS is going to need much more than a shot in the arm to save it, and amputation is not an option. A vast amount of that “spirit of courage” is going to be needed, whoever provides it and in whatever form.

Jim.Gibbons@europe-diplomatic.eu

Jim Gibbons



BOB'S YOUR UNCLE (OR YOUR AUNTY?)

**The controversy over
the gender transition
of children**

The English slang expression “Bob’s your uncle” is a simple confirmation that something has been achieved or that an explanation has reached its end. It’s very much like the French expression, “et voilà!”, and is used in similar circumstances. It seems to be a saying that is almost exclusively British and virtually unknown in other English-speaking countries. The expression is said to date back to a political scandal in Britain in 1886, when the Prime Minister, Robert Cecil, gave his totally unqualified nephew, Arthur Balfour, an important ministerial job. “Bob” is short for Robert, so “Bob’s your uncle” was a jokey explanation for Balfour’s otherwise inexplicable promotion. There may be more to it than that because the expression doesn’t appear in print until 1924, when a music hall review was produced in Dundee, Scotland, with the title song performed by the popular artiste, Florrie Forde. The song was called “Follow Your Uncle Bob”, and Balfour clearly did. It may have begun on a different date but things like that have a habit of getting confused. Certainly, saying “Bob’s your aunt” would have been most inappropriate. Nobody (as far as I know) ever suggested that Balfour was anything other than a rather fortunate nephew whose rise to prominence owed more to his family connections than to his abilities and political skills. We must recall that the word “nepotism” is derived from “nephew”.

Gender identity was clearly somewhat looser in classical times and it would seem that some people would like to restore that situation for all of us. This especially applies to what’s called “gender reassignment” in which children with gender dysphoria undergo surgery to fix their genders irreversibly for all time. Confusion over one’s sexual identity was not at all uncommon in ancient Greece (as you may recall from the many Greek myths you were told; they weren’t all about Minotaurs, after all), where various classical writers, including Plato, Herodotus and Xenophon (among a great many others) used the theme in their work. Sexual relations between adult men and young teenage or adolescent boys – normally aged between 13 and 17 – was very common. It was known as “pederasty” and was legally practised in some city states but banned in others. In any case, it seems to have been fairly common practice. In Sparta, it was compulsory for boys of 7 to take an older male lover who also acted as a mentor. The same tendencies applied to women, although according to my 1827 copy of Lemprière’s Classical Dictionary, many of the stories are exaggerated or simply untrue. The claims, for instance, that the famous Sappho surrounded herself with her young female lovers are dismissed, although Lemprière admits that her passions were violent in the extreme.



© NRE
Greek poet Anacreon with his lover

Her female companions, Telesiphe, Atthis and Megara, were, according to Lemprière, used as a pretext for what he calls “calumnies” that have tainted her reputation and to prove his point he writes: “She conceived such a passion for Phaon, a youth of Mitylene, that upon his refusal to gratify her desires, she threw herself into the sea from Mount Leucas.” If Lemprière is to be believed, she was only teaching her young women friends music, but he was almost certainly wrong. She wrote some very beautiful poetry, though, most of it devoted to her young female friends:

“Throned in splendor, immortal Aphrodite!
Child of Zeus, Enchantress, I implore thee
Slay me not in this distress and anguish,
Lady of beauty.”



© GU/SE
Professor Christopher Gillberg

Even Aristotle commended her, saying, ‘Sappho deserves respect, though she is a woman.’ Note the “though”. Well, they were distant times and equality was undreamed of. Ovid says Sappho was not handsome and was getting on in years when she fell for Phaon. It didn’t stop her from producing nine books of lyric verses as well as epigrams, elegies and other examples of great wit and intelligence. Even Lemprière was impressed, although very little of her writing survives. “Of all these compositions,” he wrote, “nothing now remains but two fragments, whose uncommon sweetness and elegance show how meritoriously the praises of the ancients have been bestowed upon a poetess who for the sublimity of her genius was called the tenth muse.” Plutarch was a fan, too. It seems as if many of the memories about her that have come down to us were scurrilous nonsense written by ancient Greece’s tabloid journalists. Unless, of course, Lemprière got embarrassed writing about such private and personal matters and preferred to use euphemisms, thus confining them to the privacy of the bedroom. After all, the early 19th century was not known as a time of sexual licence.

I No turning back

There has been a trend towards helping (if that's the right word) youngsters experiencing gender dysphoria – unhappiness with one's physical sexual identity – by undertaking surgery, including the use of what has been described as “genital mutilation”. In this case, a boy, say, who feels he is really a girl, can undergo an operation that makes his body at least appear to be female. An equivalent operation to turn a female into a male is harder to imagine, since it would involve adding something external to the body in question. According to Professor Christopher Gillberg and others at the University of Gothenburg, as quoted in Svenska Dagbladet, some of these operations have been performed “without a reasonable basis in terms of science, proven experience and often without ethical review”, which sounds very worrying. The whole issue is raised in the Canadian Gender Report, which refers to the Swedish U-Turn regarding gender transitioning in children. The report quotes the article in Svenska Dagbladet, in which it's reported that every year in Sweden hundreds of children with gender dysphoria are treated with hormones at first and later with surgery, despite a relative lack of evidence of any benefit. Clearly the sufferers require help, but in what form? The current record on treatment has been described as “a big experiment”.



An NHS poster promoting its support service

There is a big and worrying question about young teenagers who identify as transgender: however mature they think they are, do young teenagers know themselves and the world well enough to make the decision to undergo an irreversible treatment which they may regret?



The Tavistock Center's internet home page

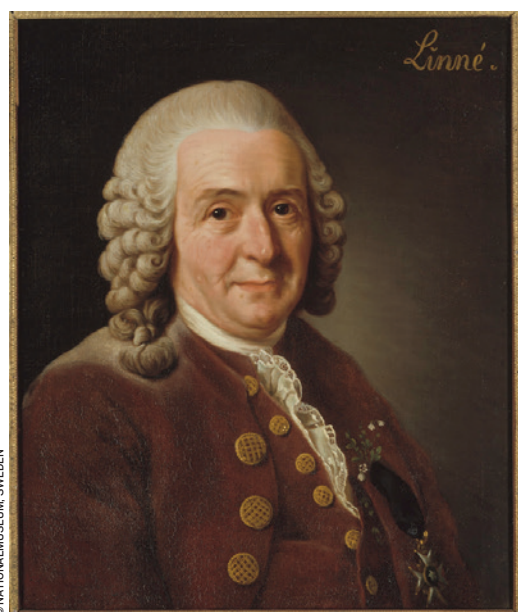
In the UK, Britain's National Health Service (NHS) has announced that it is closing down and completely re-thinking its gender identity clinic for young people because it fears that it has effectively been “rushing” children into treatment that will permanently alter their lives. Instead, the clinic is to be “decentralised” from London, setting up clinics on a regional basis in existing children's hospitals. In the US, the majority of young patients are adolescent girls, which may come as a surprise. This could mean a halt to the existing clinical approach that predominates on both sides of the Atlantic, in which a clinician accepts a patient's choice of genders and begins drug treatment to halt puberty, and then, later on begins the use of cross-sex hormones, such as androgens, which include testosterone, which gives men facial hair, a deeper voice, an Adam's apple and a more muscular build. Estrogens, such as Estradiol, on the other hand, cause such features as women's breasts, broader hips and even menstrual cycles. In fact, both genders produce both androgens and estrogens, but clearly in different proportions, depending on predominant gender, with males receiving more androgens and females more estrogens.

The decision to undergo treatment for gender dysphoria is a big one without any doubt. It means a lifetime of taking puberty-blocking drugs, cross-sex hormones and – ultimately, in many cases – surgery. The hormones – basically androgens or oestrogens – can give the patient some of the physical attributes they would like to have, along with their desired secondary sex characteristics.

The decision to close the Gender and Identity Development Service at Britain's best-known clinic for “transitions”, the Tavistock and Portman (widely known as the Tavistock Clinic), will have widespread effects on the whole issue of changing gender and the treatment in the UK of gender dysphoria. It has been pointed out that the work of the clinic should have come under scrutiny much earlier, because it was using puberty-blocking drugs that are now known to cause brain swelling in some patients, possible leading to vision loss. Staff there had raised concerns in the past, but that hadn't prevented its throughput of patients rising by 4,000% over the last decade among girls alone. Changing one's gender seems to have become fashionable or at least fairly common.

In any case, scientists have discovered that nothing is quite as clear-cut as most of us imagine. An article in Scientific American in September 2017 did an excellent job of summing up the state of our knowledge and also identifying where it's lacking: “To varying extents, many of us are biological hybrids on a male-female continuum,” said an excellent editorial. “Researchers have found XY cells in a 94-year-old woman, and surgeons discovered a womb in a 70-year-old man, a father

of four. New evidence suggests that the brain consists of a 'mosaic' of cell types, some more yin, others further along the yang scale." The editorial continues: "These findings have far-reaching implications beyond just updating the biology textbooks. They have particular bearing on issues of personal identity, health and the economic well-being of women. That is because arguments about innate biological differences between the sexes have persisted long past the time they should have been put to rest." I can't imagine that many of us – at least in the West – would argue with that.



Portrait of botanist and university professor Carl von Linné (1707-1778) by Alexander Roslin

Basically, the biology looks simple: $X + X = ♀$ and $X + Y = ♂$. For those suffering from gender dysphoria, however, the gender symbols first created by Carl Linnaeus in 1751, originally intended with reference to flowers and for being applied to plants perhaps somewhat over-simplify the entire issue. Life must be difficult in a great many ways for those who are unsure about their gender or who feel they were born into the wrong body and the temptation to resort to surgery must be strong, as long as the sufferer acknowledges that it's a one-way trip. The symbol most often used to represent someone who sees themselves as nonbinary or hermaphrodite (the word comes from the names of Hermes, the Greek version of Mercury and Aphrodite, the Greek name for Venus) is $⚥$. These characters from Greek classical literature and mythology get everywhere. It's not a sign we ever see outside a public toilet and for fairly obvious reasons.

Warnings a-plenty

Thousands of British children have received

gender "correction" treatment at the Tavistock Clinic's Gender and Identity Development Service, despite repeated warnings by experts about shoddy care there and poor decisions. Psychologists complained that vulnerable children were being rushed through a process they were too young to understand without being fully aware of its irreversibility in most cases.

The British government's National Institute for Care and Excellence (NICE) was set up in 1999 as an independent organisation intended to tackle the variation in availability and quality of healthcare across the whole NHS. Looking into what was happening at the Tavistock, it concluded that the link between actual transition and any improvement in psychological function was extremely weak. The old excuse – that a failure to carry out the gender surgery the child in question wants could lead them towards suicide – has very little evidence to support it. What's more, the Food and Drug Administration is placing an additional warning on puberty-blocking drugs, which replaces their previously held belief – dogma, almost – that puberty-blockers and cross-sex hormones were perfectly safe and reversible. The final straw came in a report by the highly-regarded paediatrician Dr. Hilary Cass, a former president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, who carried out an independent study of how Britain cares for transgender children. She stated her belief that they were receiving inadequate care, writing in her report she points out how demand for the Gender and Identity Development Service (GIDS) at the Tavistock has soared.

In the introduction to her interim report, Dr. Cass writes: "I recognise there is a pressing need to enhance the services currently available for children, young people, their independent review of gender identity services for children and young people, parents and carers, some of whom are experiencing considerable distress." Dr. Cass goes on: "I know the time I am taking to complete this Review and make recommendations will be difficult for some, but it is necessary." Dr. Cass believes we have been getting things wrong for a very long time, although given the controversial nature of the subject that may not be surprising. The Report points out that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of referrals to the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) which has contributed to an overlong waiting list for treatment.



US Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine the first openly transgender federal official

At primary, secondary and specialist level, her Report points out, there has been a lack of agreement, "and in many instances a lack of open discussion about the extent to which gender incongruence



A Mount Sinai Hospital internet promotion

in childhood and adolescence can be an inherent and immutable phenomenon for which transition is the best option for the individual, or a more fluid and temporal response to a range of developmental, social and psychological factors.” She goes on to add: “Professionals’ experience and position on this spectrum may determine their clinical approach.” She describes the current unenviable position for some young people as “a clinician lottery”.

Different country, different treatment

Britain’s decision to close down its GIDS unit has been described in an article for the Arizona Republic as “a veritable bomb” going off in the world of transgender medicine. The article explains that the closure came because the clinic had been “rushing children into life-altering treatment” without sufficient safeguards. This latest decision, says the article by Phil Boas, is inevitably going to create shock waves in the United States, “where significant numbers of this generation’s young people have been transitioning to other genders, entering a pathway of lifelong treatment on puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones and surgery.” In the United States, some 300,000 American teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 identify themselves as transgender. The whole matter is, of course, controversial, especially for religious groups, an issue that is always held to be of more significance in the United States than in Europe. One of the main advocates in the US of what’s called “gender-affirming care” denies that the treatment applied in the US differs in any

significant way from what happens in European clinics.

In the United States, doctors, clinics and hospitals will not be obliged to provide gender reassessment treatment that goes against their consciences. The mandate was contained in a rule issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which expanded the definition of non-discrimination “on the basis of sex” to include gender identity. It would be wrong, perhaps even foolish, however, to describe this, or the decision to close London’s Tavistock Clinic as a victory for one side or the other. Things simply progress and medical opinions change. Now, health authorities not only in the UK but also in Sweden and Finland have agreed that there is no evidence in most cases for the benefits of puberty-blockers and cross-sex hormone treatment. All three countries have dramatically scaled back their use in treating gender dysphoria. Health authorities seem to agree that far more research is needed. Now the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) has agreed that “eunuch” is a valid gender identity. WPATH has now withdrawn its criticism of Britain’s NHS over the closure of the Tavistock unit. Dr. Cass effectively blamed the US for the “affirmative” model that led to treatment of children



Sister of Mercy caring for a disabled child

with gender dysphoria without sufficient safeguarding. HHS issued the mandate in 2016, interpreting the Affordable Care Act as requiring “physicians to perform gender-transition procedures on any patient, including children, regardless of whether the doctor believed the procedure could harm the patient.”

In the United States, physicians found themselves obliged to perform gender-transition surgery on any patient of any age, including children, even in cases in which they feared the outcome might be damaging.

The resulting court case, *Sisters of Mercy versus Becerra*, saw a legal confrontation involving a coalition of Catholic hospitals, a Catholic university and a group of Roman Catholic nuns who run clinics for the poor. They had legal representation from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at Becket, welcomed the court’s decision, saying that it freed health care professionals to act in accordance with their conscience and their medical judgment. However, WPATH has openly condemned the NHS in a way that reveals its strong preference for the “affirmative” model, arguing that the NHS is emphasizing “careful exploration of a child or young person’s co-existing mental health, neuro-developmental and/or family or social complexities, which WPATH considered to be an “alarming” practice of “outdated gatekeeping”.

The American approach seems to be very much at variance with what happens in the Netherlands, and which seems to be spreading across Europe. There is an assumption of gender-identity discordance in both cases, but there are differences, including how gender identity can be known and what should be done about it. The main differences of approach are three-fold. Firstly, there is the childhood social transition: new names, new pronouns and the use of public toilets. In the American version, the gender identity is known from an early age and must be swiftly taken up by parents, clinicians, teachers and so on. In the Dutch model, which follows decades of research, there is a conviction that gender dysphoria will subside by adolescence or early adulthood, sometimes resolving into homosexuality, with a recommendation for “watchful waiting” intended as a preview to positive action only once the true situation and its likely outcome become clear. Differences over treatment and approach are clear, but experts on either side differ over aetiology, or basic background cause, too.

Putting things right?

Recent research suggests that if a child’s own feelings that their gender has been wrongly assigned are encouraged or even just acknowledged by their parents and peers, then their dysphoria is more likely to persist to the point at which he or she seeks puberty suppression. The “watchful waiting” should persist into the early stages of puberty and the process should only be abandoned if the sufferer finds living in their physical gender too painful mentally. The Dutch team do not recommend that a teenager should try living in his or her true physical sense.

Britain’s NHS recommends social transition only for adolescents who have been diagnosed as suffering from dysphoria. There are clinical differences of views, too. Those who follow the “affirmative” version (popular in the United States) believe the issue has a strong neurological component, although there is no clinical evidence to support this. “Studies on brain structure and functioning,” wrote Leor Sapir in ‘Health Care, Politics and Law, The Social Order’, “are notoriously inconclusive, mainly because they cannot control for homosexuality or for the effects of synthetic hormone use and

gender-rôle change on the brain.” As the Dutch researchers themselves have put it: “the (patho-) biological basis of [gender dysphoria] is still poorly understood, and its diagnosis relies totally on psychological methods.”



“I’m doing it for me”

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Trans men and non-binary people aged 25-64 are eligible for cervical screening if they have a cervix.

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Nothing has turned up to challenge this view and there are fears that young teens are identifying as cross-gender because of social influences, rather than anything medical or psychological. Such a viewpoint is strictly frowned upon in the United States, however, where the very idea that there could be an underlying social cause meets stony resistance. Interestingly, the Cass report found that most candidates for paediatric gender treatment have been teenage girls with no previous history of dysphoria but with a prepubertal history of anxiety, depression, ADHD and autism. Confirming Cass’s findings, Finland’s Council for Choices in Healthcare reported that “psychiatric disorders and developmental difficulties may predispose a young person to the onset of gender dysphoria.”



Dr Hilary Cass

Research undertaken in the United States suggests that, although the levels of psychopathology and psychiatric disorders in trans people at the time of their assessment are higher than in the rest of the population, they do improve following gender-

confirming medical intervention, in many cases reaching normative values. The main Axes in psychiatric disorders were found to be depression and anxiety disorder, which will hardly come as a surprise.

Love, desire and confusion

Love seems to have played a very big part in the social life of classical Greece, but so it does today in many societies, and back then it was also the inspiration for a great deal of classical Greek literature, although strictly speaking homosexual love largely met with disapproval, or at least it was something people preferred not to talk about. A contemporaneous epithet suggests the kinds of problems Lesbian women faced in its description of a relationship between two women: “They are unwilling to play Aphrodite’s games according to her rules, but they escape to other things that are not appropriate.” It reads like a slap on the wrist, albeit a fairly mild one, like a maiden aunt who has just caught her favourite nephew in an act of onanism. So, Lesbianism met with some disapproval, but the biographer Plutarchus suggests that in Sparta “fair women” could also fall in love with girls. Of course, the outstanding lyricist of “forbidden love” was Sappho, who came from Lesbos (where else?) and who is regarded worldwide as the first (as far as we know) Lesbian love poet.



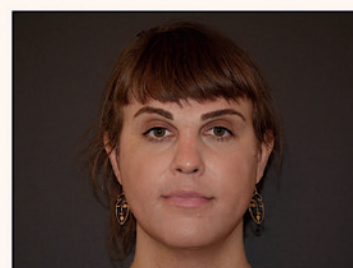
Sappho, Phaon, and Cupid by Jacques-Louis David, 1809

Some experts doubt if her “husband” actually existed, since his name actually means “penis”. Her daughter, Kleis, seems to have been real enough and to have inspired poetry on Sappho’s part. She must have come from somewhere, presumably a sexual encounter. Here is an extract: “I have a beautiful daughter; Like a golden flower; My beloved Kleis. I would not trade her for all Lydia.” It somehow sounds very modern. Sappho’s companions even get a mention in the Iliad: “I will give him seven excellent workwomen, Lesbians, whom I chose for myself when he took Lesbos – all of surpassing beauty.”

The most common form of same-sex relationships between elite males in Greece was pederasty, which means “boy love”. It was a quite common and apparently acceptable for an older male to form a sexual relationship with an adolescent youth. A boy was considered a “boy” until he was able to grow a full beard. In Athens the older man was called *erastes*, whose task it was to educate, protect, love, and provide a rôle model for his *eromenos* whose reward for him lay in his beauty, youth, and promise. Such a notion has the support of archaeological evidence discovered by experts, such as a bronze plaque of an older man carrying a bow and arrow while grabbing a younger man by the arms. The youth in question is carrying a goat whose significance is a mystery to me. Furthermore, the boy’s genitals are exposed in the plaque, which experts interpret as being further evidence of pederasty. Britain’s NHS defines gender dysphoria as: “a sense of unease that a person may have because of a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity.” It goes on to warn that: “This sense of unease or dissatisfaction may be so intense it can lead to depression and anxiety and have a harmful impact on daily life.”



BEFORE



AFTER

© THE LONDON TRANSGENDER CLINIC UK

A Facial Feminisation Surgery patient from the The London Transgender Clinic

The NHS takes a gentle, sympathetic view of those with gender issues: “Many people with gender dysphoria have a strong, lasting desire to live a life that “matches” or expresses their gender identity,” says the NHS on its website. “They do this by changing the way they look and behave. Some people with gender dysphoria, but not all, may want to use hormones and sometimes surgery to express their gender identity.” The NHS makes it clear that it’s not a form of mental illness of any kind. “Gender dysphoria is not a mental illness, but some people may develop mental health problems because of gender dysphoria.” More and more is being uncovered about the condition, just as more and more examples of Sappho’s poetry are being found and translated. Sappho never truly found a solution to salve the pain she felt on departing from one of her many female lovers. It is not a condition for which there is a “cure” and irreversible “cures” involving surgery may come to be regretted. But sex, of course, is important, whatever form it must take. As the writer Henry Miller once put it: “Sex is one of the nine reasons for reincarnation. The other eight are unimportant.” Or as Sappho herself put it in one of her many poetical works: “Sweet mother, I cannot weave –slender Aphrodite has overcome me with longing for a girl.” I must confess to feeling sorry for her obvious confusion, although her poetical works are still famous after more than 2,600 years, which is a remarkable record. Discussions concerning sex change surgery will doubtless continue with no clear end in sight. We have evolved somewhat oddly as human beings and nobody has yet found a universal catch-all cure for some of the odder side effects. Perhaps they never will.

anthony.james@europe-diplomatic.eu

Anthony James



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Augustine Volcano, Alaska

VOLCANOES... RESTLESS GIANTS OF THE PLANET

**‘Every volcano is a
powerful illustration
of God’s character.
‘(Reinhard Bonnke)**

From ancient times until the moment this article was penned, volcanoes and their recurring activity have captivated, amazed, humbled, but also deeply affected the people of our planet.

Whenever we talk about volcanoes, we speak of unimaginable power and extraordinary character and strength, we see the absolute force of nature reminding us how powerless and small we are before it.

But what is the origin of these gigantic natural phenomena?

The origin of volcanoes lies in the constant divergent or convergent movement of the tectonic plates that cover the earth beneath its crust. Driven by the constant changes in temperature and pressure under the crust and the underlying mantle, convection currents form, eventually leading to the eruption of molten material and hot magma from the Earth's interior through the cracks in the crust, usually where two tectonic plates meet. The hot magma rises from the hot spots underground and erupts as flowing lava through these cracks, creating different types of volcanoes.

After centuries of studying this phenomenon, scientists now know that every volcano goes through four phases during its long life. In the first phase, pressure builds up inside. The movement of the tectonic plates creates a magma chamber that gradually fills with hot magma. When this chamber is full, the second phase begins, in which the hot magma is ejected through the volcano's crater. The ejection can sometimes be violent, in the form of a spectacular explosion of hot lava, but sometimes it just flows slowly downwards or into the sea (if it is under water). In either case, this phase leads to a third one, the 'dormant' phase. As the magma chamber empties, the pressure drops and the volcano goes into 'sleep'. It may sleep for a few years, for ages, or forever, when some volcanoes enter the fourth and final phase of their long existence, called the 'extinct' phase.

It is estimated that today about 80 per cent of the Earth's surface, including below sea level, is of volcanic origin. Volcanic eruptions over hundreds of millions of years have shaped the geographic landscape of the Earth that we know today, with its mountains, plateaus and plains

The oldest lava found on Earth near the village of Inukjuak on Hudson Bay in Canada is estimated to be about 3.825 billion years old.



The restored version of John Martin's *Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum*

Throughout history, the eruptions of volcanoes have been recorded and documented. Pliny the Younger was an eyewitness to the massive eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Roman antiquity in 79 AD, and it is to him that we owe the first officially documented

volcanic eruption in history. Unfortunately, Pliny was overcome by the volcanic fumes on his arrival in Pompeii and died in Stabiae, another ancient Roman city near the volcano. The eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD destroyed the Roman cities of Pompeii, Herculaneum, Oplontis, Stabiae and several other villages. The lava and ash produced by the eruption covered the settlements and, although they destroyed life in these places, led to their remarkable preservation, which offers archaeologists valuable information about the way of life and customs in Roman times. Pompeii is indeed one of the best preserved archaeological sites in the world.

The deadliest volcano in the world, however, is considered to be Tambora in Indonesia. Its eruption in 1815, the largest ever recorded, killed nearly 100,000 people directly or indirectly, according to History.com.

The total number of volcano-related deaths today is estimated at 238 867.



Mount Fuji

Today, there are about 1,350 potentially active volcanoes worldwide. About 500 of these volcanoes have erupted in historical times. Australia is the only continent without current volcanic activity, but is home to one of the largest extinct volcanoes in the world, Tweed. It is estimated that 800 million people in 86 different countries live within 100 km of an active or potentially active volcano. Many of today's active volcanoes are located along what is known as the 'Ring of Fire of the Pacific', a chain of underwater volcanoes and sites of strong seismic activity at the edges of the Pacific Ocean. About 90 percent of all earthquakes occur along this ring of fire, and 75 percent of all active volcanoes on earth are found there. There are entire countries with large populations that lie on the ring of fire and are therefore constantly at risk. These include Indonesia (267 million people), the Philippines (103 million people) and Japan (127 million people).

Mount Fuji, the volcano off the east coast of Japan, is the highest and most famous mountain in Japan. It is also an active volcano in the Ring of Fire, located only 100 km from the Tokyo-Yokohama metropolitan area. Mount Fuji has erupted more than 15 times since 781. It is still considered active, although it has been dormant



Astronaut photo of ash cloud from Mount Cleveland, Alaska, USA

since its last eruption in 1707 and the last signs of volcanic activity occurred in the 1960s. Fuji is monitored 24 hours a day given concerns about the extensive damage an eruption would cause near a large populated area.

The United States ranks third after Indonesia and Japan in the number of historically active volcanoes, with most of these found in the Cascade Range and Alaska. In addition, about 10% of the volcanoes that have erupted in the last 10 000 years are in the United States. The world's largest eruption of the 20th century occurred in Alaska in 1912 (now Katmai National Park and Preserve).

When a tectonic plate moves slowly over a hot spot, a chain of volcanoes or volcanic islands can form. The best examples are the islands of Hawaii and Samoa, which were formed in this way. Mauna Loa is one of the five volcanoes in Hawaii (US state) and the largest volcano on Earth, both in terms of mass and volume. When measured from the ocean floor, which is the actual base of the mountain, Mauna Loa is 9 km high. It lies about 5 km underwater and rises "only" about 4 km gradually above sea level, in the form of a shield. The volcano occupies about 51 percent of the island of Hawaii. Mauna Loa, which means "Long Mountain" in Hawaiian, is the largest active volcano on the planet today. The current eruption, which began on 27 November 2022, is the 34th recorded since 1843. The most recent eruption is still ongoing.

The US Geological Survey volcano alert level was at WARNING, with daily updates issued for Mauna Loa. The alert level has now been downgraded to WATCH as experts believe Mauna Loa's eruption is slowly coming to an end and the output of lava and volcanic gases is greatly reduced. At one point, the daily bulletin reported a lava flow coming dangerously close to a vital highway used by residents and tourists to get from the east to the west side of the island. After a crisis that lasted for days, the road was finally no longer under immediate threat from the lava. In addition, flight restrictions were imposed in the area up to 1,500 feet above the ground. Authorities advised residents to prepare for evacuation should the lava flow towards

populated areas. So far, however, the lava is not threatening any homes or communities and no evacuation orders have been issued.

Kilauea, a smaller volcano nearby, has also erupted since September 2021. This rare phenomenon of two volcanoes erupting at the same time attracted many tourists to the area.

Iceland is one of the most active volcanic regions on earth, with eruptions occurring on average every four years. These eruptions, sometimes small and quiet, sometimes explosive, can last from minutes or hours to months or several years. Iceland's geological position is the main reason for the country's intense volcanic activity. Large amounts of magma filling the cracks in the earth's crust created by the spreading tectonic plates lead to frequent eruptions along the rift zone. Icelandic volcanoes regularly make headlines, especially on the European continent, as they sometimes disrupt the normal lives of all Europeans, not just the locals. One example is the Eyjafallajökull volcano, which in 2010 brought all air traffic over Europe to a standstill for several days as it spewed enormous amounts of ash into the air. A more recent example is the Fagradalsfjall volcano, which erupted on the Reykjanes peninsula.



Fagradalsfjall volcano in Iceland began erupting on 19 March 2021 and continued for six months

Besides the famous Vesuvius, there is another infamous volcano in Italy that makes headlines. In 2021, erupted volcanic material from Mount Etna caused it to increase in height by about 30 metres in just 6 months. In 2022, the volcano, which can be visited up to the crater during dormant periods, was active again. At the base of the cone, on its northern side, a fissure has opened and a lava flow is pouring into the valley on the eastern side of the volcano, called Valle del Bove. In recent years, the lava reached the outskirts of the villages at the foot of the volcano several times and people had to move.

But another phenomenon worries scientists when it comes to Etna. They have noticed that Etna is slowly but surely slipping. The mountain is moving very slowly, but geologists have not yet been able to understand what has caused the volcano to move. At the moment, they can only 'keep an eye' on the active volcano, because it is impossible to say whether an acceleration of this process will occur in the next few years or centuries. However, the fear of a catastrophic collapse of the mountain is great, especially since it could also trigger a devastating tsunami that would hit the coasts of both Italy and Greece.

Further west, the Canary Islands in the Atlantic (which are part of Spain) have a volcanic history that began about 70

million years ago. The Canary Islands region is still volcanically active, with the impressive Mount Teide (3,718 metres high) on Tenerife and some smaller (but equally dangerous) ones on the other islands. The most recent volcanic eruption on the islands, and the most recorded to date, occurred on La Palma in 2021.

In 2021, Cumbre Vieja erupted and, due to local weather conditions, volcanic ash from La Palma reached the nearby island of Tenerife, causing significant disruption to air traffic. The ash and smoke caused by the eruption affected all life on the island and had a major impact on tourism, an important source of income for the locals.

Ash rain can have a significant impact on crops during a volcanic eruption. Physical effects due to additional weight of the ash on the leaves, partial spilling or snapping of branches - all this prevents the natural growth process of the plants and can ultimately lead to crop failures.

Ash in the air can also affect the quality of human life. The abrasive particles of ash can scratch the surface of the skin or eyes, causing discomfort and inflammation. If inhaled, volcanic ash can cause breathing problems due to the harmful aerosols and toxic gases that make it up. It can even damage the lungs and eventually lead to suffocation. It can be particularly harmful to children, older adults and people with pre-existing respiratory or heart conditions.



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The eruption of the Sarychev volcano in Russia's Kuril Islands

Economic activity can be affected after a volcanic eruption, as it is difficult for businesses to get back to work and recover afterwards. Natural habitats are often affected and animals and plants are destroyed. It is now proven that an increased volcanic channel arm in a region due to volcanic activity will most likely lead to a decline in property prices and other economic indicators in the region. Economic activity is interrupted, transport is affected or even temporarily stopped, which can lead to losses of several million euros.

It may come as a surprise, but volcanic activity can also have a positive impact on the environment and the people who live in these volcanic regions. Over the years, it has been shown that volcanic eruptions and the processes associated with them have also directly or indirectly helped humanity.

Despite the danger of living near these volcanoes, soils with high volcanic activity are also the most fertile because they contain important nutrients such as potassium and phosphorus, which are released when the lava erupts. Volcanic soils are therefore ideal



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Remains of buildings in Francisco Leon, destroyed by pyroclastic waves and flows during the eruption of El Chichon volcano in Mexico in 1982

for growing vegetables, especially root vegetables (potatoes, carrots, onions).

Many of the metallic minerals that are mined around the world today, such as gold, silver, lead, copper or zinc, are found deep inside extinct volcanoes. Diamonds are brought to the earth's surface by a certain type of magma called kimberlite. For this reason, mining towns have often developed near volcanoes. Volcanoes also provide much of the building materials used today.

Among the documented benefits of volcanic activity is the 'cooling effect'. For example, after the eruptions of El Chichón in Mexico in 1982 and Pinatubo volcano in the Philippines in 1991, the air cooled by over half a degree Celsius. Eruptions thus practically help to combat global climate change by keeping the atmosphere cooler.

Another long-term benefit of volcanic activity is the creation of new land. All the Hawaiian islands are the result of volcanic eruptions, where hot lava meets the much cooler seawater and is then transformed into new, fertile land in a long process that can take many years.

Oddly enough, volcanoes are also a source of water, both from the magma and from the steam that rises from the ground with the magma. Over the course of 4.5 billion years, the amount of water produced by volcanoes has provided the water we have on Earth," estimates Dr Janine Krippner, a volcanologist, for accuweather.com.

Geothermal energy associated with hot springs of volcanic origin is also very important and is widely used in countries such as Iceland and New Zealand. According to scientists, the places with the highest underground temperatures are in regions with active or geologically young volcanoes.

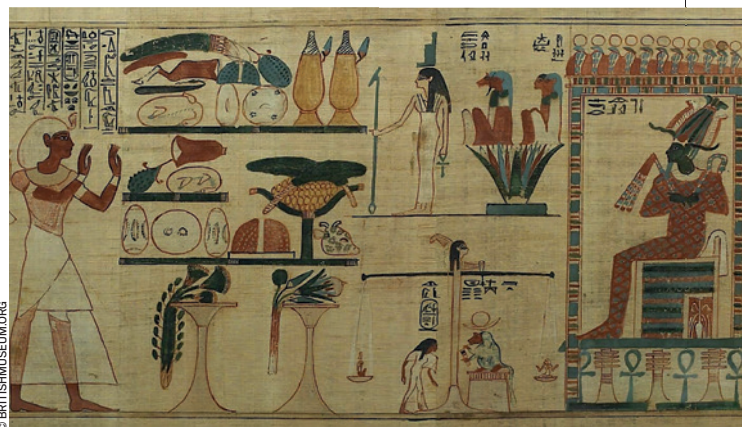
So there is much to lose, but also much to gain by the existence of these still mysterious natural phenomena. They cannot be tamed and are very unpredictable, but they could also be seen as benefactors that should never be taken for granted... some restless giants of the modern world.

alexandra.paucescu@europe-diplomatic.eu

Alexandra Paucescu

TO VISIT

THE BRITISH MUSEUM



The 'Enchanted Basin' Sarcophagus of Hapman, black granite, Egypt, 26th Dynasty, 600 BC

Hieroglyphs – Unlocking ancient Egypt

For centuries, life in ancient Egypt was a mystery.

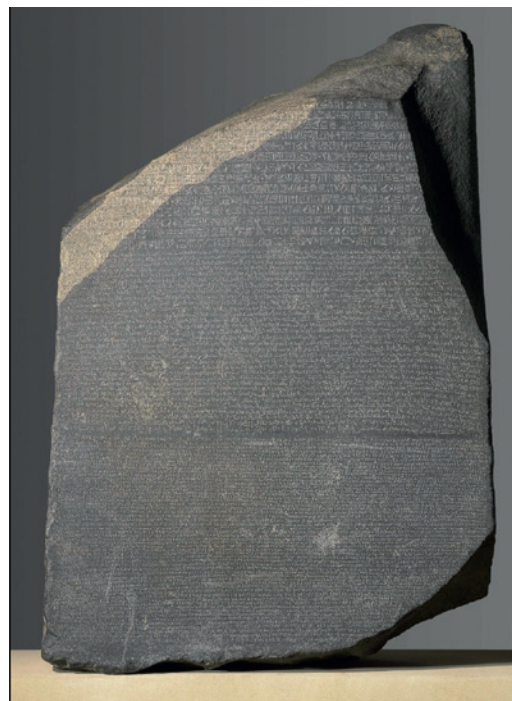
We could only glimpse into this hidden world, until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone provided the key to decoding hieroglyphs, allowing us to read this ancient script. The breakthrough expanded our understanding of human history by some 3,000 years.

Marking 200 years since the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs, this major exhibition takes you through the trials and hard work that preceded, and the revelations that followed, this ground-breaking moment.



'The Enchanted Basin' Sarcophagus of Hapman, black granite, Egypt, 26th Dynasty, 600 BC

Hieroglyphs were not just beautiful symbols, they represented a living, spoken language. From romantic poetry and international treaties, to shopping lists and tax returns, the hieroglyphic inscriptions and ancient handwriting in this exhibition reveal stories that are fantastically varied. As well as an unshakeable belief in the power of the pharaohs and the promise of the afterlife, ancient Egyptians enjoyed good food, writing letters and making jokes.



Rosetta Stone, Egypt, Ptolemaic Period, 196 BC

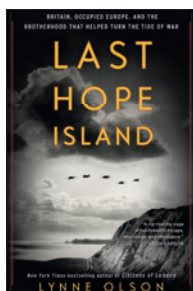
The show will chart the race to decipherment, from initial efforts by medieval Arab travellers and Renaissance scholars to more focussed progress by French scholar Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) and England's Thomas Young (1773–1829). The Rosetta Stone, discovered in 1799, with its decree written in hieroglyphs, demotic and the known language of ancient Greek, provided the key to decoding the ancient signs. The results of the 1822 breakthrough proved staggering.

Using inscriptions on the very objects that Champollion and other scholars studied, this immersive exhibition will help you to unlock one of the world's oldest civilisations.

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BOOKS



I Last Hope Island

Britain, Occupied Europe, and the Brotherhood That Helped Turn the Tide of War

By Lynne Olson

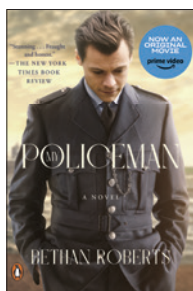
When the Nazi blitzkrieg rolled over continental Europe in the early days of World War II, the city of London became a refuge for the governments and armed forces of six occupied nations who escaped there to continue the fight. So, too, did General Charles de Gaulle, the self-appointed representative of free France.

As the only European democracy still holding out against Hitler, Britain became known to occupied countries as “Last Hope Island.” Getting there, one young émigré declared, was “like getting to heaven.”

In this epic, character-driven narrative, acclaimed historian Lynne Olson takes us back to those perilous days when the British and their European guests joined forces to combat the mightiest military force in history. Here we meet the courageous King Haakon of Norway, whose distinctive “H7” monogram became a symbol of his country’s resistance to Nazi rule, and his fiery Dutch counterpart, Queen Wilhelmina, whose antifascist radio broadcasts rallied the spirits of her defeated people. Here, too, is the Earl of Suffolk, a swashbuckling British aristocrat whose rescue of two nuclear physicists from France helped make the Manhattan Project possible.

Last Hope Island also recounts some of the Europeans’ heretofore unsung exploits that helped tilt the balance against the Axis: the crucial efforts of Polish pilots during the Battle of Britain; the vital role played by French and Polish code breakers in cracking the Germans’ reputedly indecipherable Enigma code; and the flood of top-secret intelligence about German operations—gathered by spies throughout occupied Europe—that helped ensure the success of the 1944 Allied invasion.

A fascinating companion to *Citizens of London*, Olson’s bestselling chronicle of the Anglo-American alliance, *Last Hope Island* recalls with vivid humanity that brief moment in time when the peoples of Europe stood together in their effort to roll back the tide of conquest and restore order to a broken continent.



I My Policeman (Movie Tie-In)

A Novel

By Bethan Roberts

Now a motion picture starring Harry Styles, Emma Corrin, and David Dawson, an exquisitely told, tragic tale of thwarted love.

It is in 1950’s Brighton that Marion first catches sight of Tom. He teaches her to swim, gently guiding her through the water in the shadow of the city’s famous pier and Marion is smitten—determined her love alone will be enough for them both. A few years later near the Brighton Museum, Patrick meets Tom. Patrick is besotted, and opens Tom’s eyes to a glamorous, sophisticated new world of art, travel, and beauty. Tom is their policeman, and in this age it is safer for him to marry Marion and meet Patrick in secret. The two lovers must share him, until one of them breaks and three lives are destroyed.

In this evocative portrait of midcentury England, Bethan Roberts reimagines the real life relationship the novelist E. M. Forster had with a policeman, Bob Buckingham, and his wife. *My Policeman* is a deeply heartfelt story of love’s passionate endurance, and the devastation wrought by a repressive society.



I The Rebel and the Kingdom

The True Story of the Secret Mission to Overthrow the North Korean Regime

By Bradley Hope

How did an Ivy League activist become a global fugitive? *The New York Times* bestselling co-author of *Billion Dollar Whale* and *Blood and Oil* chronicles the heart-pounding tale of a self-taught operative his high-stakes attempt subvert the North Korean regime. “Propulsive... Hope’s account is both deeply reported and novelistic.”—Ed Caesar, contributing staff writer for *The New Yorker*; author of *The Moth and the Mountain*.

In the early 2000s, Adrian Hong was a soft-spoken Yale undergraduate looking for his place in the world. After reading a harrowing account of life inside North Korea, he realized he had found a cause so pressing that he was ready to devote his life to it.

What began as a trip down the safe and well-worn path of organizing soon morphed into something more dangerous. Hong journeyed to China, outwitting Chinese security services as he helped asylum-seeking North Koreans escape across the border. Meanwhile, Hong’s secret organization, Cheollima Civil Defense (later renamed Free Joseon), began tracking the North Korean government’s activities, and its volatile third-generation ruler, Kim Jong-un. Free Joseon targeted North Korean diplomats who might be persuaded to defect, while drawing up plans for a government-in-exile. After the shocking broad-daylight assassination in 2017 of Kim Jong-nam, the dictator’s older brother, Hong, along with U.S. Marine veteran Christopher Ahn, helped ferry Kim Jong-nam’s family to safety. Then Hong took the group a step further. He initiated a series of high-stakes direct actions, culminating in an armed raid at the North Korean embassy in Madrid—an act that would put Ahn behind bars and turn Hong into one of the world’s most unlikely fugitives.

In the tradition of Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*, *The Rebel and the Kingdom* is an exhilarating account of a man who turns his back on the status quo—to instead live boldly by his principles. Acclaimed journalist and bestselling author Bradley Hope—who broke numerous details of Hong’s operations in *The Wall Street Journal*—now reveals the full contours of this remarkable story of idealism and insanity, hubris and heroism, all set within the secret battle for the future of the world’s most mysterious and unsettling nation.



I Wings of War

The World War II Fighter Plane that Saved the Allies and the Believers Who Made It Fly

By David Fairbank White and Margaret Stanback White

The incredible, untold story behind the rise of the P-51 Mustang, the World War II fighter plane that destroyed the Luftwaffe and made D-Day possible

“[A] fascinating book about passion and innovation.”—Walter Isaacson • “An essential book for those who appreciate tales of military bravery, and also for all seeking understanding of decision-making under pressure. A major contribution.”—E. J. Dionne, Jr.

When the P-51 Mustang began tearing across European skies in early 1944, the Allies had been losing the air war for years. Staggering numbers of bomber crews, both British and American, had been shot down and killed thanks to the Luftwaffe’s superior fighter force. Not only did the air war appear grim, but any landing of troops in France was impossible while German fighters hunted overhead. But behind the scenes, a team of visionaries had begun to design a bold new type of airplane, one that could outrun and outmaneuver Germany’s best.

Wings of War is the incredible true story of the P-51 Mustang fighter and the unlikely crew of designers, engineers, test pilots, and army officers who brought it from the drafting table to the skies over World War II. This is hardly a straightforward tale of building an airplane—for years, the team was stymied by corruption within the defense industry and stonewalled by the Army Air Forces, who failed to understand the Mustang’s potential. But when squadrons of Mustangs were finally unleashed over Hitler’s empire, the Luftwaffe was decimated within months, clearing the skies for D-Day. A compelling, character-focused narrative replete with innovation, determination, and bravery, *Wings of War* is the never-before-told story of the airplane that truly changed the course of World War II.

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