

Is it deliberate?

Published: January 13, 2026, 1:30 pm

I am blogging from another hotel in another country, again, this morning. And I am reflecting on a question asked of me yesterday, by someone I know and respect. It was simple, but heavily laden. It was “Is it deliberate?” ‘It’ referred to the confusion over Brexit. The suggestion is, in a sense, simple. It is that the apparent unholy mess that has developed might have been deliberately engineered to secure the ‘least worst’ Brexit outcome for all parties, with everyone accepting a compromise that really suits no one next March, simply for the sake of making a deal rather than have none at all.

What will that deal be? Some degree of significant regulatory alignment to ensure that the Northern Ireland problem can be said to be solved. And sufficient too to make sure that nothing gets turned off on 30 March. So planes, trucks, food and (from the EU’s perspective, money) will still move in and out of the UK. But no one, not least in the UK, will actually be happy.

The UK will have left the EU, but remain under its influence. But it will have lost influence, status, economic well being and any vestige of competence on the way. The EU will have made it look like leaving is not worth the risk. The Union within the UK will, temporarily, be sustained. And across the whole political spectrum there will be the appearance of regret. Except, my questioner presumed, amongst those actually guiding the process. Somewhere, he suggested, there might be an agreement that taking the process through the machinations that we have witnessed was the pre-condition for securing this bad compromise which those with authority think a solution to a problem otherwise insoluble.

Is that plausible? Does the London / Brussels back channel (and such things, of course, exist) work that way? And with that degree of assuredness that it can pull what appear to be last minute solutions from what appears to be a mess created merely to make such solution look like better outcomes to those so wearied by the process that it is presumed almost anything might be acceptable? And is May, in this scenario, the chosen one to deliver a compromise that no one else might achieve?

I happen to think the Brexit outcome I have just suggested is possible. We might get an

unholy, unacceptable, mess that parliament will approve. And I do think that will, broadly speaking, suit the EU. It might even suit May, at least in the short term. I strongly suspect she would leave office, claiming her job is done, shortly thereafter. And at a personal level I would not blame her, so long as she remembers never to notice the news for the rest of her life, for her legacy will always be sour. But do I really think this can be, or has been, engineered? No, I don't. I believe this is a cock up no one planned and no one intended.

And I still think we will live to regret it.

I have been criticised from the Lexit wing in the last day or two (and on other issues by plenty of others). I am apparently now a Blairite for still believing that the best way to secure a stable Europe - which I see as a fundamental left of centre objective - is by working in close harmony with Europe, and that the only mechanism we have to do that in is the EU, when that is what the others have chosen. Of course it is deeply imperfect. I also happen to believe that it is not beyond amendment to make it fit for purpose. And that it is the left's job to present a coherent vision of what the left might deliver to ensure that this can be achieved via the ballot box. I do not regret thinking that. Fundamentalists who will risk chaos and the well being of people for the sake of an ideal do not appeal to me. I cannot reconcile their opinion with any form of social concern I know. The world cannot be moved from an imperfect to a better state without considerable effort, and a transition period. The move to an ideal world will not happen at all. And I am unapologetic for saying so. Because I know there is no agreement on what an ideal world is - and because I respect the right of others to think that the ideal is not as I think it is - I have to say that. This, of course, means I am a pragmatist.

Pragmatists deal with cock ups, being guided by their principles when doing so.

My desire is a better world for most people. I see no way Brexit will deliver that. So I oppose it.

And at the same time I see no way that where we are is deliberate. Those who could have planned this show no signs of the intelligence or ability to guide the process through this apparent mayhem. That's the best evidence there is that this is not deliberate.

What has to be deliberate is the desire to build a better society for all. And I never believed that this was ever going to be built solely in England's green and pleasant land. I rejected this notion from the right. I do so when the left make the same claim. I am proud to be European. And I want to build European (and broader) solutions to the problems we face. Brexit is an affront to that. And it in no way compromises my ideals to say so.