

PRIVATISING FOREIGN POLICY

 **libertarian
Alliance**

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One of the hardest questions to answer when promoting the idea of libertarianism to a sceptical audience is: "What would a real libertarian government do first?" There are the obvious changes, such as a flat rate of income tax, which would undoubtedly work very well, but not *really* change much, but which tend to make people think you're just a Tory in disguise. And then there are the seemingly absurdly remote ones such as private law, which will make people think you're a mad man, without disguise.

I thought that a good way to tackle this would be to look around the cabinet, and see which ministers could go. The obvious ones are Trade and Industry and Chancellor of the Exchequer, but on reflection they have important work to do, in deregulating everything. Soon enough, I got to the idea of privatising the Foreign Office.

WE DON'T NEED A FOREIGN POLICY!

Now this probably also sounds like one of the absurdly ideological changes that would take years to get to. Anyway, wouldn't we simply abolish the Foreign Office? Instead of foreign policy being represented by one man, who doesn't represent most British people or businesses in any way, it could be conducted by the millions of British holidaymakers, travellers and businessmen who for one reason or another come into contact with foreigners. So we don't need a foreign policy, end of story.

COMPETING FOREIGN POLICIES

This is fine, but at the same time, the Foreign Office provides British citizens and businesses with useful services, negotiating trade deals and easy entry to foreign countries for travellers, so why waste that? Instead, let's break up the Foreign Office so that it no longer has a monopoly, and allow different 'foreign

offices' to compete, each negotiating the best trading arrangements and so on for British businesses and travellers.

In trade negotiations, British private negotiators could have the power to dismantle British protectionist measures, in exchange for access to their markets. Obviously, by this method, British protectionism would very quickly disappear. Negotiating companies could then link up with marketing companies and agree to market foreign products in Britain in exchange for access to foreign markets. They could also negotiate with our government to relax regulations and allow more imports in, and so very quickly our government would be forced into more deregulation.

The advantages for foreign travellers could be greater still. Travel agents, holiday clubs and other organisations could negotiate easy entry packages for those going abroad, in exchange for the obvious benefits of holidaymakers spending lots of money. This would also have a deterrent effect on hooliganism, as it would be harder, and hence more expensive, to negotiate access for football hooligans and beer guzzling jobs than it would for respectable holidaymakers.

Privatised consulates could also operate in other countries. This would stop the absurdity of our having vast embassies in obscure locations, yet only one in Madrid for the whole of Spain, when most Britons in Spain never even go to Madrid. Private embassies could operate exactly where and how they are needed, and probably save money at the same time.

POLITICAL ISOLATION IS GOOD!

Another worthwhile spin-off from this is that it would lead to political isolation very quickly. Hold on! Say most people: isolation is a *bad* thing! Well it does sound bad, but one has to ask: Why? After all, our government does not represent the people of other countries, nor does it have power over them. When one country tries to exercise power over another, war usually follows. It seems to me that since most wars have been started by politicians, and virtually none by private companies, political isolation would be a desirable thing indeed.

SPIN-OFFS

The best thing about privatising foreign policy is all the spin-offs it would bring. We would instantly have also to privatise passport issue. We'd have to open borders totally, for both people and goods, and hence deregulate to keep British firms competitive. We would also relieve the ordinary taxpayer — who goes abroad maybe once or twice a year, if that — of the burden of paying for embassies, consuls and foreign missions which are hugely expensive.

AID PROVIDED BY PEOPLE WHO WANT TO GIVE IT

Foreign aid would also be privatised. It is important to note the distinction between privatised and stopped. A good deal of foreign aid already comes from private organisations and individuals anyway, and needless to say they do it a lot better than governments. When food and clean water are needed, these are provided by people who want to give food and clean water to those unfortunate enough to need them. What most private charities *don't* do is give weapons to dictators, and encourage foreign governments to inflict environmental and social catastrophes, such as the current dam project in Turkey approved and part financed by the British government, or the abhorrent scheme of the World Bank which will forcibly move 58,000 Chinese farmers into an area currently populated by ethnic Tibetans.

THE EU — PRIVATISATION IS AGAIN THE KEY

The European Union is far and away the most controversial aspect of foreign policy in the United Kingdom today. Gener-

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

ally the number of international treaties and organisations of which this and most other countries are members is a cause for great concern and debate across the political spectrum. Privatisation is again the key. Businesses who claim that it would be advantageous to be members of the EU, the World Trade Organisation or any other such body would be perfectly free to become members. They could join either simply as themselves, or as a whole — gaining access to the EU market in exchange for being subject to their regulations — under the banner of organisations like the Confederation of British Industry who also advocate EU membership. Organisations like the Federation of Small Businesses who oppose membership would not be subject to its regulations, and would forfeit the benefits of membership. Instantly, the greatest question facing British politics today is solved!

DEFENCE — LOTS OF PRIVATE CITIZENS OWNING LOTS OF WEAPONS

So, all well and good in peace time, but, I hear you say, isn't the most important job of the Foreign Office war? And you can't privatise war. Well, yes you can. Remembering first that the basic duty of the army is defending *the realm*, which does not include Iraq, Kosovo or Indonesia. Defence of the realm is far better handled by lots of private citizens owning lots of weapons than by one large organised army, controlled by one large government. In the mean time, even with a private foreign office, the regular army would be kept in order to repel invasion.

CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS AND MERCENARIES

Foreign wars are far more controversial. There is a large body of opinion that says we simply should not be involved in the affairs of other countries, and I am certain that, at least as far as the government goes, this is right. Of course charitable organisations and mercenaries could intervene as they chose, and the public would only give to those organisations who it felt were fighting good causes, thus ending the absurdity of having people paying for wars they disapprove of. Such arrangements would also be a lot more responsive in the event of an imminent invasion. Suppose that, for example, instead of waiting for the political conditions to be right, mercenaries had gone to war with Hitler while the government was still following the policy of appeasement. Those who argue that appeasement bought us time to prepare must see that we could still prepare while private mercenaries were fighting.

FORCE IN THE NAME OF EVERY CITIZEN IS NOT JUSTIFIED

Cynical people — and they're probably right — insist that most wars are fought for the selfish economic interests of big business. The obvious answer to this problem is that most wars are incredibly expensive and unprofitable, so privatising most wars would stop them. In certain cases where assets or vital natural resources owned by British businesses are seized by a foreign power then force is justified to reclaim stolen property. However, force in the name of every citizen of the United Kingdom is not justified. Some people would be quietly happy to see BP lose an expensive oil refinery in a dictatorship it helped to prop up. The vast majority of reasonable people would probably think it unfortunate, and perhaps a bit short-sighted, but a long way short of a reason for ordinary civilians to take up arms in the name of the Queen and sail round the world making war with people we have never met.

Getting short-sighted investors out of a hole is the job of the companies who insure them, and of the investors themselves. War is expensive, brutal and generally undesirable, and it is a fair bet to assume that companies with a good name would generally not be wanted — by ever more conscientious con-

sumers — to be associated with it. Companies would find it was not worth the great expense of going to war to recover relatively small investments, so there would be a lot less war.

THERE WOULD BE FEWER WARS

Those who have a serious moral problem with going to war for profit — and I hope that means most of us — should bear a few things in mind. First, as already mentioned, there would simply be fewer wars. When there was a war, it would be in the interests of companies to keep the costs to a minimum. Keeping costs to a minimum means using the least possible amount of ammunition, bombs and soldiers, which can only mean less death and damage. The state, as we know, is wasteful, and keen to show that it isn't there just for profit, which compels it to ever further waste, and thus greater death and damage. (The cynics who say that all war is for profit should at least be pleased at this.)

Another factor to remember is that we would only go to war to seize those expensive assets that are worth the expense of war. These assets such as oil refineries, factories and chemical plants are often the very assets that are most useful for holding up a dictatorship, so recapturing them from such a government could be most useful for the noble strategic and political aim of spreading democracy.

THE AGE-OLD JUSTIFICATION FOR TYRANTS

Finally and perhaps most importantly, we would lose the age-old justification for tyrants to go to war: blind nationalism. Politicians could no longer dress up any little bit of military adventurism as some heroic patriotic struggle. War would be seen in its true colours, as a nasty and honour-less scrap between people who should know better, and something that should be avoided if at all possible.

ETHNIC CONFLICTS REGARDLESS OF OUR OPINIONS

The economic aspects of private foreign policy are obviously beneficial. The moral and political consequences are not so obvious, but I believe that they are infinitely more compelling once understood. There are many more intricate and diverse examples of how a private foreign policy is more ethical and less violent than a nationalised one. However I think a simple analogy explains the underlying theory better than a million examples could. When a crowd of people leave a football match, things are vandalised, people are beaten up, and tribal loyalties and differences make normally decent people into rampaging thugs. The same thing is happening internationally. Because wrongdoings are blamed on Britain, no one and everyone is to blame. We all suffer the consequences of a British chemical company polluting rivers and queering the pitch for a trade deal. We are all lumped in with one side or the other in ethnic conflicts regardless of our opinions — or lack of — on the conflict in question.

WE HAVE NO DUTY OR REASON TO SUPPORT THE SPECIAL INTERESTS OF OUR COMPATRIOTS

Perhaps stranger still, when we see our compatriots going to war, we feel at first duty bound to support them, even if reasoned analysis makes us think otherwise. When our *country* goes to war, in defence of our *country*, this is the ordinary people going to war in defence of their life, liberty and property. But when we go to war with another country that is half way around the world and no threat to us, then this is a war of special interests, and should be dealt with only by those interested. We have no duty or reason to support the special interests of our compatriots. Arguably we have a moral duty to critically analyse them and choose whether they are worthy of our support.