

Britain needs more than a foreign policy: it needs prin...

Published: January 13, 2026, 12:36 pm

I was amused by an article by [Philip Stephens in the FT this morning](#) that begins by saying:

Britain is an island that has lost its moorings. What it needs is a foreign policy. Not another vainglorious attempt to reclaim lost grandeur, but a measured strategy to mark out its place in a different world.

I am sure Philip Stephens is right, but I have to say he is also wrong. That is because principles come before policy, but the principles of this government are deliberately hidden so that they cannot be appraised against them.

Policy has to be based on principles, and without stated principles you cannot therefore have policies. And that makes strategy in turn impossible which means operational planning is in turn reduced to the status of farce.

And this is not just a problem in foreign policy. The absence of principles also means there is no industrial policy of any note. And principles have to be deduced from economic, tax, education and other policies as those principles themselves are not stated, and the implications are ugly.

But this is not just a problem afflicting the Conservatives. The Lib Dems have lost any strategic direction they once had - the role of support agent depriving them of all vestiges of identifiable thinking they might have ever enjoyed.

And Labour is much the same. I was talking to a significant person in Labour thinking yesterday who bemoaned the fact that so paranoid are Labour about simply creeping over a line next year any big thinking has gone out of the window as issues of power and survival dominate.

Or could it be that there is again no wish on Labour's part to state its principles for fear they might expose more than it wishes? Clause 4 has gone, but the fear of too many (even if unformulated, maybe) is that neoliberalism and hegemony replaced it and that the principles that may not be named look far too much like those false idols

of competition, choice, marketisation and even privatisation when Labour should be standing up for communal wealth creation shared appropriately amongst those participating in the process with adequate provision for all those unable to do so, whatever the reason.

It's not just policy that is missing, but principles too. With them people will engage. Without them the electorate will be rightly confused, just as most are by the UK's current foreign policy.

And one more thing: you can't build a party on policy alone: UKIP is trying to do that. It will fail for that reason precisely because the moment it reveals any principles a furore is created.