

What the strategic state might look like

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Jeremy Corbyn's [opinion piece in the Observer](#) today starts:

To succeed, we need to build shared economic growth. This government is failing to reform the economy, and hoping that the same failed economic neglect that led to the crash will somehow lead to a different result this time. We need a strategic state, not an absentee government.

I had no hand in that article, I stress, and no clue whatsoever it was coming, or its content. But I note themes that think are familiar. In my book [The Courageous State](#) I described Cameron's government as a perfect example of cowardly (or absentee) politics. As I put it in the introduction:

Cameron and Osborne, with their allies Nick Clegg and Danny Alexanderhave become the apotheosis of something that has been thirty years in the making: they are the personification of what I call the cowardly state. The cowardly state in the UK is the creation of Margaret Thatcher, although its US version is of course the creation of Ronald Reagan. It was these two politicians who swept neoliberalism into the political arena in 1979 and 1980 respectively following the first neoliberal revolution in Chile in 1973 that saw the overthrow of the democratically elected Allende government by General Pinochet. Since then its progress has been continual: now it forms the consensus of thinking across the political divide within the UK, Europe and the US.

The economic crisis we are now facing is the legacy of Thatcher and Reagan because they introduced into government the neoliberal idea that whatever a politician does, however well-intentioned that action might be, they will always make matters worse in the economy. This is because government is never able, according to neoliberal thinking, to outperform the market, which will always, it says, allocate resources better and so increase human well-being more than government can.

That thinking is the reason why we have ended up with cowardly government. That is why in August 2011, when we had riots on streets of London we also had Conservative politicians on holiday, reluctant to return because they were quite sure that nothing

they could do and no action they could take would make any difference to the outcome of the situation. What began as an economic idea has now swept across government as a whole: we have got a class of politicians who think that the only useful function for the power that they hold is to dismantle the state they have been elected to govern while transferring as many of its functions as possible to unelected businesses that have bankrolled their path to power.

That is I believe what absentee government is.

We need the Courageous (or strategic) alternative. I've [written a whole book](#) to explain what it may look like.