

What a sorry state we are in

Published: January 13, 2026, 6:40 am

It is less than a year since I put the following quote from my 2011 book, '[The Courageous State](#)' on this blog, but having [noted this morning](#) the apparent complete inability of our leading politicians to take action to back a ban on arms sales to Israel it seems appropriate to do so again.

Seeking to compare the politicians we had at that time, and still have, with the courageous politicians that I thought and still think that we need, I said:

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.

Using this logic, we now have politicians who cannot decide an obviously ethical and legally required action for four reasons.

Firstly, they are fearful that they might upset those in the arms market.

Secondly, they live in fear of Israel and are quite unable to form any coherent view about what to do about it, so obsessed with tropes are they.

Thirdly, they hide behind excuses and legal opinions rather than make up their own minds.

Fourth, they do not want to act because that might indicate that the state does have the power to intervene to do something appropriate, and that goes against everything that they believe in.

What a sorry state we are in.