

## **A Libertarian Foreign Policy Framework for Interstate Federalism**

by Scott Duryea

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### **Introduction**

Liberal democracy has historically expanded through two primary mechanisms: the gradual adoption of market economies and democratic institutions by existing states, or the creation of new political entities through independence movements. However, a third pathway exists, one that has received limited scholarly attention despite its theoretical appeal. Interstate federalism proposes that existing independent states or secessionist regions might voluntarily incorporate into an established federal system, thereby extending constitutional protections of individual liberty to populations currently outside their reach. Proponents of this approach argue compellingly that such expansion could dramatically increase the number of people living under constitutional protections while simultaneously reducing international fragmentation and the conflicts that arise from it. Christensen (2021) articulates this

vision persuasively, advocating for a "shift in vision for libertarians and classical liberals" that would "reject Westphalian national-state sovereignties and embrace instead the counterintuitive logic of the Philadelphian federal order" (445). Under this model, states would voluntarily shed their sovereignty in exchange for joining the United States, becoming subnational units while enjoying the stability of American liberal institutions.

But this theoretically appealing vision must confront substantial historical and political realities. The post-World War II international order has been characterized by the freezing of borders and the near-universal resistance of states to territorial loss, making peaceful transfers of sovereignty rare (Tilly 1990). When they succeed, secessionist movements typically pursue full independence rather than subordination within another federation. Existing states view secession within their own borders as an existential threat to their territorial integrity and national identity. These obstacles raise fundamental questions about the legitimacy of collective decision-making, the protection of dissenting minorities, and the appropriate role of external powers in supporting such movements. This essay examines how interstate federalism might be

pursued while remaining consistent with libertarian principles of non-aggression and non-interventionism. It argues that while the obstacles are formidable, a carefully designed policy framework grounded in democratic consent, respect for individual rights, and strict adherence to non-interventionist principles could theoretically advance this vision without compromising liberal values (Rothbard 1978).

### **The Principle of Non-Interventionism the Foundation of Liberal Foreign Policy**

Non-interventionism lies at the heart of libertarian foreign policy. While some liberal internationalists argue for a more activist foreign policy (see van de Haar 2011; Van Staden and Woode-Smith 2022), non-interventionism represents the most intellectually consistent liberal position. This consistency is not merely a matter of logical purity. It reflects a deeper insight about the relationship between foreign and domestic policy. A liberal state that behaves illiberally abroad will inevitably turn that behavior inward, corrupting its domestic institutions and undermining the very freedoms it claims to protect (Higgs 2004; Mises 2002; see also Coyne and Blanco 2016). Conversely, the soft

power gained by treating other states peacefully reinforces popular legitimacy for any mission of incorporating other states into the liberal fold.

This principle has deep roots in American political thought. The founding generation of the United States, particularly the first three Presidents, viewed peace as the status quo and war as an aberration to be resorted to only in cases of strict national self-defense (DeConde 1992). Ludwig von Mises articulated this principle with characteristic clarity: "The goal of the domestic policy of liberalism is the same as that of its foreign policy: peace. It aims at peaceful cooperation just as much between nations as within each nation" (Mises 2002, 105). The global order itself, established by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, rests upon the principle that states should refrain from interference in one another's affairs.

However, defining intervention with precision proves more difficult than it initially appears. Calvo (1896) argued that intervention encompasses not merely military force but also economic pressures, diplomatic impositions to change internal policies, and incitement of domestic populations to resist their governments. "Intervention which is produced

by the employment of the diplomatic process is no less intervention," he wrote, describing it as "intervention more or less direct, more or less dissimulated, which is very often merely the prelude of armed intervention" (Calvo 1896, Sec. 110). This definition may cast too wide a net. Deploying representatives of the state for communication and dealmaking hardly constitutes force. A more precise definition focuses on compulsion rather than coercion: intervention occurs when one state compels another to alter its political or economic actions through interference that the target state would not undertake if the interference were absent (Thomas and Van Wynen 1956). As international law scholar Ellery Stowell explained, the essential question is "whether an undue influence has been exerted upon the government to induce it to adopt a desired course in such a manner as really to affect its freedom of action" (Quoted in *Ibid.*, 72). Intervention thus occurs when one state compels its will on another through the imposition of negative consequences contingent upon non-compliance.

### *Plebiscite as Legitimizing Device*

Whether potential additions to the United States come from existing independent states or

secessionist regions, both scenarios require the consent of the citizens in each territory. Individuals possess a fundamental right to choose whether they wish to remain with their existing state, form an independent state, or join another political community (Mises 2002). Mises (2002) saw the referendum as the way to ascertain the will of the people in these circumstances. McMaken (2022) noted the legitimacy of using plebiscites to confirm the outcomes of independence movements and expansion. Following the French Revolution, plebiscites helped consolidate local support for secessionist movements. Territories including Avignon, Comtat Venaissin, Savoy, and Nice were given the choice through plebiscite to join the French state. The nineteenth century saw additional examples: Rome's incorporation into Italy in 1870, Denmark's sale of St. Thomas and St. John to the United States in 1868, and the Ionian Islands' integration into Greece in 1863 all employed plebiscites. Border disputes between Denmark and the German Confederation were settled through this mechanism in the 1860s. In 1905, an overwhelming majority of Norwegians voted to break away from Sweden, achieving independence shortly thereafter. Malta's citizens voted in 1964 to approve

independence from the United Kingdom, while Slovenes confirmed their independence from Yugoslavia through a plebiscite in 1990 plebiscite (Kovač 2020).

As the Soviet Union collapsed, many Soviet republics held votes to further legitimate and solidify independence, and numerous countries in Asia and Africa used plebiscites to confirm independence from former colonial powers. This extended historical record touches upon the history of using the plebiscite to gather mass political will. The plebiscite thus provides both a democratic and historically validated method for determining whether a population wishes to federate with another state (McMaken 2022).

*Preserving Individual Rights in the Face of the Collective Will*

But the logic of using plebiscites obscures the conflict between collective self-determination and individual rights. To violate no one's right to non-aggression would require that each person consent to federation. Yet unless a decision achieves complete unanimity—an outcome virtually never realized in practice—some citizens will inevitably find themselves subject to a political arrangement

they did not choose (Nozick 1974). This minority faces a genuine injustice: they are compelled to live in a system against their will. Mises recognized this tension and insisted that "the inhabitants of every territory large enough to form an independent administrative unit" possess the right to self-determination, and that "if it were in any way possible to grant this right of self-determination to every individual person, it would have to be done" (Mises 2002, 109). Yet he also acknowledged the practical impossibility of achieving perfect unanimity and recognized that in the international system of states, the democratic referendum represents the fairest available mechanism for determining collective will.

A consolation to those citizens who oppose federation exists in the form of a guarantee that their new polity would come with an increase in personal liberty. Being a minority in a democratic state with constitutional protections for individual rights is substantially preferable to being a minority in an autocratic regime. Nevertheless, the group of citizens seeking to retain the status quo remains subject to the whims of the majority (Dahl 1989). To mitigate this injustice and preserve peace, Mises insisted that states or territories wishing to federate

should place considerable emphasis on achieving popular consensus. "If the inhabitants of a particular territory want to change political jurisdictions," he wrote, "their wishes are to be respected and complied with. This is the only feasible and effective way of preventing revolutions and civil and international wars" (Mises 2002, 178). This principle aligns with the general liberal tenet that peace depends upon respecting the expressed will of populations.

### **The Existing State Model**

The first pathway through which interstate federalism might occur involves existing independent states voluntarily choosing to federate with an established federal system. This process could begin through signature-gathering campaigns or legislative referrals: a state legislature could pass a binding resolution committing the state to federation should the plebiscite win majority or supermajority support in a polity-wide vote. A critical question underlying this sort of referendum concerns sovereignty. To federate, a state must divest itself of sovereignty, willingly surrendering unlimited policy-making authority within its borders in exchange for protected individual rights

and representation within the federal system (Keating 2001). On its face, this arrangement appears extraordinarily unlikely. States have historically demonstrated intense reluctance to surrender the ability to make policy free from external interference. Yet history provides at least two examples of states that have democratically and peacefully federated under another state, suggesting that under the right circumstances, such transfers are possible.

#### *Newfoundland and Canada*

The first example is Newfoundland's federation with Canada in 1949. Newfoundland was previously a self-governing dominion of the British Empire, facing severe economic difficulties following World War II. The territory had been placed under a British-appointed Commission of Government from 1934 to 1949, significantly limiting democratic participation. In this context of economic crisis and limited self-governance, Newfoundland's population voted on its political future. Two referendums were held in 1948, with the first on June 3. This vote offered three options: responsible government, confederation with Canada, or continued Commission of Government.

No option achieved a majority, sending the decision to a second referendum on July 22, 1948. In this second vote, 52.3 percent of voters chose confederation with Canada (Hiller 1992). The process was overseen by the British government with transparent voting procedures and remarkably high participation—88 percent turnout. Despite the narrow margin of victory, the referendums were conducted fairly and are assumed to reflect the genuine will of the population.

Federating with Canada produced a substantial increase in individual liberty for Newfoundlanders. The transition replaced the unelected Commission of Government with an elected provincial legislature. It also granted Newfoundlanders full Canadian citizenship, which granted them voting rights in federal and provincial elections (Gwyn 1995). They gained access to Canada's legal protections and social programs, including health care. Freedoms of expression and association were enhanced under Canada's democratic system. Economic security improved as well: Newfoundland's bankruptcy was resolved through integration into Canada's fiscal framework. This case demonstrates that promises of enhanced individual liberties in a setting of economic decay

may prove fruitful for a successful plebiscite to federate with an existing federal state (MacKenzie 1997).

### *Texas and the United States*

The second historical example involves American annexation of Texas in 1845. The Republic of Texas gained independence from Mexico in 1836, after which it existed as a sovereign nation for nine years. Mexican refusal to recognize Texas and ongoing Native American conflicts created security concerns (Foner 1970). Texan leaders saw the potential for increased security should it join the United States. The Republic of Texas held a referendum on October 13, 1845, to determine its political future, and voters overwhelmingly approved annexation, with over 95 percent in favor (Merk 1995). This process followed negotiations between Texas's elected government and the United States, leading to a joint resolution of Congress and Texas's acceptance through a constitutional convention and referendum. While voting was limited to free white males, which was typical for the period, the process was largely transparent and reflected the democratic will of the voting population.

Federating with the United States led to an overall increase in individual liberties for most Texans. As the Republic of Texas, citizens possessed democratic rights, but chronic instability and limited resources plagued the government to the point that the rule of law and security were undermined (Campbell 2003). Joining the United States as a state granted Texans full constitutional protections, including freedom of speech, religion, and due process, under a stable federal system. They gained voting rights in U.S. elections and representation in Congress. A glaring exception was that Texas retained slavery until 1865. Slaves experienced no increase in liberty and faced continued bondage under a nominally more liberal system (Foner 1988). For free citizens, however, individual liberty increased substantially because of stronger democratic and legal protection.

### *Why is Federating So Rare?*

Aside from two examples, the historical record is thin. Independent states have rarely federated peacefully under other states. Even rarer is an increase in individual liberty following such federations. Several factors explain this pattern.

First, once a country achieves full independence, intense pride in sovereignty often emerges, which is rooted in control over security and its relations with other states. Joining a federation means permanently surrendering these prerogatives. A central government assumes control, and independent status under international law is forfeited (Krasner 1999). This psychological and political barrier proves formidable. Leaders rarely view subordination as appealing. Populations share this reluctance. Regional autonomy may be guaranteed, but the loss of sovereign status remains a significant obstacle to federal integration.

Second, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries show a clear pattern: nations have broken apart rather than merged. Decolonization after World War II created dozens of new independent states. The Soviet Union dissolved. Yugoslavia broke up. Czechoslovakia split apart. These events reinforced the key principles of nationalism and self-determination. Newly independent states typically prioritize full separation over joining a larger federation. Democratizing entities do the same. Federalism seems uncertain and risky to them, whereas outright independence appears safer

and more attractive by comparison (Hobsbawm 1994).

Third, most modern federations are "coming together" types formed simultaneously by multiple entities gaining independence or uniting from scratch; for example, the United States from colonies, Australia from British colonies, Switzerland from cantons (Riker 1964). Others are "holding together" federations where a unitary state devolves power to regions to manage diversity, as in India, Belgium, and Spain (Watts 1999). Few involve an already-independent country democratically choosing to join an existing federation. Texas and Newfoundland represent outliers from an era when economic pressures, security threats, or colonial ties made federation more feasible than independence.

Fourth, practical and political risks deter both joining states and receiving federations. The joining entity often becomes a minority unit in an established system, with limited influence over the federal constitution or policies (Lijphart 1999). While benefits like shared markets or security must outweigh perceived downsides, alternatives such as trade agreements and alliances often suffice without

requiring full merger. In cases involving ethnic or historical tensions, dominant groups in the larger federation may not reliably protect the new unit's autonomy, making the arrangement unappealing.

Finally, globalization has fundamentally changed how states approach federation. Before 1945, small states struggled to survive as independent nations, so merging into larger political units often seemed necessary. The situation is different today. Micro-states can now thrive much more easily in the modern world. They achieve success through trade and strategic alliances and no longer need to unite with larger states to survive. The incentive structure has changed dramatically, giving the smallest nations greater hope for successful independence.

That examples of independent states federating under other states are few does not, however, preclude the interstate federation project. It simply means that the United States would be charting new territory in the history of political institutions, much as the American republican project did in the late eighteenth century (Wood 1992). The rarity of precedent reflects the uniqueness of the endeavor, not its impossibility.

## **The Secession Model**

A state shedding its sovereignty in favor of federating is theoretically easier to accomplish than the case of secessionist regions, since already-existing states need not seek permission from a level of government above them to federate. Secessionist regions, by contrast, must convince their parent state to permit them to leave. Ideally, the parent state would respect the wishes of the separatist region, allow it to hold a plebiscite on the question of leaving and federating under another state, and voluntarily release the territory (Buchanan 1991). Yet states, as a general rule, prefer to keep their territory and populations.

### *The Libertarian Case for Secession*

Holding people against their will in a political regime they do not wish to inhabit is fundamentally antithetical to the spirit of individual liberty. Rothbard (1977) articulated the libertarian position on secession:

Secession—the breaking up of a State from within—is a great good in itself for any libertarian. It means that a giant central State is being broken up into constituent parts; it

means greater competition between governments of different geographical areas, enabling people of one State to zip across the border to relatively greater freedom more easily; and it exalts the mighty libertarian principle of secession, which we hope to extend on down from the region to the city to the block to the individual (156).

For a territory to federate within the liberal framework, it would need to garner majority support and secure peaceful approval from the governing state. Yet cases of territories voting to secede and the governing state approving the separation are extraordinarily rare in modern history. While secessionist movements often aim for full independence, a few historical instances exist where a region democratically voted to secede from one entity and subsequently integrated into a neighboring or related country. These cases typically occurred in post-colonial or post-war contexts, where international oversight facilitated the process.

## **Near-Misses: Historical Cases of Secession and Integration**

### *Northern British Cameroons*

The Northern British Cameroons faced a critical decision in 1961. This territory had emerged from the decolonization of the British Cameroons. The British Cameroons was a United Nations Trust Territory. The United Kingdom had administered it after World War I. The region's history was complex. Originally, it had been part of German Kamerun. After Germany's defeat in World War I, the territory was divided. British and French powers split the administration between them. The late 1950s brought change across Africa. African colonies moved toward independence. The UN responded by organizing plebiscites. These votes would determine the future of British Cameroons. The territory was split into Northern and Southern sections for voting purposes. The Northern region held its plebiscite on February 11, 1961, with the UN supervising the voting process. The results were clear: 60 percent voted to join Nigeria. Only 40 percent chose Cameroon. This led to its integration into Nigeria as Saradauna Province on June 1, 1961. The region shared Hausa-Fulani influences with

northern Nigeria. The decision reflected cultural, religious, and administrative alignments, as the area shared Hausa-Fulani influences with northern Nigeria, and local leaders like those from the Northern People's Congress advocated for it. Southern Cameroons, on the other hand, voted overwhelmingly to join Cameroon. (Rubin 1971).

Integration into Nigeria brought significant changes. Colonial trust status ended, citizens gained Nigerian citizenship, and they received access to a federal constitution. This constitution included important rights, like the freedoms of speech and assembly. But Nigeria's early independence period was turbulent. Ethnic tensions emerged and grew, and a military coup occurred in 1966. The Biafran War followed from 1967 to 1970. These conflicts eroded liberties in the north. Authoritarian rule replaced democratic governance and individual freedoms suffered as a result (Falola 1999). The region experienced mixed outcomes: economic opportunities did improve for many, while individual freedoms were not markedly enhanced.

### *Hatay Province*

The Hatay Province offers a second near-miss example. Formerly known as the Sanjak of

Alexandretta, the territory became disputed after the Ottoman Empire collapsed. France controlled it under the Syrian Mandate. The region had a diverse population, with Turks, Arabs, Alawites, and Armenians living there (Khoury 1987, 89). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk claimed it as historically Turkish land, pointing to the significant Turkish-speaking population. Tensions grew during the 1930s, and Syria moved toward independence. France, seeking Turkish alliance against Nazi Germany, allowed the region quasi-independence in 1938 after Turkish military pressure and League of Nations involvement. A controversial referendum on June 29, 1939, resulted in 96 percent approval for union with Turkey. However, this vote was widely criticized as rigged: Turkish troops entered the area, thousands of Turks were bused in to vote, and many Arabs and Armenians were expelled or fled (Barkey 2011). On July 23, 1939, Hatay formally joined Turkey as a province. While the move resolved Turkish border claims, it sparked Syrian protests and long-term irredentism.

For many residents, especially non-Turks, the move did not result in an increase in individual liberty. Joining Turkey imposed Kemalist secular reforms, promoting education and women's rights. But it

came at the cost of minority suppression through Turkification policies. Arabs, Alawites, and Armenians faced expulsions, cultural erasure, and restricted political expression. While Turks may have gained from national unity, the overall process reduced liberties for displaced groups, leading to ongoing ethnic tensions. This case demonstrates that coerced secession and federation, regardless of formal democratic procedures, fails to achieve the liberal objective of expanding individual liberty (Zürcher 2004).

### *Saarland*

Saarland provides a more successful example. This coal-rich region in western Germany was detached after World War II as the Saar Protectorate under French administration to weaken Germany and secure French economic interests. It had semi-autonomy with economic ties to France, including use of the French franc. The 1954 Paris Agreements proposed a "Saar Statute" for Europeanized independence under the Western European Union, maintaining French economic union but granting political autonomy. A referendum on October 23, 1955, asked voters to approve this arrangement; 67.7 percent rejected it,

signaling a desire for reunification with West Germany. This led to the 1956 Saar Treaty between France and West Germany, allowing Saarland to join the Federal Republic of Germany as its tenth state on January 1, 1957 (Kettenacker 1997).

The rejection of the proposed statute stemmed from pro-German sentiment, economic grievances under French control, and a preference for full integration into a prospering West Germany during its "economic miracle" (Bark and Gress 1989). Post-war security frameworks, including NATO integration, influenced the context, as joining West Germany aligned with Western alliances against Soviet threats. However, primary drivers were national identity, economic benefits, and rejecting French dominance rather than direct military security concerns. Federating led to a substantial increase in individual liberty. As a French protectorate, Saarland had limited sovereignty and was subject to French oversight, with restricted political freedoms (Herf 1997). Joining West Germany brought it under the Basic Law, which enshrined strong individual rights including freedom of expression, assembly, and due process within a democratic federal system. The economic boom further enhanced personal opportunities.

Overall, it marked a shift to greater self-determination and liberties in a liberal democracy.

*Structural Obstacles to Peaceful Secession and Federation*

True cases of a region seceding peacefully and democratically from one sovereign country and then immediately or shortly thereafter joining another existing sovereign country as a federal unit are extraordinarily rare in modern history. A rare confluence of mutual consent, international acceptance, and minimal geopolitical friction must occur. This confluence almost never has materialized due to entrenched norms, legal barriers, and state self-interest (Crawford 2006). International norms prioritize the stability of existing borders over redrawing them, as any subtraction from one state to benefit another risks a cascading effect of instability (Atzili 2012). Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, for example, emphasizes the inviolability of state borders and prohibits threats to territorial integrity. Furthermore, secession to join another state does not fit neatly into the already recognized pathways for state creation or change, such as mutual consent,

decolonization, dissolution, and remedial secession (Simmons 1999).

*Mutual consent* is extremely rare, as the parent state must voluntarily relinquish territory without coercion. Governments generally avoid doing this to prevent domestic precedents (Hechter 2000). *Decolonization*, naturally, is limited to former colonies gaining independence, not transferring to another sovereign. Most post-1945 state formations from the British or French empires became independent nations, not appendages of others. *Dissolution* has occurred with the USSR and Yugoslavia and has resulted in entities becoming independent states rather than joining neighbors. *Remedial secession* is reserved for extreme cases of oppression, like Bangladesh's secession from Pakistan in 1971 (Buchanan 1991). Despite ethnic ties to India, Bangladesh became independent rather than federating with its neighbor. Joining another state complicates matters further, as it can resemble irredentism, a state claiming and absorbing ethnic kin from a neighbor. This practice is generally discouraged because it could then justify annexations and wars (Chayes and Chayes 1995). Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea was condemned precisely because it violated these

norms (Sakwa 2015). International recognition regimes are strict, requiring effective control, democratic legitimacy, and normative appeal. But mergers lack clear precedents and often face vetoes from bodies like the UN Security Council (Fabry 2010).

In addition, states almost always resist secession, viewing it as an existential threat. This resistance stems from multiple sources. First, borders are seen as sacred or "natural" and tied to national identity (Anderson 1991). Second, secession often displaces populations. This creates long-term humanitarian and political burdens (Loescher 1992). Third, territories may hold symbolic value. They contain ancient sites or founding myths, so loss becomes unacceptable (Smith 1999). Fourth, regions often contribute resources, trade, or strategic assets to the nation (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Fifth, allowing one breakaway encourages others, risking national fragmentation (Brubaker 1996). Finally, if secession stems from external interference or aggression, it can breed resentment and victim narratives. This resistance often escalates to legal bans, military action, or economic sanctions, derailing peaceful processes (Tilly 2003; Saideman 2001). Similarly, democratic mechanisms like referendums are only

permitted if the parent state agrees upfront, which is uncommon outside exceptional cases (Lehning 1998).

In the event of a successful secession, receiving countries often hesitate to absorb newly independent regions. They worry about liability concerns and international backlash. Power imbalances between the new territory and the absorbing state create additional complications. Integrating new territory brings significant burdens, including administrative challenges, economic costs, and social disruption. Conflicts with minority populations may emerge and international sanctions could follow. Absorption can also be perceived as expansionism. This perception invites international condemnation. Other nations may form alliances against the absorbing state. The case of Albania demonstrates this caution. Despite ethnic ties to Kosovo, Albania has avoided absorption, attempting to prevent regional destabilization (Vickers 1998).

Furthermore, secessionist goals typically favor full independence. Most modern secessionist movements seek sovereign independence to assert unique identities, not subordination as a federal unit

in another country. Scotland's push is for independence from the United Kingdom, not joining Ireland or another state. And despite linguistic ties, Catalonia aims for its own state, not merging with France. Irredentist goals like joining a kin-state are rarer and often tied to ethnic nationalism. But these frequently turn violent, as in Nagorno-Karabakh's attempts to join Armenia (Coppieters 1996).

Finally, the few near-examples above involved transitional or occupied territories under international mandates. These were not secessions from fully sovereign states. True sovereign-to-sovereign transfers are absent in modern history. One reason for this is the post-colonial order's freeze of borders as a way to prevent endless conflicts (Anghie 2004). Pre-1900 cases, like Texas's transfer from Mexico to the United States, occurred in a less regulated era of expansionism. Even then they were often contentious (Pletcher 1973). When border changes do happen peacefully in contemporary times, they are more likely mergers, like German reunification in 1990, or independences, like South Sudan's 2011 split from Sudan. They are not secede-and-join scenarios (Weller and Wolff 2006). If global norms

evolve toward greater self-determination, this could change. Current trends suggest continued rarity.

### **Policy Principles for Supporting Federating Units**

Placing lack of historical precedent aside, a crucial question remains: how much support should the United States give to independently federating states and secessionist movements? The United States itself succeeded in its war of secession from the British Empire with support from France. Would it not be just for the United States to help in the same way those regions seeking a greater degree of personal freedom? The answer appears affirmative in principle, but only if pursued in the least invasive way possible.

There is no inherent problem with American citizens voluntarily donating their money, resources, and even labor to the cause of secession or federation of another polity. However, state-sponsored aid presents a different problem entirely. As Rothbard (1978) argued, "Any aid given to State A to State B (1) increases tax aggression against the people of country A and (2) aggravates the suppression by State B of its own people" (201). Using taxpayer money to support

foreign movements goes far beyond the nightwatchman state's functions that liberals advocate for. Nevertheless, in a world where borders and sovereignties are often rigidly defended, meaningful policy prescriptions can be articulated that maintain consistency with non-interventionist principles. The key to U.S. involvement lies in maintaining a passive, responsive stance that honors non-interventionism. Aid must be limited to providing requested information, supporting global norms, and facilitating integration only after a sovereign decision has been made. More proactive measures, such as funding campaigns or lobbying, would most likely cross into forbidden territory.

### *Supporting Existing Independent States*

For sovereign nations already independent, the United States can respond to organic expressions of interest without initiating or influencing the process. If a country formally approaches the United States—perhaps through diplomatic channels—expressing interest in statehood, the response could include factual resources on the constitutional admission process, historical examples like Texas or Vermont, and potential

benefits such as federal protections, economic integration, and citizenship rights. This reactive aid, akin to sharing public knowledge upon invitation, avoids interference by not shaping internal debates. State Department officials might host requested webinars detailing steps like drafting a compatible state constitution, while private groups like the Cato Institute could offer independent analyses on enhancing liberties through federalism.

The United States could also promote general standards for self-determination in forums like the United Nations or Organization of American States, emphasizing fair referendums without singling out nations. This principle-based advocacy mirrors libertarian preferences for non-coercive diplomacy and peaceful resolutions over unilateral action. If invited, neutral NGO observers could monitor a referendum, drawing on precedents in international election oversight (Kelley 2012). After a completed plebiscite, the United States could negotiate a bilateral treaty for accession, covering transitional governance, economic alignment, and debt issues. Starting aid only post-decision treats the country as a consenting partner, embodying libertarian ideals of voluntary contracts and avoiding forced incorporation. Congress might pass an enabling act

akin to Texas's 1845 resolution, with post-accession economic preferences framed as mutual gains.

Through existing trade deals or exchanges, the United States could build reciprocal relationships that subtly highlight federalism's advantages, such as states' rights and opportunities. These non-targeted programs enhance liberty via open markets and migration, reducing intervention needs by fostering peaceful ties. Expanding visas or educational programs could let citizens experience U.S. life, potentially building organic support without advocacy (Nye 2004).

### *Supporting Secessionist Movements*

For territories within other sovereign states, the approach must be even more restrained, focusing on post-secession support to avoid any implication of encouraging division. One strategy is to promote self-determination through diplomatic rhetorical support. Public statements or congressional resolutions could affirm the universal right to self-determination and stress peaceful referendums without specific endorsements, citing the UN Charter and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Cassese 1995). This mere advocacy for principles sidesteps interference.

Officials might also reference peaceful precedents like Czechoslovakia's 1993 dissolution or Iceland's 1944 independence (Gaddis 1992). Invited NGO observers could verify referendums. Upon secession through a recognized referendum, the United States could then recognize sovereignty and negotiate statehood by treaty, echoing Texas's post-independence annexation (Merk 1995). Delaying aid until after secession would ensure voluntary free association, not coercion of the parent state. Congress could enact enabling laws with criteria like population and republican governance, offering post-recognition trade or aid as mutual benefits.

Another method would be to offer humanitarian and educational assistance neutrally. Non-partisan resources, like legal advice on referendums, could be provided through bodies like the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or think tanks such as Cato (Keating 2001). Invitation-based and untied to goals, this empowers communities without undermining sovereignty. Asylum for persecuted leaders or programs sharing federalism models could proceed without funding movements. Encouraging international mediation and norms could also aid in secession efforts.

Both scenarios, while theoretically possible, face significant hurdles in practice. For independent countries, national pride and norms against sovereignty loss make voluntary accession unprecedented and unlikely in modern times (Krasner 1999). For secessionist territories, parent states' fierce resistance often escalates tensions, with even rhetorical U.S. support risking perceptions of intervention. And the history of American foreign policy has been thoroughly interventionist. The core issue at hand is remaining consistent in libertarian-classical liberal principles. Without this crucial component, the liberal project lays a foundation that is fraudulent from the beginning.

### **Charting New Territory While Maintaining Principles**

Interstate federalism offers an attractive idea for spreading liberal institutions and protecting individual freedoms across a divided world. However, history shows that peaceful transfers of power between sovereign nations are rare. States also strongly resist secession. These obstacles are real and serious. Yet they are not impossible to overcome. They are simply features of how the

world currently works. As global values change, these barriers might gradually weaken.

The best approach requires a strong commitment to libertarian principles. These principles emphasize non-aggression and non-intervention. The United States cannot force other nations to join a federal system. It cannot use economic pressure or military force. Doing so would contradict the liberal values that make this expansion worthwhile in the first place. Instead, the United States should use a careful strategy. This strategy should respond to genuine interest from other nations. It should support democratic participation on the issue while respecting the rights of individuals who disagree. In short, it should avoid interfering in other countries' affairs.

The American republic itself was founded through secession and federation. Interstate federalism would follow a similar path. It would extend the federal system to new territories through voluntary agreement rather than conquest. Whether this could actually happen remains unclear. The challenges are significant and historical examples are limited. However, if the United States stays true to its liberal principles, it could pursue this vision while

maintaining its moral authority. This moral authority is what makes the vision worth pursuing in the first place.

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