

NO FRIENDS, ONLY INTERESTS

In his recent book *All the Countries we Have Ever Invaded and the Few Never Got Round To*, Stewart Laycock outlines 22 countries that have never been invaded by Britain. Of course this does not mean that Britain has normal or friendly relations with these countries. As we shall see below, for at least one third of these 22 countries quite the opposite is true.

Paraguay: The People of Paraguay blame British imperial interests for causing the most destructive war in world history, the 1864-70 war between Paraguay and an alliance of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. This war is believed to have claimed the lives of 1.2 million Paraguayans or 90% of its pre-war population. The Paraguayans blame the British diplomat in Argentina, Sir Edward Thornton, who, in November 1859, ordered the Royal Navy to attack a Paraguayan war steamer, the *Tacum*, in order to force the release of a British prisoner held by Paraguay. The Paraguayan economy was extremely self-sufficient and protectionist; it had no foreign loans or imports. However, it did have expansionist ambitions towards a port on the Brazilian coast. Many in Paraguay believe Britain started the war because Britain's traditional supply of cotton from the United States was disrupted by the civil war there. Whatever Britain's precise role in the conduct of the war, she certainly profited from it and her diplomat in Argentina, Sir Edward Thornton, played a major role in the creation of the triple alliance of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay which crushed Paraguay.

Bolivia: In 2005, Bolivia democratically elected its first left-wing Amerindian President, Eva Morales, who accused Britain of colluding with Chile in Chile's 1879-1884 'War of the Pacific', otherwise known as the 'Guano War'. Bolivia's Atacama desert was a rich source for nitrate rich Guano or bird excrement. These nitrates were an indispensable commodity in the 19th century for the production of many articles, including explosives. When the Bolivian state nationalised British companies, which owned 13.5% of Bolivia's saltpetre production, British capital backed Chile and encouraged its invasion of Bolivia in 1880. British officers fought on the side of Chile in this 'Pacific War', while Bolivia and Peru were backed by Germany and the USA. Bolivia and Peru lost this war and, with it, 10,467 lives and huge tracts of land, including its entire coastline rendering it an economically backward landlocked country. The conquest of this Guano rich territory with the loss of 2825 lives increased Chile's tax revenues by 900% from 1879 to 1902. However, the Guano war was not the first time Bolivia had displeased 'Her Majesty'. Britain had broken off diplomatic relations with Bolivia from 1853 until 1900, arising from a diplomatic insult which had reached legendary proportions. It was alleged that, when presenting his credentials to the Bolivian President, the British Ambassador either refused a glass of Bolivian corn beer or refused to kiss the backside of the President's new mistress. Because of this, he was seized by a mob stripped and tied backwards to a donkey and paraded around La Paz's city square, before being forced to drink a barrel of beer and expelled from the country. On his return to Britain, Queen Victoria was so offended by his treatment that she at first suggested that a gunboat bombard the capital until it was pointed out that the city was 100 miles from the sea; instead, she crossed Bolivia's map out of her atlas and broke off diplomatic relations for 50 years. However, the truth behind the legend is less colourful, but more familiar. In 1853, Bolivia's erratic Mestizo President, Manuel Isodoro Belzu, backed a Native Amerindian uprising against greedy former colonial landowners. This later led to the seizure of a British-owned tin export company, J Hengen & Co, which cost the owners 15,000 Pesos. When the British Ambassador, Colonel John Augustus Lloyd, sought compensation from the President, this led to such an exchange of undiplomatic language that the British Ambassador was expelled and diplomatic relations were broken off until the 20th Century. Ambassador Lloyd later went on to die of cholera in the Crimean war.

Sweden: During the Second World War, like Ireland, Sweden remained neutral. Just as Ireland continued to supply Britain with foodstuffs and manpower throughout the war, Sweden continued to supply her neighbour Germany with iron ore. However, Britain failed to respect Sweden's non-belligerent status and, during the war, the Royal Navy sank 70 Swedish ships supplying iron ore to Germany, with the loss of 200 Swedish sailors' lives. Churchill displayed his contempt for Swedish neutrality by calling Sweden "that small cowardly country".

Vatican: Although the papal states of central Italy have existed for centuries, one of the world's smallest states, Vatican City, was only created in 1929. Despite this, Britain has still come into conflict with it. Britain has had diplomatic relations with the holy see since the time of King Edward IV in 1479. However, following the reformation and Henry VIII's break with Rome, diplomacy with the Vatican has been marked by espionage, intrigue and assassination. In Britain, it was treason to be a Jesuit or a seminarian, which was punishable by being drawn and quartered. Under Elizabeth I, diplomatic relations were broken off between 1536 and '53. Diplomatic relations were re-established under the Stewarts from 1686 to '88, only to be broken off again after the Glorious Revolution. Relations were not re-established until 1766, after the Jacobite pretender to the English throne, James III, had died. Diplomatic relations improved in 1792 due to the anti-clerical threat from revolutionary France. But full diplomatic relations were not re-established until December 1914. During the Second World War, the Royal Air force bombed the Vatican on 5th November 1943 when a British plane dropped four bombs which destroyed mosaics near the Vatican radio station.

Liechtenstein: This tiny landlocked principality is not a natural enemy for Britain; however, during World War One its government was pro-Austrian, but remained neutral. However, much of Liechtenstein's tiny economy was decimated by the Allied economic blockade of Austria and an embargo on Liechtenstein which led directly to the closure of four spinning mills in the capital Vaduz that employed 677 people. The blockade led to widespread hunger during the war as food supplies from Switzerland were suspended, which was also subject to an economic blockade by Britain and her allies. The collapse of the Austrian economy after the war led Liechtenstein to move closer economically to Switzerland.

Luxemburg: This Grand Duchy, with close ties to Germany, was created by the 1815 Congress of Vienna. Its neutrality was guaranteed by the 1867 Treaty of London. Although invaded and occupied by Germany on 2nd August 1914, democratic political life was allowed to continue under German occupation. While by no means popular, German occupation was less oppressive than in Belgium. When the Clausen district of Luxemburg city was bombed by the British RAF on 8th July 1918, with the loss of ten civilian lives, this led Arch Duchess Marie Adelaide to make vigorous protests to Britain over its actions and domestically unpopular appeals for German protection.

Guatemala: The border between the former Spanish possession of Guatemala and the former British possession of Belize has been a source of conflict for many centuries. In 1638, shipwrecked English and Scottish seamen settled on the coast of modern day Belize. They proceeded to establish a colony and fight local Amerindian tribes and Spanish settlers on the Mosquito coast who already claimed the land. By 1670, Spain recognised British possessions in America; however, in the 1783 Treaty of Versailles, Britain agreed to surrender sovereignty over Belize to Spain. In 1798, Spain tried to evict these British settlers in the battle of St George's Caye in which the Spanish were defeated. Following Guatemalan independence, Guatemala, in 1859, agreed to recognise British control over Belize if the UK agreed to build a road to Punta Gorda. In 1940, Guatemala claimed that this agreement was void as the UK had never built the road and took the matter to the international court which, however, backed the UK's claim. Following Belize's independence in 1981, there were riots

when it was believed too many concessions were being made to Guatemala. British troops remained on in Belize after independence to defend the border with Guatemala. Even today, Guatemala still has a claim over half of the territory of Belize.

Mali: In January 2013, The British government assisted the French state in its military intervention in this desolate West African former French colony when Islamic militants seized control of the north of the country. The Royal Air Force transported French troops and equipment into the country in two C17 transport aircraft. Despite repeated assurances in the House of Commons that no British troops would be deployed on the ground, it was announced on 29th January 2013 that 350 British troops would be sent to the country to train other West African troops in 'Peace keeping'.

Britain has had poor diplomatic relations with many other of the few remaining countries she has not actually invaded. Britain is an inveterate aggressor state; for her, the concept of 'normality' or 'friendly neighbourly relations' are meaningless. For her, there are only two types of states, predators and prey, and only two modes of behaviour - relentless aggression and the preparation for future aggression. This depressing reality should be foremost in the minds of all Irish and international policy makers who have the naïvety to propose friendly neighbourly relations with the ogre of international relations.

Paul McGuill, Secretary, INC – February 2013