



COMMENTARY

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Atiyah adds voice to Yes campaign over Trident

Sir Michael Francis Atiyah says he will vote Yes in September James Glossop/TheTimes

Magnus Linklater

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One of Britain's most distinguished mathematicians, Sir Michael Atiyah, has stunned his academic colleagues by announcing that he will be voting "yes" in September's referendum.

Sir Michael, one of the only scientists to have been president of both the Royal Society in London and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and who was awarded the Order of Merit in 1992, says he supports independence mainly because of the Yes

campaign's opposition to nuclear weapons.

Sir Michael, who argues his case in an article for *The Times* today, will find himself at odds with leading academics, who have warned that a separate Scotland risks losing research funding and support from the rest of the UK.

However, as a veteran member of the international Pugwash Conferences, which campaigned against nuclear weapons and won a joint Nobel prize for peace in 1995, Sir Michael argues that the anti-nuclear case is more important than special pleading for universities. The Trident nuclear submarines, based at Faslane, are, he says, "conspicuous, useless, immoral and expensive symbols of Westminster's hankering for imperial grandeur."

As a convinced European, he believes Scotland enjoys closer links to Europe than the rest of the UK, and is a firm believer in its left-of-centre policies on social welfare. "There is little doubt that the history and traditions of Scotland have led to a social conscience more akin to that of Scandinavia than of England," he says, adding: "The centre of gravity of Scottish political life is well to the left of that in England."

Sir Michael's intervention comes in the wake of a letter to *The Times*, signed by the UK's most senior scientists — Sir Paul Nurse, current president of the Royal Society, Lord Stern, president of the British Academy, and Sir John Tooke, who heads the Academy of Medical Sciences — warning that independence would threaten the future of research and collaboration between scientists north and south of the border.

Sir Michael insists that such arguments are less important than the broad issues of principle that he supports. "I am speaking out on what I believe is important for the country as a whole," he says. "What they [the scientists] say may be true, but these are secondary to my views, which are philosophical. Scotland has good science, and will be able to negotiate support from Europe."

Sir Michael, who is of Lebanese extraction, but whose grandfather and mother were Scottish, is married to a Scot, and lives in Edinburgh. He says that interventions from outside Scotland can be counter-productive. "The Scots don't like being told what to do," he says. "If people tell them they will be worse off, it can tip the balance the other way." Sir Michael's views echo those of scientists from three Scottish universities — Aberdeen, Heriot Watt and Glasgow — whose letter in *The Times* this week said independence would allow Scotland to develop its own brand and attract international students.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh has taken a neutral stance on independence. Sir Michael says he understands, but believes that it is time to speak out. "Of course there will be problems," he said. "but they are the kind of problems that can be worked out afterwards."

A Scottish government spokesman said: “Sir Michael Atiyah is a highly respected academic and we fully agree that collaborative research can be maintained with independence.”

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 **Mr Andrew Ranicki**

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White shark

23 hours ago

Never heard of him !.....but he is entitled to his opinion .I guess that we will see various 'celebrities' ,academics ,business folk etc wheeled out by the two campaigns as time goes by ...must be the 'yes' campaign's turn today ?

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MARTIN LESLIE

1 day ago

Sir Michael’s views echo those of scientists from three Scottish universities — Aberdeen, Heriot Watt and Glasgow — whose letter in The Times this week said independence would allow Scotland to develop its own brand and attract international students.

It's own brand, Whisky, Tartan, Salmon (well maybe not salmon), Haggis, Shortbread, Hogmanay, Celtic Rangers games, Scotland England football matches, what great brands.

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Feathernest

1 day ago

A brilliant mathematician doesn't essentially make a brilliant (to give some sort of name) political philosopher and

that's why there is a healthy divergence of opinion between the likes of Sir Michael Atiyah and Sir Paul Nurse.

I'm not familiar with Sir Michael but in view of his age I'm quite surprised to hear him say....."“What they [the scientists] say may be true, but these are secondary to my views, which are philosophical." Politics is all about having a governmental system in place that WORKS, rather than one which, perhaps unrealistically, follows a doctrine or chases an ideal.

There are very, very few examples in this world where a strongly socialist political system succeeds in meeting the expectations of it's citizens and if Sir Michael thinks that an independent Scotland would have the substance to be one of them, I rather feel his expectations are unlikely to be met.

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Mark Brinsden

1 day ago

As a NO voter - I also can't see the point of a nuclear capability, but I hardly think this is a ration reason for voting YES! Mathematicians are meant to be rational.

Talking about the UK nuclear capability - we are giving our Nuclear reactors to China, who now have a weapon against the UK they can sell to the highest bidder. Even the SNP would not be stupid enough to do that! So not much point in having a defensive nuclear capability in the UK.

I do despair about the intelligence and education of our politicians throughout the UK. Unfortunately rational, intelligent people don't want to become politicians.

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Mr Colin Hawksworth

1 day ago

What is going on with the government spokesman? Suddenly, his responses have become reasonable, "can " has replaced "will", "probably" has replaced "definitely". It is a welcome change of tone. Having said that, I just don't get the SNP Trident argument. Surely expelling nuclear weapons from a small country whilst seeking the benefits of NATO's nuclear shield is just gesture politics. And simultaneously arguing for the UK to continue to commission warships to be built in Scotland borders on hypocrisy. Not the best negotiating stance to take, but my guess is that in any post-independence negotiations Trident would soon become a mere bargaining chip, an aspiration for the indefinite longer term.

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