

'Yes' vote will free us from nuclear reliance

Trident is the most expensive, useless and immoral symbol of Westminster's hankering for imperial grandeur

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Intend to vote "yes" to independence for Scotland. My principal reason for doing so is because it would finally sever us from a reliance on nuclear weapons, carried by Trident submarines and based in Faslane.

They are the most conspicuous, useless, immoral and expensive symbols of Westminster's hankering for imperial grandeur since Winston Churchill first pronounced his determination to defend the empire in November 1942.

In his Mansion House speech that month, he growled: "I have not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British empire." In fact, the decline of the empire "over which the sun never sets" was, by Gibbonian standards, extremely rapid, from its Victorian heyday, with regiments of kilted highlanders, to the last spluttering anomalies of the Falklands and Gibraltar.

But the pyrrhic victories of two world wars disguise the brutal reality, and Westminster politicians of all

colours continue to talk with incongruent metaphors of "sitting at the top table" and "punching above our weight".

This illusion and nostalgia underlies all political activity. It explains the excessive military zeal of our governments in support of doubtful foreign adventures beyond our capabilities, and is of no real benefit to our security or our international standing.

Scotland has not been immune to this chauvinism, but it has gradually shown less enthusiasm for it. This was demonstrated literally by the Edinburgh protest march (in which I took part) against the Iraq war, which made Tony Blair the most reviled prime minister in Scotland after Margaret Thatcher.

I spent five years as president of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and Public Affairs, which campaigned against nuclear weapons and, jointly with my predecessor Joseph Rotblat, received the Nobel Peace Prize for its role in helping with nuclear disarmament.

Fortunately, the SNP and much of the Scottish public have been persuaded of the folly of British nuclear weapons, and expelling Trident has become a key plank of the case for independence.

The recent launch of the new aircraft carrier shows that white

elephants need not be nuclear. Ministers who predict that this grand new toy of the Royal Navy will project British power for the next 50 years seem faintly ridiculous.

The imperial background has also soured relations with Europe, and this is the second of my reasons for voting "yes".

Ironically, it was Churchill, the grand old man of the Conservative party and upholder of empire, who

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was one of the first to hail European unity as the hope for the future. He had the vision to see that Britain alone, even with the "special relationship" with America, could play a significant world role only in alliance with European partners. Sadly, we are now edging closer to the fringes and in danger of being side-lined just as China and India compete with America, Japan and Europe in a multi-polar world.

Anti-European sentiment in England, fanned by rivalry between the political parties, is much less evident in Scotland, where the "Auld

Alliance" retains a historical appeal, and where foreign immigrants are still welcome and needed. A bizarre future beckons with England out and an independent Scotland in the EU. But the idea of border controls between England and Scotland belongs to the world of fantasy.

Within the EU, frontiers have practically disappeared. I remember attending a conference in Nijmegen in the Netherlands, where my Dutch host had his garden backing on to the invisible German frontier. When cycling to work he would cross this frontier several times without noticing it, and was even given the option of paying taxes in either Germany or the Netherlands. England and Scotland need be no different if they were independent countries in the EU.

Which brings me to my third reason for supporting independence.

Foreign policy and wars may dominate the headlines but economic and social policy is what affects most citizens directly. 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. The battle over the poll tax exemplified this, as does the policy of free care for the aged and free tuition for university students. The centre of gravity of Scottish political life is well

to the left of that in England. We all agree that the referendum is an event of great significance. There are many important problems that would have to be solved if the "yes" vote wins. Already different groups, representing special interests, have been lobbying. Rival figures and forecasts have been bandied about and different voters will base their decision on different criteria.

In the academic world, many have expressed concern at the effect on research, while economists worry about the pound and the sporting world wonders what will happen to national teams. I prefer to focus on the broad policy issues: military (especially Trident), political (especially Europe) and social (especially care of the poor and vulnerable). If Scotland votes "yes", I am sure that with mutual goodwill there will be solutions to a host of technical problems. The British are famous for their pragmatism and for acceptance of special circumstances. If we can handle an independent Irish republic, I see no reason why an independent Scotland cannot be similarly accommodated.

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