

Opinion



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Trust me, Scots won't vote for independence

But the deeply negative nature of the Better Together campaign may produce long-term resentment from Nationalists



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What is Alex Salmond going to say when he loses the vote on Scottish independence this September? The problem for the SNP had seemed insoluble. Until this month. The moment the Prime Minister made his adroit pre-emptive strike and announced an early in-or-out referendum, my mind moved to the statement the First Minister of Scotland was going to have to make when the "no" result was announced, explaining away defeat. That defeat is not in question. The "yes" campaign has struggled to reach 30 per cent in polls and, despite brave words by the secessionists, nobody can see how their cause can be turned around by September. Or not without some breathtaking English discourtesy towards Scotland — and breathtaking discourtesy is not David Cameron's style. So how will Mr Salmond handle the defeat? What can he and his impressive deputy, Nicola Sturgeon, say beneath the banner of *La lucha continua!* to keep the flame of independent nationhood alive and breathe hope back into their party's *raison d'être*? With this question I wrestled unsuccessfully. And when, in Edinburgh, Mr Cameron delivered a speech distinguished by its emotional

intelligence, the challenge only grew. The PM's pitch was generous: please be assured, he said, that he would not insult the Scots by claiming they couldn't cope alone; obviously they could, perfectly well; but (he insisted) we were so much better together; and it would be a matter for profound sorrow if Scotland left. "Let's be clear . . ." he said, "I'm not going to stand here and suggest Scotland couldn't make a go of being on its own, if that's what people decide. There are plenty of small, independent nation states of a similar size or even smaller. Scotland could make its way in the world alongside countries like those . . . My argument is simple. Of course Scotland could govern itself." "Well pitched," I thought. If that's how London is going to approach this debate, if that's the tone, it will be almost impossible for Salmond & Co to complain about arm-twisting, or deny that Scotland's decisive "no" will be the nation's free, full-hearted and settled choice. We will finally have achieved closure on the

independence question. There will be no way separatists can wriggle out of the universal conclusion that Scotland had turned back. The Better Together campaign was leaving them no excuses. So why have all three main parties at Westminster abandoned the dignified and commanding position they'd built? There was no need to bully, polls indicated: the positive pitch for the Unionist case was already serving them well for the

referendum itself; but it had a second advantage, post-referendum: it drew a line. It closed the book. The people had spoken and nobody was forced. In the profoundest sense, it legitimised the answer. Yet this February the "no" campaign gave every impression of drafting the "yes" campaign's explanation of history — duress. The Chancellor, Labour's former Chancellor and the President of the European Union, have combined forces to declare that an independent Scotland would run aground on a kind of no-man's island: barred from using the pound or the euro and locked out of the European Union. The Head of the Treasury, the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England have said it would not be possible for Scotland to keep the pound; British business, alarmed, has joined the stick-waving, Standard Life being only the latest to speculate noisily about relocating in England. The outgoing boss of Sainsbury's has suggested food prices would be higher in an independent Scotland. BP, Stagecoach, RBS, the engineering group Weir . . . no wonder they're worried: when political leaders declare that an independent Scotland will be excluded from the UK's financial regulation, and groceries are going to be priced not in the British pound but the Scottish thistle, business's alarm is rational. Led by Westminster politicians, it begins to look like a concerted campaign to scare Scottish voters out of a "yes" vote. A "yes" vote they were never going to deliver anyway. This voluntary evacuation of the moral high ground by the Better Together campaign is extraordinary. They might as well re-name themselves the Better Watch Your Step, Jock campaign.

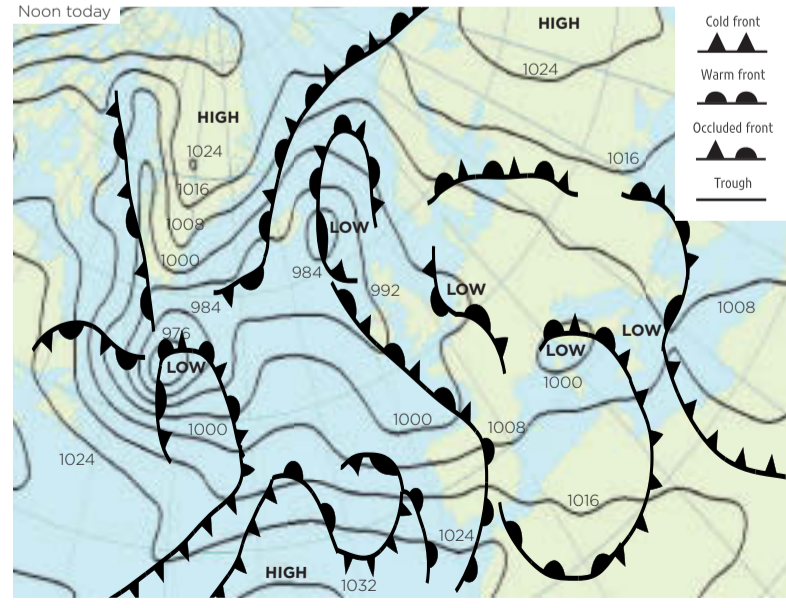
Westminster should play soft cop to the hard cop of reality we'll have Scottish interests to heart and offer the best terms we can while protecting our own position: it will be up to Edinburgh whether Scotland can accept them." The speech for the Foreign Secretary to make runs: "I'm sorry to learn that some of our EU partners may try to veto Scotland's membership. In Brussels, the UK would unhesitatingly support Scotland's application against those beastly French." In short: "Please don't go; but if you must, we'll do what we can to make it work for you, and still be on your side in an uncertain future." Trying to frighten Scotland may prove counterproductive. Equally, the strategy may well — on reflection and in the end — rattle voters into an even bigger margin for no than what's already assured. But that no will in the years that follow bring its own burden: the legend that in 2014 Scotland was cheated and bullied out of taking her rightful place in the world. For such a legend today's Unionists are writing tomorrow's script.



Short-sighted: trying to frighten the Scots may prove counterproductive

Of course their strategists are not without an answer. They say they're not scaremongering but simply alerting Scotland to the unavoidable consequences of independence; and Scots need to think about this. Indeed Scots do. There are real problems about a sterling currency union, real problems about an EU application that did not include a promise to join the euro, and real problems about a veto of Scottish EU membership by countries such as Spain and Belgium and France terrified of separatist movements of their own. These are problems for Scots to mull over, as they anyway will. But the critical mistake Westminster makes is to suggest that

Today Windy with rain across Spain, and heavy showers in Central and Southern Europe. Max 18C (64F), min -15C (5F)



Today's temperatures forecast for noon

Alicante	15	Cloudy	Helsinki	1	Fair	Nice	12	Sunny
Amsterdam	5	Cloudy	Innsbruck	2	Cloudy	Nicosia	15	Cloudy
Athens	13	Rain	Istanbul	10	Drizzle	Oslo	1	Snow
Barcelona	12	Cloudy	Lanzarote	17	Sunny	Paris	7	Cloudy
Belgrade	14	Sunny	Las Palmas	17	Fair	Prague	8	Cloudy
Berlin	10	Fair	Lisbon	15	Cloudy	Reykjavik	4	Cloudy
Brussels	6	Fair	Madeira	16	Sunny	Rhodes	16	Cloudy
Bucharest	11	Fair	Madrid	8	Rain	Rome	12	Rain
Budapest	10	Cloudy	Majorca	13	Cloudy	Salzburg	7	Cloudy
Corfu	14	Cloudy	Malaga	11	Rain	St Petersburg	1	Fair
Faro	16	Shower	Malta	15	Shower	Stockholm	4	Cloudy
Florence	9	Rain	Milan	2	Rain	Tenerife	15	Sunny
Frankfurt	8	Cloudy	Moscow	-4	Sunny	Venice	10	Rain
Geneva	3	Sleet	Munich	7	Cloudy	Vienna	9	Sunny
Gibraltar	14	Rain	Naples	13	Rain	Warsaw	11	Cloudy

Scandinavia, the Baltic states, western Russia, Belarus, Ukraine
 Cloudy with patchy light rain or sleet, falling as snow across central and northern Scandinavia. Maximum 5C (41F), minimum -13C (9F).

Denmark, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria
 Sunny spells and largely dry, but thicker cloud could bring a few spots of light rain, mainly in southern Germany, eastern Poland and Slovakia. Maximum 12C (54F), minimum -2C (28F).

France, the Low Countries
 Scattered showers, especially in northern and western France and Belgium, but some brighter spells. Maximum 9C (48F), minimum -5C (23F).

Spain, the Balearics
 Windy with rain in most places, perhaps heavy at

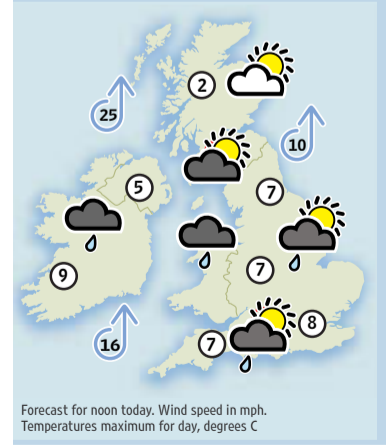
times with snow over the Pyrenees. Maximum 18C (64F), minimum 0C (32F).

The Alps
 Snow, mixing with sleet at lower elevations. Maximum 4C (39F), minimum -15C (5F).

Italy, the Adriatic coast, Greece
 An unsettled day with scattered showers and thunderstorms and a longer spell of rain in Greece later. Maximum 15C (59F), minimum 2C (36F).

British Isles
 Cloudy with showery rain lingering in the East, and isolated showers across western Britain. Staying drier with sunny spells in central areas. Maximum 9C (48F), minimum -3C (27F).

Outlook
 Rain and showers across northwestern Europe.



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