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## **Holyrood Response: What would independence mean for Scotland's standing in the world?**



The last month or so of debate has seen the key issues move closer and closer to home.

From Foodbanks and child poverty to the fall out over the latest Better Together campaign slogan – “I love my family, I'm saying No Thanks” – the battle ground for votes has centred in on the factors that will resonate emotionally with the public.

The future of the health service may have come to the fore but the weight of importance attributed to the views held by external actors, ranging from Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton to Jean Claude Juncker and Jose Manuel Barosso, show that the matter of Scottish independence is not just a matter for the Scots.

When David Bowie sends a message from his New York penthouse you know you are talking about something important.

And the reasons for their concern are obvious – Scotland may be a small nation but the presence of nuclear weapons, oil and even European fishing access – makes it an internationally significant one.

And if the world is watching the campaign, the campaign is watching the world too.

Gordon Brown emphasised the international aspect again this week, warning that if an independent Scotland defaulted on its debt it would become an “an international outcast”.

Brown said: “There is no hiding place in the international community for a country that reneges on their debts. With a total of 1.4 million Scottish jobs linked to Scotland's trade with the wider world, it is difficult to see how the SNP's 'stop the world, I want to get off' posturing would help Scottish families. You need a coherent strategy for dealing with global capital, global financial markets and global institutions.”

Coming from a man who once claimed to have ‘saved the world’, these words must mean something.

The problem with this argument – that being part of the UK affords Scotland shelter from the stormy seas of international relations – ignores the fact that Britain's influence is declining.

Even a cursory glance at the farce of David Cameron's opposition to Jean Claude Juncker's appointment as President of the EC – in which the Prime Minister found himself siding with Hungary against the rest of Europe combined – shows that the UK cannot boss the rest of the world around as it could in the past.

Alex Salmond has been mocked by Labour for releasing statements on foreign affairs. But if the First Minister is delusional in thinking that the world cares what he thinks, at least Scotland's delusion tends towards the positive.

An independent Scotland would have little global influence and it is likely that the country's introduction to the international system would involve some tough compromises.

The SNP membership were rattled by the decision to pull a policy U-turn and support membership of Nato but it is quite possible that after winning a Yes vote those negotiating an exit from the UK would have to choose between Trident and the pound.

Of course, with these sorts of negotiations yet to begin and no clear answers on EU membership, it is still impossible to say what an independent Scotland's place in the world would be.

And with Defence Secretary Philip Hammond warning that independence would weaken Scotland's ability to defend itself from outer space, it might not be the country's position on the world stage - but the cosmic one - that the Yes negotiating team would be worrying about.

Maybe Bowie could advise.

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