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The UK suspiciously reeks of the late-stage USSR

Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have joined together to challenged Westminster. Here's why the Cardiff Pact matters

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"The era of Westminster is coming to an end!" the nationalist leaders of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland declared this week.

John Swinney, Rhun ap Iorwerth, and Michelle O'Neill gathered in Cardiff to sign an agreement asserting their nations' right to self-determination, as they called on London not to obstruct referendums and outlined their preferred futures beyond the UK, including EU membership for an independent Scotland and Wales, and Irish reunification for Northern Ireland.

In Russia, the meeting has already been dubbed Britain's version of the Belovezha Accords, and the comparison is tempting because, as in 1991, political leaders from three of a state's constituent parts gathered around a table to discuss a civilized divorce.

But the resemblance largely ends there, given the driving force behind the Soviet Union's dissolution was its largest republic, Russia, represented by Boris Yeltsin. He joined his counterparts in dismantling the state that Moscow built, but no representative of England attended the Cardiff gathering, and Westminster has shown little enthusiasm for presiding over its own retreat.

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The participants were also considerably more cautious than their Soviet predecessors, so they signed as party leaders, making the declaration a joint political initiative rather than an agreement binding their governments to secession.

This distinction exposes the central weakness of the Cardiff Pact. Its signatories want to leave the UK while remaining within the constitutional framework that holds it together. Their ambitions therefore depend on political and legal processes they don't control.

Ireland's experience offers an uncomfortable historical comparison, as the settlement that opened the way to independence followed two years of guerrilla warfare. Today's nationalist leaders are pursuing an entirely peaceful route, through negotiations, elections, and referendums, but whether London will accommodate them is another matter.

Scotland has already encountered this obstacle. In 2022, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the Scottish Parliament couldn't legislate for an independence referendum without Westminster's consent, and after the close vote in 2014, London has little appetite for another.

Public opinion presents a further difficulty. Scotland remains divided down the middle, whereas in Northern Ireland, the figure cited for support for Irish unity is around 36% and Welsh independence remains a minority position, however much its advocates have gained politically.

Swinney wants another Scottish referendum by 2031, but his counterparts have offered no comparable timetable and their agreement establishes a direction of travel, but supplies neither a departure date nor a convincing explanation of how they will get there.

Britain's dissolution is therefore hardly imminent, but nevertheless, London would be foolish to dismiss Cardiff as an exercise in nationalist theater.



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Some British coverage attributed the meeting to an ill-judged intervention by Prime Minister Andy Burnham when he suggested that referendums in Scotland and Northern Ireland might be considered if there is broad public consensus, before attempting to narrow the implications of his remarks.

Qualifications rarely travel as far as the original statement and nationalists heard an opening and acted accordingly.



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Yet an unfortunate choice of words can't explain the forces behind this gathering. The more immediate political background was Labour's local elections defeat in May, which strengthened nationalist parties and created favorable conditions for cooperation and Cardiff gave that cooperation a common platform.

However, the deeper problem is the condition of the British state itself. In 2014, many Scots supported independence because they believed London ignored their interests and governed badly – and since then, Westminster has supplied little reason for them to reconsider, as economic stagnation and trained public services have steadily eroded confidence in the established order.

Conservatives and Labour have each promised renewal, only to leave voters wondering whether either possesses a credible plan, while Reform and nationalist parties have moved into the space created by that failure. Their proposed remedies differ, but their appeal rests on a shared conviction that the old arrangements no longer work.

Brexit sharpened this argument, as Britain's departure from the EU in 2020 changed the calculation for those considering a future outside the UK. Previously, independence meant leaving a state that already offered access to the EU, but now nationalists can present separation as a route back into it.

The choice, as they frame it, is between joining a larger, more successful economic and political community and remaining attached to a declining imperial center, still occasionally tempted to compensate for its weakening position with displays of former grandeur.



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This argument doesn't remove the economic risks of independence, nor does it guarantee EU membership, but it gives separatists something more persuasive than a historical grievance: A competing account of where prosperity and security might lie.

Cardiff matters principally for this reason. It did not produce a mechanism for dismantling the UK, but it brought together politicians willing to imagine what might follow it and an alternative once discussed separately in Edinburgh, Cardiff, and Belfast has acquired a shared political expression.

It's far too early to suggest that Burnham will be Britain's last prime minister, as states can survive years of disillusionment, and nationalist declarations are easier to sign than to implement.

But Westminster's problem is that preserving the union requires more than obstructing its opponents, and it also requires giving people a convincing reason to stay.

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OPINION

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**John V Asia Teacher** 9/21/2026 at 8:16 PM

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Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have consistently voted to remain part of the UK. They know they're weak without England.

[Reply](#)**Trevor Morgan** 9/21/2026 at 10:51 PM ↑

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All together now....'God save our Gracious King'

[Reply](#)**Voyt Regnal** 9/21/2026 at 6:41 PM

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Canada (UK's fiefdom) is falling apart as well. Alberta and Quebec are ready to separate anytime (Alberta recently, Quebec since long time)

[Reply](#)**citris1** 9/21/2026 at 4:49 PM

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Don't expect UK leaders to play fair. But you already know this.

[Reply](#)**Max Holbrook** 9/21/2026 at 2:58 PM

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They say, Imitation is the greatest form of flattery

[Reply](#)**mc josh and the destroyer** 9/21/2026 at 8:43 AM

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The UK has sustained the illusion of a single Country. The Cardiff Pact is a clear indication that separatist voices have not been subdued and may one day come to reality.

[Reply](#)**norberto Garcia** 9/21/2026 at 6:54 AM

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We must recall that the invasion of Scotland by England was done bribing the Scottish Parliament into self-dissolution, Act of Union 1707.

Fareweel to a' our Scottish fame,
Fareweel our ancient glory;
Fareweel ev'n to the Scottish name,
...

I'll mak this declaration;
We're bought and sold for English gold:
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!

Robert Burns

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