

# Providentialism, Brexit and the crisis of the British state

Michael Moran  
University of Manchester  
King's College London, 26 October  
2017.

# The state and the road to Brexit

- The mystery: why Brexit took so long
- Not one awkward partner but two
- ‘Our friends have embarked on a visionary but difficult project.. it is wrong for us to be there – always trying to make things difficult, always getting in the way, always moaning.’

# The awkward British and the awkward Europeans

- The British partner:
  1. Popular rejection of a European identity
  2. Derogations: Schengen; Economic and Monetary Union; the Charter of Fundamental Rights; the domains of freedom, security and justice; the Euro
  3. Cameron's awkward bargain: Exemption from 'ever closer union'; restrictions on UK benefits claimable by EU migrants – an attack on common citizenship; exemption from costs of 'bailouts' in the Eurozone – a denial of common obligations.
- The awkward European partner:
  1. The Madisonian Brussels governing system
  2. The parallel universe of the European Parliament
  3. The catastrophe of the ECB and the Eurozone
- Why are the British awkward?

# A quick outline of the argument: providentialism and road to Brexit

- Sources. *The End of British Politics?* Palgrave/Springer 2017; and work with CRESC colleagues: *Engelen et al, (2011); Bowman et al (2014 and 2015.)*
- ‘From Colley to Chilcot and back to Brexit’
- The ages of the British state
- The recurring theme: providentialism as statecraft – the British as a chosen people
- The decay of providentialist civic ideologies and the crisis of separatism – from Scotland and from the EU
- The persistence of military providentialism and the Iraq disaster
- The one dimensional ‘warfare state’
- And the starting point and finishing point: the UK can’t do Europe without a transformation of the British state

# The key to providentialism: 'the chosen people'

- 'A chosen people....a holy nation' (1 Peter: 2/9; its Lutheran appropriation; and centrality to the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*)
- The key argument of Colley, *Britons*.

What marked the union from 1707:

1. 'An aggressively Protestant polity'
2. An identity formed against an external 'other': European, esp. French, aggressive Catholicism.
3. A civic ideology that blended Protestantism, messianism and anti-Catholicism
4. Civic rituals (Gunpowder Plot deliverance, Handelian oratorios) that reinforced the image of the chosen people
5. A people besieged externally and threatened by internal (Catholic and dissenting) subversion.

# The chosen Imperial people, 1815-1914

- Colley to 1837; but 1815 as my arbitrary date - the start of the Imperial century
- Continuities: 1662 Book of Common Prayer as the prayer book of imperialism (1928)
- Continuities: 'Lord god of hosts be with us yet/Lest we forget, lest we forget'
- Continuities: The persistence of the 'aggressively Protestant polity' :  
**Empire and messianism:** Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen 1792; London Missionary Society 1795; the Scottish and Glasgow Missionary Societies 1796; the Church Missionary Society 1799; the Religious Tract Society 1799; British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804. Lambeth Conference, 1867: anticipates the Imperial Nation.
- Continuities: Disraelian providentialism: Fashioning 'Imperium et libertas': Expand the franchise (1867) Proclaim the Empress (1877) – 'liberty at home, empire (and genocide) abroad'.
- Continuities: Empire and Liberty and 'expansion of England' : the Chamberlainite vision of the 'world state': 'we have left Europe behind' (Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 1883).

# The Great War and the climax of Britishness

- War mortally wounds the Empire but reshapes the fabric of everyday life: egg and chips, the WI, the British Legion, wristwatches, BST, licensing hours....
- Seals the bond between the state and the (working class) people: Ulster and the Somme, Scotland's sacrifices, the English 'pals battalions'
- Creates the greatest modern civic ritual: Remembrance
- Above all: invents modern British politics: the disappearance of religion, territory and the 'woman question'; the emergence of Labour as a 'unionist', constitutionally conservative force.
- Labour's 'bet' on the central state – and the departure of the Irish from the casino

# The waning of imperialism – and provincialism: striking a new (providential) bargain 1918-1960

- The destruction of four empires – and the mortal wounding of a fifth – from creditor to bankrupt
- Labour and the stabilisation of the state
- Labour and the crystallisation of British social citizenship, 1918-45 (Beer)
- The crystallisation of the metropolitan elite: unification of the civil service elite 1919, the Fisher/Hankey/Norman triumvirate in the core executive, economic centralisation, cultural centralisation, the rise of intellectual metropolitanism
- The apotheosis of the metropolitan ‘intellectual’ and the evisceration of provincial life (Collini)



# The post war settlement and military providentialism

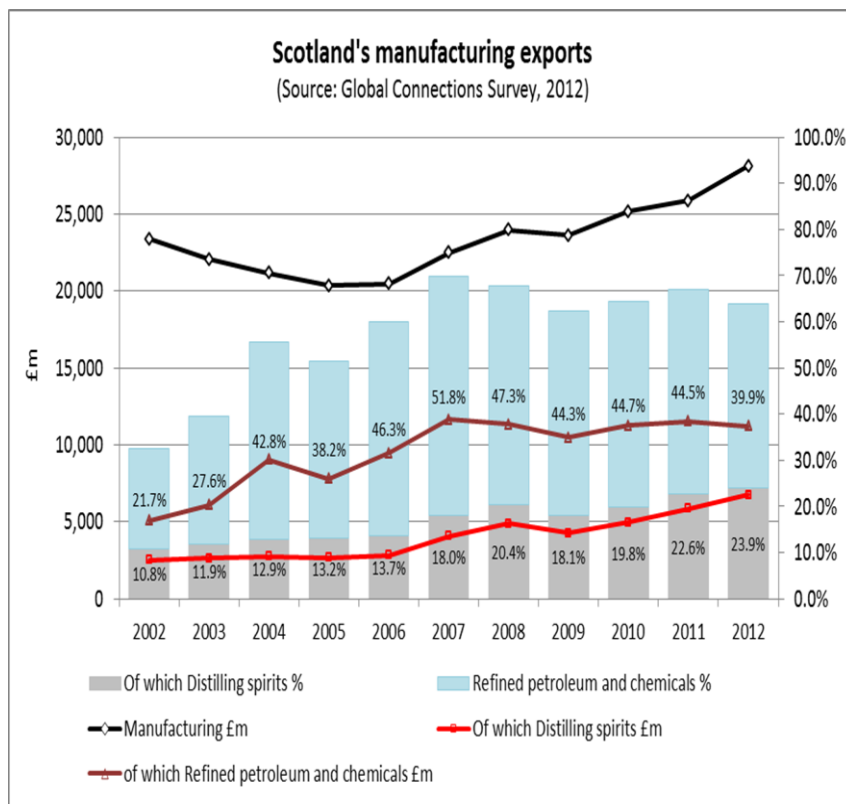
- **The settlement and a new British social citizenship:**
  1. Social universalism: the NHS as exemplar
  2. Keynesian economic management: the vision of a single economy; the activist regional policy
  3. A 'Whig' theory of social citizenship: Marshall and 'citizenship and social class' 1949
- **Labour and the new military providentialism:**
  1. Finest hour delusions: Russian manpower and American technology
  2. The reality: 'On dune and headland sinks the pyre/Lo all our pomp of yesterday is one with Nineveh and Tyre'
  3. What can the providential people do after Empire? NATO, the special relationship/ special delusion, and the Pax Americana
  4. Nuclear weapons and the providential mission: "*I never want to be talked to like that again.... We've got to have this thing over here, whatever it costs... We've got to have the bloody Union Jack on top of it.*"
- **The institutionalisation of a British military/industrial complex**

## The crisis: the *via dolorosa*, the Thatcher revolution and the destruction of social citizenship

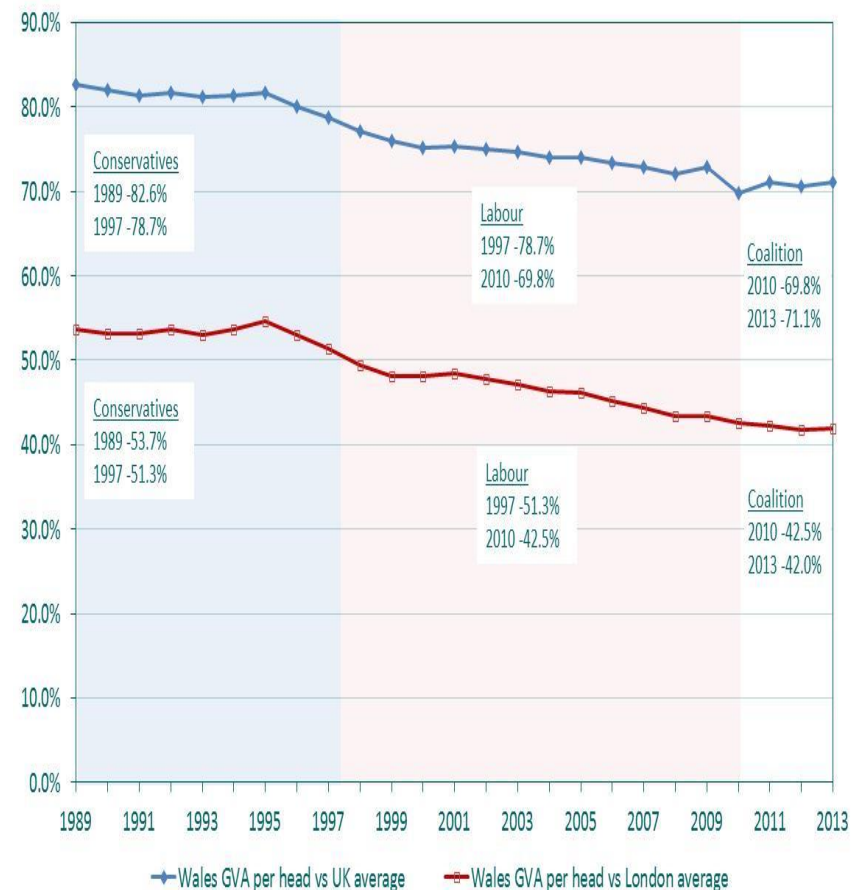
- The decline of universalism: the exodus of the middle class: the NHS as a bellwether (22% rise of private occupational cover, 1990-2012)
- The destruction of the capital base of social citizenship: the sale of social housing as an example
- The rise of the ‘public service industry’: privatisation of foundational services, from garbage to residential care (*What a waste, 2015*)
- The Nissan moment 1984: the end of a **British** economy (Germany 6, United Kingdom 3).
- The wasting of ‘Britain’

# The outcome of the revolution: the wasting of a 'British' economy

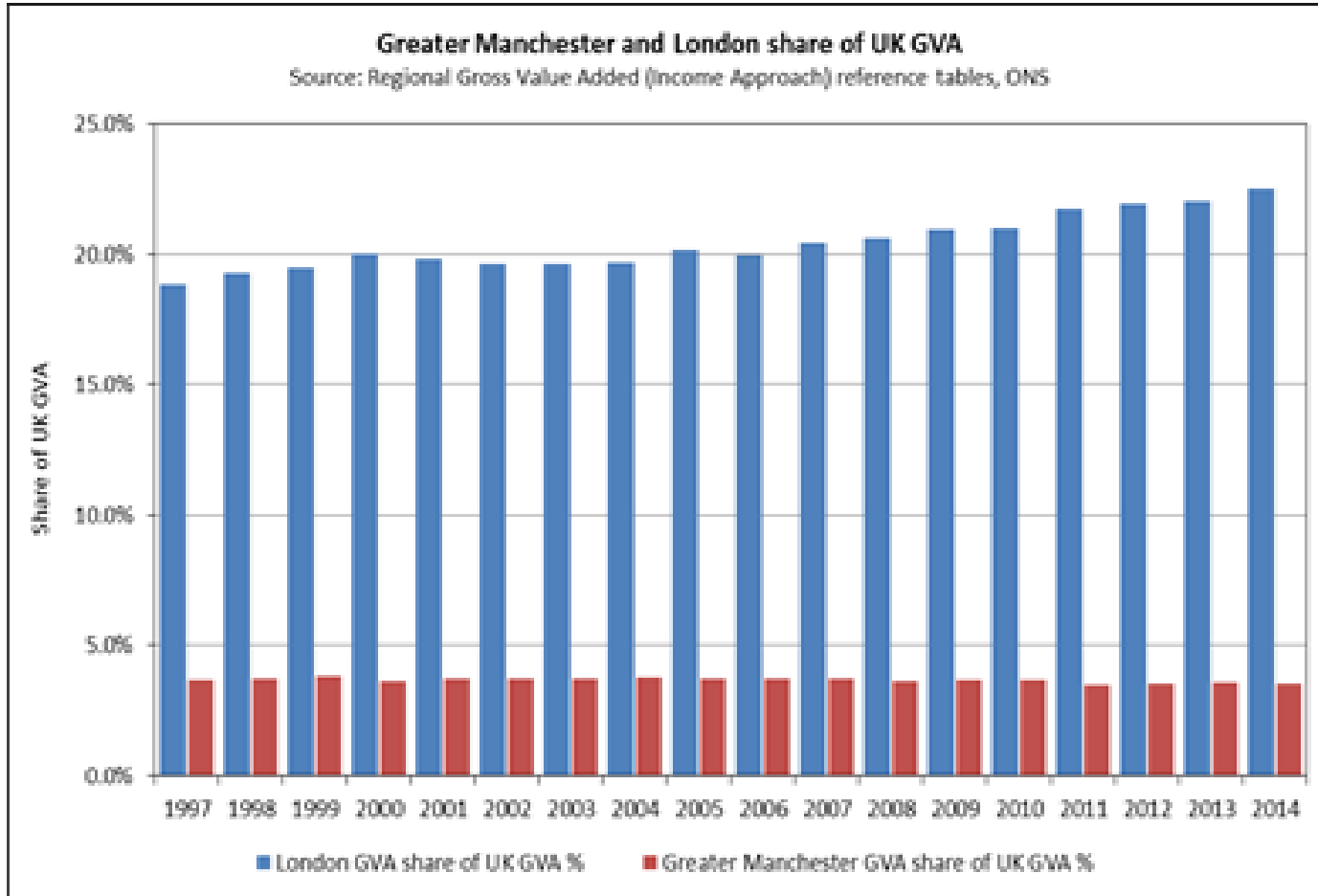
## Scotland wasted



## Wales wasted...

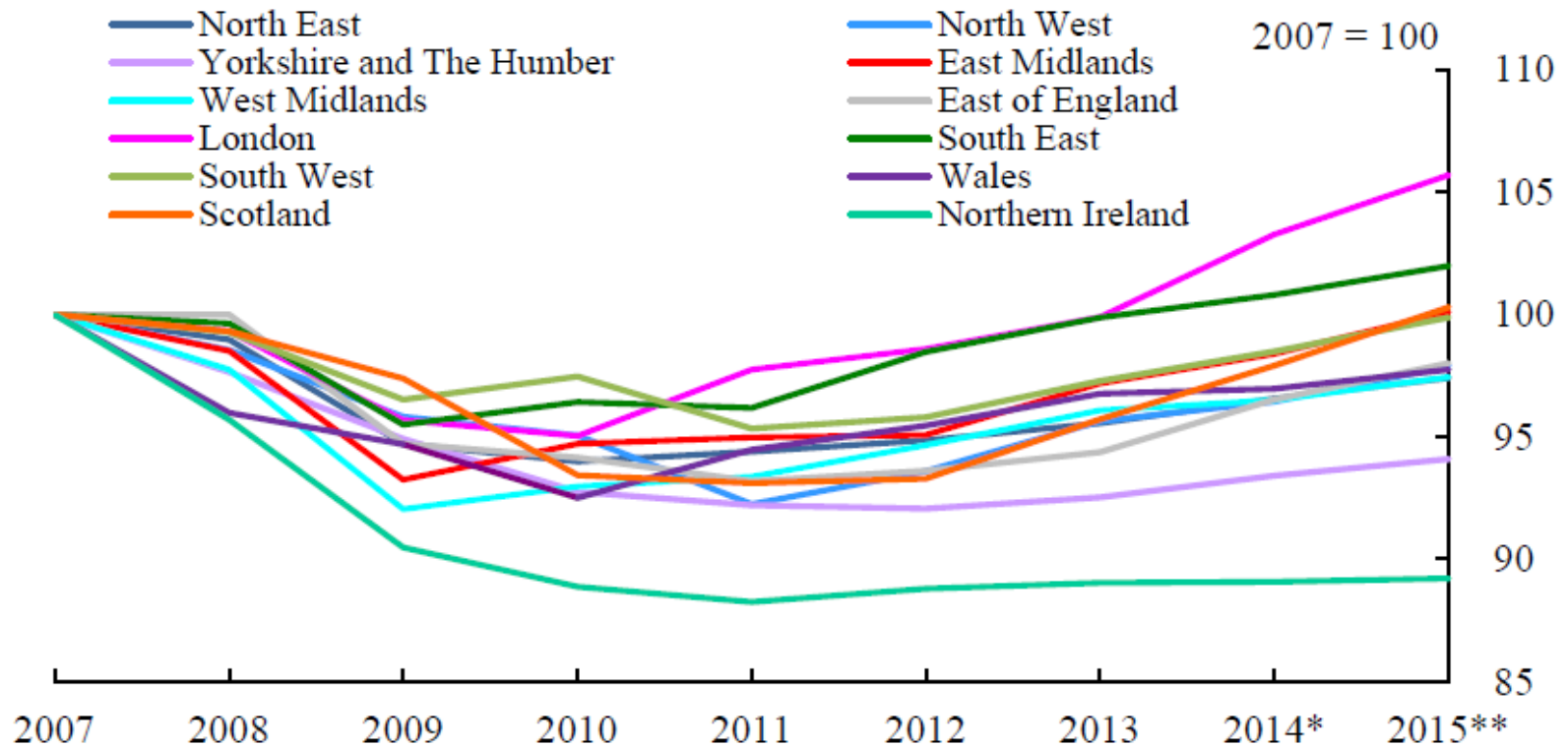


# The wasting of a *British* economy: Manchester wasted



# The wasting of a 'British' economy: post crash patterns

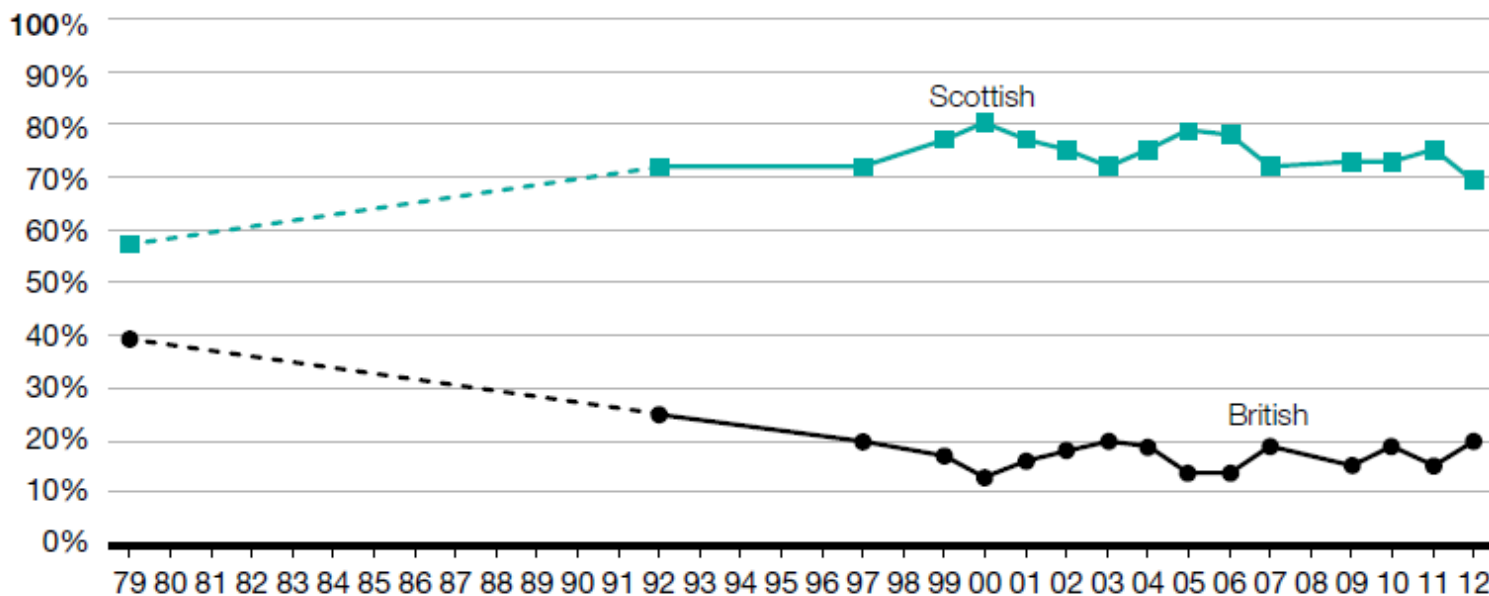
Chart 11 – Regional GDP per head\*



Sources: ONS, Bank calculations.

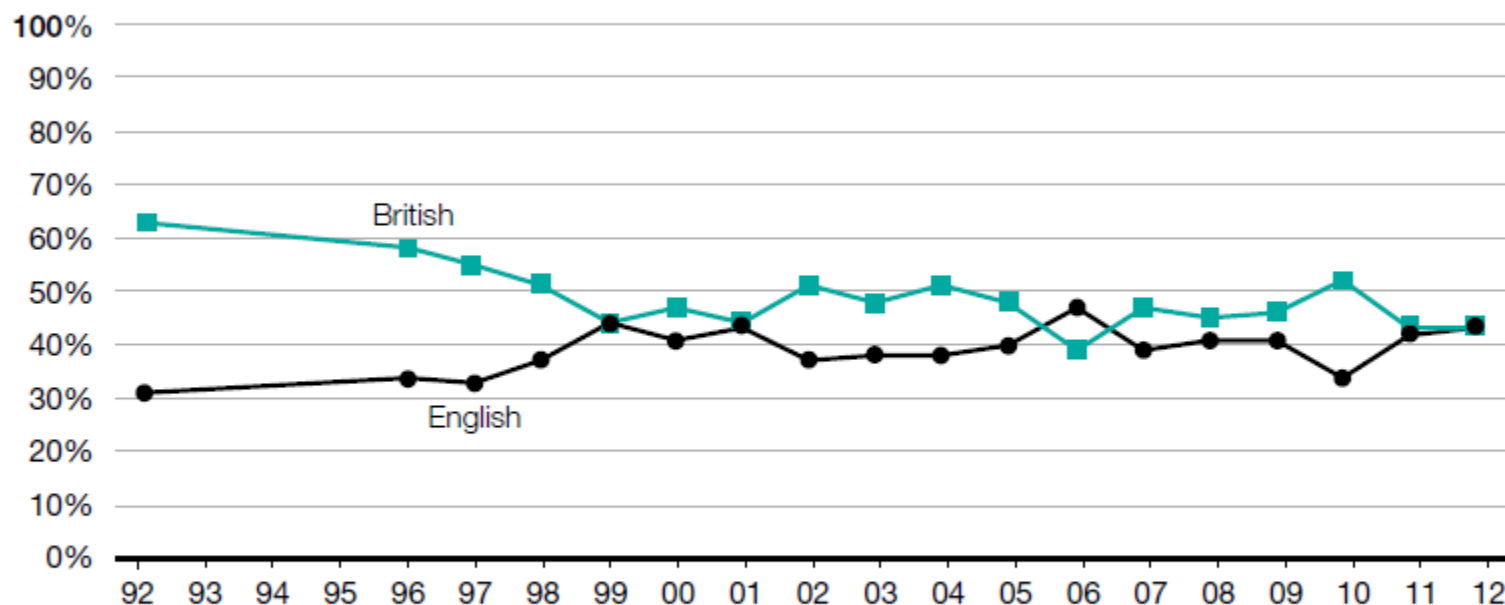
# The end of British social citizenship and the wasting of British identity: Scotland

Figure 6.1 Trends in 'forced choice' national identity, in Scotland, 1979–2012



# The end of British social citizenship and the wasting of British identity: England

Figure 6.3 Trends in 'forced choice' national identity, in England, 1992–2012



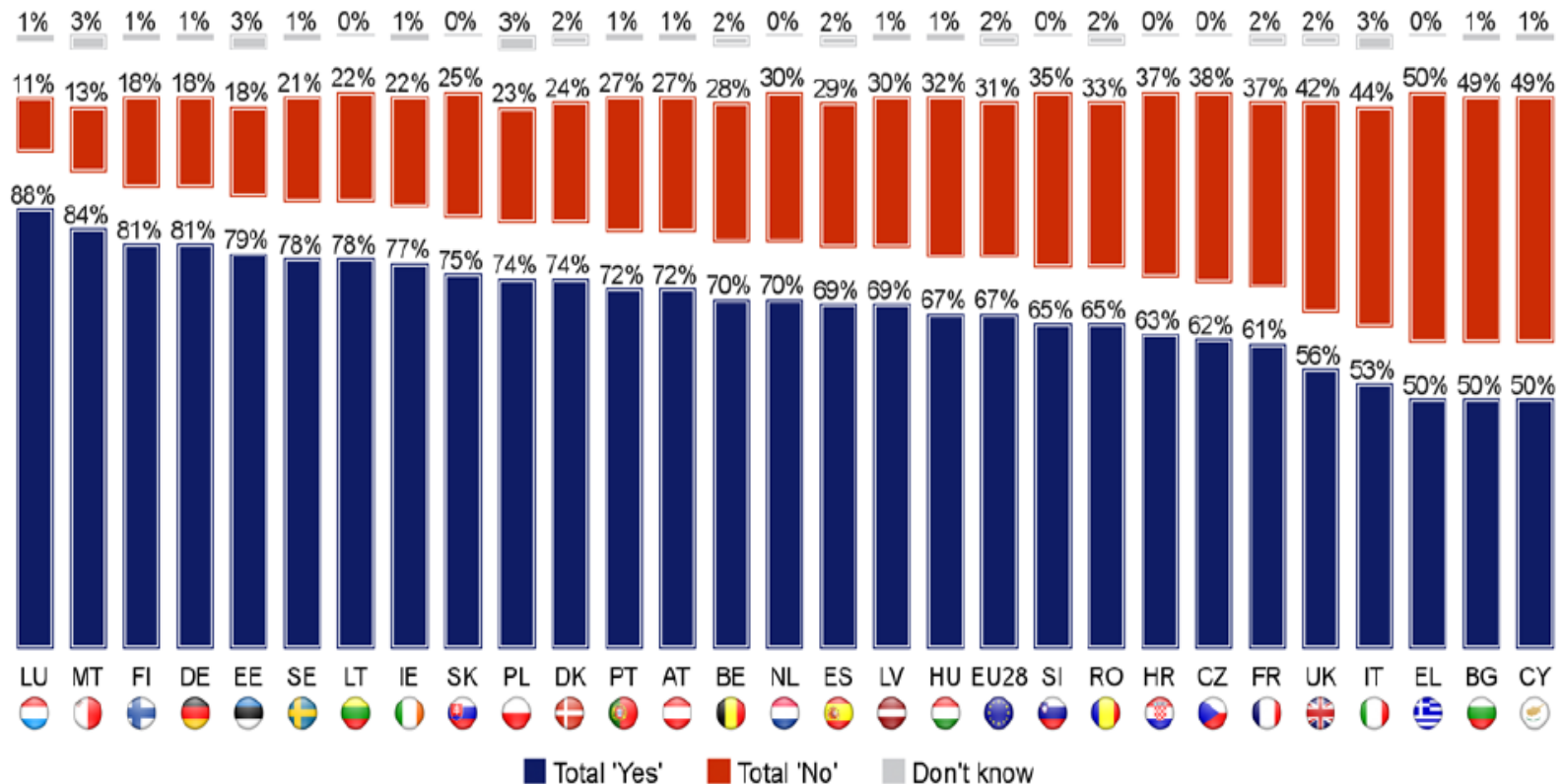
Source: 1992 and 1997: *British Election Studies*; 1996, 1998–2009: *British Social Attitudes* (respondents living in England only)

The data on which Figure 6.3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

# The wasting of European identity: the key to Brexit (2014)

QD1.1. For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your own opinion.

You feel you are a citizen of the EU





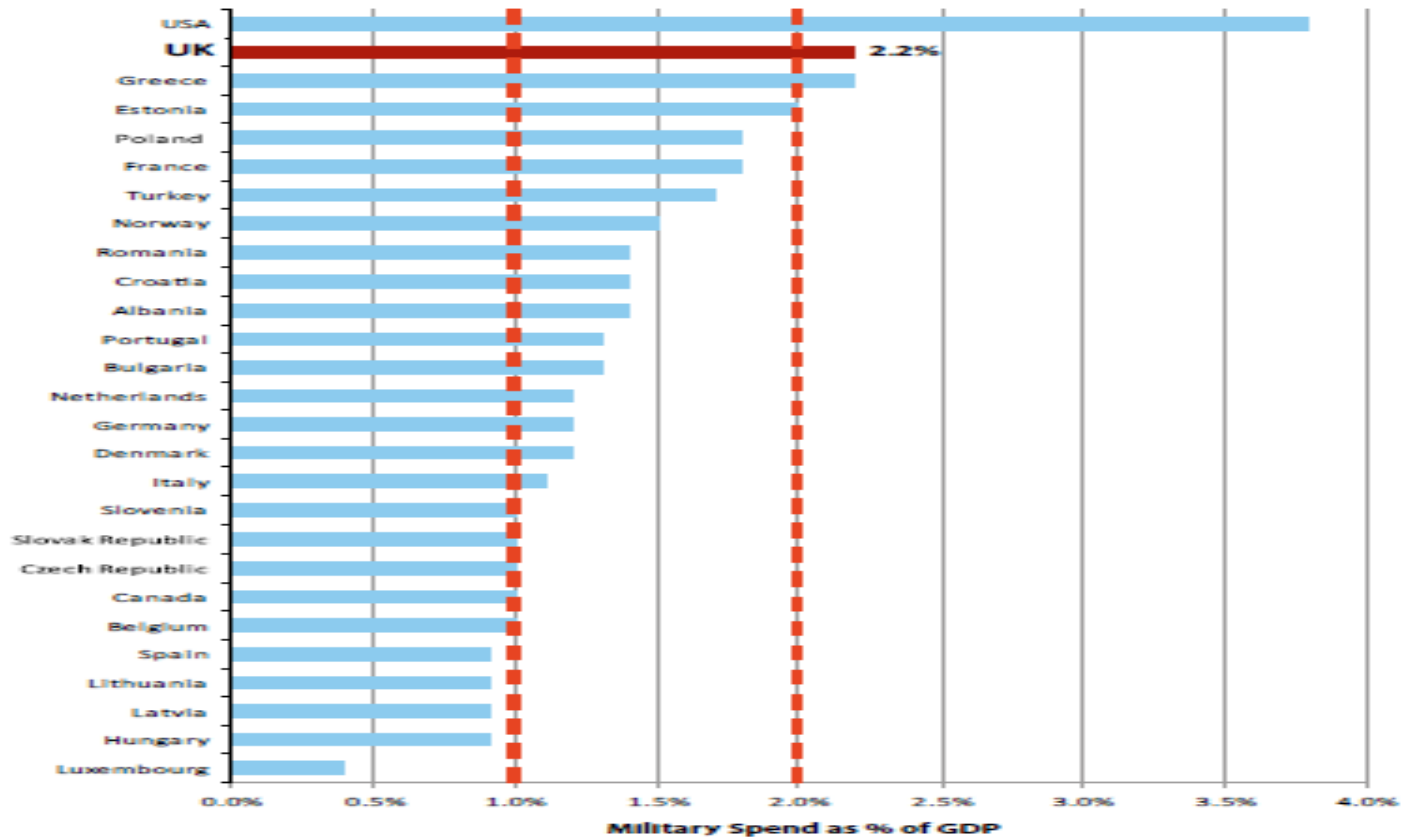
# The transformation of civic ideology: a quick summary

- The ideology supporting the post-war settlement had three key components:
  1. Social citizenship
  2. British identity
  3. Military providentialism: nuclear capacity; the special relationship/delusion; a UK military/industrial complex
- By the millennium, 1 had been destroyed; 2 had waned.
- What is left: military providentialism
- To recall: a civic **ideology** that assigns the state a special global destiny; civic rituals that celebrate this destiny; economic foundations that support the ideology and its rituals.

# The economic foundations of military Providentialism

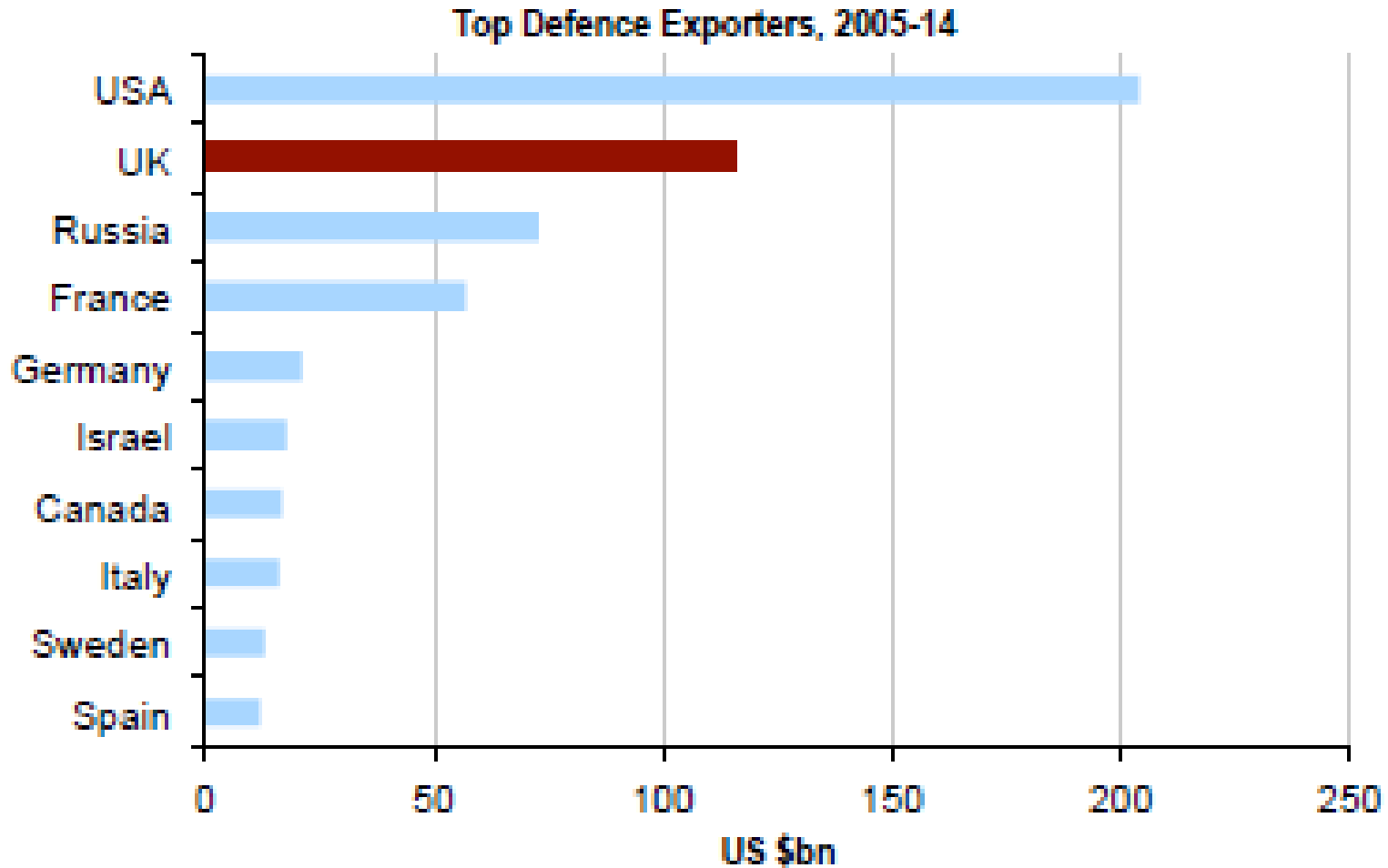
## 1: Defence Expenditure as % GDP, 2014.

**NATO Defence Expenditure as % of GDP - 2014**



Source: NATO

# The economic foundations of military providentialism 2: 'A militant and technological nation': defence exports, 2015-14.



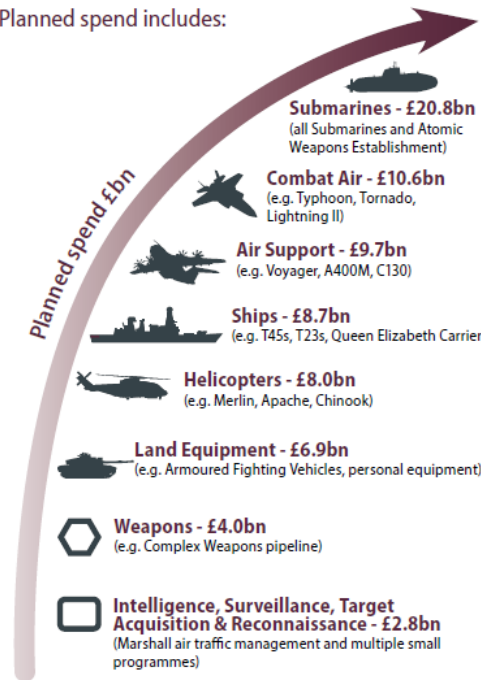
# The economic foundations of military providentialism

## 3: planning spending post 2014

### £163bn Planned Expenditure on Equipment and Support over the Next 10 Years



Planned spend includes:



Source: MOD Equipment Plan 2014

# The persistence of military providentialism: the civic ritual of Remembrance

- The (contested) origins of Remembrance
- Why didn't Remembrance die?
- The thirty year transformation:
  1. The rising popularity of Remembrance rituals
  2. Innovations in Remembrance: the restoration of the national two minutes silence (1996); the National Arboretum (1997); 'Blood swept lands of seas and red' (2014)
  3. Remembrance and 'British values' ( and the Ofsted alternative)
  4. The ecumenisation of Remembrance
  5. The centrality of Remembrance to what is left of Britishness

# Remembrance as the unifying ritual for the British state



# Ripe for adventure: Iraq and military providentialism: Chilcot and beyond

- ‘In 2003, for the first time since the Second World War, the United Kingdom took part in an opposed invasion and full-scale occupation of a sovereign State ‘
- At its heart: the **special relationship and military providentialism**: “the UK Government decided that it was right or necessary to defer to its close ally and senior partner, the US.... It did so essentially for two reasons: Concern that vital areas of co-operation between the UK and the US could be damaged if the UK did not give the US its full support over Iraq... (and) The belief that the best way to influence US policy towards the direction preferred by the UK was to commit full and unqualified support, and seek to persuade from the inside.” volume 6, p. 618
- The base supporting the superstructure of ideology:
  1. Chilcot on the economic interests at stake in control of Iraq resources and post invasion military service contracts.
  2. The arms industry and the revolving door
  3. The ‘militant and technological nation’ after the Thatcher revolution

# No end of a lesson? 100+ years of 'learning a lesson'

- Kipling and 'The Lesson' (1902) : *'Let us admit it fairly, as a business people should/  
We have had no end of a lesson: it will do us no end of good.'*
- Suez and 'no end of a lesson'
- The Butler Review 2004 of 'lessons learned'.
- The verdict on the Libyan (2011) intervention under the coalition government
- Dreams of leaving Europe behind – Seeley redux and Brexit



# Brexit, Providentialism and Statecraft

- Two busted flushes: the European future and the Providential state
- Seeley on a country whose history is over: Sweden
- Is there an alternative statecraft for a country whose history is over?