ANDREW MARR:  
Now a date for the diary: 24th March 2016. As you’ll have heard, that is the date pencilled in as Scotland’s Independence Day if a majority vote for it in the referendum next September; and there’s going to be an important milestone this week when the Scottish Government publishes its white paper setting out how an independent Scotland would operate. The SNP’s been accused of being too vague on the details, but there’ll be no stinting this time; we are promised more than six hundred pages of this. We’ll hear a lot more about it on Tuesday, but first, defending the union, here is the Secretary of State for Scotland, Alistair Campbell. Good morning.

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:  
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:  
Now we read that you had warned your cabinet colleagues not to be complacent about this vote. Do you think the English by and large, the English establishment, is complacent?
ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
Look, I think there are people all over the country who kind of take the existence of the United Kingdom for granted. And what we’ve got to get across is that this is a very real danger to the future of the United Kingdom and that in fact the United Kingdom is good not just for Scotland; it’s good for people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as well, and that this should not just be allowed to become some sort of Punch and Judy match between Edinburgh and London.

ANDREW MARR:
Given that the SNP are behind or the pro-independence vote is behind in the polls at the moment, why do you think it could be much closer?

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
Well, look, you have to look first of all at the number of people that are undecided here. And there are an enormous number - something between a quarter, maybe even up a third of people in polls are saying that they are still undecided. And if you look back to the situation before the 2011 Scottish elections, the last round of Scottish elections, similar figures and similar sort of people were undecided, and at the end of the day they all went to the SNP. Now if that happens again and these people go for independence, then this becomes very, very close. I believe there’s a great case, you know there’s a positive case to put for being part of the United Kingdom.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I was going to say up to now it could be said the SNP (and we’ll hear a lot more of them today) have got a kind of optimistic view of the future Scotland - slightly to the left of England, you know it’s a more social democratic view - and lots and lots of different groups are going to be heard this week and the weeks ahead; and the pro-union campaign has been a little bit more pessimistic and dour.

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
Well, look, there’s a long way to go in this contest yet. What I would say to you though is that there is a great story for the United Kingdom and Scotland is part of the United Kingdom. As part of the United Kingdom, we have opportunities to perform on the world stage as part of the United Nations Security Council; we’re a member of
the European Union; we’re a member of NATO. And, remember, at the same time we’ve still got our Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh able to deal with Scottish issues in Scotland…

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So that’s what you think is important?

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
It’s the best of both worlds. Why would you want to walk away from that?

ANDREW MARR:
When you were given the job by David Cameron and Nick Clegg …

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… what did they say they wanted from you?

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
Well what they said is that they want a positive case for Scotland and being part of the United Kingdom being put out there with a bit of passion, and reminding people that this is not all about politics. You know if you think back to last year with the Olympic Games, yes we had great days with Andy Murray, Chris Hoy, people like that winning gold medals for the United Kingdom, but also remember that fantastic Saturday night when you had Mo Farar, Greg Rutherford, Jessica Ennis. If Scotland were a foreign country to the United Kingdom, we would have no stake in that.

ANDREW MARR:
So the English should stop sleepwalking into this?

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
This is a decision that will be taken in Scotland, but people in the rest of the United
Kingdom - and remember there are a lot of people in the rest of the United Kingdom that are not English …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
You heard this week the Welsh First Minister having his say - saying that in fact Alex Salmond’s plan for a currency union is one that he as a Welshman did not want to see.

ANDREW MARR:
Well I want to ask about the currency union particularly. Is it possible, is it true that Westminster, George Osborne, would refuse to allow the Scots to use the pound? Because the pound is the property of the Scots as much as the English. I don’t see how that could be.

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
It is as long as we are part of the United Kingdom. But in fact public international law is very clear on this - that if you remove yourself from the United Kingdom, then you would remove yourself from all sorts of institutions and, yes, the pound would be one of them. But the worry about a currency union though …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) How would it benefit England not to allow the Scots to use the pound?

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
Well what you’re looking at here is a situation where the rest of the United Kingdom would be asking to stand guarantor for banks, for example, over which they had no control. And from Scotland’s point of view, you would be asking or they would be handing over control of their interest rates, their borrowing levels, all these things to the rest of the United Kingdom, which by that time is a foreign country.

ANDREW MARR:
But surely on a single island with a huge amount of trade going on across what would be a border, having the same currency is commonsense?
**ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:**
All of which is a perfect reason for staying part of the United Kingdom.

**ANDREW MARR:**
But it also means it would be a ridiculous thing to say to the Scots if you vote for independence, you can’t have the pound.

**ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:**
It’s not a question …

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) Is that what you’re saying, by the way?

**ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:**
Nobody is saying anything about you can’t have.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Right.

**ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:**
The fact is that a currency union wouldn’t work. It wouldn’t work for Scotland, it wouldn’t work for the rest of the United Kingdom. You look at what happens in the Eurozone and you learn in fact that the currency union there runs into difficulty because …

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) Across very, very different economies.

**ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:**
It runs into difficulty though because it doesn’t have the fiscal, the economic or the political integration. Independence is about political disintegration; it’s not about integration. Look what happened to Czechoslovakia. They tried a currency union
when they split the Czech Republic from Slovakia. It lasted thirty-three days.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Both the Slovenes and the Czechs are quite happy in their separate countries now of course and you could argue that the currency union works very well between, say, Germany and Holland and Denmark - economies which are quite similar, as Scotland’s and England’s would continue to be?

**ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:**
Well I mean …

**ANDREW MARR:**
I’m just pressing on this because it’s a very important question.

**ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:**
… it remains to be seen whether the economies would be similar. I think the fact is though that when we come to Tuesday, the question is going to be for Alex Salmond and the Scottish Nationalists …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay.

**ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:**
… George Osborne, Ed Balls have already said this is highly unlikely; Carwyn Jones says he doesn’t want this to happen. In these circumstances, surely you should be telling the people of Scotland what your Plan B is going to be. That’s what we’ll be looking for.

**ANDREW MARR:**
What about the military side? Will you be saying to the Scots again that you can’t just take assets out of the UK Armed Forces because that’s what Alex Salmond tells us he wants and thinks should happen?
ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
Well, look, you know that’s just one layer of uncertainty that comes into it on top of many other layers. And the truth of the matter is that this is one of the things that the Scottish Government will have to acknowledge on Tuesday. There are some things that they can control; there are some things that they can’t that will have to be the subject of negotiation. That’s one of them.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. The Scottish Nationalists have been having some fun at your expense because before you took this job, you thought the Scottish Office should be abolished and merged into other offices; that it was grossly wasteful, far too many civil servants. Are you going to act on that now you are Scottish Secretary of State?

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
(laughs) Look, listen I’ve been given this job and it’s probably the most important job in politics for the next 12 months and I’m absolutely relishing it. You know nobody ever would say to Alex Salmond when he was an MP at Westminster you want to abolish Westminster, so you shouldn’t be an MP here. In politics …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So you’re not going to abolish yourself?

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
… in politics you take the job that you’re given. I am absolutely relishing and loving this one.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. Mr Carmichael, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL:
Thank you, Andrew.

INTERVIEW ENDS