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Scotland, NATO, and transatlantic security

Colin M. Fleming and Carmen Gebhard (2014). Scotland, NATO, and Transatlantic Security. *European Security* 23(3), 307-325.

Abstract

This article explores the political and strategic implications of Scottish Independence for existing transatlantic security arrangements. It examines the potential institutional, legal and political obstacles Scotland might face during the transition to independence and discusses the specific challenges in the area of security and defence, including the nuclear issue and the question of what form an independent Scottish Defence Force (SDF) would need to take to allow and facilitate integration in transatlantic security structures. It argues that a number of strategic and political issues could be mitigated in the course of negotiations between Edinburgh and London. Moreover, Scotland's geostrategic position and political orientation make it an important prospective partner in international security cooperation across the Eastern Atlantic, High North and North Sea, which suggests that an advanced partnership with NATO, and eventually full membership, seems like an option that is both politically viable and more likely than any scenario that predicts seeing an independent Scotland (IS) outside these structures. This challenges some of the main strategic and security political arguments against independence and thus seeks to spark a debate about the realistic options for Scotland should it become independent after 2016.

Keywords [Scotland](#), [security](#), [independence](#)

- ## Introduction

On the 18 of September 2014, the people of Scotland will vote in a referendum on Scottish independence. The decision to vote 'Yes' or 'No' to independence will take place democratically, and the outcome will have to be respected by the Scottish and UK Governments under the terms of the Edinburgh Agreement (2012).¹ If Scotland votes 'Yes', it will secede from the rest of the UK (rUK) in 2016 and become a new independent and sovereign European state. While much of the independence debate examines domestic policy areas, a 'Yes' vote would also have major implications internationally. As the referendum draws closer, the international dimension has received more attention, necessitating the assessment of the implications of a 'Yes' vote for Scotland's international

relationships, and in particular, its prospective membership of NATO as well as its strategic and political position in the transatlantic region.

Defence and security issues, and in particular, the future of an independent Scotland (IS) with regard to transatlantic security arrangements, have become increasingly important elements in the political debate between the Scottish and Westminster Governments (SNP Defence Policy Update 2012, HM Government [2013a](#), Scottish Government [2013b](#)), as well as in the academic literature and debates (Bailes *et al.* [2013](#), Chalmers [2013](#), Macdonald and Parrot [2013](#)). The question of the way an IS would relate to NATO has been particularly prominent in these discussions. Traditionally thought to be a weak spot on the pro-independence agenda, and most of all, in the Scottish National Party's (SNP) policy programme, the SNP overturned its long-term opposition to joining NATO at its 2012 National Conference (SNP Defence Policy Update 2012). This decision changed the parameters of the debate as it dispelled one of the pro-unionist key criticisms: that Scotland would try to free-ride on the security provided by different transatlantic security networks and be militarily isolated from its closest allies.

The SNP's long-term opposition to NATO had been underpinned by its fundamental anti-nuclear stance, and its conviction that it would not join the Alliance because of its nuclear first-strike capability. Despite the SNP's new stance, membership in NATO is therefore still conditional to the commitment of the Scottish Government (SG) to ban nuclear weapons in a written constitution; a position the SG has recently officially committed to in their Independence White Paper, *Scotland's Future* (Scottish Government [2013b](#), p. 251). This has resulted in a new debate about whether Scotland would or should be allowed membership of NATO under these circumstances. It has also triggered subsequent questions regarding Scotland's ability on the one hand, and the rUK's political will to allow an IS on the other, to play a role in transatlantic security arrangements by cooperating on areas such as intelligence gathering and sharing and by contributing to strategic and operational security provision across and beyond the transatlantic region (HM Government [2013b](#)).

This article seeks to examine potential obstacles to Scottish membership of NATO specifically as well as the political and strategic implications of an IS for transatlantic security more generally. It argues that there are a number of problems that an IS would need to deal with at the outset but that these do not necessarily constitute insurmountable barriers to it becoming a member of the Alliance. If Scotland could provide assurances that it would actively engage with strategic partners, assuage the anxiety of the UK Government regarding the

proposed removal of the UK's nuclear deterrent from Scotland, commit to NATO's Strategic Concept and transition its defence forces in a way that builds on existing Alliance strengths, we argue that the Scottish membership of NATO would make strategic sense for the Alliance.

Scottish incentives to fully integrate with existing transatlantic security structures are strong. As it does for other states in the transatlantic region, NATO provides a security guarantee which Scotland could not attain on its own. At present, there are 28 members of NATO, and it remains the security organisation of choice for a majority of European states – either as full members or associate countries like the post-neutral states such as Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden, which are members of NATO's Partnership for Peace. For small states with limited military capabilities, such as Denmark, Norway, the central and eastern European countries, and possibly an IS, membership in a military alliance can be particularly beneficial (Keohane [1969](#), Hey [2003](#), Thorhallsson [2006](#)). That said, as is exemplified by the Austrian, Finnish, Irish and Swedish cases, a small state like Scotland could equally exist without full NATO membership, not least because there is no imminent territorial threat, and equally, no political pressure to become a member of the Alliance. Notwithstanding the organisational and structural costs of transitioning to independent membership in NATO, it seems out of question that fully remaining outside NATO would be much more costly financially, and pertinently would make it much harder for Scotland to cooperate or even integrate with its key partners. This is particularly crucial for an IS's strategic relationship with rUK, which the SG has repeatedly highlighted as one of the key pillars of Scotland's potential future defence architecture (SNP Defence Update 2012, Scottish Government [2013b](#), p. 250).²

Potential Scottish membership in the EU in turn has so far mostly been discussed in the economic context. Despite a desire for a more integrated European security and defence framework, as has repeatedly been articulated in several key EU documents, Europe's security continues to be strongly underpinned by NATO (e.g., Council of the EU [2008](#)). The institutional structures put into place to operationalise the EU's Common Security Defence Policy (CSDP) strongly mirror their NATO equivalents; the capability development process within the EU is also almost entirely modelled on NATO's standards and frameworks of reference, which is why Scotland's potential future relationship with NATO is most crucial. Scottish membership of the EU as such is not the focus of this article but given the institutional, strategic and political overlap between NATO and the EU, Scottish involvement with the Alliance would always also condition its potential contribution to the EU's CSDP as well as other branches of EU external action.

Consequently, this article will refer to EU-related matters where appropriate without trying to give a full account of the EU membership question as such.

This article proceeds as follows: The opening section provides an overview of the challenges Scottish independence might pose for existing transatlantic security arrangements. It examines the potential obstacles that Scotland might face in becoming not only a full member of NATO, but also a trusted ally to regional partners both within and outside the EU. The following section then proceeds to assess the strategic opportunities for Scotland and the mitigating circumstances that could make Scottish membership of transatlantic security arrangements a workable political and strategic option and perhaps even open up new strategic opportunities for the region. In doing so, it looks at key areas where a Scottish Defence Force (SDF) could provide capabilities to its strategic partners and the way Scotland's geostrategic position is likely to provide incentives for its partners to promote its integration should independence become a reality. An independent Scotland would face a number of challenges in finding its place in international security structures, and many governments in the transatlantic area would at this given point in time prefer the status quo over such a scenario. However, in the event of independence, the political and institutional obstacles of integrating Scotland into existing security arrangements would also be conditioned by an altered set of options for its partners: given what an IS could offer in strategic and geopolitical terms they could unlikely afford isolating Scotland or hampering its transition in this regard.

Challenges

Several key aspects of transatlantic security in which Scottish independence might have problematic consequences for current NATO (and EU) members have been highlighted in the political debate. The most frequent arguments posited pertain to areas such as international terrorism and organised crime as well as the implications for intelligence cooperation (HM Government [2013b](#)). More prominently, however, particularly in the British domestic context, Scottish independence has been discussed in the context of the nuclear question and the potential implications for the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent (e.g., see House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee [2012](#)). This is a key issue around which the primary disagreements between the British and the Scottish Governments have revolved. There have been allegations that Scottish independence would force the rUK to unilaterally disarm its nuclear arsenal, which would place it in a difficult strategic position. Until recently, this was a hypothetical question, with analysis on this area being limited as a result (for an important exception see

Chalmers and Walker [2001](#)). The SNP's long-term position against nuclear weapons and the SG's intention to enshrine the illegality of nuclear weapons in a written constitution have provoked the UK Government to highlight this position as a serious impediment to Scottish membership of NATO. This political dispute raises several questions: to what extent are these areas of real concern to those assessing the impact of a Yes vote in 2014? To what extent do these policy issues matter for the USA and other NATO members? How will Scottish involvement in NATO and other transatlantic security arrangements be received in the wider strategic environment?

It has been postulated by some that an IS would become a 'weak-link', from which Islamic, or possibly Irish, terrorist networks could attack the rUK (Chalmers [2012](#), p. 9). Arguing this point, British Home Secretary Theresa May (Conservative Party) has made the claim that Scotland would be at an increased risk from transnational terrorism (cited in *The Guardian* [2012](#)). This was also echoed by former MI6 operative Baroness Meta Ramsay, who stated that Scotland was a 'soft target' (cited in Grant [2012](#), p. 26). This claim is grounded in the argument that Scotland would lack the intelligence apparatus with which to interface with counter-terrorism partners across the British Isles, and in particular, the wider transatlantic region (HM Government [2013b](#)). Consequently, it has been claimed that Scotland would not be a suitable candidate for becoming a partner in intelligence sharing – one of the key arguments of the SNP in the context of the independence debate. As a recent report of the *Scotland Institute* ([2013](#)) highlighted, there is disagreement between the SG and London as to whether an IS would be up to the task. The report also goes on to question whether other states, particularly rUK (and also the USA), would be willing to share all but the bare minimum of intelligence with the Scottish agencies. The report ([2013](#), p. 39) argues:

Bluntly put, the US will hardly commit to intelligence sharing with an IS intent on nuclear disarmament, and the rUK, in turn, would be unwilling to act as a conduit passing on privileged material.

Those opposing independence have signalled that the SG's and SNP's anti-nuclear stance would be a reason for Scotland to be denied membership in NATO or other regional security arrangements. As highlighted earlier, the SNP overturned its policy against membership of the Alliance at its October 2012 National Conference but did so on the condition that Scotland would prohibit nuclear weapons from being based on its sovereign territory (SNP Defence Update 2012). The debate surrounding whether this will prohibit Scotland's membership of NATO is now a key feature in the current constitutional debate.

As Malcolm Chalmers, Special Adviser to the UK Parliament's Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, noted in evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in the British House of Commons (2013, p. 151):

there would be little international sympathy, at least among the UK's traditional allies, were Scotland to insist that the UK's nuclear armed submarines leave its territory on a timescale that did not allow the rUK to construct alternative bases in England or Wales.

As a result, one would also expect that other NATO members – particularly the USA and France – would watch Scotland's negotiations over the removal of the UK's nuclear deterrent very closely (Walker [2012](#)). One can also imagine a scenario where international pressure impacts on Scotland's negotiations with the government of rUK. If the SG chose to force unilateral disarmament and push for the immediate removal of Trident it would undoubtedly inhibit Scotland's chances of joining NATO as part of its transition to independence.

As the defence debate has progressed, the issue of whether Scotland would sign up to NATO's Strategic Concept's (2010) has been indelibly linked to the timescales for the removal of the nuclear fleet from Scotland. As the UK Government's paper *Scotland analysis: defence* (2013) argued: 'The SNP's Policy position, to seek membership of NATO for an Independent Scotland state while being unwilling to subscribe to the nuclear aspects of NATO's Strategic Concept ... would represent a significant complication to its membership' (p. 11). As the report reaffirms elsewhere, all 'NATO nations, whether they possess nuclear weapons or not, are required to subscribe to NATO's Strategic Concept' (p. 62).

Similarly, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee ([2013](#), para 38) has argued that 'Scotland could expect to face robust negotiations and would not necessarily be in a position to unilaterally shape its membership terms in line with its domestic political commitments on nuclear weapons'. This view is echoed by the House of Commons Defence Committee report on *The Defence Implications of Possible Scottish Independence* ([2013](#), p. 37), which states that 'no new member would be allowed to join NATO if that state had unresolved military or territorial disputes with other countries'. The report continues by further stating that 'NATO is a nuclear alliance and we believe that any action likely to disrupt the operation of the UK's strategic deterrent would undoubtedly influence NATO Member countries' attitudes towards an application from Scotland' (2013, p. 38).

However, it is worth pointing out that the SG and the SNP have never issued any statement suggesting that Scotland would not be willing to fulfil the criteria for membership. Rather, they stated that membership of NATO would be sought, with the caveat that no nuclear weapons would be hosted on Scottish territory

(SNP Defence Update 2012). This debate has moved on with the recent publication of the SG's White Paper (2013), which signalled the SG's intention to fulfil the full criteria of membership by signing NATO's Strategic Concept (2010, p. 14), thus accepting the provision that NATO is a nuclear alliance. Consequently, the SG has committed itself to a 'don't ask' policy similar to Norway and Denmark, which would allow naval vessels of the Alliance to dock in Scottish harbours without a requirement to state whether they were carrying a nuclear payload. Going further, the White Paper (2013, p. 250) states that: 'The basic premise of NATO is that all members must make an active commitment to the Alliance and Scotland would recognise and play our full part in building collective security and capability'. This intention removes one of the major barriers to Scottish NATO membership.

Throughout the past two years, the SG and SNP have consistently highlighted the prospect of Scotland working in cooperation with rUK and other allies. This policy position was committed to at the SNP National Conference in 2012 (SNP defence update) and has been underlined on several occasions by SNP defence spokesperson, Angus Robertson ([2013a](#), [2013b](#)). Although the SG has remained intent on its plan to ban nuclear weapons from Scottish territory in the event of independence, it has never suggested that Scotland would force the unilateral disarmament of rUK, or seek to force the diminution of British defence capabilities. On the question of the UK deterrent, the official position from the SG on this issue has been to secure 'the earliest safe removal of Trident from Scotland' (Sturgeon [2013](#)). The SG ([2012](#)) stated publically that it would work towards removal in cooperation with the government of the rUK under the terms of the Edinburgh Agreement. As Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon ([2013](#)) argued:

Following a 'yes' vote in the referendum, it would be the responsibility of the Scottish and UK Governments to continue to work together ... to agree the arrangements for the safe and timely withdrawal of Trident nuclear weapons systems from an Independent Scotland.

Though the position of the SG and the SNP has consistently chimed with public opinion in Scotland, there is still no proposition for a fixed timescale for removal. The SG White Paper suggests its preferred option would be to remove the nuclear fleet by the end of the first parliamentary term following independence – approximately six to seven years from the referendum date. The wording used in the White Paper, 'with a view to removal of Trident' (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 247) indicates that this is a preferred negotiating position rather than a fixed timeline. This signals the prospect for a negotiated settlement which could work

in the interest of both sides. The exact time needed to remove nuclear weapons remains contested; Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament have suggested as little as two years, while other defence analysts have suggested a period of 10–15 years or longer (see *Terminating Trident 2012*). How long this would take would be determined by political expediency, the tone of negotiations and the interests of Scotland and rUK. This is a significant issue; however, of NATO's 28 member states only three – the USA, UK and France – possess nuclear weapons, and of itself Scotland's anti-nuclear stance should not preclude membership of the Alliance. The nuclear question would be required to be handled with care given the complications which would result for rUK (particularly in terms of finding an appropriate site). Yet, as is covered in more detail later, given that the SG's White Paper outlines a transition to full operating capability during a phased transition depends on good relations with rUK the nuclear discussion would not be divorced from other aspects of the defence debate, and both sides would lose out if this overriding issue was not handled constructively.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that under the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Scotland would be prohibited from hosting nuclear weapons on its sovereign territory. It would therefore be illegal under international law for Scotland to house Trident indefinitely or for the rUK or USA to be seen to 'coerce' a state whose people oppose nuclear weapons, and have democratically voted for independence (Walker [2012](#)). This would require the Scottish and rUK Governments to work together to achieve a suitable outcome during transition negotiations. Although it would be important politically for the SG to agree sufficient time for London to remove the nuclear deterrent from Scotland (perhaps granting extended basing rights), it is likely that there will be pressure on both sides to ensure that negotiations are speedy and are conducted in an appropriate manner.

If Scotland secedes from the UK, there will be challenges resulting from the political and strategic implications for all states operating in the transatlantic region. States rarely wish to actively alter the status quo unless it is in their interest to do so (Waltz [1979](#)). This however, does not necessarily imply that regional stakeholders would not see a new actor entering the political and strategic arena as a potential partner and ally. The *realpolitik* of the international situation could quickly alter the balance, and ultimately recondition the circumstances for Scotland to become an integrated member of transatlantic security structures. As discussed in more detail later, Scotland commands an important geostrategic position, which could bring benefits to transatlantic security if an independent Scotland were to join the Alliance.

Opportunities for Scotland in a reformed Alliance and a new security landscape

Scottish NATO membership lies at the heart of the defence-related debate about independence. A lot of the political and academic discussions surrounding NATO membership have so far focused on the obstacles IS might encounter in this context based on the SG's stance on the nuclear issue and with regard to the Scottish defence posture more generally. To assess the potential implications of independence and the negotiating position IS might find itself in, it is also important to acknowledge the dynamic nature of international security institutions. NATO's Strategic Concept of 2010 underpins the purpose of the Alliance in its current makeup, but NATO as an organisation has changed dramatically since its inception. Beginning life in 1949, NATO's core function up until the end of the cold war was territorial defence of western Europe, containment of communism and acting as a deterrent against Soviet aggression. The Alliance continues to underpin the security of the transatlantic region in the post-cold war era; however, NATO has undergone significant changes and has assumed a far greater political role than originally conceived. While adjusting the organisation to the new security landscape, NATO member countries had to deal with a range of factors and accompanying scenarios that were not foreseeable during the height of the cold war.

The political and strategic implications of this transition have largely not been factored into the current debate regarding Scottish independence, with the UK Government highlighting the limits of Scottish international reach as well as prospective capability shortfalls, which are posited as potentially insurmountable problems as Scotland makes the transition to a fully operational capacity (HM Government [2013a](#)). However, NATO's transformation agenda throughout the post-cold war era, which has seen it transition from a defensive alliance to one which seeks to mitigate a range of diverse risks (Williams [2009](#)) has very much bearing on the debate regarding Scottish membership of the Alliance. Today's NATO is more than a military alliance, which opens up opportunities for new members like an IS to contribute in ways that were not foreseeable in the recent past. NATO membership of an IS, as will be shown in greater detail later, would also open new possibilities for the Alliance and provide the organisation with new ways of capitalising on the strengths and distinctive characteristics of its member countries and partners.

With regard to capabilities, as will be discussed in the final section of this article, Scotland would not require, nor be expected to provide, full-spectrum forces in order to qualify for an advanced partnership with NATO, and eventually, full

membership (and also to make a military contribution to the EU's CSDP). Rather, it could provide relative strengths including full interoperability within NATO and the CSDP, and develop niche capabilities similar to other small states that could make a valuable contribution to the full spectrum of operations, which transatlantic security policies have evolved to include in the last two decades (Moroney [2004](#)). What is more, ongoing cuts to national defence budgets across NATO (with the exception of Norway and Poland) and the EU take pressure off any aspiring member in the sense that even established core states in both organisations do no longer provide the high-end hard capabilities that placed them at the heart of transatlantic security matters in the first instance. This challenges the critical proposition that Scotland could be denied membership of either NATO or the EU based on any capability shortfalls or limitations to its defence posture. For example, NATO's 'Smart Defence' initiative is driven by austerity and a requirement for European states to maximise their defence cooperation in order that NATO remains prepared for future challenges (Rasmussen [2013](#)). Although some members of the Alliance would likely prefer maintaining the status quo, it is an entirely different question what their actual attitude would be should Scotland indeed become independent. In an era of defence austerity (Flanders [2011](#)) paired with the strategic reality of non-military security challenges becoming ever more prominent, even for the Alliance, one can legitimately question why Scotland would be excluded.

We suggest that contrary to critical propositions of an IS being unable to live up to the minimum requirements of membership, Scotland can bring political and strategic value to transatlantic security arrangements, which neither NATO nor the EU's CSDP would be wise to exclude.³ Scotland would expect difficulties in negotiating memberships with NATO and the EU if the SG was seen to act irresponsibly with regard to rUK positions, particularly regarding nuclear weapons or any of the political and institutional parameters of accession. However, as pointed out earlier, with both Edinburgh and London agreeing to respect the outcome of the referendum it seems unlikely that the SG would take such a route in the first place.

In addition, just as the Alliance has transitioned from a cold war conventional territorial defence model to one more focused on dealing with a variety of twenty-first century security issues, it now also more strongly emphasises many of the normative underpinnings of European integration, which Scotland has already endorsed as part of an EU member state. As current Secretary General, Rasmussen ([2013](#)) underlined, 'NATO is far more than a military alliance. NATO is a community of values. It is a family of nations that believes in freedom,

democracy, and the rule of law'. This view also informs the 'open door' policy of the Alliance, which openly envisages further rounds of enlargement (Strategic Concept 2010, p. 25). Overall, there is little reason why Scotland should, or would, be prevented from joining the Alliance subject to successful post-independence negotiations with London. Scotland already possesses the political institutions and democratic credentials for membership in both NATO and the EU. While it would be required to build military capability, and independent organisational identity and experience, Scotland clearly has the potential to be a valued ally and member state in the future. Besides Scotland's future in NATO, the technicalities and legal requirements of transferring EU membership to an IS are of course still subject to debate within the UK and the European Commission. However, as Scotland already fulfils the *acquis communautaire* and Copenhagen criteria (Keating²⁰¹³), Scottish membership *in principle* seems a widely unchallenged scenario both internationally and domestically although, as is the case with NATO membership, European Government officials have been reluctant to express any such view openly. Coming back to the nuclear issue – the SG's intention to remove Trident from Faslane and Coulport – which some have highlighted as a potential deal breaker for Scotland, it can be assumed that a negotiated settlement whereby Scotland allows an appropriate timescale for rUK to remove Trident would allay concerns internationally that transatlantic security would be undermined by Scottish independence in this regard.

There are, of course, no guarantees that Scotland would be welcomed internationally as an active part of the transatlantic security community. The UK is a major NATO member, and the Alliance as well as all allied governments have understandably distanced themselves from engaging in this domestic debate. Many have been keen to highlight all the potential challenges and institutional implications. Notwithstanding these concerns altogether, however, it is prudent to regard Scottish independence as a possible scenario, which should it materialise, the international system and the security environment of the transatlantic arena would need to adapt to. As the following sections highlight, Scotland's potential to meet the obligations and responsibilities as full member of NATO means that it would not just be in the obvious interests of Scotland to integrate into transatlantic security structures, it would also be the best option for its partners should the situation arise.

Geostrategic implications of Scottish independence

Given its geostrategic position at the outskirts of north-western Europe any strategic partner and security organisation would struggle to deny that inclusion

of an IS was to the benefit of not just the stability and security provision in the region itself but also in the interest of the transatlantic community more generally. Sitting at the heart of the North Atlantic area, Scotland's geostrategic position marks it out as a pivotal regional partner that could not just exert influence over the North and Irish Seas, but have potential strategic outreach across the Eastern Atlantic and the High North. Although the UK currently underpins security in this area, it would cease to do so if Scotland becomes independent. Both NATO and rUK itself would therefore do well in plugging Scotland into existing defence and security structures. As Spaven ([1983](#), p. 9) observed during the cold war:

Scotland is usually seen as a peripheral country, stuck out on the north-west fringes of Europe. To military planners things look rather different. Scotland sits in a commanding position overlooking the vast expanses of the north-east Atlantic. It lies on the shortest routes by air, sea and telecommunications from the USA to Europe, and it has large expanses of sparsely populated terrain suitable for military planning.

This geostrategic significance remains. Similar to the geostrategic position of Norway and Iceland, Scotland presents itself as a scarcely populated and geographically exposed territory with a vast coastline, which could be seen as a challenge and source of potential vulnerability. However, these significant circumstances also constitute a strategic potential that the Alliance as well as the EU would be ill-advised not to tap into. Since the end of the cold war, geopolitical circumstances in the British Isles have changed to the North as well as to the South. The nature of security challenges has changed radically to the point where any credible military threat to the region has become close to unthinkable, although it still has to be considered that concerns over Russian geopolitical interests have remained a crucial frame of reference for central and eastern European allies in particular. That said, non-conventional security issues, such as global warming, environmental degradation, maritime pollution, resource scarcity and energy security, have become more prominent even in the global perception, and this is reflected in the strategic outlook of adjacent states including Denmark, Norway, Iceland and also Ireland, Sweden and Finland (Borgerson [2009](#), Johnston [2010](#), Haftendorn [2011](#)). For instance, although the UK Government has recently published its Arctic policy framework, *Adapting to Change: UK Policy towards the Arctic* (HM Government [2013c](#)), out of the strategic actors in the region, Britain has so far placed less of a prominent focus on these new security challenges and the sub-region. It has instead striven more distinctively towards keeping up a conventional defence portfolio and putting a lot of effort and

resource into force projection, which can be seen in the British contribution to operations with more global reach, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Ritchie [2011](#)).

As a small state, IS could typically be expected to place greater emphasis on the immediate geographical surroundings than a larger state like the UK would do (see Bauwens *et al.* [1996](#), Inbar and Sheffer [1997](#), Hey [2003](#), Wivel [2005](#)). While this implies that Scotland would not be looking to mirror the British power politics approach it would also open up new avenues for Scotland to play a more proactive role in these areas of primary strategic interest. As is exemplified by the Nordic countries, and most notably, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, having political impact within transatlantic security organisations as well as strategic leverage across and beyond the region is neither necessarily linked to a robust military posture – including a nuclear capability or to any sort of definitive level of strategic assertiveness. The SNP has already highlighted that the Nordic states are of particular importance when it comes to developing a defence model for IS (Robertson [2013b](#)). Apart from geographical proximity, IS would in many ways be a suitable follower of the Nordic examples, most notably the one of Denmark and Norway. Both have been active and compliant NATO members without providing a full range of capabilities. Both were faced with strategic policy choices after the end of the cold war but NATO's transformed and more comprehensive agenda has ultimately provided them with opportunities to focus their efforts on a selective number of niche capabilities as well as on ensuring interoperability and sustainable force developments (Moroney [2004](#), Petersson and Saxi [2012](#)).

That said, an IS would unlikely sign up for a similarly high level of ambition as Norway and Denmark have demonstrated in recent years given that at the outset it would have to put greater effort into rebuilding basic structures for an independent Scottish defence apparatus. The Nordic states have not officially signalled their support of Scottish independence, however, the close proximity and shared strategic interest would make cooperation likely if it materialises. The inclusion of IS into regional networks and defence cooperation initiatives including, for example, Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO) would certainly have strategic appeal for regional powers (Bailes *et al.* [2013](#)).

With regard to Scotland's role within NATO, the future of existing military infrastructure on Scottish territory is of course crucial. Scotland presently hosts remote radar stations at Royal Air Force (RAF) Buchan in Aberdeenshire as well as a site in Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides. As the UK Government has made clear, both are integral components of present UK air defence and 'provide vital long-range coverage of the northern approaches to the UK and neighbouring

NATO nations', as well as enabling the 'Control and Reporting Centre at Boulmer in Northumberland to control Quick Alert fighters at extended ranges' (HM Government [2013a](#), p. 24). Other assets include the British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre, a facility which is used for subsea and surface operations and which would be useful for NATO, RAF Prestwick – home to the Scottish Air Traffic Control Centre, an air traffic control asset that monitors the UK's northern airspace. These and other assets, including the joint headquarters capability at Faslane which is utilised during NATO's annual joint exercises (Agile Warrior) would remain important to the rUK and other NATO states. In addition to other military resources, the defence ranges at Cape Wrath and the Hebrides provide Scotland with existing assets and facilities which are compatible with NATO structures and procedures, and which the SG has confirmed would be continued to be utilised by its allies (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 246). These, taken together with an IS potential to provide further military capabilities to regional and global missions underpin Scotland as an important geostrategic base.

To what extent can an IS contribute militarily to transatlantic security?

An independent but integrated SDF would be an important partner for regional allies such as Norway and Denmark, and the EU's CSDP, as it would for the Alliance itself. Of course, much will depend on the final model of a SDF, which is why after coming to a negotiated settlement with the rUK (2014–16) it would be essential for the SG to undertake a Defence and Security Review (2016), which has been outlined in the recent White Paper (Scottish Government [2013a](#), pp. 235–236). The SG has acknowledged that an SDF would be unable initially to take full responsibility for Scotland's security and would require early assistance from rUK and transatlantic partners, and has signalled its desire to work closely with the Westminster Government (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 238) This would include shared responsibilities between governments and the retention of UK military bases in Scotland, with a view to continuing this position if in the interests of both states (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 238, pp. 246–247). The SG's White Paper sets out its intention for a 'phased' transition of its armed forces over ten years, building its capability in line with a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) in 2016, which would fully examine Scotland's territorial requirements and obligations as a partner in transatlantic security. Given that the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) is in the midst of significant downsizing (HM Government [2010](#)) and struggling to meet its targets for its reserve force 2020 (Ministry of Defence [2013](#)) vision, both sides may benefit from taking more time to fully transition in a sustainable way (Dorman [2012](#)).

The SG (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 237) has identified five 'defence priorities' for an IS: (1) 'maintaining the commitment to a budget for defence and security in an IS of £2.5 billion'; (2) 'securing the speediest safe withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Scotland'; (3) building a focus on maritime capabilities, such as air and sea-based patrol, and specialist forces able to operate around our coasts, protecting Scotland's maritime assets and contributing to collective security in the North Atlantic; (4) progressively building a total of 15,000 regular and 5000 reserve personnel over the ten years following independence; and (5) reconfiguring the defence estate inherited at the point of independence to meet Scotland's needs, including the transition of Faslane to a conventional naval base and joint headquarters of SDFs. It has also committed to assess whether Rosyth could be brought back into use as a naval base on the east coast, giving the SDF flexibility and quicker response times to potential incidents and risks to oil infrastructure in the North Sea (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 245).

The phased transition outlined in the White Paper would provide the SDF with an estimated total of '7500 regular and 2000 reserve personnel at the point of Independence'. This would be increased to a predicted '10,000 regulars and 3500 reserves by the end of the five years following independence'. Over the 10-year transition period, the SG envisages meeting its maximum strength of 15,000 regulars and 5000 reserves (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 237). At the point of independence, the SG's has committed to naval, air and land forces able to defend Scottish territorial interests. These outlines would be subject to negotiations but as stipulated by the SG, Scotland's naval capabilities would comprise 'one naval squadron to secure Scotland's maritime interests and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and contribute to joint capability with partners in Scotland's geographical neighbourhood'. The squadron would consist of two frigates from the Royal Navy's (RN's) current fleet: a command platform for naval operations, up to four mine counter-measure vessels from the RN Fleet, offshore patrol vessels and up to six patrol boats and auxiliary support ships. The SG has committed to a second naval squadron during the transition period, and which would 'contribute to NATO and other operations outside home waters' (Scottish Government [2013b](#), p. 241).

Scottish land forces in 2016 would have an army 'HQ function and an all-arms brigade, with three infantry/marine units', which would be equipped in the first instance from a share of UK assets. It is estimated that this will comprise 3500 regular and 1200 reserve forces, rising to an estimated 4700 regular personnel throughout the transition period. While the first task of a Scots army would be territorial defence, there is now a commitment that Scottish troops would

participate in overseas missions. This would be decided by the Scottish Parliament and the decision to send troops to war would be undertaken by a Triple Lock system similar to the Republic of Ireland (Scottish Government [2013b](#), p. 251). While it is expected that there would still be limitations to Scottish involvement in major stabilisation operations (something tempered by public opinion and cost alike), it is important to reiterate the SG's commitment to contribute to Alliance operations and the onus would be on Scotland to demonstrate that it has the willingness to do so during accession negotiations with NATO.

In the main, the SG argues that this will be achieved through strong naval forces and an enhanced air capability able to, including Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA), significantly contribute to security in the North Atlantic. Again at the time of independence, the SG anticipates that its air forces will be equipped with a share of UK assets and will have the capability to police Scottish airspace 'within NATO'. Among the initial assets the SG proposes a Quick Reaction Alert squadron, consisting of a 'minimum of 12 Typhoon fast-jets based at Lossiemouth on Scotland's Moray Coast'. It is anticipated by the SG that the number of fast-jets would rise to 16 over time, thus enabling it to contribute to NATO missions 'overseas' (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 242). Underpinning both naval and air forces, the White Paper has committed to the procurement of up to four MPA (Scottish Government [2013a](#), p. 242); a capability that if delivered quickly would bring added value to Scotland's neighbours.

As noted earlier, Scotland's geostrategic position combined with the shifting strategic priorities to its North (Borgerson [2009](#)) means that Scotland would be able to fulfil a role valuable to allies by assisting to secure the North Atlantic and High North. Priority investment in both naval and air assets (as outlined by the White Paper) would enable it to do this, building capacity in areas where it could prioritise its own strategic interest whilst also providing valuable capabilities which underpin its ability to cooperate with allies.⁴ While it will take time to reach full capability, as well as building operational experience, its commitment to do so would provide a powerful case for membership of key defence organisations.

Although Scotland would be unable to provide the range of tasks undertaken by the UK forces globally, its geographical location puts it in a position where it can enhance maritime security currently lacking from a UK perspective. As a consequence of the UK's strategic focus towards the Middle East, and budget cuts announced as part of the SDSR (HM Government [2010](#)) which have seen the RN's surface fleet slimmed down to 19 vessels, the RN does not presently base any major surface vessels in Scotland and has thus struggled to maintain security;

most notably when the RN was unable to interdict a Russian carrier fleet which sheltered only a few miles from the Scottish Coast in 2010; a situation which was played out for a second time in January 2013. On both occasions, the RN had to rely on assets in Portsmouth and which were unable to react with speed to these threats.

Scotland's geostrategic position and its interest in developing a high-end naval capability make it well placed to participate in NATO's standing maritime groups. The purpose of these groups is to provide a continuous maritime capability for NATO operations, and have been described as being a 'cornerstone of NATO's maritime strategy'. The groups comprise two Immediate Reaction Forces (SNMCMG1 and SNMCMG2) as well as a Standing NATO Maritime Mine Countermeasure Group. While groups SNMCMG1 and SNMCMG2 can be deployed globally during wartime, SNMCMG1's main area of operation is in the Eastern Atlantic; it is currently led by Norway.

The UK has not provided any assets to SNMCMG1 since 2009, and it is therefore likely that Scottish involvement would be welcomed. Similar circumstances apply to the EU's recently developed maritime strategy, which has resulted in substantial operational involvement of EU forces, for example, in multinational efforts at fighting piracy and organised crime at sea off the Somali coast.⁵ An IS could make an important contribution to this particular niche of the CSDP. What seems important to highlight in this regard is that despite concerns that Scottish EU membership would need to be negotiated and would potentially place Scotland in an indefinite institutional position for some time, this would have a marginal impact on the way IS could be invited to contribute to CSDP operations. IS would, as many candidate countries and partners of the EU before, be included in the party of 'contributing third states' which gives countries that are willing and able to be involved in international crisis management operations an avenue to contribute, granting them access to the same level of operational involvement as it is held by full members. There is no reason to assume that IS would be denied such involvement after this has been common CSDP practice with states that have a much more difficult political relationship with the EU, such as Turkey and even Russia.

The procurement of an MPA fleet would provide a relative specialism currently lacking from the UK defence inventory. It would thus be well placed to fill existing security gaps resulting from cuts in the British MOD budget. The decommissioning of the UK's Nimrod fleet in 2010 and the MOD SDSR's (HM Government [2010](#), p. 27) decision to scrap the Nimrod MRA4 programme has created a major capability gap – exposing large expanses of sea lanes without adequate security provision.

Critics of the decision to withdraw the MRA4 capability have highlighted the downgrading of UK capacity to ensure adequate surveillance in the North Atlantic. This has, as a result, undermined UK and transatlantic intelligence and surveillance coverage, which is easily exploitable for those with the necessary know-how. Indeed, the House of Commons Defence Committee's ([2011](#), para 137) Sixth Report of Session 2010–2012 concluded that:

We deeply regret the decision to dispense with the Nimrod MRA4 and have serious concerns regarding the capability gaps this has created in the ability to undertake the military tasks envisaged in the SDSR. This appears to be a clear example of the need to make large savings overriding the strategic security of the UK and the capability requirements of the Armed Forces. We are not convinced that UK Armed Forces can manage this capability gap within existing resources.

The UK is now the only European state with extensive coastline not to have this specialised defence asset. The MOD currently has no plans to reinstate an MPA fleet and has relied on allies to cooperate using their own assets (see House of Commons Defence Committee [2012](#)). The evidence provided to the defence committee on this issue has highlighted both the need to cooperate with allies and long-standing collaborative programmes would be beneficial to UK interests. Reiterating this point, the minister noted that:

There is a great deal we can do in cooperation with our allies and partners. There is a great deal that we do in the way of cooperation and information sharing, and there are various new initiatives being undertaken in NATO and in the EU that would assist international cooperation in this field in the future.

There would be undoubted costs associated with Scottish procurement of an MPA fleet, and as in other areas it would take time to build operational experience, as well as the capability itself. However, if the SG's commitment to procure MPA was realised, Scotland could possess a powerful asset useful not just for NATO and the EU but also for the rUK.

The extent to which the SG envisages its defence forces following independence will depend on negotiations with the Westminster Government and it is to be expected that there would be compromises on both sides; therefore, there are no guarantees that Scotland would get everything on its wish list. As Malcolm Chalmers ([2013](#)) has noted, the rUK would not want to diminish its own capabilities, and this will lead to hard negotiations over assets. This said, a future SDF would not start from scratch. As noted by both the UK and Scottish Government papers, Scotland already has a range of major military sites in place, and while this infrastructure will require to be realigned to meet Scottish interests they are significant assets. In addition, although Scotland's share of defence

assets would depend on negotiations with rUK, its division would also be determined by what it has contributed to UK defence spend. On a straight division of assets Scotland could expect to receive approximately an 8.6 per cent share (according to 2007 figures), thus providing the foundation from which to shape an independent defence structure (HM Government²⁰⁰⁷). Under a different scenario, negotiations might lead to a situation where Scotland receives a smaller share of UK assets, but receives financial compensation to make up the shortfall (Chalmers ²⁰¹³). This might include compensation for capabilities that Scotland did not need or want, but which its taxpayers had contributed. The UK's nuclear deterrent, the new Queen Elizabeth carriers and the Joint Strike Fighter fall under this category. Using this money in conjunction with the SNP's proposed £2.5 billion defence budget, Scotland would have a comparative defence spend to other similar-sized states in NATO.

Scottish taxpayers currently contribute £3.4 billion to the UK defence budget, with just under £2 billion being spent in Scotland. Although the SG budget will have to factor in the financial cost of start-up and running costs (especially those associated with big ticket items such as Typhoon), it is considerably bigger than present (Scottish Government^{2013b}, p. 22). Though still significantly smaller when compared to the UK, the phased transition outlined by the SG provides an indication of how the SG intends to deal with the start-up costs associated with building a credible SDF. Taking this negotiation position, whereby Scotland gains the military assets needed to found the SDF in conjunction to a large financial endowment would not necessarily work against it. Financial compensation would provide planners with opportunities to explore potential capabilities over the 10-year transition, releasing money that could also be used for start-up costs.

As highlighted earlier, Scotland would not need a full range of capabilities to get involved in either NATO or the CSDP. Like other similar-sized states, Scotland would be able to defend its core interests and engage with international partners by developing a defence force that builds on relative strengths whereby it can provide added value to transatlantic security organisations. Scotland would have the opportunity to do what few other states are in a position to do: create a defence architecture that reflects new international priorities without being burdened by organisational barriers and strategic legacies which hamper adaptation to new security threats. One should in no way downplay the challenges associated with building a new defence force; however, in the event of independence the SG would thus be able to underpin an SDF with an adaptive model where the services are suited to the strategic milieu it enters as an independent state rather than being determined by existing structures and

dependencies. An IS defence posture would also have the benefit of enabling Scotland to concentrate on areas that are of political and strategic interest, but which are currently not sufficiently undertaken by the UK. Taking these policy announcements on board, if these come to fruition there is an argument to be made that an SDF could have the potential in the longer term to provide a defence capability that could enhance rather than diminish the security of the British Isles and the transatlantic area.

Conclusion

This article has set out to examine what challenges and obstacles would prohibit Scotland's path into transatlantic security structures should independence become a reality. Until recently, the possibilities of Scottish NATO membership seemed compromised by the SNP and SG's plan to constitutionally ban nuclear weapons from Scottish territory. It therefore seems likely that early Scottish membership of NATO would be hinged on its final position on Trident. However, the SG's White Paper on independence has indicated that it would adhere to NATO's status as a nuclear alliance and has as a result removed one of the biggest barriers to membership so far highlighted by the UK Government. Concerning the timescale of the removal of the nuclear deterrent from Scotland, this article acknowledges that Scotland could expect difficulties of membership in international organisations if it was seen to act irresponsibly in negotiations with rUK. This said, having an anti-nuclear stance domestically is unlikely to prohibit membership when the SG has underlined its commitment to NATO obligations. Based on declarations from the SNP and SG, and a softening on this position in its White Paper on independence there is reason to surmise that an IS would act responsibly in negotiations with London. Given that the SG's blueprint for its defence forces relies heavily on a phased transition, something that would require good relations with the rUK, it would be in Scottish interest to come to a settlement on this issue. The nuclear issue can be viewed as a potential bargaining chip for both parties: The SG would need to work closely with London not only because of its transition but also because it would have bearing on NATO membership. With Scotland's accession to transatlantic security organisation at stake, its requirement for a cooperative transition of defence forces, and the potential that the rUK could lose its deterrent, the Trident issue is of central importance of both parties and it is likely that negotiations would produce an outcome acceptable to both. It is fully accepted that any plans to instigate the removal of Trident in the short term would have implications to Scotland's

candidacy of the Alliance; however, if that issue was resolved this too would alleviate any apprehension among NATO members.

It is important to reiterate that although there could be obstacles to Scottish membership of the Alliance initially, Scotland's geostrategic position and political outlook, and its ability to fill existing military gaps once independent could also make it an important regional ally. When considering the changing geostrategic environment – especially in regard to new security risks and a growing strategic focus on the High North – leaving Scotland isolated would damage the existing security architecture more than accepting Scotland's membership. This is especially important in reference to Scotland's Nordic neighbours who have strategic interests similar to Scotland and who are therefore likely to seek Scottish involvement in regional military structures. As we note, it will take time for an IS to transition from being part of the rUK; however, this should not be thought of as an insurmountable major barrier to membership if an IS sets out why and where it can add specialist value of importance to members of transatlantic security organisations.

As discussed earlier, the SG defence outline is premised on the inheritance of a range of capabilities as a share of defence assets from the UK. Whether the SG receives everything in its wish list would depend on negotiations with London, and as such its proposed SDSR (2016) may alter Scottish aspirations and involvement in transatlantic security frameworks, at least in the short term. Nonetheless, although the costs associated with the creation of an SDF and the eventual order of battle cannot be fully known until such time as Scotland became independent, the SG's commitment to work with allies, primarily through NATO and also in other regional organisations, provides an indication of its defence and security intentions. Given that Europe and the USA, through both NATO and the EU, are championing increased defence cooperation between states it is likely that Scotland would become a full member of these security organisations. Whether this is achieved as part of a transition to independence or through accession negotiations (which seems the most likely scenario) is open to debate.

We acknowledge that there would be pressure on the government of a newly IS to provide assurances to potential strategic partners. However, as the experience of other small states has demonstrated, an IS could bring added value to NATO and other transatlantic organisations over time. As noted, there will be costs associated with creating an independent defence establishment and forces. This could be alleviated to some extent by the phased transition envisaged by the SG. Building capabilities would be a priority for a newly IS, and as outlined in the SG's

White Paper, it would seek cooperation during this time. Throughout the transition, the onus would be on Scotland to fully demonstrate that it could play an active role in the Alliance. This said however, Scotland's important geostrategic position in the heart of the North Atlantic, its potential strengths and the SG's commitment to fully abide by NATO's strategic concept cannot be overlooked.

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Notes

1. The agreement was signed by the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, Scottish Secretary of State, Michael Moore, First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond ([2012](#)) and Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon on 15 October 2012, creating the legal basis for the way the referendum takes place and is received by the parties involved.

2. The majority of European states would expect the leaders of an IS to demonstrate their inclination and willingness for Scotland to join NATO, which could smooth Scotland's way into the wider European security framework.
3. Although Scotland's estimated defence budget would not reach the 2 per cent GDP that membership supposes, currently only three – USA, UK and France – match this target, which makes it unlikely to be a deal breaker (Scotland Institute 2013, p. 55).
4. See footnote 1.
5. While NATO is operating in the same mission space with a very similar mandate, the EU's maritime operation 'Atalanta' has even taken on precedence as the more resourced and sustainable mission (Gebhard and Smith [2014](#)).

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