



# Scotland's defence - safer in the UK

## *Briefing note*

**April 2016**

Scotland In Union is a non-party movement which unites people around a positive view of Scotland in the UK. We are a not-for-profit organisation. We have supporters from all points on the political spectrum, and many diverse views about how to improve life in the Scotland. This briefing note is designed to help make the case for a stronger Scotland in the UK. For more information, please see [www.scotlandinunion.co.uk](http://www.scotlandinunion.co.uk)

## Scotland's defence – safer in the UK

*Scotland plays a key role in the Atlantic alliance and global security as part of the UK, contributing fully to the UK's professional armed forces. Our armed forces are the envy of many countries, and are universally respected for their capability.*

*If it left the UK, Scotland would lose influence over Western defence policy, thus, in effect, losing influence over its own defence. Nationalist policies would undermine the UK's role as a key member of NATO, and Scotland's armed forces and defence-related industries would face rapid decline.*

*Fortunately, in 2014 Scots decided to stay in the UK and thus we continue to wield international influence and benefit fully from global alliances and co-operation. As a result we are safer abroad and at home in today's uncertain world.*

### **A proud record and a great contribution**

As Adam Smith said, "the first duty of the sovereign, that of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies can be performed only by means of a military force."

The United Kingdom benefits from first rate defence forces. In conjunction with the Foreign Office and intelligence agencies they protect Scots citizens and interests overseas<sup>1</sup> and keep us safe at home. Ultimately our safety rests in the hands of the men and women of our armed forces. The Royal Navy, the British Army and the Royal Air Force also fulfil our treaty obligations and carry out operations for altruistic and humanitarian reasons. People in Scotland are as well protected as in any country, thanks to the defence forces of the United Kingdom.

Scotland has made an extraordinary contribution to British military success. In the last century, Scottish troops played distinguished roles in common British causes in two World Wars, the Cold War and other conflicts and peacekeeping missions around the world. Scottish regiments and Scottish soldiers, sailors and air force personnel have proud records and traditions of achievement and excellence.

Today, Scottish units and service personnel are fully integrated in the UK's defence forces, playing a vital role in global security. The UK has the world's fourth largest defence budget, and is one of only a handful of countries capable of operating a full spectrum of military force with global reach, connected with other capable allies.

As a result the UK and Scotland are central players in the Western alliance which upholds not just the security of the British Isles and Europe, but the rule of international law around the world. The UK retains a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, helping it to 'punch above its weight' in global politics, and thus to look after the interests of all the people of the UK.

### **NATO membership**

Nationalist plans for the defence of an independent Scotland involve breaking away certain units and assets from the UK's defence forces and using that as a base to create, over ten years, a defence force of c. 15,000 regular personnel and 5,000 reservists<sup>2</sup>. This cadre and defence expenditure would

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<sup>1</sup> An independent Scotland would not have the capability to protect Scottish interests globally. For example, in a crisis abroad that threatened the safety of Scots citizens it is unlikely that Scots forces alone would be able to help. During the Libyan crisis of 2011 Alex Salmond urged the UK government to do more to help stranded Scots oil workers. That would not have been an option if he had got his way in the 2014 referendum.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 6 *Scotland's Future, your guide to an independent Scotland*, Scottish Government 2013.

relate roughly proportionately to the UK's according to Scotland's current population share of the UK.

During the 2014 referendum campaign, the nationalists envisaged Scotland staying in NATO. However, NATO officials made clear that Scotland would have to apply to join NATO afresh, with entry needing unanimous approval from all other members. Since NATO is a nuclear alliance, and all NATO members have to subscribe to its policy of nuclear deterrence (whether they have nuclear weapons or not) it is difficult to see how a successful NATO application is consistent with nationalist hostility to the UK's (and other members') independent nuclear deterrent<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, NATO members are obliged to commit themselves to spending 2% of GDP on defence. While not all members do so, if Scotland wished to reduce defence expenditure as part of a 'defence dividend' on leaving the UK, its NATO application might become even more difficult.

Finally, some senior nationalists prefer a non-aligned status for Scotland. Overall, there is a significant risk that Scotland would fall out of the NATO alliance if it left the UK.

### **A question of influence**

While NATO membership would be preferable, the exact composition and alignment of independent Scottish forces are to a large extent irrelevant. A total force of 20,000 personnel would include few advanced capability units, and Scottish defence would continue to rely on the wider security afforded by the Atlantic alliance and its key members: the USA, the (remaining) United Kingdom, Germany, Canada and others. Regional threats such as those potentially posed by Russia cannot be countered by countries such as Scotland on their own.

Global security too, which Scotland ultimately depends on, is upheld by powerful, responsible powers committed to upholding the international rule of law.

The UK plays a major role in upholding both regional defence and international security, and thus its own and Scotland's domestic security. As an integral part of the UK, Scots have the power, through the democratic process, to influence vital decision making affecting the whole of the UK and consequently NATO and the UN. Losing its voice in the UK would mean that a separate Scotland would have no more influence than other similarly sized countries in decisions affecting European and world-wide security issues.

An independent Scotland would therefore in effect lose influence over defence policy, not gain it. Countries the same size as Scotland have little say over the important defence decisions made by NATO and other allies that affect them. The UK currently exerts its international influence on behalf of all its people; a separate Scotland's international influence would be much diminished.

### **Weakening the UK would mean weakening the defence of Scotland**

If an independent Scotland withdrew its financial and material contribution to the UK's defence it would weaken the remaining UK's contribution to the Atlantic alliance. The UK would have to increase defence spending by c. 8-9% to fill the capability gap; in that event it is more likely that the UK's capability would decrease, thus weakening both the UK and NATO, undermining the Western alliance. This would ultimately weaken global and regional security, affecting Scotland itself.

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<sup>3</sup> The UK's independent nuclear deterrent, and its relevance to Scotland, will be addressed in a separate SIU briefing note.

The independent Scottish defence forces would not make up the shortfall, even if spending was kept proportionately at the same level. Scottish forces could operate with UK forces to some extent but neither would be able to achieve the economies of scale possible from a unified approach. Modern defence crises typically require responses from experienced, full capability forces with top of the range equipment that are only available to countries with the largest defence budgets.

The details of defence policy outlined by the SNP in their case for independence fail to recognise the interdependence of the front line forces and the wider support which is at present is provided by central agencies on a UK-wide basis.

At the highest level these comprise the links between the Cabinet and the Ministry of Defence, incorporating intelligence gleaned from the world-wide activities of the Foreign Office, the Secret Intelligence Service and GCHQ. At lower levels are the training and procurement organisations which ensure the fighting forces have the equipment and the capacity to use it effectively. In specialist roles the SAS and SBS and the bomb disposal experts provide a level of expertise which an independent Scotland would not be able to match because of the lack of economies of scale.

Logistically, the scale of UK forces can justify the expense of air transport, vehicle fleets and the massive stores and supply agencies that are needed for a total defence force of over 150,000 personnel. If Scotland wished to provide all these facilities independently, the funds remaining for ships, aircraft, armoured vehicle and helicopters, not to mention infantry, would be minimal. It is quite likely that independent Scottish forces, like those of other similarly sized countries, could in effect only be used abroad in limited roles, or perhaps for civil emergencies.

By weakening the UK an independent Scotland would weaken NATO and its allies and therefore its own security. In this context, it is unsurprising North Korea was the only country which explicitly supported Scottish independence in 2014, or that Russia now courts nationalist politicians as guests on its TV and radio shows.

### **Honouring our commitments**

Scotland, as part of the UK, has certain defence commitments that go beyond either immediate domestic defence from foreign aggression, or the specific interests of NATO.

These include the special security requirements of Northern Ireland and a number of overseas responsibilities in territories that for various reasons have remained under the UK's jurisdiction. In defence terms the most notable of these is the Falkland Islands but the UK also has security responsibilities in the Caribbean, Gibraltar and elsewhere<sup>4</sup>.

Currently, Scottish nationalists have no plans to honour these commitments in the event of independence, even though places like Northern Ireland and the Falklands have stronger links with Scotland than other parts of the UK<sup>5</sup>.

The nationalist approach appears to be that Scotland can leave the UK and any obligations it has at the same time, even if those obligations were jointly incurred and held while the UK was together. This is at odds with nationalist plans to claim a portion of jointly held UK assets like foreign embassies or military hardware.

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<sup>4</sup> Neither the Falklands nor any other British Overseas Territory is even mentioned in *Scotland's Future, your guide to an independent Scotland*.

<sup>5</sup> Most Falkland islanders have Scots or Welsh ancestry. The special links between Northern Ireland and Scotland are well known.

## **Supporting our service personnel**

Currently the UK's armed forces provide training and a rewarding career, including leadership development, for many Scots. While a separate Scotland's armed forces would draw on a proud military tradition, the small size of the armed forces and the lack of economies of scale mean they would find it harder to attract and retain high calibre recruits.

The armed forces of an independent Scotland, like those of other similarly sized countries, would have little meaningful role in the maintenance of global security by the Western alliance. Instead, work would largely be restricted to ceremonial duties, help with domestic civil emergencies and occasional United Nations missions. While these are worthy activities in their own right, they do not provide the full range of military career possibilities that many Scots join the armed forces to experience.

It is likely that many Scots servicemen would leave the Scottish forces in the event of independence, and either seek an alternative career or try to stick with the remaining UK armed forces. The Scottish armed forces would become a shadow of their former selves.

## **Economic and industrial considerations**

In addition to the primary considerations of security, there are some serious economic considerations to bear in mind when considering the implications of Scotland leaving the UK.

At present there are many Scottish companies and Scottish arms of UK companies which serve the wider UK and international defence industries, notably the shipyards on the Clyde and Forth. The inevitable reduction in UK defence procurement in a separate Scotland would deal a severe blow to this sector, which currently accounts for some 13,000 jobs<sup>6</sup>.

A further decline in Scotland's defence industry would result from the caution which the United States would likely display in sharing military technology secrets with a new country, with small and almost certainly less capable counter-intelligence operations, and the actions of which had already weakened NATO. Contracts to support US and joint NATO procurements would dry up, and major defence companies, from BAe to Selex, would relocate their operations in order to win and fulfil those orders.

## **Conclusion**

Most Scots are rightly proud of Scotland's military tradition and of Scots' continued contribution to global security, through the UK's highly capable armed forces.

Leaving the UK would undermine Scotland's defence directly, as NATO membership would be uncertain, and both NATO and the UK would be weakened by Scotland's departure from the UK.

Separation would also have an indirect impact on Scotland's ability to influence geopolitics in its own interests. Scotland would no longer benefit from the UK's permanent representation on the UN Security Council, thus reducing its ability to influence military and political decisions around the globe.

A separate Scotland's armed forces would be weaker and less efficient, due to a lack of economies of scale and a reduced ability to work with and rely on strong intelligence and counter-intelligence

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<sup>6</sup> Scottish Development International, quoted in *Scotland Analysis: Defence*, HM Government.

agencies. Leaving the UK would have an enormous impact on defence-related industry and employment in Scotland, and probably send Scotland's defence industry into terminal decline.

Fortunately, thanks to the result of the 2014 referendum Scotland continues to benefit from an outward looking, international defence policy as part of the UK. Our service personnel are part of some of the most capable and advanced armed forces, respected across the world, standing shoulder to shoulder with allies for mutual defence and support.

Within the UK, contributing to and benefitting from the UK's defence, security and foreign policy and operations, Scots are safer, abroad and at home.