

Will Scotland Sink the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent?

For over sixty years, the possession of nuclear weapons and practice of nuclear deterrence have been important to the United Kingdom's defense policy, self-image, and international standing. It was a partner in the Manhattan Project and had acquired its own weapons by the mid-1950s, its program thereafter assisted by cooperation agreements with the United States. Its nuclear capability has long been assigned to the NATO alliance, and it is one of the five nuclear weapon states recognized by the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Yet, remarkably, continuing the United Kingdom's position as a nuclear weapon state could now rest in the hands of Scottish voters in September 2014. Nuclear decision-making has always rested on the assumption that the United Kingdom would remain united, with power and authority centered in London. That assumption underpinned the UK government's decision, endorsed by the Westminster Parliament in March 2007, to replace the aging submarines that carry its only nuclear weapon system, Trident. The decision took for granted that the UK Trident system would continue to use its bases in Scotland for several more decades.

However, the government did not anticipate the Scottish National Party's (SNP) sweeping victory in the 2011 elections in Scotland—just twelve years after authority over many elements of Scottish domestic policy had been devolved to a re-established Scottish Parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh. (The Scottish Parliament had last convened in 1707 to approve the Act of Union, which gave the Westminster Parliament sole legislative authority over the combined

Malcolm Chalmers is Director of Research at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London, and can be reached at malcolmc@rusi.org. William Walker is Professor of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, and can be reached at wbw@st-andrews.ac.uk.

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The UK's future as a nuclear weapon state could rest in Scottish voters' hands.

territories.)¹ Nor did the UK government predict the SNP-led Scottish government's subsequent call for a referendum in September 2014 on independence, nor its pledge—if the referendum delivered a yes vote—to use the new state's sovereign authority to remove all nuclear weapons from Scottish territory.

The political and economic obstacles to opening equivalent bases elsewhere in the United Kingdom are formidable. The ambition to evict Trident therefore challenges the United Kingdom's desire to remain a nuclear weapon state, with all that this entails for its security and standing in the world. Much is at stake. Could an independent Scotland carry out its threat? Could London develop alternatives to submarine-basing—or alternatives to Scottish bases—in reasonable time and at an acceptable cost? What might be the international implications?

Recent opinion polls suggest that the Scottish government will lose the referendum. The Scottish government can presently count on only a third of the electorate to vote for independence. Much can nevertheless happen between now and September 2014. The Scottish government will publish its “White Paper” on independence in November 2013, which it hopes will strengthen support for its cause. The course of the debate will also be affected by the economy's performance, UK political parties' positioning for the general election in May 2015, and the prospect of a subsequent referendum on continuing membership of the EU. International developments, including the Eurozone's fate, will also influence the outcome. Scotland's independence may seem unlikely at present, but it is being regarded in the UK and abroad as sufficiently possible to take its prospect seriously.

The Submarine Replacement Decision

In numerous statements over many years, the UK government has expressed its commitment to the long-term goal of nuclear disarmament.² However, it has also emphasized that it would abandon nuclear weapons only if other states did the same: it could therefore only occur within a multilateral framework and, in all likelihood if at all, over the very long term. In the meantime, the UK government's expressed interest lies in upholding the status quo: maintaining a credible minimum deterrent in the form of a submarine-based nuclear force, independently operated but “assigned to NATO”; sustaining intergovernmental relationships that have developed around it, especially with the United States and recently with France; supporting the NPT and its safeguards system while cultivating an image as the world's most “responsible nuclear sovereign”,³ and

enjoying the reputation and extra influence that nuclear weapons are perceived to bring their possessors.

In line with this commitment, the UK Parliament approved Prime Minister Tony Blair's 2006 decision to launch a program to replace the four aging Vanguard-class submarines (the platform for Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles, or SLBMs) with a new generation of SSBNs (submarines capable of carrying SLBMs) due to begin entering service in 2024. The new submarines would be designed in close cooperation with the United States, and be able to carry whatever successor to the Trident D5 missile the United States chooses to procure.

This decision was reaffirmed in 2010 when the Conservative Party-led coalition government took office, but with the date for the first new SSBN's entry into service postponed until 2028. In order to maintain this timetable, the government announced that the main investment decision (known as Main Gate) to embark on full-scale development and production should be made in 2016, after the 2015 UK general election. In the meantime, a five-year assessment phase is under way to refine the successor submarine's design. This is due to finish in 2016, after an expenditure of around £4 billion.⁴

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A Scottish Spanner

The United Kingdom's SSBN force is based in Faslane, Scotland, west of Glasgow on the Gare Loch. Eight miles away on Loch Long lies Coulport, which services the warheads and missiles.⁵ Both are accessed via the Firth of Clyde, a waterway extending some fifty miles southwards before reaching international waters. As a result, if Scotland became a sovereign state, the United Kingdom's entire nuclear force would rest on the territory and move through the waters of a foreign power. This could have immediate consequences for Trident's replacement, since the rest of the United Kingdom (rUK) could hardly proceed in 2016 on spending heavily to construct the new generation of SSBNs if the threat of closure hung over the nuclear bases.

Yet, relocation would be very difficult. In the event of independence, the UK and Scottish governments' long-term objectives would fall into fundamental tension. As a starting point, the UK government is likely to insist that current SSBNs, together with successor submarines and supporting naval and land-based security forces, should continue to be based at Faslane and Coulport for the indefinite future. It has already stated that "the Government remains committed

to an independent nuclear deterrent as the bedrock of the United Kingdom's national security, and is making no plans to move the Vanguard Class submarines from [the naval bases on the] Clyde."⁶

By contrast, the Scottish government would come under strong domestic pressure to secure the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from its soil as early as possible. Anti-nuclear sentiment extends well beyond the ranks of the SNP, cutting across political parties and finding strong expression in churches and civil society. There is some dispute over the strength of this public opposition, with the answer often depending on the precise question being asked.⁷ Even so, largely because of the consistently low representation of the pro-nuclear Conservative Party north of the border and the considerable presence of the SNP in Holyrood, Scottish political leaders tend to be more anti-nuclear than their English counterparts. Thus, the March 2007 UK Parliament's decisive vote in favor of the nuclear modernization plan was followed in June 2007 by the Scottish Parliament's equally decisive but inconsequential vote against.⁸

The SNP has also traditionally opposed NATO membership, mainly because of the Alliance's support for nuclear deterrence. However, desiring to be regarded as a responsible international actor, the Party's leadership changed its policy at the SNP's 2012 annual conference. It now aspires to join NATO after securing independence. But it insists that "an SNP government will maintain NATO membership subject to an agreement that Scotland will not host nuclear weapons."⁹

As it is, the change of policy on NATO has faced strong opposition within the Party due to the Alliance's continuing espousal of nuclear deterrence. The SNP leadership was only able to obtain a narrow majority in favor of its new policy at its 2012 conference, with two of its members in the Scottish Parliament subsequently resigning from the Party in protest.¹⁰ There has also been concern that membership would provide some NATO governments with an opportunity to thwart Scottish non-nuclear ambitions, a concern increased by the German government's apparent policy reversal when it fell into line with NATO's Deterrence and Defense Posture Review of May 2012, ending its call for the removal of non-strategic U.S. weapons from German territory. Attempting to allay concerns, the SNP's leadership has recently pledged to include a clause in the constitution of an independent Scottish state that would render illegal the location of nuclear weapons on Scottish territory.¹¹

Frustrating Scotland's nonnuclear ambitions would be a likely priority for a post-referendum UK negotiating team, unless and until suitable alternative bases could be found and built. Negotiators might point to the precedent of Ireland in 1921, in which the agreement on independence included provision for the Royal Navy to maintain treaty ports there. They might also point to Russia's continued naval presence in Sevastopol, more than two decades after Ukraine achieved

independence. But neither case involves nuclear weapons, with all their political and normative significance. Conversely, the sensitive safety and security issues associated with nuclear bases also make them especially difficult to relocate. When pressing its case, the United Kingdom might argue that its nuclear force has historically been a symbol of an internationalist security policy—seen in longstanding cooperation with the United States and more recently with France—which Scotland, especially if it were to be seeking NATO membership, should beware of disrupting. Rather than upset the independence project, London could argue, Scottish basing of the rUK's SSBNs should instead act as a symbol of Scotland's internationalist commitment, and of defense solidarity between the two states as they enter the difficult process of creating separate armed forces.

A Scottish negotiating team will likely contest such arguments vigorously. Yet it would have to consider the potential damage to obtaining other necessary goals. The SNP's claims that an independent Scotland would automatically "inherit" membership in the UN, EU, and NATO are not widely accepted.¹² Past precedent suggests that a new state's membership in such organizations would depend case-by-case on the consent of existing member states. Some states concerned by the spillover effects of Scotland's secession on their own unity (such as Spain) might see this as an opportunity to signal to their own separatist movements that a transition to EU membership (in particular) would be problematic. Scotland's acceptance as a full EU member state could also be complicated if the Conservative Party were elected with an overall majority in the next UK General Election, and then fulfilled its promise to hold a referendum on the UK's EU membership. And there, difficult negotiations would have to take place over whether Scotland could continue to enjoy the opt-outs (on the Schengen Agreement and the Eurozone) and the special budget arrangements (the UK rebate) that the UK now enjoys. Provided that the rUK strongly supported Scotland's EU and NATO membership applications, however, most other members' interests in stability would mean that they would be unlikely to stand in the way of a negotiated transition to dual membership.

Scotland's prospects would prove different, however, if Scotland's intransigence over Trident basing began to affect London's willingness to support its EU and NATO candidacies. It would also risk London's retaliation on economic, monetary, and other issues. Both countries would suffer from the social and economic disruption accompanying a messy transition to separate statehood. But the rUK, much the larger power, would suffer much less in proportion.

Alternatives

It is hard to imagine the rUK being comfortable with the permanent basing of its most important military assets on foreign territory. In practice, however, both

parties in these negotiations would be aware of just how difficult, and expensive, it would be to transfer the facilities in Scotland elsewhere.¹³ There are three options, each posing serious difficulty: the United Kingdom can move the bases to England or Wales, move them to France or the United States, or avoid reliance on Scottish bases entirely by changing the weapon system.

Given sufficient time, the submarines could probably move from their current base at Faslane to the Royal Navy base in Devonport in southwest England, which already has facilities for hosting nuclear attack submarines. The problem comes in transferring the warhead and missile storage facility at Coulport: the United Kingdom's safety regulations for nuclear facilities dictate minimum safety distances from nearby populations or industrial centers, and Devonport is too populated to meet these requirements. Potentially a site near Falmouth, also in England's southwest, could host a new warhead and missile depot. This was one of the sites shortlisted in 1963 when the original choice of Faslane and Coulport was made. Milford Haven in Wales is another candidate. However, Falmouth is a tourist area, while most of the United Kingdom's liquefied natural gas (itself potentially explosive) enters the country through the port of Milford Haven. Even if available, the Ministry of Defense has acknowledged that the costs of developing any other sites for nuclear purposes would run into several billion pounds.¹⁴ Moreover, given the many regulatory and planning hurdles before construction even commences, it is not a process that could be completed quickly.

The option of using bases outside the United Kingdom could also be explored. The United States did something similar when it deployed SSBNs in Scotland (at Holy Loch) and Spain (at Rota) during the Cold War. The United Kingdom already draws its Trident D5 missiles from a common U.S./UK pool based at King's Bay, Georgia, in the United States, where the missiles regularly return for servicing. Graduating to warhead storage and loading at King's Bay might not therefore be a huge next step. Alternatively, the United Kingdom might conceivably establish a Coulport-equivalent base at Brest in Brittany, France, where the French submarine fleet is located. In either scenario, Devonport could operate as the main base for UK missile submarines, with King's Bay or Brest used for warhead loading and unloading.

Yet, either option would face enormous logistical and political obstacles. The need to maintain a separate chain of warhead custody would necessitate creating an autonomous UK base, with all the attendant costs and political sensitivities. Arrangements would also have to be made for transport (initially by sea) from this base to the United Kingdom's warhead servicing facilities at Aldermaston, west of London. France might welcome such a strong symbol of the indivisibility of UK and French nuclear deterrent postures, particularly given the asymmetry of interdependence that would result from the UK's reliance on it. U.S.

cooperation might also be possible, if still unlikely, given the close nuclear relationship between the two countries. But ceding the sovereignty and independence entailed by such arrangements would be very hard to sell in rUK. Indeed, the Ministry of Defense recently appeared to rule this option out: "The appropriate facilities do not exist in France and to use facilities at King's Bay in Georgia, USA, would present a complex logistic and cost challenge. Operations from any base in the USA or France would greatly compromise the independence of the deterrent and there would be significant political and legal obstacles."¹⁵

The rUK could contemplate other courses of action if it deemed relocation at home or abroad impossible. For instance, it could adopt a different weapon system capable of deployment in England or Wales (Northern Ireland is never considered). The Ministry of Defense reviewed alternatives to submarine systems, including air-launched cruise missiles and ICBMs, prior to the 2007 replacement decision.¹⁶ It concluded that they were strategically and operationally inferior, and would often pose regulatory and planning problems of their own. The Liberal Democrats, the traditionally nuclear-skeptic junior partner in the UK's present coalition government, have presided over an official Cabinet Office study into possible alternatives to Trident, which reported in July 2013. As a result, the Liberal Democrat leadership now appears to have rejected all non-Trident based alternatives, while holding open the possibility of reducing the force to three or even two submarines. This would likely require the abandonment of the Royal Navy's Continuous At-Sea Deterrent posture. But such a change, strongly opposed by the Conservative Party, would not end reliance on Faslane and Coulport.

If the rUK were to conclude that submarine basing was no longer an option (either in Scotland or on its own territory), it might revert to a nuclear force involving delivery by aircraft. Given the planned withdrawal of Tornado strike aircraft from service, however, air basing would probably require substantial additional investment in new longer-range aircraft and/or longer-range missiles. The 48 F-35B aircraft, due to be brought into operation by 2020 and capable of deployment on land or on the United Kingdom's new aircraft carriers, could be adapted for a nuclear role. But their short range and, in carrier-based roles, vulnerability would be widely seen as a substantial downgrading of the effectiveness of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent.

In principle, a post-separation rUK could decide to dismantle its nuclear weapon capability, thereby joining Scotland in becoming a non-nuclear weapon state. This step would become more attractive if the costs of Trident's replacement

If submarine basing was no longer an option, a nuclear force might involve delivery by aircraft.

became hard to bear, and it would avert most of the difficulties discussed here. Yet, the United Kingdom's unilateral disarmament is not an option that its main political parties seem willing to contemplate at present. They would be even less persuaded of its merits by what would effectively be perceived as Scottish coercion. On the contrary, the United Kingdom's breakup might strengthen rather than weaken the successor state's attachment to nuclear weapons in its desire to remain a major international power.

Is there an Acceptable Compromise?

Three options for an organized phase-out from Scotland come to mind.

If rUK decides to maintain a nuclear deterrent, if it rejects alternative systems, if the early opening of new bases outside Scotland proves impossible, and if Trident's permanent basing in an independent Scotland is unsustainable—then attention would turn to the longevity and terms of the submarine force's future presence in Scotland. Could an organized phase-out from Scotland be imagined that would enable rUK to relocate the nuclear force at acceptable, predictable costs, and over an acceptable, predictable timeframe? Three options come to mind, tied to the rhythms of the submarine- and missile-replacement programs.

The first is to continue deploying the current four Vanguard boats out of Faslane and Coulport, under temporary basing agreements, but to start the process of building new facilities in England to house the new generation of SSBN boats. With entry-into-service due to begin in 2028 after the manufacture and commissioning of the first boat is completed, this would provide more than a decade's period of grace (starting in 2016) to prepare alternative bases. A second option links closing Faslane and Coulport's nuclear operations to completing the U.S.-led Trident missile-replacement program (due in the early 2040s), giving more time to find an alternative to Coulport, which is the greatest challenge. A third option would involve separating the two bases' timetables for closure, developing an alternative to Faslane in time for the new submarines to be based in England or Wales from 2028, while continuing to use Coulport until the new Trident-replacement missiles come on stream around 2040.

Each option would involve significant extra cost and uncertainty. The first would be difficult to achieve, and would require a concerted push by the rUK government to overcome political and planning obstacles to opening new bases. The 25-year postponement of the nuclear bases' closure implied by the second option would be hard for a Scottish government to swallow. The third option has political appeal at face value—it would help the Scottish government to justify

retreat from Trident's complete removal by claiming success in closing the nuclear base at Faslane, and converting it to a conventional military base, while giving London more time to find a substitute for Coulport. However, it would require Scotland to acclimate to the presence of nuclear weapons on its territory—with no sovereign control over their usage—for at least another generation. Furthermore, it would still require some provision for the presence of rUK conventional forces in the Firth of Clyde to protect the SSBNs and their bases. There would also be operational issues and extra costs involved in lengthening the separation distance between the two facilities.

Having made no preparations and held no public discussions or inquiries on the issue, rUK negotiators would not be able to predict whether and when new sites could be found and then steered through regulatory and planning processes in England or Wales. They could probably agree only to “best endeavors” made “in good faith” to “explore possibilities” for removal. Anything so open-ended is unlikely to satisfy Scottish negotiators.

This said, the Ministry of Defense would probably never be comfortable operating the nuclear force out of a separate Scottish state, even one that is prepared to tolerate its presence. An independent Scotland's assent to continued basing might become most problematic at precisely the moment when an independent nuclear force could have greatest importance—such as a time of grave national emergency, when the UK stands alone. This was certainly the UK's historical experience with post-independence Ireland, which insisted on the removal of the Royal Navy from its territory in 1938 because it wished to remain neutral in the looming conflict with Germany. Common membership in NATO, along with close post-separation defense cooperation, could help provide some assurance that Scotland would not claim neutrality were the rUK's vital interests to be threatened. It could be much harder for Scotland's government to accept that nuclear weapons, based in Scotland, could play a key role in protecting these interests.

Besides the familiar issues that arise when armed forces are based in a foreign country, the rUK would rely on the Scottish government's cooperation to ensure safe passage for warheads across the road network to Coulport and would have to allow significant further Scottish involvement in safety and environmental regulation. In addition, the Ministry of Defence would have to accept Edinburgh's overall governance of activities in the coastal approaches to the nuclear bases, approaches that would have become its sovereign domain. That includes agreement on arrangements for overseeing the passage of ships and protection of wildlife and the seabed, including sonar installations in this context. Under Articles 4 and 5 of the Law of the Sea, a state's territory can extend for twelve nautical miles from the coast; thus, the submarines would not leave Scottish territorial waters for at least 50 miles after departure from Faslane

and Coulport, the Firth of Clyde being no wider than 24 miles (twelve miles from either coast) until south of the island of Arran. Article 20 of the Law of the Sea also stipulates that “In the territorial sea, submarines and other underwater vehicles are required to navigate on the surface and to show their flag.”¹⁷ A special bilateral treaty would be required to determine how, by whom, and under what conditions to manage the passage of nuclear submarines up and down the Clyde.

To reach agreement on this difficult issue, therefore, both Scotland and the rUK would have to take political risks. The rUK would want to ensure that it could keep its nuclear force operational in Scotland, at least until it were able to develop an alternative site elsewhere. But it would find it hard to convince Scotland’s government to agree to permanent basing, involving reversal of long-standing opposition to the presence of nuclear weapons on Scottish soil. Scotland, for its part, could not reasonably insist on Trident’s departure until the rUK had been given sufficient time to plan and implement its relocation. A compromise would, therefore, probably resemble one of the options outlined above. In return for Scotland accepting Trident basing until current boats and missiles are replaced, the rUK would accept that its nuclear force could not remain in Scotland indefinitely, and would have to begin preparing for the submarines’ relocation. The rUK’s willingness to make concessions on other issues of vital importance, possibly including the national debt and North Sea oil, would have a strong bearing on the Scottish position.

International Reactions

The formation and recognition of new states has been a common phenomenon in the modern era, especially following decolonization and the end of the Cold War. Scotland possesses more attributes of a successful state than many newcomers: it has a long democratic tradition, an advanced economy, substantial natural resources, administrative experience, and a fine capital city. It is not located in a region of conflict and there is no expectation of violence if it were to separate from the United Kingdom, not least because the UK government has pledged to honor the democratic choice of the Scottish people. “The governments have agreed that the referendum should . . . deliver a fair test and decisive expression of the views of people in Scotland and a result that everyone will respect.”¹⁸ Scotland’s absorption into the community of states could therefore prove comparatively straightforward in most respects, which is not to suggest that it would be painless.

In the past, foreign governments viewed the Scottish referendum as a domestic UK affair; governments assumed that the United Kingdom would remain a stable political entity presided over by a strong central administration.

Within the past year, though, two events in particular sparked international interest. The first came on October 15, 2012, when the Scottish and UK governments signed the Edinburgh Agreement, providing formal confirmation that the referendum would take place, setting out its terms, and locating authority for its conduct in the Scottish Parliament. (The Edinburgh Agreement was required because, according to the 1998 Scotland Act, the Westminster Parliament alone possesses legal powers to call referenda.) The second came when the Edinburgh Agreement was closely followed by an upsurge of nationalist protest in Catalonia, Spain.

The combination of these two events created fears of a contagion of secession in Spain, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Italy, and elsewhere that would threaten the viability of states, upset delicate power balances, and foster instability as well as potential violence in several parts of Europe. Scotland's secession, the first to happen within a long-established liberal democracy since before WWII, could set a troubling precedent. The concession given to Scotland by the Edinburgh Agreement, honoring Scottish rights to hold and run the referendum, added to foreign concerns. An editorial soon afterward in *The Washington Post*, echoed by former U.S. President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during speeches in London and Glasgow respectively, showed that these concerns were not confined to the European continent: "... the more fragmented Europe becomes, the less it will be able to use its collective strength on the global stage... A weaker Europe means a less stable world, and less leverage for the democracies."¹⁹

Attention is bound to increase as the September 2014 referendum approaches, especially if opinion polls shift in the nationalists' favor. Even then, the instinct among governments will be to keep a distance. All would change, however, if the Scottish people actually voted for independence. Then, other states' interests would be affected, and governments would find themselves having to make judgments about their policies toward the prospective new state. Relations between Scotland and other states would then become direct, rather than mediated mainly through the United Kingdom, and would be subject to international law, process, and custom.

Above all, governments would worry about the effects of Scotland's departure on the rest of the United Kingdom as a political society and state. Separation could affect the United Kingdom's power and will; its future internal cohesion, political culture, and foreign policy; and its engagement with international organizations and arrangements in which the United Kingdom has played an important part, including the European Union, NATO, and UN Security Council.²⁰ Even without the Scottish issue, the United Kingdom's international orientation has become less predictable, especially given the possibility that a

referendum on EU membership in 2016 or 2017 (recently proposed by the Conservative Party) could lead to its departure from the EU.

The fact that Scotland's separation from the UK would involve nuclear weapons would compel foreign governments to pay even closer attention to the issue. They would want to guarantee the safety and security of those weapons, ensure compliance with international treaties and regulations, and manage any political and strategic adjustments. High on the agenda would be Scotland's membership in the NPT and NATO. Although the politics of accession would differ—the former involving membership of a global regime and the latter a military alliance—they would not be unconnected.

Regarding the NPT, the rUK would probably succeed to the United Kingdom's status as a nuclear weapon State Party, following the Russian precedent in the early 1990s. Scotland, however, could not be accepted as a successor state of the United Kingdom in this context, nor would it wish to be. Governments would expect an independent Scotland to join the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state on the earliest possible occasion and to submit to comprehensive international safeguards and other pertinent regulations. They would require assurances that all military nuclear assets left on Scottish territory would be held under the rUK's sole control in accordance with the NPT's Article I. In practice, this control would be more absolute for submarines than airborne weapons, since submarines (unlike aircraft) could not be piloted by personnel of a non-nuclear weapon state (as can occur with NATO non-strategic weapons). In addition, the IAEA's right of access and inspection within Scotland could not be constrained, and Scotland would be expected to establish effective export control and physical security processes backed by appropriate criminal sanctions.

Unlike the NPT, where Scotland's early accession would be regarded as mandatory, attaining NATO membership would depend on judgments by the Organization's current members, and above all by the United States and by the rUK, which would become the United Kingdom's successor in NATO in all likelihood. As NATO decisions require consensus, Scotland's acceptance into the Organization could only happen after extensive consultation, each member effectively possessing a veto. Linkage of Trident's future basing with Scotland's NATO membership, and of their terms, would be inescapable. Before making a decision, other member states would want to consider the implications of London's and Edinburgh's negotiations for their collective military deployments and doctrines, and for shouldering responsibilities across the alliance. France would play a major part in the debate, not least because the potential for it to become Europe's only nuclear-armed state would be as unwelcome for France as for its neighbors, and because its policies have envisaged an increase in, rather than rupture of, cooperation with the United Kingdom in nuclear weapon policy.

Post-referendum Scottish insistence on the nuclear force's immediate or early removal would surely be regarded as unreasonable in NATO capitols. Equally, the rUK's insistence on its nuclear force's indefinite operation out of Faslane and Coulport, if clearly against Scotland's wishes, would probably also be a non-starter in a democratic alliance that prides itself on respecting the sovereignty of its member states, several of whom are committed to reducing NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons. Furthermore, it would risk a strong reaction in the NPT context, where the rUK could find itself in an awkward position given its strong recent advocacy of nuclear disarmament, albeit to be achieved only through multilateral agreement. Although Scotland could hardly have joined the NPT by the time of the Treaty's Review Conference in spring 2015, its ambitions would be known and might attract considerable attention at that time among non-nuclear weapon states.

Of all foreign governments, the U.S. views would count most. A Scottish commitment to evict Trident might well be seen by Washington as a threat to the "special relationship" which it still values, if to a diminishing extent. The technological cooperation undertaken under the U.S.–UK Mutual Defense Agreement (MDA) and the Polaris Sales Agreement (PSA), encompassing both warheads and ballistic missiles, has been one of the special relationship's mainstays. Its sustenance was one of Tony Blair's main concerns when launching the nuclear modernization program. Although Washington might not want to be seen coercing an unwilling Scotland on London's behalf, it could be expected to use its influence to discourage any peremptory Scottish action which disrupted an important element of the U.S.–UK special relationship.

Although hardly amounting to an international crisis, an independent Scotland would give rise to awkward issues for foreign governments. Come what may, both external and internal pressure would grow to find a middle way between permanent basing and early removal from the Scottish

bases—external because governments would be keen to avoid conflicted relations between Scotland and the rUK, and internal because neither Edinburgh nor London would have interest in allowing division on nuclear policy to frustrate negotiations on economic and other urgent issues. Whether that middle way exists will remain an open question until after (and if) the referendum delivers a yes vote.

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Conclusion

Along with other nuclear-armed states, the United Kingdom's practice of nuclear deterrence has rested on an emphatic assertion of internal sovereignty. It has been taken for granted that the UK government and Parliament alone possess the right and authority to decide nuclear weapon policy, including the location and usage of bases for the nuclear force.

The United Kingdom would lose this sole right and authority if Scotland became independent. Faslane and Coulport's continuing as nuclear bases, whether under leasing agreements or as UK sovereign base areas, could only happen under Scotland's consent and agreed terms. Scotland would also possess sovereignty over the bases' sea approaches, requiring agreement on their joint management and protection. The conditions under which the UK nuclear force could operate out of Faslane and Coulport would therefore require negotiation.

The Scottish government's freedom to exercise sovereignty, however, would be heavily constrained. It could not quickly carry out its pledge to have Trident removed from Scottish territory without jeopardizing other vital interests requiring London, Washington, and other capitals' cooperation. Since the Scots lack necessary expertise, dismantling the nuclear installations would also require the rUK's full cooperation. In addition, Scotland would be bound by NPT rules to accept that the rUK (a nuclear weapon state) could alone exert operational control over its nuclear weapons while they remained in Scotland (a non-nuclear weapon state) during any transitional period.

Inevitably, nuclear weapon policy within the British Isles—especially regarding bases—would therefore become the subject of negotiation between the representatives of two prospective, and then actual, sovereign states. A way would have to be found past London's insistence on permanent use of Faslane and Coulport for nuclear purposes and Edinburgh's insistence on their early closure or adaptation to solely conventional military use. On Edinburgh's side, an imaginable compromise would entail acceptance that the nuclear force could still operate out of the two bases for a defined period (or periods, if the futures of Coulport and Faslane were separated) while alternative bases or weapon systems were developed. On London's side, it would entail acceptance that best efforts should be made to develop those alternatives over the agreed timeframe, probably stretching over the current system's remaining operational lifetime, and that the bases would face closure if they were unsuccessful.

The breakup of nuclear-armed states has historically been a source of international concern, especially after the sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. It continues to be one of the most dangerous risk scenarios in Pakistan, given its violent religious and ethnic conflicts and the fragility of its civil-military relations. International concern over the potential implications of the breakup of the United Kingdom, by contrast, is mitigated by its past success in the peaceful and constitutional management of political change, albeit—as with the dissolution of the Empire and resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict—encountering considerable problems along the way.

As a final year of intense reflection on the possible implications of Scotland's independence begins across the United Kingdom, there are encouraging signs that the processes of dissolution and reconstitution could be conducted in a manner which respected this important tradition. This historical record should also provide some confidence that, were independence to come, London and Edinburgh could sort out their differences on nuclear policy and find solutions that did not jeopardize international security. Whether that confidence will be put to the test will depend on the decision made by Scotland's voters in September 2014.

Notes

1. On Scotland's modern history, see Tom Devine, *The Scottish Nation* (London: Penguin Books, 2012). On the SNP's development, see Peter Lynch, *SNP: The History of the Scottish National Party* (Welsh Academic Press: Cardiff, 2002).
2. See *The Future of the UK's Nuclear Deterrent*, Cmnd. 6994 (December 2006), p. 8, https://www.gov.uk/.../DefenceWhitePaper2006_Cm6994.pdf.
3. William Walker, "The UK, threshold states and responsible nuclear sovereignty," *International Affairs* 86, no. 2 (2010): pp. 447-464.
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