

Why Scottish Independence Could be Main Obstacle to ‘Global Britain’

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Global Research, March 26, 2021

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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Last week the UK’s new [Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development, and Foreign Policy](#) was published, outlining the country’s future geopolitical strategy. The 114 page document, which I discuss in a previous [article](#), conveys a clear message: the days of Britain taking a backseat in international affairs is over. (This translates as more meddling in the affairs of other states of course – soft power manipulation, supporting regime change etc). Britain is back, so get out your Union Jack flags and remember the lyrics to ‘Rule Britannia’.

Incidentally, it was [announced](#) on Wednesday that government buildings across the UK would now be required to fly the UK flag at all times. This of course won’t go down too well in Scotland, where the Union Jack is, for many, an offensive reminder of London control. Indeed, the SNP’s Mhairi Black said: “If the Tories think an overload of Union Jacks on buildings is the answer to promote the strength of the Union, then it shows how thin the case for the Union is.”

However, the idea of promoting the British flag very much ties with Boris Johnson’s nationalist crusade, to celebrate ‘Britishness’ and regain some national pride which he has indicated in the past we are lacking in.

Ironically however Boris Johnson himself has been integral in the current divide between north and south. An unpopular figure in Scotland, his leadership has only boosted the case for Scottish independence, along with Brexit, of which he was a key proponent. Scotland has maintained its opposition to Brexit (it voted against it) and has stated that in an independent Scotland it would seek to rejoin the EU. The SNP have criticized the way the Scottish government was not properly consulted during Brexit negotiations. This apparent disregard for Scottish concerns on the matter have rubbed salt in the wound of a nation already disgruntled by being forced out of the EU against its will.

Scotland has never been closer to independence. Public opinions polls consistently show a majority in favour of dismantling the Union. And given Boris Johnson’s plans for ‘Global Britain’ this could be a real stumbling block, for two main reasons. For Scotland’s foreign policy would likely be – based on both SNP policy documents and think-tank publications – non-interventionist, involving a significant reduction in military expenditure.

Take for example, this [document](#) written by two Scottish academics and published by

Scottish think-tank 'Common Weal'. It clearly states 'Scotland would be an international actor of a fundamentally different character from the UK.' It says that an independent Scotland would reject the traditional British approach of 'projecting power', as historically it has 'invited international criticism due to the damage that has sometimes been visited upon the "recipients" of this projected power'.

Furthermore it is suggested that the country's "'military behaviour" would be guided by specific, dedicated articles within a written constitution... this would also give Scottish governments recourse to constitutional protection against taking action in instances where they were solicited by other international actors to 'get involved' in military operations which might be of questionable morality, or which might be considered against Scotland's national interests.'

Such an approach of legal framework would contrast greatly with current UK legislation, as we have seen in recent years with regime change operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and missile strikes on Syria - all which have been carried out against the will of much of the population, particularly north of the border.

The second area in which an independent Scotland would cause problems for the UK's 'power projection' plans is also outlined in the "Common Weal" paper: nuclear weapons. The document clearly states that Scotland would be free of them, something which would cause England some problems in terms of where to store them all. It is believed there are around 200 nuclear weapons based at Coulport in Scotland; it would be tricky getting them all down to Devonport, 170 miles away, and it's been [suggested](#) there isn't enough storage space there anyway. Removal of these nuclear weapons has been described as a 'bedrock' policy of the SNP, who recently accused the UK government of [hypocrisy](#) by signing up to the non-proliferation treaty but increasing its nuclear stockpile at the same time.

It's worth pointing out that the SNP have also traditionally been opposed to NATO membership, changing their policy only in 2012 under the condition that the military block would give up its nuclear weapons - not likely to happen anytime soon. Therefore any hope London has of working together with Scotland in the area of defence is compromised by i) Scotland not becoming a NATO member and ii) it abandoning its nuclear capability.

Geographically too, Scotland has been important for UK defence. Firstly in terms of being an experimental playground for biological weapons; such as the anthrax testing on Gruinard island and for honing missile defence systems - the Ministry of Defence uses 115,000 square kilometres of airspace in the Hebrides, and Cape Wrath is the only naval firing range in Britain. Also strategically its location has been said to be vital in defending Britain from the so-called 'Russian threat' we hear much about nowadays.

An [Economist](#) article last year outlined this in detail, stating that Scotland's 'northerly latitude is ideal for projecting air and naval power into key Atlantic sea lanes and bastions of Russian power in the High North'. It also explains how typhoons can be launched from RAF Lossiemouth in Moray to 'Russian bombers from Murmansk that approach British airspace'. As I have stated in previous [articles](#), the Russian threat is a complete misreading of Russian foreign policy objectives, but it can be used by British leadership to justify military expenditure.

Given Boris Johnson's plans that were obviously long in the pipeline for 'Global Britain' it shows remarkable lack of foresight that no real attempts have been made by the UK

government to reach out to Scots. There has been a mad rush recently to move civil servants up to Glasgow, and a concerted media effort to undermine the Scottish government and the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, but it's all a bit late.

Scots have, by now, been persuaded that the Westminster government, over its handling of Brexit, has no real regard for Scotland and its wishes. And a combination of arrogance and genuine disregard for Scotland has led Johnson's government to adopting a laissez-faire approach. The result: the independence train has already left the station and there's no catching up with it. As such, Boris Johnson would be better advised to rethink his foreign policy strategy, as if Scotland has anything to do with it, there won't be any 'Global Britain' left to project.

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This article was originally published on [InfoBrics](#).

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