

The Referendum Schools Debate

FEBRUARY 2014

NATO

STEPHEN DAISLEY



MOTION:

**“AN INDEPENDENT
SCOTLAND SHOULD
BE A MEMBER OF
NATO”**



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INTRODUCTION

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is an intergovernmental military alliance of mainly North American and European powers committed to the principle of common defence. It was founded in 1949 after the Western powers, suspicious of the Soviet Union’s intentions following the end of World War II, signed the North Atlantic Treaty. NATO would bring together those nations “resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security” [Ref: [NATO](#)]. The organisation grew in importance during the Cold War between the West and the Soviet Union, which established a counter-alliance, the Warsaw Pact, in 1955. Although created as a check on Soviet expansionism, NATO did not conduct any military operations until after the collapse of the Soviet Union but it has since intervened in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya. The alliance has grown from the 12 original signatories and now numbers 28 member states, the most recent additions being Albania and Croatia in 2009. Three member states have an independent nuclear deterrent—the United States, the UK, and France—while a further five host American weapons as part of NATO’s “nuclear sharing” policy [Ref: [Arms Control Association](#)]. The UK’s nuclear weapons are based in Scotland, and this, along with the financial, organisational and ethical debates surrounding defence policy, has thrown NATO into the spotlight in the independence referendum.

Policy shift

In October 2012, the SNP conference passed a resolution which overturned their 30-year opposition to an independent Scotland being a member of the alliance [Ref: [STV](#)]. The decision proved controversial, with delegates voting 426 to 332 to approve, and even prompted the resignation from the party of two MSPs [Ref: [Holyrood](#)]. In the previous three decades, the party had opposed NATO's nuclear status (though it supported cooperation on peacekeeping and humanitarian aid [Ref: [BBC News](#)]). It also opposed military operations such as the air strikes against Serbia, which Alex Salmond famously called "unpardonable folly" [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Supporters of the policy shift argue that it confirms an independent Scotland "will engage positively and responsibly with the global community" [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. For example, policing of air and sea in northern Europe is coordinated through a NATO command centre in member state Denmark. This may play an increasingly important role as competition for resources in the Arctic increases. To those who ask how an independent Scotland could square the circle of being a nuclear-free country while joining a nuclear-armed alliance, pro-NATO voices point out that only three member states have nuclear weapons and those which host US weapons, led by Germany, have been pushing for their removal [Ref: [Guardian](#)], while Canada and Greece remain NATO members who once hosted nuclear weapons while no longer doing so [Ref: [Arms Control Association](#)].

Why join NATO?

An independent Scotland with NATO membership would benefit from the deterrent effect provided by NATO allies under the organisation's Article V, under which an attack on one member is considered an attack on all. Cooperation with other members, in areas such as maritime defence, cyber security and policing operations could make

up for perceived weaknesses gaps in Scotland's defence capability [Ref: [UK Parliament](#)]. However, the Scottish Greens argue that NATO is "about the aggressive projection of power around the world" and that membership of a nuclear-armed alliance while Scotland itself becomes nuclear free is "moral hypocrisy" [Ref: [Patrick Harvie](#)]. The anti-NATO movement more generally argues that the organisation remains fundamentally a pro-nuclear one and that, while the German attempt to disarm from within has been a goal for a number of years, it has met with little success [Ref: [The Local](#)]. Outside of the nuclear context, some question Scotland's ability to make independent decisions while remaining part of NATO [Ref: [Daily Record](#)], which, they claim, places Western military interests above the wellbeing of member states' citizens. Better, they argue, would be for Scotland to pursue a more benign foreign policy based on the principles of non-aggression, opposition to weapons of mass destruction, international legal conventions on the use of military force, and on avoiding alliances with nations not committed to the same legal conventions and treaties to which Scotland has committed itself [Ref: [Jimmy Reid Foundation](#)]. First Minister Alex Salmond has sought to allay fears about the involvement of Scottish troops in future NATO missions by arguing that such deployments could be made contingent on a vote in the Scottish Parliament [Ref: [Herald](#)]. Opponents of NATO question the alliance's use in the modern world – arguing that the threats faced at the time of its formation no longer exist. Rather than facing war against another power like Russia, threats today come more in the shape of terrorist attacks, acting outside nation-states [Ref: [Daily Record](#)]. Indeed, some argue, staying in NATO could increase the risk of these attacks [Ref: [Herald](#)]. The changing geopolitical landscape has also changed, which some argue has resulted in a dilution of NATO's core values, and that "wars of choice" like Afghanistan have made the organisation

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superfluous to shifting alliances among countries [Ref: [Der Spiegel](#)]. On the other hand, while NATO's role in the modern world has shifted, supporters argue that it still provides a valuable alliance for addressing these new needs –for example, working together on cyber security threats [Ref: [Der Spiegel](#)].

Whither Trident?

Central to the question of an independent Scotland's relationship with NATO is the issue of Trident, the UK's nuclear deterrent system. The weapons system, based at Faslane on Her Majesty's Naval Base Clyde, has long been a source of controversy with a permanent "peace camp" in operation outside the base since 1982 [Ref: [New Left Project](#)]. The current UK Government, a coalition of two parties with starkly contrasting positions on Trident, has produced an "Alternatives Review" to examine the costs and structure of a replacement for Trident [Ref: [UK Government](#)] but the final decision on whether to replace the nuclear deterrent has been delayed until after the 2015 election [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Much of the NATO debate centres around whether Scotland could remove Trident submarines from the country and remain a member of NATO. The SNP says yes [Ref: [Scotsman](#)] while senior NATO figures have briefed that no new member states would be accepted into the alliance where there was a dispute over nuclear weapons [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Supporters of the idea of remaining in NATO point out that the majority of members do not host any nuclear weapons, thus continued membership is no block to the banning of nuclear weapons from Scottish soil. In fact, they contend, the goals of nuclear non-proliferation are better served from within the organisation. They argue that the organisation no longer serves the same purposes it did during the Cold War (12 of the members joined after the end of the USSR) and point out that a number of NATO members have removed

nuclear weapons from their territory. In the wider referendum debate, the SNP insists that voting for independence is the only way to ensure the removal of nuclear weapons [Ref: [SNP](#)]. In the pro-union camp, there is a diversity of views on nuclear weapons. But unionist activists have argued that the referendum is not about nuclear arms policy and maintain that Trident can be scrapped on a UK-wide level [Ref: [Lib Dem Voice](#)].

Defence jobs

An attendant issue is the impact on employment, if any, of a possible Yes vote in 2014. The UK Government has suggested that Scotland could lose "privileged access" to UK-US defence trade [Ref: [STV](#)] while Labour peer Lord West estimated as many as 25,000 defence jobs could be lost under independence [Ref: [UK Parliament](#)]. Supporters of independence dismiss these claims as "scaremongering", insisting that an independent Scotland would in fact expand its security activities in the area of surface naval defence [Ref: [Scotsman](#)] and point to Scotland's industrial and engineering infrastructure, and its defence and aeronautics skills base, as proof that a Yes vote would not endanger the security industry [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. Membership of a common defence alliance could also help protect jobs, possibly facilitating a modest level of defence expenditure [Ref: [RUSI](#)] or, alternatively, providing Scotland with access to an established market in defence procurement, in much the same way that UK companies currently enjoy [Ref: [SDI](#)].

ESSENTIAL READING

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FOR

Why we can ban nuclear weapons and stay in NATO

Alex Salmond *Herald* 14 October 2012

Why independent Scotland must stay in NATO

George Kerevan *Scotsman* 24 August 2012

Two cheers for SNP growing up on defence

Alex Massie *ThinkScotland* 17 June 2012

Scotland cannot afford to leave NATO

Jim Murphy *Guardian* 2 March 2012

AGAINST

SNP NATO turnaround is morally defenceless

Tom Miers *Scotsman* 1 September 2012

The Case for Leaving NATO

Dave Thompson *Herald* 26 August 2012

NATO-powered independence? No thanks

Ian Bell *Herald* 12 August 2012

Staying in NATO does no favours

Annie Brown *Daily Record* 20 June 2012

ORGANISATIONS

Better Together

NATO

No to NATO Scotland Coalition

SNP-CND

Yes

BACKGROUNDERS

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How NATO is navigating Syria (and other issues for the evolving Alliance)

Howard LaFranchi *Christian Science Monitor* 26 September 2013

Visiting Faslane Peace Camp

New Left Project 6 August 2013

Trident Alternatives Review

HM Government 16 July 2013

No, Nicola, a vote against independence is not a vote for Trident

Caron Lindsay *Lib Dem Voice* 11 July 2013

Scotland Likely Must Choose NATO Membership or Trident

Removal: Report

Nuclear Threat Initiative 25 June 2013

Independent Scotland and NATO

Scottish Government 19 April 2013

Moore: Scottish Government U-turn on NATO shows their claims have no foundation

Scotland Office 10 April 2013

Alex Salmond speech at SNP Spring Conference

SNP 23 March 2013

Nato membership for an independent Scotland? The SNP's nuclear headache

Alan Trench *Guardian* 22 October 2012

NATO hypocrisy is a profound misjudgement

Patrick Harvie *patrickharviemsp.com* 19 October 2012

Joining Nato: the SNP can safely hold fire on its anti-nuclear dream

Ian Davis *Guardian* 16 October 2012

No place in NATO without the nuclear option

Michael Kelly *Scotsman* 30 August 2012

Loyalty test may be a wonky strategy

Lesley Riddoch *Scotsman* 27 August 2012

Don't vote against NATO. Vote for something better

Robin McAlpine *Jimmy Reid Foundation* 17 July 2012

NATO sticks with nuclear policy

Oliver Meier *Arms Control Association* June 2012

The End of an 'Auld Sang': Defence in an Independent Scotland

Malcolm Chambers *Royal United Services Institute* April 2012

Navigating NATO Procurement

United Kingdom Joint Delegation to NATO October 2010

Does NATO have a future?

Der Spiegel 5 June 2008

The North Atlantic Treaty

4 April 1949

IN THE NEWS

Remaining in NATO 'would make terrorist attack more likely'

Herald 13 October 2013

Alex Salmond accused of misleading voters over Trident base promises

Guardian 15 August 2013

Scottish independence: Scottish government officials meet with NATO

BBC News 15 August 2013

NATO chiefs deal blow to SNP's anti-nuclear strategy

Guardian 14 August 2013

Scottish independence: Air and naval defence plans

Scotsman 26 July 2013

Trident nuclear sub fleet should be scaled down, says review

STV 16 July 2013

Independence could cost Scotland defence trade and jobs, UK claims

STV 14 June 2013

NATO: Independent Scotland would have to apply for membership

STV 10 April 2013

Independent Scotland could keep defence industry, says expert

Scotsman 21 November 2012

Two MSPs quit SNP over party's decision to support NATO policy

STV 23 October 2012

SNP politicians resign over NATO vote

Holyrood 23 October 2012

SNP leadership narrowly wins controversial NATO vote at conference

STV 19 October 2012

SNP to vote on overturning its longstanding anti-NATO stance

STV 19 October 2012

Scottish independence: We'll stay in Nato but ban Trident, says Alex Salmond

Scotsman 18 October 2012

Scottish independence: Arctic threat to Scotland 'makes NATO vital'

Scotsman 4 October 2012

SNP nuclear activists to call for Scotland to be kept out of NATO

STV 25 August 2012

SNP NATO U-turn might not spell an end to Trident in Scotland, party warned

STV 20 August 2012

Anti-nuclear campaigners protest outside SNP HQ over proposed NATO U-turn

STV 9 August 2012

Nuclear campaigners accuse SNP of 'buckling' over NATO membership

STV 3 August 2012

75% want an independent Scotland to be a member of Nato, poll finds

STV 22 July 2012

Scotland Tonight: SNP and Nato

STV 17 July 2012

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IN THE NEWS

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Reversing party's opposition to NATO could be SNP's 'Clause Four moment'

STV 17 July 2012

David Cameron to delay Trident replacement

Guardian 19 October 2010

Peace pact prompts war of words

BBC News 1 December 1999

Nato bombing 'unpardonable folly'

BBC News 29 March 1999

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Debating Matters has teamed up with STV to give secondary school pupils across Scotland the opportunity to debate the big issues in the run up to the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. The Scotland wide competition will give school pupils, many of who will be eligible to vote in the referendum on independence, the chance to research and discuss issues which will affect the future of Scotland. STV will provide a platform for debates and cover the competition on air and online. Debating Matters has produced these special editions of our acclaimed Topic Guides on the motions for debate.

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- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
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- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
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Professional role
(if applicable)

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**“DEBATING MATTERS
TEACHES A WAY
OF THINKING.
INTELLECTUAL
ARCHITECTURE
IS CREATED BY
ENGAGING WITH
IDEAS”**

TRISTRAM HUNT, HISTORIAN & BROADCASTER

