

A response to the Scottish National Party's criticism of the Henry Jackson Society report: *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*

By George Grant

3 July 2013

Yesterday saw the launch of a new report, *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, of which I am the author.¹ The report provides the most detailed critique of the SNP's proposals for how they would defend an independent Scotland to date, and found a number of significant shortcomings. At the heart of the problem with the SNP's defence strategy, I conclude, is that it is designed more to help win the 18 September 2014 independence referendum than it is with actually defending Scotland.

To accompany the launch, the Scottish National Party (SNP) issued a press release, together with an accompanying brief detailing why, in their view, the report was "partial, partisan and inaccurate".²

Having read the SNP's objections to my report, I find them to be almost entirely without foundation, and so have chosen to respond to each criticism in turn. The SNP's objections are listed in bold, with my response to each immediately below.

The Henry Jackson Society (HJS) report makes no mention of the billions of pounds of assets, both in defence and in security. According to the most recent National Asset Register the UK's defence assets were worth £92bn. Scotland's 8.4% population share being worth £7.8bn

This first criticism is both wide of the mark and misses the point. In my assessment of the SNP's commitment to securing an independent Scotland's "share" of UK military assets in Chapter III, I quote the Scottish National Party (SNP) Defence Spokesman, Angus Robertson MP, at some length on this point.

"On equipment, we're a twelfth of the population, so 8.4 per cent; it's pretty much what everybody acknowledges", Robertson told me in interview. "Assets and liabilities will be negotiated at that level [...] There are equipment types [however] that we have contributed towards which Scotland will not be operating. Scotland will not be operating nuclear submarines, although we have paid for them; Scotland will not be operating aircraft carriers, although we have contributed towards them."³

¹ Grant, George, *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, The Henry Jackson Society, 2 July 2013, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HJS-In-Scotlands-Defence-Report-LOW-RES.pdf>

² *Defence report slammed by SNP*, Scottish National Party, 2 July 2013, <http://www.snp.org/media-centre/news/2013/jul/defence-report-slammed-snp>

³ Grant, George, *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, The Henry Jackson Society, 2 July 2013, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HJS-In-Scotlands-Defence-Report-LOW-RES.pdf>, p. 45

As I say immediately after this, “what Robertson envisages would be negotiation in which Scotland might take a proportionately higher share of certain assets, in exchange for taking zero shares of those which it felt it did not need. Alternatively, he suggested, the SNP may agree to some sort of financial settlement that would see Scotland fairly compensated for its contribution – whilst it had been part of the UK – towards assets which it would not inherit come independence”.⁴

The SNP criticism also misses the point because it demonstrates, to a certain extent, the same underlying assumption that enabled them to claim that their proposed £2.5 billion defence budget was simultaneously a saving of £1 billion on Scotland’s current contribution to the UK defence budget, as well as an increase of some £500 million in terms of defence spending in Scotland. Such a rationale assumes that a given region of the UK can calibrate how much it benefits from overall defence spending based on how much is spent there, relative to other regions. As I say in the report, “such a perspective is problematic insofar as there will be numerous assets integral to the defence of Scotland as a part of the UK that are not physically located there, just as there will be assets based in Scotland which are integral to the defence of England; Wales; and Northern Ireland.”⁵

The HJS report says that, ‘the most glaring examples of this are found in the SNP’s commitments...to base their entire Navy and their Armed Forces’ headquarters on the Clyde; and to join NATO whilst simultaneously divesting Scotland of nuclear weapons’.

- **The policy of placing our navy and JFHQ is perfectly feasible as the Former Flag Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland, who was the most senior Royal Naval officer in Scotland, Rear Admiral (Retired) Martin Alabaster has said: “There is an existing headquarters at Faslane that is used as the joint forces headquarters to run the large Joint Warrior exercise, so communications desks and computer terminals are available there, but it is not, for example, a hardened facility as we might have elsewhere in the UK. Faslane is an obvious choice because it already exists, but I cannot think of any particular reason why it would be particularly hard to do it somewhere else, if that were suitable.” 11/06/13 to the Defence Select Committee’s inquiry into Scottish Independence**
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/uc198-i/uc19801.htm>

The primary objection to placing the Scottish Navy at Faslane contained within the report was strategic, specifically because it is based in the southwest of Scotland, whereas almost all the nation’s major offshore assets, not to mention most of the potential threats, are located to the north and east. It has nothing to do with Faslane not being a perfectly well-equipped facility. It was my assessment, and it remains so, that the SNP’s primary rationale for saying their navy would be based on the Clyde was to reassure voters that removing Trident from Scotland

⁴ Grant, George, *In Scotland’s Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, The Henry Jackson Society, 2 July 2013, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HJS-In-Scotlands-Defence-Report-LOW-RES.pdf>, p. 45

⁵ Grant, George, *In Scotland’s Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, The Henry Jackson Society, 2 July 2013, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HJS-In-Scotlands-Defence-Report-LOW-RES.pdf>, p. 44

(which is currently based there and employs 6,700 people), would not lead to massive job losses.

As for whether or not it would be a suitable location for the armed forces headquarters, my report merely observes that a location so far away from Edinburgh would be strange given that – ordinarily – it makes good sense to have a nation's armed forces HQ close to the political centres of power. In the UK, for instance, the MoD is located just a few hundred yards from Parliament and almost directly opposite Downing Street. This isn't a coincidence.

- **25 out of 28 NATO nations do not possess nuclear weapons. Air Marshall (Retired) Iain McNicoll said "I think it is reasonable to point out that other members of NATO do not accept nuclear weapons. It is possible, at least in theory anyway, for Scotland not to accept nuclear weapons." 11/06/13 to the Defence Select Committee's inquiry into Scottish Independence**
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/uc1-i/uc19801.htm>

I refer all interested readers to Chapter II of my report where this and many other such assertions are dealt with in some detail.

The HJS report claims that, "An SNP-governed independent Scotland would therefore stand alone in its commitment to unilaterally force the removal of another country's nuclear weapons capability from its territory."

- **The inverse is true – many signatories of the NPT would not welcome the unilateral positioning of all of one nation's nuclear weapons in a sovereign state.**

Again, please see Chapter II, specifically pages 31-37.

The HJS report mistakes a report from Stewart Crawford as SNP policy. The HJS report says that SNP are considering Hawks for fast jet fleet to do QRA. "the Hawk trainer (endorsed by the SNP's defence spokesperson),"

- **The SNP have never said this. Only Stuart Crawford in his report has said this. The HJS report's incorrect understanding has actually led to them using a picture of a Hawk on the front cover of the report.**

This is an extraordinary objection, as it is simply untrue. During my interview with Angus Robertson on 19 March 2013 I spoke to him at some length about this, specifically raising the objection that the RAF Hawk would probably not be able to carry out the role envisaged for it by the SNP.

I was doubly surprised to be contacted by Robertson's special advisor, Luke Skipper, on the day the report was published, to inform me: "I believe you have misunderstood. It [the Hawk] cannot even do QRA [Quick Reaction Alert]. Angus did not endorse it in this critical role."

That's very strange, I told Skipper, given that I have Robertson on record in my report saying that the Hawk "can be operated to do the role the fast jets currently perform in the QRA platform."⁶

The HJS report confuses the Scottish Government submission to the SDSR, which was cross party, with the SNP's submission, by Angus Robertson, to the SDSR. The SNP submission merely appended the Scottish Government's report at the end. The cross party Scottish Government report is available here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/918/0104964.pdf>. This report, in bold, on its cover, says it is: A cross party submission from Scottish Government and the main Scottish party leaders. It is clearly footnoted as such in the SNP's submission. Therefore pages 90-92 are incorrect along with other references.

This is also untrue. All quotes in that section were taken directly from the SNP's submission to the UK Government's 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). Moreover, to be doubly sure, these quotes were taken from the version sent to me directly by the office of Angus Robertson MP. Not only that, but several of the assertions contained within that submission have been reproduced by the SNP on their website elsewhere.

Irrespective of this, the criticism misses the substantive point, which is that this section of the report reflects the SNP's previous assertions regarding the importance of Ministry of Defence (MoD) contracts to the defence industry in Scotland.

The HJS report claims the UK government stopped publishing regional statistics in 2011-12, when they actually stopped in 2008. A simple search of parliamentary questions by Angus Robertson MP would show this, along with a Westminster Hall debate on the subject and a SNP amendment debated and voted on during a previous Armed Forces Bill.

This criticism reflects an earlier draft which did indeed contain that error, as I sent the SNP a pre-published copy of the report to review. The final version of the report launched on 2 July, and available online, has rectified that mistake. From the version of the report the SNP had, however, they were certainly justified in pointing this mistake out.

The HJS report says there is 'broad agreement' that the Typhoon jet is 'too advanced and too expensive' for Scotland to maintain: "Unfortunately, there appears to be broad agreement amongst the strategic community, as well as recognition from within the SNP, that the Typhoon would almost certainly be too advanced and too expensive for an independent Scotland to maintain".

- **However Air Marshall (Retired) Iain McNicoll said, "The SNP changed its policy on that last autumn, but there is a decision for NATO to make in that respect as well. If it was still part of NATO, I can see no reason why the networks that exist at the moment would not be able to continue pretty much as they are....If you were dividing up the current UK Armed Forces, clearly a proportion of the Typhoon**

⁶ Grant, George, *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, The Henry Jackson Society, 2 July 2013, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HJS-In-Scotlands-Defence-Report-LOW-RES.pdf>, p. 52

force would be available, and that is an outstanding air defence aircraft. Presumably they could inherit that. If they were prepared to be part of a wider virtual-if you like-fleet of aircraft, they could also cope with the support aspects as well". 11/06/13 to the Defence Select Committee's inquiry into Scottish Independence

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/uc198-i/uc19801.htm>

There is broad agreement that the Eurofighter Typhon would be too advanced for an independent Scotland to maintain. The report acknowledges that the Typhoon is an outstanding aircraft and that, and I quote, "if Scotland is expecting to inherit some air-defence aircraft from the UK, then the only suitable option (in terms of capabilities) would be the Eurofighter Typhoon".⁷

But it all comes back to the bigger strategic question of the kind of nation Scotland would want to be in the world; and then deciding what sort of assets would be needed to underpin that, and the SNP have simply not provided a serious assessment of that as yet. The Typhoon is incredibly expensive and incredibly advanced, and designed to fulfil a range of functions far beyond basic air patrol duties.

Somewhat unfortunately for Angus Robertson, it must be noted that on the same day as he published this criticism of my report, the SNP's Veterans Minister, Keith Brown MSP, told the House of Commons Defence Committee that the Typhoon would indeed be "beyond the requirements of an independent Scotland".⁸ This appears to be a fairly irreconcilable contradiction, but one I shall leave the SNP to resolve.

The HJS Report makes claim that Scotland's navy will only support 1000 jobs, "While the SNP propose stationing the Scottish Navy in place of the Trident fleet, that would be unlikely to generate more than 1,000 jobs.

- **Norway and Denmark have far more than 1000 navy personnel. Not one expert has suggested such a low figure**

The report provided comparisons with both Norway and Denmark, as well as drawing on expert advice from elsewhere, before arriving at this conclusion. The question at hand is how many of the 6,700 jobs currently generated by Her Majesty's Naval Base Clyde could be replaced by stationing the Scottish Navy there in an independent Scotland.

As the report makes clear, there are serious concerns with the SNP's constant comparison with Norway, given that their annual defence budget is some £4.6 billion, over £2 billion more than the SNP propose to spend. Closer to the mark is Denmark – at least in terms of budget, which

⁷ Grant, George, *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, The Henry Jackson Society, 2 July 2013, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HJS-In-Scotlands-Defence-Report-LOW-RES.pdf>, p. 52

⁸ Maddox, David, *Scottish Independence: NATO entry 'not automatic'*, Scotsman, 3 July 2013, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/top-stories/scottish-independence-nato-entry-not-automatic-1-2986882>

spends £2.6 billion per annum on defence (just a little more than the SNP's proposed £2.5 billion).

Denmark has two main naval bases: one with 600 personnel and the other with 500 personnel, a total of 1,100.⁹ Even if we said that placing the Scottish Navy at Faslane could generate double that, which I do not say, that still falls far short of the 6,700 jobs currently there. That was the only point; it had nothing to do with a critique of a Scottish Navy more broadly.

The HJS Report attacks the policy of placing the main Scottish naval facility in Faslane. Yet it is the UK that has no significant conventional vessels based in Scotland and NONE on the East coast.

The report firmly maintains that placing the Scottish Navy at Faslane would not make strategic sense. The UK makes use of Faslane for its Trident nuclear submarine fleet for specific reasons relating, *inter alia*, to the physical characteristics of the site. Comparing the UK's maritime posture to that of an independent Scotland is something of a superficial criticism given that the areas they are seeking to defend; the size of their navies; and their strategic outlook generally would almost certainly be very different.

That being said, this report is not seeking to defend the UK Government's defence posture, especially following the ill-conceived 2010 National Security Strategy and SDSR. Indeed, I co-authored an extensive and highly critical report into the Coalition Government's NSS and SDSR at the time.¹⁰ However, this report is about the SNP's defence proposals for an independent Scotland, since it is the SNP who are advocating that outcome.

The HJS report makes no attempt to compare the future of the industry in Scotland under the Union with Independence. It says "Currently it is claimed that Scotland's defence industries employ some 12,600 people and contribute around £1.8 billion per annum to the country's economy. Much of this - think of the Clyde shipyards and the Faslane/Coullport naval base -relies on orders from the MoD and hosting on the Trident submarine fleet"

- **The HJS report makes no mention of evidence by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster 'Given the world-class shipbuilding industry, particularly on the Clyde, I would have thought all the surface ships required could be procured from within Scotland.'**
11/06/13 to the Defence Select Committee's inquiry into Scottish Independence
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/uc198-i/uc19801.htm>

The report does not deny the world-class quality of the Scottish shipyards; it points out that no warship has been ordered and built for the Royal Navy outside of the UK since the Second World War, and that this would very likely continue to be the case were Scotland to become

⁹ Grant, George, *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, The Henry Jackson Society, 2 July 2013, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HJS-In-Scotlands-Defence-Report-LOW-RES.pdf>, p. 69

¹⁰ Jenkin, B. & Grant, G., *The Tipping Point: British National Strategy and the UK's Future World Role*, The Henry Jackson Society, London, July 2011

independent. Contracts for these ships are invariably awarded non-competitively to UK-based companies on national security grounds, with the Government invoking the Article 346 Exemption releasing them from EU competition rules to do so.

I refer readers to Chapter VI of my report, specifically pages 92-95, for greater detail.

The HJS report does not mention that after the Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier build is complete the jobs based directly on warship building will fall from 5000 to 1500 across the UK regardless of Independence.¹ Under the ToBA agreement signed by Labour there was no geographic location cited for which yards will stay open. The ToBA does 'not contain nor commit MOD to a particular level of annual expenditure in any geographical location or constrain BVT in relation to how or where BVT conducts its business' (Angus Robertson Parliamentary Question 5 December 2009).

Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond confirmed this was a commercial decision by BAE: "One of the downsides of big programmes like the carriers, which create lots of good news when they start, is that when they come to an end it inevitably means a downsizing of the overall workforce," he said. "Now, where that downsizing takes place is an issue for the company and I'm sure BAE are already discussing with their workforce their plans for the future. It's explicitly not our decision where BAE builds the Type 26s. It's a commercial decision they will have to make." (<http://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/local/minister-warns-bae-job-cutsinevitable-1-3791996>)

I fully concur that once construction of the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers is completed, the number of jobs involved in that programme will inevitably decline! This is a statement of the obvious and Philip Hammond is right to point out that it is indeed one of the downsides of big programmes like that from a jobs perspective.

The SNP are right to point out that the decision as to where the Type 26 Global Combat Ships will be built has yet to be taken. I explain in some detail in the report, however, why – if Scotland votes 'No' to independence in 2014 – those vessels will in all likelihood be built north of the border, and why the inverse will be true if Scotland does become an independent country. For the reasons why, readers can consult Chapter VI of the report, specifically pages 92-93.

Irrespective of this, it is worth repeating again that my report does not argue in favour of the Union and against Independence for Scotland: it provides a detailed assessment of the SNP's defence strategy and whether it stands up to serious scrutiny.

The HJS Report makes no mention of Article 346 in the context of the current union, "With the best will in the world, if the MoD were to place future equipment orders post Scottish independence elsewhere in the UK under the EU Article 346 exemption then the Scottish defence industries would be in trouble."

- **It should be highlighted that even in the realms of EU Exempt expenditure, which by very definition must be spent in the UK, Scotland gets less than its population share – over 5 years we have stats for that equates to £1.87bn. This is at the**

absolute high-water mark of 'protected expenditure' with the QE builds at full swing. This will only decrease.

That may be so, but it is the position of my report that this figure would decrease dramatically still further in an independent Scotland. It is a question of simple mathematics. The UK maintains the second biggest defence industry on earth. Defence companies tend to go where the money is. The report explains in some detail why I believe MoD contracts would decrease substantially in Scotland, and it is simply not plausible to argue that an independent Scottish Government would realistically be able to place a comparable number of orders, for a defence force projected to be just one eighth the size of the UK's, to replace that lost business.

See Chapter VI of the report for more detail on these issues.

The HJS Report makes unsubstantiated claims about what Scotland could and could not afford. It says: "(such as advanced fast jets, battle tanks, aircraft carriers, and the requisite supporting assets) which enable Scotland to play a more global role would almost certainly not be on the table" (HJS 39)

- **Norway and Denmark both operate advanced fast jet fleets**

These are not unsubstantiated claims, and all are dealt with in the report. It must be noted, however, that because the SNP have themselves provided so little detail about their ambitions, in particular the reasons *why* they would need certain assets and not need others, it makes a detailed critique rather more difficult in that regard.

The reasons why an independent Scotland would probably not seek to operate advanced fast jets (I had in mind the Typhoon and its equivalents), have already been explained. Beyond looking at the suitability or otherwise of the RAF's three jet types for an independent Scotland (the Typhoon, the Tornado GR4 and the Hawk T1 / T2), I confined myself to saying that: "If Scotland did wish to possess fast jets in its Air Force, therefore, it is the conclusion of this report that it would need to acquire them from elsewhere; no suitable jet currently exists in the RAF's inventory".¹¹

Regarding aircraft carriers, the SNP have said themselves they would not seek to operate those.

The reason why I say an independent Scotland would probably not seek to acquire main battle tanks (Challenger II) is because neither I nor almost every military expert consulted for the report could think what Scotland would use such an advanced and expensive piece of equipment for.

However, it all comes back to the SNP's total failure to provide a proper defence strategy informed by a foreign policy that clearly outlines what sort of nation an independent Scotland would want to be in the world; what it would want its armed forces for; and what it perceived the main risks to its national security as being. This has to be the starting point of any serious

¹¹ Grant, George, *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*, The Henry Jackson Society, 2 July 2013, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HJS-In-Scotlands-Defence-Report-LOW-RES.pdf>, p. 53

defence strategy, and it is the starting point of my report to observe how difficult it is to properly scrutinise the SNP's equipment proposals in its absence.

To clearly grasp what I mean by this, I refer readers to my entire report: *In Scotland's Defence? An Assessment of SNP Defence Strategy*.

Some final remarks

In closing, I should also like to make a couple of more general points regarding the SNP's response to my report.

I was especially disappointed by the SNP's complete failure to take on board any of the report, instead attempting to explain why it was simply full of errors. Hard though the SNP may find it to believe, I want my report to be used constructively to help improve the quality of this debate. The SNP's response suggests that they do indeed believe that their defence strategy is watertight and does not warrant critiquing. Unfortunately, it now appears to be the view of the great majority of people outside the SNP who focus on these issues, not to mention a good number inside the party, that this is simply not credible.

If the SNP cannot acknowledge the fact that their defence proposals need serious work, then they will lose this debate.

I was also very disappointed to see how the SNP sought to discredit the report by smearing the think-tank which commissioned me to write it, The Henry Jackson Society (HJS), as "neo-conservative", and complicit in the "scaremongering" of what they call 'Project Fear'. I also understand that the SNP negatively briefed against HJS to the Scottish media in the week running up to the report's publication in an attempt to persuade journalists not to take the report or its findings seriously.

First of all, this report is neither 'neo-conservative', nor 'liberal', nor anything in between: it is not calling for a specific outcome on some matter of foreign or defence policy; it is providing a critique of the SNP's defence strategy. It does not say, for instance, whether Trident is a good or a bad thing, or whether Scotland should be part of NATO or not; it merely examines the feasibility of the SNP's proposals in that regard.

Secondly, I personally reject being characterised as "neo-conservative" in the strongest terms, especially given the many assumptions now ingrained in the public consciousness about what neo-conservatives believe, much of which is closely bound up with the so-called 'War on Terror'. Having spent much of the past year living and working in Libya, establishing as deputy editor the first post-Gaddafi English language newspaper, the *Libya Herald*, I have a good understanding of the unique and disparate challenges confronting states seeking to transition from dictatorship to democracy, as well as a great deal of sympathy with those seeking to make the change. Having been threatened with abduction by Islamist militants for investigating a death list in Benghazi, which forced my return to the UK, I have also experienced first-hand the darker side of what the authorities in Libya, as in many other North African and Middle Eastern countries, are seeking to confront.

Finally, to describe the report itself as part of 'Project Fear', suggests that it takes a stand against Scottish independence, and unreasonably so. To reiterate and to conclude: the report neither supports nor opposes independence for Scotland; it seeks simply to assess whether the SNP's proposals for the defence of an independent Scotland are credible. The SNP may not be able to see it, but those are two quite different things.