

Scotland's Place in the World

An equitable and sustainable approach to the development of the foreign and defence policies of an independent Scotland.



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Military Security or Human Security?

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Introduction

Some say that it’s wrong to apply war time contexts to the Covid Crisis. Understandable of course, as war involves violence and sacrifice that’s often shared unequally. Moreover, war is invariably accompanied by the propagation of “glorious” narratives that can leave a bitter taste in the mouth.

However, wars, particularly global wars, always involve social and economic change and often disruption and in that regard the Covid Pandemic is no different. That change can be radical in parts with new winners and new losers both geopolitically and economically.

The slow moving car crash that is the Climate Crisis meant that upheaval was going to happen anyway, but at a slower pace than that engendered by Covid 19. Indeed, given the inevitable, and sadly in parts almost irreversible, nature of climate disruption some of the decisions and choices that we would have been confronted with may have been brought forward by a few years.

Unlike the Covid Crisis climate disruption does not, or at least so far has not, involved a single or a series of fast flowing social and economic shocks. There will also be winners and losers as a result of this crisis, organisationally, economically and also, ideologically.

The Covid Crisis makes certain that the 2021 Scottish Parliament election will be about much more than who wields a range of devolved powers more efficiently and a bit more equitably. As people go to the polls they will ask if they and theirs would be safer or less safe in an Independent Scotland.

If the SNP go into that election declaring that Human Security will be the principal overarching driver of an independent Scotland’s security policy then it will have a distinct advantage over its main electoral rivals. A feature of mainstream British politics is that the traditional post imperial National Security approach is hardwired into British

thinking. Even Labour under Corbyn had come to terms with retention of nuclear weapons. After all it was the same post war Labour Government that built the NHS who also built the bomb.

The purpose of this paper is to scope out some basic determinants that should shape the foreign and security policy of a re emergent Scottish state in the 21st Century as it works through, and with good fortune comes through the Covid 19 pandemic.

Methodology

In undertaking this task, I rely heavily on a particular approach that's often used in the field of international relations, the geopolitical approach.

I then suggest that because of Scotland's inherently stable geopolitical situation it will be able to develop a progressive foreign policy based upon the paradigm of Human Security in which Scotland's National Security concerns can be given their place, but within an overall Human Security context.

In other words, the framing and the prosecution of an independent Scotland's national security concerns, and there are some that need to be addressed, will be shaped as a subservient part of Scotland's Human Security goals.

To do this I need to explain why Scotland's basic geopolitical determinants favour the Human Security approach rather than the more traditional National Security approach.

National Security

National Security is a very old political concept. Some indeed have argued it is the seminal driver in the creation of states.

The National Security approach means that every other policy driver is subservient, including issues of social and economic justice. Indeed, the expenditure of human life, if needs be on an industrial scale, is often treated as a resource to be expended in the pursuit of National Security goals.

A useful starting point is what I will call the feudal bargain. Here a small skilled warrior class will, for a considerable consideration, including first call on land on wealth and indeed on all resources, protect the many. Of course, this theoretical bargain invariably manifests itself in the real world in economic, social and political privilege.

In some states, indeed in all states from time to time, the apparatus of National Security is primarily configured to protect someone's or some group's iteration of the state from the vast majority of the people who actually happen to live in that state. This is one, but by no means the only, driver that can lead to what we often refer to as civil war.

However, the profitability of the preparation and the prosecution of war has in the late 20th and early 21st centuries reached unprecedented levels.

Five Star General and President of the USA Dwight Eisenhower foresaw this and warned the world to guard against the behemoth of the Military Industrial Complex. Many states, including the U.K, often fail to heed his warning.

The purpose of many 21st century wars is no longer victory in a kinetic conflict with another state or non-state actor, where the winner imposes its political will on the loser. Rather the purposes of many wars, and this can be seen in their longevity, has become the creation of a constant continual profit stream.

Consequently, the institutions and the people who make up the military industrial complex seek to ensure that it is they who frame, as far as they can, the discourse around issues of national security. As Chomsky often argues they manufacture consent not only for war, but for constant continual war to ensure constant continual profit.

It's no accident that Saudi Arabia, the world's third largest military spender has not imposed its political will on Yemen and that the USA, the world's largest military spender, has not imposed its political will on Afghanistan.

More relevant to us in Scotland is the decision of successive British Governments, to become involved in a series of long drawn out and heretofore never ending 21st century expeditionary wars. None have been won, or even concluded in a way that has satisfied any of the participants. All they have resulted in is the destabilisation of the whole region, from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea.



1. Eisenhower, January 1961.



2. Sea rescue boat. From the Independent, 22nd July 2019

Indeed, the resultant refugee crisis has arguably threatened to destabilise the European Union. Certainly, it helped foster the development of the political far right from the Atlantic in the West to beyond the rivers Oder and Danube on the East.

This means that as well as the retention of the cultural virility totem pole that is Trident (it has no utility in any security paradigm) Britain's armed forces are almost entirely configured to act as someone else's well trained and well-armed auxiliaries in future foreign adventures.

So, the National Security Paradigm was, in the British context, threadbare even before the advent of Covid 19. Today, as we look ahead to the post Covid 19 world where pandemic and climate disruption are the biggest threats, its utility is of, at best, secondary importance.

The most dramatic exposure of the limited utility of the National Security paradigm in the age of Covid is of course the USA. This was graphically summed up in a recent Washington Post Op-Ed by Max Boot a prominent Republican national security academic (though to be fair no cheerleader for Donald Trump) when he said, “We need N95 masks, not F-35 fighter aircraft.”



3. Ventilator used by the NHS. Prices range from about £5,000 for small ones to for £25,000 for larger devices.



4. F-35 bomber helmet. From £216,000 to £288,000 per helmet.

Human Security

The Wikipedia definition, or aspects of it, are as good an explanation as any. It argues, *“that the proper referent for security should be at the human rather than national level. Human security reveals a people-centred and multi-disciplinary understanding of security.*

It goes on to say, *“Critics of the concept argue that its vagueness undermines its effectiveness, that it has become little more than a vehicle for activists wishing to promote certain causes, and that it does not help the research community understand what security means or help decision makers to formulate good policies.*

Alternatively, other scholars have argued that the concept of human security should be broadened to encompass military security: ‘In other words, if this thing called ‘human security’ has the concept of ‘the human’ embedded at the heart of it, then let us address the question of the human condition directly. Thus understood, human security would no longer be the vague amorphous add-on to harder edged areas of security such as military security or state security.

In this paper I argue from the latter position. That the actual day to day needs of the many should be the priority such as health, living standards, and security including the wider definition of social as well as national security.

That the development of national security policies and their prosecution by a sovereign Scottish state, should sit within an overarching Scottish Human Security Policy position. That Scottish National Security policy and its prosecution be driven by Scotland’s Human Security needs rather than, as is the case in some countries, the other way around.

Good examples of this cart before the horse approach can be seen in the USA and in Russia, where everything is subsumed and subservient to their perceived historical role as, in the case of the USA, the globe's military hegemon and in the case of post-soviet Russia to cement its position as a regional military hegemon.

Some other countries feel compelled, rightly or wrongly, by the geopolitical characteristics of the region they are in, to give primacy to the National Security paradigm, examples include, but are not confined to, countries like Israel, Pakistan, The Ukraine and Iran.

It's not the purpose of this paper to critique the decisions of these countries rather to point out that Scotland's geopolitical good fortune allows us a much wider range of options on how we formulate our security policy.

It is that geopolitical good fortune I will now turn to. First of all, I must give a brief explanation of what geopolitics is and why it's a useful tool to scope out the basic security determinants of an Independent Scotland.

Geopolitics

The biggest hurdle the Yes campaign faced in 2014 was not that a majority of Scots had a close affinity with Unionism. Rather it was that a significant minority of Scots liked the idea of an independent Scotland but felt insecure in voting for independence.

The trope of "too wee and too poor" is the most familiar one. However, it had a less prominent sibling in the "too isolated and too vulnerable" trope.

Together these tropes conjured up to a vision of an economically and geopolitically insecure Scotland. Punted relentlessly by most of the mainstream media as well as political unionists, it proved to be a winning formula for No. It's our duty to ensure that it's a losing formula for No next time.

A central feature of the "too isolated too vulnerable" trope is the "dangerous and uncertain world" mantra. A moments reflection reveals that it is of course nonsense. Some parts of the world are indeed dangerous and uncertain. However, it is equally true others are not.

I will use three examples for illustrative purposes. New Zealand, The Ukraine, and The Republic of Ireland.

New Zealand

All agree that New Zealand is one of the most geopolitically stable and secure states in the world. The reasons are twofold, its relative isolation and its temperate climate. Over 4,000 kilometres from Australia it is highly unlikely any other state would wish to invade it. Indeed, some time ago the New Zealand Air Force removed its fast jet capability because it added nothing to its security.

More recently its favourable geography, in terms of its islands, settlement structure and global position afforded its Prime Minister a basic platform to fashion an effective Coronavirus strategy.

I'm not saying that New Zealand doesn't have geopolitical challenges, but invasion is not one of them. These basic geopolitical parameters give New Zealand a secure foundation on which a rational security discourse can be had. New Zealand's geopolitical good fortune and its temperate climate bodes well in the development of effective strategies to tackle climate change.

The Ukraine

In the geopolitical beauty stakes the Ukraine is at the other end of the spectrum. Geopolitical determinants can change, even be transformed, over time. However, the Ukraine has been for centuries and for the foreseeable future at least, one of the most geopolitically unstable regions of the world.

The Russians claim that it is, in fact the birthplace of the Russian nation and for it to break away from Russia is seen by many Russians as nothing short of bizarre. From the Ukrainian perspective, particularly Western Ukraine, it sees itself as fully European. Irrespective of the merits of either perspective, no one doubts that it is placed in one of the most geopolitically unstable regions for the world.

It is understandable therefore, given the ongoing low intensity war in its eastern areas. The Human Security approach will have very limited electoral salience in Ukrainian politics. It will have its supporters there no doubt, but they will be confined to the political margins.

The Republic of Ireland

The third example is the Republic of Ireland. I chose Ireland because it is a state that shares more geopolitical characteristics with Scotland than any other. In its essentials 21st century Ireland is a threat to no one and no one threatens Ireland.

This was not always the perception of course. Ireland has historically been a geopolitical football for countless others. For the Bruces, for the Plantagenets, for the Tudors, for the Valois and for the Hapsburgs and the Stuarts too. Indeed, until around a century ago, it was a geopolitical football in British imperial politics too.

However now in the 21st Century no one sees Ireland as a threat. Moreover, Ireland nestles in a geopolitical cultural blanket thrown about it by the USA. That in itself may present some issues for Ireland.

However, it has also meant that it was only in December of 2019, nearly a century after the state's creation, that the Irish Government felt the need to get around to developing an explicit security strategy for the Republic.

Scotland

This is something that even a devolved Scottish Government could do. Pre Covid 19 some could challenge such a move; however, post Covid 19, such resistance to a public consultation would, I am sure get, short shrift.

The post Covid 19 Scottish public mood will be demanding significant re-prioritisation and reinterpretation of what meaningful security means for all Scots, rich and poor, young and old.

Scotland nestles in one of the most, if not the most, geopolitically stable areas in one of the most geopolitically stable regions of the World, Western Europe. Indeed, so does the United Kingdom. Paradoxically it is because the United Kingdom is in a geopolitically stable region that it can afford to configure almost all of its armed forces for expeditionary warfare rather than home defence.

Trident and the new carriers are utterly irrelevant in addressing any of the real security needs of the UK. Indeed, in terms of the carriers, even some in the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), the oldest military think tank in the world, recently seem to have come to effectively the same conclusion though couched in more qualified language.

Reflect on this. If there is a consensus that the Republic of Ireland nestles in an area of geopolitical security then at what point, on the journey from Larne to Stranraer does the ferry exit a region of geopolitical stability and enter that “dangerous and uncertain world” so often alluded to by many politicians.

Britain works very hard to maintain the primacy of the national security paradigm. In the style of the medieval church, every 12 weeks or so, even during the Covid lockdown, all of the media, gear up to repeat a recurring geopolitical morality tale. It’s a joint production, by the RAF and its Russian counterpart, long rehearsed with continual reruns in the hope that it seeps into our collective consciousness.

It’s as good a real life exemplar of Chomsky’s “manufacturing consent” theory as you will find anywhere.

A couple of very big, often very shiny, sometimes quite old, Russian long range bombers take off from the Murmansk Area. They are then picked up by Finnish military radars, they pass it on to Swedish military radars who pass it on to Norwegian military radars who then pass it on to UK military radars. Two RAF fast jets are scrambled. Said jets rendezvous with the Russian bombers, well outside UK air space and the performance commences. One RAF jet takes photographs of the other RAF jet wiggling its wing with the Russian bomber as a “cool” backdrop.

The photo is dutifully widely published in the main-stream media next day, sometimes with an op-ed by a retired Air Marshal who may or may not be a non-executive director in an arms company, decrying “our” lack of preparedness.

The above example would be bordering on the facetious if it were not for the fact that taking evidence in 2014 the Westminster Defence select committee ridiculed the notion of an independent Scotland being unprepared for a Russian “incursion”.



No mention was made of the fact that for such a dog fight to take place somewhere over the Moray Firth, the Russians would have to get past three other airforces, not to mention any United States Navy assets in the North Atlantic.

In the same year RUSI took a rare journey out of its Whitehall HQ to run a seminar in Holyrood on the topic of the growth of the Russian military. A reasonable presentation on the development of new Russian military infrastructure along its polar coast was given. It was also mentioned that the heretofore polar coast had been icebound until the advent of global warming. It is now a major sea route, so the development of new naval facilities along the thousands of miles of new coast waters is inevitable.

However, the audience was then presented with a conclusion that the Russian Bear was not only rearming but may be coming Scotland’s way. Interestingly the map used in the presentation included nothing West of Norway!

I have still to find a scenario in which the UK, far less Scotland, would be a priority conventional target. the truth is, Scotland like Ireland would be the beneficiary of multiple levels of defence for free.

Conclusion

Our key international relationship will not be with any alliance or indeed international institution. Important though these would be our most important international relationship would be, as always, with England. Absent Scotland, England is more likely to move to start to shed its post imperial baggage, or so many English commentators increasingly think.

Our relationship with England will, as has always been the case, be the key factor for the foreign ministry of an independent Scotland. As with Ireland so with Scotland. Our relationship with England will be based on one of huge cultural similarity and mutual security.

We are no longer in the 15th or 16th Century or indeed post war quasi imperial Britain. Like Ireland it has been centuries since Scotland has been a potential back door to foreign invasion of England.

Crucially, though, the Human Security approach will allow a future Scottish Government, like New Zealand, to address the realities of climate change. It will also allow Scotland to contribute in a rational way to wider global discourse on the challenges and solutions to the climate disruption that is an inevitability.

The Irish Government has opened up a public consultation on a future first time Security Strategy and that is something that Scotland could do now and should do now.

Moreover, given the holistic nature of the Human Security paradigm I can think of no impediment that would stop a devolved Scottish Government starting to have a public consultation, as Ireland has, over a security strategy for Scotland.

I would argue that there is no reason why, as an outcome of an inevitable future Covid 19 enquiry, there cannot be an examination of, if not the development of, a Human Security approach as one of its outcomes. In that consultation I would argue that the starting point would be Scotland's basic, quite stable and secure, geopolitical determinants, rather than the baggage and legacy of a post imperial Britain.

When we successfully sell the good news story of Scotland's inherent geopolitical stability we can swiftly move on the people's priorities - a long and healthy life in a socially and economically secure setting.

Considering these issues through a Human Security lens is propitious during this period and possible subsequent periods of lock down. However, it is propitious also in the long term. The Human Security approach will allow a future Scottish Government to address the realities of climate change. It will also allow Scotland to contribute in a rational way to wider global solutions to climate disruption.

Bill Ramsay, Convener SNP CND

SNP CND is affiliated to Scottish CND and is the forum where SNP members have a space to develop a distinctive Scottish Nationalist anti-nuclear perspective.

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