

# Security in a Small Nation Scotland, Democracy, Politics

EDITED BY ANDREW W. NEAL

# Security in a Small Nation

Scotland, Democracy, Politics

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## 8. To Speak Security or Not to Speak Security? Responsibility and Deference in the Scottish Independence Debate

*Andrew W. Neal*

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This chapter is about how and why security was debated and not debated in the Scottish independence referendum campaigns. It begins with a summary of the security content of the campaigns in the run up to the vote, arguing that ‘security’ was not entirely absent but not prominent either. The main focus is to discuss the political implications of speaking security, using the lens of securitisation theory. It argues that more security talk is not necessarily a good thing, because it may ramp up fear and mobilise security apparatuses. The chapter then considers the implications of staying silent on security, which are not innocent either. This is because historically, the power and authority of the state to declare and define security threats depended on the silent deference of the wider political class. By demonstration, the chapter compares the quietude of security politics in Scotland with the history and transformation of security politics at Westminster.

Security was not absent from the independence debate, but nor was it prominent.<sup>1</sup> In Scotland, the highest profile security issue was Trident, although in policy and academic parlance this is a matter of 'defence' rather than 'security'.<sup>2</sup> The 670 page Scottish Government White Paper offered a chapter on international relations and defence and another containing six pages on security and intelligence. The latter offered proposals for an independent Scotland to work closely with current allies, create stronger constitutional limitations on war powers, and establish a single Scottish intelligence agency that would operate within a strong human rights framework.<sup>3</sup>

Measured by volume of material, the UK Government and UK Parliament produced more. This included the UK Government's 'Scotland Analysis' papers on defence and security. The latter is particularly interesting, representing an unprecedented accounting of every possible security-related agency in the UK, drawn very widely, from the intelligence services and their offshoots to specialised police agencies such as the Financial Intelligence Unit.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, parliament conducted inquiries into the defence, foreign policy, security, and intelligence implications of Scottish independence via its select committees.<sup>5</sup> The Foreign Affairs Committee evidence session

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- 1 For more forensic examinations of the debate, see Chapters 6 and 7 in this volume.
  - 2 For the Nationalists, demanding the removal of Trident from Scotland seemed more a matter of principle than national security as such. The SNP policy to remain in NATO – a nuclear defence alliance – suggested they did not wish to abandon the principle of nuclear deterrence entirely, or at least that their internal policy-making process had produced an ambiguity.
  - 3 Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2013), <http://www.gov.scot/resource/0043/00439021.pdf>, pp. 232–51, 61–67.
  - 4 HM Government, *Scotland Analysis: Cm. 8741: Security* (London: HMSO, 2013), [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/253500/Scotland\\_analysis\\_security.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253500/Scotland_analysis_security.pdf)
  - 5 Scottish Affairs Committee, *The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: A Defence Force for Scotland—a Conspiracy of Optimism?* (London: House of Commons, 2012); Scottish Affairs Committee, *The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: How Would Separation Affect Jobs in the Scottish Defence Industry?*, Eighth Report of Session 2012–13, Report, Together with Formal Minutes (London: HMSO, 2013); Defence Committee, *The Defence Implications of Possible Scottish Independence. Sixth Report of Session 2013–14, Volume 1: Report, Together with an Appendix, Formal Minutes and Oral Evidence* (London: HMSO, 2013), <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Ck76yDPw1r8C>; Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Inquiry into Foreign Policy Implications of and for a Separate Scotland' (2012), <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2010/scotland/>;

held in Edinburgh in January 2013 was significant because it seems to have changed SNP policy.<sup>6</sup> Nicola Sturgeon told the committee that her colleagues were consulting on the feasibility of a Scottish foreign intelligence service, a Scottish MI6 in effect. Committee member Rory Stewart MP made this look unrealistic through his questioning, pointing out the costs and the fact that only a handful of larger states had the capacity to maintain dedicated foreign intelligence services. The subsequent White Paper proposed that an independent Scotland would have only a single combined intelligence agency.

These documents and inquiries were discussed in the press by various protagonists and analysts, but they were not a feature of the headline public debate. More general security discussion was not extensive when compared with contentious issues such as the currency of an independent Scotland or the longevity of North Sea oil. In the televised debates, few questions asked were about national security or related issues such as terrorism. In one exception early on, Home Secretary Theresa May and Defence Secretary Philip Hammond made speeches claiming that an independent Scotland would be at greater risk of terrorist attack if it was deprived of the security umbrella and border controls of the UK.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite claims that the private name for the 'Better Together' campaign was 'Project Fear',<sup>8</sup> pro-Union campaigners did not repeat this type of security argument, which was easily dismissed by Nationalists as scaremongering.

Neither side made security a prominent feature of their campaigns. Instead, they repeated predictable and relatively uncontroversial lines. For the Nationalist, an independent Scotland would be secure outside

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Foreign Affairs Committee (2013); Scottish Affairs Committee, *The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: Terminating Trident – Days or Decades?, Fourth Report of Session 2012–13, Report, Together with Formal Minutes* (London: HMSO, 2012).

- 6 N. Sturgeon evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, *Foreign Policy Considerations for the UK and Scotland in the Event of Scotland Becoming an Independent Country, Sixth Report of Session 2012–2013* (London: HMSO, 2013), <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmfaff/643/643.pdf>, Ev 62.
- 7 [N.a.], 'Home Secretary Theresa May in Scots Immigration Warning', *BBC News*, 24 March 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-17498681>; [N.a.], 'Scottish Independence: Warning over "Weakened Military"', *BBC News*, 2 June 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-21776602>
- 8 Tom Gordon, 'I Admit It: The Man Who Coined the Project Fear Label', *Herald Scotland*, 21 December 2014, [http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13194407.I\\_admit\\_it\\_the\\_man\\_who\\_coined\\_Project\\_Fear\\_label/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13194407.I_admit_it_the_man_who_coined_Project_Fear_label/)

the UK, and an independent Scottish government would act responsibly to make that so; for the Unionist, Scotland would be more secure within the UK, where it would continue to enjoy the protections of an extensive and well-established security and intelligence apparatus. Seen through the simplest interest-based political lens, Nationalists had an obvious stake in reassuring the public that Scotland did not face threats it could not manage alone or through anticipated partnerships with allies. Unionists had an obvious stake in stressing that an independent Scotland faced an uncertain world, and could no longer depend upon the UK security umbrella.

Arguably, there was an element of disingenuousness in both these positions, not because of their contestable assessment of threat, but because the future security partnerships of an independent Scotland were difficult to foresee. They would depend on the future goodwill of other states, particularly the remaining UK and US. The Nationalist and Unionist positions could be seen as performative, in that they attempted to describe a certain future in order to shape the politics of the present, and to 'perform' a particular reality. Neither side displayed an appetite to push security issues further. As such, security did not become as politicized as other issues.

Away from the campaigns, there were several attempts to provide independent expert assessments of the threats an independent Scotland might face. Examples included papers by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and Chatham House, although these organisations are closely associated with the UK defence and intelligence community.<sup>9</sup> The reports of our ESRC seminar series, 'Security in Scotland, with or without Constitutional Change', offered a different perspective.<sup>10</sup> In particular, they pointed out that many important security-related questions that

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9 Rebecca Johnson and others, *No Need to Be Afraid: An Assessment of Possible Threats to Scotland's Security and How They Should Be Addressed* (Biggar: The Jimmy Reid Foundation, 2012); Malcolm Chalmers, 'The End of an "Auld Sang": Defence in an Independent Scotland', *RUSI Briefing Paper* (2012); Chatham House, 'Scotland's Independence Referendum', Chatham House (London 2013), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/research/regions/europe/UK/scotlands-independence-referendum>

10 Andrew W. Neal, Julie Kaarbo, and Charles Raab, 'ESRC Seminar Series: "Security in Scotland, with or without Constitutional Change"', Centre on Constitutional Change (Edinburgh 2013–2015), <http://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/tags/security-defence>

a newly independent Scotland would face had not been discussed in public. These neglected issues included the democratic accountability of the UK security services in Scotland during the transition to independence and beyond, and the constitutional implications of any future security cooperation and intelligence sharing between Scotland and the remaining UK.<sup>11</sup> These expert reports received media coverage, but were not widely debated or politicised.<sup>12</sup>

With this summary in mind, the aim of this chapter is to consider the political implications of the security debate, or lack of. How should we judge the fact that security was not widely discussed? How much public debate on security would have been enough? To take the democratic position that more public debate is always better does not adequately consider the risks posed by security talk (see, for example, Chapter 7 in this volume). On the other hand, to take the ‘securitarian’ position that the threat always needs to be taken more seriously does not consider the extent to which security is a matter of intersubjective and manipulable collective fears, rather than merely cold hard realities (see, for example, Chapter 6 in this book). This chapter will argue that both security speech and security silence are implicated in the processes that shape and construct insecurities. This must be considered in light of the historic role that deference and recognition have played in the reproduction of state-based security authority.

## The dilemma of speaking security

The idea that there is no simple way to ‘measure’ the reality of security threats has long been a cornerstone of the academic study of security.<sup>13</sup> This is because there is no neutral and objective Archimedean point from which to judge. Security threats are in the eye of the beholder. It is not that they are not real, but their perception and meaning is as much a part of their social and political ‘reality’ as any ‘objective’ aspect.

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11 Andrew W. Neal, ‘Fourth Report: Intelligence and Security Oversight in an Independent Scotland’ (2014), [http://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/sites/default/files/papers/Intelligence and security oversight in an independent scotland 4th REPORT FINAL.pdf](http://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/sites/default/files/papers/Intelligence%20and%20security%20oversight%20in%20an%20independent%20scotland%204th%20REPORT%20FINAL.pdf)

12 Although see the ‘clash’ prompted by our first report: [N.a.] (2013).

13 Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 24.

This is to say nothing about the physical destructiveness or likelihood of explosions, storms, floods, etc. Rather, it is to highlight the role that fear, judgment, and subjectivity play in how governments and publics perceive threats.

Securitisation theory starts from this position. Its contribution is to offer an explanation of how insecurities are socially constructed through speech, and specifically through securitising speech acts that follow an established 'grammar' of threat, urgency, and exception.<sup>14</sup> This makes 'security' not a question of 'realities out there', but of political choices and responsibilities. Its founder Ole Waever argues:

The securitization approach points to the inherently political nature of any designation of security issues and thus it puts an ethical question at the feet of analysts, decision-makers and activists alike: why do you call this a security issue? What are the implications of doing this — or of not doing it?<sup>15</sup>

Speaking security thus has constitutive effects on *insecurities*, and potentially in turn on security policy and practice. To talk about an issue in terms of 'security' — rather than in alternative terms such as 'social problem', 'political challenge' or 'economic opportunity' — adds to the security inflection of that issue. Such talk may help to justify draconian policies, make certain communities 'suspect', or persuade governments to remove issues from open deliberation in favour of closed executive decisions or other security 'black boxes' within the state. It may encourage a permissive atmosphere for violence and contribute to a general politics of fear. Whoever speaks security in public must be careful about the consequences. These concerns about responsibility have long been at the heart of securitisation theory.

The idea of a *dilemma* of speaking security comes from Jef Huysmans.<sup>16</sup> Huysmans teases out elements of securitisation theory to stress that processes of securitisation through speech do not occur

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14 Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), p. 32.

15 Ole Wæver, 'Securitizing Sectors?: Reply to Eriksson', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 34, 3 (1999), 334–40 (p. 334).

16 Jef Huysmans, 'Defining Social Constructivism in Security Studies: The Normative Dilemma of Writing Security', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 27, suppl. 1 (2002), 41–62. Huysmans (p. 62) uses the term 'writing security', in reference to David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Policies of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

in a vacuum. ‘Security’ is historically and conceptually associated with an institutionalised set of security structures, expectations, and prerogatives, such as sovereign war powers and the military.<sup>17</sup> To talk about an issue in security terms may mean not only constructing it as a security issue, but mobilising existing security institutions and pathways.<sup>18</sup>

According to this view, the implications of security speech concern more than the immediate and instrumental political choice to construct a security issue or not. Security speech can tend towards extremes because ‘security’ is already historically structured as a discourse and practice of extremes. The legacy of ‘security’ is one of existential threats, operational secrecy, and exceptional security powers.<sup>19</sup> In any discussion of security there are already certain historical and institutionalised pathways that may end up being followed. Security speech – by potentially waking this sleeping giant of ‘security’ – can bring about consequences that reach ‘beyond the intentions and control of the individual’s practices of definition’.<sup>20</sup> Huysmans writes, ‘speaking and writing about security is never innocent [...]. Security writings participate in a political field where social questions are already contested in terms of crisis, threats, and dangers’.<sup>21</sup>

To consider security and Scottish independence in terms of a dilemma of speaking security is to highlight the role of security speech in constituting insecurities and the perceived landscape of security threats faced by a country. In this light, the protagonists in the debate about Scottish independence did not simply face a political choice about how seriously to take ‘real’ security threats. Rather they faced a choice about how to speak about security in a volatile political situation that risked mobilising the historical grammar and institutional pathways of security. In the event, there was in fact little security talk in the Scottish independence debate, which largely avoided the risks of speaking

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17 Huysmans (2002), pp. 42–43.

18 *Ibid.*

19 One problem with securitisation theory is that it, ‘note[s] the sedimentation of a certain meaning of security, but transform[s] this observation into a conceptual axiom’, as Felix Çiuta puts it in his ‘Security and the Problem of Context: A Hermeneutical Critique of Securitisation Theory’, *Review of International Studies*, 35, 02 (2009), 301–26 (p. 321).

20 Huysmans (2002), p. 42.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

security. Nevertheless, this relative silence should not be considered innocent.

## The dilemma of *not* speaking security

What did the referendum protagonists do by *not* speaking security? Wæver implies in his quote above that there are implications and responsibilities in the choice *not* to securitise.<sup>22</sup> There is always the choice to talk down a perceived threat, to de-escalate a relationship of enmity, or to find alternative, non-securitarian terms of debate. This is to *desecuritize* an issue.<sup>23</sup>

Wæver's ideas about securitisation and desecuritisation were inspired by the peace initiatives and East-West détente of the late 1980s. His theory established the idea that speech could construct issues as security issues, but that, in turn, speech could deconstruct them back into 'merely political' issues through desecuritisation.<sup>24</sup> Michael C. Williams argues that this two-way process offers hope from a democratic point of view: because securitisation is part of the discursive realm, 'security practices are thus susceptible to criticism and transformation'.<sup>25</sup> But this begs the question of security and silence: what if there is little security discourse in the first place?

Writing from a feminist perspective, Lene Hansen once mooted the possibility of a 'silent security dilemma'.<sup>26</sup> She pointed out the difficulty vulnerable individuals and groups may have in vocalising their insecurity. Examples include women facing domestic violence, or minorities persecuted in a repressive society. Hansen argued that this dilemma, 'occurs when insecurity cannot be voiced, when raising something as a security problem is impossible or might even aggravate

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22 Wæver (1999), p. 334.

23 Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in *On Security*, ed. by Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 46–86.

24 Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), pp. 4–5; See also Lene Hansen, 'Reconstructing Desecuritisation: The Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply It', *Review of International Studies*, 38, 03 (2012), 525–46.

25 Michael C. Williams, 'Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47, 4 (2003), 511–31 (p. 512).

26 Lene Hansen, 'The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School', *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 29, 2 (2000), 285–306.

the threat being faced'.<sup>27</sup> Hansen is concerned about the occasions when the subject cannot speak, when they cannot vocalise what threatens them.

However, silence may not only be a sign of marginalisation or exclusion. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued that silence may function as a form of power. It may confer legitimacy and recognition on those who *do* speak. Silence from a group, and 'the absence of any refutation', may imply that the one who is speaking speaks for them.<sup>28</sup> Silence may signify acquiescence, deference, or recognition. For Bourdieu, power depends on the conscious and unconscious choices of actors to go along with received wisdom and not to challenge recognised authorities. Such deference may be freely willed, but also coincide with subordinate positions in hierarchical power relationships, such as backbenchers toeing the party line. It may also reflect agreement, consensus, and shared outlooks on, for example, the nature of security threats and what should be done about them. As a former member of the Intelligence Security Committee explained to me on the committee's lack of internal divisions: 'It's not that it's not political, but that we all agree'.<sup>29</sup>

This calls for an extension of Huysmans' dilemma of speaking security. I argue that there is a political dilemma posed not only by the choice to speak security, but also by the choice *not* to speak security. Silence on security is not simply the absence of speech. In the context of security, silence has meanings and effects. In the simplest terms borrowed from securitisation theory, silence may denote 'audience acceptance' of an instance of securitisation.<sup>30</sup> Staying silent may be a responsible choice in some circumstances. It may be an irresponsible choice in others. It may mean abstaining from talking up threats and insecurities. It may mean not drawing attention to potential security risks, thereby encouraging complacency and leaving the public exposed to danger.<sup>31</sup> There are more subtle political implications too, as Hansen and Bourdieu suggest.

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27 Hansen (2000), p. 287.

28 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p. 190.

29 Anonymised interview with former ISC member.

30 Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), p. 33.

31 On the distinction between threat and risk see M. V. Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War: Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–2.

These do not relate to the judgment of specific instances of securitisation, but are structural and historically institutionalised. Silence may be the result of marginalisation and a lack of choice. And it may confer legitimacy on those who *do* speak security, especially if that means not challenging what they say or their authority to say it. As we will see, these points resonate with the history of British security politics and its structures of power, authority, and legitimacy.

### Elite security discourse and silence

Discussion of security was not entirely absent in the Scottish independence debate. In expert circles there was extensive activity. Some of this was behind closed doors, but it led to the publication of several reports. This milieu of security expertise is a good representation of the exclusionary structure of security discourse. Chatham House, for example, has given the world its famous 'Chatham House rule', which allows sensitive matters to be discussed by people who hold sensitive positions under the agreement that it will not be attributed to them in public.

Expertise itself can be exclusionary, but particularly so on security when matters of secrecy and access are so important. The researchers at Chatham House and others such as RUSI often have the expertise, familiarity, access, and resources to offer authoritative analysis. One example is the RUSI report on the costs of relocating Trident.<sup>32</sup> These researchers can be considered security insiders, or at least close to security insiders. No such organisations exist in Scotland. Our ESRC seminar series partly fulfilled this role from a different perspective, but we too followed the exclusionary 'Chatham House rule', for it is often the only basis on which current and former members of the intelligence community, police, military, and civil service can and will speak.

In the context of the independence referendum, should security debate have extended further beyond this milieu of security experts? While their reports were met with media comment, and while there were private interactions between experts and government, there was

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32 Hugh Chalmers and Malcolm Chalmers, 'Relocation, Relocation, Relocation: Could the UK's Nuclear Force Be Moved after Scottish Independence?', *RUSI Occasional Paper* (2014).

little interaction between this expert discourse and what might be called the 'political class' in Scotland. MSPs, for example, stayed well clear of security matters.

These circumstances call for a qualification of the meaning of security silence. The *de facto* alternative to public debate on security is not complete silence, but a relatively exclusive expert discourse, limited to closed seminars, specialist committees, insiders, and government officials. Not debating security in public means leaving it to the experts.

What does public and political silence on security mean in this context? Based on a reading of Bourdieu and an analysis of the history of British security politics, I argue that security silence confers recognition and legitimacy on those already authorised to speak security. As discussed, the security field is already structured to privilege certain actors: mainly the state, its representatives, and those close to them. Indeed, it is a fundamental feature of modern state sovereignty that the state claims the right and representative power to declare, define, and tackle security threats.

### Silence, deference, and recognition in the history of British security politics

The historical conventions of British security politics show how this representative power has been reproduced through practices of exclusion, deference, and recognition. For example, historically, British MPs were actively prevented from asking parliamentary questions of the security services. The standing orders of Parliament ruled all such questions out of order.<sup>33</sup> Until the late 1980s, this exclusion was also manifest in the convention that that the intelligence services did not officially exist, and that by extension they would not subject be to parliamentary oversight as the rest of the executive was.<sup>34</sup>

There are different reasons that explain this tradition, and it still exerts a powerful legacy. It is not only that the state needs to keep hold of intelligence and operational secrets for fear of endangering agents,

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33 H. Bochel, A. Defty, and J. Kirkpatrick, *Watching the Watchers: Parliament and the Intelligence Services* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 30.

34 Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2012).

giving away a tactical advantage to enemies, and sometimes hiding wrongdoing and preventing embarrassment. There has also been a general sense that national security is too important for grubby partisan politics. Politicians often repeat the principle that security is the first responsibility of the government. Many MPs remain silent on security, choosing not to speak. Historically, they rarely challenged the security prerogatives of the state (although this is changing). This deference, combined with exclusion through official secrecy and parliamentary rules and conventions, was the basis of the informal constitutional settlement on which the British security state rested, and to a large extent it remains so.

Generally speaking, one reason why MPs do not raise certain topics is a lack of expertise. Intelligence expertise is especially difficult to acquire unless one has been a security 'insider', such as a minister or ISC member. Such expertise cannot be gained overnight. Andrew Defty argues that once the first handful of parliamentarians started engaging in intelligence oversight through their ISC membership in 1994, it took many years of ISC member turnover for even a small number of MPs to feel qualified to speak on such matters.<sup>35</sup> Parliamentary debates on ISC reports remain sparsely attended to this day, with most speakers being current or former members of the ISC itself.<sup>36</sup> Not speaking because of a lack of expertise is not simply exclusion but *self*-exclusion. It is an extension and internalisation of silence; another aspect of the reproduction of existing structures of security authority.

Christopher Andrew, the official historian of MI5, considers that these conventions were recognised, supported, and upheld by Parliament.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, Bochel, Defty and Kirkpatrick show that there were many MPs who rejected this system of silence and tried to undermine it, particularly on the political left, but they were the exception rather than the norm.<sup>38</sup> Either way, these conventions and structures began to give way towards the end of the Cold War, beginning with the 'legalisation' of MI5 through the 1989 Security Service Act, and the creation of a

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35 Andrew Defty, 'Educating Parliamentarians About Intelligence: The Role of the British Intelligence and Security Committee', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 61, 4 (2008), pp. 621–41 (p. 630).

36 Bochel, Defty, and Kirkpatrick (2014), pp. 93–97.

37 Andrew (2012), p. 753.

38 Bochel, Defty, and Kirkpatrick (2014), p. 33.

modicum of democratic intelligence oversight through the Intelligence and Security Committee in 1994.

The politics of intelligence oversight is only slowly changing, even after the Snowden revelations and recent ISC reform. But there have been challenges to the wider parliamentary convention of deference to security authorities since the 2003 Iraq war. Two broad developments are under way. First, fewer MPs are willing to trust the executive on security matters. Many current and former MPs now seriously regret the trust they placed in Tony Blair and the intelligence apparatus in 2003.<sup>39</sup> The repercussions of this are still playing out. The UK parliamentary vote against intervention in Syria in August 2013 was instructive not only because the Government lost (which can partly be explained by bad parliamentary timing and planning), but because of the type of questions and demands made by many MPs in the debate. The ghosts of Iraq haunted the chamber. Some MPs refused to accept the government's assessment of the intelligence on chemical weapons use in Syria. Some demanded to see raw intelligence material themselves in order to make their own assessments. This may also be an effect of greater availability of information and the rise of open source intelligence, which featured prominently in the debate. Amanda Gookins argues that this 'has led many policymakers to believe they can be their own analysts, rendering them sceptical of the value of intelligence products'.<sup>40</sup> This represents either a misunderstanding or a rejection of the way the intelligence assessment system — and specifically the Joint Intelligence Committee — works through caveats and not facts.<sup>41</sup>

The second development is that the meaning and scope of 'security' has expanded far beyond what it was in 1980s and 1990s. It is no longer limited to defence and intelligence, and hence no longer limited to defence and intelligence oversight. One effect is that it is no longer necessary for parliamentarians to engage directly with secretive intelligence policy in order to deal with 'security'. For example, parliamentary committees

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39 Paul Flynn, *How to Be an MP* (London: Biteback, 2012), p. 211.

40 Amanda J. Gookins, 'The Role of Intelligence in Policy Making', *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 28, 1 (2008), 65–74 (p. 68).

41 Lord Butler of Brockwell, *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* (London: HMSO, 2004), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/14\\_07\\_04\\_butler.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/14_07_04_butler.pdf)

have in the last decade conducted inquiries into food security, energy security, cybersecurity, the meaning of national strategy, border control, surveillance, and communications data retention, to name a few. As a result, there is quantifiably more security speech at Westminster than in previous decades. Most of it does not follow the classic securitising 'grammar' of existential threat and exception.<sup>42</sup> It follows a general trend of security becoming less of an elite discourse, less exceptional and more normal. Parliament, the media, civil society, and the public are more willing to ask difficult questions and less willing to confer legitimacy on security authorities through silence.<sup>43</sup>

## Security politics in Scotland by comparison

Holyrood seems isolated from these trends in British security politics. In addition to the general absence of security issues in the independence debate, there has been a lack of activity on anything security-related in the Scottish parliament and its committees. Neither have there been policy statements from the Scottish government or any of the Scottish political parties on contemporaneous scandals such as Snowden's revelations about GCHQ and NSA's surveillance capabilities. It is also difficult to find MSPs who have demonstrated an interest in security matters (one exception is former senior police officer and Labour MSP Graeme Pearson). This is strange given the long-standing politicisation of Trident in Scotland, the depth of anti-Iraq war feeling among the Scottish public (which may be a factor in the collapse of Scottish support for the Labour Party), and the security activism of SNP MPs at Westminster such as Angus Robertson.

The quietude of Holyrood on security might be explained by the fact that security is a 'reserved' matter: MSPs have not needed to engage with security. But it must also be remembered that if Scotland had voted Yes to independence, the Scottish Parliament would quickly have had

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42 Ole Wæver, 'Politics, Security, Theory', *Security Dialogue*, 42, 4–5 (2011), 465–80 (p. 478).

43 See for example Andrew W. Neal, 'Normalization and Legislative Exceptionalism: Counterterrorist Lawmaking and the Changing Times of Security Emergencies', *International Political Sociology*, 6, 3 (2012), 260–76.

to engage with all hitherto 'reserved' matters, including security and intelligence oversight.

The implications of the silent security dilemma are significant in assessing the politics of security in the Scottish independence debate. The relative silence on the part of the protagonists could be judged as a responsible choice not to politicise security. But it is also an expression and reproduction of existing structures of power, expertise, and authority on security. Silence could reflect a form of marginalisation, specifically a lack of expertise on security amongst the Scottish political class. It is also possible that party leaders silenced discussion of security by their members because it was viewed as too politically risky. Yet although under devolution the Scottish political system has been structurally excluded from security matters, the decline of security deference at Westminster shows that these exclusionary structures are not set in stone. Their legitimacy and reproduction can be undermined by withdrawing the silence and passive deference on which they depend.

Scottish independence would not necessarily mean an end to a deferential security relationship with Whitehall. There would be a complicated and no doubt difficult transition. The Scottish Government White Paper all but accepted that it would take some time to build up independent intelligence and security capabilities, certainly longer than the 18 months between a Yes vote and the proposed independence day of 24 March 2016. It argued that there were precedents for the British state offering security assistance to newly independent states such as its former colonies.<sup>44</sup> The White Paper also suggested that it would be in the security interests of no one for a newly independent Scotland to be immediately ejected from the UK security umbrella and left to its own devices.<sup>45</sup> Instead, it proposed that an independent Scotland would continue to work closely with UK security agencies.<sup>46</sup> Between independence, transition, and continued UK assistance and cooperation, it is difficult to say whether this would have meant a withdrawal of UK intelligence and security capabilities from Scottish territory, such as MI5 field offices (of which there are apparently two) and GCHQ surveillance capabilities, and what the timetable would have been.

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44 Scottish Government (2013), p. 263.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 264–65.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 263.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the security content of the Scottish independence debate through the idea of a twin dilemma of speaking or not speaking security. It has argued that neither option can be seen as innocent. It has long been argued by the securitisation literature that security speech is constitutive of insecurities and, in turn, constitutive of security policies and practices. Security speech is not only a question of political choice, but also of unintended consequences, because speakers are not necessarily free to construct the meaning of security issues as they wish. They are always in danger of mobilising the legacy of security institutions, pathways, expectations, and meanings. In this sense, following Waever and Huysmans, the choice to speak security is political and comes with responsibilities. This is a good reason for political actors to exercise caution and stay quiet on security, as has been the case for much of the history of security politics in the UK.

The second part of the chapter argued that although security speech poses a dilemma, security silence does also. It is not an innocent choice. Silence on security reinforces the authority of the state and to a lesser extent the associated milieu of security experts. Silence translates as deference. Deference confers recognition. Again, this has been the case in much of British political history. Today, despite signs of change at Westminster, security remains an elite discourse. Silence is central to the institutional authority and power of 'security'.

From this perspective, there are two ways to judge the lack of security debate in the Scottish independence campaigns. On the one hand, the lack of debate could be judged positively if it avoided the risk of escalating security talk towards an extreme politics of securitisation. In this sense, protagonists in the independence debate could be judged as acting responsibly. On the other hand, silence on security is not politically neutral. It works as a silent recognition of existing structures of security authority, which reside predominantly with the UK Government. More generally, a lack of public debate on any subject goes against democratic instincts. This symbolic power imbalance on security is something for both sides to consider from the point of view of political strategy should any second Scottish independence referendum arise.

Explaining the reasons for the relative silence of the Scottish political class on security in the independence debate, particularly on the

pro-independence side, would require further research. It may have been born out of political calculation and an attempt to triangulate with a cautious electorate. This could be explored in research interviews with referendum campaign strategists, if they were willing to pull back the curtain. The relative silence may also have been a function of the Holyrood's structural marginalisation on security in the devolution settlement and a lack of security expertise among the Scottish political class. The latter is already evident from the CVs of MSPs, almost none of whom have security-related experience. Given existing research on the attitudes of Westminster MPs towards security engagement, it would not be a surprise if research interviews with MSPs revealed a reluctance to engage with security topics.<sup>47</sup> However, this should be offset against the demonstrable security and defence activism of SNP MPs Angus Robertson and Alex Salmond at Westminster (which was true for Robertson even before he became a 'security insider' by joining the ISC in 2015).

The historical example of Westminster illustrates how difficult it is for parliaments to engage with security issues, due to barriers of secrecy, lack of expertise, and conventions of responsibility and caution. Even when parliament has gained new avenues for security scrutiny and oversight, such as the creation and then recent reform of the ISC, it has taken decades for parliament to accrue security expertise, which does not seem to proliferate effectively beyond those directly involved.<sup>48</sup> Yet recent developments show that these hindrances may not be permanent obstacles to greater democratic engagement with security. Westminster offers a lesson, or perhaps an uncertain experiment, on what it means to challenge the historical and constitutional settlement between democracy and security. Parliament has won concessions from the Government by pressing for more intelligence oversight, tabling difficult questions, launching committee inquiries in emerging new areas of security, and staging rebellious votes. Change has happened piecemeal and is largely uncoordinated. As a process it is by no means complete. Its final destination and constitutional implications remain unclear. Increased parliamentary engagement with security is more democratic than silence, but can also be unpredictable, as the 2013 vote

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47 See Bochel, Defty, and Kirkpatrick (2014).

48 See Defty (2008).

on Syria showed. There is a delicate political path to tread between, on the one hand, speaking out and damaging the conventions of caution and responsibility that can restrain the escalation of security discourse, and, on the other, remaining silent and reinforcing the existing structures of security power and authority.

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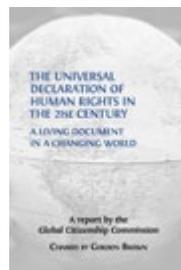
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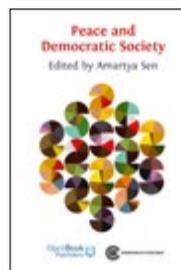
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# Security in a Small Nation

## Scotland, Democracy, Politics

Andrew W. Neal (ed.)

The 2014 Referendum on Scottish independence sparked debate on every dimension of modern statehood. Levels of public interest and engagement were unprecedented, as demonstrated by record-breaking voter turnout. Yet aside from Trident, the issue of security was relatively neglected in the campaigns, and there remains a lack of literature on the topic. In this volume Andrew Neal has collated a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives on security and constitutional change in Scotland and the UK, including writing from experts in foreign policy analysis, intelligence studies, parliamentary studies, and journalism.

*Security in a Small Nation* provides an illuminating analysis of the politics of security. Its authors reflect on a number of related issues including international comparisons, alliances, regional cooperation, terrorism, intelligence sharing, democratic oversight, and media coverage. It has a particular focus on what security means for small states and democratic politics.

The book draws on current debates about the extent of intelligence powers and their implications for accountability, privacy, and human rights. It examines the foreign and security policy of other small states through the prism of Scottish independence, providing unique insight into the bureaucratic and political processes associated with multi-level security governance. These contributions provide a detailed picture of the changing landscape of security, including the role of diverse and decentralised agencies, and new security interdependencies within and between states.

The analysis presented in this book will inform ongoing constitutional debates in the UK and the study of other secessionist movements around the world. *Security in a Small Nation* is essential reading for any follower of UK and Scottish politics, and those with an interest in security and nationhood on a global scale.

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