

<b>Institution:</b> University of Glasgow
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D30 - History
<b>Title of case study:</b> Advising government on the defence implications of an independent Scotland
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

An independent Scotland has the potential to radically transform the shipbuilding and nuclear weapons industries, with a UK-wide impact. University of Glasgow research has helped shape the contentious public and political debate on the future of the Clyde shipbuilding industry, naval bases and UK nuclear weapons in the case of Scottish independence. Alongside significant public and media engagement, Phillips O'Brien from the Scottish Centre for War Studies at Glasgow has advised on policy, written commissioned papers for and testified in front of two UK parliamentary committees – Foreign Affairs and Scottish Affairs – and briefed UK and European diplomats.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b>
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Beginning with his first books on British and American Naval policy and on the development of naval technology in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Phillips O'Brien (Reader, History, 1996-present) has developed an expertise on the interrelationships of domestic politics and strategic decision-making in the UK. In researching both books he explored such issues as the politics of basing military units and spending on naval shipbuilding. His research examined how, for instance, the shipbuilding industry of the UK was protected or subsidised in times of economic decline and how naval bases were used to prop up the economies of different local areas – eg, north of the Firth of Clyde near Glasgow. Deciding when and how to spend the British defence budget was always politically influenced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as O'Brien's research has shown, and this political imperative would have an important influence on the shape of the defence policy of an independent Scotland and the rest of the present UK. This research provided a perfect launching pad for O'Brien to lead in the debate over defence policy and Scottish Independence. Of all the issues in the debate so far, the most extensively covered have been the future of Faslane/Coulport and the future of the shipbuilding industry on the Clyde. Both these issues lie at the intersection of political need and defence necessity, which is a focus of O'Brien's research.

Since 2001 O'Brien has been director of the Scottish Centre for War Studies at Glasgow University, a unique multidisciplinary centre for the study of war in all of its various aspects. From conferences and other activities has emerged the Global Security Roundtable, which brings together academics from a wide range of fields with an interest in security issues. He has hosted seven major conferences since 2010, two of which produced books and two of which had a specifically Scottish theme. The first was on Scottish writers and the two World Wars and the second was on the future of the Scottish Regiments, which O'Brien chaired and summarised. Both were covered extensively in the media.

<b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)
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O'Brien, P. *British and American Naval Power: Politics and Policies 1900-1936*, (Praeger, 1998).

ISBN 10: 0275958981 / 13: 978-0275958985 [available from HEI]

O'Brien, P. (ed.) *Technology and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century and Beyond: The Future of Naval Warfare*, (Frank Cass, 2001) ISBN-10: 0714651257 | ISBN-13: 978-0714651255 [available from HEI]

O'Brien, P. *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance*, (Routledge/Curzon, 2004) ISBN 0415326117 [available from HEI]

## Impact case study (REF3b)

O'Brien, P. 'The 1910 Elections and the Primacy of Foreign Policy', in Mulligan and Simms, *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History 1660-2000*, (Palgrave, London 2010) ISBN 9780230574724 [available from HEI]

### Refereed Articles:

'The Titan Refreshed: Imperial Overstretch and the British Navy Before the First World War,' *Past and Present*, 172, August 2001. (doi:[10.1093/past/172.1.146](https://doi.org/10.1093/past/172.1.146)) [available from HEI]

'The American Press, Public Opinion, and the Reaction to the Outbreak of the First World War', *Diplomatic History*, 37, June 2013 [REF2] (doi:[10.1093/dh/dht020](https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht020))

## 4. Details of the impact

### **Contribution to political and policy deliberations in Westminster and Holyrood**

Phillips O'Brien has become one of the UK's leading experts on Scottish independence and defence, and is head of the Scottish Centre for War Studies and the University of Glasgow's Global Security Network. He has informed political debate and public understanding of the Scottish independence question through media appearances as an impartial expert, and has contributed to EU policy debates by advising the UK, French and German governments on the potential impacts of an independent Scotland on European defence policies.

The issue of Scottish Independence began to be discussed in earnest after the victory of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in the Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2010. On 12 October 2011, the UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee (SAC) announced that it was convening an inquiry into the '[Referendum on Separation for Scotland](#)'. The purpose of the inquiry was to focus on "the processes and mechanics" of such a referendum and to identify "the issues which will need to be resolved before a referendum is held in order to allow voters to make an informed choice." One of the most important such issues is defence. For 30 years (until 19 October 2012), the SNP held a clearly stated position against membership of NATO because it was a defence alliance based on nuclear weapons. Since 1998 the UK's nuclear programme has been the submarine-delivered Trident programme, with its entire nuclear submarine fleet located at Faslane Naval Base on Scotland's Rosneath Peninsula. For these reasons, the question of a future defence policy in an independent Scotland was one of great significance to the UK Parliament in particular.

Based on an extensive research background in UK naval defence issues and policy, in May 2012 O'Brien was asked by a senior staff member for the SAC to work with the Committee to help develop the defence-related research questions for the inquiry. He was also asked to provide evidence to the inquiry on the implications of Scottish independence for the future of the Faslane and Coulport naval bases and for the defence shipbuilding industry on the Clyde, and for Scotland remaining in NATO. In addition to the evidence and opinion provided to the committee, O'Brien became one of the key media commentators on the subject of defence. The bases at Faslane and Coulport currently support 6,500 civilian and military jobs and are set for expansion to 8,000. O'Brien pointed out the significance of this in the west of Scotland, an area that has been less enthusiastic about independence than the east. He has been able to use his understanding of the political nature of basing decisions and of the development of British strategic policy to comment on the likely shape of Faslane/Coulport in an independent Scotland, in particular what units could be based there and how large a facility it could be in terms of jobs. He consistently spoke to the media on the advantage to an independent Scotland of staying in NATO, pointing out the similarities to countries such as Denmark and Norway. His analysis showed that a non NATO-aligned independent Scotland would need to relocate its naval bases to the east coast, potentially alienating a large constituency in western Scotland through loss of jobs.

### Impact case study (REF3b)

Through his work with and testimony before the SAC in September 2012, O'Brien was then commissioned to write a briefing paper on the issue of comparative policies for defence bases for nuclear submarines in different similarly sized countries (Ireland, Norway, Denmark and New Zealand) to identify for the Scottish National Party the potential implications of deactivating the Faslane base in Scotland. He concluded that although the Trident submarines could be deactivated in as little as two days, it would take at least 20 years for the UK government to build a nuclear base elsewhere for the weapons to be moved out of Scotland, and he commented on the options open to the UK government for renting facilities in other countries. On 12 September 2012 he presented oral testimony on this subject and other defence matters to the SAC in Westminster. (There was considerable press coverage, particularly in Scotland, around both appearances before the Committee. The SNP's change of position on NATO was announced on 19 October 2012.) The SAC [report on the issue of Trident and the future of Faslane/Coulport](#) was published on 23 October 2012 and directly quotes Dr O'Brien five times, delivering his expertise directly to parliamentarians.

### Advising on the international implications of Scottish independence

As a result of his oral testimony and work with the SAC in September 2012 O'Brien was asked by a specialist for the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee to assist the UK government to prepare a further phase of research, this time on the international implications of Scottish independence. In response, O'Brien submitted a briefing paper for the committee examining the potential American, German and French positions on Scottish independence and NATO. While the UK government does not have an official position on the Scottish referendum question, O'Brien has clearly influenced the examination of the issues under debate.

As O'Brien's involvement with government committees on the issues of defence in an independent Scotland gained momentum, he was approached by the foreign services of Germany and France to brief government representatives on the same topic. On 21 June 2012 he briefed a team of German diplomats including the Deputy Ambassador to the UK. On 5 October 2012 he provided a similar briefing to a team of French diplomats led by the French defence attaché and the French Consul-General in Edinburgh. He has also been consulted by a former US Ambassador (now a UN Ambassador for human rights), on the various strategic implications of Scottish independence. These talks have opened up important areas of international feedback. Subsequent to the meeting with O'Brien, the French Consul-General wrote an official report briefing the Foreign Ministry of France on Scottish independence and the implications for issues of defence and the European Union. O'Brien's analysis is quoted extensively, sourced both from his appearance before the Scottish Affairs Committee and his private briefing to the French diplomats.

O'Brien is trusted by parties on all sides of the independence debate. He has been consulted on a confidential basis a number of times by the head of the SNP's defence agenda. During these consultations O'Brien questioned the wisdom of an independent Scotland having only one naval base from which the North Sea is relatively inaccessible, leaving the oilfields on which the independence campaign's economic projections depend vulnerable to attack. O'Brien's influence on policy is illustrated by the SNP's subsequent adjustment of its policy to acknowledge that there would need to be another naval facility on the East Coast, almost certainly at Rosyth. The UK government's Ministry of Defence has also consulted O'Brien on a number of occasions on the progress in Scotland of the debate around defence and the issues that require more intensive investigation. In July 2013, O'Brien was asked to meet with the Scottish Government's Defence Policy Unit and share his expertise as part of their work to support Scottish Ministers in the development of defence and security policy in the event of constitutional change.

### Contribution to public debate

## Impact case study (REF3b)

O'Brien's analysis has been influential in the independence debate being played out in the UK media. He has appeared on BBC Newsnight Scotland twice to discuss defence issues, STV's Scotland Tonight (29 October 2012), BBC Radio 5 (29 October 2012) and BBC Radio Scotland's 'Good Morning Scotland' show (30 October 2012, 12 January 2013). *The Scotsman* commissioned O'Brien to write expert pieces on key issues in the independence debate; the first was published on 17 April 2012 and the second on 30 October 2012. He was also commissioned to write two articles for *The House*, the official magazine for the Houses of Parliament, in March 2012 and October 2012 (distribution within Westminster is an average of 2,744 per issue). He has been asked to give expert comment in articles in *Holyrood*, the magazine for Scottish Parliamentarians, and *The Herald*, following work with the Scottish Government, with these articles reaching an estimated combined readership of c.50,000 people. He was also invited to make a presentation on the subject of defence and Scottish Independence to the Royal Society of Edinburgh on 29 May 2013. Finally, he has worked very closely with the editor of *The Herald* to further develop stories on the question of Scottish independence and defence; a major piece on the state of the defence debate ('Defence of the New Realm') was published 10 June 2013.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

#### Evidencing input to policy discussions:

[Testimony to Scottish Affairs Committee 12 September 2012](#)

[Testimony to Foreign Affairs Committee, 17 October 2012](#)

Commissioned articles for the magazine of the Houses of Parliament, *The House*, in the March 2012 and October 2012 issues [available from HEI]

Emails evidencing requests to present oral testimony to Scottish Affairs Committee and to prepare further research for the House Foreign Affairs Committee [available from HEI]

#### Evidencing input to public debate:

[Newsnight Scotland 16 April 2012](#) (discussing position of Scotland and NATO)

The Scotsman: [SNP defence policies depend on being in NATO](#) (17 April 2012)

The Herald articles citing O'Brien's analysis on an independent Scotland's defence policy ([SNP nuclear tangle grows](#) 17 September 2012; [Defence of the new realm](#) 8 June 2013)

Holyrood magazine articles citing O'Brien's analysis on defence policy positions of the SNP ('[Limits on Constitutional Pledge](#)' 19 October 2012; '[War of Words](#)' 22 October 2012)

[BBC News online](#) (28 October 2012, discussing Trident)

Editor, The Herald (contact details provided)