

A STUDY OF SCOTTISH PARADIPLOMACY SINCE THE UK'S VOTE TO LEAVE THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2016

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to establish the key characteristics of Scottish paradiplomacy since 2016 and assess whether the Brexit vote has led to a change in its volume or practice. With reference to Catalonia, the study also investigates whether the Scottish Government's external activity fits the definition of 'protodiplomacy'. Scrutinising the 'good global citizen' paradigm, this thesis considers the future of Scotland's external affairs either as a sub-state or with independence. To explore these issues, the study draws from six interviews conducted with politicians and academics, as well as conducting a wider analysis of political discourse. The major findings indicate that Scotland's paradiplomacy is largely typical of a sub-state and, in its current form, does not represent a threat to the sovereignty of the UK. While Brexit presented rhetorical opportunities for Scottish ministers and increased sympathy for Scotland's position, the Scottish Government has stayed clear of more overt, protodiplomatic strategies. In the next few years, a focus on developing Scotland's soft power, public diplomacy and informal networks appears to be the most likely approach. While the intention to be a 'good global citizen' is accompanied by a number of 'ethical' foreign policy pledges, a future government of an independent Scotland would face challenges in holding true to these, as the debate over Trident exemplifies.

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Introduction

In May 2021, the Scottish National Party (SNP) was re-elected as the largest party in the Scottish Parliament, falling just one seat short of a majority. The SNP government has entered into a “cooperation agreement” with the Scottish Greens, and the two parties have committed to holding a second independence referendum “preferably” by the end of 2023, with polls showing public opinion almost evenly split.¹ Much of the literature on Scottish nationalism and the independence movement has focused on domestic issues and the apparent divergence in political priorities between Scotland and England. During the independence referendum campaign in 2014, debate and analysis was primarily devoted to topics such as currency, social justice, and the economy.² While the Scottish electorate’s decisive rejection of Brexit has increased international profile and sympathy for the independence cause, there has been less scholarly attention on the ways in which the Scottish Government (SG), Parliament (Holyrood) and wider civic society have attempted to build alliances and wield influence internationally.

Under the Scotland Act 1998, which sets out the terms of devolution, Holyrood has control over policy areas including health, education, and justice, while powers including fiscal, economic, and monetary policy, immigration and defence are “reserved” to the UK Parliament (Westminster). International relations and foreign policy are among these reserved powers, though there is some scope for Scottish international engagement as part of the devolved settlement.³ The SG has an external affairs directorate led by a Cabinet Secretary and a junior minister. Holyrood also has an active external relations role, chiefly through the

¹ “SNP-Greens Deal Pledges INDYREF2 within Five Years.” BBC News. August 20, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-58272209>, accessed September 1, 2021

² Keating, Michael, and Nicola McEwen (2020). “The Independence Referendum of 2014.” The Oxford Handbook of Scottish Politics, 649–74. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198825098.013.34>.

³ “Scotland Act 1998, Schedule 5, Section 7 (1).” Legislation.gov.uk. Statute Law Database, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/46/schedule/5>, accessed April 25, 2021

scrutiny of the Government's policies by the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs & Culture Committee. Successive Scottish governments have engaged in 'paradiplomacy' - the academic term commonly used to describe sub-state foreign affairs – and this will be increasingly crucial in the post-Brexit diplomatic environment. With the Scottish and UK governments locked in a stand-off – which could lead to a legal battle⁴ – over the right to hold a referendum, the credibility of an autonomous Scotland will come under scrutiny at home and abroad. Many Scottish paradiplomatic activities will also form the basis of foreign policy and international relations in a possible future independent Scotland. It is therefore a pertinent moment to investigate the key characteristics of Scottish sub-state diplomacy and how it is evolving in the post-Brexit context. This introductory chapter will outline some of the key theoretical positions and sub-fields in the literature on paradiplomacy. I will begin with an overview of the origins of the concept, before exploring the prominent view that paradiplomacy has become “normalized”. The chapter will then address some of the typical strategies and goals of paradiplomacy, and how it is shaped by the sub-state's relation to the sovereign state. Next, I will present theories of sub-state diplomacy as a function of ‘stateless nationalism’ and consider occasions when paradiplomacy veers into ‘protodiplomacy’. I will go on to review some of the literature on Scottish international relations, highlighting a lack of detailed analysis of Scottish paradiplomacy, particularly in the post-Brexit era. Finally, the chapter will outline my methodology and the structure of the thesis.

The term ‘paradiplomacy’ was introduced into academic debate by Panayotis Soldatos and Ivo Duchacek in the 1980s and early 1990s, during a revival in the study of federalism and comparative politics.⁵ An abbreviation of ‘parallel diplomacy’, the term has been described as

⁴ Sim, Philip. “Scottish Independence: Could the Supreme Court Rule on a Referendum?” BBC News. BBC, May 9, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-57047898>, accessed September 1, 2021

⁵ Soldatos, Panayotis (1990) “An Explanatory Framework for the Study of Federated States as Foreign-Policy Actors,” in Hans J. Michelmann, Panayotis Soldatos (eds.), *Federalism and International Relations: The Role of Subnational Units*, Oxford, Oxford Press, pp. 34-38

“the foreign relations of sub-national governments”.⁶ In a more expansive definition, Noé Cornago describes paradiplomacy as:

[. . .] sub-state governments’ involvement in international relations, through the establishment of formal and informal contacts, either permanent or ad hoc, with foreign public or private entities, with the aim to promote socio-economic, cultural, or political issues, as well as any other foreign dimension of their own constitutional competences.⁷

The term is not universally popular. Scholars such as Brian Hocking insist that it implies conflict and incompatible interests between the national and sub-national policy levels.⁸

Other designations, such as sub-state diplomacy, have alternatively been used to refer to the phenomenon. However, as ‘paradiplomacy’ still appears extensively in the literature, I will use this term and ‘sub-state diplomacy’ interchangeably.

An emerging body of scholarship has demonstrated that sub-state governmental actors are increasingly engaging internationally to promote their interests. There is acknowledgement in academic research that this is no longer a peripheral occurrence and constitutes a change in the practice of diplomacy.⁹ Cornago has observed that “sub-state interventions in the diplomatic realm — once considered exceptional or deviant — are becoming normal...their practices, institutions and discourses are increasingly widespread.”¹⁰ Gary Chambers notes that substate involvement is an “intricate part of the reconfiguration process of international politics and negotiation.”¹¹ The traditional diplomacy of the nation-state is increasingly confronted by challenges in transnational politics, the growth of international and

⁶ Aldecoa, F. & Keating, M. eds. (1999). *Paradiplomacy in Action: The Foreign Relations of Subnational Governments*. London: Frank Cass.

⁷ Cornago, Noé. (1999) *Diplomacy and paradiplomacy in the redefinition of international security: Dimensions of conflict and co-operation*, *Regional & Federal Studies*, 9:1, p. 40, DOI: [10.1080/13597569908421070](https://doi.org/10.1080/13597569908421070)

⁸ Hocking, Brian. (1993) *Localizing Foreign Policy: Non-Central Governments and Multilayered Diplomacy*, New York (NY), Palgrave Macmillan, Quoted in Crikemans, David. (2010). *Regional Sub-State Diplomacy from a Comparative Perspective: Quebec, Scotland, Bavaria, Catalonia, Wallonia and Flanders*. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*. 5. 37-64. 10.1163/187119110X12574289877489.

⁹ Aldecoa & Keating (1999), Crikemans (2010), Cornago (2010)

¹⁰ Cornago, Noé. (2010). *On the Normalization of Sub-State Diplomacy*. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*. 5. 11-36. 10.1163/1871191x-05010102, p. 35

¹¹ Chambers, Gary (2012), *Europe and Beyond: The Development of Sub-State Paradiplomacy With Special Reference To Catalonia*, “*The Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*”, issue 7, no. 1., p. 10

supranational organizations and social and non-governmental organizations¹², as well as by social movements and multinational corporations.¹³ André Lecours views supranational structures such as the EU as providing legitimacy for regional governments to bypass central institutions.¹⁴ European integration allowed for “the spread of a shared perception concerning the need to provide institutional venues for mobilizing sub-state governments across the European region.”¹⁵ Based on his study of empirical data of various sub-state entities, Crikemans concludes that boundaries between conventional state diplomacy and sub-state diplomacy are becoming far less distinct.¹⁶ In the last decade, the relevance of research in this area has become ever greater, with Scotland’s independence referendum as well as Brexit changing the dynamic of sub-state diplomacy across the UK. Meanwhile, the unofficial referendum in Catalonia in 2017 and its subsequent fall-out provide a good example of paradiplomacy morphing into protodiplomacy, and how this was met with counter-paradiplomacy by the central state, as I will address further in Chapter 2.¹⁷

According to Peter Lynch, paradiplomacy tends to be driven by one of two political goals. It can be used as a tool to enhance the profile of the country or region to advance claims of statehood. Conversely, it can be harnessed by regional governments and parties that aim to resist secession and statehood by demonstrating that the region can be an effective player in international relations while avoiding the risks of full independence.¹⁸ For Lecours and Moreno, paradiplomacy is primarily a function of ‘stateless nationalism’ which serves as a

¹² Chambers (2012), p. 10

¹³ Lecours, André. (2002). Paradiplomacy: Reflections on the Foreign Policy and International Relations of Regions. *International Negotiation*. 7. 91-114. 10.1163/157180602401262456., p. 95

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Cornago (2010), p. 20

¹⁶ Crikemans (2010)

¹⁷ Castan Pinos, Jaume & Sacramento, Jeremy (2019), "The state strikes back: A study of Spain’s counter-paradiplomacy in Catalonia", *Relations internationales*, 2019/3 (No 179), p. 95-111. DOI: 10.3917/ri.179.0095. URL: <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-relations-internationales-2019-3-page-95.htm>

¹⁸ Lynch, Peter (2021), *Scottish Government and Politics: an Introduction*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, p. 159

means for identity expression and a site of political territorial mobilization.¹⁹ In this respect, Lynch suggests that nation-building can be used to enhance the profile of the region in preparation for an eventual bid for statehood.²⁰ While this may be an annoyance to the parent state, it does not always result in greater conflict between central and regional governments, nor does it necessarily trespass on any policy areas beyond its remit. Soldatos' framework distinguishes between external causes of paradiplomatic activity, such as global interdependence and the role of external actors, and domestic causes, such as the constitutional framework, regionalism/nationalism, the growth of federated units and electoralism.²¹ This thesis will situate the Scottish case within this framework.

Paradiplomacy driven by nationalist mobilization can ultimately evolve into protodiplomacy, which involves “initiatives and activities of a non-central government that graft a more or less separatist message on to its economic, social, and cultural links with foreign nations”, even at the risk of provoking serious conflict.²² Through this approach, sub-state governments court and rally foreign support for an eventual declaration of independence. Cornago suggests that protodiplomacy is rare, even among those sub-state governments where “a clear will of differentiation with regard to the hosting state exists”.²³ Paradiplomacy is generally not regarded as a threat to the central state and its activities remain largely within the terms of formalised agreements. Protodiplomatic activities, on the other hand, often intentionally go beyond the remit of the sub-state government, regularly encountering obstruction and hostility from central governments, a process which Pinos and Sacramento label counter-paradiplomacy. The authors argue that Catalonia's paradiplomatic objectives have been

¹⁹ Lecours, André & Moreno, Luis. (2001). Paradiplomacy and stateless nations: a reference to the Basque Country. Documentos de trabajo (CSIC. Unidad de Políticas Comparadas), N°. 6, 2001, p. 1

²⁰ Lynch (2001), p. 159

²¹ Soldatos (1990), p. 34

²² Duchacek (1988), p. 240, cited in Cornago (2010), p. 31

²³ Cornago (2010), p. 31-32

considerably affected by Spain's counter-paradiplomatic strategies, which became core features of Spain's foreign policy.²⁴

Scholars have analysed some of the strategies and "games" behind paradiplomacy. I.K. Holovko argues that paradiplomacy can allow the objectives of subnational states to "slip beneath the political radar" of sovereign states. The author suggests that less sophisticated strategies, such as participation in international networks, are often more effective than formal actions such as establishing pseudo-embassies.²⁵ The idea of the performative constitution of agency is also present in the literature on sub-state diplomacy.²⁶ Aldecoa and Keating note that paradiplomacy can enable sub-states to "seek recognition as something more than mere regions".²⁷ Dickson employs the concept of sovereignty games, as envisaged by Addler-Nissen and Gad, to consider how sub-state actors have "challenged, subverted or appropriated" sovereignty.²⁸ The Scottish independence referendum in 2014, Dickson argues, acted as a catalyst in the development of international agency. She states that "mimicry" of fully sovereign states can also be utilised by sub-state governments to enact the performance of sovereignty. In the run up to the 2014 referendum, she contends that Scotland mimicked a small, social democratic state, closely following the Nordic model.²⁹

Dickson's comparative study of Scotland, Wales and Bavaria is one of the few works of scholarship in recent years to analyse paradiplomacy from a Scottish perspective. Peter Lynch provides a useful, brief overview of how devolution has helped to develop Scotland's

²⁴ Castan Pinos & Sacramento (2019)

²⁵ Holovko, I. K. (2016). The paradiplomacy of subnational actors: the potential and forms of realization. *Grani* 19 (11), p. 1

²⁶ Braun, B., Schindler, S. & Wille, T. (2019) Rethinking agency in International Relations: performativity, performances and actor-networks. *J Int Relat Dev* 22, 787–807. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0147-z>

²⁷ Aldecoa & Keating (1999), p. 5

²⁸ Dickson, Francesca (2017). Paradiplomacy and the state of the nation. A comparative analysis. PhD Thesis, Cardiff University, p. 49

²⁹ Dickson (2017), p. 131

directive and strategic role in international engagement since 1999.³⁰ Others have focused on specific diplomatic incidents, such as Daniel Kenealy's analysis of the release in 2009 of the Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi.³¹ Stephen Gethins' new book looks at Scotland's place in the world with a wide scope, reflecting on how the country's relationship with the rest of the world has developed over the years and how it manifests itself today.³²

This thesis aims to contribute to this literature by narrowing the lens and exploring Scotland's paradiplomatic activity and foreign relations since 2016. In Chapter One, I will consider the key characteristics and motives driving Scottish paradiplomacy. While I will address the activities driven by functional, economic concerns, my primary focus will be on the more political actions which deploy soft power and public diplomacy to enhance Scotland's profile and involvement in international affairs. According to Joseph Nye, soft power "tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political value and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority."³³ Public diplomacy is defined as governments' direct communication with foreign societies as a means of creating positive public opinion about the country or region in question and projecting its values and ideas.³⁴ Sub-state regions commonly deploy these tools because they do not necessarily require constitutional levers. A recent British Council Report ranked Scotland 16th in the National Brands Index, noting its "strong reputation abroad".³⁵

³⁰ Lynch, Peter (2020), "Scotland International: Understanding Scotland's International Relations", The Oxford Handbook of Scottish Politics, ed. Michael Keating, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198825098.013.31

³¹ Kenealy, Daniel. (2012), Commercial Interests and Calculated Compassion: The Diplomacy and Paradiplomacy of Releasing the Lockerbie Bomber. Diplomacy & Statecraft. 23. 10.1080/09592296.2012.706542.

³² Gethins, Stephen (2021), Nation to Nation: Scotland's place in the world. Luath Press Ltd

³³ Nye, Joseph (2008), "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 616 (1), p. 95

³⁴ Castells, M. (2008) 'The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance', The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 616(1), pp. 78–93. doi: [10.1177/0002716207311877](https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311877).

³⁵ Gethins (2021), p. 195

Politically, Scotland's soft power and public diplomacy is mediated through areas such as climate change, international development, progressive domestic legislation, and the creation of the 'good global citizen' paradigm. One might assume that the EU referendum in 2016, and the prolonged negotiations following it, would have considerably shaped or altered Scottish paradiplomacy. It would be unsurprising to see an increase in the SG's attempts to portray the country internationally as distinct from the rest of the UK in its political goals and social values. Chapter One will investigate this hypothesis.

Chapter Two seeks to establish whether devolved Scottish paradiplomacy has represented a threat to the national sovereignty of the UK. Given the SG's independence aspirations, as well as the softening attitudes towards this goal internationally, particularly in Europe, it might be expected that Scotland would go beyond traditional sub-state diplomacy to engage in protodiplomatic activities. To evaluate this, I will present the case of Catalonia in the run-up to its 'wildcat' referendum in 2017. Rather than conduct a full comparative study, I will draw key lessons from Catalan protodiplomacy and Spanish counter-paradiplomacy to assess whether Scottish sub-state diplomacy is taking the same course and whether counter-paradiplomatic activity is evident at UK Government (UKG/Whitehall) level.

Chapter Three will examine competing visions for the future of Scottish global affairs. First, I will address possible strategies Scotland might adopt to become a more effective sub-state actor within the UK. Second, with the long term future of Scotland's constitutional status uncertain, I will consider how the country's foreign policy would shape up as an independent state, addressing some of the accompanying challenges, opportunities, and tensions. The Scottish independence movements tends to envisage an 'ethical' foreign policy within a civic nationalist framework. A key impetus behind 'ethical' foreign policy interventions, according

to David Chandler, is the objective of enhancing legitimacy in the domestic sphere.³⁶ I will consider the depth of the SNP's 'good global citizen' paradigm, including the intention to adopt a feminist foreign policy.

In terms of limitations, this thesis is primarily a study of Scotland's governmental external engagement and political deployment of soft power and does not attempt to cover the myriad ways in which the nation's international standing is shaped in other fields, such culture or business, for example. These spheres are not unrelated to formal political connections, and indeed they often overlap, but could not be explored within the confines of this thesis. To help sharpen the analytical focus, this thesis is devoted to Scottish paradiplomacy since the Brexit vote, as this marks a material change in circumstances in terms of both Scotland and the UK's position in the world. It would be worthwhile in a separate project to analyse Scotland's paradiplomacy in the few years prior to 2016. A comparative study between Scotland's international engagement in the run up to the 2014 referendum and in the period preceding a potential future referendum would be particularly instructive.

Methodologically, this thesis will involve qualitative analysis of political discourse, drawing from material such as manifestos, speeches, parliamentary committee meetings, panel discussions and policy papers. Throughout my analysis, I will also draw from primary research in the form of interviews I have conducted with six politicians and academics. These include: Stephen Gethins, former SNP spokesperson for International Affairs & Europe at Westminster; Ian Murray MP, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland; Donald Cameron MSP, Scottish Conservative external affairs spokesperson at Holyrood; Philip Rycroft, a senior diplomat who has advised both the Scottish and UK governments, serving as UK Permanent Secretary at the Department for Exiting the European Union from 2017 to

³⁶ Chandler, David (2003) 'Rhetoric without Responsibility: The Attraction of 'Ethical' Foreign Policy', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 5(3), pp. 295–316. doi: 10.1111/1467-856X.00108.

2019; Professor Michael Keating of the University of Aberdeen, one of the foremost academic authorities on paradiplomacy; and Professor Caron E. Gentry, Head of International Relations at the University St. Andrews. Time and resource restraints have restricted the number of interviews. However, I took care to approach interviewees with a high level of expertise and experience in the topics, while also ensuring a balance of party-political perspectives as well as those from diplomatic and scholarly backgrounds. These interviews are intended to provide useful primary data rather than definitive accounts on Scottish paradiplomacy.

The literature clearly demonstrates that paradiplomatic processes have reinforced the view that the modern nation-state is no longer the exclusive site of economic, political, and cultural sovereignty.³⁷ Paradiplomacy as a field in the promotion of Scottish international standing and nationhood, especially in the post-Brexit context, remains under-explored. The thesis will help to address this gap and ensure paradiplomacy and foreign policy is properly considered as the divergence between the Scottish and UK governments divergence intensifies, particularly over independence.

³⁷ Chambers (2012), p. 7

Chapter One

Successive Scottish governments since the advent of devolution have engaged in paradiplomacy. An increasingly confident Scottish paradiplomacy, with a greater focus on nation-building, characterised the years between 2007 and 2016, spanning the SNP's first two terms in office.³⁸ This period also coincided with two historic referendums: the 2014 vote which retained Scotland's place in the UK and the UK-wide vote in 2016 to leave the European Union (EU), despite the Scottish electorate opting to remain. This chapter will assess the key characteristics of Scottish paradiplomacy since the Brexit referendum. I will focus on areas the SG and Parliament have used devolved powers, such as in climate change and international development, in distinctive ways to enhance its own 'brand' and build a more sovereign standing. This chapter will consider these policies as part of a broader strategy in the deployment of public diplomacy, image-building, soft power, and 'values' to promote Scotland internationally. I will also analyse the SG's relations with European states and institutions and evaluate if and how the character of this paradiplomatic activity has changed as a result of the vote to leave the EU and the subsequent negotiations. Finally, this chapter will contend that, despite the SNP's independence agenda, Scottish paradiplomacy since 2016 has largely been uncontroversial and 'normal' for a substate. While there have been efforts to enhance Scotland's status and viability as an autonomous nation, particularly in contrast to the declining reputation of the UK, these have not yet strayed into protodiplomacy.

According to Keating, the paradiplomatic motives of substate governments are highly diverse but can be grouped into two broad categories: functional motives, which are principally economic, and symbolic motives, which are distinctly political in nature.³⁹ Economic

³⁸ Lynch (2021), p. 2

³⁹ Keating, Michael. Interview by Macdonald, Callum. Online Video Call. August 3, 2021.

development is a notable feature of the SG's functional external affairs approach. An action plan to increase trade, investment, and exports, for example, was published in 2016.⁴⁰ There are also engagement strategies focused on economic development with the US, Canada, India, China, and Pakistan.⁴¹ However, important though these activities are, they are not as potent politically or symbolically as paradiplomatic efforts in other realms of policy making or those that focus on soft power, 'values', and public diplomacy.

Two areas the SG pursued distinctive, if limited, foreign policy goals, are in climate justice and international development. Scotland has pledged to reduce emissions of all greenhouse gases by 75% by 2030 and targets net-zero emissions by 2045, five years before the UK as a whole.⁴² The SG lauds these commitments as "world-leading"⁴³ and frequently cites praise from figures such as Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, who said the legislation was "inspiring" and demonstrated "bold leadership".⁴⁴ A closer look reveals a more complex picture. Holyrood has missed its carbon targets for the last three years. Moreover, although the licensing of North Sea investments is a matter for the UKG, the SG has faced criticism for failing to unequivocally oppose proposed exploration in the Cambo oil field west of the Shetland Islands.⁴⁵ Despite Scotland possessing an estimated 25% of Europe's offshore wind and tidal resources and 60% of the UK's onshore wind capacity, there are concerns that its transformative potential is being squandered, with the industry largely dominated by foreign investment and private

⁴⁰ Scottish Government (2016), Global Scotland: Trade and Investment Strategy 2016–2021, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/global-scotland-scotlands-trade-investment-strategy-2016-2021/>, accessed September 20, 2021

⁴¹ Scottish Government: International Relations, <https://www.gov.scot/policies/international-relations/>, accessed September 20, 2021

⁴² Scottish Government: Climate Change, <https://www.gov.scot/policies/climate-change/>, accessed September 20, 2021

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ <https://twitter.com/pespinosac/status/1177231636657770496?lang=en>, accessed September 20, 2021

⁴⁵ Bol, David. "MSPs Told CAMBO Oil Field Plans Would BE 'BETRAYAL of Future Generations'." HeraldScotland. HeraldScotland, September 15, 2021.

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/19583220.cambo-oil-field-plans-betrayal-future-generations/>, accessed September 29, 2021

ownership.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, in speeches abroad the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has repeatedly cited her Government's endeavour in tackling the environmental crisis, as well as citing initiatives such as the Climate Justice Fund, which helps tackle the effects of climate change in the world's poorest countries.⁴⁷

With Glasgow hosting COP26 in November, the SG has an extra incentive to promote its climate credentials internationally. While it looks unlikely that the UKG will grant any official role for the SG⁴⁸, the potential of the event has not been lost on Stephen Gethins who states that climate diplomacy is a “fantastic opportunity” for Scotland to showcase itself to the world:

I would hope that the UK chooses to play the whole team and include Scotland as part of their delegation. Other sub-state actors will be part of their national delegations...But I think that even if the UK does exclude Scotland, we need to be innovative and imaginative in how we engage with the rest of the world.⁴⁹

The First Minister has been keen to highlight her own involvement, publicising discussions with John Kerry, the US climate envoy.⁵⁰ The SNP's cooperation agreement with the Scottish Greens, agreed in summer 2021, could be seen as a statement of intent to the rest of the world about the seriousness with which Scotland takes the environmental crisis. After Boris Johnson opted against funding the Conference of Youth in the run up to COP, Sturgeon confirmed her government would foot the bill to ensure the event goes ahead.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Maxwell, Jamie, “The Scottish National Party Can't Be Trusted to Tackle the Climate Crisis.” Jacobin. August 21, 2021. <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/08/scottish-national-party-climate-greens-nicola-sturgeon>, accessed September 15, 2021

⁴⁷ Scottish Government: [Arctic Circle Assembly 2016: First Minister's speech](#), October 7, 2016.; [Women's role in conflict resolution: First Minister's UN speech](#), April 5, 2017; [World Forum on Climate Justice: First Minister's speech](#), June 5, 2019; [Scotland's International Development Alliance annual conference: First Minister's speech](#), September 26, 2018, all accessed August 3, 2021

⁴⁸ Soussi, Alasdair, “Scotland readies for COP26 spotlight as political tensions simmer”, Al-Jazeera, September 23, 2021 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/23/scotlands-devolved-government-readies-for-cop26-spotlight>, accessed September 30, 2021

⁴⁹ Gethins, Stephen. Interview by Macdonald, Callum. Online Video Call. April 26, 2021.

⁵⁰ <https://twitter.com/nicolasturgeon/status/1367882365071155206?lang=en>, accessed September 2, 2021.

⁵¹ Scottish Government, COP26 youth conference, <https://www.gov.scot/news/cop26-youth-conference/>, September 13, 2021. Accessed September 15, 2021.

Signalling progress on climate commitments is part of a wider effort to promote Scotland internationally as a “good global citizen” and an “open and outward looking country”. Sturgeon has frequently invoked these notions before foreign audiences, not least when talking up Scotland’s international development programme. She has noted her government was one of the first to confirm adoption of the new sustainable development goals, and has drawn attention to the SG’s humanitarian emergency fund, as well as development partnerships with Pakistan, Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda.⁵² The First Minister has underlined the importance of gender equality in this work, noting the Women in Conflict programme.⁵³ As the first global advocate for the #HeforShe campaign, Sturgeon was invited to address the UN in New York on women’s role in conflict resolution.⁵⁴ SG ministers have, at times, differentiated these activities with the UK’s approach. In 2020, the UKG Department for International Development was merged with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, followed by an estimated £4bn reduction in the foreign aid budget.⁵⁵ After the SG announced a donation of PPE stocks to partners in sub-Saharan Africa to aid their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Minister for International Development, Jenny Gilruth, tweeted: “Contrast with the Tories, who used Covid as an excuse to slice the overseas aid budget. We stepped up, they stepped back. Scotland can do so much better.”⁵⁶

A similar dynamic is evident in human rights. The SNP’s 2021 manifesto emphasised its commitment to incorporate UN human rights treaties.⁵⁷ The UN Convention on the Rights of

⁵² [Arctic Circle Assembly 2016: First Minister's speech](#)

⁵³ Scottish Government, [Scotland's place in the world: First Minister's Stanford University speech](#), April 4, 2017

⁵⁴ [Women's role in conflict resolution: First Minister's UN speech](#)

⁵⁵ “Political Vandalism’: DfID and Foreign Office MERGER Met with Anger by UK Charities.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, June 16, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/16/political-vandalism-dfid-and-foreign-office-merger-met-with-anger-by-uk-charities>. Accessed September 15, 2021.

⁵⁶ <https://twitter.com/JennyGilruth/status/1437363558619176960>. Accessed September 23, 2021.

⁵⁷ SNP Manifesto 2021, https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04_15_snp_manifesto_2021___a4_document?mode=window, p. 13, accessed April 26, 2021

the Child were recently incorporated into domestic law at Holyrood, though this is being challenged by the UKG in the Supreme Court on the grounds that it is not within the competence of the Scottish Parliament.⁵⁸ Keating reflects on the optics of this disagreement:

Those are probably fairly costless things for the SG to sign up to and there may be an element of symbolism there, but certainly, these are things that the UKG doesn't want...Unionists that I've talked to can't see the reasoning behind that. It's something coming from the London civil service.⁵⁹

The puzzlement at the UKG's approach may stem from a recognition that the SNP has sought to capitalise on a sense that Scotland and the UK have fundamentally divergent political priorities and values. For example, during speeches at American universities, as well as celebrating Scotland's world class higher education sector, the First Minister has contrasted her government's policy of free tuition for undergraduate students with the fee-paying English system, stating "we believe that education is something precious and should be based on an individual's ability to learn, not on their ability to pay."⁶⁰ She has noted that Scotland was the first country in the world to embed LGBTI rights into the school curriculum, and the first to provide free sanitary products in all secondary schools and universities. She has also drawn attention to international recognition for legislation to better tackle domestic abuse, as well as the SG's involvement in an alliance of nations and regions promoting wellbeing, not just GDP, as a measure of economic performance.⁶¹ "As a nation of just 5 million people, we will never be one of the world's great powers", Sturgeon said in Washington DC, "But we do believe that we can still make a meaningful contribution to great causes."⁶² The First Minister has frequently invited those with Scottish ancestry, and even those without, to share in these

⁵⁸ "United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) Bill." Holyrood Website, May 14, 2021. <https://www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view/united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child-incorporation-bill>. Accessed September 2, 2021

⁵⁹ Keating interview (2021)

⁶⁰ Scottish Government, [First Minister's speech at Georgetown University, Washington DC](#), February 4, 2019; [Scotland's place in the world: First Minister's Stanford University speech](#), both accessed August 3, 2021

⁶¹ Scottish Government, [Institute for New Economic Thinking annual conference: First Minister's speech](#), October 21, 2017, accessed August 4, 2021

⁶² [First Minister's speech at Georgetown University](#)

successes. “If you want to be Scottish”, she told Stanford University, “nobody, least of all me, is going to stop you.”⁶³

Aligning the country with “great causes” and strengthening alliances with the diaspora is an important and uncontroversial means by which the SG utilises soft power to construct an inclusive and modern civic nationalism. By extolling progressive domestic legislation to receptive foreign audiences, the First Minister portrays Scotland as a caring, moral country which has made significant achievements within the limits of devolution. In so doing, she hints at what might be possible with full statehood without explicitly using these appearances to lobby for independence. Sturgeon’s aptitude at playing stateswoman has become a big asset in this respect; a recent feature in *New Yorker* magazine is testament to her growing profile and reputation.⁶⁴

Appearances by Scottish ministers in international contexts is an example of what Keating identifies as an “external projection” to help nation-building at home.⁶⁵ Similarly, Chandler argues that ‘ethical’ foreign policy declarations can serve the objective of enhancing legitimacy in the domestic sphere.⁶⁶ There might be something of this in Angus Robertson’s comments call on the UK’s response to the crisis in Afghanistan: “The plodding response by Westminster has seen it take longer to recall the House of Commons than the Taliban needed to overrun the country.”⁶⁷ As a sub-state government with limited powers in external affairs, SNP’s rhetoric and aspiration in foreign policy can take prominence over responsibility and

⁶³ [Scotland's place in the world: First Minister's Stanford University speech](#)

⁶⁴ Knight, Sam. “Nicola Sturgeon’s Quest for Scottish Independence”, *The New Yorker*, May 3, 2021 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/05/10/nicola-sturgeons-quest-for-scottish-independence>, accessed September 15, 2021

⁶⁵ Keating (1999), p. 5

⁶⁶ Chandler, David (2003) “Rhetoric without Responsibility: The Attraction of ‘Ethical’ Foreign Policy”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 5(3), pp. 295–316. doi: 10.1111/1467-856X.00108.

⁶⁷ Robertson, Angus. “Afghanistan: After Taliban's victory, UK has a moral obligation towards refugees fleeing this brutal regime”. *Edinburgh Evening News*, August 16, 2021, <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/afghanistan-after-talibans-victory-uk-has-a-moral-obligation-towards-refugees-fleeing-this-brutal-regime-angus-robertson-msp-3347835>, Accessed August 18, 2021

accountability. This is a key incentive for the SNP, as I will discuss further in Chapter 3.

However, the SG's paradiplomacy also represents an inverse of this dynamic; highlighting eye-catching domestic legislation to boost the country's moral authority abroad. The 'good global citizen' paradigm offers a clear way for the SG to mark itself as distinct from the UK without having the tools to fully deliver or implement an alternative programme.

The starkest means by which the SG has sought to claim moral authority and distance itself from the UK is over the Brexit vote. Sturgeon has repeatedly alluded to the 'democratic deficit' of Scotland leaving the EU against the wishes of 62% of its voters. The morning after that referendum in June 2016, the First Minister proclaimed that Scotland had "voted to renew our reputation as an outward looking, open and inclusive country", adding that the overall vote to leave was a "sign of divergence between Scotland and large parts of the rest of the UK in how we see our place in the world."⁶⁸ The following month, she declared that the SG would engage with the EU to "build understanding of and support for Scotland's position. The response we have had so far has been warm and welcoming."⁶⁹ Throughout the Brexit negotiation process, the SG expressed frustration that the UKG had "sidelined Scotland"⁷⁰ without engaging with proposals for differentiated approaches that might have devolved aspects of migration policy or allowed Scotland to stay in the EU's single market. When the deal was finalised in December 2020, the First Minister claimed that promises had been broken and that Scotland faced a "far harder Brexit than could have been imagined when the referendum took place".⁷¹ It is not only the SG which identified an asymmetrical balance of

⁶⁸ Scottish Government, First Minister: EU referendum result, June 24, 2016, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/first-minister-eu-referendum-result/>, accessed August 3, 2021

⁶⁹ Scottish Government, Scotland in the European Union, July 25, 2016, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-european-union/>, accessed August 3, 2021

⁷⁰ Scottish Government, 20 years of devolution and Scotland's parliament: First Minister's speech, June 24, 2016, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fm-20-years-devolution-scotlands-parliament/>, Accessed August 3, 2021

⁷¹ Scottish Government, Brexit deal: statement by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, December 24, 2020, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/brexit-deal-statement-first-minister-nicola-sturgeon/>, Accessed August 4, 2021

interests. Philip Rycroft says that “respect” was missing from the UKG’s approach to the negotiations, stating that Brexit “stripped away the ambiguity of the devolution settlements” and “demonstrated just where power rests within this Union”.⁷²

The full impact of Brexit on Scotland’s European relations is still unfolding, though clearly there has been tangible change. Most obviously, Scotland has lost its six MEPs at the European Parliament. The meetings at the Council of Ministers, European Council, European Commission, and the Committee of the Regions, no longer have Scottish or British representation. UK and Scottish organisations are likely to have less influence both within European network bodies and when in direct contact with EU institutions.⁷³ For Stephen Gethins, Brexit means Scotland is:

part of a country that is increasingly isolated from the rest of Europe. The post-Brexit period was incredibly damaging for the whole of the UK and the way it’s perceived elsewhere. There has been a reduction in soft power and diplomatic capital.⁷⁴

In the absence of formal institutional links with Europe, Scotland’s relations with individual states have taken on added importance. Rather than focusing on common cause with other secessionist movements, such as in Catalonia, the SG has tended towards partnerships with similarly sized, independent nations. This is exemplified by its dealings with Nordic countries, notably through the participation and hosting of the Arctic Circle Forum. In addition to celebrating shared history, geography and culture, these connections have allowed the Government to emphasise mutual policy priorities, interests and values. Ministers have urged for a reconfiguration of Scotland’s geopolitical centre of gravity. At the Arctic Assembly 2017, the First Minister emphasised that Scotland is geographically the Arctic’s

⁷² Chris Deerin. “Boris Johnson’s ‘MUSCULAR UNIONISM’ Will Only Drive Scotland Further towards Independence.” *New Statesman*, July 22, 2021. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2021/06/boris-johnson-s-muscular-unionism-will-only-drive-scotland-further-towards>. Accessed July 23, 2021

⁷³ Hughes, Kirsty (2021), Scottish Centre for European Relations, “Scotland’s European Relations. Where Next?.” <https://www.scer.scot/wp-content/uploads/Final-pdf-Scotland-Europe-Paper-15-6-21-kh.pdf>. Accessed September 29, 2021.

⁷⁴ Gethins interview (2021)

nearest neighbour and that the northern part of Scotland is closer to the Arctic than it is to London.⁷⁵ Similarly, Fiona Hyslop, then Cabinet Secretary for External Affairs, stated on Arctic Day 2019: “Geographically, Scotland is no longer peripheral at the northwest corner of Europe. We find ourselves in a key position, close to the central Arctic, linking the region with the rest of Europe and the wider world.”⁷⁶

Nonetheless, Scotland still has myriad connections and relationships with the continent as a whole. While most of these will be impacted by the framework of the two treaties governing EU-UK relations, and by the UKG on post-Brexit policy, many links with Europe have been retained, especially in civil society, business and in NGOs.⁷⁷ Under the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UKG and devolved administrations, sub-state governments are permitted to have offices in Brussels, which are formally part of the UK permanent representation to the EU.⁷⁸ The SG has four main ‘innovation and investment’ hubs in the EU – in Brussels, Berlin, Dublin, and Paris, with a further two planned in Copenhagen and Warsaw.⁷⁹ There are also SG offices outside Europe in Beijing, Ottawa and Washington DC.⁸⁰ Scottish Development International, Scotland’s trade and inward investment body, manages a wider assortment of more than 30 international trade and investment promotion offices. Meanwhile, Scotland Europa, a membership organisation of businesses, universities, and public bodies, promotes Scottish interests in the EU.⁸¹ There are

⁷⁵ Scottish Government, Arctic Circle Assembly 2017: First Minister's speech, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/first-ministers-speech-arctic-circle-assembly/>, October 13, 2017, accessed August 4, 2021

⁷⁶ Scottish Government, Arctic Day: speech by Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, March 25, 2019, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/arctic-day-speech-by-cabinet-secretary-for-culture-tourism-and-external-affairs/>, accessed August 4, 2021

⁷⁷ Hughes (2021)

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Scottish Government, Agreement with Scottish Green Party, August 20, 2021, <https://www.gov.scot/news/agreement-with-scottish-green-party/>, accessed September 15, 2021

⁸⁰ Scottish Government, International Relations, <https://www.gov.scot/policies/international-relations/>, accessed September 3, 2021

⁸¹ Scotland Europa, <https://www.scotlandeuropa.com/aboutus/>, accessed August 15, 2021

also 65 ‘honorary consulates’ of other nations across Scotland.⁸² Efforts have been made to compensate for Brexit, as Sturgeon said in Paris: “In the last two years we have doubled our trade representation on mainland Europe. We have launched a new promotional campaign which invites people to live, work, invest in and visit our country.”⁸³

On 31st January 2020, the day the UK left the EU, the SG published the *European Union's Strategic Agenda 2020-2024: Scotland's Perspective*.⁸⁴ It outlines three key priorities: tackling climate change; promoting growth and well-being; and promoting innovation and research. According to Kirsty Hughes, these are the three main functional areas that continue to drive Scottish paradiplomacy in the EU.⁸⁵ This document was followed in March 2021 with *Steadfastly European, Scotland's Past, Present and Future*, which reflects on the impact of Brexit and reiterates the SG's commitment to “European values”.⁸⁶

Nonetheless, on the topic of whether Brexit has triggered a significant increase in Scotland's paradiplomacy towards Europe, my interviewees are divided. Michael Keating highlights extensive European networking by the Catalans, Basque and Flemish, and voices surprise the SG not done more of its own:

I was told they are developing (a European networking strategy), but they're keeping awfully quiet about it. They're not even networking around Europe to prepare the way there. Why, I don't know.⁸⁷

⁸² Dougall, David Mac. “Ferrero Rocher? Non, Merci! Meet the Foreign Diplomats at Home in Scotland.” The Courier. August 14, 2021. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/uk-world/2455753/ferrero-rocher-non-merci-meet-the-foreign-diplomats-at-home-in-scotland/>. Accessed August 25, 2021

⁸³ Scottish Government, First Minister's speech at French National Assembly, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/first-ministers-speech-at-french-national-assembly/>, February 19, 2019, accessed July 23, 2021

⁸⁴ Scottish Government, European Union's Strategic Agenda 2020-2024: Scotland's Perspective, January 31, 2021, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/european-unions-strategic-agenda-2020-24-scotlands-perspective/pages/2/>, Accessed September 22, 2021

⁸⁵ Hughes (2021)

⁸⁶ Scottish Government, *Steadfastly European, Scotland's Past, Present and Future*, March 9, 2021, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/steadfastly-european-scotlands-past-present-future/documents/>, Accessed September 22, 2021

⁸⁷ Keating interview (2021)

Donald Cameron suggests that the impact of Brexit has had a greater effect on the internal workings of the UK than on paradiplomacy:

There were definitely moments where Nicola Sturgeon went to European capitals to see what support there was for independence in the hypothetical scenario that Scotland voted for it and then wanted to get back into the EU. I think that that became politically contentious. But I struggle to say that there was a huge Brexit tsunami of issues about paradiplomacy, because I just don't think there was.⁸⁸

In contrast, Philip Rycroft said his department was conscious of an “increase in the diplomatic activity of the SG” after Brexit:

Clearly, they have and had a big motivation to demonstrate that if Scotland was independent and applied to re-join the EU, they could do so easily. We anticipated that they'd be getting out and about to build alliances, and indeed, it looks like that's what they've done, and I would expect them to be doing more of that. It is obviously in their interest to normalize the prospect of independence and part of that is to show that it would be acceptable to our near neighbours.⁸⁹

Stephen Gethins points to the Scottish Government's appointment of people who formerly served as diplomats, adding that he expects to see “acceleration of that work and a deepening of that diplomatic expertise”.⁹⁰ If the SG does expand its European engagement, it appears it would be met with a broadly receptive environment. Michael Keating says that “around Brussels circles there's much more of an understanding of where Scotland's coming from and a general sympathy”.⁹¹ Philip Rycroft identifies a “marked change in attitudes in the EU towards a potential Scottish application to join as an independent nation.”⁹²

However, while political sentiment around Europe is more favourable to Scotland following its vote to remain, the loss of institutional power has clearly weakened the SG's position. As I will discuss further in Chapter 2, an attempt to compensate for this through other channels does not in itself amount to a protodiplomatic strategy nor represent a threat to the

⁸⁸ Cameron, Donald. Interview by Macdonald, Callum. Online Video Call. August 27, 2021.

⁸⁹ Rycroft, Philip. Interview by Macdonald, Callum. Online Video Call. August 9, 2021.

⁹⁰ Gethins interview (2021)

⁹¹ Keating interview (2021)

⁹² Rycroft interview (2021)

sovereignty of the UK. The Labour government in Wales, a pro-union party representing a country which voted leave, also had strong objections to the UKG approach and had sought a stronger relationship with the EU than the final deal offered.⁹³ There are 300 substate representations who engage with the EU, dealing exclusively on issues such as regional funding and other work which falls under their local remit.⁹⁴ The SG's paradiplomacy is therefore not unusual and largely amounts to a typical paradiplomatic strategy. As Kirsty Hughes says:

Promoting trade, culture, research, investment, and innovation including on sustainable energy and swapping climate change best practice are all within its powers as a devolved administration and an approach that is also taken by sub-state governments that are not seeking independence.⁹⁵

In conclusion, while Scottish paradiplomacy since the Brexit vote in 2016 has involved functional, economic objectives typical of many sub-states, it has predominantly been characterised by political and symbolic activities to enhance Scotland's distinctive voice on the international stage. This is encapsulated in the 'good global citizen' paradigm, in which the SG has drawn on public diplomacy and soft power to construct an international reputation based on values and the distinctiveness or success of domestic Scottish policies. Scotland's vote to remain in 2016 presented the SG with an opportunity to emphasise its own credentials to a more sympathetic EU, however, it has also lost the institutional power to capitalise on this. While there has been an increase in the SG's diplomatic activity across the continent, particularly by the First Minister, this has not been on a greater scale than many other sub-state governments. Chapter Two will develop this argument by demonstrating that Scottish

⁹³ Welsh Government, Written Statement: Welsh Government response to the initial UK and EU negotiation mandates, February 11, 2020, <https://gov.wales/written-statement-welsh-government-response-initial-uk-and-eu-negotiation-mandates>, Accessed September 27, 2021

⁹⁴ Gethins (2021), p. 9

⁹⁵ Hughes (2021), p. 15

paradiplomacy in its current form does not represent a threat to UK sovereignty, as well as examining why it has not engaged in more protodiplomatic activity.

Chapter Two

The previous chapter set out the key characteristics of Scottish paradiplomacy and how it has been impacted by Brexit. I have argued that while the SG has adopted elements of nation-building, public diplomacy, and soft power to promote Scotland's standing, it has so far remained typical of a sub-state, largely staying within the terms of the devolution settlement and the MOU. The SG has tended to avoid protodiplomatic activity and serious conflict with the UKG over its external affairs. Chapter Two will expand on this argument by drawing from the theoretical literature on protodiplomacy and its aims and outcomes. To exemplify this, I will evaluate examples of protodiplomacy in the case of Catalonia to inform my analysis of Scotland paradiplomacy since 2016. I will present theories why Scotland has not pursued a form of diplomacy as strident and overt as that of Catalonia, as well as analysing how an emerging UK counter-paradiplomacy shapes and influences the Scottish approach.

As context for better understanding Scotland's current paradiplomatic activities, it is instructive to look at cases in other nations with sub-state entities. Sub-states pursuing paradiplomacy tend to have the consent and cooperation of the sovereign state with the terms of such engagement explicit in the law, as is the case with the Scotland Act. However, the UK is more centralised than many other nations with sub-state entities, which often have a more developed and formalised external affairs role than Scotland. For example, many of the German *Länder* have significant powers in paradiplomacy. German states can sign international treaties with the consent of the federal government. They also have the right to be consulted on treaties that impact *Länder* competences and can take the federal government to court if this is not respected.⁹⁶ German and Belgian regions have the right to represent

⁹⁶ Scottish Parliament, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, March 14, 2019, <https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12004&mode=pdf>, Accessed July 23, 2021

their country at the Council of Ministers. Several Canadian provinces are active in paradiplomacy, particularly Quebec, which has reached hundreds of ‘understandings’ with other state and sub-state governments.⁹⁷ Stephen Gethins argues that “with its overcentralisation of foreign policy, not only is the UK missing a trick, it's also going against the grain of what other Western multinational and federal states do.”⁹⁸ Ian Murray, however, is less convinced that a decentralised approach would work in the UK and is adamant that all of these arguments are “pitched through the prism of the SG wanting independence.”⁹⁹

Nonetheless, despite the SG’s pro-independence stance, Scottish paradiplomacy appears to pose little risk to the integrity of the UK if it stays within the confines of the Scotland Act and MOU. If kept at arm’s length by the UKG, the successful promotion of Scottish interests abroad may even help to show the effectiveness internationally of the British multinational project, as well as utilising Scottish soft power, such as the diaspora, to aid the UK’s relations with foreign partners. As James T. McHugh explains:

The state has an interest in preserving and promoting a plethora of economic, social and cultural goals that reflect the variety of that country and its local and regional divisions. Delegation of elements of the diplomatic process to subunits is not, under those circumstances, a threat to the sovereignty of the state, but a means of promoting its multiple and varied interests.¹⁰⁰

My interviewees agreed that, under present conditions, Scotland’s paradiplomatic activities do not represent a challenge to British sovereignty. “It’s certainly not a threat to the UK,” says Michael Keating, “The foreign office is really quite relaxed about this.”¹⁰¹ Philip Rycroft agrees maintaining that, at most, it can be a “diplomatic irritant”:

⁹⁷ McHugh, James T. (2015) Paradiplomacy, protodiplomacy and the foreign policy aspirations of Quebec and other Canadian provinces, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 21:3, 238-256, DOI: 10.1080/11926422.2015.1031261, p. 250

⁹⁸ Gethins interview (2021)

⁹⁹ Murray, Ian. Interview by Macdonald, Callum. Online Video Call. June 24, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ McHugh (2015), p. 239

¹⁰¹ Keating interview (2021)

If you have a minister from a devolved government, talking to ministers of other governments saying we don't agree with the UK Government line on something - that's about as serious as it gets.¹⁰²

Donald Cameron is more comfortable with Scotland promoting itself internationally than some of his unionist and Conservative counterparts: “It’s easy to exaggerate the significance of this kind of thing. I think David Frost (Brexit Minister) has got a lot more difficult things on his plate than the odd comment by a Scottish or Welsh Minister.”¹⁰³

The SG’s paradiplomacy can be differentiated with protodiplomacy, the term used to describe a sub-state which actively seeks international recognition to become independent.¹⁰⁴ Unlike paradiplomacy, it “clearly involves attempts at influencing the policies of sovereign states”.¹⁰⁵ While successful paradiplomacy usually requires cooperation and constitutional adherence between different levels of government, protodiplomacy tends to exacerbate, often deliberately, political tensions.¹⁰⁶ While the current UK and Scottish governments disagree on a range of issues, including the constitution, Sturgeon’s administration has not sought to actively undermine the foreign policy of the UKG. The First Minister has used international appearances to promote Scotland’s achievements and ‘values’, highlighting its vote to remain in the EU and its readiness to re-join in future, but has stopped short of lobbying for independence.

McHugh argues that protodiplomatic activity can be interpreted as subversive not just towards the parent state but the entire international system, because it bypasses the sovereignty of the central government to seek recognition from the international

¹⁰² Rycroft interview (2021)

¹⁰³ Rycroft interview (2021)

¹⁰⁴ Paquin, Stéphane. “Identity Paradiplomacy in Québec.” *Quebec Studies* 66 (2018): 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.3828/qs.2018.14>.

¹⁰⁵ Lecours (2002), p. 95

¹⁰⁶ Cornago, Noe (2018), “Paradiplomacy and Protodiplomacy.” *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*, 2018, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118885154.dipl0211>, p. 6

community.¹⁰⁷ This would go against the SNP hierarchy's cautious approach and desire to be seen as an 'honest broker' on the international stage.¹⁰⁸ Alyn Smith MP and Stuart MacDonald MP – the SNP's shadow foreign affairs and defence spokespeople – are presenting their interactions with EU networks as 'project no surprises'.¹⁰⁹ They see their interests best served by portraying Scotland as a cooperative and dependable counterpoint to a UK seen as rogue and unpredictable following the Brexit vote. In keeping with this, the SG is keen to respect international norms by securing agreement from the UKG for its plans for another independence ballot. Michael Russell, then Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe & External Affairs, said in January 2021 that a second referendum must be "beyond legal challenge to ensure legitimacy and acceptance at home and abroad."¹¹⁰

The Scottish case can be further illuminated by examining the external activities of another sub-state which has been run by a government seeking independence. From around 2013, Catalonia engaged in protodiplomacy through its attempts to gain support on the global stage for its independence.¹¹¹ A study by Segura found clear evidence of protodiplomatic messaging in foreign trips by the President and Government councillors; meetings with correspondents from foreign media; and various acts of protocol and outreach. Nearly all of these contained references to conflict between Catalonia and Spain.¹¹²

A key development was the establishment of the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia (Diplocat) in 2012.¹¹³ Diplocat is not officially responsible for the public diplomacy of the

¹⁰⁷ McHugh (2015), p. 245

¹⁰⁸ Gethins (2021), p. 185

¹⁰⁹ Hughes (2021), p. 18

¹¹⁰ "SNP Lays out 'Roadmap to Independence'." The Independent. January 23, 2021.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/snp-independence-referendum-roadmap-b1791799.html>, Accessed September 24, 2021.

¹¹¹ Crikemans (2020) and Segura, Caterina García (2017). "Sub-State Diplomacy: Catalonia's External Action amidst the Quest for State Sovereignty." *International Negotiation* 22, no. 2 (2017): 344–73. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-22001110>.

¹¹² Segura (2017), p. 364

¹¹³ Segura (2017), p. 353

Catalan *Generalitat*, though the lines are often blurred.¹¹⁴ Among its diverse membership is the Government of Catalonia and all the main city councils, representatives of the business sector, trade unions, universities, and FC Barcelona. The consortium's main objective is to "publicize Catalan values and assets" and influence international public opinion to have a positive view of Catalan self-determination, or at least its right to decide.¹¹⁵ Diplocat targets international media, foreign legislatures, and the academic sector, periodically undertaking surveys, foreign press analysis and social network monitoring. It operates an international visitor program and produces explanatory documents on the Catalan situation.¹¹⁶ In the run up to the referendum in October 2017, Diplocat organised public debates on independence.¹¹⁷ The use of public diplomacy by the Catalan pro-independence movement, primarily through Diplocat, is therefore different from the SG's as it has very explicitly tried to court foreign support for independence and recognition of statehood, while being directly oppositional to the objectives of the central government. Michael Keating shares his experience:

Over the years, I was invited constantly by Diplocat... They were engaged in a very conscious protodiplomatic campaign... I would say, well, I'll come and speak, as long as both sides are present and not just the pro-independence side. And they'd say absolutely, because they've got nothing to lose, they don't mind the anti-independence side, the unionists, being there as long as they get a platform for themselves. There's no such thing as bad publicity as far as they're concerned... It was really quite instructive. Of course, it was extremely sensitive and whenever you went to a meeting there was somebody from the Spanish Government and you could feel the tensions in the air.

These tensions manifested in the Spanish Government's pursuit of counter-paradiplomacy, the term describing the response by a parent state aimed at opposing and disrupting paradiplomacy perceived to be hostile to its interests.¹¹⁸ In October 2018, the Spanish

¹¹⁴ Crikemans (2020), p. 404

¹¹⁵ Diplocat, <https://diplocat.cat/en/>, Accessed August 10, 2021

¹¹⁶ Segura (2017), p. 363

¹¹⁷ Crikemans (2020), p. 404

¹¹⁸ Pinos and Sacramento, "Counter-paradiplomacy, the highest stage of Spanish diplomacy", *Pensem*, February 13, 2021, <https://www.pensem.cat/noticia/79/counter-paradiplomacy-highest-stage-of-spanish-diplomacy>, Accessed August 10, 2021

government launched the Secretariat of State for Global Spain, with the primary aim of resisting Catalan secessionism.¹¹⁹ The alleged illegality of Catalan independence is at the heart of the message the Spanish Government communicates to foreign states. In March 2017, the ex-Spanish Foreign Minister, José Manuel García Margallo, revealed that “No one knows how many favours we owe to many people for making them give statements [of support].” One such “favour” was Spain acquiring Latvia's support for Spanish territorial integrity with the deployment of 313 soldiers and eighty vehicles at the Latvian-Russian border.¹²⁰

Hostilities between Spain and Catalonia reached breaking point in the wake of the ‘wildcat’ referendum in October 2017. After Catalan officials declared independence, the Spanish Government immediately removed regional autonomy and stripped the *Generalitat* from its own diplomatic apparatus.¹²¹ Diplomats from Madrid were sent to effectively take over Catalan international affairs. Diplocat, along with most Catalan government offices abroad, were shut down in April 2018, with the Spanish state declaring them propaganda tools. However, Diplocat reopened the following year when pro-independence parties regained control of the parliament in Barcelona.¹²² In June 2021, the Spanish Court of Auditors ruled that 75% of Diplocat’s activity was unconstitutional and issued fines of €5.4m for allegedly spending public funds promoting independence abroad.¹²³ According to Segura et al., “The cycle of actions and reactions, accusations and counter-accusations, clearly demonstrates that protodiplomacy has become a reality.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ *ibid*

¹²⁰ *ibid*

¹²¹ Crikemans (2020), p. 397

¹²² Alexander, Colin, and Albert Royo i Marine. “Prohibited Sub-State Public Diplomacy: The Attempt to Dissolve Catalonia’s DIPLOCAT.” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 16, no. 3 (2019): 238–50. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00151-5>.

¹²³ Pons Valls, Emma, “Albert Royo, ex-Diplocat: “El Tribunal de Cuentas nos castiga porque el Estado no ha ganado el relato internacional”, *Publico*, July 22, 2021, <https://www.publico.es/entrevistas/albert-royo-exdiplocat-tribunal-cuentas-castiga-no-ganado-relato-internacional.html>, accessed September 10, 2021

¹²⁴ Segura (2017), p. 364

Despite the bitter fallout following the referendum, research has shown Diplocat has had a positive effect on international public opinion. A study by Torras-Vila and Fernández-Cavia suggests that Diplocat's efforts to give a platform to negative as well as positive views on Catalan self-determination might have provided the institution with the necessary credibility.¹²⁵ Recalling an event in Germany, Eve Hepburn said she encountered surprise among Diplocat staff that Scotland did not have as many offices in European cities as Catalonia.¹²⁶ Michael Keating draws a similar contrast:

You'd expect there to be a lot more protodiplomacy going on. I was really surprised that the SG hadn't done more to put its side across, even in the way the Catalans were doing by bringing the unionists along and having a debate about this. I think people should be aware that when Brexit happened, opinion shifted in Europe. But it strikes me they're still not taking advantage of that because there's much more sympathy for Scotland and general awareness that Scotland voted remain. It's partly because they feel everybody knows about Scotland... Well, that's not true. People know there's a place called Scotland, but they don't know what its constitutional status is.

It is therefore necessary to investigate why the SG, which already has its own precedent for a legally binding independence referendum, as well as growing sympathy and understanding for its position across Europe post-Brexit, has not pursued a bolder international strategy. Keating and Donald Cameron suggest the SNP is wary about the cost of international offices and ministerial trips - actions which in-and-of themselves are permitted under devolution - and that there might be "nervousness" about the reaction in the unionist tabloid press.¹²⁷ An August 2021 headline in the *Daily Express* - "SNP makes taxpayers fork out £7m on world offices to 'pretend Scotland is independent'" - is a typical example of this.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Torras-Vila, Joan, and José Fernández-Cavia. "DIPLOCAT's Public Diplomacy Role and the Perceptions towards Catalonia among International Correspondents." *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 14, no. 3 (2017): 213–22. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-017-0073-7>.

¹²⁶ Scottish Parliament, European and External Relations Committee, February 5, 2015, <https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9772&i=89519&c=1796984&s=paradiplomacy>, Accessed July 23, 2021

¹²⁷ Keating (2021) and Cameron (2021) interviews

¹²⁸ Percival, Richard. "SNP Makes Taxpayers Fork out £7m on World Offices to 'Pretend Scotland Is Independent'." *Express.co.uk*. *Express.co.uk*, August 23, 2021. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1480507/snp-news-office-scotland-independence-nicola-sturgeon-taxpayer>. Accessed August 25, 2021

More fundamentally, however, the evidence indicates that protodiplomacy is often ineffective and laden with risk. According to Noé Cornago:

protodiplomacy rarely produces the results expected by its proponents, namely to secure significant international support for a secessionist process, being more frequently conducive to international isolation and ethnopolitical conflict with the consequent economic, social, and political costs.¹²⁹

Criekemans' comparative analysis of protodiplomacy, which considers the cases of Slovenia, Catalonia, and Kurdistan, concludes that, overall, "the chances for success appear slim".¹³⁰ In particular, he highlights that:

The case of Catalonia constitutes one of today's most dramatic cases of how the aspirations of wannabe states can turn into a nightmare, from a situation of far-reaching autonomy and a quite developed sub-state diplomacy to a tutelage and humiliation from Madrid."¹³¹

Moreover, the European Commission maintained that the referendum was not legal and was an internal matter for Spain.¹³² In March 2021, the European Parliament voted to strip parliamentary immunity of three Catalan MEPs facing sedition charges.¹³³

On this evidence, it is logical to infer that the SNP would feel that protecting the gains of devolution and enhancing the prospect of independence in Europe are better served by a more cautious, gradualist strategy. Indeed, this may partly explain why the SG was reluctant to be too emphatic in its backing for Catalonia. Sijstermans and Brown Swan found in their study of responses to Catalan crisis that the SNP's support was "both less cohesive and less intense" than their Flemish counterparts.¹³⁴ Not only is the outcome of the contested Catalan referendum a cautionary tale for the SNP, it is also in their interests not to damage relations

¹²⁹ Cornago (2018), p. 12

¹³⁰ Criekemans (2020), p. 399

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 402

¹³² European Commission. Statement on the Events in Catalonia. October 2, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_17_3626 , Accessed August 20, 2021

¹³³ Herszenhorn, David M. "Parliament Lifts Immunity of CATALAN MEPS." POLITICO. March 9, 2021. <https://www.politico.eu/article/carles-puigdemont-immunity-catalan-meps-european-parliament/>. Accessed August 20, 2021

¹³⁴ Judith Sijstermans & Coree Brown Swan (2021): Shades of solidarity: Comparing Scottish and Flemish responses to Catalonia, Regional & Federal Studies, DOI: 10.1080/13597566.2021.1881064 , [p. 1](#)

with Spain, upon whom it relies not to veto Scotland's potential re-entry into the EU as a future independent state. As Michael Keating explains:

Although there's a natural affinity with being part of a broader European trend, it is extremely difficult for them to operate and link up with other forces. The SG is trying to secure at least the neutrality of national governments; if they get the neutrality of the Spanish government that's all they need.¹³⁵

He reflects on a similar reluctance to align with the Quebecois separatists:

Here the First Minister is on the cusp of getting an agreement on an independence referendum, why should she get mixed with a bunch of people who've lost two referendums and alienate English Canada, including all the Scots in English Canada, and alienate the Canadian government which will be required for the purpose of the Commonwealth?¹³⁶

It is likely that the reluctance to align closely with other independence movements stems from the same pragmatism that determines the SG's wider external affairs. That said, Philip Rycroft argues that the lack of protodiplomacy is more attributable to the "obviously different" circumstances between Scotland and Catalonia than any lack of volition on the part of the SG or SNP:

People tend to forget that, as late as October 2019, it was unclear just how the UK would leave the EU. In terms of Scotland's position around all of that there was such uncertainty and it was difficult to mount a campaign on that basis. Then of course, COVID comes along, which has dominated everything else.... I would anticipate that over the course of the next eighteen months or so that sort of activity would be ramped up.¹³⁷

Rycroft's perspective is convincing in that, while it is unlikely that the SG will adopt a strategy as brazen or transparently protodiplomatic as Catalonia, it would not be surprising to see an expansion of its networking and a bolder form of public diplomacy, particularly in Europe, once the public health crisis eases. Indeed, if the SG continues to insist on holding a referendum in the next five years, "after the COVID pandemic has passed",¹³⁸ it is likely that

¹³⁵ Keating interview (2021)

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ Rycroft interview (2021)

¹³⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/news/agreement-with-scottish-green-party/>, accessed August 10, 2021

enhanced outreach of some kind will accompany this campaign. To apply this to Soldatos' framework, the different context is important not only in terms of external factors such as the pandemic but also internal differences between the UK and Spanish state apparatus and constitution.¹³⁹ Many analysts would argue that, unlike Spain, the UK is not a unitary state.¹⁴⁰ While Spain refutes Catalonia's legal right to secede on principle, the UKG has not outright denied that Scotland has a right to self-determination, maintaining instead that now is not the time for another referendum.¹⁴¹ The closure of Diplocat and removal of Catalan external affairs capacity reveals the perceived threat these functions pose to the Spanish state. This far exceeds in severity any action taken by the UKG. Philip Rycroft offers his perspective on attitudes in Whitehall to devolved paradiplomacy:

It clearly varies from department to department and from individual to individual, and most broadly speaking, [they] would accept there was a legitimate role for their outreach. But there would be push back - and it depended a little bit on the circumstances - if people felt that they'd gone too far in terms of carving out a line that was separate from that of the UK.¹⁴²

While it has not taken as hard an approach as Spain, there are signs the UKG is adopting tougher counter-paradiplomacy, particularly in relation to Europe. In May 2021, David Frost was accused of lacking respect after writing to the devolved administrations reminding them of the need to keep Whitehall informed about contact with the EU and member states and "to support the UKG's position in such contacts".¹⁴³ Rycroft states that while Frost was

¹³⁹ Soldatos (1990)

¹⁴⁰ Centre on Constitutional Change. "Back to the Unitary State?" Centre on Constitutional Change. September 10, 2021. <https://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/news-and-opinion/back-unitary-state>. Accessed September 23, 2021

¹⁴¹ Cameron-Chileshe, Jasmine. "Gove Backs Scottish Independence Vote If There Is 'Settled Will'." Financial Times, August 1, 2021. <https://www.ft.com/content/69f75fec-fb06-4a94-b577-bfa1ff8b3eae>, Accessed September 25, 2021

¹⁴² Rycroft interview (2021)

¹⁴³ "Clumsy Control-Freakery": Frost Demands to Know about All Scottish Comms with EU." The London Economic, June 11, 2021. <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/politics/clumsy-control-freakery-frost-demands-to-know-about-all-scottish-comms-with-eu-272767/>. Accessed August 1, 2021

“basically asking them to observe what is in the MOU”, it was “a bit peremptory” and “quite aggressive” in tone. Michael Keating explains the UKG’s rationale:

They don't want [Scotland] to get into Europe by the backdoor... That's a part of the general assertive unionism that they're engaged in. So, I don't think that would affect, say, the Scottish presence in the U.S., or Dublin, or Germany, but certainly in Brussels.¹⁴⁴

Despite the UKG’s growing vigilance, there remains scope for the SG to increase its activity internationally, including in Europe, as long as it stays within the MOU. While the lack of protodiplomacy appears to be attributable in part to the SG’s risk-averse approach, as well as the fear of suffering the same fate as Catalonia, it is difficult to argue with Rycroft’s contention that the unpredictable and uncertain circumstances around the Brexit deal, followed by the immense challenges of the pandemic, created almost impossible circumstances to accelerate international outreach. Moreover, while there is an understandable desire to learn from the failures of Catalan protodiplomacy, it is equally important not to ignore the differences between the UK and Spanish state. On one level, Catalan diplomacy, chiefly through Diplocat, was a success in softening attitudes and enhancing understanding internationally. However, this appeared to make little difference in the aftermath of the referendum, with the EU and others dismissing it as an internal matter because it was not legally binding. On this basis, the SG faces a careful balancing act of increasing its networking in Europe and beyond while not contravening the terms of devolution. Ultimately, if and when a second referendum comes around, it appears likely that unless it is legally agreed within the UK, it risks not being recognised by the international community, and good relations abroad could count for little.

¹⁴⁴ Keating interview (2021)

Chapter Three

This thesis has examined the main features of Scottish paradiplomacy and grappled with some of the reasons why the SG has not engaged in more protodiplomatic activity following the Brexit vote. Drawing from my interviews, existing research, and theory on paradiplomacy, Chapter Three will set out expectations for how Scotland's sub-state diplomacy might evolve in the coming years, and whether it will take on a more protodiplomatic character. I will also consider what kind of foreign policy an independent Scotland would adopt, critiquing some of the associated opportunities and tensions.

The character of Scotland's sub-state diplomacy in the next few years will depend to a large extent on the parties holding power at both Holyrood and Westminster. After 14 years in office and still polling at nearly 50%, it appears likely that the SNP will continue to dominate devolved politics for the foreseeable future.¹⁴⁵ Ian Murray believes the desire to separate from the UK will be the driving force of the country's external affairs:

The motivation for the current SG is single-minded towards independence, but I would have thought that the motivations (for paradiplomacy) would be to enhance the role of Scottish and British business and to advance your own interest in international bodies... We know that the SNP are trying, particularly in America and across the EU, to make the case for independence rather than meet the case for what would be particularly Scottish issues in any international body.¹⁴⁶

For Stephen Gethins, the block to more effective paradiplomacy is not the SNP's position on the constitution, but an uneven power balance and unformalized devolved structure:

Overall critical to the success of sub-state actors and their actions in the international arena is the relationship that they have with the state. There are clear rules and guidelines that are set out that clearly define the responsibilities of the sub-state entity and provide an outlet for any disputes or disagreements. That is more difficult with asymmetric devolution where the devolved administration is subordinate to the 'central legislature'.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Ballot Box Scotland, <https://ballotbox.scot/>, accessed September 25, 2021

¹⁴⁶ Murray interview (2021)

¹⁴⁷ Gethins (2021), p. 92

Gethins believes Scotland will have to be more inventive in its international engagement as it lacks even the limited means for institutional engagement enjoyed previously as part of the EU.¹⁴⁸ Equally as important as formal offices, according to Michael Keating, are “networks and how to get to the right people to influence them.”¹⁴⁹ He also recommends greater openness to learn from other sub-states on functional matters, which he says often get mixed up with political or constitutional sensitivities, highlighting the Basque country’s work on economic development, labour market and social policy.¹⁵⁰ According to Eve Hepburn, the most successful strategies of sub-states involve creating a narrative about their country being unique and having a niche in the world.¹⁵¹ Similarly, Daniel Kenealy believes that small sub-states should cultivate being an expert on one or two specific things, rather than having policy that is “a mile wide and an inch deep”.¹⁵² Keating argues there is a need to enhance links with Europe in the education system, business and civil society, noting “there is none of the deep engagement that I find in other places”.¹⁵³ In support of this activity, Gethins calls for Scotland House to be “staffed up”, commending recent appointments and noting he expects to see further “deepening of that diplomatic expertise”. Irrespective of constitutional preferences, it is clear that to maximise Scotland’s interests and influence, Scottish political institutions and civil society must network extensively and utilise soft power, while also seeking to build a reputation for expertise in specific areas.

Of course, it cannot be ignored that the current SG has committed, at least rhetorically, to hold a second independence referendum by the end of 2023. Francesca Dickson argues that

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 204

¹⁴⁹ Scottish Parliament, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, March 14, 2019, <https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12004&mode=pdf>, Accessed July 23, 2021

¹⁵⁰ Keating interview (2021)

¹⁵¹ <https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12004&mode=pdf>, Accessed July 23, 2021

¹⁵² *ibid*

¹⁵³ *ibid*

Scotland came close to protodiplomacy in the run up to the 2014 referendum, especially through overt attempts to align the country with a Scandinavian ‘arc of prosperity’.¹⁵⁴ Donald Cameron believes a repeat of this kind of activity is possible, but he is doubtful about how the SG could significantly expand its international outreach without undermining the devolution settlement:

Angus Robertson, the new Cabinet Secretary [for External Affairs], very much sees himself as a European, he speaks German, and I wonder whether he will want to take it to another level. I suppose the problem for the SG is that it's so explicit in the Scotland Act that international relations is not there.¹⁵⁵

As Scotland and the rest of Europe emerges from the worst of the pandemic, and the prospect of another referendum becomes more immediate, it is likely that the SG will continue to enhance its international engagement and public diplomacy, testing the boundaries of what the UKG will permit. Philip Rycroft predicts a renewal of its efforts to align with Nordic countries over the UK:

This is also [important] for the domestic audience: Scotland presenting itself as a credible interlocutor on the international stage, making its mark with other small, social democratic Northwest European countries... That trope in Scottish politics about saying Scotland is more akin to Denmark, Norway and indeed Iceland is strong and powerful, and they will undoubtedly come back to that.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, paradiplomacy is determined in part by the interaction between different levels of government, and Scotland’s activity will also be shaped by the UKG’s approach. As part of the wider effort to preserve the UK through ‘assertive’ or ‘muscular’ unionism, British diplomats have reportedly been told to stop referring to the UK as a union of four nations and instead assert its status as one country.¹⁵⁶ In August 2021, Boris

¹⁵⁴ Dickson (2017), p. 41

¹⁵⁵ Cameron interview (2021)

¹⁵⁶ Chris Deerin, “Boris Johnson's ‘MUSCULAR UNIONISM’ Will Only Drive Scotland Further towards Independence.” *New Statesman*, July 22, 2021. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2021/06/boris-johnson-s-muscular-unionism-will-only-drive-scotland-further-towards>. Accessed August 10, 2021

Johnson declined an invitation to meet with Nicola Sturgeon on a visit to Scotland.¹⁵⁷ Rycroft predicts this could be indicative of a firmer approach:

A sensible UKG would say it's absolutely fine for the SG to have its outreach to member states of the EU or further afield, but it should do so with respect in the protocol and of the MOU...But I suspect there will be pushback against that from Number 10 and others who will say that sounds far too nice and you have to be a lot tougher.¹⁵⁸

Donald Cameron is concerned about the potential for “grievance”, stating that this strategy could become “grist to the mill for the SNP” and “dangerous” for the union.¹⁵⁹ However, while a more belligerent approach by the UKG could present rhetorical and symbolic opportunities for the SNP, it also indicates the UKG will not agree to a referendum – important for international recognition – until it becomes more politically damaging than withholding one. Perhaps the Prime Minister believes that taking a firm stance now will cause the SG to miss an opportunity while its history with the EU is still recent and seen positively. One of the key planks of an independent Scottish foreign policy would be EU membership, and while Scotland is relatively well equipped for accession, the timing could be crucial. Kirsty Hughes suggests that if there is a referendum in the next five years, Scotland is unlikely to have diverged far from EU laws and rules. However, if a vote was held after ten or more years, there would be greater divergence and more difficulty realigning.¹⁶⁰

Nonetheless, there seems to be broad agreement that there is more willingness in the EU to accept an independent Scotland than before 2016. Fabian Zuleeg, Chief Executive of the European Policy Centre, says that “rejecting a country that wants to be in the EU, accepts all

¹⁵⁷ Editorial, “The Guardian View on Boris Johnson in Scotland”, August 4, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/04/the-guardian-view-on-boris-johnson-in-scotland-an-undeclared-campaign>, Accessed August 10, 2021

¹⁵⁸ Rycroft interview (2021)

¹⁵⁹ Cameron interview (2021)

¹⁶⁰ Hughes (2021)

conditions, is willing to go through the appropriate processes and follows European principles...should be inconceivable.”¹⁶¹ The risk of a Spanish veto also seems to have declined. As Philip Rycroft says:

In 2014, there were plenty of people saying that it would be quite difficult, like the Prime Minister of Spain (Mariano Rajoy) or President of the European Commission (José Manuel Barroso) and so on. The noises now are a lot are rather different and more accommodating.¹⁶²

This view is shared by Alyn Smith, who says that “Madrid will take its line from London”, meaning that as long as there is an agreement between the governments in the UK, Spain will accept the outcome and be able to contrast it with the unauthorized Catalan referendum.¹⁶³

Michael Keating adds:

I very much doubt if the President of the Commission again would do what Barroso said...I can't imagine them saying that because (a Scottish application) might happen and of course they would really have to accept it, no question about it.¹⁶⁴

A lack of clarity on currency is widely seen as a crucial weakness of the last Scottish independence campaign and the issue remains contentious, including within the Yes movement.¹⁶⁵ However, keeping the pound, at least temporarily, would not be a block to joining the EU as there are other member states which do not use the euro. An independent Scotland would also seek to secure membership of the UN and its bodies, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which most analysts believe could be achieved quickly and with little trouble.¹⁶⁶

An autonomous Scotland would likely focus on the principles of cooperation, multilateralism, and the rule of law. According to Kenealy, the SG would aim to build coalitions with like-

¹⁶¹ Cited in Scottish Government, European Policy Centre: First Minister's Speech, Brussels, February 10, 2021, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/european-policy-centre-first-ministers-speech/>, Accessed August 1, 2021

¹⁶² Rycroft interview (2021)

¹⁶³ Reform Scotland

¹⁶⁴ Keating interview (2021)

¹⁶⁵ Keating & McEwen (2020)

¹⁶⁶ Written evidence from Dr James Ker-Lindsay, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2014), “The foreign policy implications of and for a separate Scotland”, accessed July 15, 2021

minded, small- and medium-sized states and within international organisations. A country of Scotland's size and capability would not lend itself to "indo-Pacific tilt" of the UK, argues Stewart McDonald MP, SNP defence spokesperson. Instead, its focus would be on regional security and working closely with neighbouring armed forces. McDonald recommends a "total defence" approach, inspired by the Swedish model, in which military, human, physical, and economic security are seen holistically. In this vein, he suggests a "Resilience Scotland" body could be set up to counter cyber terrorism, pandemics and ensure maritime security.¹⁶⁷ Research indicates that small states can have disproportionate influence on international politics if they possess high-level, niche defence and security capabilities.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, Scotland would no longer have any influence on the UK's hard power projection in organisations like the G8. Ian Murray also suggests that, through its place in the union, Scotland benefits from wider British soft power.¹⁶⁹

Underpinning the practical considerations of an independent foreign policy would be a set of values, which Stephen Gethins maintains would help define how Scotland is seen by partners "for decades to come."¹⁷⁰ The SNP manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament election stated that an independent Scotland would strive to be a 'good global citizen', which means "playing our part in tackling global challenges including poverty, injustice and inequality". It includes pledges to increase the International Development Fund; maintain and strengthen Scotland's relationship with EU partners ("with a view to rejoining as soon as possible"); establish a Migration Service for Scotland; support the establishment of an Institute for

¹⁶⁷ Alyn Smith MP & Stewart McDonald MP in conversation with Chris Deerin, Reform Scotland, March 8, 2021, <https://reformscotland.com/2021/03/alyn-smith-stewart-mcdonald-in-conversation-with-chris-deerin/>, accessed March 10, 2021

¹⁶⁸ Kenealy, Daniel, The EU's Foreign, Security and Defence Policies in an Unstable World, in *The Future of Europe: Disruption, Continuity and Change*, Scottish Centre for European Relations, 123-128, (2019), p. 128

¹⁶⁹ Murray interview (2021)

¹⁷⁰ Gethins interview (2021)

Peacekeeping and a Scottish Council for Global Affairs; and to create the first Scottish Cities of Refuge for writers and artists fleeing violence and persecution.¹⁷¹

The manifesto also pledges to pursue a “feminist foreign policy” (FFP), defined as “a political framework centred around the wellbeing of marginalised people and...processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy’s hierarchical global systems”.¹⁷² As Professor Caron E. Gentry explains, a FFP does not just address women’s material positions around the world but embraces a “reorientation” of foreign policy based upon cosmopolitan ideals of justice, peace, and pragmatic security.¹⁷³ She believes Scotland is well suited to this approach:

Scotland’s internal politics are already fairly feminist...There’s a commitment to social justice and social welfare, a commitment to devolve power, a commitment to broader socio-economic equality, and a commitment to cosmopolitan ideals, which moves us into diplomacy and foreign policy.¹⁷⁴

The First Minister says she believes passionately in the manta of ‘More Women, More Peace’.¹⁷⁵ While Gentry acknowledges that those who have been disempowered know better how power works “because they navigate it on a daily basis”, she also finds the idea that women are more peaceable to be problematic. Gentry adds that she has urged the SNP to understand FFP as not just about gender, but as an overarching framework for foreign policy rather than merely one component of it.

A likely critique of the ‘good global citizen’ or FFP paradigm would be that it is utopian, or naïve to bad-faith actors. Scotland would also have to wrestle with contradictions and hypocrisies inherent in this approach, not least its own complicity in slavery and colonialism,

¹⁷¹ SNP Manifesto 2021, https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04_15_snp_manifesto_2021___a4_document?mode=window, p. 72, accessed 26/04/2021

¹⁷² Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy>, accessed April 24, 2021

¹⁷³ Gentry, Caron E., “Scotland's Feminist Foreign Policy Can Lead the Way.” Reform Scotland, January 21, 2021. <https://reformscotland.com/2020/08/scotlands-feminist-foreign-policy-can-lead-the-way-caron-e-gentry/>.

¹⁷⁴ Gentry, Caron E., Interview by Macdonald, Callum. Online Video Call. July 22, 2021.

¹⁷⁵ [First Minister's speech at Georgetown University, Washington DC](#)

which the country is yet to truly reckon with.¹⁷⁶ Gentry is forthcoming about this and says the SG will have to grapple with what it is willing to compromise. One important issue is the arms trade. Alyn Smith argues that parliamentary scrutiny over arms exports is almost absent at Westminster, whereas Scotland would have a chance to develop a more robust system modelled on places like Belgium which have greater sign-off.¹⁷⁷ A test of the SG's sincerity in these matters might be how it deals with the presence of US companies like Raytheon, which has a factory in the town of Glenrothes. The arms manufacturer attracted controversy for its sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia used in the war in Yemen.¹⁷⁸

One of the most high-profile and long-standing features of the SNP's prospectus for independence is the removal of Trident nuclear weapons from their base at Faslane in the River Clyde. However, voices from both sides of the constitutional divide have argued there is a moral contradiction with this position and the desire to join NATO, which only became SNP policy after a narrow and controversial vote at a party conference in 2012.¹⁷⁹ The SNP continues to maintain its "firm and unequivocal opposition to nuclear weapons – both in principle and to their location in Scotland."¹⁸⁰ However, not a single NATO member signed the UN call for the prohibition on nuclear weapons, which came into force in January

¹⁷⁶ Editorial, "To Be Truly Progressive, Scotland Needs to Face up to Its Role in Empire and Industries That Caused the Climate Chaos." *Bella Caledonia*, August 4, 2020. <https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2020/08/02/to-be-truly-progressive-scotland-needs-to-face-up-to-its-role-in-empire-and-industries-that-caused-the-climate-chaos/>. Accessed September 30, 2021

¹⁷⁷ <https://reformscotland.com/2021/03/alyn-smith-stewart-mcdonald-in-conversation-with-chris-deerin/>, accessed March 10, 2021

¹⁷⁸ Merat, Aaron, "Making a Killing: Inside the Scottish ... - Prospect Magazine." <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/raytheon-glenrothes-britain-arms-saudi-arabia>. Accessed September 3, 2021.

¹⁷⁹ "SNP Members Vote to Ditch the Party's Anti-Nato Policy." BBC News. October 19, 2012. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-19993694>. September 8, 2021

¹⁸⁰ https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04_15_snp_manifesto_2021___a4_document?mode=window, p. 13, accessed April 26, 2021, p. 74

2021.¹⁸¹ Ian Murray argues that NATO members would find the SG's position on Trident unconvincing:

You cannot try to be a NATO power and, at the same time, insist that nuclear weapons are moved. They could be moved to Barrow-in-Furness (in the north of England) which is not very far down the road. The principle is you want to be defended by those nuclear weapons but you don't want them in your own waters. It's not a particularly strong argument for international allies.¹⁸²

This is disputed by Keating, who notes that most NATO countries do not possess nuclear weapons:

I don't think it would be a practical problem. You've got to sign up to NATO doctrine which contemplates first-use response but that doctrine is by no means as clear as that. Nobody has actually asked Norway explicitly 'would you sign up to pressing on the nuclear button and annihilating the Russians?'.¹⁸³

Gethins also believes that joining NATO would be straight-forward, citing former Danish government minister, Rasmus Helveg Petersen, who states that "Scotland is strategically located because of the 'Iceland gap'...that is an important bargaining chip". Former British Ambassador to Norway and NATO, Mariot Leslie, insists that Norway would be "very pleased to be sure that Scotland is in NATO."¹⁸⁴

Nonetheless, many experts have suggested that an independent Scotland seeking to remove nuclear weapons could weaken the UK geopolitically and jeopardise its position on the UN Security Council.¹⁸⁵ Cameron believes withdrawing the weapons would be a mistake: "I think it would be really difficult to unwind a defence system that has been in place for a very long time that is relied upon by NATO allies and provides security for people in the country." Rycroft stresses that much would depend on the nature of the independence negotiations

¹⁸¹ "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – Unoda." United Nations. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>, accessed April 24, 2021

¹⁸² Murray interview (2021)

¹⁸³ Keating interview (2021)

¹⁸⁴ Gethins (2021), p. 148

¹⁸⁵ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2014), "The foreign policy implications of and for a separate Scotland", accessed July 15, 2021; "Scottish independence will impact the UK's global role", Clatham House, May 10, 2021, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/05/scottish-independence-will-impact-uks-global-role>, Accessed August 12, 2021

because “any sense of a breach in defence capability, even temporarily, would be welcomed by states that like to see a weakening of the UK’s ability to project hard power”¹⁸⁶ Relocating the missiles would pose major practical and financial challenges that would likely lead to compromises, as Rycroft explains:

Even if there is another suitable port within the UK, it would be a decade or more before it could be made ready. In this period, the government of a future independent Scotland, I think, would have some interesting conversations, put it that way, with NATO allies, not least the United States, because the UK deterrent matters. I would anticipate that the First Minister would get a call of congratulations from the White House, but there would be a caveat in terms of Russia defences, in terms of Faslane. And you can see a deal being done that might be ‘the SG stands by our principle that these weapons have to be removed from Scottish soil but we accept that this is going to take time, so we’ll lease you back for 10 years.’ That would have financial benefits and diplomatic benefits, such as easing entry into NATO for an independent Scotland... There are, of course, outlying scenarios where things would break down. If, for example, the SG, said ‘no, we need these removed by next week’ - if we were in those circumstances - I would expect everything else would be going badly as well, like negotiations over debt, negotiations over disentangling Scotland from UK systems like tax and welfare, and the border... But I think the central scenario is one in which sensible people would see the need to do a sensible deal.¹⁸⁷

A U-turn or even a lengthy delay to the removal of the weapons could cause a problem at home for the SG, given the unpopularity of the weapons in Scotland and especially among the SNP and Green Party rank-and-file. In September 2021, SNP conference delegates backed a three-year deadline for Trident removal in an independent Scotland.¹⁸⁸ Keating says: “It would be very difficult to explain to the membership that you are keeping the nuclear weapons in a foreign country when you made such a big deal about getting rid of them.”¹⁸⁹

In summary, the evidence from my interviews suggests there remains scope to develop and improve the effectiveness of Scotland’s paradiplomacy without necessarily impacting either

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/05/scottish-independence-will-impact-uks-global-role>, Accessed August 12, 2021

¹⁸⁷ Rycroft interview (2021)

¹⁸⁸ Nutt, Kathleen. “SNP Conference to Vote on Deadline to Remove Trident from the Clyde.” The National. The National, September 12, 2021. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/19575004.trident-deadline-vote-take-place-snp-conference/>. Accessed September 13, 2021.

¹⁸⁹ Keating interview (2021)

way on prospects for independence. However, if the probability of another referendum grows in the coming years, it is likely that Scotland's international relations will increasingly be used by the SG to advance independence, and for this to be met with intensified counter-paradiplomacy by the UKG. The SNP's tendency for gradualism and desire to be seen as credible internationally suggests the overt protodiplomacy witnessed in Catalonia will not be repeated in Scotland. Instead, the SG might focus on expanding its public diplomacy and soft power strategies, while making the case for greater formal autonomy in external affairs, rather than on activity which could be challenged legally. The desire for a different, more ethical, approach to foreign policy is a motivating factor for the independence movement, as well as a political tool in distinguishing itself from the UK status quo. However, as the debate over Trident and NATO demonstrates, these ideals are susceptible to charges of hypocrisy as well to bargaining under the pressure of realist considerations. To stay true to the 'good global citizen' paradigm, any future government of an independent Scotland would likely face difficulty balancing expedient decision-making with satisfying key promises to its supporters.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Scottish paradiplomacy is chiefly driven by soft power, public diplomacy and the harnessing of a values-based ‘brand’ that is distinctive from the rest of the UK. While a separate Scottish state is the SNP’s ultimate objective, this does not mean that functional activities have been ignored, or that paradiplomacy intrinsically enhances the prospect of independence. Indeed, Scottish paradiplomacy is broadly similar to other sub-states, rarely going beyond its competences set out in the Scotland Act and the MOU.

A central hypothesis of Chapter One was the expectation that the Brexit vote would have led to a significant upturn in the volume and tone of Scottish paradiplomacy. However, the evidence I have presented suggests a more nuanced picture. Certainly, Brexit offered rhetorical and symbolic opportunities for Scottish politicians when addressing European audiences, especially the First Minister, whose own profile and stock abroad has risen substantially in recent years. However, it appears that Scotland still lacks the scale and depth of the networks established over decades by other sub-states such as Catalonia, the Basque Country and Flanders. Moreover, the devolved administrations were shut out of Brexit negotiations by the UK and thus unable to exert much material influence. The loss of institutional power in leaving the EU and the prolonged uncertainty over the final deal were compounded by the all-encompassing emergency of Covid-19, restricting Scotland’s capacity for paradiplomatic activity at a time when it could have benefited from it most.

Under these circumstances it is clear that Scottish paradiplomacy has not undermined UK sovereignty, nor does it appear likely to do so unless there is a shift to a much bolder approach from the SG. This might involve breaking the terms of the MOU, overtly eliciting support for independence from other European states, or its international offices spending money allocated by the UKG for its own divergent diplomatic aims. However, based on the

lessons from Catalonia and the SNP's desire to be seen as lawful and legitimate in the eyes of foreign partners, an overtly protodiplomatic strategy seems unlikely. The SG seems to recognise that while an obstinate approach could undermine UK authority in the short term, it risks leading to a consolidation of the status quo or even the loss of hard-won gains in the longer term. Instead, the SG can be expected to continue building its soft power and public diplomacy, while pursuing deeper participation in more informal international networks, perhaps allowing it to "slip under the radar", to borrow I.K. Holovko's phrase.¹⁹⁰ It remains to be seen what effect a more authoritative UK counter-paradiplomacy will have on the SG's behaviour, with unionists divided over whether this will nullify any perceived threat or only play into the SNP's hands.

In the years ahead, Scotland's sub-state diplomacy can be developed to better promote the country's interests abroad, irrespective of constitutional positioning. This applies not only to the functional and economic activities, but also the more symbolic actions. Soft power and branding need not only benefit the independence movement but could potentially be used to show the effectiveness of the British multi-national project. This thesis has also demonstrated the salience of the 'good global citizen' paradigm both in Scotland's paradiplomacy and the SG's prospectus for an independent foreign policy. Chapter Three has shown that a Scottish state would be relatively well set to join the EU, UN, and other key bodies in the international community. The country possesses many of the tools to be a successful small state in global affairs, although this would come at the cost of the loss of ability to influence the UK, a state with significantly greater hard power geopolitically than an independent Scotland would have. It is clear that ambitions to create an ethical foreign policy rooted in multilateralism and peacebuilding is a key motivating factor for independence, while also presenting the SNP

¹⁹⁰ Holovko, I. K. (2016). The paradiplomacy of subnational actors: the potential and forms of realization. *Grani* 19 (11), p. 1

with opportunities to reaffirm its moral authority and distinctiveness from the UK. However, as the debate over Trident and NATO exemplifies, current and future Scottish governments will face a test living up to these lofty ideals while retaining good relations and leverage with powerful allies.

Paradiplomacy may not have received as much attention, either in academia or more generally, as other social and political issues in devolved Scotland. However, its relevance to the country's future is likely to grow in the coming years due to the continued focus on the constitutional question, the impact of Brexit, and the steady expansion of the SG's international outreach. The objective of this study is to contribute to this under-explored area by situating it within recent seismic events and drawing lessons from other sub-states, particularly Catalonia, to examine the character of Scottish paradiplomacy and its potential development in the coming years.

As noted in the introduction, this thesis has not attempted to cover the diverse ways in which Scotland's global profile is shaped outside formal political spheres. Studies in these areas would be interesting and worthwhile, as governments and politicians perform only a limited role in harnessing soft power; culture, history, and other areas play a critical role in its construction. In addition, if and when there is a second vote on independence, it would be useful to examine how the country's paradiplomacy has evolved since the first referendum and what lessons have been learned.

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