

Notes from David Leask meeting 27 March 2018

- Scotland – looser federal nature of UK forming. English don't realise it, Scots aren't used to it and are vulnerable. Russians saying no sanctions on Scottish products or visa problems for Scottish people.
- After Skripal attack, SNP foreign affairs spokesman called for police to interview Russian consul. Trade worth £5 billion put on hold.
- Scottish nationalists have good relationships with 'separatist' movements. Want good relations with Balts, EU, no Russian noise about separatism.
- Lots of social media activity. Sputnik worming its way in to business infrastructure, also normalised among some fringe nationalists. Fringe sees English (Anglo-American/Anglo-Saxon) as the enemy; they're easily led by Kremlin activities aimed at dividing. They see British media as mouthpieces of the 'occupying state'. Nasty when challenged.
- Russia trying to become formal friends with SNP and Green and working in the social media space to exacerbate extremism and division.
- Salmond is mainly shunned now but some people are still beholden to him – 'alt nat'. Fringe nats are sharing Press TV and Telesur as well as Kremlin propaganda outlets.
- Sputnik head Nikolai Gorshkov appears credible – 'former BBC' etc. But Sputnik has made itself look ridiculous – main correspondent says Scotland should 'do what the IRA did'.
- Reporting of what Kremlin is up to not taken seriously by lots of people.
- Core aim of Russian propaganda is to get people to say the BBC is the same as RT/Sputnik. Satisfaction with BBC public is low among ordinary Scottish people.
- Scotland does not have experts and specialists for its Russia and China foreign policies.
- Cable magazine – commercial venture set up by Scottish academics to educate on foreign policy <https://www.cablemagazine.scot/>
- Scotland is interested in North Sea fishing, Arctic. Lots of Scottish interaction with Arctic Council.
- How far is Scotland from robust foreign policy apparatus? Does it need to be independent? Doesn't need to be independent. Not laying the groundwork for foreign policy expertise: can't do the equivalent of an A Level in Russian. Politicians still talking about 80s student politics rather than big issues of now. Anti-nuclear, anti-NATO, anti-Americanism was a big part of Scottish nationalism.
- Commonweal, Common Space website <https://www.commonspace.scot/>. Left-leaning, non-SNP independence supporters – against 'Anglo-Saxon' worldview. <https://www.commonspace.scot/articles/12567/robin-mcalpine-nicola-sturgeon-alienating-indy-movement-and-trampling-decades-snp>
- How big is fringe in independence movement? Big among activists, but fringe – nowhere in party/state machinery?
- Conservatives made gains – five-party system in national elections. But Holyrood elections more indicative.
- Does Holyrood release analysis? Yes, <http://www.parliament.scot/msps/29398.aspx>
- Dr Paul Monaghan – lost seat due to intemperate comments on social media, including pro-Kremlin views. [@ PaulMonaghan](#)
- No credible Corbyn-like figure on the horizon to take over the SNP at the moment.
- Membership of SNP is **one in 32 of the population**. Lots of people brought in by social media activism. Some of the new social media savvy activists are calling the mainstream "sellouts". Wings Over Scotland is extreme and **soft on Putin, constantly equating Russia and its broadcasting with the UK**. <https://wingsoverscotland.com/russias-greatest-publicity-machine>.
- Mainstream Scotland more left wing than England. See Corbyn as positive – overtaking SNP from left. (**Old Labour was to the right of SNP**).
- Glasgow, Edinburgh, St Andrews have Russian departments. Heriot-Watt doesn't do Russian anymore. Edinburgh has Russkiy Mir – seems to be free of pro-Kremlin nonsense. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/all-news/russian-ties-191010>
- Also Princess Dashkova centre. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/dashkova>
- Jenny Carr – Scottish-Russian Forum. Bad relations with Dashkova centre. Scottish parliament had a cross-party Russia forum, closed through lack of interest.

- YATA – there would probably be a lot of studenty anti-NATO responses. But that might be more of a reason to do it. But SNP reversed NATO policy when it realised what Russia was up to (**under influence of Nordic/Baltic allies**)
- Mainstream politicians don't want to challenge the fringe normally but they're starting to. Stewart McDonald (defence spokesman) pitching NATO – “friends in Norway, Balts etc are in it”. **SNP foreign policy chiefs have very anti-Kremlin, anti-RT, pro-Ukraine rhetoric.**
- Immigration not an issue in Scotland.
- Pushing at open door – allies in Scotland about disinformation. Putin may want to sow discord among Scottish nationalists. Pro-independence sister paper had headline complaining Russian trolls attacking Sturgeon. http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/16094929.SNP_top_brass_warn_Sturgeon_is_being_targeted_by_Kremlin_trolls/ Yes campaign had attacks on servers and cyberactivity, thought it was the Brits but then concluded it was probably Russians. http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/referendumnews/15771388.Yes_leaders_Don_t_be_naive_about_Russian_online_meddling_in_independence/
- SNP going to Ukraine – to reassure allies they are not pro-Russian.
- Comparison of Crimea 'referendum' to Scottish one is offensive.
- Main Scottish, Catalan and Quebec parties really close allies. Refused to go to Moscow separatist loons summit. Although David Leask feared some odd 'nutcase in a kilt' would go (but nobody did). http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/13772145.Scottish_nationalists_shun_Kremlin_s_quot_separatist_summit_quot/
- Sensing that Catalans growing less hostile to Russia because of Spain crackdown. Ruptly reporting Barcelona protests. Puidgemont gave first interview to RT after being deposed.

Shell companies

- Ukraine most common abuser of SLPs, for asset protection as much as criminal activities. SLPs are also in Canada, New Zealand etc. But Scottish ones have own legal personality although it's just a partnership. If partners are in secrecy jurisdiction like Belize, they can be anonymous.
- Advertised in Ukraine as fraud/money laundering kits. Way to move money in secret. \$7 billion out of the \$20 billion in the 'Laundromat' case was Scottish. Peer-to-peer money movement outside banks.
- SLP and bank account in Baltic states – looks legit, EU bank plus 'Scottish' company. Lots of them around the world, 75% in FSU, but also Latin America for bribes. Balts specialise in non-resident banking. Get corrupt judge (often in Moldova) to order you to pay a fake debt, then you can transfer dirty money.
- Ukraine exporting bullets to Middle East at a time of conflict using company based in Scottish countryside.
- Influence peddling using front companies – lobbying etc. Using SLPs to export coal from Donbass. Big Russian oligarchs buying Donetsk coal, taking it to Rostov, sending it to Turkey under the name of a UK company.
- SLPs used to break Crimea blockade – a council house in Inverness was the address of the “owner” of a Russian ship that had run out of money in a Turkish harbour.
- LNG being unloaded in Mykolayiv/Nikolayev which does not have proper facilities to handle it. Scottish company was the owner of the tanker – where might it come from?
- Respectable companies providing this service.