

A [new RUSI study](http://rusi.co/1sNn9V8) argues that relocating Trident out of an independent Scotland would be both financially and technically feasible, adding between £2.5 and £3.5 billion to the cost of retaining the UK's nuclear forces. But it would take more than a decade to do so, rather than the four years to which the SNP is currently committed.

'Relocation, Relocation, Relocation: Could the UK's Nuclear Forces be Moved after Scottish Independence?', by Hugh Chalmers and Malcolm Chalmers tackles the financial and political hurdles of relocating Trident, and provides a detailed analysis of how these hurdles might be overcome in the event of separation.

While it is technically feasible that the rest of the UK could continue to base its forces in Scotland following independence, this option would introduce significant political and operational complications in the long term. The rest of the UK would only seriously consider it if the problems of continued Scottish basing were clearly smaller than those of relocating nuclear forces to the rest of the UK or abandoning them entirely.

However, RUSI's study shows that this is unlikely to be the case. Once land is acquired and cleared, developing the required infrastructure may add between £2.5 and £3.5 billion to the costs of retaining nuclear forces. Furthermore, while there would likely be significant local opposition to new nuclear facilities, this would not derail relocation if it were outweighed by broader national support for nuclear weapons. (The UK Defence Forum has pointed out for instance that Milford Haven has deep water, a Royal Navy jetty, and that improved infrastructure to west Wales might ameliorate such local opposition)

"While the technical and financial challenges presented by Scottish independence will influence the discussion on the future of the UK's nuclear deterrence, they are not severe enough to dictate it."

The paper also argues that it is highly unlikely that Trident could be relocated by the Scottish government's target of 2020. "An agreement to link relocation to the entry into service of a new generation of nuclear-armed submarines, currently anticipated to begin in 2028, could provide a more natural timeframe for relocation." A pledge not to prepare Scottish bases for a successor submarine could reassure an independent Scotland that the Vanguard-class submarine would be the last of its type based in Scotland.

"Despite its opposition to nuclear weapons in Scotland, agencies of the Scottish government already work effectively with the UK to co-ordinate a number of services vital to the continued operation of nuclear forces from the Clyde. This tradition of co-operation would be likely to continue if Scotland were to transition to independence."

Access paper at: <http://rusi.co/1sNn9V8>