



# The Perch Pod Episode 29

## An Independent Scotland with Anthony Salamone

Jacob Shapiro:

You're listening to The Perch Pod from Perch Perspectives. Hello, listeners and welcome to another episode of The Perch Pod. As usual, I'm your host. I'm Jacob Shapiro. I'm also the Founder and Chief Strategist of Perch Perspective, which is a human-centric business and political consulting firm.

Jacob Shapiro:

Joining me on the podcast today is Anthony Salamone. He is the Founder and Managing Director of European Merchants, which is a Scottish political analysis firm based in Edinburgh. Anthony has done a lot of interesting work, published a lot of interesting reports on European Merchants website. That's [merchants.scot](http://merchants.scot) if you want to check out some of his reports. Wanted to get his perspective on Scottish independence, and especially on the upcoming parliamentary elections in Scotland coming up in early May.

Jacob Shapiro:

We recorded this podcast on April the 1st. I believe elections in Scotland are due on May 6, so you'll be getting this a couple weeks before Scottish elections, though I'm sure some things will have happened in the meantime.

Jacob Shapiro:

Just a note about how I decided to structure the podcast. I really wanted to start the first half of the podcast with this interesting idea of if Scotland is independent, what are some of the foreign policy questions an independent Scotland is going to look like? So, the first half of this conversation is focused on that question, thinking through what an independent Scotland looks like, not from any partisan or political view. We didn't express any preference one way or another that's for the Scottish people to decide for themselves, but just trying to think out at a theoretical level what does Scottish foreign policy look like. Then in the second half of the podcast, we talk about whether that's even realistic or not, and what some of the domestic political issues are going forward.

Jacob Shapiro:

Some of you have been emailing in comments about the podcast, and it's really helpful, even if it's just as simple as, "I like this episode," or "I didn't like this episode," or "This one was too long." Any feedback you have on the podcast is read and most welcome. You can also email us at



info@perchperspectives.com if you want to talk more about what Perch Perspectives does, the political analysis that we provide, our clients and investors so that they can make better sense of the world.

Jacob Shapiro:

This is also the part of the podcast where I plug our new Latin-America-themed newsletter called LatamPolitik. If you go to [latampolitik.com](http://latampolitik.com), you can sign up for the newsletter. It's being published in both English and in Spanish. It's \$5 a month. So, for the price of a fancy coffee or a pint of beer, you can get access to more Perch.

Jacob Shapiro:

If you haven't left a review of the podcast yet either on Apple Podcast or wherever you're listening to podcasts, please consider doing so. It is immensely helpful for us, and it's just a small fraction of your time. So, take care. Cheers, and we'll see you out there.

Jacob Shapiro:

All right. Anthony, it's a pleasure having you join us. This is one of my favorite topics that I don't get to talk to people about, especially here in the Southern part of the United States because they're not that many nerds about Scottish politics here. So, thank you for taking some time to come on the podcast.

Anthony Salamone:

Thanks for having me, Jacob. Looking forward to our discussion.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. You've done a lot of interesting work. I was rereading through some of the stuff that you've been putting out about Scottish foreign policy and how Scotland should be thinking about its foreign policy going forward. So, before we dive in to the real meat of it, I just wanted to ask how did you get interested in this stuff because, I mean, the listeners will obviously note that you don't have a Scottish accent. So, how did this capture hold of your imagination?

Anthony Salamone:

I suppose I've been on a journey, if you like. I mean, my first area of expertise and first interest is the European Union when I did my bachelor's degree with French and German and European Union studies, which is a very specific degree that we used to have at Edinburgh University. I was always fascinated by how the EU worked in an era of nation states and so on.

Anthony Salamone:

As an extension of that, being here in Scotland and having moved here over a decade or so ago, obviously, Scottish politics is so fascinating in its own mainly because of the independence debate, but, of course, there are all the other facets of what goes on in politics here, too.



Anthony Salamone:

I supposed if you merge those two together, you're thinking there's such a heated, if not vibrant debate on Scottish independence, and a key part of that is what's Scotland's relationship with the European Union should be, and what kind of foreign policy Scotland should have. I should say those are key issues. I don't think the debate associated with them are very good, and that's a lot of what the work I've been trying to do has been about, is trying to make those debates more informed and I'd just say more substantive.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah, and I commend you for doing so. You've added a depth to the conversation that is not normal, I think, out there in most media platforms, which is the whole reason I reached out to you and wanted to talk, but that actually seems like a perfect place to begin, and we can get to some of the domestic politics later because it's, as you said, it's a lot of fun or at least for the external observer. I don't know if it's fun for the folks on the ground.

Jacob Shapiro:

I want to start with that EU question because in a lot of what you've written about, you talk about, I think you referred to it as Full Europe Theory in one of your pieces, that the real, I guess, coming to fruition, a Scottish foreign policy would be joining the EU 100%, becoming the most EU of the EU member states, putting all of Scotland's cards on the European Union. I just want to play a little bit of devil's advocate there because, I mean, Scotland would be, what, roughly 1% of the EU's population. It would be roughly 1% of the EU's GDP. It's not going to be a place where Scotland is maybe going to have, certainly not as much political or economic or cultural influence as it does inside the UK. So, how do you respond to somebody who thinks about the EU as just trading one master for another from a Scottish perspective?

Anthony Salamone:

Yeah. I think there's a lot to unpack there. First off is that just to the question of how much influence Scotland has within the UK, I think a lot of people would dispute the idea that Scotland has a lot of influence. If you look at the way in which the Brexit processes have been conducted, separate from the fact of whether or not you are in favor of Scotland staying and/or the UK staying and/or the European Union, the way in which it was implemented showed a huge degree of a lack of care for the devolved settlement as we call it. So, that's the powers that Scotland has had since 1999 in terms of setting up the Scottish parliament and the Scottish government, and all of that.

Anthony Salamone:

So, anyway, so there's that question, but then if we come back to the principle of leaving the UK just to join the EU, well, obviously, that gets you to what is the EU about. The EU is a grouping of states, which are, yes, they share sovereignty, but they voluntarily decide to do so in order to try to tackle the major challenges which Europe faces and try to build a common future. I think that's something that a lot of



people in Scotland like, have always wanted to be part of, which is one of the reasons why people in Scotland, by majority, going to stay in the European Union.

Anthony Salamone:

If Scotland were to become independent, that would appeal to people here. I often get asked the question of we had the EU referendum back in 2016, why are Scots pro-EU? Why did Scotland vote to stay in the EU along with Northern Ireland as opposed to England and Wales. I don't think the question is why was Scotland pro-EU. The question is why is England and Wales, so Euro skeptic.

Anthony Salamone:

From my perspective, if you're going to go to the trouble of being independent and going through that and separating from the rest of the UK, I think, and you're considering how can Scotland be successful in the rest of Europe and the world, then those are two distinct things.

Anthony Salamone:

To me, it only makes sense for Scotland to be a full active member of the European Union. Now, in the question of size, sure, Scotland would be a smaller member state, but it doesn't mean you can't be influential for your size and for your situation. You look at countries like Ireland or other countries like Finland and so on, in their different ways, depending on the kind of strategy which those countries have, you can be influential into EU in terms of whatever dimension you want to look at it, how you engage within the council to at the moment, every member state has a European commissioner. There've been calls to change that, but it hasn't happened, and it's not really on the agenda through to working collaboratively at the European parliament and so on.

Anthony Salamone:

The whole point of that and the logical sense of that is that you have to go into it understanding how the European Union works, accepting the reality of where you have challenges, where you see opportunities, and working with all of that creatively, and then if Scotland were to do that, I'm very confident that Scotland could be a successful EU member state, but it would have to leave behind a lot of the leftover mentalities from how the UK as a whole approach European integration, which is to say was very transactional, very trade and economic-focused and, frankly, characterized by an extraordinary lack of understanding of how the European works. We see that to this very day having been gone through five years of Brexit.

Anthony Salamone:

So, Scotland wouldn't be able to keep all of that. We have to leave that behind and adopt how most of the other states in Europe see the EU.

Jacob Shapiro:



Yeah. Although to be fair sometimes, the EU doesn't even know how the EU works because of how messy it's gotten. So, those are two great points, and I want to break them both apart. I want to start with what you said about you reframed that question very well, why is England so Euro skeptic versus people asking why Scotland is pro-EU, but I think there's some decency of political reasons and historical reasons for that. I mean, if we go back before Scotland and England were part of one country, Scotland was basically the way that continental Europe balanced against the much stronger England. So, Scotland had an interest in being independent from England. They look towards Europe. That was why all that French influence was running around there. So, there was that natural fear, I think.

Jacob Shapiro:

So, I think England is programmed to be Euro skeptic and Scotland is the smaller power on the island of Great Britain, is always looking for outside powers, and it seems to me also there's a little bit of a mismatch of strategic interest at the EU-Scotland level because Scotland is going to be looking for that relationship that allows it to secure itself vis-a-vis England or whoever else it's worried about.

Jacob Shapiro:

Whereas Europe, as you said, it's a constellation of states that came together for peace and security on the European continent, but Scotland didn't really experienced the wars of the European continent because it wasn't on the continent. Everything the EU is driving about is making sure that Germany and France are part of one continental units, so that they don't fight each other and destroy the whole continent by trying to assert dominance over the other.

Jacob Shapiro:

So, in that sense, I see why Scotland is pro-EU and I see why even the EU in the future might look toward Scotland as a country that it wants to have a relationship with, but don't you think there's a little bit of a difference between continental European countries that are a part of that geostrategic project and someone like Scotland who while close by and has all sorts of ties is an island apart, is not actually involved with some of the main dynamics that affect the rise of that EU entity?

Anthony Salamone:

Well, I agree with you on the point that Scotland is on the geographical periphery of the European Union and obviously the geographical periphery of Europe, and that would shape how an independent Scotland would engage with the EU and also shapes it now. Sure. Scotland is not sandwiched between a variety of other European countries with land borders like most of the European Union is, but in terms of the rest of what you've mentioned, I don't think there's any concern here in Scotland about relationship with England. England and the UK would not be some adversary if Scotland became independent. It would be a very important neighbor and partner. I think the general view here is that the relationship between Scotland and UK should be as cordial and disclosed as possible, particularly considering what the obligations of EU membership might require and working with that.

Anthony Salamone:

Also on the question of what is the European Union and what are the goals of the European Union, of course, it was about postwar reconstruction of Europe and binding France and Germany together. I think we have moved beyond that quite a lot now. When we're talking about challenges to be faced, I think it's much more about the ones which we are all quite clear on, which is sustainable economy and growth, dealing with climate change, building a Europe, which is fairer and more just and more equal, all those kinds of things.

Anthony Salamone:

Of course, there are foreign policy as we would normally think of them in security dimensions. The EU is traditionally weaker on those areas and much stronger in terms of the economic space or the regulatory space, and so on. Of course, there are always these discussions about Europe as a block versus or with the United States or versus China and so on. Of course, all that is there, but in terms of most people within Europe or within the member states of the European Union, I think it's much more about working together on a practical level. Of course, there are the value dimensions as well of trying to say that the European project is something which can speak to every member state.

Anthony Salamone:

Of course, every member state had its different reasons for joining. If you go back yes, it was about postwar reconstruction for the Eastern countries. It was about rejoining Europe. For Spain and Greece and Portugal, it was about moving on from dictatorship, and so on and so on. Scotland would have its own story of why it wanted to join the European Union.

Anthony Salamone:

Of course, I think that would be essential. Again, that gets to the point of not what was the UK's story for joining the EU. I think that's always difficult to say other than the economy wasn't doing so well at the time and we realized it would be convenient to be part of the single market as it was being developed. If we go back to the European economic community, I don't think that would be a sufficient story for Scotland to sustain EU membership in the way which we see, and other member states like Ireland, for instance, where support for EU membership and opinion polls exceeds 80%.

Anthony Salamone:

If you wanted to get to that kind of space, you need to have a reason and a story for why Scotland should part of the EU, and it wouldn't look like the UK story if there is one, and it would be probably economically focused.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. I mean, the UK story is, and it's part of the Scottish story and the Scottish story is part of the UK story at a certain point there inextricable, but the anecdote I always throw out is that Churchill was one of the first to think about what a United Europe should be. So, even in the bastion of the Tory Party, where the nationalists and Boris Johnson all make their home today, the person that they all look up to was somebody who saw very clearly that Britain needed to have a relationship with the United Europe

and to prepare for the coming conflicts ahead or for the coming issues that were going to come ahead. Europeans were probably stronger together than they were apart, but for a lot of different reasons and for a lot of the reasons that the EU, I would say, has punched below its weight and hasn't realized its full potential, it's been hard to get that going.

Jacob Shapiro:

I think that also raises one of the questions about ... because even let's say everything goes perfectly Scottish, Scotland declares independence, the UK government says, "Great. We give you our blessing," everything's great", you're still talking about, I don't know, five years minimum, probably more, like a decade just to get all the Ts crossed and all the Is dotted. I'm not sure the EU today is going to be the EU of 10 years from now because, as you said, there is this thing about values and the EU has grown beyond its initial project.

Jacob Shapiro:

I think one of the things giving real impetus to the EU forward is precisely what you alluded to, which is you have China on one side, you have Russia fooling around, you have Germany needing to open up new markets because they're not finding the growth that they need in the current markets that they have, you have France imagining that it's going to be a great power once again. So, you have this circling of the wagons to use the US expression of a stronger, more coherent European entity with a more coherent centralized defense policy, maybe even more monetary powers.

Jacob Shapiro:

Those are things. Is that the EU that Scotland wants to join? Does it change as the EU changes? Is it a blank check? How do you think about how the EU is evolving and where Scotland would be in 10 years from now when it was hypothetically joining?

Anthony Salamone:

Well, I can say that what I think, but I think it's worth me saying before I do that that those kinds of questions I think are absolutely crucial, but they have zero role in our present debate. No one talks about what are the strategic objectives of Scotland joining the European Union, how is the European Union evolving, and what do we think about that, and what are we going to contribute to that debate, and so on and so on, but our present political discourse is nowhere near those kinds of questions. I think that unfortunate because they're really important.

Anthony Salamone:

Secondly, just on how long it would take, I wrote a large report on Scotland joining the European Union. I think it would take about four to five years for Scotland to join the EU from the day it applied to the day it joined. Obviously, of course, when you add in however long it would take for Scotland to become independent and so on, then, yeah, you're looking, depending on what our referendum is, you're looking to Scotland perhaps becoming independent and then having rejoin the EU towards the end of this decade.



Anthony Salamone:

I don't think a lot of people here appreciate that either. It's usually either one end of the scale or it's that either Scotland would join the EU remarkably quickly or that somehow it would be impossible for Scotland to join the EU. Those are the kinds of extremes in which our political debate is situated.

Anthony Salamone:

In terms of how the EU is evolving, yeah. I think the EU always faces, there's always a crisis, at least one crisis, if not more than one crisis. So, that's not new. Obviously, maybe bigger than they were before. There are many internal challenges, as well as external ones in terms of we talked about values, in terms of value issues with certain member states through to how the dynamics within the member states and then the council have changed when you take the UK out of the equation, which has been really interesting to see, the extent to which the Nordic Baltic states plus Ireland sometimes, plus the Netherland sometimes try to coalesce to advance interests. Whereas before, some of them would have tagged along with the UK or hidden behind it when the UK blocks it, and think they didn't want to see.

Anthony Salamone:

It was very easy for Germany to let UK say no to France. Whereas Germany finds it harder to say no to France on its own. So, all those things are there, and where does Scotland fit into that and how would Scotland want to see Europe, I think that Scotland would ... I could imagine Scotland being somewhat like Sweden in the sense that it would want to advocate those kinds of core values for the European Union but still be keen on the free trade. The single market is important aspect. We don't want too much Europe where it's not absolutely necessary. We want to ... That's a very common Nordic refrain. We want to go back to basics. We want to get everything right that we're doing now before we add on new things.

Anthony Salamone:

I can imagine Scotland being somewhere in there. Of course, Ireland is always a very interesting case, not at least considering the close relationship between Ireland and Scotland. Ireland has a very intriguing role of having a reason to become a net contributor to the European Union. It has all these different attributes in the sense that it's a Western European state, Northern European state, but it also had bail out, so it can understand the plight of some of the Southern and Eastern states.

Anthony Salamone:

Notably, it did not side with the so-called Frugal Four in the EU budget negotiations, and tried to strike a middle ground there. So, anyway, I could see Scotland trying to do that as well potentially of not falling in to a stereotypical northwestern richer than most more pro-market and less integrationist member state. I think it's hard to tell because no one talks about those sorts of things.

Anthony Salamone:





In terms of the European Union itself, I'd like to say that the upcoming conference on the future of Europe would be a very important space, where these kinds of core questions about the, which have always dawned to the European Union or at least for the last few decades of what is the endpoint of European integration, what is the finale day. If we know what that is, are we headed towards the more federal Europe? Are we agreed there? Not us because we're not part of the EU anymore, but has the European Union that that's where we should be going? What level of political integration in the Euro Zone makes sense? All these kinds of questions, but I'm not entirely convinced that the conference on the future of Europe will give us those kinds of answers because the EU is very good at just muddling through all the time.

Anthony Salamone:

EU would have thought it by now enough people in Brussels and national capitals would have realized that just kicking the can down the road in terms of defining very clearly what the EU's long-term aims are, what kind of integration we're going to have, is there public support for all of that, and then how are we going to build that. You can't just keep postponing those discussions, and not just the discussions but the answers to those questions and then doing them forever. I think we're still in that phase.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. I mean, it's April 1st here. I think it was yesterday the European Commission slapped Poland on the wrist again for the I can't even count the how many of times that they've told Poland they don't like what they're doing with the judiciary. Hungary, another country, obviously, that has run a fowl of EU principles, of democracy, all that sort of thing. I guess Scotland would be walking in as automatic critics of Poland and countries like Hungary in the values debate. Should I conclude that from how you're thinking about how Scotland would approach European values?

Anthony Salamone:

I think that that would be the default to position that Scotland would adopt, but I imagine that the initial years of being an EU members state, it might say those things more quietly because it would be trying to establish itself as a member and be getting along with all of the member states on some basic level as a necessity, but I'm not sure. Again, it's hard to say what the entry strategy, if you like, for Scotland as an EU, certainly, while it's not a member state. It would need to ensure that it was on at least neutral terms with every member to ensure that the accession would actually happen. It's a question of to what extent.

Anthony Salamone:

For instance, obviously, Spain is a very motive country here, and Scotland with a lot of sympathy in the pro-independence movement here in Scotland and people in Catalonia, I imagine they would be disappointed when they see the Scottish government not talking about that with Spain. Needless to say, not the public forum because, obviously, if Scotland were seeking to join the EU, it would need Spain to vote for that.

Jacob Shapiro:

Would need Spain to revert and probably would need, well, I don't know if they would need the UK to sign off post-Brexit. That's an interesting ... Well, no. I guess I go back and forth. I can convince myself either way because Spain is not going to like the president being set, but on the other hand, I'm sure they wouldn't mind sticking to the UK at that point. So, I guess I'd have to toss my hands up on that one.

Anthony Salamone:

Well, I don't think that ... So, that leads us back to what people are talking about on Scotland, which is what is the pathway for Scotland to become independent and what is required for that. Again, I think there's a lot of realism lacking from that debate. To cut it short, every EU member state would need to accept however Scotland was becoming independent, they agree with that. Again, I think that's basic to an external audience, but, here, there's a lack of appreciation of how international relations work in the sense that every member state would need to recognize Scotland and that every member state would look to what the UK government's response is to Scottish independence and base in large part their response on what the UK says.

Anthony Salamone:

Anyway, assuming that there's an agreed referendum that Scotland votes for independence and that the UK government is onboard with that and onboard with the negotiations for Scotland to become independent and then every EU member state accepts that and agrees with that, and then I presume that Scotland's accession process wouldn't be vetoed by any member state, I don't think so, but in the sense that they wouldn't veto because they didn't want Scotland, specifically, because of the reason of accession and so on.

Anthony Salamone:

My point what I was saying about earlier about not talking about Catalonians. So, it's that you never know happens throughout an accession process. Obviously, an issue can come up. For instance, Croatia, one of the reasons on the latter stage of the accession process why it was curtailed was its border issue with Slovenia, which was resolved and then unresolved after it joined the EU. So, there was a block on Croatian accession going forward by one country until it was resolved.

Anthony Salamone:

So, who knows what would happen? Of course, there could always be a situation where any single EU member state could say, "Hang on. We have a problem with the thing here," and that put the brakes on the accession process. The way to avoid that is to maintain good relations with every member state throughout the process, which in turn means that you may not be raising issues with them about problems you have with them if you want them to vote through every single aspect because every single aspect of the EU accession process in the council require unanimity.

Jacob Shapiro:



Yeah. One more big picture foreign policy question and EU level question before we start diving down to some of the nitty-gritty stuff at the UK-Scotland level and in Scotland itself, you alluded to Ireland and I'm glad you brought up Ireland because I feel like two models for how Scotland might behave in the future. You have the Ireland model or you have the New Zealand model. Ireland would be an all-in on the EU strategy, some of what you sketched out here.

Jacob Shapiro:

New Zealand would obviously be a much different model and New Zealand is geographically isolated from everything else. So, it has its own reasons for its strategy, but I raised that up because I wanted to raise the questions of if Scotland was independent, and we'll get to all ... I decided to begin this at the broad strategic level as if Scotland was independent. So, we'll get to whether that's actually going to happen in the second half of the podcast listeners. Don't get your panties in a wad.

Jacob Shapiro:

I wanted to ask about if Scotland is independent, what is the future of NATO? Is Scotland going to be in NATO? What is Scotland's relationship to the Five Eyes, which is the intelligence sharing agreement with the UK, the US, Australia, and New Zealand, Canada? I don't want to leave Canada out. How is Scotland going to position itself because, and this came up a little bit when you talked about how Scotland wouldn't want the relationship with England necessarily to be adversarial. They'd want it to be cordial. That's not completely in Scotland's control. When you have decision makers in other countries, they have to assume the worst case scenario, not the best case scenario. So, even if it is cordial and even if everything goes according to plan, they're going to be also sketching plans for, "Well, what happens if we can't trust Scotland? What happens if, as in World War II, we're not sure that we can .... Well, I should take that metaphor back a little bit.

Jacob Shapiro:

One of the reasons Ireland is not part of the Five Eyes is because the US didn't trust Ireland in the context of World War II because they were worried what was going to be communicated to Ireland, could get back to Germany, and there were good reasons to be concerned about that sort of thing. So, where is Scotland in that future universe, even if it is in the EU? Does it have relationships there? Is it more broad or does it really go all-in on the EU thing and it becomes more like an Ireland situation rather than New Zealand?

Anthony Salamone:

There's a lot to say in response to your multitude of questions.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. Bring it on.

Anthony Salamone:

Right. So, first of all, in terms of the relationship between an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK, again, I would reverse the question that I'm very confident, and it's not just my personal opinion, obviously, in terms of my discussions with people, policymakers and decision makers, decision shapers and so on across the independence movement and beyond that if Scotland were to vote for independence, that Scotland would be approaching that bilateral relationship in the spirit of amity and cooperation and so on. If the bilateral relationship were not as cordial as other people would want, it would not be because of Scotland. It would be because of the UK's approach or the rest of the UK's approach, which, of course, it would be fairly obvious considering the way in which the UK government has behaved throughout the Brexit process and afterwards.

Anthony Salamone:

I think even from an outside observer, you can see the way in which UK ... The UK's international reputation has diminished significantly from having no clue of what the UK wanted from Brexit through to just the degrees of animosity towards the EU throughout the negotiations, through to all the calamities of not being able to pass things in the House of Commons, through to whatever.

Jacob Shapiro:

To breaking their word on the withdrawal agreement already most of the times.

Anthony Salamone:

Yeah. So, all of that, through to the UK government's recent review of foreign policy, which they want to have the potential to increase its nuclear arsenal, which is going backwards from what we thought certainly the European side was emphasizing. Anyway, so all of that. So, my point is that if the Scotland bilateral relationship is not as nice as people would want to be, it would not be because of Scotland. I think that's an important thing to say.

Anthony Salamone:

In terms of NATO, NATO is a challenging ... So, my read is there's broad consensus, including on people who don't want Scotland to become independent. Obviously, there are issues with the border and trade between Scotland and England and so on. The pro-European consensus is fairly solid here. What's less solid is a NATO consensus if you like, which is to say that, of course, there are definitely people within the independence movement who wouldn't want Scotland to join NATO. I think there's a majority within the independence movement still and the majority of the Scottish population, which would support that.

Anthony Salamone:

Of course, that is the official position on the Scottish National Party, which is the largest pro-independence party in the largest party will stop in Scotland. As I like to put it, the support for NATO is usually whispered at best because, again, it links to a challenging issue for the independent side, which is the future of the nuclear arsenal based in the city of Glasgow on the Clyde, the river, and how is that extricated and what the time table for that, and so on and so on.



Anthony Salamone:

So, anyway, I think the conclusion would be that I imagine that an independent Scotland would join NATO and would be a normal active member on the order of a Norway or a Denmark, but there would be a desire to remove the UK's base from the fast lane, and not to host nuclear weapons from the UK or, well, the US or anyone else I suppose, but we have a long list to choose from.

Anthony Salamone:

So, there's that. In terms of the Five Eyes, I don't know if anyone has ... I mean, I thought about this. I really don't know how much other people have thought about it. I guess the question isn't the desire for Scotland to have that close intelligence sharing relationship with the rest of the UK, the United States, the partners. From my perspective, it's the question of what kind of capacity would Scotland have to be able to continue to be in that relationship, and what would Scotland be contributing to it. I'm not so sure what the answer to those questions are, and until they are, my default presumption is that it doesn't really make sense for Scotland to be the sixth eye as it were, but I think that's a discussion that requires a lot more thought and development before we can have any real concrete answers on those kinds of questions, but I suppose it links through to what kinds of relationships Scotland would seek to have with the United States, and I imagine as I'm writing my foreign policy blueprint, I think that once again, Scotland would be echoing Ireland in the sense of trying to be a full member of the European Union, but also have a close and active relationship with the United States.

Anthony Salamone:

Again, it's not about building something from nothing. It's about reframing how Americans think about Scotland because, of course, the circumstances will have changes if Scotland would be independent as opposed to being fused with the rest of the UK. Of course, some Americans are slightly geographically challenged. So, the distinctions between the United Kingdom, and Britain, and Great Britain, and England, and Scotland sometimes might be a bit fuzzy, anyway, but I think that there are a lot of roots that Scotland could develop to cultivate the Scottish diaspora and Scottish interested people in the United States, not to copy Ireland. That doesn't make sense. Ireland is a different country. It's been independent for a lot longer.

Anthony Salamone:

Obviously, it has great links with its diaspora and so on, but to obviously look to what they're doing at some respects and tailor it to a 21st century approach of if you're becoming independent in 2020, whatever, where do you go from there. I guess one final thing I might say on that is, of course, is the question of to what extent should Scotland be doing some of these things regardless of whether or not it becomes independent, to what extent should Scotland be engaging in the world. Of course, there's broad consensus in the Scottish society that it makes sense for Scotland to have a global voice even if it's still part of the UK.

Anthony Salamone:



So, to what extent should Scotland be engaging more with actors in the United States at federal state and local levels regardless of its constitutional future. I think that's an interesting question, too.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. You answered a difficult question very well, but it would be a major change just on the security level for the United States, not all those geographical challenged people who don't know where things are on the map, but at the security sharing level arrangement, that would be a big issue for the United States that it would have to think through.

Jacob Shapiro:

Let's dive a little bit into some of the fun domestic politic stuff because, I mean, it's gotten much more interesting in the last couple of weeks, too. It seemed like Sturgeon was riding the British government's ineptitude on COVID-19 and Brexit very, very well. On the polls, we're all looking great, and then, boom! Hello, Alex Salmond. Hello, Alba Party. Hello, everything thrown up in the air. The poll is starting to waver a little bit.

Jacob Shapiro:

Obviously, it's hard to put too much stock in polls, but the Scottish National Party right around 50%. The latest FT poll I saw for independence was 45 for independence, 45 against, 10 undecided. So, everything narrowing right ahead of the photo finish coming up in May. So, I'll just throw that at you and be in there on the ground. How do things feel? I mean, is it that tight? Should we trust these polls at all? What are you thinking right now?

Anthony Salamone:

Well, I think that generally speaking, opinion polling for Scottish elections is more reliable than it has been for other contests in other parts of the world. So, we're in a strange situation where ... So, I suppose maybe we could take a step back a bit that we've got a ... So, we got election for the Scottish parliament. It's a mixed system. So, it's called the Additional Member System. So, we have a combination of first-past-the-post constituencies or electoral districts, plus regional lists. So, you get both of those. You have each person going into a vote will have two votes as it were. They'll vote for their constituency representative, and they will vote for a regional list party.

Anthony Salamone:

So, we're going into this election knowing we had or have five major parties, the outgoing Scottish parliament, the SNP, Scottish National Party, and the Scottish Greens, where both pro-independence parties, and then we've got three pro-UK parties, the Scottish Labor, the Scottish Tories, and the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

Anthony Salamone:



Anyway, we're going to the election basically knowing that the Scottish National Party are going to win this election. The question is by how much are they going to win this election, and whether or not they will have majority, and then also who finishes second because the question is, will Scottish Labor beat the Scottish Tories into second place, which they used to reverse position before that.

Anthony Salamone:

So, yeah. I guess then we have all the other issues about what that victory the SNP will have, how large it is or whether it's majority, what that means for a future independence referendum. Since the bar is set so high for the SNP that we know they're going to win, that big emphasis is by how much will they win. Will get that majority in their own right?

Anthony Salamone:

I think it's a bit epocreful, but officially, well, unofficially, the reason why we have this mixed system besides ensuring a more equitable electoral outcome that reflects voters preferences was to prevent a single party from getting a majority. That's what people say.

Anthony Salamone:

Of course, back in the day, that was the Labor Party, and indeed the initial coalition governments in Scotland were between the Scottish Labor Party and Scottish Liberal Democrats. Of course, the SNP broke that mold when they won a majority in 2011. So, in a sense, but they don't have one at the moment. They're a minority government governing in their own right with occasional support from the Scottish Greens, especially on things like the budget or confidence votes in members of the government.

Anthony Salamone:

So, all of that is there, and then into the mix comes Alex Salmond launching his new party, the Alba Party. Alba means Scotland in Gaelic. I think he has had some pronouncing that along with other members of the party. So, it's a big intriguing.

Anthony Salamone:

Anyway, so all of it is there. I suppose politics is complicated anywhere, but all of it makes Scottish politics a little bit complicated because independence is the subtext for basically everything that happens in Scottish politics, even if it's about a school here or something about a health service through to Brexit, through to whatever. It all comes down to divisions on independence.

Anthony Salamone:

What we are seeing now is something different. We can go into, if you want, inside of all the background to why Alex Salmond is no longer in the SNP and the investigations into his conduct and the criminal charges which he faced, which he was acquitted on all of through to how he and Nicola Sturgeon used to be close political allies and now they are bitter adversaries, all of that.



Anthony Salamone:

To point a stand at the moment is now we have three pro-independence parties have a chance of winning seats. We got the SNP who are going to win. The Scottish Greens will clearly have seats. They may pick up seats or what they have at the moment. The elected was six. The outgoing parliament have five. Now, we got the Alba Party, which is another pro-independence party, which could pick up seats, but it's really hard to tell how well they'll do at this stage. I don't even think there's been a single opinion poll published including them as an option, but I'm sure that will come soon. I guess the issue is if Alex Salmond is reelected to the Scottish parliament, what role will he and his party seek to play, particularly when it comes to independence.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. No, there are no polls out and, obviously, his parties are fresh that I didn't even know how to pronounce it. So, I appreciate the correction on that. I'll have to get myself in shape there.

Jacob Shapiro:

Also, when I was doing research before this podcast, I didn't realize that he has a podcast with RT. Did you know this? What is he doing with a podcast with RT? This may sound like a trivial question, but this goes to some of the questions I was mentioned about Scottish relationship, both with the EU and especially with the United States. Why is the leader in some ways of or he's not the leader anymore, but that first leader of Scottish independence and nationalism in the early 2000s. Why does he have a podcast on RT? I don't get it.

Anthony Salamone:

Well, it's more than a podcast. It's this full-blown TV show. So, yeah, it's not a good look, needless to say. Of course, the SNP's response was to say, "We are not associated with this. Our ministers will not be appearing on the show," and so on, though several members, former members now because many of them have joined Alba are involved in producing the program or who appear as regular guests were members of the SNP at the time.

Anthony Salamone:

No. It links to a challenging feature of Scottish politics when it comes to Scotland's relationship with the United States that there are elements that I don't think that nowhere near a majority of people who are more receptive to a ... I don't know if you call it a Jeremy Corbyn style relationship with Russia, but one is less anti-Russia, if not pro-Russia.

Anthony Salamone:

This gets us deep into who constitutes the independence movement and who are on the fringes of the independence movement. There are people on the fringes of the independence movement who may with Alba be moving closer to the center, who deeply distrusts the UK state, the British state, and all of its institutions, including the BBC, and for them, if they do not trust the British state, they do not trust





the institutions, they do not trust its policies, then they by default are more receptive or do trust the things which the British state opposes.

Anthony Salamone:

If the British state says, "We do not trust the government of Russia. We do not trust the broadcasters because they spread propaganda," and so on and so on, the by default, they do not believe that and in fact, they believe the opposite. This is challenge, not at least because it's very embarrassing for the Scottish government to have people who are articulating those kinds of views.

Anthony Salamone:

I think one of the reasons that it's more difficult is because since I mentioned that NATO is a sensitive issue, it's not mentioned as much, there isn't a lot of counterbalance discourse from mainstream politicians to say, "This is rubbish. The vast majority of us don't believe this. This is what we think," that doesn't happen a lot. So, the people on the fringes are loud because they're not counterbalanced by the majority who think that associating with RT or Russia generally is not what Scotland or Scottish politics or mainstream Scottish politics is supposed to be about or be like.

Anthony Salamone:

No. I suppose the difference with Alba now is that the SNP as a party doesn't have that issue with all these defections from the SNP to Alba. Those fringes or factions are becoming concentrated in new party. The difference is not that those people exist. The difference is that Alex Salmond just decided to front it. Of course, he will have had different motivations for doing so. I imagine chief among them is a desire to return to frontline politics, and the new political party was the, in his view, the best means of doing so.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. Well, it seems to me that there are three scenarios going forward. So, I want to throw them at you and you tell me if I've missed any or which one of these you think is most likely. The simplest is just SNP wins an outright majority, goes about its business, starts the wheels turning for an independence referendum. That's the cleanest, easiest thing.

Jacob Shapiro:

A second would be that the SNP doesn't win an outright majority, but when you add Sturgeon's votes and Salmond's, when you put the SNP and the new party together, you get a majority, and maybe Salmond turns into the Nigel Farage of Scotland or something like that, and as you get the Brexiteers in Brexit, you get his crazy independence folks on their side. I guess that's one scenario.

Jacob Shapiro:

Then the worst case scenario from a Scottish independence perspective would be that the SNP doesn't win a majority. So, those are the three possibilities I see. Did I miss any? What possibility right now, I know we're about a month out from elections, do you think is most likely right?

Anthony Salamone:

I suppose the only other thing I would add is what role would the Scottish Greens potentially play. So, I mean, first of all, it's a very prophetic view because there's a piece in the Times today quoting Nigel Farage congratulating Alex Salmond on creating the Alba Party saying it was a very clever thing to do and that he endorsed the move.

Anthony Salamone:

So, anyway, yes. That's there. No. Yeah. So, SNP majority outright is obviously what the SNP wants. Of course, they wouldn't want that, but the next question is the SNP majority versus a pro-independence majority. We have a pro-independence majority already. There's one already now in the outgoing parliament between the SNP and Greens. There has been some talk of a SNP-Green coalition. Of course, that might be in the event the SNP don't get a majority, but it might be even if the SNP do get a majority that they would have an enhanced number, a larger pro-independence governing majority with the Greens.

Anthony Salamone:

I think that there is a zero desire on the part of the Nicola Sturgeon to work with Alex Salmond in the Scottish parliament on anything, which gets to the point I was mentioning of what it would be like to have three pro-independence parties in the Scottish parliament, which we have not had for some time in the sense that we need to have a pro-independence government with a part of the opposition also being pro-independence, but a distance opposition.

Anthony Salamone:

The Greens were not in coalition with the SNP, but they supported them in almost everything that really mattered. There wasn't a confidence and supply agreement because it was on a case-by-case basis, but it was confusing, but somewhere in there.

Anthony Salamone:

So, what do I think is most likely? Well, it's hard to say with the caveat, though. We don't know at this stage, but I think it is certainly plausible that the SNP could win an outright majority because they're polling well. When it comes to the first-past-the-post constituencies, of course, winning basically all of the constituencies would get you majority right there.

Anthony Salamone:

We would expect the SNP to win the vast majority of constituencies and they would have their majority. The key point that's being debated ad nauseum in Scottish politics at the moment is Salmond's strategy



because, of course, he is not standing in the constituencies. He's only standing on the electoral regional list.

Anthony Salamone:

So, he is advocating what he is calling, and it's been the tagline everywhere for the party, the super majority, the independence super majority. So, that's very interesting, right? So, Alex Salmond is publicly saying, "I've left the SNP. I've started my own party, but when you go in to vote, I want you to vote SNP for the constituency, and then I want you to vote me on the list."

Anthony Salamone:

Therefore, we will create the so-called super majority for independence in the Scottish parliament that will have a huge number of members of the Scottish parliament to support independence he claims up to 90 of the 129 members and so on.

Anthony Salamone:

Critics say that this is gaming the system in the sense of artificially inflating the number of pro-independence MSPs in a way which it does not match public opinion. Now, of course, people are entitled to vote for parties that follow the rules, register themselves stand. We don't have to stand in the constituencies. You can just stand on the regional list only. There's nothing wrong about that, but, obviously, the SNP are not exactly welcoming Salmond's endorsement to vote for them and they want nothing to do with this, and they don't like this talk of the super majority because they know it doesn't look good and the last thing that they want is to be associated with that kind of rhetoric because they feel it might diminish a victory that they do achieve.

Anthony Salamone:

When you say the SNP would win majority but Salmond also wins a number seats and he achieves his so-called super majority, will the SNP's victory actually be taken less seriously or somehow diminished by it? They'd rather just avoid that. Obviously, they might not be able to.

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. I mean, it's an interesting strategy, and we have seen both in the Brexit conversation and US elections in 2016. We have seen what a smaller faction on the fringe of a political spectrum can do to overall politics. So, I see why Farage is looking at what Salmond is doing is clever because he's trying to move the conversation. As you said, he absolutely is trying to game the system. I mean, he probably wants it to be good for him, too, but he's absolutely trying to stack the deck, and that would put Sturgeon in an interesting position because she would have to be the cooler head and the cooler heads don't always prevail when it gets into politics.

Jacob Shapiro:



Let's close on just the actual issue, which we've been dancing around this whole time, which is whether the Scottish people want independence in the first place. The Brexit leave a remain vote. I think it was 62/38. Scotland wanted to remain in the EU, but most polls right now that I have seen on Scottish independence basically put it as a toss up, 50/50. So, if those polls are right, you have a much greater percentage of Scottish people wanted to remain in the European Union than actually want independence, maybe, and we can talk about how COVID or Brexit or all these other things has maybe increased desire for independence, whether the Salmond-Sturgeon drama is decreasing desire for independence.

Jacob Shapiro:

I thought it was pretty interesting that the polls really started to shift pro-independence in Scotland after the pandemic. There was a spike after Brexit, but then they went back down. It was really only beginning of 2020, I can't believe it's already been a year and a half, the beginning of 2020 when things started lifting off again.

Jacob Shapiro:

So, in some ways, the things that we're talking about are moot point because if the Scottish people are not fully invested in independence, none of the other things that we're talking about can really happen. Even 50/50, that's not a great percentage. I don't know if Scotland is going to be able to do the things it needs to do to secure independence with that much ambivalence. So, where do you stand on that right now and what the polls are telling you about the desire for independence separate from all the politics that we just talked about?

Anthony Salamone:

Yeah. I think it's clear that public opinion on independence had changed, particularly is that you mentioned in 2020, but particularly since June of 2020. From June of 2020 up until January or February of 2021, there were at least 20 consecutive opinion polls, which showed independence ahead in a way which we'd never seen. Then, obviously, it was very close. You could only say it was majority if you took out undecided voters, but nevertheless, that was substantially different from anything we had ever seen in modern Scottish politics.

Anthony Salamone:

That has since the polls since narrowed on the question of independence, but, nevertheless, that's a very interesting trend. Of course, people wonder why that is the case. You mentioned some of the reasons why. I think I agree with the premise that the most important reason for that shift is Brexit. Of course, we have been waiting ever since the EU referendum to see would people who backed staying in the EU but were less certain about independence shift to supporting independence because of Brexit. We never really saw that bounce.

Anthony Salamone:



I think that that has started to materialize as, first of all, after the UK formally left the European Union, after it became clear that the UK's future relationship, which is now our present relationship with the EU would be a very distant one even more distant than was promised by the leave campaign during the EU referendum when they assured people that, of course, the UK would stay in a single market, where that didn't happen at all. We have a minimal trade agreement, which barely covers services and which does not include free movement. It includes very little.

Anthony Salamone:

Anyway, people realized that and I think contributed to a sense that if you have to choose between and, of course, many people didn't want to have to choose, but if you do, which you do in this case, choose between the European Union or the United Kingdom Union, more people are deciding to choose for the European Union.

Anthony Salamone:

Then you add in Nicola Sturgeon's communication and management during the pandemic as opposed to the UK government and Boris Johnson, I think that it's very clear that a lot of people will support the way in which Nicola Sturgeon has steered the Scottish government response in terms of her forthrightness and communication. Though, I think it also has to be said that in terms of mortality and the rest, Scotland is comparable to the rest of the UK. It's not as if the Scottish management of the pandemic has been that much better in terms of the results.

Anthony Salamone:

Then you add in Boris Johnson himself, him being elected prime minister or being chosen as prime minister, and then everybody winning an election in his own right after governing without that mandate himself. He is not popular here amongst most people on all levels from his policies like the Brexit ones I just mentioned through to his mannerisms and style. He is just not, as one of my colleagues wrote in the Financial Times, he's not the kind of Englishman to save the British Union and I think that that's correct.

Anthony Salamone:

He plays into a lot of the stereotypes of the kind of Englishman that many Scottish regardless of the use just don't find as appealing or convincing as a politician. So, all of those things contribute, in my view, have contributed to that, if not majority for independence, then growing support for independence.

Anthony Salamone:

Now, that links to why would you push for an independence referendum with the SNP if you don't have a majority, if there isn't a clear sustained majority for independence. Well, again, to add the complexities in there, there are elements to that. One is that Brexit has fundamentally changed the calculus of Scottish politics where people realize there's a big change, big shift from what we had in 2014. If we hadn't had Brexit, I don't think we'd be having a debate right now about holding a new referendum, at least not a serious one, anyway. Of course, there would always be elements of the independence movement that would want one tomorrow or today. In fact, some people do want that.



In fact, some people don't even want to have a referendum. They just want to so-called dissolve the UK and they haven't yet got on to the fact that that's not exactly a feasible route to actually becoming independent in a real way. Anyway, yes, Brexit changed everything and shook things up.

Anthony Salamone:

The second as I suppose I have just already covered, Nicola Sturgeon is under substantial pressure from people in her political party and also the wider independence movement, so these are people who are in other political parties, who are not in any political party, who want to see progress on independence, i.e., a new referendum or something like that. So, I think the SNP leadership feel the need to be seen to be moving in a direction of a new referendum.

Anthony Salamone:

Of course, they've done a number of things over the past few months on that basis, for instance, they published before the election campaign started their draft bill on holding an independence referendum. Now, originally, that bill was supposed to include the specific date that they had in mind for the referendum. They ultimately decided not to do that because they realized, of course, that with the pandemic still ongoing, there's no way to effectively predict when a referendum could be held, not at least to say that, obviously, it would entirely be 100% smart move to put in a date if you couldn't actually guarantee that would happen, which, of course, they can't. So, I'm sure it was a wise decision not to say when the referendum should be ...

Anthony Salamone:

Of course, one of the main attack lines from the union side is to say, "Well, we shouldn't have a referendum in a pandemic. We need to whatever. We need to focus on the pandemic, the recovery." The SNP are paying to say, "Well, we're not proposing to have a referendum now."

Anthony Salamone:

Here, it's also where it gets a bit interesting. On the one hand, the quick line is when the pandemic is over, we don't really know the pandemic is going to be over. More specifically, though, and Sturgeon said this in the debate this week and more recently that when the current health crisis is over, which I presume means an acute phase of the pandemic, but in the recovery phase, it would be fine and they're viewed to have a referendum.

Anthony Salamone:

Of course, Nicola Sturgeon specified that she wants to have the referendum in the first half of the parliamentary term, which would put a referendum in 2022 or 2023, and that's not counting the whole fact that what does the UK government think about that, and then what would the response be.

Jacob Shapiro:

Well, that is the elephant in the room, and this can be our last question, which is let's say SNP wins a majority or let's say Sturgeon wants to move forward with a referendum, Johnson has already said no and he hasn't shown any inclination to change his mind on that. So, what if Britain or what if the British government continues to just say, "Sorry. You have your shot already and we're not approving this. So, you can either do this illegally and we'll crack down accordingly or you can just go back to doing whatever you were doing before, but we're not having another referendum." How does Scotland or how do supporters of Scottish independence deal with that in any kind of meaningful way?

Anthony Salamone:

I think it's probably the single most challenging question to which there is not a clear answer in respect to Scottish independence. So, Boris Johnson has had different kinds of responses and used different kinds of language. More recently, he has de-emphasized the we're not having another referendum, not at least because I'm sure his Scottish conservative colleagues had said that it will only increase support for independence. Since then he said that a referendum is unnecessary, irrelevant, a waste of time, not what people want, basically saying we shouldn't have a referendum and has avoided explicitly saying, "I will block one." So, that's interesting and that's there.

Anthony Salamone:

We just don't know. We've been having the same arguments and asking the same questions and all of it has been on hold until we have had the election, know what the result is, and then see what the SNP does, whatever the Scottish government is, and then see what the UK government says in response.

Anthony Salamone:

So, even if Johnson at the moment says, "I don't want a referendum," and so on, if the SNP do win the majority, what will he really say? I mean, we don't know that. We know what he said before, but it is possible. I don't know how likely it is, but it is possible he could say, "Right. You won a majority." That's very important into the Westminster mentality. As I mentioned, the Scottish parliament is used to having coalition government. That is not how London Westminster politics work, I mean, majority is very important, and it's a very accepted clear principle that if you got majority, that you have the right to implement your manifesto. If the SNP win a majority as they did in 2011, there should be a referendum.

Anthony Salamone:

Then you could go into all sorts of questions about where does power and sovereignty lie within the UK, what role does parliamentary sovereignty play at the UK level because, of course, that the doctrine in the UK parliament that parliament is sovereign. That is not the accepted wisdom in Scotland. We believe in popular sovereignty, that the people are sovereign, not a parliament, and certainly not the UK parliament.

Anthony Salamone:

So, there's all of that. So, you can take a legal argument and say, "Legally, the United Kingdom is the state, and if the United Kingdom government says there should be no referendum, that's that, end of



story." You can also say, "Scotland is a constituent part of the United Kingdom. Scotland is democracy. The UK is a democracy. Scotland voluntarily joins the United Kingdom if the people of Scotland say they want to have a referendum to decide whether or not they leave as was clearly established in the press in 2014. Who are the UK government to say no?"

Jacob Shapiro:

Yeah. Well, I think that's the question and we will see what happens after May because I think what happens in May is going to do a lot towards answering that question. So, Anthony, thank you so much for taking the time. Maybe once we get a little more clarity on all these things and what happens in the elections, maybe you'll agree to come back on and tell us what you think then.

Anthony Salamone:

I'd be delighted to.

Jacob Shapiro:

All right. Cheers.

Jacob Shapiro:

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