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IRELAND AND NATO: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Introduction

Modern Irish defence and security concerns have received limited attention both domestically and internationally. Ireland's long-held stance of military neutrality, secure geo-strategic neighoburhood, and the lack of a coherent military tradition largely explain the paucity of interest. However, Ireland's role in the EU's Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) and the country's relationship with NATO have been the source of some domestic public controversy. Since joining NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme in 1999, Ireland has made important contributions to peacekeeping operations through this programme. Nonetheless, Ireland's relationship with NATO has been characterized as 'reluctant' and 'cautious'.[1] Neutrality, and specifically the Irish electorate's conception of neutrality, is the primary cause of reluctance. This paper seeks to contextualize Ireland's involvement in the PfP and to explore the challenges and likely scope of future Irish-NATO relations. How this relationship will develop is largely dependent on domestic Irish opinion, resource prioritization, and the possibility of alterations in Ireland's geo-strategic neighbourhood.

For small states, the promotion of an international rules-based order is directly in their security interests to mitigate threats to their independence from larger powers. Since independence, Irish governments have sought the protection of collective security through multinational institutions such as the League of Nations, the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU). As a militarily weak small state, Ireland has sought to promote and enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution through these international institutions. Ireland has been a strong advocate of human rights, development aid, disarmament programmes and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Supporting institutional approaches to maintaining a peaceful world order has been central to Ireland's foreign policy strategy. Having maintained a strong commitment to peacekeeping operations mandated by the United Nations (UN) for over 50 years, successive Irish governments have ensured the country is seen internationally as an honest broker in conflicts. Despite controversy and cautiousness, Ireland's participation in the PfP greatly enhances its ability to engage in peacekeeping and crisis management activities. Irish contributions to peacekeeping occupy a prominent position in the Department of Defence White Paper and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's foreign policy statement 'The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World', which were both launched in 2015.[2] However, neutrality continues to dominate popular and academic discourses and its maintenance also features heavily in both documents.

The nature of Irish neutrality consistently exercises domestic public opinion, as evidenced during the Nice and Lisbon referenda debates. Concern for the legitimacy of Irish neutrality is also the primary reason Ireland's relationship with NATO has been controversial. For this reason, the paper will begin with an exploration of the roots of Irish neutrality up to present day. Particularly since the Second World War, the Irish population's perception of what neutrality encompasses has affected the foreign policy options of successive Irish governments. It is important, therefore, to highlight the confusion surrounding the concept of neutrality in the Irish context to understand the Irish government's relationship with NATO. An account of Ireland's contribution to NATO missions through the PfP will follow before the challenges and opportunities for the future of the relationship are explored in the final section.

Irish Neutrality

Irish neutrality is not a traditional policy akin to that of Switzerland. Irish neutrality is not fixed in national or international law; it is a policy choice adopted by all Irish governments since the Second World War due to its popularity amongst the electorate. Some authors trace the roots of Irish neutrality back to separatist and isolationist opinion in the early period of the 20th century, the anti-recruitment campaigns of the First World War, and the Irish independence struggle.[3] This view is supported by the failed Irish attempt, during the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations in 1921, to insert a neutrality clause for an Irish Free State in the event of a British declaration of war with another power.[4] However, these concepts of neutrality were predominantly associated with a desire to remain outside of British imperial wars.[5] Nationalistic anti-imperialist fervour should, therefore, not be categorised as representative of a specific neutral tradition in Ireland prior to the Second World War.[6]

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1   Magnus Petersson, 'NATO and the EU 'Neutrals' – Instrumental or Value-Oriented Utility?', in Håkan Edström, Janne Haaland Matlary & Magnus Petersson (eds.), NATO: *The Power of Partnerships* (Palgrave Macmillan, New Security Challenges Series, 2011), p. 121.

2   Irish Department of Defence, 'White Paper on Defence', August 2015 and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 'The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World', January 2015.

3   Robert Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality 1939 – 1945* (Gill & Macmillan, 1983), p. 75; Ronan Fanning, 'Irish Neutrality: An Historical Review', Irish Studies in International Affairs (Vol. 1, No. 3, 1982), pp. 27-29.

4   The proposal was rejected out of hand by the British negotiators who argued that a Dominion could not be neutral in a war in which Britain was involved, see: Fanning, 'Irish Neutrality: An Historical Review', p. 29.

5   Thomas E. Hachey, 'The Rhetoric and Reality of Irish Neutrality', New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua (Vol. 6, No. 4, Winter, 2002), pp. 27-28.

6   See: John A. Murphy, 'Irish neutrality in historical perspective', in Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts (eds.), Ireland and the Second World War: Politics, Society and Remembrance (Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 9-10.

During the inter-war period, Ireland like the other European neutrals, sought shelter through the collective security of the League of Nations. The Irish premier, Éamon de Valera, had used the League to espouse "the camaraderie of small countries in resisting the warlike designs of the greater powers".[7] It was the failure of that institution to effectively deal with the Abyssinian Crisis in 1935 that prompted the small neutral European states to shift away from the rules-based system to a more traditional neutrality.[8] For the Irish government, adopting a position contrary to that of Britain, was also "the ultimate exhibition of Ireland's international sovereignty",[9] which was a key foreign policy goal of Éamon de Valera. As Ronan Fanning has stated:

In practice small states can rarely implement an absolutely independent foreign policy. Their freedom of choice is inhibited by the great powers within whose spheres of influence they happen to fall. In practice, therefore, the yardstick of independence for such small states is their ability to act independently of neighbouring great powers.[10]

Pragmatism, desires for an independent foreign policy to assert sovereignty, domestic security concerns tied to anti-British sentiment, a sense of injustice regarding the partition of Northern Ireland, and a moral stance against involvement in big-power conflicts, have all been advanced by historians as interwoven or independent rationales for Irish neutrality in the Second World War.[11] Declaring neutrality was one thing, maintaining it was another. To fulfil de Valera's commitment to the British government that Ireland would not be a cause for complaint to Britain's security,[12] the government actively pursued a policy to neutralise public opinion through draconian 'negative' censorship.[13] Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Joseph Walshe, stressed the need to neutralise opinion through 'positive' censorship via highlighting the moral superiority of neutrality:

Public opinion must be built up on a neutral basis, a neutral-mindedness must be created. A list of the States which are neutral should be frequently and prominently displayed in the Press. The advantages of being neutral should be stressed. The losses and suffering of all kinds, including famine and poverty, which come upon countries at war should be stressed. For Ireland, neutrality is the only logical policy […] As an eminently Christian State, we are obliged to maintain a position which will allow us to take the most efficient part in the establishment of peace. It is quite possible that the head of our Government may be able to take a very real part in bringing about a cessation of hostilities […] Unless we remain neutral, we cannot join with the small States of the world, and with the Vatican in particular, in attempts to bring about peace […] The tendency to give as facts or as the opinions of personages of great influence, what are really reports from prejudiced sources, should be watched. (The attribution to the Holy Father of sentiments appearing in the Osservatore Romano [Vatican newspaper] in the course of a message from Poland is an example of this type of propaganda.) […] In general, it might be no harm to inform the editors of our papers that want of respect on their part for the principle of neutrality laid down by the Government and the Parliament might involve us at a later stage in an air-raid on Dublin, for consequences of which they would have to take responsibility. There is no question about the vital necessity of neutrality for the preservation of this State, and the cliques which run the anti-Government Press have no moral right whatever to oppose that policy.[14]

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7   David Fitzpatrick, The Two Irelands: 1912 – 1939 (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 151.

8   A conflict between Italy and the Empire of Ethiopia (Abyssinia), during which Mussolini's Italy conquered and subsumed Abyssinia into Italian East Africa. League sanctions were limited and did not prevent Italian actions, see: Peter J. Beck, 'The League of Nations and the Great Powers, 1936 – 1940', World Affairs (Vol. 157, No. 4, Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations: Part One, Spring 1995), pp. 175-189.

9   Michael Kennedy, 'The Foundation and Consolidation of Irish Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1945', in Ben Tonra, Michael Kennedy, John Doyle and Noel Dorr (eds.), Irish Foreign Policy (Gill and Macmillan, 2012), p. 30.

10 Ronan Fanning, 'Irish Neutrality', in Neutrals in Europe: Ireland (Conference Papers 11, The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 1990), p. 1.

11 See: Fisk, *In Time of War*, pp. 75-76; Diarmuid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900 – 2000* (Profile Books, 2004), pp. 388-390; Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Censorship in Ireland, 1939 – 1945: Neutrality, Politics and Society* (Cork University Press, 1996), pp. 3-4; T. Ryle Dwyer, *Behind the Green Curtain: Ireland's Phoney Neutrality During World War II* (Gill & Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1-14; and, Hachey, 'The Rhetoric and Reality of Irish Neutrality', pp. 31-32, in which the authors outline most or all of these causes as determinants of Éire's neutrality. Eunan O'Halpin, *Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality During the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 46-47 and Ronan Fanning, 'Irish Neutrality: An Historical Review', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* (Vol. 1, No. 3, 1982), p. 28, identify anti-British sentiment or the antipathies towards the British amongst certain sections of the Irish public and some government ministers as the *raison d'être* for Irish neutrality. Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building* (Revised Edition with Andrew McCarthy, Gill & Macmillan, 2005), p. 110-111, argues that Irish neutrality was an exercise in *Realpolitik* and a pragmatic calculation based on Ireland's inability to effectively contribute to the war or defend against attack. Brian Girvin, *The Emergency: Neutral Ireland 1939 – 45* (Macmillan, 2006), pp. 62-64, focuses on domestic security concerns. J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912 – 1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 243, points to a pragmatic calculation based on military weakness and a desire to maintain independence by remaining outside the conflict.

12 "It is not, as some people appear to think, sufficient for us to indicate our attitude, or to express the desire of our people. It is necessary at every step to protect our own interests in that regard, to avoid giving to any of the belligerents any due cause, and proper cause, of complaint", Éamon de Valera, Dáil Debates, Vol. 77, No. 1, Col. 3, 2 September 1939.

13 Michael Rynne, the Department of External Affairs' highly influential Legal Advisor, also advocated a positive neutrality in the early months of the war. See: National Archives of Ireland (NAI) Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Legal Advisor's Papers, Michael Rynne to Joseph Walshe, 5 September 1939. For the best accounts of Ireland's censorship policy and the question of morality, see: Ó Drisceoil, Censorship in Ireland; Robert Cole, Propaganda, Censorship and Irish Neutrality in the Second World War (Edinburgh University Press, 2006) and Donal Ó Drisceoil, ''Moral Neutrality': Censorship in Emergency Ireland', History Ireland (Vol. 4, No. 2, Summer, 1996), pp. 46-50.

14 University College Dublin Archives (UCDA) P/104/3433 Frank Aiken Papers, Walshe to Joseph Connolly, 18 September 1939.

By contrasting the virtue of Irish and Vatican neutrality with the barbarism of war whilst imposing a draconian censorship on war news, the government associated neutrality with possession of a superior morality. When Churchill heavily criticised Ireland after the war for its neutrality policy, de Valera retorted with a stirring rebuke of the warring nations and asserted the moral correctness of a small country desiring international peace. Though Churchill's view prevailed amongst the Allies, de Valera's response was hailed at home. The Irish government's pious sentiments were supported nationally by two critical factors; firstly, both during and prior to the war, neutrality was overwhelmingly popular domestically, and secondly the policy succeeded in keeping Ireland out of the conflict. Irish neutrality during the Second World War allowed the country to express its sovereignty and independence from Britain, signal its religious and moral righteousness, and call attention to the partition of the country by a neighbouring large state. The confluence of these concerns would turn Irish neutrality into an "article of faith";[15] one which the government would refuse to break so long as the partition of the island remained.

In 1949, the government linked the ending of partition to the possibility of joining NATO. This "poorly handled manoeuvre" was rejected and Ireland subsequently refused to join the collective defence organisation.[16] The consequence of this episode was a consolidation and entrenchment of Irish military neutrality. Though Ireland joined a raft of new international agencies in the aftermath of the war, it remained outside the two key security institutions, NATO and the UN. In the case of the latter, Ireland's application for membership was vetoed by the Soviet Union until 1955. The 1950s has been characterised as a period of international isolationism for Ireland, and it was not until the 1960s that the country began to carve out a role on the international scene by actively participating in UN peacekeeping missions, arms limitation negotiations and nuclear non-proliferation talks. Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 was an important aspect of the country's shift to economic liberalism, but it was also significant for Irish neutrality.

Since joining the EEC, accusations that the government is bargaining away Irish neutrality have taken root. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Irish Taoisigh (prime ministers) were not averse to acknowledging the possibility of some participation in common European security efforts.[17] US concerns in the 1960s that the acceptance of neutrals into the EEC would undermine the capability of the community to act as a bulwark against the Soviet Union should NATO's resolve diminish, prompted Irish leaders to engaged in a fudge. While privately committing to undefined future collective defence collaboration abroad during Ireland's application bid, Irish leaders promoted their commitment to the integrity of neutrality at home.[18] To reconcile these competing commitments, Irish governments have qualified Ireland's neutrality policy to mean 'Irish military neutrality', thus permitting discussions on security and defence issues under EU frameworks. Karen Devine has argued that this stance has no basis in international law and is merely a construct of successive Irish governments to re-assure the Irish public while neutrality is progressively eradicated.[19] Questions regarding the legitimacy of Irish neutrality have also been fuelled by revelations since the 1970s regarding the Irish government's impartial actions towards the Allies during the Second World War. During the conflict, the Irish government provided a broad range of beneficial services to the Allies in intelligence and military matters. A number of authors, commentators and politicians, have cited Allied-Irish intelligence sharing, the release of Allied internees, and assistance to Allied aircraft and aircrews as evidence of Ireland's Allied-friendly 'non-belligerence'.[20] Trevor Salmon and T. Ryle Dwyer have both written books which specifically question Irish neutrality during the war. While Salmon adapted the chapter title ''Unneutral Neutral Eire' or Non-Belligerent Ireland?' from an earlier article of R. M. Smylie,[21] Dwyer subtitled his book 'Ireland's Phoney Neutrality During World War II'.

More recently, the Irish government's practice of permitting armed forces to use Shannon Airport as a transit hub for military aircraft, equipment and personnel within certain limitations has come under heavy scrutiny. Throughout the Cold War, the Irish government allowed landings and overflights of foreign military aircraft under the condition that they were not armed or on an operational flight. This was in line with the position the Irish government formulated during the

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15 Patrick Keatinge, The Formulation of Irish Foreign Policy (Institute of Public Administration, 1973), p. 30.

16 Mervyn O'Driscoll, 'Multilateralism: From 'Plato's Cave' to the European Community: 1945-73', in Tonra et al., Irish Foreign Policy, p. 36.

17 Garret Fitzgerald, 'Myth of Irish neutrality not borne our by historical fact', The Irish Times, 24 April 1999.

18 Karen Devine, 'Neutrality and the development of the European Union's common security and defence policy: Compatible or competing?', Cooperation and Conflict (Vol. 46, Issue 3, 2011), p. 340.

19 Karen Devine, 'The difference between Political Neutrality and Military Neutrality' (Address to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Public Service Oversight and Petitions, 15 July 2015), p. 2.

20 Trevor C. Salmon, Unneutral Ireland: An Ambivalent and Unique Security Policy (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989), p. 8; Róisín Doherty, Ireland, neutrality and European security integration (Aldershot, 2002), p. 13; Dwyer, Behind the Green Curtain, p. 345, in which Dwyer concluded that "it is inaccurate to call that policy neutrality; it was determined non-belligerency"; Garret Fitzgerald, 'The origin, development and present status of Irish "neutrality"', Irish Studies in International Affairs (Vol. 9, 1998), p. 13; Harold J. Kearsley, 'Irish neutrality and the state, past, present and prospects', in Jouko Huru, Olli-Pekka Jalonen and Michael Sheehan (eds.), New dimensions of security in Central and Southeastern Europe (Tampere, 1998), p. 172; Roger MacGinty, 'Almost like talking dirty: Irish security policy in post-Cold War Europe', Irish Studies in International Affairs (Vol. 6, 1995), p. 129; Stephen Collins, 'Casting off the imaginary cloak of neutrality', Sunday Tribune, 23 March 2003; Stephen Collins, 'Our sham neutrality has finally been exposed', Sunday Tribune, 30 March 2003; Rory Keane, 'Neutrality nothing but a "group think" mantra', Irish Times, 30 July 2004.

21 R. M. Smylie, 'Unneutral Neutral Éire', Foreign Policy (Vol. 24, No. 2, January 1946), pp. 317-326.

Second World War. However, post 9/11 this practice came under increasing scrutiny due to the passage of US military aircraft en route to the Middle East in a non-UN sanctioned conflict. Subsequently, activists and opposition members of parliament from the left-wing of Irish politics have consistently challenged the government regarding the legality of this arrangement. Accusations of complicity in the Iraq War and allegations that the airport was used by the CIA, under the strongly criticized and secretive extraordinary rendition programme,[22] have tarnished the image of Irish neutrality in eyes of those critical of the arrangement. By contrast, defenders of the arrangement highlight its positive impact on US-Irish relations and contend that it brings economic benefits to the local region.[23] Meanwhile, successive governments have pointed out that the arrangement remains in line with Ireland's long-standing practice of only permitting the transit of aircraft that are unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives, are not engaged in intelligence gathering, are not engaged in military exercises or operations and have obtained permission to land by the Irish government.[24] However, with few apparent verification activities taking place, many remain sceptical of the government's claims.

In 2014, two members of the Irish parliament were arrested when they scaled a security fence at the airport and attempted to search US planes to provide proof contradicting government assurances.[25] Though Irish governments have strongly defended the Shannon arrangement, they have not been immune to public protests. Wikileaks revelations have shown that domestic protest against the arrangement in 2006 compelled the Irish government to widen its definitions of war munitions requiring prior clearance from Dublin to military trucks and Humvees during the run up to the 2007 general election.[26] Nonetheless, according to ShannonWatch, an organisation that monitors the activities of military aircraft at the airport, at least 730 US military flights landed at Shannon in 2016 alone.[27] The most significant challenge to the Shannon arrangement came in 2003 when peace campaigner Edward Horgan brought the Irish government to the High Court for its alleged participation in the Iraq War. The presiding judge dismissed Mr. Horgan's legal challenge on the basis that the definition of what 'participation' entailed was a matter for the Irish parliament, not the courts, to decide. He further asserted that while the Shannon arrangement appeared to be inconsistent with the obligations of a neutral under international law, international law only interacted with domestic law on a constitutional, statutory or judicial basis.[28] As Irish neutrality is only a political policy choice, it has no basis in any of these categories. The Shannon arrangement bolsters the view that Ireland is neither de facto nor de jure neutral, but arguments defending the existence of Irish neutrality remain,[29] and it is likely that the 'neutral vs. unneutral' debate will continue ad nauseum.

As Irish neutrality is still highly popular in Ireland, the debate regarding its legitimacy remains central to Irish defence and security considerations. To assuage public opinion, Irish diplomats have consistently secured assurances in European treaties that Irish military neutrality would be respected. Since 1987, the sentiments of the Irish electorate have become crucial to government decision-making in this area. In that year a Supreme Court ruling in the case of Crotty v An Taoiseach,[30] found that significant changes to EU treaties required amendments to the Irish Constitution. This ruling granted the Irish electorate the unique right within the EU to vote by referendum on the ratification of EU treaties. As a result, the protection of Irish neutrality has consistently been at the forefront of objections to EU treaty changes. This compelled the Irish government to obtain assurances from the EU that participation in the community's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) did not prejudice Irish military neutrality during the Maastricht Treaty negotiations in 1993.[31] Regardless, concern for the protection of this foreign policy option was a significant contributor to the Irish

22 Simon Carswell, 'Shannon played vital logistical role in rendition circuits, say researchers', The Irish Times, 9 December 2014. For the research project on which the article was based, see:
    https://www.therenditionproject.org.uk/flights/flight-database.html [cited 03 - 12 - 17]

23 For example, see: Fintan O'Toole (ed.), 'Should we let US troops land at Shannon en route to Iraq?', The Irish Times, 26 February 2007.

24 Juno McEnroe, 'Poll finds most people oppose military use of Shannon', Irish Examiner, 15 March 2016, quoting the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

25 Dan Griffin, 'Mick Wallace and Clare Daly arrested at Shannon Airport', The Irish Times, 22 July 2014.

26 US Embassy Ireland to Defense Intelligence Agency, Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Security Council, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State and US Mission to the EU, 5 September 2006,
    https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06DUBLIN1020_a.html [cited 03 - 12 - 17]

27 Press Association report, ''At least 730' US military flights in Shannon Airport in 2016', The Irish Times, 9 January 2017.

28 Judgement of Justice Kearns in Edward Horgan v An Taoiseach, The Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Minister for Transport, The Government of Ireland, Ireland and the Attorney General, 28 April 2003. See:
    https://www.therenditionproject.org.uk/flights/flight-database.html [cited 03 - 12 - 17]

29 Karen Devine, 'A Comparative Critique of the Practice of Irish Neutrality in the 'Unneutral' Discourse', Irish Studies in International Affairs (Vol. 19, 2008), pp. 73-97.

30 Judgement of the Supreme Court of Ireland, 'Crotty v An Taoiseach', 9 April 1987,
    https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2013/5/6/187e7d4f-aa3e-43da-a1e2-bb3fc41d2fbd/publishable_en.pdf [cited 11 - 11 - 17]

31 Katy Hayward, 'The European Union: National and Supranational Dimensions to Foreign Policy', in Tonra et al., Irish Foreign Policy, p. 139.

electorates' initial rejection, by referenda, of the European Union treaties of Nice (2001) and Lisbon (2008).[32]

A complicating factor for Irish governments is the divergence between its own official definition of Irish military neutrality and popular domestic understanding. The Irish government re-defined military neutrality since joining the EEC to mean 'non-membership of a military alliance'. However, Professor Ben Tonra of University College Dublin has rightly highlighted the normative view most Irish citizens have of neutrality as a policy that is synonymous with being a 'good global citizen' in international relations.[33] This is supported by Devine's research on public attitudes in Ireland towards neutrality, which shows that the public favours a policy of 'active' neutrality. This concept encompasses "peace promotion, nonaggression, the primacy of the UN, and the confinement of state military activity to UN peacekeeping, not being involved in wars, and maintaining Ireland's independence, identity, and independent foreign policy decision-making".[34] Taken together they comprise Ireland's general approach to the wider world, however, based on surveys in the 1980s, 90s and 00s, only 2.5% of the Irish population on average conceive of Irish neutrality in accordance with the government's official narrow interpretation.[35]

Neutrality is an oft maligned foreign policy choice for small states due to their asymmetric power capabilities compared to larger powers, and it would be remiss not to mention those who wish for the Irish government to adopt a different course. Views against the maintenance of Irish neutrality have predominantly come from the right-wing of Irish politics. Former Irish Taoiseach (prime minister), Garret Fitzgerald, of the centre-right Fine Gael party, was particularly vocal in expressing this view.[36] More recently, in 2013 the youth wing of Fine Gael, which has been the majority partner in the Irish government since 2011, called for Ireland to abandon neutrality and begin accession talks with NATO.[37] In 2015, though rejecting the possibility of NATO membership, Fine Gael's Eoghan Murphy claimed in the Dáil (the Irish parliament) that, historically, neutrality is almost impossible and that "Ireland is not a neutral country and never has been".[38] As recently as September 2017, Fine Gael MEP Brian Hayes suggested that Ireland needs to re-examine its neutrality policy in light of modern day terrorist and cyber security threats within the EU.[39]

Nonetheless, calls for the abandonment of Irish neutrality remain a minority opinion. The predominant consensus between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the two political parties that have dominated Irish politics since the foundation of the state, is that Irish military neutrality in its present form should be maintained. These centre to centre-right parties occupy roughly 60% of seats in the present Irish parliament. The two main left-wing parties in Ireland are Sinn Féin and Labour. Sinn Féin, which commands roughly 15% of seats in parliament, favours an 'active neutrality' in line with the normative view of the population. Of the 7 unsuccessful bills proposing to enshrine neutrality in the Irish Constitution since 1999, 4 have been tabled by Sinn Féin. The centre-left Labour party, which maintains approximately 4% of seats in parliament, tabled 1 bill. Labour supported Sinn Féin's 2003 bill while on the opposition benches, rejected the 2015 bill while in coalition government with Fine Gael, and supported the 2016 Sinn Féin bill when back in opposition. The Green Party and an independent member of parliament proposed the other 2 neutrality bills. The remaining 21% of parliament comprises of various minor parties and independents, many of whom are very supportive of enshrining Irish neutrality in the constitution. Since the establishment of Irish neutrality, however, only Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have led Irish governments. As John Coakley has summarised, these parties remain dominant and have consistently moved along with European-wide developments in military cooperation, while those who have been uncompromising and vocal on the left-wing remain politically weak.[40]

Professor Tonra's view is that Irish military neutrality does not affect Irish foreign policy as the bar for a breach of the official interpretation (i.e. joining a military alliance) is set so high.[41] Irish military neutrality does not, for example,

32   In referenda on successive EU treaties since the Single European Act (1987), fears surrounding the impact of these treaties on Irish neutrality have consistently ranked in the top two reasons behind a voter's decision to vote against the treaty. See: Karen Devine, ''The Myth of Irish Neutrality': Deconstructing Concepts of Irish Neutrality using International Relations Theories', Irish Studies in International Affairs (Vol. 17, 2006), pp. 116-117; Brigid Laffan and Jane O'Mahony, Ireland and the European Union (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 120 and, Karen Devine, 'Irish Neutrality and the Lisbon Treaty' (Paper presented at "Neutrality: Irish Experience, European Experience" Conference organised by the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin and Dublin Monthly Meeting [Quakers] Peace Committee, 8/9 May 2009). http://doras.dcu.ie/14898/1/Irish_Neutrality_and_the_Lisbon_Treaty.pdf [cited 10 - 09 - 16]
33   Ben Tonra, 'Security, Defence and Neutrality: The Irish Dilemma', in Tonra et al., Irish Foreign Policy, p. 224.
34   Devine, 'The difference between Political Neutrality and Military Neutrality', p. 4.
35   Ibid.
36   Garret Fitzgerald, 'A myth of "traditional neutrality" developed from the Irish decision to be a non-belligerent in the Second World War', Irish Times, 21 October 1997; Garret Fitzgerald, 'Wartime neutrality theoretical rather than real', Irish Times, 29 January 2005.
37   Young Fine Gael press release, 22 July 2013. See: http://www.yfg.ie/news/entry/yfg-calls-for-ireland-to-engage-in-accession-talks-with-nato [cited 07 - 11 - 17]
38   Eoghan Murphy, Dáil Debates, Vol. 870, No. 4, 6 March 2015.
39   Radio interview of Brian Hayes MEP, EuroParlRadio, 13 September 2017, https://europarlradio.podbean.com/e/ireland%E2%80%99s-neutrality-needs-to-be-looked-at-%E2%80%93-hayes/ [cited 03 - 12 - 17]
40   John Coakley, 'Society and political culture', in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher (eds.), Politics in the Republic of Ireland (Routledge, 5th edition, 2010), p. 63.
41   Tonra, 'Security, Defence and Neutrality: The Irish Dilemma', in Tonra et al., Irish Foreign Policy, p. 224.

preclude bi-lateral defence agreements or many other defence and security activities through multinational institutions. The disconnect between Irish official policy and public opinion is the source of consistent debate on Ireland's relations with the EU and NATO in the sphere of defence and security. Confusion surrounding the character, legitimacy, and reality of Irish military neutrality poses both challenges and opportunities for deeper Irish-NATO relations, and it is in this confused context that future possibilities must be considered.

Ireland and the Partnership for Peace

NATO's Partnership for Peace was conceived soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union primarily as a frame-work through which NATO and former Soviet states could develop trust and closer relations via individually tailored programmes. The PfP was one facet of NATO's response to re-defining its raison d'être. With the Soviet threat effectively nullified, the military alliance sought to broaden its scope to remain relevant.[42] Membership of the PfP was a pre-cursor for many of the former Soviet states to join NATO as full members, but the programme also sought to develop closer ties with Europe's neutral states. In the 1990s, the PfP was seen by some prospective NATO members as a waiting room for NATO membership.[43] For the current EU neutrals, however, the PfP is seen as a complement to their EU commitments through the Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) and not a stepping-stone to full membership.[44] Their engagement with NATO is facilitated through the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), which provides a forum for discussion and coordination on security and political issues with NATO members and partners.[45] As the PfP allows for differentiated participation, partners can pick and choose from roughly 1,600 activities across a wide range of concerns to enhance knowledge acquisition, cooperation and contribute to NATO-led operations.[46] It is a way to remain 'inside the fence, but outside the walls' of the defence alliance.[47] The PfP's main objectives are:

> 1. Transparency in defense planning and budgeting, 2. democratic control of defense forces, 3. non-combat operations under UN or OSCE authority, 4. cooperative military relations with NATO in joint planning, training and exercises, and 5. force interoperability over the longer term with NATO members, including through participation in Combined Joint Task Forces.[48]

These aims can be split into political (points 1 and 2) and operational concerns (points 3, 4 and 5). As the political objectives have long been well established in Ireland, it is the operational concerns which are of most interest here and they are highly interwoven in the Irish case.

Peacekeeping is the primary concern of Ireland's defence forces overseas and the country has carved out a role in this field on the world stage over the last 60 years. Since 1958, the Irish defence forces have assisted in 43 UN authorized overseas missions. With the passage of national legislation in 1960, Irish participation requires a UN mandate and parliamentary approval if 12 or more armed soldiers are required. However, UN failures to adequately address crises in the new security environment following the end of the Cold War prompted a re-orientation towards co-operation with regional institutions to intervene more quickly on its behalf. Thus, Ireland has contributed to UN authorized missions commanded by the EU and NATO. Figure 1 shows the missions in which Ireland has participated under NATO's PfP since the country joined the programme in 1999. As a partner, Ireland chooses its level of commitment within the PfP and has tailored a programme focused on enhancing the capabilities of the Irish defence forces, interoperability with NATO members and partners, peacekeeping and crisis management tasks in line with the Petersberg Tasks, humanitarian and environmental protection operations, and marine co-operation.[49] In 2001, the Irish government also engaged in the PfP's Planning and Review Process (PARP) which seeks to boost the capabilities of partners to co-ordinate during NATO or EU-led crisis response missions.

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42   Andrew Cottey, Security in the New Europe (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 68.
43   See: David Betz, Civil-Military Military Relations in Russia and Eastern Europe (Routledge-Curzon, 2004), p. 32.
44   See: Petersson, 'NATO and the EU 'Neutrals'', p. 112.
45   NATO, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.
     https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49276.htm [cited 15 - 12 - 17]
46   See: Graeme P. Herd, 'NATO Partnerships: For peace, combat, and soft balancing?', in Graeme P. Herd and John Kriendler (eds.), Understanding NATO in the 21st Century (Routledge, 2013), p. 71.
47   This is the title of a book on Europe's non-allied states and NATO. See, Laura C. Ferreira-Peraira, Inside the Fence, but Outside the Walls: The Militarily Non-Allied States in the Security Architecture of Post-Cold War Europe (Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, Bern, 2007).
48   Summary from Petersson, 'NATO and the EU 'Neutrals'', p. 113, which refines the objectives listed in the PfP's framework document. For the original text of the objectives see: NATO, Partnership for Peace: Framework Document (January 1994), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_24469.htm [cited 10 - 12 - 17]
49   Tonra, 'Security, Defence and Neutrality: The Irish Dilemma', in Tonra et al., Irish Foreign Policy, p. 231.

Figure 1. Irish peacekeeping and crisis management missions under NATO's PfP. Information taken from the Department of Defence website: http://www.military.ie/overseas/ [cited 12 - 11 - 17].

Mission	Command	Dates	Region	Purpose	Personnel
EUFOR/ SFOR[50]	NATO/EU	1997 - 2000	Europe	Crisis Management	50
KFOR[51]	NATO	1999 - Present	Europe	Peace Support Operation	12
ISAF[52]	NATO	2001 - Present	Asia	Peace Support Operation	7

Due to Ireland's policy of military neutrality, Ireland's engagement with the PfP and PARP were not without controversy domestically. Even the Fianna Fáil led government that brought Ireland into the PfP was against Ireland joining the programme while in opposition in the mid-1990s for fears it would diminish neutrality.[53] This hesitation underscores the cautiousness of Irish governments not to betray military neutrality and Ireland was the last of the European neutrals to sign up the PfP. Austria, Malta, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland had all joined by 1996, while Ireland only joined in 1999. The 2000 Department of Defence White Paper argued that Ireland's participation provided numerous opportunities for the country to enhance its peacekeeping role and to exert influence over the conduct of international peacekeeping operations through the provision of training to international partners.[54] Nonetheless, subsequent fears regarding a perceived abandonment or dilution of Irish neutrality amongst the Irish electorate were a significant contributor to the initial rejection of the EU's Nice Treaty.[55] To mollify these concerns, the government inserted the concept of a 'triple-lock' on Irish participation in overseas military operations into the national discourse during the Treaty debates.[56] This mechanism was a construct based on the government's understanding of Irish legislation, and consists of the requirement for a UN mandate, a clear government decision and parliamentary approval. This final point refers to Article 28.3.1° of the Constitution of Ireland (Bunreacht Na hÉireann) which states that "[w]ar shall not be declared and the State shall not participate in any war save with the assent of Dáil Éireann".[57] As a majority government decision would almost invariably directly equate to parliamentary approval due to the use of party and governmental whips,[58] a 'triple-lock' is perhaps not the best descriptor.

Petersson describes Ireland as the most reluctant of the 'big' neutrals in the EU (Sweden, Finland and Austria).[59] Domestic pressure and statutory roadblocks restrict options for Irish governments in their relations with NATO and Ireland's contributions to NATO-led missions have been limited as a consequence. The Irish Department of Defence, and critics of the statutory restrictions, point to the EU's mission in Macedonia to highlight how the 'triple-lock' mechanism can prevent Ireland from fulfilling its commitment to international peacekeeping operations unnecessarily.[60] Ireland was originally a member of the UN mandated peacekeeping forces in Macedonia,[61] however, when the mission came up for re-authorization in the Security Council, China used its veto due to Macedonia's recognition of Taiwan. In response, NATO took over the mission until 2003 when the EU assumed command of its first ever military operation. Without a clear Security Council mandate, the Irish government decided it could not participate in the mission. Subsequently, the Irish government amended national legislation in 2006 to broaden the scope under which Ireland could contribute to peacekeeping and crisis management operations. The Defence (Amendment) Act, 2006 states that the country can partake in a mission so long as the international force or body established for this purpose has been "mandated, authorised, endorsed, supported, approved or otherwise sanctioned by a resolution of the Security Council or the

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50 European Force Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR)/Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR).

51 Kosovo Force (KFOR).

52 International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

53 Laffan and O'Mahony, Ireland and the European Union, p. 190.

54 Irish Department of Defence, White Paper on Defence, February 2000, p. 68.

55 Devine, ''The Myth of Irish Neutrality', pp. 116-117.

56 Ben Tonra, 'Unpicking the "Triple-Lock" of Ireland's Defence Green Paper' (Official blog of University College Dublin's School of Politics and International Relations, 17 July 2013). See: http://www.politicalscience.ie/?p=451 [cited 12 - 11 - 17]

57 Article 28.3.1° of the Constitution of Ireland (Bunreach Na hÉireann).

58 A whip is a designated enforcer of party or governmental decisions with the task of ensuring members vote along party or government lines. Free votes on issues in the Irish parliamentary system are not common, and a member of parliament who decides to vote against their party may well be expelled.

59 Petersson separates Malta from this group due to disparities in the country's size and capabilities compared to the other 4. See: Petersson, 'NATO and the EU 'Neutrals'', p. 121.

60 Irish Department of Defence, Green Paper on Defence, July 2013, pp. 9-10; Tonra, 'Unpicking the "Triple-Lock" of Ireland's Defence Green Paper'; Tonra, 'Security, Defence and Neutrality', in Tonra et al., Irish Foreign Policy, pp. 231-232.

61 United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP), 1995 – 1999.

General Assembly of the United Nations".[62] This widened scope expands the conditions under which Irish defence forces can partake in multinational missions through regional institutions such as the EU and NATO. However, it remains the case that if any permanent member of the Security Council were to veto UN authorization, endorsement, support, approval or sanction for a particular mission, then Ireland would not be able to participate in the international response.

Force interoperability, however, is the main concern for the Irish defence forces. In 2016, Minister of State for Defence, Paul Kehoe TD, highlighted interoperability as the primary aim of Ireland's membership of the PfP when defending Ireland's decision to join the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII).[63] Interoperability entails adherence to NATO standards, rules and procedures, as well as the use of similar equipment by the defence forces of partners. This issue has grown in importance since the end of the Cold War as NATO has sought to re-define its purpose. Peacekeeping and crisis management became central concerns of the organization and thus the interoperability of forces is crucial to the smooth engagement of multinational forces during crises. Ireland signed up to take part in the PII in 2014, which was launched at the Wales Summit. This initiative strengthened the commitment of partners to maintain and deepen interoperability and established an Interoperability Platform (IP) which provides an avenue for partners to attend and participate in some NATO committees and bodies in relation to interoperability concerns.[64]

Ireland makes further contributions to NATO through training programmes on counter-terrorism. Former NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen highlighted the "invaluable training" the Irish defence forces have provided to NATO members through the organization's Programme of Work in Defence against Terrorism when he visited the country in 2013.[65] Due to historical and contemporary experiences of terrorism on the island of Ireland, the Irish defence forces are well placed to train partner countries on counter-terrorism measures. Irish expertise in dealing with the threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are particularly prized. IEDs are the leading cause of casualties for NATO troops. Ireland provides training for counter-IED measures and the country was the only PfP partner invited to participate in a NATO Communications and Information (NCI) Agency technical training event with specialists from NATO member states and the US Department of Defense in 2016.[66] Through Ireland's Defence Forces Ordnance Corps training facility, NATO members have also participated in training on responding to so called 'lone-wolf' attacks. Interest in this course in 2015 was reportedly high following a spate of Islamic State (IS/ISIS) attacks in Europe and North Africa.[67]

Challenges and Opportunities

The Irish-NATO relationship presents opportunities for greater development on technical levels through enhanced knowledge sharing, training and deeper interoperability. During his June 2017 visit to Dublin, Lieutenant General Jan Broeks (Director General of NATO International Military Staff) commented positively on Ireland's contributions to "planning for peacekeeping and peace support, communications, command and control, operational procedures, logistics and training",[68] and it is within these competencies that opportunities reside. Ireland's defence forces have long advocated the benefits of the PfP to Ireland's peacekeeping capabilities and NATO's interoperability efforts closely align with the EU's efforts to foster closer defence and security cooperation. On a deeper level, former NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, informed the Irish people that the door to full membership remained open when he made the first visit of a NATO Secretary General to Ireland in 2013.[69] However, the Irish-NATO relationship is best described as challenging and it is the challenges that necessitate greater exploration. The first two challenges regard the road-blocks in the way of Ireland becoming a full member of the alliance, while the final challenge relates to the future of Ireland's participation in the PfP.

The largest barrier to the prospect of Ireland joining NATO is the country's policy of military neutrality, which is strongly supported by the Irish electorate even if their conception of neutrality differs from that of the government. Left-wing political parties and activist groups have been critical of Ireland's participation in the PfP and can apply effective pressure on the government to constrain its policy options. In 1996, the Irish government's White Paper on Foreign Policy stated that any change to Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality would necessitate a referendum, placing such

62 Article 1 of the Defence (Amedment) Act, 2006. See: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2006/act/20/enacted/en/print.html [cited 12 - 11 - 17]

63 Paul Kehoe, Dáil Debates, Vol. 914, No.1, 21 June 2016.

64 See: NATO, Partnership Interoperability Initiative. https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_132726.htm [cited 10 - 12 - 17]

65 NATO, NATO and Ireland: working together for peace (speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Institute for International and European Affairs (IIEA) in Dublin, 12 February 2013). See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_98369.htm [cited 10 - 12 - 17]

66 NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCI), Protecting NATO forces against improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (20 June 2016). See: https://www.ncia.nato.int/NewsRoom/Pages/160620_Protecting-NATO-forces-against-improvised-explosive-devices.aspx

67 Jim Cusack, 'Defence forces to host 'lone wolf' anti-terror classes for NATO', Irish Independent, 20 August 2015.

68 NATO, Director General of the NATO International Military Staff visits Ireland, quoting Lieutenant General Jan Broeks, 14 June 2017, https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/news_144969.htm?selectedLocale=en [cited 12 - 12 - 17]

69 Suzanne Lynch, 'Door is open for Ireland to join NATO, says military alliance's chief', The Irish Times, 11 February 2013.

a decision in the hands of the Irish people.[70] However, this is not legally binding on Irish governments and hence it is not considered a facet of the 'triple-lock'. Mention of a referendum is also conspicuously absent from the 2015 'Global Island' foreign policy statement. The statement did, however, affirm military neutrality as a "core element of Irish foreign policy".[71] Furthermore, the Irish government has consistently stressed commitment to military neutrality and it obtained EU guarantees to protect the policy option prior to the second Lisbon Treaty referendum. These guarantees were necessary to address the Irish electorate's concern that neutrality was imperilled by deeper EU defence commitments as it was "the second most important reason why people voted 'no'" in the first referendum.[72] No major Irish politician has thus far advocated joining NATO, however Devine has traced a progressive trend amongst Irish politicians, particularly from the centre-right Fine Gael party to question Irish neutrality and remain somewhat quiet on EU common defence issues.[73] In fact, opposition to Ireland's current relations with NATO is much more vocal.

Organised opposition comes from the Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA). This group, which includes the campaigner who brought the Irish government to the High Court over the US military's use of Shannon, is affiliated with Sinn Féin, the Green Party, the Communist Party of Ireland and a host of other national and international primarily left-wing organisations and trade unions. PANA has 5 central tenets, namely that (1) Ireland should not join or associate with any military alliance, (2) it should promote and pursue security only through the UN or the Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe, (3) it should reject the militarization of the EU, (4) it should refuse to cooperate with or condone policies or military groupings involving nuclear weapons or any weapons of mass destruction, and (5) it should only deploy its defence forces overseas on UN mandated peacekeeping missions.[74] PANA's submission to the Irish government, during consultations regarding the Department of Defence White Paper, advocated that Ireland leave the PfP because a neutral Ireland cannot share the strategic aims of a "nuclear armed military alliance".[75] Numerous left-wing Irish politicians support PANA's stance, and as shown earlier all major left-wing Irish political parties support enshrining Irish neutrality in the Constitution. Domestic opinion polls have also consistently shown that close to two thirds of Irish voters support neutrality,[76] and a 2016 poll showed that 6 in 10 respondents want neutrality enshrined in the Constitution, while a similar number believe that Shannon Airport should not facilitate military transit arrangements.[77] That proposals to constitutionally bind the government to neutrality have so far been rebuffed by successive Irish governments highlights a schism between Ireland's dominant parties and the left-wing of Irish politics and the majority of the Irish population. Devine has clearly demonstrated the schism between Ireland's political elites and popular opinion since the beginning of European level efforts to foster closer cooperation in security and defence matters.[78] These elites must balance EU defence commitments under the CSDP in accordance with the official interpretation of Irish military neutrality on one hand, whilst soothing domestic opinion which favours an 'active' neutrality on the other. The consequence of these constraints is that the prospects of Ireland seeking full membership of NATO remain decidedly low, for now.

The second challenge to the possibility of Ireland joining NATO is that the island's geo-strategic neighbourhood is very safe and the country can obtain its current security requirements without the need to join the alliance. Ireland's primary threat throughout the island's history has now become a political ally and defence partner. For centuries, the island of Ireland suffered numerous conquests, spoilations, and plantations from monarchs and governments of what is now the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. However, after centuries of British domination punctuated by the repeated attempts of Irish nationalists to secure alliances with Britain's enemies, the two countries have developed a strong relationship in recent decades. This has included joint efforts to maintain peace in Northern Ireland and reciprocal head of state visits by Queen Elizabeth II and the President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins. In the security realm, relations were established between MI5 and G2 (Irish Military Intelligence) during the Second World and proved extremely effective in thwarting fifth column activity from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and German spies. Though intelligence sharing continued into the Cold War, it was of a limited nature until the early years of the Northern Irish 'troubles' in the 1970s. From that point on quiet, and "largely undocumented", cooperation deepened and included training and technical links on bomb disposal techniques.[79] Collaboration between regular forces was also established in 2015, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK), which formalized previously ad-hoc co-operation. Under the terms of the agreement, the British army

70   Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), White Paper on Foreign Policy (1996), chapter 4, para. 4.9.

71   DFAT, 'The Global Island', p. 29.

72   Devine, 'Irish Neutrality and the Lisbon Treaty', p. 1.

73   Devine, 'Neutrality and the development of the European Union's common security and defence policy: Compatible or competing?', pp. 340-345.

74   Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA) Objectives, official website, https://www.pana.ie/aims.html [cited 12 - 12 - 17]

75   Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA), Positive Neutrality is Ireland's Best Defence (Submission to government White Paper on Defence, November 2013). https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/psop/PANA-White-Paper-on-Defence.pdf [cited 07 - 12 - 17]

76   Devine, ''The Myth of Irish Neutrality', pp. 116-117.

77   Juno McEnroe, 'Independent TDs want neutrality enshrined in Constitution', Irish Examiner, 16 March 2016.

78   Devine, 'Neutrality and the development of the European Union's common security and defence policy: Compatible or competing?', pp. 340-345. See also: Laffan and O'Mahony, Ireland and the European Union, p. 191.

79   Eunan O'Halpin, 'British Intelligence, PIRA, and the Early Years of the Northern Ireland Crisis', in Paul Maddrell (ed.), The Image of the Enemy: Intelligence Analysis of Adversaries Since 1945 (Georgetown University Press, eBook, 2015).

provides its Irish counterpart with surplus equipment at no cost and the Irish army provides training to British forces regarding peacekeeping and crisis management operations, while cooperation in military exercises between both sides is enhanced.[80] With Ireland's primary historical foe now an international partner with strong security links, Ireland's back-yard is quiet and relatively secure.

Article 42(7) of the Lisbon Treaty provides further security assurance. This clause provides for mutual defence assistance in the event that an EU member-state is attacked, while offering flexibility on the character of that assistance to protect some members' neutrality.[81] Furthermore, though Ireland's Air Corps is not fit for the purpose of defending the country, a report from 2016 indicated that the Irish government has entered into an arrangement with the British Royal Air Force (RAF) to protect Irish skies from planes hijacked by terrorists.[82] In 2015, RAF Typhoon fighters scrambled to escort two Russian bombers, that had entered British and Irish controlled airspace with their transponders off, away from the area.[83] It is likely, therefore, that Ireland would also seek assistance from the RAF to protect against more traditional aerial threats. It is clear that, for now, Ireland's geo-strategic neighbourhood is relatively secure. This reality is also reflected in the 2017 Eurobarometer survey which found that while Irish people are concerned about terrorism and immigration for the EU in general, they were amongst one of the least concerned about these issues as they pertain to Ireland.[84]

The current safe security environment aside, Ireland has always maintained a chronically under-funded defence force since the foundation of the state. Unlike other European neutrals, Ireland has never mustered sufficient forces and capabilities to credibly defend the country from traditional military threats. In addition, Ireland does not have a martial tradition. While this does not preclude membership of NATO — Iceland is a founding member yet maintains no army — the absence of a political appetite to provide sufficient funding to the defence forces indicates the level of priority Irish governments place on traditional defence. In part this can be explained by the country's unique historical context. Irish independence was not achieved through traditional military success, but through disruptive guerilla tactics which brought Britain to the negotiating table. During the Second World War, the possibility of invasion from either Britain or Germany was very real. Nonetheless, it did not compel the government to invest sufficiently in the military to provide a serious deterrent to conventional forces. It was assumed that in the event of invasion guerilla tactics would once again be employed in conjunction with appeals for external assistance from whichever belligerent had not invaded. In this sense, Ireland has never maintained what one would call an 'armed neutrality'.

In more recent times, a study of 600 defence force personnel in 2017 noted serious issues regarding knowledge and staffing retention. Wages in the defence forces have not matched the rising cost of living. Some Army chaplains have stated that they no longer encourage personnel to stay on and complaints regarding facilities and the treatment of female staff who have returned to duty after pregnancy have been highlighted. Air Corps staff have also signaled their concern for safety standards in aircraft maintenance.[85] Rather illuminatingly, during an interview for NATO's official magazine (NATO Review) in 2013, former Irish Minister for Justice and Defence Alan Shatter focused on the possibilities for greater financial cooperation in response to a question about the need for a shift of focus in Ireland from national to international concerns.[86] This exchange brought to the fore an important inhibitor to deeper relations between Ireland and NATO, the weak political appetite to fund defence in general.

The focus of Ireland's defence forces remains fixed on domestic security, domestic inter-agency assistance, peace support training and missions, and capability maintenance and development. Domestically, Ireland's defence forces perform numerous support and civic tasks for other government agencies. On a day-to-day basis they are engaged in activities ranging from the protection of physical cash transfers between banks, emergency assistance to local authorities during bad weather and flooding, an air ambulance service for the Health Service Executive (HSE), and the provision of a fishery protection service.[87] Developing Civil Defence and enhancing inter-agency collaboration in emergency and non-emergency situations remains a central objective of the Irish defence forces, as set out in the Department of Defence's Statement of Strategy 2016 – 2019.[88] Contributions to international defence and security issues remain within the field of policy-making, peacekeeping and interoperability. To maintain these activities, Ireland spends 0.5% of GDP on

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80 Stephen Collins, 'Ireland and UK agree historic defence agreement', The Irish Times, 12 January 2015. See also: British Ministry of Defence, 'UK and Ireland sign historic defence agreement', 19 January 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-ireland-sign-historic-defence-agreement [cited 11 - 12 - 17]

81 Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on European Union. See: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/mutual_defence.html [cited 15 - 12 - 17]

82 Seán O'Riordan, 'RAF tornado jets could shoot down hijacked planes in Irish airspace', Irish Examiner, 8 August 2016.

83 Dan Griffin, 'Russian aircraft entered Irish controlled airspace – IAA', The Irish Times, 19 February 2015.

84 European Union, Standard Eurobarometer 87: First Results (European Commission, Spring 2017).

85 Conor Lally, 'Defence Forces Under Siege: 600 staff paint a grim picture', The Irish Times, 23 October 2017.

86 Alan Shatter interview with Paul King, NATO Review, 26 April 2013, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2013/Partnerships-NATO-2013/Second-video-Irish-minister/EN/index.htm [cited 03 - 12 - 17]

87 Government of Ireland, Statement of Strategy 2011 – 2014, (Department of Defence and Defence Forces, 2012), pp. 8 – 9. See also: Defence Forces Ireland, official website, http://www.military.ie/en/info-centre/what-we-do/ [cited 15 - 12 - 17]

88 Government of Ireland, Statement of Strategy 2016 – 2019 (Department of Defence and Defence Forces, 2016).

defence.[89] This is similar to Luxembourg, NATO's lowest spending member and far from NATO's 2% of GDP guideline.[90] Therefore, it is unlikely that the government would seek full NATO membership and the extra funding commitments that could imply. The EU's PESCO projects will receive funding through the European Defence Fund (EDF) and are more likely to engage Irish interest.[91]

The final challenge regards Ireland's future participation in the PfP. As EU defence and security cooperation commitments increase, it is unclear what effect this may have on Ireland's commitment to the NATO programme. Improved EU cooperation and interoperability over the long-term may undercut the primary rationale for Ireland's involvement. Though alignments between NATO and the EU on security and defence matters are heralded as efforts for both institutions to complement one another, a unified and robust EU defence and security apparatus could conceivably diminish the benefits Ireland reaps through NATO. Should the cost of maintaining membership or partnership with what may develop into two competing security organisations become a burning issue, it is significantly more plausible that the Irish government would preference EU structures over NATO. Furthermore, cutting NATO ties could be seen by a future Irish government as a means to quell opposition to deeper EU defence cooperation. Brexit has brought this consideration more to the fore. As staunch Atlanticists, the UK has long advocated for the maintenance of NATO in Europe over a common EU defence apparatus. In contrast, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has advocated the creation of an EU army,[92] and in September 2017 French President Emmanuel Macron called for the EU to have the capacity to act autonomously in military and security matters.[93] Barring a dramatic volte-face in British politics, the absence of British objections to the scope and degree of deeper EU defence cooperation will likely re-invigorate the ambitions of European elites who envision a more dynamic, robust and wide-ranging EU defence capability.

In a sign that Ireland is committed to following other EU members some way down this path, the Irish parliament voted to sign up to the EU's permanent structured co-operation (PESCO) on security and defence issues in December 2017. This mechanism will provide an annual combined EU budget of Ð500m for EU security projects until 2021 when the sum will increase to Ð1.5bn per annum. The Irish government has stated that participation will not affect Ireland's narrowly defined 'military neutrality', and the 'triple-lock' remains effectively intact as PESCO projects will operate on an opt-in or opt-out basis. The degree to which these projects will overlap with the activities Ireland engages in under the PfP may be crucial to the continuing importance of the Irish-NATO relationship. From an Irish perspective is the shared budget arrangement which may reduce the burden on the Irish taxpayer to fund expensive overseas peacekeeping missions. Savings will also likely be made through PESCO via pooled procurement which will lead to cost reductions in the purchase of equipment through economies of scale. Criticism of this development has been muted in the Irish media due to ongoing negotiations regarding the ramifications of Brexit for the Irish border with Northern Ireland. Parliamentary debate of the issue was brief and took place under the shadow of head-line grabbing complications in the Brexit negotiations. However, some left-wing politicians did voice their concerns in the Dáil, particularly regarding the use of satellite systems to monitor the EU's border and the belief that Ireland has signed up to join an EU army.[94]

While no immediate case presents itself for the Irish government to abandon the PfP, it remains to be seen how PESCO and other future common EU defence initiatives will affect the Irish-NATO relationship. This question is also predicated on the future of NATO itself. The depth of the United States' commitment to NATO and the low-levels of financial commitment to funding the alliance, especially since the 2008 financial crash, ensure NATO's future remains in some doubt. Though US President Donald Trump ultimately back-tracked on his 2016 campaign claims that NATO was obsolete, his America First policy and occasionally isolationist rhetoric are far from re-assuring that his commitment to NATO as an international security institution is reliable. The confluence of deeper EU-level cooperation and uncertainty surrounding NATO's future make predictions regarding Ireland's continued participation in the PfP difficult to forecast.

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89   Based on 2016 figures, see: Government of Ireland, Spending Review 2017: Defence Vote Group (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, July 2017), p. 13.

90   Based on 2016 figures, see: NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2009 – 2016) (Public Diplomacy Division Press Release, 13 March 2017), p. 3.

91   European External Action Service, 'Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) – Fact Sheet',
https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/34226/Permanent%20Structured%20Cooperation%20(PESCO)%20-%20Factsheet [cited 15 - 12 - 17]

92   Andrew Sparrow, 'Jean-Claude Juncker calls for EU army', The Guardian, 8 March 2015.

93   Mehreen Khan, Jim Brunsden and Michael Acton, 'Six areas where France's Emannuel Macron wants to shake up Europe', Financial Times, 27 September 2017.

94   Mick Wallace TD stated PESCO was effectively an EU army and that if Ireland joined PESCO it would be "the final nail in the coffin of Irish neutrality". See: https://www.rte.ie/news/politics/2017/1207/925760-pesco/ [cited 07 - 12 - 17]

Conclusion

Continued opportunities exist within the Irish-NATO relationship for deepening interoperability, capability development, enhancing Ireland's profile through training programmes, and through contributions to NATO peacekeeping and crisis management missions. Ireland prides itself on its contributions to peace support missions and training international defence forces in countering terrorism through bomb handling and disruption techniques. However, the prospects for Ireland becoming a NATO member remain low. Neutrality is still overwhelmingly popular in Ireland, and concern for the protection of this foreign policy option consistently complicates Ireland's ratification of major EU treaties. Furthermore, Irish military neutrality, though narrowly defined as non-membership of military alliances, obviously still precludes full membership of NATO.

Nonetheless, the door is not fully closed. Successive Irish governments have repeatedly defeated attempts from Opposition parties to enshrine neutrality in the Irish constitution. Irish governments prefer the pragmatic flexibility of their narrow definition of 'military neutrality'. The current majority partner in the Ireland's minority government, Fine Gael, also counts a number of anti-neutrality members amongst its ranks, which keeps alive the possibility that the Irish government will one day take steps which further challenge the normative view the Irish population holds regarding neutrality. Were a future government to unpick the 'triple-lock' or abandon neutrality altogether, it is more likely that this would be the result of EU common defence developments than the allure of NATO membership. The Irish population is the most pro-EU of the member states and defence developments in that institution will likely remain Ireland's primary focus.[95]

At present, however, the island's security environment presents few compelling reasons to abandon neutrality. Ireland's defence and security needs are supported by EU membership and the mutual defence clause, and bilateral security links with the United Kingdom. Prospects also remain remote so long as the Ireland's defence capacity remains a low priority. The Irish government can currently fulfill its desire to engage in peacekeeping operations, but has historically shown little inclination to invest in its defence forces for other purposes. Were Ireland to join NATO, it is unclear how it would contribute much further than it currently already can through the Partnership for Peace. In the short and medium-term, it is likely that efforts involving the enhancement of interoperability through NATO will continue in tandem with deeper EU collaboration on security and defence issues through PESCO in accordance with the Lisbon Treaty. The long-prophesied EU army remains on the horizon, but further steps taken in its direction may one day lead Ireland to a fork in the road regarding neutrality. At that point, NATO's role itself may be in serious question.

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95 Based on 2017 Eurobarometer findings, 58% of Irish people have a positive image of the EU. See: European Union, Standard Eurobarometer 87: First Results (European Commission, Spring 2017).

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