

# Deconstructing the myth: A study of Irish neutrality, 1939-1973

Written by Eugene Quinn

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## Deconstructing the myth: A study of Irish neutrality, 1939-1973

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Amongst a national literature obsessed with state partition and sectarian conflict, the issue of Irish neutrality is a minor concept, primarily due to the acceptance of Éire[1] as a neutral entity in a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe dominated by hot and cold conflict. This mythology is ignorant of the reality, making reappraisal of the 'neutrality' issue critical for a better understanding of Ireland's international doctrine. Compared with other topics, writing on Irish neutrality is a small field, but most works claim the Irish Republic as a defiant neutral in the midst of international engagement.[2] The considerable body of literature claiming state neutrality has been offered further support historically by dominant political figures such as Eamon de Valera, who claimed: "There was, for this state, only one possible policy, neutrality." [3] Recent government commitments upholding defence of perceived military non-partisanship[4] have complimented this rhetoric, instituting the idea of Éire as the peace-living exception surrounded by international belligerents, an illusion which became a shibboleth for the Irish people.

This theory remained uncontested until Trevor Salmon's *Unneutral Ireland* became the first revisionist text on state non-partisanship, claiming Éire as a non-belligerent, pro-Western force, economically dependent and ideologically aligned to capitalist powers.[5] Salmon's challenge opened the way for further academic writing, Robert McNamara suggesting an Irish philosophy "in favour of European integration and a pro-American foreign policy." [6] This position has been further supported by former Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald, who believed "The success... of neutrality during the war led to the conversion of the pragmatic decision to remain a non-belligerent into a myth of traditional neutrality." [7] Development of revisionist texts provoked a challenge through Karen Devine's 'Comparative Critique'. Focusing on the European neutrals such as Austria and Switzerland, Devine dismissed Salmon's revisionism in particular, rejecting neutrality as a comparative concept, whilst also defending Irish non-partisanship as a robust construct.[8] Devine's criticism of Salmon's structure may be valid, but her contextual argument, like other sources, does not reflect the realities of the national position, a reality that will be supported in this essay.

For effective analysis, simplification of the matter is required. Previous studies of Irish neutrality have been complicated by different perceptions of neutrality as either a military, economic or political construct.[9] This structural confusion has been accompanied by unworkable contextual comparisons with other European neutrals that have unnecessarily complicated discussion on Éire's non-partisanship. But the most significant problem has been a paucity of primary evidence, making justification of revisionist perspectives on state neutrality difficult. With the recent release of such documentation, accurate analysis of Ireland's stance can now be drawn. Stripping the topic down to a basic reflection of whether Éire *supported* any particular side during conflict will allow the reality of state foreign policy to be displayed. In this essay, I intend to challenge the myth of Ireland as an international neutral in a time of conflict. Through the use of primary evidence comprised mainly of government documents and parliamentary debates from 1939-1973, the 'Unneutral' theory will be justified, refuting the widely held delusion over Ireland's detachment. Specific focus upon the actions and rhetoric of statesmen during World War II will provide the starting point, following onto study of the Irish stance in relation to the Cold War constructs of supranational organizations and economic integration.

An ideal research collection would cover a national reaction to the issue of neutrality, but the truth is that social and media influence upon government policy decisions were non-existent, a point reflected by an absence of relevant

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documentation. It must be acknowledged that Irish society's sentimental ties to the non-partisan concept forced outward political claims of neutrality,[10] hiding a taciturn reality. The secretive nature of this pragmatism left the public disconnected from foreign policy discourse, a position enhanced by the public mainly focusing on their standards of living rather than foreign policy.[11] Public disengagement with international activity was exacerbated by the scarce media resources during the period, financial restrictions limiting the scope of the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* to national affairs.[12] Additionally, state broadcaster Radio Telefís Éireann was not fully established until the 1960s, its own coverage of international affairs very limited.[13] This left international affairs exclusively in the control of state officials, who believed in the need for foreign policy to be the preserve of the political elite given their rationality.[14] Although the realities of being a small dependency in a world controlled by superpowers pushed Éire towards a Western stance, Irish politicians across both major parties willingly accelerated this shift. Through their words and actions, a place among the nations of the 'Free World' was created; the essentially uncontested myth of state neutrality may suggest otherwise, but Irish non-partisanship, whilst being an original national policy, became progressively obsolete in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## Historiography

Before a study of Irish 'neutrality' in the specified timeframe can be conducted, it is important to understand why Christianity and Éire's relationship with Britain are the two key strands that have guided Irish foreign policy, and how they feed into the narrative of Irish history before independence and establishment of foreign policy. The dominant element of the Irish identity, Christianity has been *the* influential tenet explaining much of Irish government policy across a range of issues since state formation, foreign policy a part of this process. Established on the island in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD, the Roman Catholic branch became the exclusive religious movement in the state,[15] a position not challenged until the 16<sup>th</sup> Century by Henry VIII. The arrival of England's Protestant King signalled the most dramatic upheaval in the history of the island, Éire being subsumed into the British Empire[16] against the will of a Catholic population opposed to colonial rule and the imposition of alternative religion.[17] Discontent turned into aggression repressed most infamously by Oliver Cromwell,[18] fostering extreme anti-English sentiment. This antipathy only grew with the national disaster of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century potato famine, millions of Irish dying with English negligence perceived as the catalyst.[19] Bitterness towards colonial rule was channelled into political challenges, the campaign led by Charles Parnell most notable,[20] but it was the violent republicanism effectively organized by the Irish Republican Army in 1916 that facilitated long-sought secession.

Identified in Éire as the 'Rising', events of Easter Week 1916 forced a British rethink over maintained control of Irish territory,[21] concessions leading to the declaration of the Irish Republic's foundation in 1919 by the secessionist Dáil Éireann parliament. With creation of the state came the need for Ireland to define its relationship towards Britain, creating the second elemental factor in national foreign policy. While Irish independence had occurred, leaders of the new state such as de Valera and William Cosgrave believed Éire would be perceived internationally as influenced by colonial masters if independent wasn't restated.[22] In a bid to facilitate the national prestige believed necessary for affirmation of state sovereignty, figureheads separated themselves by establishing Éire as an international neutral. Their opportunity to assert this non-partisan stance distant from British ideals was taken through the post-World War League of Nations organization. Created primarily to ensure no further global conflicts,[23] Ireland's faithful commitment to the ideals evoked in the League's Charter concerning small nation rights[24] and mediation of international tensions[25] strengthened recognition of the state's independence. [26]

The end of peace saw the end of Irish idealism however, ideological aggression of the 1930s undoing attempts to stabilize international harmony. Fascism's rise brought with it the re-emergence of national aggrandizement, Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and Italy's 1935 incursion in Abyssinia genuinely testing the League's authority over member nations. Despite attempts at facilitating peace alongside threatening sanctions against belligerents, the League's capacity to fulfil its Covenant proved wanting. For Irish statesmen that fully bought into the League as a force for peace, failure of the organization proved alienating. This was reflected in de Valera's statement to the Dáil as Taoiseach[27] on the Abyssinian affair, dismissing the League's Covenant as a "dead letter" by failing to protect Abyssinian independence.[28] The League's collapse ushered in a new era of conflict in Europe, driven by ideological disputes between democratic and totalitarian forces, culminating in the devastating Second World War. Although Ireland initially professed ideological and military neutrality as the continent drifted into war, reality

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necessitated a rethink in Irish policy. As much as League of Nations prominence stated Éire's autonomy, separate from Britain, the onset of conflict challenged Ireland's capacity to survive if forced into battle. Aware of fascist leaders' expansionist intentions, Irish statesmen abandoned their neutral tendencies in favour of supporting the Allied war effort, their position guided by pragmatism over the dependency upon Britain and ideological repudiation of Axis philosophy.

## Ireland and World War II

Despite the obvious incapability of the Irish to challenge major power intentions as part of the war, Éire's desire to remain independent throughout conflict was stated at its outbreak by leaders, de Valera speaking of "dying in a good cause" by defending Irish detachment. [29] The absurdity of this position was later mocked by the well known Irish comedian Shaun Connors in a Cold War context:

"Russian diplomat goes 'Irish population, how many?'"

'Ah maybe around 4 million' says the Irishman

'In Russia, is over 200 million.'

'Irish official says 'Right, no war so'

'Why no war?' goes the Russian'

'Well sure we'd have nowhere to put all those prisoners of war' the Irish fella says!"

Connors and his audiences knew the reality behind the joke, a reality Éire's statesmen soon came to realize when the potentially pernicious prospects for the state in trying to fight any belligerents alone dawned. Outbreak of war in 1939 saw the 'Great Powers' of Europe re-engage in military conflict, Britain and France initially at the forefront of defending democracy, many smaller states reliant upon the Allied leaders for their independence. Much as Irish leaders declared independence from wartime alliance, national weaknesses forced alignment, especially with Britain.

Failure to adopt progressive economic policies that could ensure Irish state self-dependence meant Ireland became heavily dependent upon British exporting and importing to safeguard basic survival. Even during an 'Economic War' between the two states in the early 1930s that saw prohibitive tariffs and restrictions imposed in a fit of brinksmanship, Republic receipt of British goods never fell below 50% of their total imports, exports to Britain consistently above the 90% mark.[30] World conflict further circumscribed the trading possibilities for Éire, as nations either adopted economic insularity[31] or became subsumed into the Axis sphere, drawing Ireland even closer to Britain. Declassified documents show developing trade patterns in WWII, Irish import of Allied goods reaching a base of 70% that was maintained throughout the war, with the export relationship showing 99.9% of goods going to Britain and aligned states in 1942.[32] Total Allied dominance of trade made Ireland economically dependent upon the grouping, thereby also making Éire's autonomy reliant upon Western forces, a point made starkly by TD Patrick Burton. In a speech to the Dáil, Burton noted that due to trading circumstances, "If those people say to us tomorrow 'Get off your pedestal of neutrality or we will starve you', we have no option but to do so." While neutrality was the Irish Republic's official line, financial colonization was the reality.

As the leaders of the pro-democracy Europeans, British and French forces helped in the defence of Allied supporters, a relationship that not only saw the major nations attempt to ensure territorial protection of smaller allies, but provide them with resources aimed at reinforcing military capabilities.[33] While Irish leaders remained outside of this official grouping, Éire's military dependence upon Allied forces was almost as great as their economic reliance. The Republic's armed personnel; totalling 20,000 men at most,[34] exemplified the inability of the state to defend itself from aggressors, TD Thomas Johnson's claim of Irish military resources being akin to "putting up an umbrella against a bomb" appearing no more suitable than in describing Ireland's wartime scenario.[35] Éire's perceived vulnerability to aggrandizing forces meant covert action was required to maintain state liberty, contradicting political

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claims to neutrality. The Irish government sought increased armaments from abroad, officially citing a need to ensure that belligerent nations in WWII would respect the Republic's 'neutrality', but the source of the weapons rather undermined Ireland's supposed non-partisanship. In a statement to the Dáil, de Valera declared that "We sought them in America; we sought them in Britain; we sought them on the Continent even" and that Irish defences were as a consequence stronger.[36] Indeed, official documentation revealed discussions between Irish and British representatives, with Britain agreeing to supply Éire with rifles, explosives and gas masks as precautionary measures in the event of an invasion on Irish territory.[37]

In light of warnings such as the Polish claim in 1940 that Nazi forces were like to invade within 24 hours,[38] the Irish government felt it necessary to further entrench this military relationship with Britain by establishing an agreement on territorial defence. The understanding, stated in documents as "Éire would fight if attacked by Germany and would call in the UK the moment it became necessary"[39] underlined Ireland's military dependence and undermined political bluster regarding defensive capabilities. Agreement between the two states over territorial protection completed a process Éire attempted to facilitate even before the war,[40] planning for any deleterious effects stemming from conflict. While wartime Defence Minister Oscar Traynor implored that Ireland was able to "prevent violation of its neutrality by the belligerents,"[41] the dearth of resources provided the truth on Irish defence capabilities. Failure to strengthen the relationship with Britain through agreements and supplies would have left Ireland even more exposed to conquest than was already the case given their small size. Already economically dependent upon the trade arrangement with Britain, request of military support thereby became far easier for Irish leaders who were acting to retain national sovereignty. Economic and military security provided by the Allies in turn necessitated Irish support for the 'United Nations'[42] war effort, but the plainly evident national support for the Allies means this was not a process forced upon Irish representatives.

Fine Gael TD James Dillon may have been expelled from his party for rejecting neutrality in favour of an unequivocal pro-Western discourse,[43] but in truth Dillon's rhetoric reflected Irish actions supporting the Allied cause. Dermot Keogh's claim of the extent of Irish Republic assistance towards Britain as "unprecedented"[44] is justified when looking at the voluminous collection of documents outlining Éire's efforts to help Western forces. In addition to files on withdrawing supplies to Axis legations and allowing Allied naval forces to use Irish ports,[45] Éire's policy on military internees highlighted a partisan wartime stance. Initial policy during the Emergency[46] was to imprison both Allied and Axis military belligerents caught on operations in the state,[47] but official documentation has shown how this policy changed to reflect Ireland's position in the conflict. An appeal on behalf of British internees by wartime representative to Éire, Sir John Maffey,[48] showed that Ireland had actually released over 350 Allied internees over 6 years of conflict, far more than equivalent Axis figures.[49] This contradiction was further emphasized with the state's policy towards wartime operations by both sets of forces. Sources show how "Allied airmen are presumed to be on non-operation flights unless the contrary is proved by us and German airmen are presumed to be on operational flights unless the contrary is proved by them." [50] Such policy, incompatible with the supposed Irish wartime neutrality widely argued, exemplified the dependency in their relationship with Britain, necessitating pragmatism when required by their neighbours. Contrary wartime policy undermined Éire's claim to neutrality as much as 160,000 Irish Volunteers to the British war cause did,[51] a demonstration of how ideology also served to posit Ireland within the conflict. This level of support was based upon a popular rejection of fascism that differed from other European states where the ideology gained a footing.[52] Nazi philosophy that included an anti-clerical approach was enough of a reason for Irish society to dismiss the fascist ideology. Ironically however, the population's irrefutable defence of an illusory detachment from conflict ensured what meagre state support for fascism existed was discredited.[53] National patronage made government efforts to support the Allied war cause much easier, efforts necessitated by Éire's dependency upon Britain in particular for state survival in light of the threat from fascism. De Valera's idealistic neutrality in the League of Nations became realistic conformity amidst the spectre of hot war, this pragmatism continuing to define Irish Republic policy as the world fell into cold war after 1945.

## Ireland and supranational organizations

While it is evident to see that Ireland supported the Allied forces during the Emergency, covert actions to help the British war effort did not produce American favour after the conclusion of hostilities. The outward stance of neutrality angered US officials, who perceived Éire as at best unappreciative of Allied efforts to preserve the neutrality of states

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like the Irish Republic, at worst an enemy, the State Department alleging the Irish state of being Nazi sympathizers as late as 1944.[54] American disapproval saw Ireland fall into a position of international isolation in the aftermath of WWII, a position Irish leaders aggravated through a commitment to political principles on the issue of NATO membership. American efforts to construct military security for European nations ravaged by the economic and human costs of global conflict saw the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.[55] This effectuation the North Atlantic Treaty, signed by a dozen pro-Western nations in 1949, Ireland not included within the group. As part of a bid to reintroduce Éire into the international sphere on terms favourable to the United States, an offer was made for the state to join the NATO Alliance in January 1949.[56] However, citing contentious state partition and practical confirmation of this rejected territorial division through a military partnership including Britain,[57] Ireland refused membership and the offer was withdrawn.

Rejection of NATO membership instituted the Republic's detachment as the East-West ideological divide in world politics developed, an unpopular position amongst Irish leaders who were in truth supportive of the NATO concept. Sean MacBride, the contemporaneous Irish Minister for External Affairs, reaffirmed partition as the key inhibitor to state membership when questioned on the matter in the Dáil, but clearly posited Ireland with the cache of Western nations when claiming "With the general aim of the proposed Atlantic Pact...we are in agreement." [58] While state participation was totally blocked by the political and popular sore of partition, Irish representatives explicitly stated their support for the Western defence agreement. The Treaty's aim to protect smaller nations within Western Europe from the newly emerging threat to sovereignty produced by Soviet aggrandizement found favour amongst Irish policy-makers. Still incapable of legitimately defending their own territory, with British might badly reduced after their efforts in WWII, a communal defence strategy was appealing. However, political realities in being required to maintain the myth of neutrality barred the state from direct involvement. However, with Éire's position in the post-war struggle clear, Ireland's Western stance would instead be evoked as a part of the 'Capitalist Bloc' at the United Nations.

Created out of the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks Conference, the United Nations Organization was designed to be the effective supranational body that would prevent conflict and instigate intra-national dialogue, learning from the failure of the League of Nations.[59] Potential to use the UNO as a way of re-establishing Éire's international prominence, minded towards global peace and national self-determination, appealed to some parliamentarians supportive of neutrality. Labour leader William Norton's hopes for an idealist Irish position at the UN[60] were however dashed by William Cosgrave's announcement of the Irish delegations' policies in New York. Cosgrave's principles bore similarities to Ireland's League of Nations philosophy, but the Taoiseach's third principle proved a caveat:

- I. To uphold the terms of the UN Charter domestically and implore its effective application across the rest of the world.
- II. To maintain an independent stance within the UN General Assembly, adopting position based upon judgment of the merits of a case.
- III. To prevent the spread of Communist power and influence in the world, a position owing to Ireland's intrinsic role as a defender of global 'Christian civilization.' [61]

Cosgrave's identification of the third strand as the intrinsic element of policy at the UN[62] reflected both historical state rejection of Communism[63] based upon the atheist core in the ideology's structure and Irish fears over the system's encroachment. Apparatchik aggression which saw the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe concerned Irish leaders, the prospect of a Godless doctrine taking the same grip over Europe as totalitarianism had being anathema to statesmen. Reaction came in the form of making the third policy strand central to the Irish delegation's actions at the UNO, an ideological decision made all the easier by Soviet intransigence that delayed Ireland's entry to the UN. Cosgrave's declaration of Ireland's policy was not made until 1956, 11 years after establishment of the United Nations, Éire's entry having been blocked twice previously[64] by a Soviet veto based on beliefs that Ireland would become another Western bloc vote in the General Assembly.[65] Soviet belligerence, leading to de Valera's claim that "one group deliberately, as it seemed, was setting itself out not to co-operate and to frustrate all the efforts of the other group at co-operation", [66] arguably contributed to adoption of a Western bloc stance both at the UN and in overall Irish foreign policy. As Cold War tensions reached their nadir in the 1960s, statesman adopted a deliberately

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anti-communist tone, adding to the swell of Western criticism against the USSR. Irish dialogue at UN gatherings attacked Eastern economic and political activities, speaking of Soviet attempts to sabotage democracy through attempts to create economic depression[67] and imposing “undemocratically elected” governments in Eastern Europe.[68] Such words were reflected in a voting pattern which saw the pro-Western line supported three times as often as the Eastern position in UN Assembly polling by the Éire delegation.[69] Ironically, it is in amongst this support for a Western position where some of the key examples which give credence to the myth of Irish neutrality lie, no case more notable than Ireland’s call for discussion of Communist Chinese representation. Call for discussion on the ‘Chinese Question’ at the UN may be highlighted as one of the prime examples in a “period of independent policy-making” by Aoife Bhreatnach, but Ireland’s position was quickly brought into line by American pressure. Ireland’s opening gambit on ‘Red China’s’ representation in the General Assembly suggests autonomy; primary evidence shows later abrogation of neutral inclinations in favour of the traditional Irish desire for international prestige.

Like all Irish foreign representatives, External Affairs Minister Frank Aiken had an explicit distaste for the communist ideology, but on occasion this did not prevent him from pursuing matters in the interest of the UN’s strive for global harmony. Aiken’s own personal triumph came with the establishment of the Non-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, committing nuclear powers to limits on their armament levels.[70] Conversely, the Minister’s moment of notoriety was in his support of the Indian initiative calling for discussion of Chinese UN representation. Éire’s leader at the UN restated his abhorrence of Chinese communist repression in a speech to the General Assembly, but affirmed a commitment to upholding the UN Charter, which he hoped to see implemented in the Chinese state by communist leaders.[71] Concessions potentially legitimizing the spread of communism to strategically important areas of the world proved beyond reproach for American officials, who used their diplomatic influence to pull Éire back into line with Western policy. The emergence of Irish ambassador Frederick Boland as a main candidate for Presidency of the General Assembly in 1960 offered the Irish Republic an opportunity to further enhance their international prestige but Boland’s hopes for success depended upon American support. Concerns amongst US officials were that an independent President could harm national interests at a time of severe tension in the Cold War struggle, therefore Boland’s conformity needed to be ensured before endorsement.[72] Condemnation of communist Chinese persecution against Tibetan monks[73] by the Irish delegation appeared to show the necessary obedience, the US consequently choosing to support Boland’s candidacy, their own decision bound up in the pragmatism of Czechoslovakia’s Jiri Nosek being the alternative.[74] For Irish leaders that still perceived state sovereignty as unsure, having one of their own presiding over an international body of such magnitude afforded Éire invaluable levels of global esteem, helping to further state their presence as a legitimate entity.

Boland’s election as President fulfilled Irish desires for certifying international prominence, but their reliance upon America for this success ensured presidential and delegation alignment with Western/American interests. Éire representatives’ calls for discussion of the ‘Chinese Question’ became condemnation of both China[75] and other communist forces, the delegation’s silence regarding the Vietnamese conflict being unique amongst a swell of global condemnation of American actions.[76] The Republic’s stance was noted in the Dáil by Noel Bröwne, the TD saying “after the appointment of Mr Boland, I believe our position deteriorated and we became pro-British and pro-American.”[77] Arguably with their voting record, Éire’s position had always been pro-British and pro-American, even during the spell known as the ‘golden era’[78] for an apparently neutral delegation. Boland’s election definitively saw the end of surprises by the Irish at the UN though, leaders implicitly aware of the debt owed to America for Ireland’s Presidency of the UNGA. On top of Irish ideological opposition to Communism, represented by an obvious voting pattern in the General Assembly, America’s facilitation of greater Irish presence on the world stage ensured Éire’s pro-Western position in the UN. Evident Capitalist bloc patronage by Irish figures through supranational constructs goes some way to delegitimizing the myth of Éire as a Cold War neutral, a process brought to its completion by a new set of political leaders. The arrival of Lemass, Lynch and other Western bloc advocates into the Irish government framework at the same time as Boland led ‘Free World’ representation in New York helped to further underline Irish partisanship. For state leaders, the need for sovereignty was replaced by the desire for social enrichment, the Western bloc construct of the European Economic Community providing Irish leaders with the structure to accelerate state development, whilst also eroding any claims to Cold War neutrality.

## Ireland and economic integration

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De Valera's retirement in 1959 saw the coerced pragmatism of 'Dev' replaced by Lemass' avowed pro-Western position. As a consequence, it became a case of when, and not if Éire would seek integration into the developing Western European construct, based upon political, economic and military union[79] for pro-democratic nations. Economic unification provided Ireland with the ideal opportunity to seek both increased standards of living and Western European union. However, in truth the integration had already begun with prior Irish acceptance of Marshall Plan funding. Along with providing military security, American policymakers set in motion regional economic regeneration through the European Recovery Programme. The project afforded financial aid to European nations ravaged by conflict, in a bid to ensure the maintained capitalist dominance within Western Europe, national flirtations with communism proving a concern to US leaders.[80] Although Ireland was not the primary target for American charity given the state's entrenched faith in the capitalist system, financial provisions provided an opportunity to incorporate the Irish Republic into a Western bloc of nations after rejection of NATO.

The original intention was for Irish leaders to state the country's economic autonomy by rejecting available ERP funding.[81] A desperate shortage of resources coupled with Western pressure meant such an option was denied to Éire diplomats. Ireland's underdeveloped manufacturing system required importation of some essential goods for popular consumption, a dependency fulfilled through access to British trade and Irish Republic reserves of convertible sterling. American pressure upon Britain to end sterling convertibility to all nations, a process enacted in 1947, badly affected the Irish state's capacity to act independently. Unable to either make goods or purchase them using accumulated wealth reserves, the state came to a practical standstill for five weeks until America provided emergency supplies.[82] Directed by public sentiment towards the half-truth of military neutrality that carried ramifications for office-holders who challenged the idea, Irish leaders reluctantly asserted their detachment from NATO. There was no such public outcry at the offer of aid from America, its effects going beyond challenging Ireland's non-partisanship, funding directly impacting upon the public wellbeing. Éire's economic susceptibility meant provision of goods became provision of aid, IR£133 million of loans acquired from the ERP fund, economically stabilizing the nation.[83] Although there was security, Ireland's economy was now dependent not only on British trade but US funding, further eroding the myth of state neutrality. This illusory concept was entirely disintegrated with the expansion of the European Coal and Steel Community into the EEC. Primarily interested in economic advancement through multilateralism, but with membership open to all that "Resolved to strengthen the safeguards of peace and liberty,"[84] the EEC became the representation of the Western Bloc in Europe. Irish interest in joining this new grouping was strong, but the realities of their relationship with Britain made their application non-negotiable.

State sovereignty at the time of the European Economic Community's development was not genuinely in question, but the economic truth was that Éire remained as vulnerable at the time of European expansion as in the Second World War. Financial meltdown was prevented largely by the state's trade with Britain, amounting to IR£225 million in 1960,[85] 11.6% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.[86] Britain's interest in Common Market participation[87] therefore ensured a similar Irish position, leaders fully aware of the dangers that came with potential economic isolation. Capable of maintaining moderate economic health through favourable British trading, the Irish hand was forced by possible loss of such a structural support to the Common Market, with no other viable trade arrangement suiting Éire.[88] Awareness of these realities saw the Irish EEC application submitted alongside its British equivalent in 1961.[89] Although a Europhile leader,[90] Lemass pointed to "The elementary facts of our trade situation"[91] as ensuring Éire applied for EEC membership alongside Britain, a point made further evident by contemporaneous Finance Secretary Ken Whitaker: "We have applied for membership of the EEC because it would be economic disaster for us to be outside the community if Britain is in it. We cannot afford to have our advantageous position in the British market turned into one of exclusion by a tariff wall." [92]

Whitaker's blunt claim that Ireland's economic survival was essentially reliant upon Britain and potential EEC membership stripped away any pretensions of neutrality. Depending upon Britain may have been a difficult idea for some statesmen to accept, but loss of their neighbours' protection and resultant economic disaster was a far worse scenario for the Irish Republic. This necessity to conform to the realities of the Anglo-Irish partnership was in any case complimented by the desires of the political leadership to pursue membership, immaterial of guiding realities. Accession to the EEC was aggressively sought by the Irish government over a number of years, rhetoric combining with actions to break down the myth of Éire's 'neutrality' in the Cold War era.

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A 1963 Dáil Debate on Common Market negotiations saw TD Brendan Corish challenge Lemass on the Republic's disassociation from their supposedly traditional policy of neutral foreign policy. The exchange definitively signalled the Irish government's position on international relations in the Cold War era. In responding to Corish's claim that there was no need to present Éire as definitively anti-communist during negotiations on EEC accession, Lemass replied: "Lemass: I certainly did not want the country to be represented as being neutral in that sense. Corish: Even the Hottentots[93] know we are anti-Communist. Lemass: In that case we are on one side and not neutral." [94]

The Taoiseach's situation of Ireland was a public confirmation of Irish Republic policy that for a long time had embraced Western European integration, stating the previously tacit position in the Cold War struggle. Formation of a Western bloc was exemplified not only in the North Atlantic Treaty and European Recovery Programme, other Western-orientated organizations such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for European Economic Co-Operation indicated Western European union. Ireland's role as an original member of both groups, playing a part in financial maintenance of the Council and OEEC[95] (Later OECD) was an early indicator of Éire's Western identification, later reflected by desired EEC membership. Acquiescence with the Western European ideal exposed the falsehood of Irish 'neutrality', the chase for membership having effects upon Irish policy at the UN.

Akin to Ireland's League of Nations approach, the Éire delegation in New York became a successful mediator of national disputes, as shown in the argument between Italy and Austria over the South Tyrol region.[96] Tied with symbolic moments of Irish autonomy in thought, including Aiken proposing discussion of the Chinese question, Éire's successful placating of national tensions meant other nations perceived an independent arbiter interested in peace.[97] As a result, when the first South Tyrol resolution failed to hold, the Irish Republic was expected to lead resolution attempts again,[98] a move prevented by Lemass. By informing the delegation that "Having regard to our vital interest in retaining Italian good-will during the EEC negotiations, it is very important that we should not come into any conflict with them on the Tyrol question at this time,"[99] the Taoiseach ensured the favour of member nation Italy with regards to Common Market accession.

Support for member nation interests was complimented with support for collective European Community interests by Irish statesmen, even regarding the historic complication of military neutrality. Previously a concept Éire's leaders dared not to embrace; political union necessitating military alliance became a viable national policy if required, as shown in negotiations between Irish and EEC leaders. The last state policy analogous to neutrality was dismissed by Lemass in accession negotiations, the Taoiseach suggesting that the Irish government and population would accept any political requirements needed for membership, including abrogation of military separatism.[100] Confirmation of this position led to EEC Commission member Jean Rey noting how the Republic "looked forward to being full members and accepting the concomitant political commitments." [101] Any public antagonism over the potential for Ireland to be shoehorned into the Western European Union defence agreement was subsumed by the material benefits that leaders knew would arise from EEC membership. Integration into an ever-expanding economic grouping would provide Ireland with the development it so desired after years of economic stagnation, which was only prevented from becoming collapse by a tenuous trading partnership. With EEC membership, the economic and social enhancements for Éire would be considerable, whilst at the same time providing the state with security against the continuing Communist threat. Military neutrality may have become theoretically extinct with membership, but Irish leaders were very willing to forego this concept in favour of security against the 'Red Scare', a security best produced through hypothetical alliance with militarily powerful Western Europeans. Acceptance of Ireland's membership saw accession for Éire in 1973, positing the nation in the East-West European struggle beyond argument. However, it can be said the realities showed Ireland as integrating into the Western bloc for the previous 30 years. Acceptance of ERP funding at a time of high economic dependency upon Britain made any other path rather than integration unfeasible for Ireland. This volition was complimented by Irish leaders' embracing of materialism along with the state's anti-Communist, Christian ideology, with Common Market membership providing tacit military union against the Soviet threat. This support for Western ideals meant that 30 years on from de Valera's declaration of the League of Nations Covenant as a "dead letter", Irish neutrality was just the same, a concept clearly exposed by the concomitant factors of Ireland's position in Europe.

## Conclusion



# Deconstructing the myth: A study of Irish neutrality, 1939-1973

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The myth of Irish neutrality was built up over years by a collection of literature arguing Irish non-partisanship as an intrinsic part of the state's political make-up. This position was given further strength by a politicians' fear of being the figure charged with either suggesting or acting in a way that would end a policy the public held to be a representation of Ireland as an independent world actor. Salmon was the first theorist to posit a more accurate concept of Éire's stance. *Unneutral Ireland* was the first portrayal of a pro-Western Irish state both in World War II and the Cold War, but the author's argument was let down by structural flaws and a lack of definitive evidence. In solely focusing on Éire state policy as opposed to attempting comparative study with other nations' variable stances, realities surrounding the Irish Republic's position become clearer. With primary sources now readily available to support Salmon's original challenge, justifying Ireland's obvious pro-Western position in a time of global conflict is an easier task. However, this argument does come with some qualifications regarding Ireland's actions during the period

To totally dismiss the considerable amount of analysis claiming 'Irish neutrality' as historically invalid would be wholly remiss. Indeed, there is information to be taken from this literature that helps to build a wider picture of what Irish foreign policy constituted, some attempts at an independence of thought from national statesmen occurring in the timeframe. Initial neutrality reflected in the Irish League of Nations delegation was overtaken by a need for pragmatism, leaders aware of Ireland's inability to defend its sovereignty independently. Nonetheless, this did not prevent ministerial figures from occasionally acting of their own choice, Sean MacBride and Frank Aiken challenging Western conformity over the issues of NATO and China's UN position respectively. These two cases form the base for the range of literature citing the Irish Republic as an international neutral in an antagonistic era, and this body of work must be considered in order to develop a full understanding of the debate over Irish foreign policy. This is merely position-taking by theorists however, some validity in their arguments but the truth lying within the primary evidence we are now able to analyse and produce conclusions from.

Ireland's perceived neutrality is a myth not sufficiently examined by theorists, politicians or the public, an illusion that has become a widely accepted 'reality'. Study of Ireland's foreign policy from the 1930s through to the 1970s shows two key strands guiding decision-making, blending ideology with diplomatic pragmatism. Irish dependence upon major Western powers, more particularly a long-standing reliance upon Britain is one factor. America's construction of a Western democratic alliance after World War II incorporated the Irish Republic; economic help provided through ERP funding aligned to the prestigious, American-influenced appointment of Ireland's Frederick Boland as UNGA President to entrench Ireland's Western support further. This position was already well-established by Éire's position at the bottom of the international food chain, dependency upon Britain in a range of ways folding Ireland into the Capitalist bloc by proxy. With Britain becoming increasingly subservient to the US, their satellites were made to subscribe to the same position, Ireland's total dependency upon Britain for economic and military support nullifying any claims to state neutrality, a point noted by Irish politicians. [102] Volition was essential to positing Ireland in the respective global struggles, but ideology was just as important to this process. Éire's incontrovertible Catholic dominance made Western bloc conformity a reality, the anti-religion philosophy key to Nazism and Communism reviling Irish leaders committed to Christian principles. This was reflected in the early stages of the period largely by rhetoric and covert activities, becoming explicit stating of Ireland's position, confirmed by becoming a member of the EEC. Even in the years after EEC accession, Irish ministers continued to pledge support to the concept of state neutrality, but political points-scoring targeted at a public still supportive of the 'No NATO' shibboleth[103] didn't reflect the facts of Ireland's stance. Over a period of more than 30 years, respective Irish leaders committed themselves to a foreign policy supporting Western nations in conflict with totalitarian and communist forces. Failure to evince this approach to the public, combined with a collection of symbolic moments suggesting Irish autonomy, gave rise to the acceptance of Éire's neutrality in foreign policy. Through access to primary documentation, we can, and should now challenge this myth first argued in the 'Unneutral' thesis; history may portray Éire as the champion of independence, but the truth is that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Ireland was a true Cold Warrior of the Western bloc.

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[87] P. Keatinge, *The Formulation of...*, p.60

[88] Although the European Free Trade Agency, created as a reaction to the EEC, provided another European economic organization for Ireland to consider joining, the benefits of union were best seen amongst Scandinavian participants, a key reason for Britain's decision to abandon EFTA in favour of seeking EEC Membership. See D. Urwin, *The Community of Europe...*, pp.117-8 and throughout the remainder of the source, which serves as an effective appraisal of early European economic integration

[89] P. Wylie, *Ireland and the Cold War...*, pp.46-7

[90] B. Farrell, *Seán Lemass* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), p.118

[91] Dáil Éireann, Volume 191, 05 July 1961, European Economic Community – Convention on Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development: Motion of Approval, 267

[92] Text of speech delivered by T. Whitaker in Conway's Hotel, Claremorris, Co. Mayo, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1962, National Archives of Ireland, NAI File D/T S17246A/62, European Economic Community

[93] Indigenous African tribe, otherwise known as the Khoikhoi.

[94] Dáil Éireann, Volume 199, 05 February 1963, Adjournment Motion: EEC Negotiations, 1035-6

[95] Dáil Éireann, Volume 143, 16 December 1953 – Oral Answers – Payments to International Organizations, 2427

[96] J. Skelly, 'National Interests and International Mediation: Ireland's South Tyrol Initiative at the

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United Nations, 1960-1' in M. Kennedy and J. Skelly (eds.), *Irish Foreign Policy...*, p.299. This chapter provides an effective description of the South Tyrol dispute should it be required.

[97] *Ibid.*, p.302

[98] *Ibid.*, p.305-6

[99] Lemass letter to Aiken on proposals relating to new session of General Assembly, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1961, University College Dublin Archives, Frank Aiken Papers, File P104/6328

[100] Minutes of meeting, meeting of Lemass and Hallstein (President of EEC), 1962, National Archives of Ireland, File NAI DEA 99/3/129, Ireland and the EEC following suspension of British-EEC negotiations

[101] Taoiseach on EEC Unity, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1965, National Archives of Ireland, File NAI DEA 99/3/129, Ireland and the EEC...

[102] Dáil Éireann, Volume 247, 23 June 1970, Membership of EEC: Motion, 1702-3

[103] T. Salmon, 'Irish Neutrality: Myth or Reality?', *The Round Table*, Vol. 290 (1984), p.212

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