

Defending

Irish Neutrality

AN ALTERNATIVE
TO THE APPROACH
OF THE
IRISH GOVERNMENT



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The principle of neutrality

The right to determine one's own relationship with other countries and to pursue an independent foreign policy is a key component of the principles of self-determination and sovereignty.

Sinn Féin believes that the principle of neutrality is a fundamental republican principle and was one of the cornerstones of foundation of the Irish state.

Neutrality has earned the Irish state significant good-will abroad and is essential to our ongoing positive relationships with other countries. Furthermore, as a state with extensive experience of peace-keeping and conflict resolution, Sinn Féin believes that we are in a uniquely strong position as a people to advance a policy of positive neutrality.

Erosion of Neutrality by successive Irish Governments

Successive Irish Governments have allowed the principle of Irish neutrality to be eroded. In 1997, the Fianna Fáil Government signed the state up to NATO's Partnership for Peace despite a pre-election pledge to call a referendum on the issue. The same Government broadened the mandate for international force deployment to include deployment with non UN forces.

Since 2002, Shannon Airport has been used to effectively become a forward military base for the US military. It is estimated that, in that time, nearly 3,000,000 US soldiers have now passed through Shannon Airport. In recent months, film footage of US Vice President Mike Pence greeting US troops in full combat gear on a stopover in Shannon Airport was a sobering reminder of the continued erosion of our neutral status. Pence's blasé attitude to another state's neutrality is what occurs when the state does nothing to assert that neutrality, rather it acts to undermine it.

Recently, in an uncustomary frank statement, Fine Gael's four MEPs have dropped the party's pretence of supporting neutrality completely and have called for its abandonment. This should be a huge wakeup call that we must now act to defend and reinforce Ireland's neutral position.

The escalation of involvement with EU military structures and the recent expulsion of a Russian diplomat in supposed solidarity with another EU member state under the pretence of common defence and security cooperation (CDSC) clearly shows that this Government is prepared to sacrifice our neutrality and independent foreign policy at the altar of European integration unless stopped.



Increased European Militarisation

The Nice and Lisbon treaties, initially rejected by the Irish people, have subsequently transferred political, economic and military power away from Member states and deferred it to centralised EU bodies.

This has coincided with an increased EU spend on military and evidence shows that this continues to increase across the EU. In 2016, the EU nations spend a combined total of €199 billion on defence.

There are growing demands that each EU member state must increase the proportion of military spending to at least 2% of GDP, in line with current NATO spending targets. This represents a five fold increase in defence spending for Ireland, despite clear demands in areas such as housing and health.

PESCO

Possibly the most alarming action taken against neutrality by any Irish Government, is the signing up to PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), the EU's military alliance. Described as the "sleeping beauty" of the Lisbon Treaty by the EU Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker, it lays the foundation for a full security and defence union. He has further intimated that a "fully fledged Defence Union" will be in place by 2025. This growing militarisation of the EU was the primary reason for the rejection of this treaty initially by the Irish people.

The then Foreign Affairs Minister, Micheál Martin, sold the Irish people a pup by fudging the issue of neutrality when his Fianna Fáil Government forced the Irish people to vote for a second time on the Lisbon Treaty.

By signing up to PESCO after a cursory Dáil debate and vote, this Government has betrayed the Irish people with the active collusion and collaboration of the Fianna Fáil party. Signing up to PESCO was completely unnecessary as it was assumed by other EU states that the Irish state would not participate in PESCO as a result of our neutrality. There was no expectation or requirement for Ireland to join.

By participating in PESCO the Irish Government has committed the Irish people to increasing defence spending and implementing a defence policy which is fully aligned with NATO's strategic aims. It commits us to funding military projects and missions irrespective of Irish participation and by providing troops for deployment or back-up would see this state contributing fully to the European military alliance. It also commits Ireland to having our Defence spend open to annual critique by the EU for compliance with its military spend targets.

The EU has consistently pointed out that PESCO is fully compatible with and will complement NATO – in order for projects to be funded via PESCO there must be clear coherence with NATO.

It is clear that this project is not intended to make Europe safer; it is intended to make it easier for EU troops to be deployed on missions outside of Europe.



Timeline of Irish Government's erosion of Neutrality

1992	Irish Government fails to follow Danish example of achieving a protocol, exempting them from involvement in increased EU militarisation
1997	Fianna Fáil Government signed up for NATO's Partnership for Peace
1997	Irish Troops deployed on NATO led missions in Europe
1999	850 Irish Troops committed to the NATO aligned EU Rapid Reaction Force
1999	Irish Troops deployed to KFOR in Kosovo on NATO led missions
2000	First ever White Paper on Defence broadened mandate for international force deployment to include deployment with non-UN forces
2001	Irish Government refuses to seek a protocol to the Nice Treaty on Irish neutrality
2001	Nice Treaty rejected by the Irish people in a referendum
2002	Second referendum held on the Nice Treaty
2002	Irish Government allows Shannon airport to be used as a military stopover for US troops
2003	120,000 demonstrate in Dublin against war in Iraq, yet Irish Government continue to allow Shannon Airport to be used as a military base for the US
2003	Bill to hold constitutional referendum to enshrine neutrality in Bunreacht na hÉireann defeated in Dáil by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael
2004	Irish Government approves joining the European Defence Agency without a Dáil debate or vote
2008	Irish Troops participate in Nordic Battlegroup
2008	Lisbon Treaty referendum defeated
2009	Irish Government holds second referendum on Lisbon Treaty, assuring the Irish people that neutrality will not be affected
2011	Irish Troops participate in Nordic Battlegroup
2012	Irish Troops participate in German Led Battlegroup
2013	Irish Troops deployed to Mali, supporting the undemocratic Malian Government responsible for large scale human rights abuses
2015	Irish Troops participate in Nordic Battlegroup
2015	Bill to hold constitutional referendum to enshrine neutrality in Bunreacht na hÉireann defeated in Dáil by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour
2016	Irish Troops participate in German Led Battlegroup
2016	Bill to hold constitutional referendum to enshrine neutrality in Bunreacht na hÉireann defeated in Dáil by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Independent Alliance
2017	Irish Government backs proposals for the establishment of a European Defence Fund
2017	Irish Government backs proposals for the establishment of a European Military headquarters
2017	Irish Government approves participation in Operation Sophia, which goes beyond humanitarian action and involves participation in EU naval force missions
2017	Irish Government, including three Independent Alliance Ministers, signs up to PESCO
2018	US Vice President Mike Pence filmed greeting US troops in combat uniforms at Shannon Airport
2018	Irish Government commits troops to German Led Battlegroup until July 2020



Key Recommendations:

In order to strengthen Ireland's neutrality Sinn Féin would:

- ▶ Hold a referendum to amend the Constitution to enshrine neutrality in Bunreacht na hÉireann and codify it in domestic legislation;
- ▶ Prevent the use of Irish airports, airspace, seaports, or territorial waters for preparation for war or other armed conflict by foreign powers;
- ▶ Stop the US Military from transporting arms and military equipment through Shannon Airport and protect Irish airspace;
- ▶ Oppose a European Army and end Ireland's participation in the EU Battlegroups and NATO's Partnership for Peace;
- ▶ Enhance our relationship and commitments with the UN and actively promote UN reform and capacity-building to create a revitalised UN which is capable of fulfilling the promise of the Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and of upholding international law;
- ▶ Ensure, until a Danish style EU treaty protocol is achieved, full adherence to the Triple Lock Agreement governing the overseas deployment of the Permanent Defence Forces;
- ▶ The ethical procurement and sale of armaments;
- ▶ The formation of global alliances with progressive, neutral states and the promotion of a human rights' approach to international relations and the promotion of a Human Security approach to international relations;
- ▶ Rescind Ireland's ratification of the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO);
- ▶ Actively seek the demilitarisation of the EU and resist efforts at further militarisation of the EU and between Member States.



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