

Ireland, the Triple Lock and Military Neutrality

Ciaran Murphy



About the Author

Ciaran Murphy is a retired civil servant who served for 15 years as Assistant Secretary in the Department of Defence and as Ireland's Defence Policy Director and National Armaments Director. In that role, he had responsibility for International Security and Defence Policy, including defence policy in relation to EU CSDP, UN, OSCE, NATO/PfP and Irish Defence Forces Overseas Operations. He retired from that position in 2022. He is a graduate of the Institute of Public Administration, the Irish Management Institute and the European Security and Defence College.

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1. Introduction

Ireland today is a staunch supporter of the United Nations (UN) and bases much of its foreign policy on its support for the UN and the values, principles, and objectives it represents. It is also the case that much of the political and public discourse today suggests that Ireland's membership of the UN, and the adoption of what has become known in Ireland as the Triple Lock – that is to say, the confirmation of a UN mandate, cabinet approval, and the approval of Dáil Éireann to allow Irish participation in overseas deployment of members of the Defence Forces - can be understood as a validation and reinforcement of Ireland's policy of military neutrality. However, any review of the political debates both at the time the Oireachtas approved Ireland's application for membership of the UN in 1946 and, indeed, the adoption of the Triple Lock in legislation do not support this hypothesis. The view of the political establishment at that time was that membership of the UN would actually potentially challenge or even undermine Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality. Moreover, there was little enthusiastic support in Dáil Éireann for Ireland applying for membership of the UN in 1946.

The UN was established in 1945 with the aim of preventing future world wars, and succeeded the League of Nations, which was established in 1919 and was widely characterised as ineffective. On 25 April 1945, representatives from 50 nations met in San Francisco, California, and began drafting the UN Charter, which was adopted on 25 June 1945. The charter took effect on 24 October 1945, when the UN officially began operations. The organisation's objectives, as defined by its charter, included maintaining international peace and security, protecting human rights, delivering humanitarian aid, promoting sustainable development, and upholding international law.

2. Ireland's Application to Join the United Nations (UN) in 1946

In 1946, Dáil Éireann debated an emergency motion on Ireland joining the UN. While Ireland today may be seen as a leading champion of the UN and its role in the world, that was not at all the case presented in the Dáil debates in 1946.

One of the key issues that was debated was the obligations of membership, which related primarily to the provision of forces to enact the decisions of the UN Security Council. In introducing the motion on membership in July 1946, then Taoiseach, Eamon De Valera, stated

*“Naturally, the first question is whether we should decide to enter or not. The Government have considered that and, although they are fully alive to the obligations which membership would involve, the Government are in favour, in principle, of entry.”*¹

Even in recommending Ireland's membership to the Dáil, the Government considered the whole concept flawed in that the five Permanent Members (P5) of the Security Council with veto powers were not subject to the same rule as others. The Taoiseach then noted that:

*“It is pretty certain that the big states had a deciding voice, and the objections which small States find to this Charter arise from the fact that the big states were not willing completely to submit themselves to the rule of law. The veto which was mentioned here is evidence of that. They are not prepared to accept majority rule either in the Council or in the Assembly—not even a two-thirds majority rule unless that two-thirds would invariably include each one of them. They are, so to speak, refusing to submit in their own regard to that universal rule of law which is really the foundation stone of any proper league of nations.”*²

The Taoiseach further expressed his concerns regarding the veto powers of the P5 in the UN Charter in the following terms:

*“However, those who do not wish that [the P5 countries] have to decide between having that or having nothing at all and I suppose they accepted this as being the best they could secure, in the hope that as time goes on there might be amendments to get rid of the more objectionable provisions. It seems to me that until the greater states place themselves under the rule of law, like the other States, we have not got the real foundation for peace.”*³

1. Oireachtas 24 July 1946 Dail Éireann debate – Wednesday, 24 Jul 1946 Vol. 102 No.10 : Membership of United Nations Organisation – Motion. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1946-07-24/14/> [Accessed 13 March 2025]

2. Oireachtas 24 July 1946 Dail Éireann debate – Wednesday, 24 Jul 1946 Vol. 102 No.10 : Membership of United Nations Organisation – Motion. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1946-07-24/14/> [Accessed 13 March 2025]

3. *ibid*

He then concluded that *“The big states have put themselves above the law; they will not submit. All the other states, except these, have to submit to the rule of law.”*⁴

This was hardly a ringing endorsement of the UN system by Eamon De Valera.

The second issue arose in the debate relates to the provision of forces for UN Operations. In the view of the Taoiseach and the Government at the time, Ireland’s membership of the UN would mean that it could no longer pursue an independent foreign or neutrality policy as it would be bound by the decisions of the UN Security Council.

*“We must do so [contribute to UN activities], even though we have no say in the decision to take such action, and the decision is one with which we disagree. We might very well disagree with the view taken by the Security Council. Suppose, for instance, State A, with which we have been on friendly relations, and with which we might have certain historic ties of a cultural and other character, took steps against State B, for reasons which might be sound reasons from its own point of view, and the Security Council thought that those steps amounted to an infringement of the charter on the part of State A, in such a case, even though State B is a State with which we have no sympathy at all, a State whose ideology—to use a word so much used in recent years—might be said to be quite different from our own, and might be opposed to our political and fundamental beliefs, yet we should be bound to take whatever action the Security Council should decide upon, and to participate in the enforcement measures against State A, with which we were fundamentally friendly, in favour of State B, with which we have no friendship at all, simply because the Security Council decided it should be so.”*⁵

DeValera also raised constitutional issues in relation to UN Membership stating

*“According to our Constitution, war cannot be declared by the State nor can we participate in a war save with the consent of Dáil Eireann. Now, is there a definite inconsistency between the obligations which we would incur by entering into this organisation [the UN] and our Constitution?”*⁶

The other area of debate on membership related to what one might call the national question. On this DeValera stated that:

*“We here in this State form only a part of our nation. The question occurs to some people then should we, seeing that the whole of our nation will not be represented by this State, join at all. The natural corollary to that question is to ask: is our joining going to affect that situation one way or the other? Is our joining an organisation of this sort going to improve the prospects of bringing about the unity of our nation so that our State, at any rate, would be a nation State, or will it do the reverse? I do not think myself, looking through the charter, that one could reasonably hope that through the organisation itself we would be able to bring about the unity of our nation.”*⁷

General McEoin’s response to the Taoiseach’s presentation on membership was as follows:

*“If it does us no good it will do us no harm”.*⁸

The Taoiseach concurred, stating further:

*“We in the Government have balanced the pros and cons. In our circumstances, although it is impossible to be enthusiastic [emphasis added], I think we have a duty as a member of the world community to do our share in trying to bring about general conditions which will make for the maintenance of peace. It would not be right for us to stand aside critically without appreciating the difficulties that are inherent in the formation of an organisation of this sort. On the balance of the pros and cons we have decided that in principle we should apply.”*⁹

At this juncture, the debates highlight that the obligations arising from Ireland’s membership of the UN were seen as having real implications for Ireland’s neutrality, possibly even undermining what was perceived to be Irish neutrality at this time. Moreover, concerns around the implications of Ireland’s membership of the UN were shared across the political spectrum at this time.

4. *ibid*

5. *ibid*

6. Oireachtas 24 July 1946 Dail Eireann debate – Wednesday, 24 Jul 1946 Vol. 102 No.10 : Membership of United Nations Organisation – Motion. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1946-07-24/14/> [Accessed 13 March 2025]

7. *ibid*

8. *ibid*

9. *ibid*

This can be seen in remarks from Patrick Gilligan T.D. from Fine Gael who stated:

“The obligations we accept are many and serious. Reference was made to neutrality. Neutrality has been elevated in this country into something in the nature of a positive virtue— something like justice, honesty and truth. It is not any of those. Nor was it at any time in the past seven years at that level. It was a matter of expediency and, so far as this country was concerned, what was involved was only State neutrality. The State did not take any side but the people took sides. There was not ideological neutrality so far as this country was concerned. Whatever it was, even such a small part of neutrality as is encompassed in the term “State neutrality”, must hereafter be given up if we join this organisation [emphasis added].

We can be forced to war. We can, certainly, be forced to make our territory accessible to forces that are going to war for the charter against members who are going to break it. How it is considered that neutrality will be possible under these circumstances, I cannot conceive [emphasis added].”¹⁰

In responding to contributions on the floor of the Dáil, the Taoiseach stated:

“On the question of sovereignty, we have to realise that whenever you enter into any combination and accept the rules, then to that extent you deny the right to decide for yourself. To that extent you surrender your sovereignty. That is inevitable in all organisations.”¹¹

In this regard, the Taoiseach stated, and Dáil Éireann accepted, that membership of the UN would require a substantive surrender of sovereignty on matters relating to the commitment of forces in international conflicts. It was also acknowledged that this would have implications for the role of the Dail Eireann as the sole body able to declare war as provided for under Bunreacht na hEireann (the Constitution of Ireland).

In relation to the provision of force facilitated under Article 43 of the Charter, the Taoiseach stated further:

“We would have to maintain whatever military forces or facilities are prescribed in the special agreement to be made with the Security Council. We may assume that we have got over the first difficulty and have been able to arrive at an agreement with the Security Council as to the forces to be maintained and the facilities to be given. If the Security Council decides that action should be taken against a particular State, and that action leads to war, we must participate in that action and enter the war. That raises another point with regard to our constitutional position”¹² [emphasis added]. It would seem from this contribution, that the concern was not so much about the UN mandate but rather the importance of Dail Eireann sanction for any particular deployment, however that might arise.

..... The member States have certain practical obligations; military measures may be used and, if they are used, the individual States will have to contribute in accordance with their agreements and the demands made upon them. That is a very serious obligation for any State. It does mean, of course, that States are agreeing in advance that in certain circumstances, namely, when in accordance with the charter, when called upon by the Security Council to take armed action, they will do so and, so to speak, go to war at the bidding of the Security Council.”¹³

As stated at the outset, from a review of the Dáil debates, it would appear that there was limited enthusiasm for Ireland’s application to join the UN right across the political spectrum, the general view being that ‘it won’t do us any good but we can also see no immediate harm’. In addition, while there were significant concerns that the obligations of membership would significantly compromise Ireland’s sovereignty, neutrality, and independence relating to national decisions on matters of foreign policy, the decision was that this was a price worth paying. Moreover, there is clear consensus and acceptance that the constitutional provisions in relation to Dáil Éireann’s role in declaring war would become moot by virtue of the obligations of membership of the UN. While those concerns have not come to pass, clearly at the time when the Dáil was considering the issue, membership of the UN was not perceived as representing a reinforcement of Ireland’s sovereignty or neutrality. If anything, the debates suggest that the perception among the then political establishment, both Government and Opposition, was the exact opposite, in that Ireland’s policy of neutrality would potentially be made vulnerable, if not entirely obviated, by UN membership’.

10. Oireachtas 24 July 1946 Dail Eireann debate – Wednesday, 24 Jul 1946 Vol. 102 No.10 : Membership of United Nations Organisation – Motion. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1946-07-24/14/> [Accessed 13 March 2025]

11. *ibid*

12. *ibid*

13. *ibid*

3. The Origins of the Triple Lock: Ireland, UN Peacekeeping, and the 1960 Defence Act

While Ireland applied for UN membership in 1946, this application was not approved until 1956 due to a Russian veto. In 1958, Ireland deployed the first contingent of the Defence Forces on a peacekeeping operation mandated by the UN Security Council. In 1960, the UN Secretary General asked Ireland to provide forces for a new UN Mission in the Congo, and the Defence (Amendment) Act 1960 was introduced as emergency legislation to give legal underpinning to the deployment to the Congo as part of a peacekeeping operation. This was succeeded by the Defence (Amendment) (No2) Act 1960.

In introducing the Act in Dáil Éireann, the then Taoiseach Sean Lemass, T.D. stated:

“The purpose of the present measure may be simply stated. Its purpose is to authorise the sending of contingents of the Permanent Defence Force outside the State for duties of a police character on behalf of the United Nations and, secondly, to provide in respect of such members of the Defence Forces as may volunteer for service overseas during the period of its operation the same statutory conditions of service as apply to members of the Defence Forces stationed at home.”¹⁴

The general thrust of the measure as referenced in Dáil debates was that the legislation was to respond to the obligations which had been extensively debated in Dáil Éireann when it originally approved the motion for Ireland to apply for membership of the UN in 1946.

In this regard, Deputy Brendan Corish of the Labour Party stated:

“In view of the fact that we are members of the United Nations Organisation, and that we knew when applying for membership that such requests might be made to us, I think it only right that we should act in accordance with our responsibilities.”¹⁵

Deputy Noel Browne, then leader of the National Progressive Democrats, raised the issue of whether the provision in the legislation for Dáil approval would be retained in the anticipated legislation which would become the Defence (Amendment) (No2) Act 1960.

“Would the Taoiseach expand the reference he made to the introduction of permanent legislation to allow the sending of troops abroad as a matter of course? Does he mean that he wants to take away from us the Constitutional right which we appear to have at present of considering the circumstances of each occasion on which it is likely that troops may be sent from Ireland to take part in police or other operations? I believe this is an ideal procedure and I hope it is not the intention of the Government to depart from it or depart from the principle that our soldiers or service men should not have to take part in an operation of any kind abroad other than one sanctioned by Dáil Éireann.”¹⁶
[emphasis added]

The Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, reiterated that the purpose of the bill was to comply with the request from the UN and to meet Ireland’s obligations under the Charter. Importantly, there is an acknowledgment that Ireland would fully accept, and to an extent, embrace, its obligations under the UN Charter. This marks a clear development from the original hesitation regarding neutrality shown in the debates in 1946.

Speaking in the Seanad, the Taoiseach reiterated:

“The purpose of the Bill is to enable the Government to comply with the request of the United Nations to contribute an Irish Battalion to the United Nations Force which is at present being constituted for service in the Congo. In considering this request, the Government here had regard to the obligations which this country assumed when we became a member of the United Nations. Article 2 (v) of the Charter obliges all members to give the United Nations every assistance in any action it takes in accordance with the Charter and under Article 25 all members of the Organisation agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council. Under Article 43, all members undertake to make available to the Security Council armed forces and other facilities necessary to maintain

14. Oireachtas 7 December 1960 Dail Eireann Debate – Wednesday, 7 December 1960. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1960-12-07/6/>

15. Oireachtas 7 December 1960 Dail Eireann Debate – Wednesday, 7 December 1960. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1960-12-07/6/>

16. Oireachtas 7 December 1960 Dail Eireann Debate – Wednesday, 7 December 1960. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1960-12-07/6/>

*international peace and security. We are naturally anxious that Ireland should honour her obligations under the United Nations Charter in the spirit as well as in the letter.*¹⁷

Furthermore, in none of the debates on the Act was there any reference to the issue of military neutrality, which also marks a development from 1946. In relation to the requirement for a UN mandate for the envisaged operation, there was no sense from the debates that this marked out the extent to which Ireland was prepared to accede in terms of deploying forces in order to contribute to the maintenance of peace and counter conflict across the globe. Looking at the debates, both on Ireland's application for membership of the UN and on the Defence Amendment Act 1960, the clear underlying rationale was that the UN was the only organisation which would have a role in the maintenance of international peace and security and countering inter-state, international, and global conflict.

In the event of any such conflict, the clear impression of those engaged in the debate on all sides was that the issue would come before the UN Security Council to be resolved. No alternative circumstances were considered. However, this was probably because no other circumstance could be envisaged at that time given the extensive membership of the UN, which included all the major powers, and the provisions contained in the UN Charter to which all members had subscribed. So, one could conclude that it was not a case of the then Oireachtas, through the Defence Amendment Act 1960 and its successor, excluding any alternative to a UN mandated mission but rather that the deployment of a UN mandated force in such circumstances was seen as the 'only show in town' and therefore presented the only form of mission which could involve the Irish Defence Forces being deployed outside the State.

And there the issue lay, following the enactment of the 1960 Act and its updating in the Defence Amendment Act 1993. The issue of the Triple Lock and Ireland's military neutrality largely lay dormant until the debate in advance of the Nice Treaty referendum in 2001.

4. The Nice Treaty: Mainstreaming the 'Triple Lock'

On 7 June 2001, the Irish people in a referendum rejected the provisions of the Nice Treaty of the European Union. One of the key issues in the debate in Ireland was the potential impact of the treaty on Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality.¹⁸

EU Leaders met to discuss the outcome of the Irish Referendum in Seville during the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 21–22 June 2002. Out of the meeting came declarations known as the Seville Declarations on the Treaty of Nice. As part of this, the other EU14 governments accepted an Irish declaration that spelled out the meaning of the Triple Lock, and the need for a UN mandate, cabinet approval, and the approval of Dáil Éireann approval to allow for Irish participation in EU activities of a military nature.¹⁹

In response to the Irish declaration, the European Council issued a declaration of its own which recognised the right of Ireland (and all Member States) to decide in accordance with national constitutions and laws whether and how to participate in any activities under European Security and Defence Policy.²⁰

The Irish government, having obtained the Seville Declaration on Ireland's policy of military neutrality from the European Council, held a further referendum on the Treaty of Nice on Saturday, 19 October 2002. The second proposed amendment included two significant qualifications compared to the 2001 referendum, with one requiring the consent of the Dáil for enhanced cooperation under the EU Treaty, and another preventing Ireland from joining any EU common defence policy.²¹ On this occasion²² the Treaty passed with 60% in favour.²²

17. Oireachtas 7 December 1960 Dail Eireann Debate – Wednesday, 7 December 1960. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1960-12-07/6/>

18. IIEA 2009: 7 Lisbon - The Irish Guarantees Explained. Available at: https://www.iiea.com/images/uploads/resources/230535195500_Lisbon_Treaty_Explained.pdf

19. Council of the European Union 2002 Presidency Conclusions, Seville European Council, 21-22 June 2002. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/council/2002/en/19951>

20. European Council 2002 Presidency Conclusions, Seville European Council, 21-22 June 2002. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/council/2002/en/19951>

21. Referendum Ireland Referendum on the Twenty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution Bill, 2002 – Treaty of Nice. Available at: <https://www.referendum.ie/archive/treaty-of-nice-twenty-sixth-amendment-of-the-constitution-bill-2002/>

22. Vaughn Miller 8 October 2009 The Treaty of Lisbon after the Second Irish Referendum. House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/RP09-75/RP09-75.pdf>

5. The Lisbon Treaty Referenda and the Triple Lock Today

The issue of Ireland's Neutrality and the Triple Lock arose again in the vote on the Lisbon Treaty in 2008. The first referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon held on 12 June 2008 was rejected by the Irish electorate by a margin of 53.4% to 46.6%, with a turnout of 53%.²³ In a well organised campaign, the 'No side' stated that inter alia abortion would be legalised under the new Lisbon Treaty; that Ireland would not be able to maintain its military neutrality under the Treaty; that the new Treaty would allow for conscription into an EU military force; and that corporate taxes would increase.²⁴

For the purposes of this paper, we will focus mainly on the issue of military neutrality and conscription to an EU military force. Following a public engagement in the wake of the referendum result, the Government drafted a declaration and, in the meeting of the European Council (the meeting of the heads of government of all twenty-seven European Union member states) in Brussels on 11–12 December 2008, then Taoiseach Brian Cowen presented the concerns of the Irish people relating to matters including taxation policy, family, social and ethical issues, and Ireland's policy of neutrality.²⁵

The European Council agreed that:

- The Treaty of Lisbon would not make any change, for any Member State, to the extent or operation of the Union's competences in relations to taxation;
- The Treaty of Lisbon does not prejudice the security and defence policy of Member States, including Ireland's traditional policy of neutrality, and the obligations of Member States;
- A guarantee that the provisions of the Irish Constitution relating to the right to life, education and the family would not be affected by the Treaty of Lisbon.²⁶

In response, the Irish Government committed to seeking ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon by the end of the term of the current European Commission in October 2009, provided that the above provisions were implemented satisfactorily.

The concerns of the Irish people, which gave rise to the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in 2008, were encapsulated in a protocol attached to the Lisbon Treaty entitled "*PROTOCOL on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon*".

The key provisions in relation to Security and Defence from an Irish perspective are the provisions which provide that the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) does not prejudice the security and defence policy of any member State; does not affect or prejudice Ireland's policy on military neutrality; retains to the member State the decision as to the nature of aid or assistance to be provided to a Member State which is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of armed aggression on its territory. The protocol emphasises that any decision to move to a common defence will require a unanimous decision of the European Council and that, it would be a matter for the Member States, including Ireland, to decide, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon and with their respective constitutional requirements, whether or not to adopt a common defence. The protocol goes on to state that:

- The Treaty of Lisbon does not affect or prejudice Ireland's traditional policy of neutrality.²⁷
- The Treaty of Lisbon does not provide for the creation of a European army or for conscription to any military formation.²⁸
- The treaty does not affect the right of Ireland or any other Member State to determine the nature and volume of its defence and security expenditure and the nature of its defence capabilities.²⁹

23. Referendum Ireland. Referendum on the Twenty-eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2008 – Treaty of Lisbon. Available at: <https://www.referendum.ie/archive/referendum-on-the-lisbon-treaty-twenty-eighth-amendment-of-the-constitution-bill-2008/>

24. Raj Chari 2008 Why did the Irish reject Lisbon? An analysis of referendum results. Real Instituto Elcano. Available at: <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/why-did-the-irish-reject-lisbon-an-analysis-of-referendum-results-ari/>

25. Council of the European Union. 2009 Brussels European Council 11 and 12 December 2008 Presidency Conclusions. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/104692.pdf

26. Council of the European Union. 2009 Brussels European Council 11 and 12 December 2008 Presidency Conclusions. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/104692.pdf

27. Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon, done at Brussels on 13 June 2012. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/treaty-series/c12bb-protocol-on-the-concerns-of-the-irish-people-on-the-treaty-of-lisbon-done-at-brussels-on-13-june-2012/>

28. Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon, done at Brussels on 13 June 2012. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/treaty-series/c12bb-protocol-on-the-concerns-of-the-irish-people-on-the-treaty-of-lisbon-done-at-brussels-on-13-june-2012/>

29. Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon, done at Brussels on 13 June 2012. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/treaty-series/c12bb-protocol-on-the-concerns-of-the-irish-people-on-the-treaty-of-lisbon-done-at-brussels-on-13-june-2012/>

- It will be a matter for Ireland or any other Member State, to decide, in accordance with any domestic legal requirements, whether or not to participate in any military operation.³⁰

6. Conclusion

Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality since World War II has been based on the principle of non-participation in a military alliance or adherence to or the adoption of any mutual defence arrangements.

Ireland's prospective membership of the UN in the 1940s and 1950s posed a significant challenge to this policy. The architects of Ireland's UN membership and of Ireland's policy of military neutrality, expressly accepted that the provisions of the UN Charter could potentially create an obligation for Ireland to participate in a conflict to which it was not already party to. It was also accepted that the role of Dáil Éireann, regarding participation by Ireland in a war or conflict mandated by the UN Security Council, as provided in Bunreacht na hÉireann, could be curtailed given the obligations of UN membership to provide troops at its request to participate in UN military operations against an aggressor.

As such, the Triple Lock in Ireland, which was introduced in the Defence (Amendment) (No 2) Act, 1960 and has continued in the various amendments thereto, cannot reasonably be understood as an expression of Ireland's policy of military neutrality but rather as the legislative basis to give effect to the obligations of UN membership. Its primary purpose was to enable rather than restrict and to protect the role of Dail Eireann in sanctioning such actions, given the provisions of Bunreacht na hEireann.

Having regard to the Oireachtas debates involving those who initiated Ireland's membership of the UN, it is clear that it was never the case that UN membership or the provisions of the Triple Lock was seen by them as a reinforcement of Ireland's policy of military neutrality. If anything, their perspective was that UN membership and the obligations thereof could potentially end Ireland's military neutrality, given the obligations of membership and this was a situation they were prepared to accept.

It is clear that the provisions of the UN Charter relating to the obligation to provide forces when requested by the UN has not evolved in the manner that at least part of the Irish political establishment had envisaged in 1946. However, this does not change the reality that there was a genuine belief and acceptance in 1946 that Ireland's membership of the UN undermined rather than reinforced Ireland's policy on military neutrality.

It is also the case that those advocating for UN membership in 1946 decried the fact that the permanent members of the Security Council would have a veto on Security Council positions on international conflicts. Moreover, the P5 could also veto any UN action against an aggressor should that be their wish. In recent times, writing in 2025, the increasing reality is that the Security Council appears to be unable to agree on actions to be taken in the case of aggression, international conflict, and threats to international peace and security around the world. Appeals by those who are the victims of such aggression become mired in obfuscation and inaction due to the P5 veto or the threatened use thereof. The very significant concerns expressed in Dáil Éireann in 1946, regarding the limitations which the P5 veto would impose on UN capacity to respond to conflict and aggression, are more prescient than ever. In that regard, one could argue paradoxically that the proposal to remove the Triple Lock requirement, as provided for in the Defence Acts, would be entirely in keeping with the reservations expressed by the supporters of UN Membership in 1946.³¹

This article does not seek to advocate for or against the Triple Lock or Ireland's policy of military neutrality. Rather, the purpose of it is to review the historical record regarding the considerations and concerns around Ireland's application to join the UN in 1946, as reflected in the political discourse at that time. It is important to note that Eamon de Valera, widely considered to be the architect of Ireland's policy on neutrality, was also the person who proposed Ireland's application for membership of the UN. In more recent times, a narrative has built up to the effect that Ireland's membership of the UN and the statutory provisions of the Triple Lock regarding UN Security Council mandates for overseas deployments were an expression, a reinforcement, and even an extension, of Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality and that this was the basis for membership of that organisation. However, the historical record shows

30. Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon, done at Brussels on 13 June 2012. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/treaty-series/c12bb-protocol-on-the-concerns-of-the-irish-people-on-the-treaty-of-lisbon-done-at-brussels-on-13-june-2012/>

31. Micheal Lehane 21 May 2025 Government publishes legislation to remove Triple Lock. RTE. Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/2025/0521/1514188-triple-lock-legislation/> [accessed 23 May 2025]

that this narrative has little basis in fact and the opposite was the case. The architects of Ireland's traditional policy of neutrality fully accepted that Ireland's membership of the United Nations would make Ireland's neutrality vulnerable. Consequently, as Ireland looks to review the future of its defence and security policy, it should be remembered that Ireland's membership of the United Nations was never intended to underpin its neutrality, and that the Triple Lock's intended purpose was to allow the deployment of troops, not to restrict it.

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The Institute of International and European Affairs,

8 North Great Georges Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

T: +353-1-8746756 F: +353-1-8786880

E: reception@iiea.com W: www.iiea.com