SECURING EUROPE AFTER TRUMP:
NAVIGATING TROUBLED WATERS

by Patrick Keatinge

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Securing Europe after Trump

Abstract: The risk of nuclear extinction – the extreme case of political conflict – remains alongside those posed by climate change and pandemics.

This paper reviews the response of European states to the dangers of political conflict in an unstable international environment at the beginning of 2021. The first part looks back at "the world after Trump": the persistence of armed conflict during the Covid-19 pandemic; the legacy of the Trump administration and the prospect for a revival of multilateralism under its successor; the role of the United Nations Security Council with regard to international crisis management, peacekeeping and disarmament, including the nuclear conundrum.

The second part of the paper examines security and defence policies in the European region. This covers continuing threats to the east and south, NATO's role in military deterrence and recent developments in the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy.

The focus of the third part of the paper is the national level, as Ireland starts a two year term on the UN Security Council and participates in the EU's evolving policy. Also on the national agenda are the security and defence implications of bilateral relations with the United Kingdom following the coming into force of Brexit, and an important review of the national defence forces.

Introduction: Our Age of Multiple Risks

Twelve months, ago the risks associated with climate change were headlined in many countries throughout the world. Now we are entangled in a global pandemic, with damaging social and economic consequences. Unfortunately that is not all we have to worry about. A recent study of possible "existential catastrophes for humanity" within the next 100 years places the consequences of great power nuclear war alongside climate change and "naturally arising" or engineered pandemics[1].

Great power nuclear war is the extreme case of the broad category of violent political conflict between and within states, large and small, and frequently involving non-state groups. The general risks involved may not be existential for humanity, but they are not trivial. So far as the response of public policy is concerned, welcome to the anxious world of "security and defence policy", alongside public health, economic recovery and climate mitigation.

The ultimate goal of this policy, "security", is usually understood in a broad way to apply to international conflict (though, confusingly, it is also used in the narrower context of the state's policing of internal order). "Defence" suggests a central role for military force in response to external aggression. In practice, this field of public policy is complex, containing a wide range of civilian, diplomatic and military agencies and activities. In effect it is the hard edge of foreign policy.

This paper is a snapshot of security and defence policies in Europe at a point of particular significance - the change in the United States administration following the presidential election in November 2020. The new administra-tion comes into office amid great uncertainties; "black swans" – those highly improbable and threatening events – beat their angry wings just over the horizon[2]. This paper examines some of the main global implications of this event, before looking in more detail at the policies of NATO and the European Union in Europe. It concludes with a brief cautionary comment on Ireland's national security and defence agenda, as a Member State of the European Union starting a two year term on the United Nations Security Council.

The World after Trump

The pandemic and armed conflict. The Covid-19 pandemic is still with us. Its overall impact on the extent and intensity of armed conflict will be a matter for future historians to judge, but an interim assessment suggests armed conflict has not been stemmed by the pandemic. After the first wave of global infections it was reported that political violence had increased in 43 cases and persisted at the same level in 45, headline examples being Afghanistan, Libya, the Sahel, Syria and Yemen[3]. In the midst of the third wave (early 2021), we have to add more negative events, such as a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the long-disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, a civil war in Ethiopia and the resumption of fighting between the Polisario Front and Morocco after a 30 year ceasefire[4].

In spite of their often serious exposure to the pandemic, belligerent actors, from large states to small paramilitary groups, have been able to adapt their tactics to exploit opportunities arising from the new situation. Peacemakers have struggled to maintain their institutional capacity, and overcome the limits of virtual communication whether in capitals or on the ground.

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1 Toby Orde, "The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity", Bloomberg Publishing, London 2020. The author's judgements of the relative probabilities are summarised on p.167.

2 Nassim Nicholas Taleb, "The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable", Penguin Books, London 2011.

3 These figures are from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) project, cited in "Horsemen of the apocalypse", The Economist 20 June 2020.

4 For a detailed assessment, see Jarret Blanc and Frances Z. Brown, "Conflict Zones in the Time of Coronavirus: War and War by Other Means", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 17 December 2020.

The legacy of Trump. The defeat of Donald Trump in the presidential election in November 2020 may owe much to his mishandling of the pandemic crisis, but we are left with the legacy of his four years in power, the ground zero of the current security environment. Three negatives stand out - the intensification of geopolitical rivalry, the president's incoherent approach to diplomacy, and a laissez faire approach to arms control.

The central issue has been the rise of China's influence in economic and political terms, already marked by a defensive response by preceding administrations. Trump's contribution has combined a blustering zero-sum rhetoric, trade "negotiation" by sanctions and the bullying imposition of collateral damage on his allies. More generally, Trumpian diplomacy consisted of erratic unilateralism, involving a direct repudiation of multilateral institutions and contempt for alliances and allies.

At a time when the military implications of technological change became more pressing (cyber, artificial intelligence, space) existing arms control agreements dating from the Cold War were allowed to lapse. The president's generous funding of the military threatened to stoke an arms race without clear strategic calculation. Though credited with not having started any new wars, his clumsy attempts to disengage from existing conflicts did little to resolve them.

The two major issues facing the Trump administration in the field of nuclear non-proliferation, Iran and North Korea, illustrate the limitations of its approach. The withdrawal from the existing multilateral treaty on Iranian nuclear development, and its replacement by relentless economic coercion, arguably accelerated the possibility of Iran becoming a nuclear power. The campaign to "denuclearise" the Korean peninsula– all "fire and fury" – was an embarrassing display of pantomime diplomacy. North Korea is still a nuclear power with intercontinental reach.

The rescue of multilateralism. The recent presidential election has resulted in a potentially significant departure from the Trump era. The new administration of Joe Biden is committed to a broadly multilateral approach in the conduct of its foreign policy. It promises to reengage with multilateral agreements that Trump abandoned, to respect the international institutions in which the US is a member and to take its allies seriously.

However, a caveat is in order (apart from the obvious point that multilateralism is in itself no panacea). The deep divisions in American society will force the administration to devote most of its attention and political capital to domestic issues; the resilience of "Trumpism" promises a polarised congress in the short term and the spectre of revenge in four yearstime. Even with the promise of executive action by the new president, the restoration of the credibility of an American-inspired multilateralism is far from a done deal.

The United Nations Security Council. A major test of a renewed multilateralism will come in the context of the United Nations Organisation. With its universal membership and wide range of associated agencies, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) - both of which Trump subverted - the UN may be seen as the institutional apex of a cooperative approach to international crisis management.

When it was founded in 1945 the UN was ascribed a central role in conflict resolution in the form of the Security Council, which was supposed to be the main provider of "collective security". However, a necessary condition for the creation of the new institution was the privilege of permanent membership for an exclusive category of the "great powers" of that era, now often referred to as "the P5", each of which could veto action by the UN. As a consequence the central confrontation of the next forty five years, the Cold War between Moscow and Washington, was kept at arm's length from the Security Council. The latter, however, so long as it did not attract a veto from any of the P5, was able to develop a much less ambitious practice of "preventive diplomacy" under the Secretary General, a role which might be reinforced by the deployment of military peacekeeping forces.

The record of UN peacekeeping has been mixed. Ambiguous mandates reflect dissension in the Council, exposing contributing forces to dangers on the ground. Variations in the professionalism and equipment of the latter, and the challenges of interoperability between different military

cultures, have to be overcome. The nadir of UN peacekeeping was painfully apparent in Bosnia and Rwanda in the mid-1990s, yet the sheer need for the development and deployment of every means of conflict resolution remains[5].

The nuclear conundrum. Another important issue on the UN's security agenda is disarmament, naturally including the ultimate risk posed by a great power nuclear war. This was reflected in the January 2021 session of the General Assembly when the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons reached the ratification target of 50 signatory states and came into effect on 22 January 2021. The treaty, in which the 84 signatories repudiate the possession of nuclear weapons, was endorsed by an impressive list of former politicians and officials, including two former NATO Secretary Generals, Javier Solana (in office 1995-1999) and Willy Claes (in office 1994-1995)[6].

But the nine nuclear powers, which include all the permanent members of the Security Council (United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France, together with India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea) are unmoved. As the current Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, puts it: "Giving up our deterrent without any guarantee that others will do the same is a dangerous option"[7]. Barring decisive anti-nuclear dissent within the nuclear powers, this position is likely to persist. Consequently, the UN's disarmament agenda will reflect more familiar and less ambitious issues.

It is a full agenda nevertheless, and one which requires urgent attention. The next periodic review conference of the long established Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has been postponed again until August 2021. Even before that one of the last remaining US-Russian arms control agreements, the New START treaty, was due for expiry early in February[8]. Add the fact that "disarmament" is not just about nuclear weapons; it covers everything to do with strategic stability, from delivery systems, all sorts of conventional weapons, new military technologies, to verification procedures and other confidence-building measures. In short, it is time for a comprehensive rethink of arms control[9].

Security and defence policies in Europe

The proximate threats in the European region. Since Russia's response to the "Maidan revolution" in Ukraine in 2014 (the annexation of Crimea and support for its proxies in eastern Ukraine) the threat of what is commonly called Russian "revanchism" has been a prominent feature of the European security environment. Relations between Russia and its western neighbours include a military stand-off, in which military deployments are accompanied by methods of hybrid warfare (aid to proxies, disinformation campaigns and cyber attacks) and economic sanctions. An intermittent diplomatic dialogue conducted mainly under the aegis of the Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has so far resulted in prisoner exchanges, and the instability on Russia's border has increased with the political succession crisis in Belarus in 2020.

Fears of an "accidental" or deliberate military escalation are particularly marked in the Baltic region, including militarily non-aligned Finland and Sweden. In Moldova and the Western Balkans, the challenge is less acute, being more one of political rivalry in a context that harks back to traditional struggles to gain dominance in "spheres of Influence".

The security challenges to the south of Europe are less concentrated on one source but are no less difficult to counter, given the bewildering array of overlapping regional rivalries, external interventions, proxy wars, weak states and paramilitary groups involved in that con-

5 For an assessment of the UN 75 years on , see "Unhappy", a special report in the Economist, 20 June 2020. An insider's view is Martin Bell, War and Peacekeeping: Personal Reflections on Conflict and Lasting Peace, Oneworld Publications, London 2020.

6 The New York Times, 28 October 2020.

7   See www.nato.int, 10 November 2020. NATO's policy is explained in detail In the North Atlantic Council Statement as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons Enters into Force, 15 December 2020.

8 The new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was agreed in 2010 between the US and Russia and limits the number of deployed nuclear strategic warheads to 1,550 each. It expires on 5 February 2021, and has an option to extend to 2026 .

9 See Liana Fix and Ulrich Kuhn [umlaut!], "Strategic Stability in the 21st Century", Russian Analytical Digest No. 260, 20 December 20

venient but vastly over-simplified acronym - MENA (the Middle East and North Africa).

For many European societies, the threat boils down to the actions of jihadist terrorism, often a virus with domestic carriers, but the response requires a broader approach, given the many instabilities that allow that virus to spread throughout the region and beyond. The outlook is bleak[10].

During the past year, amidst the ravages of the pandemic, conflicts in Syria, the Sahel and Yemen remain unresolved. There is a fragile cease-fire in Libya. Turkey's increased activism in Libya and maritime exploration in the eastern Mediterranean (contested by Cyprus, Greece and France) are only the latest twist to the tale. It is hardly an exaggeration if Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, describes the EU's neighbourhood as "engulfed in flames"[11].

NATO and military deterrence. Part of the European responses to these threats have a military dimension, and here the NATO alliance is the relevant military framework, not least because it incorporates American capabilities. The change in the US administration in itself reinforces the Alliance's political credibility, given the previous president's casual subversion of its role. In that sense "NATO is back", as a central component in Joe Biden's promotion of transatlantic multilateralism.

But two things will not change in the Alliance. One is the running debate about burden sharing, though we may expect it to be conducted in a less divisive tone. The other is the problem of solidarity within the Alliance, though there may be some comfort in the fact that the role of principal contrarian has moved from Washington to Ankara. Turkey's insistence on purchasing Russian armaments, its aspirations to be a leading regional power and its indifference to democratic values make it a difficult partner.

Yet NATO is bullish about its future. A recent report entitled "NATO 2030: United for a New Era" confirms the existing policy of deterrence and dialogue with Russia, recommends more attention to terrorism, "emerging and disruptive technologies" and a watching brief on the rise of China. There is an emphasis on making the Alliance more "political", in its consultative processes and its awareness of non-military risks such as pandemics and climate change. On the vexed question of "political unity and cohesion", however, no fingers are pointed and the report can only remind its readers that the Secretary General is available to mediate disputes[12].

The European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy. The NATO 2030 report also recommends the reinforcement of the alliance's relations with the European Union, hardly surprising given the vast overlap in membership. Twenty two of the 27 EU Member States belong to both organisations.

The EU relationship with the United Nations has also developed over the last twenty years - its significance may be seen in the fact claim that "collectively, the EU and its Member States are the single largest financial contributor to the UN"[13]. In the field of peacekeeping, the EU has been the pioneer and exemplar of the way in which the UN can in effect outsource peacekeeping to regional organisations, which can work with with the global body and with each other. The African Union is now also part of this pattern.

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), unlike NATO, is not based on an open-ended mutual defence commitment; the deployment of Member State forces is voluntary and confined to peacekeeping operations outside the Union. Since 2017, it has undergone a series of reforms, including an enhanced legal commitment (Permanent Structured Cooperation, or "PESCO" as it is generally known) by 25 of the 27 Member States (excluding Denmark and Malta) which participate in collaborative projects of their choice from a menu of 47 specific projects, mainly to do with the generation of military capabilities.

PESCO has been accompanied for the first

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10 See Marc Lynch, "The Arab Uprisings Never Ended: The Enduring Struggle to Remake the Middle East", Foreign Affairs, January/February 2021.

11 The Financial Times, 12 September 2020.

12 See "NATO 2030: United for a New Era, Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General, 25 November 2020. The main findings are summarised on pp. 12-15.

13 Annex regarding EU priorities at the UN September 2020 to September 2021, European Council conclusions, 13 July 2020.

time by provisions in the EU budget, allocating 7 billion euros to a European Defence Fund to improve defence research and development. Existing mechanisms to finance EU military operations have been reformed and funded with a further 5.8 billion euros in a new "European Peace Facility"[14].

Another reform launched in June 2020 and agreed last December aims more at the "why" than the "how" of EU international crisis management. This is a process called the "Strategic Compass", based on a threat analysis with input from the Member States which is to be formally adopted early in 2022. By clarifying the extent of agreement on external threats to the EU (and its own vulnerabilities) it is hoped to provide a basis for future military planning. Somewhat along the lines of the European Intervention Initiative launched by France in 2018, it suggests at least the beginning of the development of a "common strategic culture". More immediately, it may offer a clearer sense of direction, a way to navigate the troubled waters of EU security and defence policy. Both the Member States and the outside world will be able to take the measure of the EU's potential agency on the geopolitical stage[15].

Underlying the evolving bureaucratic landscape of CSDP, there has always been more than one view of how it should develop in that broader context. The change in the US administration has given this debate an added edge. If NATO has been revived for now by the departure of Donald Trump, not just as the agent of military deterrence but as a conduit of political relations with the US, where does this leave the EU's advocacy of "strategic autonomy", the capacity to act independently of American support if needs be?

The latter notion has some traction in political discourse in the EU institutions, its strongest advocate being the French president, Emmanuel Macron. In a recent interview, he argued that European and American values and neighbourhood issues are not the same, but bemoaned the tendency, as he put it, that "we have forgotten to think because we thought our geopolitical relations through NATO". However, governments of other Member States seem to be happy to

leave it that way, at least in the short term.

There may be no pressing need to make a binary choice between a transatlantic model of European security, in which the EU complements NATO, and that of regional autonomy (in which the EU can act alone). However, in the medium term - another world away, say in 2024 - it may be another matter[16]. Even if the crude isolationism of the Trumpian worldview does not return, the more longstanding and nuanced debate on American disengagement is likely to persist. French President Macron may not be the only European leader to hedge his bets on the continuation of US support.

Towards the bigger picture. In assessing the significance of the security and defence policies outlined above, these debates about the EU's strategic autonomy and American disengagement remind us that security and defence policies do not exist in a vacuum. At the EU level , the Common Security and Defence Policy is a sub-set of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, itself a subset of the Union's "external action" which also incorporates trade and development policies. The question of strategic autonomy also has resonance with regard to its economic interests. Also, the EU has made a deliberate, if not always successful, attempt to develop a "comprehensive approach" which, unlike NATO, integrates its civilian (i.e. police and judicial) missions with military peacekeeping operations.

Indeed, NATO itself is only one element in transatlantic relations, alongside trade and the whole range of non-governmental networks which compose the larger part of the iceberg of multilateralism. International institutions such as the Organisation Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and less formal interstate groups like the Group of 7 (G7) richest countries which reflect broad commonalities associated with what is still rather oddly known as "the West".

And finally, bringing the big picture of security and defence into focus, it has to be viewed along with the other sources of fear we now face: climate change, pandemics, economic col-

14 For details of the CSDP, see www.eeas.europa.eu.

15 For a comment on the CSDP reforms, see Sophia Besch, "Europe tests the waters for a stronger defence policy", The Financial Times 14 August 2020.

16 For President Macron's views, see "The Macron Doctrine: A Conversation with the French President", geopolitiqes.eu, 16 November 2020. For a comment see Paul Gillespie,

"Europe should think before renewing the alliance with Biden", The Irish Times,21 November 2020.

lapse. These are all connected in complex ways; consider climate change as a multiplier of violent conflict. This makes it difficult to find adequate policy responses, but if our present predicament has taught us nothing else it is that we depend on our national governments to find them[17].

Ireland's security and defence policy agenda: a reality check

There is one overriding piece of good news for our national security and defence agenda. The prospect of a distinctly more cooperative approach by the new American administration will enhance the pursuit of our values and interests in this field. Multilateralism gives a small state both a presence on the stage and the possibility of working with others to influence the plot.

However, there is no guarantee that satisfactory outcomes will be achieved in our age of multiple risks. Thus there is a case for an initial reality check, covering four broad themes. The first two concern Ireland's policy in the two main multilateral settings, the United Nations and the European Union. The third covers the bilateral relationship with our nearest neighbour in the novel context of Brexit, and the fourth asks whether we have the means to follow through with our commitments.

Sitting comfortably on top of the world? Between January 2021 and December 2022, Ireland has the rare responsibility of membership of the UN Security Council, for only the fourth time since joining the UN in 1955. Business at the top table is wide ranging, but the character and credibility of a member's ability to play the role of honest broker in conflict resolution will depend in large measure on their reputation in the field of security and defence. In Ireland's case policy, this concerns the national profile on disarmament and peacekeeping[18].

Ireland was one of the initial sponsors of the most advanced position on nuclear disarmament, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, but if this won't convert the six nuclear states in the Security Council (the P5 plus India), Ireland's long-standing support for the non-proliferation regime (in which Ireland also had a hand in back in the 1960s) will be a sound base for collaboration on the overall disarmament agenda. An attempt to revive the multilateral treaty to check Iran's nuclear ambitions is an immediate priority[19]. On peacekeeping, and conflict resolution more generally, the state's reputation stands up to scrutiny.

However, it is only sensible to acknowledge that a seat at the top table is no sinecure. The workload has increased threefold since Ireland was last on the Council twenty years ago. Team Ireland will be on call 24/7, responding to an agenda packed with the accumulation of conflicts, many of which date back to the early years of the UN.

But expect too, the black swan events. Each of Ireland's three previous terms of office has suffered such a visitation. The first saw the Cuban missile crisis in 1962; the most recent, the 9/11 attack on the US in 2001. But the Falklands war in 1982 demonstrates most vividly the dilemmas which can arise. In his definitive account of his experience in the UN Security Council, Ireland's Permanent Representative, Noel Dorr, devotes half the book to a detailed and reflective analysis of the Council's role during the Falklands war, an atypical conflict in the last decade of the Cold War. There were two diplomatic embarrassments for the would-be Irish peacemaker - a break with European Community solidarity on economic sanctions against Argentina and a bad-tempered crisis in bilateral relations with the United Kingdom[20].

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17 See Michael O'Sullivan, "Lessons of crisis should inform Government policy", The Irish Times, 13 May 2020.

18 For Ireland's approach to Security Council membership, see the speech by the Taoiseach, Micheal Martin, United Nations General Assembly, 26 September 2020.

19 See Simon Coveney T.D., "Ireland's priorities for the UN Security Council in 2021-2022", IIEA webinar, 22 January 2021.

20 Noel Dorr, A Small State at the Top Table: Memories of Ireland on the UN Security Council, 1981-82, Institute of Public Administration, Dublin 2011.

Securing Europe: terms and conditions apply. Ireland's long-standing policy of military neutrality is confirmed in the Programme for Government agreed by the Fine Gael-Fianna Fail- Green Party coalition in July 2020[21]. In short, Ireland does not do collective military deterrence as a signatory of the North Atlantic Treaty. Ireland's connection with NATO, in the Partnership for Peace network, is focused on military interoperability standards, a necessary condition for any form of military co-operation.

It is in the context of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy that Ireland's regional policy is conducted. Here the familiar tight control over the deployment of forces outside the state - the "triple lock" of approval by government, parliament and the UN - is restated, but there is also a greater emphasis on controlling participation in the PESCO arrangements, in a distinction drawn between acceptable and untouchable PESCO projects. This is seen in the particular reserve attached to the European Peace Facility funding mechanism, abstaining from anything to do with "lethal force weapons for non-peace-keeping purposes". In practice, interpreting this condition may not as easy as it seems at first sight, as the relevant parliamentary committees ponder the ambiguities of dual (civilian and military) technologies and the assessment of circumstances in which weapons have "lethal force".

Balancing this very cautious commitment to the CSDP, the Programme for Government is at pains to describe military neutrality as "active" and involving "participative multilateralism through the UN and the EU". In short, we may expect a national policy based on detailed consultation, attempting to reach common positions and solidarity on economic sanctions and declaratory policy with 26 EU partners at the regional level, and as a preparation for consultation with EU partners in the UN Security Council - that is to say, France, and Estonia during 2021. Given the recent solidarity shown to Ireland in other contexts - mainly the arduous Brexit predicament - there may be expectations of a reciprocal degree of solidarity. But if the emerging "Strategic Compass" fails to show the way Team Ireland will have to rely on its own opinion.

Brexit, the Shared Island and its shared seas and airspace. The departure of the United Kingdom from the EU has caused all sorts of problems over the past four and a half years, and may continue to do so. The last minute EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement now in force covers some aspects of cooperation on internal security, but at the UK's behest, does not cover either foreign or defence policy. However, there is a widespread expectation that the UK will align with the EU (and a Biden administration) on many, perhaps most, major issues. There is even an informal "E3" pattern of consultation between the UK, France (both P5 members in the Security Council) and Germany, while at a more mundane level, the United Kingdom is also still a member of another network, the European Intervention Initiative (E2I) established by France.

Post-Brexit adaptation may also involve the bilateral security and defence relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom. For so long, one the central points of contention between Dublin and London and destructively entangled with the issue of partition, this issue had dissolved by the time of the resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. With both states in the EU, any residual security and defence issues were dealt with as a matter of practical cooperation with an almost invisible political profile. In 2015, the two states agreed a formal Memorandum of Understanding covering most of this agenda[22].

The question of fishing rights was an emotional sticking point in the final Brexit negotiations, raising the spectre of cod wars, though with reference mostly to the British-continental waters. The final outcome on this issue unsurprisingly pleased neither side, but whatever the implications for fishery protection, Ireland does not possess adequate military capabilities to respond to some other threats which could arise in its seas and airspace. If incoming hijacked civilian aircraft, or even foreign military aircraft which have failed to acknowl-

21 Programme for Government, 2020, p. 114.

22 See Ben Tonra, "Ireland", in Hans-Peter Bartels, Anna Maria Kellner, and Uwe Optenhogel (eds), Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe: On the road to a European Army?, Dietz, Bonn 2017, p. 242.

edge their presence, are to be dealt with the Irish state depends on British intelligence and military support; likewise concerning submarine intrusion and the vulnerability of major undersea cables[23].

This interdependence can be seen as an extension of the bilateral intelligence and police cooperation which responds to residual land-based terrorist threats, the dark side of the government's approach to relations between the Republic and Northern Ireland, now formalised as the Shared Island policy[24]. Brexit is a reality now rather than a prolonged nightmare; in the context of a formal reset of British-Irish relations is it time to review the way in which this policy is conducted and, allowing for a necessary discretion on intelligence cooperation, the shadowy way it is presented to the public?

There is also a vocal and widespread body of opinion (not just in the Shared Island) which sees Brexit as the harbinger of the dissolution of the United Kingdom, thereby offering a path to a united Ireland within the medium term. In the event that this expectation comes close to realisation we may, however, find that there is an elephant in the room, in the form of a largely unexamined question, that of the intensity of the unionist preference for life with NATO rather than military neutrality[25].

Do we have what it takes? This final question on the national agenda concerns the means rather than the ends of policy. With regard to the ability of recent governments to present and maintain policy abroad, the overall answer is positive; it has been demonstrated not least in the long campaign to win the seat on the Security Council.

But there is a question about the capacity of the Defence Forces to follow through in the military context. This is not about the forces' reputation or professionalism, but rather about material conditions and the reform of organisational structures in order to sustain that reputation. Problems in the recruitment and especially the retention of personnel,

equipment, levels of pay and family support have recurred frequently over recent years. Numbers of personnel have declined; ships are unable to deploy for want of sailors.

In response to this predicament, the new coalition government has appointed an independent Commission on the Defence Forces, to report within twelve months. This review is seen as an integral component in the new cycle of fixed defence reviews. At this stage there is no point in second-guessing the Commission's findings. That it, and the whole process of defence reviews, exist at all is to be welcomed.

Since Hitler decided at the end of 1940 to march east, geography has given Ireland a relatively easy ride with regard to security and defence and a consequent limited attention. But we now need to take a closer look at where our interests lie in this age of multiple risks and black swans. Is geography still on our side?

23 These risks are raised in Paul Hegarty and Caitriona Dowd (eds.), Defence Forces Review 2020: see especially Derek McGourty, "Irish Defence Planning and its Guiding Strategy in a Changing Strategic Environment"; Victoriya Fedorchack, "Ireland in the Contemporary Strategic Environment: The Case in Favour of Air Policing"; Eoin Micheal McNamara, "Ireland, Atlantic Order and Military Burden-Sharing: Is the Global Island Pulling its Weight?"

24 Programme for Government 2020, pp. 103-107.

25 For a rare exception, see Newton Emerson, "Joining NATO would send powerful message to unionists", 4 April 2019.

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