

## THE STUDY OF IRISH FOREIGN POLICY

It is remarkable that notwithstanding the extraordinary growth in the study of International Relations and foreign policy in Ireland over the last ten to fifteen years, that there has not been an effort to compile a contemporary textbook on the subject of Ireland's foreign policy. While several excellent research monographs have been published, to date we have lacked a text that has introduced the subject and brought the student through the historical context, the policy-making machinery and the thematic priorities of present-day Irish foreign policy.

As editors, we were unanimous in our wish to invite Professor Patrick Keatinge to contribute a Preface to just such a text as this. It remains a testament to the quality of Patrick's contribution to the study of Irish foreign policy that his path-breaking early works: *The formulation of Irish foreign policy* (1973) and *A place among the nations: Issues of Irish foreign policy* (1978) remain eagerly sought after by graduate students and are among the most frequently thumbed volumes on Irish foreign policy within Irish university libraries. Patrick Keatinge was a pioneer of the study of international relations in Ireland. He was also one of the earliest explorers of Irish foreign policy. As has been noted in a volume dedicated to his achievement, 'it was he who guided at least two generations of academics through the shoals, reefs and rip-tides of international relations and their application to the study of Ireland's relationship(s) with the rest of the world' (Tonra and Ward 2002:2).

Patrick's academic journey – as briefly outlined in his Preface – parallels much of the development of modern Irish foreign policy as he moved from studying diplomatic history and bilateral relations with Britain, through wartime and Cold War neutrality, into a new multilateral world centred upon the United Nations and finally into an engagement with Europe, with a focus on Ireland's place within the European security framework. The goal of the following text is to reassess these themes within a contemporary context and also to address new developments such as the rise of civil society in contributing to the shape of Irish foreign policy, the growing place of human rights within that policy and the profile given to development co-operation in Ireland's relationship with the world. Critically too, Ireland's place in the world economy is addressed, reviewing Irish efforts to pursue prosperity in a world of internationalised trade, investment and finance.

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A number of key themes recur through this volume, although they may not feature prominently in chapter headings. The first of these is Ireland's dedication to multilateral institutions and to working within those institutions to agreed ends. Whether it was the League of Nations, or later the Council of Europe, the United Nations or the European Union, the goal has always been to make these institutions work; to ensure that they operate on the basis of universally applied rules and that they deliver on shared goals. At first sight, there is perhaps no surprise here. In traditional terms, a small state such as Ireland would be expected to make the most of what it can from institutions that can shelter the State from the bitterest winds of international anarchy and from the depredations of global forces and more powerful states. In Ireland's case, however, the commitment to multilateralism and its associated institutions is arguably more than pragmatic self-interest. Irish history in general and the history of the modern Irish State since independence set a context within which, at both official and popular levels, issues of justice, fairness and legitimacy resonate powerfully. As several of the chapters below will attest, the expectation that the Irish State will do 'the right thing' internationally on, for example, human rights, development co-operation, international peacekeeping and conflict resolution, remains high. The fact that the State may regularly fail to meet those expectations, out of choice or by force of circumstance, does not weaken those expectations.

The dedication to multilateralism is perhaps best exemplified in Ireland's commitment to the United Nations. An early point of concern to the editors was that there was no specific 'United Nations' chapter in the volume, no focused attention on the history of Ireland's membership of the body or its contribution, successes and failures. We knew, of course, that since Ireland joined the United Nations in 1955, its membership of that organisation has been of central importance in Irish foreign policy and practice. We felt, however, that such a chapter would

quickly have become almost a mini-summary of the book as whole, since it would have to cover much of the history of Irish foreign policy over the past half century, including Ireland's profile in international peacekeeping, nuclear non-proliferation and arms control as well as its engagement in human rights and international economic development. Indeed, a case can probably be made to see the United Nations as being the *primus inter pares* among Ireland's multilateral engagements. A second theme that emerges from the chapters below is the striking shift in the centre of political gravity underpinning foreign policy-making. The student who contrasts and compares the basic institutional structures deemed important to the construction of foreign policy with those identified by Patrick Keatinge thirty-five years ago, will find that nothing has significantly changed on the face of it. The Minister, responsible to cabinet, directs a department whose function is to propose and to execute policy as determined by government on behalf of a sovereign and independent state. Names may change; 'External Affairs' to 'Foreign Affairs' to 'Foreign Affairs and Trade' and internal structures may evolve, but the basic parameters are the same. Similarly, the declaration of Article 29.4.1 of the Bunreacht Na hÉireann that 'The executive power of the State in or in connection with its

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external relations shall in accordance with Article 28 of this Constitution be exercised by or on the authority of the Government' implies a clear and definitive hierarchy in the exercise of foreign policy. In foreign policy-making today, however, such an analysis – as the chapters below will indicate – would miss both subtle and substantial shifts that have transformed the process of foreign policy-making. Many new actors stand on the domestic foreign policy stage, demanding both attention and policy input. The NGO (non-governmental organisation) and activist community has exploded in size over the last twenty to twenty-five years, with a wide variety of thematic, geographic and political interests. Political parties and even think tanks have developed and maintain their own international linkages, devoting time and resources to the analysis of international affairs. Universities too have extended their coverage of international affairs with new degree programmes, research centres and the pursuit of external project funding. For its part, the media (print, broadcast and 'new') juggles commercial realities with ever-increasing editorial demands for broader, deeper and stronger coverage of the world and Irish interests therein. All this while parliamentarians continue to struggle to define their place within the policy ferment; to find both their voice and their role.

For its part, the executive is today seen less as the conductor of foreign policy and more often as the audience for a 'chorus' of voices demanding attention, access and influence. There are also new constitutional and legislative restrictions, which have delimited the extent to which the State may share or pool its foreign, security and defence responsibilities with international partners – just as the State volunteers to undertake new obligations under international law and through multilateral institutions. Perversely, as the government is increasingly bound from both below and from above, the demands for government to act decisively and independently; to make a difference in the world, only increase. While foreign policy rarely surfaces as a critical issue in domestic politics, the public scrutiny and analysis of that policy has rarely been higher.

A third theme that several contributors have either made explicit or have implied, is that Ireland is something of a 'middle power' or at least a State that, to use a phrase which has become something of a cliché, succeeds in 'punching above its weight'. If one were to offer a cruel caricature of this idea, it would be an image of Ireland the valiant, Ireland the good, bringing to bear its unique historical witness and expertise on the world. Part of this is understandably rooted in a long-standing, perhaps naive, belief that having stood apart from war, both hot and cold, Irish foreign policy has been imbued with a certain credibility and independence which can be leveraged to good effect in pursuit of particular international public goods such as peace, justice and socio-economic development. At a minimum it might be argued that by standing even some way apart from those states that are comparatively more willing to use military force, Ireland contributes less to a murderous global arms race and can contribute more powerfully toward collaborative efforts toward international peace and security. From the perspective of Ireland's self-interest, consciously seeking to

establish the State's claim to middle power status does increase Ireland's power within international affairs beyond that which the country's size would suggest as being

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likely. The use of development aid, peacekeeping forces and support for the United Nations, from this perspective, is not so much a claim of moral superiority but rather a conscious diplomatic strategy, in keeping with Ireland's political culture, which is designed to maximise the State's influence. We invite students and readers to interrogate this book on this issue.

A fourth thematic point, and one on which, like the United Nations, the editors discussed the possibility of writing a distinct chapter, is the question of Ireland's 'neutrality'. This is one of the best known, if little understood aspects of Irish foreign policy and must certainly be addressed in any book such as this. However, as with the United Nations, this was a theme that we decided was best addressed as a cross-cutting theme to the book, with a focus on its significance for security and defence policy. Neutrality has been used to mean different things in different historic periods. The term was used in a wartime context from 1939–45 and subsequently used to mean nonmembership of NATO during the Cold War. Since the 1970s, it has also been used by some writers and campaigners in a much broader sense to encapsulate either an 'independent' foreign policy, not formed in the context of EU common positions, or alternatively (or even simultaneously) used to mean a policy with a strong normative focus, with a commitment to development, United Nations peacekeeping, human rights and disarmament. In recent years governments have adopted a more self-consciously restrictive use of the term, often referring to 'military neutrality', to emphasise that they see the policy as only requiring the government to refrain from membership of formal defence alliances. These varied uses of the term make an analysis of the debate difficult and the reader can trace these debates in the historically focused chapters and in the chapters on national security, the EU and peacekeeping in particular.

All of the above raises a wider issue. How 'good' is Ireland – in both senses of that word? First, how effective has Ireland been in the pursuit of its declared foreign policy goals – whether obviously self-interested or seemingly altruistic? In what foreign policy areas has the Irish State devoted real political effort and precious resources – and to what effect? Where, if anywhere, can one identify the gaps between easy rhetoric and tough diplomatic engagement? Second, in the universe of states, does Ireland offer real added value in terms of values, norms and principles? Are these in any way linked to the aforementioned tradition of military neutrality such that they would materially distinguish the Irish State from, say Norway, Canada or Denmark? Where has Ireland paid a real cost in pursuit of its foreign policy principles? These questions do not invite glib answers. They invite thought, reflection and analysis – most especially in a comparative context, both historic and political.

A final and somewhat contrasting theme evident in at least some of the chapters to follow is the marginality of the Irish State. While a new focus on 'the Irish diaspora' has given us an increased sense of the wider Irish presence in the world, do we have an accurate sense of perspective regarding Ireland's international role? Given the constraints over which a small, peripheral island state has no control and given the extent to which the Irish State has chosen to embed itself purposefully within multilateral institutions – including an economic and political Union which aspires to 'ever closer union' – how far can we still talk of an independent Irish foreign

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policy? In many chapters of the following text, contributors have drawn attention to the financial crisis of 2008 and the arrival in Ireland in 2010 of the EU/IMF 'Troika'. Whilst this is the most graphic illustration of the extent to which the Irish State is subject to forces outside its control it is only really remarkable for its clarity. How reasonable is it to expect the Irish State successfully to exert its will on the world? What are the strategies available to such a state to amplify its voice and build upon its ambitions? Is the best that can reasonably be hoped for simply the consistent application of principle to foreign policy and its effective execution?

It may be that the critical reflections above are very much reflective of the times in which they were written. The chapters that follow were all written over the summer of 2011 in the teeth of profound insecurity, not just about the Irish State and

its capacity to address foundational economic errors of its own making, but also about the willingness and ability of the European Union to grasp the enormity of its own structural weaknesses. To that end, students and readers should also see the following contributions as status reports from a small island at a particular point in time.

The concept for a comprehensive account of modern Irish foreign policy came in April 2010 through a proposal to the Royal Irish Academy's Committee for International Affairs. The Committee decided to investigate the commissioning and publication of a broad volume that would serve the needs of the growing cohort of students of Irish foreign policy and the broader community of students of comparative foreign policy. The text would comprise chapters written by academic analysts and practitioners of Irish foreign policy under the direction of an editorial team drawn from the Academy Committee for International Affairs.

The International Affairs Committee saw the proposal in a positive light and approved the project. An editorial team of Committee members was proposed and agreed. Potential authors of chapters, each an expert in their relevant field, were identified from a wide cross-section of disciplines. By the autumn of 2010 the lineup of editors and authors for the volume was complete.

The RIA's Publications Committee gave the project its support and approval in late September 2010 as did senior figures in the RIA including the then President of the Academy Professor Nicholas Canny, and the RIA's Executive Secretary Mr Patrick Buckley.

The Publications Committee asked that the editors pursue contacts with likely publishers. After discussions with a half a dozen national and international publishers, the editors chose to work with Gill & Macmillan on the publication of the volume. The enthusiasm of Gill & Macmillan for the project and the professionalism with which they approached its execution were both impressive.

By the summer of 2011 draft contributions were taking shape, and to examine progress, the contributors met for a one-day round table conference in Academy House in late June. At this conference ideas and content were discussed, areas of contention, debate and overlap were examined and the first broad shape of the volume became clear. A stringent publication and production timetable were put in place, with final draft chapters to be submitted by October 2011. The editors are most grateful to all contributors for adhering to the ambitious deadlines set.

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In addition, the editors would like to express their particular thanks to colleagues who have contributed substantially to this project. First and foremost, our appreciation goes to Dr John Maguire of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) who, as Secretary to the Academy Committee for International Affairs, helped enormously in getting the project off the ground. Thanks also to Ruth Hegarty, Managing Editor, and Helena King, Assistant Editor at the Academy Publications Office for their advice and support. Mr Niall Matthews, Academic Programmes Assistant at the Academy undertook the extraordinary task of market research for the book – including a comprehensive audit of all third-level institutions and programmes with a profile in international relations, peace studies, international relations history, foreign policy analysis, development studies and international law. Finally we offer our thanks to Marion O'Brien at Gill & Macmillan who in her work with us has exemplified the very best in Irish publishing.

Ben Tonra

Michael Kennedy

John Doyle

Noel Dorr

17 October