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1 Ireland possesses no civil or military nuclear power, nor is it a member of any military alliance which does. One would not be betraying any military or political secrets either by revealing that there are no plans for an independent Irish force de frappe, nor, occasional statements by certain politicians notwithstanding, is there any early intention to move away from what has by now become a "principled" position of neutrality, even if it is not enshrined in the Constitution. Nonetheless, the State has played a small but prominent rôle in nuclear affairs on the international scene for a number of years, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

2 It is pertinent to ask why a small State such as Ireland should have chosen to play such a rôle, what were the means used to prosecute this policy, and how it developed and changed in an evolving domestic and international political climate.

3 This rôle has been most evident in the area of nuclear disarmament, where Ireland was the chief mover in the development of what came to be known as the Non-Profileration Treaty, agreed under United Nations auspices in 1968. The purpose of this Treaty, which will be explored in greater detail further on, was to reduce the possibility of nuclear confrontation, pending nuclear disarmament by those States which already had nuclear weapons to States not already in possession of them. This is what was meant by the concept of non-proliferation.

4 In more recent years, Ireland has begun to take an interest in the question of the civil uses of nuclear power. While the State's active involvement in non-proliferation goes back to the 1950s, the latter question first emerged in the late 1970s, after the decision was taken in Ireland that it would not itself build a nuclear-powered electricity generating station. Since that time, the British nuclear programme, especially the Sellafield reprocessing plant on the western English coast, has become a matter of considerable public controversy in Ireland, because of the potential effects which could arise for the Irish people and environment. The Chernobyl accident in 1986 and the growing concern with environmental and green issues in Ireland as elsewhere has served to heighten the attention paid to the nuclear debate in recent years.
The purpose of this article is to explore briefly: the origins of Irish policies in the civil and military nuclear domains, the extent to which these policies may have arisen due to arbitrary factors, such as the personal beliefs of particular politicians, and the extent to which they may have arisen due to Ireland’s constant attempts to define a meaningful role for itself as a military neutral State in a polarised Europe and a relatively unfriendly post-war world, the extent to which Ireland’s attitudes in the military and civil areas may be linked, finally, and perhaps most importantly, the exigencies of realpolitik for a small State with limited resources and a geopolitical position which imposes certain realities of its own. These realities obviously include new developments within the European Community, particularly in the light of the passage of the Single European Act, and increasing cooperation, not only in the political area, but also in defence matters. To put the question another way: how much of current Irish nuclear policy is rhetorical rather than real, to what extent has Ireland’s ability in the past to articulate an independent policy on nuclear questions been largely a result of the fact that at a certain moment certain other more powerful countries needed a small, non-involved State to act as broker in articulating ideas that needed to be articulated at that time, to what extent is Ireland likely to have to trim its sails in the future precisely because some of its policies in the area of nuclear policy, especially civil nuclear policy, are no longer consistent with the policies of some of its partners in the European Community.

The beginning: Irish policy in the 1950s

One of the more influential figures in the implementation of the NPT is Ambassador Mohammed Shaker of Egypt. In his work on the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Shaker gives due credit to the Irish role in the development of the concept of nuclear non-proliferation. The first chapter of his book is headed:

"The formulation of a guiding concept: the Irish resolution"

and opens as follows:

"It was a response to Irish endeavours in the United Nations in the years 1958-61 that a concept of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons was laid down by a United Nations General Assembly resolution."

In other words, the whole area of non-proliferation was first made the subject of general discussion in the United Nations by virtue of an Irish initiative. Having thus acknowledged the pivotal nature of the Irish role in this domain, Ambassador Shaker then goes on to make the following rather curious observation:

"Before embarking on this study (the book under reference), it appears to us that no special reasons pertaining to Ireland have motivated this country’s efforts in that earlier phase. The high ideals of the Minister of External Affairs of Ireland, Mr Frank Aiken, as can be deduced from his statements and writings, were apparently the catalysts for his country’s stand. Ireland’s stand on non-proliferation is no exception to the increasing role played by other small countries, members of the United Nations, in the peaceful resolution of many problems pertaining to world peace and security and more particularly in the field of disarmament and arms control."

In other words, Ireland’s contribution in the field on nuclear disarmament, while recognized by this expert as important, indeed seminal, arose essentially from the more or less arbitrary fact that Ireland had the good fortune to have as a Minister for Foreign Affairs someone who had a strong sense of personal mission about these matters.
Anyone involved for a long time in UN work may well tend to subscribe to the view that in this perfect and egalitarian community of nations all States are capable of equal achievements: or at any rate it may be expedient to express such views. Nonetheless I think Ambassador Shaker does less than justice to the Irish policy line. I shall be suggesting during the course of this article that, whatever criticisms may be offered of Irish policy in the nuclear domain, both currently and in the past, Shaker’s point of view seems to ignore the particular historical reasons which led to the Irish approach in the area of nuclear disarmament. Indeed, the Irish initiative was a sophisticated expression of the combination of enlightened self-interest and morally defensible altruism in the foreign policy domain.

The background to Irish Foreign policy in the 1950s

This is not the place in which to go into detail about the Irish approach to foreign policy, and in particular the Irish experience of neutrality during the Second World War and its subsequent decision to remain neutral in the emerging Europe of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. I would however suggest that these background factors played a rôle in the developments which led to the initiatives which Ireland took in the late 1950s in the nuclear area, and I would like to point some of the reasons lying behind these developments.

First, although the emerging Irish State of the 1920s and 1930s was intensely isolationist and inward-looking in many respects, there was a real interest on the part of a small elite in foreign policy. De Valera’s personal interest and contribution to the League of Nations is well-known. Perhaps the most important guiding idea was his personal commitment to collective security. He was convinced that, left to themselves, larger nations would always tend to oppress smaller ones, and that it was thus very much in the interest of the smaller States of the world to foster international cooperation through organizations and treaties of a binding kind. This may Sound a somewhat banal belief to outline now, but this was not necessarily the case in the 1930s. De Valera’s confident and successful chairmanship of the League of Nations in 1932, at a time when he had barely begun the processing of rehabilitating his "slightly constitutional party" (to use the famous phrase attributed to Lemass) of former gunmen, provided early evidence of his soundness of judgement and deep interest in the area of international relations. Another relevant factor was obviously the country’s position as a leading ex-colonial nation. The Irish experience here was later to play a key role in enhancing the state’s profile in the UN.

Secondly, one must consider the legacy of Irish neutrality in the Second World War. This neutrality during the Second World War and subsequent Irish decision not to join NATO have been the subject of much debate. Critics sometimes tend to see in the Irish attitude — especially that of De Valera and the more hard-line members of Fianna Fáil (Frank Aiken was certainly one of these) simply a visceral hostility to Britain as the origin of its neutrality during the war. Others see the De Valera position (supported almost universally in Ireland) as essentially based on a form of internal realpolitik. According to this viewpoint, the neutrality option was ineluctable because any other approach would have been too divisive from an internal point of view. In truth, as Fisk, Lee, Carroll and Keogeh and others have demonstrated, it was a very slanted neutrality which favoured the Allies in many ways and was very far being simplistically anti-British or inward-looking, however harshly we may judge it today in other respects. It is also worth remembering
that many other States, including the USA, did their utmost to remain neutral at outbreak 
of the War. In Ireland itself, of course, it was a very popular policy. The only politician of 
note to challenge a cross-party consensus was James Dillon of Fine Gael, and he was out of 
line with the stated platform of his own party. Ireland certainly practised a neutrality 
"pas comme les autres". It has been argued with some justice that, judged by the usual 
canons, this was a seriously flawed neutrality, for which Ireland subsequently paid a 
certain price in terms of her foreign policy options after the war.

What was the post-war legacy of this neutrality? It is undeniable that Sean McBride's 
(Foreign Minister in the Coalition Government elected in 1948, and recently deceased) 
attitudes towards a possible application to join NATO some years later had little to do 
with an ideology of neutrality and everything to do with the existence of Partition. Even if 
this point be admitted, however, it is still the case that neutrality took on a life and 
meaning of its own in subsequent years, became a popular policy and began to be 
perceived as a fundamental element of Irish foreign policy. The ideas of De Valera in the 
thirties and Aiken in the forties and later, both on international cooperation and more 
specifically on neutrality, were to provide an important and consistent for later policies 
developed in such domains as nuclear matters. In brief, Ireland's neutrality was not 
purely isolationist, not purely anti-British, and some of the seeds of Ireland's later 
approach to international relations can be found in the policies adopted in this earlier 
period.

One illustration of De Valera's own attitude to international affairs in the post-war period 
is provided by the debate which took place at the end of the 1940s about Ireland's 
proposed membership of the Council of Europe, which Ireland subsequently joined. When 
the proposed ratification of its membership was being debated, in July 1949, the question 
of the sovereignty of the participating nations was raised. The then Minister of External 
Affairs, Mr. MacBride, said:

"At the outset, I should emphasize that there is no desire in the statute (ie, the 
statute founding the Council of Europe) to interfere in any way with the 
independence and sovereignty of the participating nations. European nations are 
not new nations that can be detached from their traditions and culture. They are all 
old nations which are largely the mainspring of a civilisation and culture which 
now spreads far beyond Europe into most parts of the world. There is no wish, even 
if it were possible, to in any way alter or interfere with the traditions, culture or 
individual characteristics of the different European nations that will compose the 
Council of Europe. This would be both impossible and undesirable."

The leader of the Opposition, Mr. De Valera at the time, said:

"For instance, the question of sovereignty has been mentioned. It surely must be 
clear to everybody who thinks at all that the right to do as you please is not 
consistent with any form of real collaboration and that the first thing States must 
be prepared to do is to enter into treaties, over the period in which the treaty is 
effective or lasts, you to that extent bind yourself not to follow your own sweet will 
but (to) do the things which you have contracted to do. I have always held that 
when this question of sovereignty is raised we ought quite flatly to tell everybody 
that sovereignty, in the sense of being allowed to do as you please, must go if there 
is to be any type of union. It is essential that it should go. It is inconsistent with 
union and with real cooperation and I see nothing derogatory in contracting to
limit your sovereignty in the same way that other States are prepared to limit theirs."

This remarkable phrase, which does not appear to have figured in the arguments put forward by various sides in the run-up to the Irish constitutional amendment which the Supreme Court decided was necessary for the State to accede to the Single European Act in 1986, is far more cogent and progressive, in my opinion, that the somewhat woolly judgement, with its overtones of imperialism and moral smugness, offered by MacBride. It demonstrates the consistency and sophistication of De Valera's approach to international relations, as well as showing a sense of realism which is sometimes supposed only to have been invented at the time of Lemass's arrival in power. Without going into the question at great length (and I have not had the opportunity to study the official papers on this question), I think it would also be fair to conclude that in general the ideas espoused by De Valera at this time would have been adopted by Frank Aiken when he later served as Minister for External Affairs.

So much for the general background. What was it that led Ireland to adopt the particular policies which it put forward in the nuclear field? Taking the factors already mentioned, that is to say, Irish policy on neutrality, which was clearly a popular policy; and the question of the approach to international cooperation and collective security — that it should be encouraged and should be binding where possible — I think we may easily understand the third element which formed the prelude to its nuclear policy: the limited nature of its foreign policy options in the 1950s.

The 1950s

Ireland in the 1950s was an isolated country. It had been neutral during the Second World War: the victorious allies were unlikely to forget this for some time. De Valera's stock, which had been high in the 1930s, was naturally a lot lower in the 1940s. The memory of his courtesy call upon the German Ambassador, Hempel, after the death of Hitler, rankled in many Allied minds. Even if such negative factors were uppermost only in the minds of a minority, for the rest, the country probably attracted very little attention in the post-war period. Ireland had not joined NATO and its application to join the United Nations had been refused, partly because of a veto by the Soviet Union (paradoxally, its less than neutral anti-communism meant that at a time when a determined approach to the USSR to support its membership might have yielded results, Ireland chose not to do so). Economically, the country was depressed by deflationary policies, a highly protected and inefficient private sector and chronic high emigration.

The Great Irish Love-Affair with the United Nations

By the mid-1950s the country found itself with the difficult and delicate task of improving its negative international position while at the same time building as best it could on the basis of a neutrality which, for better or for worse and whatever its origins, was fast becoming a fundamental part of its approach to foreign policy. I believe that the explanation for Ireland's crusading policies in subsequent years, apart from the undoubted personal commitment of Frank Aiken, and this should not be underestimated, lies largely in its need as an emerging post-colonial country to develop rôles whereby it might become acceptable and useful and more esteemed in the outside world.
Such a position, which was as much a matter of pragmatism and enlightened self-interest as one of principle, led directly to what may be called the Great Irish Love-Affair with the United Nations, which lasted roughly from 1955, when Ireland finally succeeding in joining the UN, until it became member of European Community at the beginning of 1973. One of the principal pre-occupations of the United Nations in the 1950s was precisely the question of what was to be done about the nuclear arms race, and what initiatives were to be taken on disarmament and non-proliferation. It is not surprising that Ireland should have chosen to take initiatives in these particular areas, where it had a rôle to play as an emerging small nation.

The nuclear question was not the only area where Ireland took initiatives. The other main emphasis of Irish policy within the United Nations at the time and, in particular, from 1960 onwards, was in the area of UN peacekeeping, where Ireland became one of the major contributors to UN operations around the world and built up a rôle which gave the country a high profile in Ireland and abroad.

The Irish contribution to the elaboration of international policy in the area of non-proliferation may thus be regarded as a foreign policy initiative in the pure sense. No doubt one of the factors which assisted its freedom in developing these kinds of initiatives was the fact that there was virtually no debate within the country on foreign policy questions in those days, and it was therefore possible for a small elite to approach the question in the light of a rational perception of the need to develop new rôles for the country and thus allow her to take her place among the nations.

The policies advanced by Ireland

So much for the underlying reasons. What did Ireland actually propose in the area of international nuclear cooperation? Space does not allow more than an outline discussion of this question. In the late 1950s the two major questions were the problem of disarmament of those States who had already acquired nuclear weapons - what is referred to in UN jargon as GCD, or General and Complete Disarmament - and, more importantly at least at that period, the question of non-proliferation. Ireland shared the common perception at that time that any moves on general disarmament were likely to be extremely slow, if indeed anything at all could be achieved. This was hardly surprising, bearing in mind the extreme level of international tension and Cold War rivalry which characterized the period. The fact that it has since taken almost thirty years to develop the first limitation agreement, on INF or medium-ranges missiles, shows the correctness of this belief. Indeed it is clear that further significant moves on this front, now in prospect for the first time since the last War, will follow, rather than serve as the basis for, the dismantling of the East-West divide.

It was logical, therefore, to conclude that the first initiatives in the nuclear weapons field should be in the area of non-proliferation. Between 1958 and 1961, a period covering four annual sessions of the UN General Assembly, Ireland consistently sought to achieve progress in this area by tabling resolutions calling for non-proliferation to be studied as an urgent problem. In approaching the question, Ireland devoted considerable attention to the issue, in terms of time, effort and political lobbying. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, leaving Anglo-Irish relations aside, it constituted Ireland's major foreign policy plank at the time.
26 There was a perception on the part of the majority of the major players involved that something should be done about non-proliferation, and that nuclear weapons should not be allowed to spread to those countries not already members of the 'Club'. But the different powers, particularly some NATO members, were by no means of one mind in their approach towards the Irish resolutions. Ireland's and here Aiken's role was crucial, nevertheless maintained its basic position and was not swayed by arguments put forward, by the Americans and French in particular, other than to extent to which it was tactically necessary at particular times to make concessions to the points of view of the different parties. Thus the French in 1959 opposed an immediate and binding approach to non-proliferation, for the very good reason that they had not themselves joined the nuclear club and expected to do so in the very near future. Ireland on that occasion withdrew the element of the resolution which called for a binding, immediate prohibition. This was not so much a question of giving way to the French viewpoint as a recognition that the time was not ripe for a resolution in the terms originally envisaged, and that if any progress was to be achieved a stage by stage, realistic approach would be called for. The French did subsequently explode their first nuclear device in 1960 and became much more cooperative on the question of the nuclear nonproliferation shortly after that time.

27 It is a tribute to the efforts made by the Irish delegation at the time (and this was, for the four years in question, largely an Irish initiative) that by 1961 it was possible for an unanimous resolution to be adopted. This resolution is usually known in the jargon of disarmament experts as the Irish resolution. The operative part reads:

"The United Nations... calls upon all States, and, in particular upon the States at present possessing nuclear weapons, to use their best endeavours to secure the conclusion of an international agreement containing provisions under which the nuclear States will undertake to refrain from relinquishing control of nuclear weapons, and from transmitting the information necessary for their manufacture to States not possessing such weapons, and provisions under which States not possessing nuclear weapons will undertake not to manufacture or otherwise acquire control of such weapons..."

28 In sum, those who had weapons would not give them, or the information to make them, to anyone else; those who did not have them already would undertake not to acquire or make them.

29 This was the resolution which led to the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1st July 1968. During the period between the adoption of the Irish Resolution in 1961 and the adoption of the Non-Proliferation Treaty embodied the aims set out in the Resolution, the question acquired an impetus of its own.

30 The initiative in formulating the details of the Treaty largely passed to those States most directly involved, especially the five nuclear weapons powers (USA, USSR, UK, France and China). Nevertheless the Irish rôle in launching the debate was crucial, and Ireland continued to be actively involved between 1961 and 1968 in the drafting of the Treaty, which was subsequently signed and ratified by the majority of States in the world from 1968 on.

**Ireland after 1968**

31 After 1968, Ireland continued to play a rôle in the implementation of the new Treaty. The question of non-proliferation had to be considered in a number of domains. Apart from
the basic elements already mentioned, a related question which came to be important after 1968 was that of "safeguards". It was considered desirable to ensure that States developing civil nuclear power would not develop parallel military programmes. Responsibility for implementing the relevant provisions of the NPT is entrusted to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which tries to ensure the proper application of the safeguards clauses. The Irish rôle here has also been important.

The IAEA contains a number of different interest groups. These include certain non-nuclear weapons States, mainly in the Third World, which have come to see the NPT as being discriminatory insofar as it accepts that certain States already have nuclear weapons while providing that no new State should acquire them. Other countries, including Ireland, have taken a progressive approach designed to ensure the most rigorous and effective possible application of safeguards. Particular concern is felt over the question of certain countries which have refused to apply full safeguards to their civil nuclear facilities. In general, these are countries which are widely suspected, with varying degrees of more or less reliable evidence, of developing their own nuclear weapons programmes. The 1987 Atlas Economique et Politique lists the following as possessing nuclear weapons capability or being on the point of acquiring it: Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Pakistan, South Africa, South Korea and Taiwan.6

Results of NPT

The NPT was the major achievement of the UN in the field of military nuclear affairs on the post-war period, although one should not forget such other multilateral treaties as the Test Ban Treaty of 5th August 1963 and such later agreements as SALT 1 on 26 May 1972. The NPT is of course an imperfect instrument and, as pointed out, only tackles one half of the nuclear problem, as it does not directly address the problem of existing nuclear weapons. However, in a post-war world which has seen no outright military conflict between the superpowers but scores of bitter regional wars, would not the world have been an infinitely more dangerous place if some of these wars had threatened to escalate to a nuclear confrontation? The very least which can be said is that the danger threshold would have been dramatically, and perhaps catastrophically, lowered. To that extern, at least, the non-proliferation process represents the successful application of a legal instrument based on the principle of international collective security. Undoubtedly, the world would have been a less safe place without it.

In more recent years the emphasis has again switched to disarmament as the pace of East-West détente quickens. Meanwhile, as pointed out, various regional powers have, in spite of the NPT, laboriously assembled the raw materials, hardware and technical know-how to make or shortly expect to make crude but deadly devices. The risk of some much device being used in a theatre such as the Middle-East must become ever more real, although the present Soviet-American thaw raises for the first time a real hope that concerted pressure on their respective clients may help to achieve compromise. Meanwhile, the NPT has at the very least provided an invaluable window of time when, whatever the savagery of the conflicts, the worst doomsday scenarios were not realized.
Assessing Ireland's contribution to the process

Ireland's approach to the military nuclear question is an example of a policy which was adopted in the late 1950s for reasons which were a mixture of principles, pragmatism and enlightened self-interest. It was possible for the country to adopt this policy at that particular time because others also needed someone to articulate such a policy. There needed to be the development of an international consensus in the domain of non-proliferation. It happened that Ireland was able to play the role of midwife. This does not mean that it was also necessary to pursue such a policy with a certain firmness and fortitude, and Aiken's role as Irish Foreign Minister was crucial. As in other policy areas around the same time Aiken showed that he was not a man to be swayed by political pressures from any quarter. A famous example of this independence of thought is provided by the issue of the discussion of the possible admission of "Red" China (discussion of the issue, not the actual admission of China), where Ireland shocked certain countries, particularly the United States, by supporting such a discussion. Aiken on that occasion is said to have resisted pressure from some of the highest American quarters, political and religious.

In the case of the non-proliferation resolution, while the principle on non-proliferation may have been accepted by nearly all the major players, the details were the subject of many disagreements and a certain vigour, courage and reasonable consistency were needed to hold the line.

There were limits to Irish policy in this area and these limits have been the subject of some later criticism. They bring us to the question of what a small country with a particular geopolitical position and special economic circumstances can achieve in an area of major international policy.

As already suggested, Irish achievements in this area were due to a number of factors, some of which had nothing to do with Irish efforts. It could be said that Irish policy towards the NPT was in fact relatively cost-free. No significant financial commitment was required — not an unimportant consideration. Since then, however, various factors have come into play which have rendered the somewhat less than complete nature of the Irish commitment to progress in the area of international nuclear politics more evident than it may have been at the time. These factors can be set out very briefly.

First, Irish interest in non-proliferation matters declined as other issues came to the forefront. Peacekeeping, in particular, was and remains a very saleable policy in terms of political and public perception and support. People can more easily understand and relate to missions involving Irish troops on peacekeeping operations than to rather arcane proceedings having to do with the technicalities of military nuclear policy. In the public mind, the State's role in peacekeeping is far more important than the contribution Ireland made to the NPT.

Second, the Irish commitment to the more recent and more thoroughgoing approach which is now called for if one really wishes to be seen as totally identified with an anti-nuclear stance has faltered in various ways, in spite of political rhetoric. In the practical domain Ireland, almost alone among countries claiming a serious posture in this area, has no separate office dealing with the IAEA in Vienna, and relies on the staff of the small and overworked Embassy. In a number of specific policy areas Ireland and other "moderate"
anti-nuclear States have been upstaged by the policies of New Zealand under David Lange as well as by the more militant and frequently successful policies of international pressure groups such as Greenpeace, who have succeeded in bringing nuclear issues into the arena of popular debate. The current approach of nuclear matters, for instance, may include such measures as the banning of nuclear-armed or potentially nuclear armed ships, submarines, and aircraft from national sea and air space. In the case of New Zealand, the American refusal to State whether its warships were or were not carrying nuclear weapons (a long standing US position) led to a serious breach in US-New Zealand relations including the withdrawal of New Zealand from the ANZUS defence pact. Ireland, by contrast, takes the position that its opposition to nuclear weapons is well-known, and that no friendly country would wish to behave in an abusive way by ignoring this policy when crossing Irish territory. The least one can say is that the belief is not supported by any great body of evidence. As George Washington put it: "... there can be no greater error than to... calculate upon real favours from nation to nation..." Furthermore, it is generally held that the Irish authorities almost completely lack the technical means required to monitor such matters, particularly air and sea surveillance.

Third, political commitment to a tough policy weakened after Ireland joined the European Community. An example is the change of attitude by Ireland in the 1970s in the case of a UN General Assembly resolution dealing with nuclear testing in the Pacific — one may easily imagine which EC Member State was the principal target of the resolution.

In general, it could be said that, where the policies adopted have involved costs, Ireland has, more often than not, been unwilling to assume those costs. Irish policy in the non-proliferation area is one which had a certain significance for the country, and for others outside Ireland, at a certain time, but which could not be said to have become a basic principle of Irish foreign policy over the years. One may observe that this is very different from the Irish experience of neutrality, where an incomplete and pragmatic policy, unsanctified by any constitutional clause, acquired the status of holy writ although this has been challenged by recent European developments. This ambiguity in the area of the Irish approach to international nuclear policy emerges more clearly in the civil domain.

Ireland's policy in the civil domain

As already pointed out, this question has come to be prominent in Ireland since the end of the 1970s. There was a debate in Ireland during that decade about whether Ireland should build its own nuclear power station, which it was planned to site at Carnsore, in a remote area of County Wexford in the South-East. Ultimately the Government decided, largely for economic reasons, not to proceed with this facility. The controversy led to the development of the first strong ecological lobby in Ireland, an unlikely mix of local agricultural interests, left-wing and city-based "greens", folk and rock musicians and intellectuals. There was a strongly post-60s counter-cultural flavour to the protests.

In the early 1980s, following this first experience in consciousness-raising, Irish people from nearly all parts of the political spectrum became increasingly concerned with the implications for Ireland and the domestic population of certain parts of the British nuclear programme, both civil and military. Particular concern was felt about the Sellafield re-processing plant (formerly known as Windscale) in Cumbria on the western coast of England, as well as the ageing generation of Magnox nuclear reactors, some of which were nearly 30 years old. In an incident in 1957, a serious fire at Windscale, led,
according to some allegations, to an increase in certain cancers among pregnant women and children. Concern in the 1980s was mainly focused on airborne and seaborne radioactivity released principally through the discharge of waste products from the plant. The nuclear accident at Chernobyl in April 1986 naturally led to an increase in public concern over these matters, especially as the older generation of British reactors was known to lack some of the safety features of modern plants, such as adequate secondary containment structures. Another feature of the British programme which concerned some people was that the principle of separate cycles of civil and military programmes for those countries which did have nuclear weapons — a principle which is supposed to be a basic element of the non-proliferation code — was not respected by Britain, since the re-processed products of certain jointly-operated facilities were in fact being used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons, albeit in the US. Finally the marine military domain was also a matter of increasing concern. During the 1970s and 1980s a number of incidents involving trawlers and submarines brought about the gradual realization in the minds of politicians and the general public that the Irish sea was one of the most-used submarine highways of the European coast. This in turn raised all kinds of fears about collisions and other accidents and incidents involving nuclear submarines or vessels carrying nuclear weapons.

**Action by Ireland in civil and recent military matters**

In looking at the ways in which Ireland has pursued its policies with respect to the problems of civil nuclear power, certain parallels and certain differences may be observed in comparison with the approach adopted towards non-proliferation and related questions in the domain of military nuclear power. In particular, policies in the civil domain (and those military domains mentioned above which have only recently become a matter of public controversy) have been reactive, driven largely by public opinion. This is in marked contrast to the earlier NPT experience, where policy formulation was a carefully constructed pro-active line elaborated by a foreign policy elite of experienced and in some cases brilliant diplomats in the Department of External Affairs acting with the full backing of their political masters.

In dealing with the issues of the more recent period, pressure has been brought to bear at different levels, both bilateral and multilateral, with mixed results so far. On the bilateral level, direct talks do not appear so far to have led to any commitment by the British to phase out the discharge of radioactive waste into the Irish Sea (although the level of such waste has diminished dramatically since the 1970s), still less to bring about the eventual closure of the plant, the long-term stated aim of Irish policy. Indeed, the endless parroting of "Sellafield must go", while no doubt satisfying some deep ritualistic tribal needs, became in itself a symbol of the paucity of serious policy as well as the inadequate nature of the technical preparation underlying the Irish stance. Little was said for instance about the nuclear waste which already existed and which could not therefore be wished away by closure, nor about the enormous benefits to Britain, in jobs and profits, from re-processing. As far as the Magnox reactors are concerned, as well as the siting and building of any new facilities, these appear to be regarded by the British authorities as internal political matters. There has been some progress on the marine front, with the Royal Navy and other NATO forces now being forced to regularly admit to incidents involving trawlers. These changes are almost entirely due to the pressure of public
opinion and international lobbies rather than government action. The Irish financial commitment to the necessary surveillance and control measures is virtually non-existent.

On the multilateral level, Ireland has raised the question of nuclear safety in a number of different forums. In the IAEA, Ireland has tried to give an increased emphasis to nuclear safety, as opposed to non-proliferation, in the debates which take place every year on these matters. In EURATOM, one of the founding treaties of the European Community, Ireland has tried to exploit the health and safety provisions of the EURATOM Treaty, as yet underdeveloped. Irish policy has focused on the development of those clauses of the Treaty which could serve as the basis for more effective monitoring by the EC of the nuclear installations of the Member States.

At the 1987 conference in Geneva, held under UN auspices, on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy (the so-called PUNE Conference), Ireland played a prominent rôle. In particular, the Irish delegation, in its principal intervention during the plenary session, made a number of remarks about the civil uses of nuclear power which went so far as to say that Ireland was not only opposed to the civil uses of nuclear power on its own soil, but that it believed that nuclear power presented unacceptable risks to the public at large and should be phased out. In other words, Ireland was against nuclear power anywhere. Critics may say that, once again, the Skibbereen Eagle was in full flight.

Space does not permit detailed consideration of current policies and the manner in which they have been prosecuted. The driving force of the policy has clearly been the level of domestic concern with the implications of the nuclear energy programmes of Ireland's nearest neighbour. Having no domestic nuclear installations, the public feels free to oppose nuclear power in an absolutist way. This domestic concern was naturally accentuated by the Chernobyl incident in April 1986. If there was an anti-British element in the Irish opposition to nuclear activity in that country, it was hardly more than a minor element. While public perception is one thing, the official response has sometimes suggested some disarray, or, more seriously, a failure to place the problem in a broad foreign policy context. This is not unconnected with the fact that in recent years the leading government in this area has not been the Department of Foreign Affairs, but rather the Department of Energy, whose ministers (in governments of more than one complexion) may have seen the issue as a popular and politically cost-free one.

Conclusion

Perhaps the main point to underline is that, whereas in the previous case of non-proliferation policy Ireland had at least the potential support of its neighbours and partners, and was thus free to choose to pursue a policy which was effectively cost-free and capable of serving as the basis for a degree of consensus, the case of civil nuclear programmes is quite different. Here, Ireland is pursuing a policy which is potentially very much in conflict in those of its neighbours. It has yet to be decided in policy terms how such questions should be approached in the more complex and subtle world in which we now live, especially as regards internal relations within the European Community. Thus, for instance, the Irish decision to become involved in a case before the European Court involving Luxembourg and France is entirely defensible and logical on the grounds advance. It also requires a more sophisticated appreciation of the global issues than we needed in the past. One can hardly doubt that the day France links the nuclear question
with, for instance French support for structural funds for Ireland, the Irish position may become less bellicose.

51 A brief look at how these questions were dealt with during the Single European Act debate is interesting. Ireland, in recent years, followed two divergent lines. On the one hand a policy of confrontation with the British was adopted on the question of nuclear power. On the other, the country followed a policy of accommodation in other quarters. An intermediate "grey area" such as the Luxembourg case referred to above, indicated that the country was in some ways trying to work out a new line of a kind which may have to be modified in the light of partners' reactions.

52 Thus, for instance, during the campaign on the SEA the Greenpeace movement claimed that the EA would make it impossible for Ireland to develop and prosecute anti-nuclear policies of the kind with which the State had come to be identified. The Irish Government argued with a degree of success that the SEA would not prevent such policies directed at the EURATOM treaty in the field of nuclear safety as the SEA made no reference to the said treaty. Even if this was true, there was an emerging contradiction. Ireland was a strongly communautaire Member State, seeking to achieve its aims through debate and consensus. Against that experience must be balanced a tendency for the country to speak as it had been free to speak in the past, especially during the 1950s period considered above.

53 The world has changed since that time and one epoqu e's principled stance can become the unrealistic and futile (because unrealisable) millenarianism of another. This can be summed up by three brief points. The luxury of policy-making in a vacuum, which in a sense is the position in which Ireland was fortunate enough to find itself in the 1950s, is no longer possible. A more subtle approach is called for, with a greater appreciation of the linkages between the different problem areas and the need to form realistic alliances with partners. Today no policy is cost-free, especially with an alliance such as the EC. Ireland is not free to adopt a nuclear safety policy within the EC without taking account of the possible costs which may arise in other policy areas, in the pursuit of a policy which may antagonize some partner Member States. Any approach to what may be loosely defined as "positive neutrality" must take into account the fact that Ireland must have something to offer to its partners as a contrepartie. In the 1950s and early 60s Ireland could offer such a rôle to the world based on the idea that as a small country with an anti-colonial past and a strong commitment to international collective security she could offer peacekeeping and the development of initiatives on non-proliferation. These roles were important and useful for other people and thus secured a measure of goodwill towards the country. Within the EC today, Ireland has a specific problem of how to offer a role as the only non-member of NATO within the Community. The country needs to think about its position and what it can offer to others to offset what may sometimes be a negative perception of our neutral role. This is by no means a matter of saying that the country should abandon its "controversial" policies; indeed, a more forward-looking, progressive and courageous policy may be called for. Whatever the decision it is necessary to adopt a global approach, based on proper preparation and a serious commitment in terms of personal and financial costs. Public debate on foreign policy is needed, precisely because no policy today is cost-free. There is a need to move away from an essentially "pure" or elitist process of policy formulation which previously guided the Irish approach. At the very least, an Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Policy, however much it may disturb
traditional members of the foreign policy establishment and some politicians, especially in Fianna Fáil, is now long overdue.

NOTES

1. Shaker, Mohammed, *The non-proliferation Treaty*
4. Ibid.

ABSTRACTS

The Republic of Ireland does not possess nuclear power and is also deeply committed to its policy of neutrality. Probably because of this neutral stance, Ireland was in a position to play an important international part in the 1950s and 60s, in the negotiations which led to the signing of the Non-Proliferation treaty in 1968. In more recent years, its position concerning nuclear energy has partly been dictated by the State of Irish public opinion. But in the present European context, it is no longer possible for Ireland to pursue its policies regardless of other E.E.C nations, and a change in its policies concerning nuclear energy will probably become necessary.

La République d’Irlande ne possède pas le nucléaire. Elle est par ailleurs fortement attachée au principe de la neutralité politique. C’est sans doute à cause de cette position qu’elle a été amenée, dans les années cinquante et soixante, à jouer un rôle international important au cours des négociations qui ont abouti au traité de non-prolifération en 1968. Plus récemment, sa politique en matière de nucléaire a été dictée en partie par l’état de l’opinion publique en Irlande. Mais dans le contexte européen actuel, il n’est plus possible à l’Irlande de rester sur ces positions sans tenir compte de ses partenaires de la C.E.E, et elle devra sans doute à l’avenir moduler sa politique en matière de nucléaire.

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