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Ireland: Frank Aiken's Early Steps to Contain Nuclear Proliferation

Mervyn O'Driscoll

Introduction

The Irish Minister for External Affairs Frank Aiken's crusade for a nuclear non-proliferation resolution (1958 and 1961) was a component of his wider policy of addressing critical international problems, but it was also an assertion of Ireland's role as a middle power. Military neutrality enabled Ireland to act entrepreneurially to propose solutions to global problems, such as horizontal proliferation, and adopt a constructive posture. This chapter explores the general rationale and techniques adopted by Frank Aiken.

Ireland was a late arrival to the UN (1956) owing to a Soviet Union's embargo on Western leaning states. But on gaining entrance to the body, Aiken was intent on consolidating on Ireland's previous internationalism at the League of Nations, as expounded by Aiken's mentor, the elder statesman, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Eamon de Valera. He built on Irish military neutrality (non-membership of military alliances), which was first declared in 1939. After the Second World War, neutrality accreted a new instrumentality. It was possible to project a constructive image of Ireland as an independent neutral dedicated to improving the global commons. In this way, it could augment Ireland's profile and influence, but this stance was contingent upon the government and minister for external affairs in office. This technique came to fruition under Aiken at the UN after 1957. He embraced 'positive neutrality' to a greater extent than other postwar governments and recognized the UN's utility. Then neutrality became associated with the message of Ireland, the independent broker building bridges, easing bipolar tensions, and appealing to the intensifying Afro-Asian voice (after the Bandung Conference of 1955). Aiken leveraged neutrality as a diplomatic and mediating asset at the UN.

Most international scholarship delivers a rather limited account of the origins of the idea for the NPT. It notes the significance of Ireland's formative role at the UN from 1958-61 in distinguishing the problem of the spread of nuclear weapons as an international problem

demanding attention and proposing the case for an international treaty between nuclear and non-nuclear powers. However, the scholarship lacks an understanding of Aiken's motivations, Irish interests and contexts and is usually heavily informed by UN perspectives or more US-centered accounts.¹

The chapter is critical of claims that Ireland was an insincere opportunist seeking exposure at the UN in the late 1950s for national advantage or profile.² This is an understandable perspective. There was an ancillary benefit to Ireland adopting a high-profile global role. But, as this chapter shows, Aiken was an adherent of what Paul Kennedy called the 'the parliament of man' image of the UN – viewing it as the legitimate forum to advance solutions to global problems.³ A brand of Aiken-de Valera Fianna Fáil neutral internationalism prevailed over many Western-inclined voices and predispositions in Irish politics and society. What is notable is Aiken's commitment and unquenchable perseverance in advancing non-proliferation. This is as part of his wider commitment to the notion of the United Nations as the one global organ possessing the authority to address common problems.

Aiken was informed by the Swedish 'middle power' paradigm and inspired by the rhetoric of the Swedish Secretary-General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjöld. Ireland took advantage of the UN's widening membership during the age of decolonization. The indefatigable Aiken was the primary architect of Ireland's advocacy of non-proliferation and a norm entrepreneur. Labelling him the 'father of the NPT' is appropriate, given his steadfast resolve to place nonproliferation on the international agenda. It was conjoined with Aiken's regional disarmament proposals and ideas of developing 'areas of law' to manage the Cold War regulating issues of common interest and concern. His reading of Cold War developments convinced him that the proliferation tipping point was near, after which Pandora's Box would be wide open with inestimable consequences. It was imperative to act, and tenacity was essential.

¹ Mohammed I. Shaker, *The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: Origin and Implementation* (London: Oceana, 1980), 3 Vols.; Evgeny M Chossudovsky, "The Origins of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: Ireland's Initiative in the United Nations (1958-61)," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (1990): 111–35; Henry Sokolski, *Best of Intentions: America's Campaign against Strategic Weapons Proliferation* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 40–6; Henry Sokolski, "What Does the History of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Tell Us about Its Future?" *Reviewing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty* (2010).

² See Paul Sharp, *Irish Foreign Policy and the European Community* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990).

³ See Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The United Nations and the Quest for World Government* (London: Penguin, 2007).

The chapter draws on published UN records to supplement Irish archives. Unlike previous accounts, it benefits from US State Department records compiled by William Burr for the National Security Archives.⁴ These latter fill in America's role in setting the attitude of the Western-oriented or -associated states and, in particular, those of the Atlantic Alliance (NATO), towards Aiken's nonproliferation campaign. The account delineates how the US-NATO nexus was axiomatic to the resolution's success: Afro-Asian support and the emergent non-aligned sentiment was insufficient. The small corpus of Irish literature which details Aiken's non-proliferation travails underplays the importance of Aiken navigating the evolving NATO nuclear sharing discussions after 1958, and his will to find common ground with the US.⁵ The reason for this lacuna in Irish-based research is its dependence on Irish archives. That research was produced in the 1990s after the Irish archives first became available. For Aiken, America was the hinge on which sealing the nuclear weapons cupboard and securing near complete UN backing for nonproliferation relied, as he appeared to understand that the Soviet Union was instinctively antiproliferation and the Afro-Asians were supportive. He contended that both Superpower's self-interest lay in minimizing proliferation.

A sub-theme in the analysis is the previously unacknowledged or underappreciated British dimension. A deep reading of the Irish archives reveals Britain's background role in assisting Ireland to transcend US and/or NATO objections to the Irish resolutions at key moments. First, however, the chapter attends to the knotty nature of Ireland's foreign policy after 1922, with a particular emphasis on post-1939 Irish neutrality.

The Origins and Development of Irish Neutrality

Ireland confounded the bipolar calculations of its Euro-Atlantic neighbors and the Eastern bloc in the postwar world. That reflected its formation, political history, and national culture. Irish postwar policy was influenced by a blend of military neutrality, recent independence (1922),

⁴ See 60th Anniversary of the Irish Resolution: A Forerunner of the NPT, National Security Archive (hereafter NSA) <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault/2018-10-29/60th-anniversary-irish-resolution-forerunner-npt>

⁵ Catherine Manathunga, "The Evolution of Irish Disarmament Initiatives at the United Nations, 1957-1961," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 7 (1996): 97-113; Joseph Morrison Skelly, *Irish Diplomacy at the United Nations, 1945-1965: National Interests and the International Order* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997).

democratic convictions, and religiosity (Catholicism). These were decisive influences on Aiken after 1957 and merit explanation.

First, neutrality was of recent vintage and emerged in response to the outbreak of World War Two.⁶ A discernible aspiration to neutrality existed in Irish nationalism historically but it was not practicable to implement it on the attainment of Irish independence in 1922, as the British retained control of three strategic ports in Irish territory until 1938. Its immediate origins also lie in Irish disenchantment with the impotence of the interwar collective security of the League of Nations, the partition of the island (the rationale for not allying with Britain or joining NATO), involuntary membership of the British Commonwealth (until it formally left in 1949), and Irish defenselessness. A domestic consensus emerged as the international situation deteriorated in the late 1930s. Wartime neutrality was termed the 'Emergency' (a national emergency 'in a time of war'). Neutrality's architect was the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Eamon de Valera, who held the external affairs portfolio from 1932 to 1948. He was stoutly supported by Aiken, with whom he forged close links during the national revolution (1919-22) and civil war (1922-23). Aiken was the Minister for Defense from March 1932, and de Valera appointed him Minister for the Coordination of Defensive Measures when the war broke out. Aiken implemented strict censorship to prevent partiality towards either of the belligerents. The Irish media were prevented from expressing opinions about the justness of the Allied or Axis causes. One critic spoke of censorship as a 'Frank-aikenstein monster.'⁷ The state was relatively insulated from direct involvement in the war, excluding those 100,000s who emigrated and worked in the British war economy or those enlisted in the British armed forces.

Domestically, all democratic parties supported neutrality, except for the Deputy Leader of Fine Gael (the main opposition party), James Dillon. This was remarkable, considering the polarized party system produced by the Civil War (1922-23). Fianna Fáil was the progeny of the defeated

⁶An extensive literature on the origins and implementation of Irish neutrality in the Second World War exists but the some of the most authoritative work includes: Ian S. B. Wood, *Ireland and the Second World War: Britain, Ireland and the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Eunan O'Hallpin, *Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality during the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008); Brian Girvin, *The Emergency: Neutral Ireland, 1939-45* (London: Macmillan, 2006); Dermot Keogh and Mervyn O'Driscoll, eds., *Ireland in World War Two: Diplomacy and Survival* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004); Robert Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality 1939-45* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983); John P. Duggan, *Neutral Ireland and the Third Reich* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1989); Mark M. Hull, *Irish Secrets, German Espionage in Ireland, 1939-45* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003); Trevor C. Salmon, *Unneutral Ireland: An Ambivalent and Unique Security Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

⁷ Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Censorship in Ireland 1939-1945* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 260.

anti-Treaty side in the civil war and was led by the elder statesman de Valera until 1959. It nearly, but not quite, monopolized government after 1932. It celebrated a more republican character than Fine Gael, the faction of the revolutionary movement that won the Civil War but lost power in the 1932 general election. An overt republicanization of society then commenced under de Valera.⁸

Instinctive survivalism underlay the declaration of wartime neutrality and neutrality's success generated national cohesion for the first time since the Civil War. When the war tilted against the Axis (1942/1943), the republican-ideological differentiation of Ireland from Britain became central. This was partially, but not wholly, a response to the Anglo-American press' assailing of neutrality's legitimacy and scolding of de Valera for betraying fellow democracies. The propaganda war pitted the Allies, depicted as fighting a just war, against de Valera's neutrality, as a defender of national and positive neutrality virtues.⁹ Aiken was probably more rigid in his defense of neutrality than de Valera as he had a 'deep-rooted' anglophobia, according to the eminent Irish historian Ronan Fanning.¹⁰

Regardless, neutrality under de Valera became identified with independence and self-determination. Swathes of the public and the political elite construed World War II as the latest war among self-interested Great Powers, rather than a war for democracy and liberty against fascism and Nazism, pointing to the incongruity of the Anglo-American alliance with the totalitarian Soviet Union¹¹ Communism was an anathema to Irish Catholics. Irish republicans critiqued Britain's democratic virtues, viewing it as an imperial power frustrating the goal of a one-island Irish republic. De Valera refused to follow the example of other neutrals, particularly in Latin America, who joined the Allied bandwagon in 1944 and 1945. That placed Ireland solidly in Sweden and Switzerland's camp. That may have granted Sweden an enhanced function to play in defining Ireland's international posture, at least from Aiken's

⁸ See Brian Girvin, "The Republicanisation of Irish Society: 1932-1948," in *A New History of Ireland VII: Ireland 1921-1984*, ed., J.R. Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 127–60.

⁹ See Robert Cole, *Propaganda, Censorship and Irish Neutrality in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Ronan Fanning, "Aiken, Francis Thomas ('Frank')," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.dib-ie.ucc.idm.oclc.org/biography/aiken-francis-thomas-frank-a0070>.

¹¹ See Mervyn O'Driscoll, "Concluding Thoughts," in *Ireland in World War Two*, eds. Keogh et al.; Mervyn O'Driscoll, "Keeping Britain Sweet: Irish wartime neutrality, political identity and collective memory" in *Collective Memory in Ireland and Russia* eds. N. Keogh and A. Sorokin (Moscow: Moscow State Library of Foreign Literature, 2006), 98–119.

perspective, after Ireland joined the UN. After all, Sweden played a prominent and leading role in the organization in the late 1950s and 1960s.

It was not automatic that Ireland would retain neutrality in the longer term, although nationalist antipathy to involvement in a military alliance involving Britain was notable. Despite neutrality during World War II, Irish benevolence to British and American security interests were notable.¹² The maintenance of neutrality during the war depended on some conciliation of Allied interests that was covert and plausibly deniable. It maintained a close and covert intelligence relationship with Britain's MI5 after 1945 and set up a regular liaison with the CIA after 1954, exchanging information about subversives, counterespionage, and communists¹³ When developing Shannon airport as a transatlantic hub on the Western seaboard, it partially impeded the access of Eastern bloc carriers after 1945.¹⁴ Dublin was ardently anti-communist and fearful about the advances of international communism.¹⁵ It was ideologically anti-Communist. Not surprisingly, Ireland applied for UN membership in 1946, encouraged by the US and Britain. But it encountered a Soviet veto citing Ireland's wartime neutrality and claiming it was pro-German in the late war. For nine years, America and the Soviet Union engaged in a standoff blocking membership to one another's perceived friends. To all intents and purposes, Ireland was regarded as an informal member of the Western bloc, at least ideologically.

Notwithstanding this, a watershed was passed in 1949 which had far-reaching consequences. America invited Ireland to join NATO in 1949, appreciating its instinctive anti-Communist and Western sympathies. But Ireland rejected the offer for nationalist reasons. The inexperienced pro-American and anti-communist Minister for External Affairs, Seán MacBride, miscalculated. A committed Irish republican, he supposed he could secure American assistance to convince Britain to acquiesce to the island of Ireland's unification in return for NATO membership. This was inconceivable for Washington. Close Anglo-

¹² This is illustrated and acknowledged in MI5's official assessment immediately after the war: Eunan O'Halpin, ed., *MI5 and Ireland, 1939-1945: The Official History* (Dublin: Portland, OR; Irish Academic Press, 2003).

¹³ Eunan O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland: The Irish State and Its Enemies since 1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 277–9, 281.

¹⁴ Joseph P. O'Grady, "Ireland, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Civil Aviation: A Study in Applied Neutrality," *Éire-Ireland* 30, no. 3 (1995): 70–1.

¹⁵ Enda Delaney, "Anti-Communism in Mid-Twentieth-Century Ireland," *The English Historical Review* 126, no. 521 (2011): 878–903.

American relations remained globally essential to American interests.¹⁶ The problem for Irish politicians after MacBride's misstep was that no Irish government was prepared to join NATO if unification was not advanced either symbolically or in reality, as it would encounter accusations of national betrayal.

With the elapse of time, Irish postwar military neutrality became embedded in the Irish mind and body politic. It was explicable as an organic extension of the wartime stance. After all, MacBride explored a bilateral defense pact with the US after 1949, and Aiken also did so in 1952. They argued that Ireland's division was the sole reason for not joining NATO. The US rejected these feelers as it was committed to regional defense pacts (NATO).¹⁷ The longer Ireland remained outside the Western mainstream, the greater the opportunity for the normalization of neutralist thinking in peacetime. Neutrality was validated in the popular mind as enabling the nation to survive World War Two intact. It fueled popular complacency that Ireland could repeat the maneuver in a future war, as Ireland was not strategically vital in the Cold War. According to one commentator, what was novel about neutrality was not that it was based on realpolitik during wartime but 'the illusions which afterwards grew up about the moral basis of Irish foreign and defence policy.'¹⁸

In any case, the costs of joining an alliance became unaffordable during the 1950s. Ireland's material priorities were heavily domestic and socio-economic, while its international symbolic priorities were irredentist. An unprecedented economic recession afflicted the country during the 1950s. Mass unemployment, rural depopulation and emigration characterized the period. Ireland's persistence with economic protectionism and its fixation with national sovereignty limited its openness to international economic cooperation during this dark decade. Its population declined by 400,000 falling to 2.8 million in 1961, its lowest level for a century. There was no popular demand for Ireland to join NATO.

¹⁶ For accounts of this see: Ian McCabe, *A Diplomatic History of Ireland, 1948-49: The Republic, the Commonwealth and NATO* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1991); Kris Brown, "A Hermitage Ireland: A Foreign Policy of Despair? 1951-5," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 10 (1999): 105-34; Elizabeth Keane, "'Coming Out of the Cave': The First Inter-Party Government, the Council of Europe and NATO," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 15 (2004): 167-90.

¹⁷ Brown, "A Hermitage Ireland," 108-17.

¹⁸ O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland*, 257.

The entry to the UN was achieved belatedly in December 1955 when the Soviets dropped their decade-long veto.¹⁹ American (and British) support was instrumental in surmounting the Soviet boycott (1946 to 1955). Washington's barter deal with Moscow secured Irish UN membership, in which an equal number of Western and Eastern bloc states were admitted on December 16, 1955. Initially, a Fine Gael-led coalition government directed Ireland's fortunes in the UN; the historical consensus is that it adopted a pro-Western orientation that disappointed uncommitted states outside the Cold War bloc system, in particular the growing number of Afro-Asian states, and led the authoritative history to conclude it was 'an ally of the West'.²⁰ That changed after a Fianna Fáil returned to power in March 1957, with de Valera as Taoiseach again, and Aiken as Minister for External Affairs.

Aiken's General Approach

Aiken had an 'almost symbiotic relationship with Mr. de Valera'.³⁰ The pre-eminence Aiken attached to the UN as an organ of world opinion was unequivocal. His willingness to stay in New York for many weeks at each session during his long tenure as Minister for External Affairs (1957 to 1968) was remarkable. From the outset, Aiken, intended to propose 'some quite concrete proposals of a rather far-reaching character', securing general outline approval from the government for his signature initiatives.²¹ The Minister quickly informed Ireland's Permanent Representative to the UN (PRUN), Frederick Boland, that he was 'strongly critical' of steering close to reflexive anti-Soviet and anti-Communist American and Western opinion.²² UN membership imposed a responsibility 'to take up positions on many critical international situations, some of which might previously have appeared of only rather remote or academic interest as far as Ireland was concerned.'²³

Aiken found a willing collaborator in Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien, who led the recently created UN section in Iveagh House, Dublin—the Department of External Affairs (DEA)

¹⁹ See Joseph Morrison Skelly, "Ireland, the Department of External Affairs, and the United Nations, 1946-55: A New Look," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 7 (1996): 25, 63–80; Deirdre McMahon, "'Our mendicant vigil is over.' Ireland and the United Nations," in *Obligations and Responsibilities: Ireland and the United Nations, 1955-2005*, eds., Michael Kennedy and Deirdre McMahon (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2005), 5–24.

²⁰ Skelly, *Irish Diplomacy at the United Nations*, 25–85.

²¹ *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy* (hereafter DIFP), Volume X, Doc. No. 63, 66.

²² DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 67, September 4, 1957, 72.

²³ DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 47. June 29, 1957, 49.

headquarters.²⁴ O'Brien and young Department members aspired to emulate neutral Sweden's independent line—something Thomas Jonter explains in this volume.²⁵ Aiken resolved to pursue a line supportive of the 'moral authority' of the UN and Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld.²⁶ Tensions quickly emerged between the more Western-inclined Frederick Boland and Eamon Kennedy, the Counsellor of Ireland's UN Delegation, on one side, and Conor Cruise O'Brien and younger Irish diplomats on the other. The energetic Aiken guaranteed that the independent line prevailed, resulting in a flurry of activity that is memorialized as Ireland's 'golden age' at the UN.²⁷

Aiken drew inspiration from Ireland's good citizen posture in the League of Nations. He was well-versed in de Valera's performance there after 1932, when the country was a high profile supporter of international society, collective security, disarmament, human rights, and the rule of law. After 1932 de Valera, an outspoken advocate of the League Covenant, won universal respect for a constructive approach.²⁸ Ireland's League activism and de Valera's unfulfilled vision had a formative impact on Aiken. Norman McQueen astutely identifies Aiken's championing the discussion of Chinese representation at the UN from 1957 as connected to de Valera's 'small nation idea' in the League. The nexus between de Valera's 'heyday' at the League (1932-35) and Aiken's zenith at the UN (1957-61) is also recognized in the work of Skelly.²⁹ And Aiken could cite de Valera's precedent of advocating the Soviet Union's admission to the League in 1934 when he raised the China representation problem in 1957.³⁰ Aiken's annual campaigning for a UN discussion on Beijing's membership epitomized his mien. He did so in the face of American hostility as such a discussion endangered Taipei's occupation of China's permanent seat on the Security Council. Aiken had already proven his mettle in his defense of wartime neutrality against Washington's criticisms. Likewise, he withstood the vitriol from Ireland's instinctively anti-Communist society, in the same way, he had the domestic criticism of his draconian censorship during 'the Emergency'. In the late

²⁴ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *To Katanga and Back: A UN Case History* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 13.

²⁵ See chapter 6 Thomas Jonter, "Sweden: Nuclear Acquisition or Disarmament?" See also O'Brien, *To Katanga and Back*.

²⁶ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Memoir: My Life and Times* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1999), 185–8.

²⁷ Noel Dorr, *Ireland at the United Nations: Memories of the Early Years*. (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2010), 37. Dorr progressed through the ranks before he finished as Secretary-General of the Department (1987–95).

²⁸ Michael Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations, 1919-1946: International Relations, Diplomacy and Politics* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), 164–71, 189–92.

²⁹ Skelly, *Irish Diplomacy at the United Nations*, 249.

³⁰ Norman Macqueen, "Frank Aiken and Irish Activism at the United Nations, 1957-61," *The International History Review* 6, no. 2 (1984): 217–8.

1950s, Aiken and key supporters decided that Ireland was rejoining an international community after an enforced absence and were settled on making a positive contribution.

Aiken and the Birth of Non-proliferation

Aiken's non-proliferation proposal originated as part of a package of concrete measures to build respect for 'a world rule of law' 'in the shadow of the atom bomb,' in conformity with the spirit of internationalism underlying de Valera's example in the 1930s.³¹ Aiken's priority in 1957 was to avoid the escalation of tensions into a Superpower conflict in Central Europe and the Middle East. In his maiden address at the UNGA (September 1957), he recommended mutual phased troop withdrawals in Central Europe and the Middle East to 'lay the political foundations of peace.' He urged the elimination of regions of tension creating 'safety zones' until general and complete disarmament was attainable.³²

Drawing back forces by a few hundred miles East and West of the Iron Curtain would take the Soviet Union out of six satellite states and leave the US in Wales, England, much of France and much of Italy.³³ He informed the US Ambassador that any phased mutual withdrawal (even 100 miles) would mitigate the dangers of proximity. He expressed concern at forces in central Europe possessing short-range tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons.³⁴ The scheme was founded on his apprehension that nuclear deterrence could fail with catastrophic consequences in this pressurized Cold War cockpit. Aiken fretted that ballistic missiles annihilated space, eliminating time for diplomacy. The Irishman termed his Central European scheme a 'radical' disarmament approach,³⁵ but it dismayed NATO and West Germany. Comparisons with Poland's Rapacki Plan fueled automatic Western disapproval. The episode displayed Aiken's willingness to incur Western censure. But he gauged there was no near-term prospect for general disarmament, and immediate remedial actions were urgently required.

On this premise, he framed an incremental Irish approach to nuclear disarmament and non-dissemination, contradicting Boland's advice to Aiken's predecessor not to intervene in general

³¹ Terms used by Aiken at United Nations General Assembly (hereafter UNGA), 13th session September 19, 1958, 40.

³² Aiken at UNGA, 12th session, 682nd Plenary Meeting, September 20, 1957, 46.

³³ DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 70, September 20, 1957, 75–6.

³⁴ DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 74, October 2, 1957, 78–9.

³⁵ Aiken at UNGA, 12th session, 682nd Plenary Meeting, September 20, 1957, 45–6.

disarmament debates owing to the complexity of the issues and the high degree of contention.³⁶ The deterioration in the atmosphere in late 1957 demanded action in Aiken's mind. With East-West disarmament negotiations deadlocked, the launch of Sputnik in October 1957 amplified East-West tensions to a fever pitch. Sputnik triggered a crisis of NATO confidence and nourished doubts about Washington's willingness to defend Western Europe. Extended deterrence was mistrusted.³⁷

Dag Hammarskjöld encouraged constructive proposals to cultivate consensus and progress,³⁸ and Aiken was of a like mind. His line was that

in international affairs at times of terrible tension like the present with the world on the brink of nuclear war. Ireland's role is that of the peacemaker. She should use her influence to assuage acerbities to moderate opinions, and ease tension. Her representatives could do this by studying both sides of particular problems under discussion in the United Nations and seeking to place detached, objective and realistic views before the Assembly.³⁹

Although records have not revealed the precise genesis of Ireland's non-dissemination proposal, it was Aiken's personal initiative immediately preceding the 13th session of the UNGA. One clue is a tantalizing mention by Conor Cremin, the Secretary General of the Department of External Affairs, on September 5, 1958 – Aiken was 'working very hard, and been for some days, on his principal speech at the Assembly' whose 'main theme is likely to be a proposal that the nuclear club should not be further extended and that countries possessing nuclear weapons should undertake not to supply them to other countries.'⁴⁰

Aiken's ruminations were displayed in his UNGA address on September 19, 1958. He placed his observations on the disarmament gridlock center stage and argued that passivity and fatalism were not options. Isolation and self-defense were unattainable in the nuclear age. This underlay his belief that all states, including small, non-nuclear, and neutral states, had a grave

³⁶ DIFP, X, Doc. No. 525, January 14, 1957, 729.

³⁷ Boland's reports from New York were bleak. For example, NAI, DFA/5/313/36 A, Boland to Cremin, April 21, 1958.

³⁸ NAI, DFA/5/313/36 A, Boland to Cremin, February 7, 1958 & "The Element of Privacy in Peace-making," Address by Hammarskjöld at Ohio University, February 5, 1958.

³⁹ DIFP, XI, No. 157, September 20, 1958, 210.

⁴⁰ DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 151, September 5, 1958, 202.

stake in nuclear security. Arguing that nuclear weapons made a world order based on the rule of law an imperative, the challenge was ‘to preserve a Pax Atomica while we build a Pax Mundi.’⁴¹

This line of thinking was probably founded on Aiken’s recognizing that Irish neutrality was no guarantee of survival in the next war. Ireland, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, had perhaps smugly reverted to its pre-war practice of neglecting investment in its defense with military forces not exceeding 10,000 poorly equipped regulars. That might be described as a token defense or even a gendarmerie. It had worked before, and so had neutrality. Irish defense policy relied on good neighborly defense relations with Britain and NATO. National defense expenditure was a low political priority. Ireland occupied a benign geopolitical position, , at least compared to its western European neighbors. It had an understanding with Britain to not allow itself to be a base of attack. Dublin had proven this to London during the Second World War.⁴² In that sense, it is correct that Irish governments had their cake and ate it, avoiding joining NATO, standing on moral principles, and not investing in the credible defense of neutrality.⁴³

But by the mid-1950s global, and particularly the European security, space evolved in an ominous direction. Eisenhower nuclearized NATO, reducing conventional expenditure (the New Look policy) and was under pressure to respond to Khrushchev’s bellicosity from 1956 onwards. The exponential growth in destructive power (signified by the shift into the H-Bomb age), the move to replace bombers with missiles and an erratic and bellicose Khrushchev engaging in periodic nuclear missile diplomacy, exploded any Irish misconceptions that neutrality offered security. After a decade of Irish complacency and self-absorption, it could no longer ignore the global nuclear age.

And Aiken had grave misgivings about the prospects for general and complete disarmament.⁴⁴ His skepticism was informed by the League’s disarmament failures which he referenced in UNGA speeches, but it was also a response to the unproductive disarmament discussions since 1946. In a world where general disarmament was unattainable in the near-term, Aiken reasoned

⁴¹ Aiken at UNGA, 13th session, 751st Plenary Meeting, September 19, 1958, 40.

⁴² O’Halpin, *Defending Ireland*, 257–69.

⁴³ Eunan O’Halpin, “The army in independent Ireland,” in *A Military History of Ireland*, eds., Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 423.

⁴⁴ Aiken at UNGA, 13th session, 751st Plenary Meeting, September 19, 1958, 40.

that any expansion of the nuclear club added to the knotty strategic calculus and compounded the fragility of the atomic peace. He informed the UNGA that it was in all states 'urgent' mutual interest to address the danger of nuclear use. The prerogative was to contain the club's membership to the US, USSR, UK, and France. He contended the 'gravest threat to stable peace' during the 'nuclear stalemate between the major Powers, is the contest between them for the adherence and control of the non-attached and the detachable States.'⁴⁵

Moreover, 'the antagonisms between small Powers which are so bitter that one side or the other might not? hesitate to use such weapons.' He sketched a global agreement based on 'mutual consent' and a reciprocal pledge between nuclear and non-nuclear powers. Aiken viewed this limited measure as 'one important element' in an incremental approach to nuclear abolition. To Aiken, restriction complemented his disengagement schemes for Central Europe and the Middle East. It accorded with his insistence in all UN sessions from 1957 into the early 1950s to expand what he termed 'areas of law' for common benefit in a shared global space. Aiken's intuition was that atomic club restriction contained proliferation and averted additional strategic complications.⁴⁶

Following positive feedback, an encouraged Aiken developed a preliminary draft,⁴⁷ supplying it to the Americans on October 8. It called on nuclear states to refrain from providing nuclear weapons or technical assistance to non-nuclear states who would reciprocate by renouncing nuclear weapons. The UN Secretary-General would invite members to state their intentions regarding a non-proliferation convention drafted by an ad hoc committee by March 1, 1959.⁴⁸

US Opposition, the Retreat and Post-Mortems

Henry Cabot Lodge, the US ambassador to the UN, was 'initially receptive' but then declared that it was 'unacceptable' after consultations with the State Department,⁴⁹ and the British followed the US 'inflexible attitude.'⁵⁰ Some NATO and SEATO delegations privately

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ NAI, DFA/6/449/8/1, A/C 'Aiken to speak in nuclear debate', *Irish Press*, October 11, 1958.

⁴⁷ NAI, TSCH/S/160051 A, Report on the Thirteenth General Assembly of the United Nations, 11.

⁴⁸ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 3, October 7, 1958.

⁴⁹ NAI, TSCH/S/160051/A, Report on the Thirteenth General Assembly of the United Nations, 11–2.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

insinuated agreement with Aiken's aims, but would not vote for or co-sponsor a resolution opposed by America.⁵¹ America's objections were informed heavily by its negotiations with its NATO allies to store nuclear weapons on their territories. These were designed to implement a NATO decision in December 1957 and reassure NATO allies after Sputnik. Although US law stipulated that Washington retained control and ownership of nuclear warheads, John Foster Dulles anticipated public criticism claiming that atomic stockpiles in NATO states amounted to spreading nuclear weapons.⁵² Dulles contended that the US shared Aiken's 'basic objectives' and opposed the 'uncontrolled' spread of nuclear weapons,⁵³ but submitted that the 'context' was not ripe for Aiken's resolution.⁵⁴ Cabot Lodge fretted that Aiken's concept possessed 'great appeal.' He recognized that Aiken had 'got hold of a proposition that is a real bell ringer in international politics.'⁵⁵ Fortunately for the Americans, the disappointed Aiken recognized the political realities,⁵⁶ even though he was not informed that nuclear sharing was at the root of the American objections.

Recognizing Western antipathy, Aiken improvised. He called for a separate roll call on paragraph 2 of the resolution at the UN First Committee on 31 October. The paragraph was a straightforward statement recognizing that increased numbers of nuclear states aggravated tensions and militated against general disarmament. The outcome was a vote of 37 to none in favor with 44 abstentions, leading Aiken to state satisfaction at the lack of opposing votes. Fortified, he withdrew the resolution and noted he was not insistent on a particular method to address proliferation. He hoped that a reconstituted UN Disarmament Commission might address the matter.⁵⁷

The Irish dissected the roll call vote and of the four European countries who voted in favor (Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Ireland), one was Sweden. Stockholm had the capabilities to manufacture nuclear weapons, however, the Swedes confirmed their support of the Irish Resolution before the vote. The Soviet bloc's vote in favor was unexpected. The DEA

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 11, October 24, 1958.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 13, November 3, 1958.

⁵⁶ NAI, DFA/5/313/36/1, Delegation Meeting No. 3, Saturday, October 25, 1958; NAI, TSCH/S/160051 A, Report of 13th UNGA, 16.

⁵⁷ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Submission to Government from the Office of the Minister for External Affairs on the subject of General Assembly of the UN (XIV Session), September 4, 1959.

encountered one explanation: Aiken's sudden roll call wrongfooted that bloc, which had no time to develop a common position. In Irish estimations, the fact that Poland voted first was to Ireland's advantage, since it was 'more favorably disposed' than any of the other Communist countries to Ireland 'for historical and religious reasons'. Therefore, the Irish calculated that the remainder of the 'uncertain' Soviet bloc followed the Polish example in an effective free vote.⁵⁸

Irish-Polish accord had arisen around the necessity for Central European disarmament in 1957, as espoused in Warsaw's 1957 Rapacki Plan and Aiken's disengagement proposal. In late 1957, Poland informally told Irish sources that Ireland's 'non-bloc policy' was 'very welcome to Poland'. A Polish diplomat observed that Ireland was 'in an enviable position, to be able to take a straight line at UN and it is the desire of Poland to be in the same position, a desire not likely to be realized with the crowding-in of her heavy neighbours.'⁵⁹

The DEA was heartened that six Latin American countries (Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Haiti and Venezuela) voted in favor too. Latin American countries typically followed the US lead. Likewise, support was given by the entire Afro-Asian bloc, except for a few closely aligned to the West (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Philippines, and Japan).⁶⁰ This chimed with DEA analyses, particularly on the part of O'Brien and other progressives, that Ireland could rely on the support of the growing Afro-Asian bloc and some Latin Americans. Ireland's profile as an independent that was anti-Communist, Catholic, anti-colonialist, and supportive of national self-determination held some appeal.⁶¹

It was also striking that Australia intervened in the First Committee to justify its abstention because it did not favor another ad hoc committee (in this case to deal with spread of nuclear weapons), but recognized that Aiken performed a significant service in raising the issue. That may hint at Ireland's diasporic and ex-Commonwealth links with more progressive Dominions such as Australia (and later Canada). A NATO member, Norway, echoed Australia's explanation.⁶²

⁵⁸ NAI, TSCH/S/160051A, Report of 13th UNGA, 19–21.

⁵⁹ DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 96, December 12, 1957, 110–1.

⁶⁰ NAI, TSCH/S/160051A, Report of 13th UNGA, 19.

⁶¹ See, for example, DIFP, X, Doc. No. 384, December 20, 1955, 530–2; DIFP, X, Doc. No. 441, August 27, 1956, 620; DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 87, November 6, 1957, 101.

⁶² NAI, TSCH/S/160051A, Report of 13th UNGA, 19–21.

Aiken next contemplated putting down a motion on nuclear restriction if the 82-Disarmament Commission was reconvened. Hammarskjold and the Indian representative tentatively suggested Ireland would make an excellent chair for the Disarmament Commission. However, since Dublin had not exchanged diplomats with the USSR,⁶³ Moscow objected.

In sum, though, Aiken had salvaged a moral victory. The 13th UN session revealed that nonproliferation had international allure. It might be feasible to build a coalition. Ireland's profile as an anti-imperialist, neutral, European democracy and former British Dominion resonated with diverse constituencies. NATO countries were reluctant to incur the displeasure of international opinion favoring non-proliferation. This reflected intensifying concerns about the dangers of the arms race and nuclear testing. The international context was favorable.

Opportunities, 1958-9

East-West rapprochement commenced when Khrushchev talked about 'peaceful coexistence,' and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan promoted East-West mediation. A voluntary test moratorium involving America, the Soviet Union and Britain began in November 1958. Efforts to resolve Berlin's status led to a conference of the foreign ministers of the four powers from May to August 1959 in Geneva. The thaw enabled the four foreign ministers to found a Ten-Nation Disarmament Committee (TNDC) to grant the Eastern bloc parity with the West in line with Soviet wishes.⁶⁴

Dublin, therefore, engaged in a broad campaign proselytizing antipathetic capitals.⁶⁵ The intensifying Ban the Bomb movement in Britain was encouraging.⁶⁶ In February 1959, Aiken instructed O'Brien to contact British newspapers to plug nonproliferation and military

⁶³ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/3, McWhite to O'Brien, December 30, 1959; Ibid., O'Brien to Cremin, December 1, 1959; Ibid., to O'Brien to Belton, February 2, 1959; Ibid., Boland to O'Brien, February 17, 1959.

⁶⁴ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/3, UN Permanent Representatives of France, USSR, GB and the US to Hammarskjold, September 7, 1959. See also, NAI, DFA/6/440/8/6, Hamilton, "Big 4 Bypass UN on Disarmament," *New York Times*, August 11, 1959, 1; Ibid., "Breaking the Disarmament Deadlock," *London Times*, August 12, 1959.

⁶⁵ DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 190, April 4, 1959, 253; DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 200, May 13, 1959, 260-1.

⁶⁶ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/2, Biggar to Cremin, December 31, 1958.

disengagement in central Europe.⁶⁷ Links were consolidated with the *Manchester Guardian*, leading to a 'well-informed' article on May 7, 1959 extolling the virtues of Aiken's restriction proposal.⁶⁸ The British Labor Party's discussions on unilaterally renouncing the bomb (the 'non-nuclear club idea') were auspicious,⁶⁹ and connections were made in Washington with George Kennan who praised Aiken's 'valiant effort'.⁷⁰

The British developments (media interest, Labor Party discussions, the rise of the CND) encouraged Aiken to inscribe nonproliferation on the UNGA agenda in June.⁷¹ This gave Ireland ample time to canvas for a draft resolution. Early responses from the Eastern bloc were favorable. While Canada, Norway and Australia expressed sympathy and were willing to offer a 'degree of limited and discreet help,' they remained reticent. The Irish task was to frame a 'mild resolution' to allow concerned Western allies to vote for it or abstain.⁷² Aiken wanted to secure American support.⁷³

Overcoming the Main Objections

US Objections

However, Irish probes revealed little substantive change in Western attitudes despite expressions of sympathy.⁷⁴ At this point, the Irish registered the obstacle was the nuclear sharing agreements the US was negotiating with selected NATO allies (West Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Turkey, Canada, and Greece) in 1958 and 1959. These were brought to Irish attention by Senator Hubert Humphrey, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Disarmament of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. For the Senator, the US executive's bilateral agreements

⁶⁷ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/2, O'Brien to Boland, February 1959 [no day provided]; Ibid., Boland to O'Brien, February 19, 1959.

⁶⁸ NAI, DFA/6/449/8/1 'Ireland and the Bomb', *Manchester Guardian*, May 7, 1959; Ibid., Reprinted in full in the weekly bulletin of the Department of External Affairs: Eire Ireland, No. 437, April 11, 1959; Ibid., Boland to O'Brien, May 13, 1959; Ibid., unidentified (O'Brien?) to Alastair, May 1959; Ibid., O'Brien to Shields, May 22, 1959.

⁶⁹ See for example NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, *The Guardian*, "The Non-Nuclear Club Idea," June 22, 1959; Ibid., No. 1901, Biggar to O'Brien, June 23, 1959.

⁷⁰ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/2, "Policy changes needed on reds, Kennan warns," *Washington Post*, May 16, 1959; Ibid., MacWhite to Shields, May 26, 1959; Ibid., Kennan to Hearne, June 15, 1959.

⁷¹ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Cremin to Boland, May 25, 1959; TAOIS/S/160051 A, DEA Memo for Government, The General Assembly of the UN (XIV Session), September 4, 1959, 5.

⁷² NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Cremin to Boland, May 25, 1959.

⁷³ Manathunga, "The Evolution of Irish Disarmament Initiatives at the United Nations, 1957-1961," 105.

⁷⁴ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Cremin to O'Brien, August 25, 1959; Ibid, Reactions of various countries to Irish proposal for prevention of the wider dissemination of nuclear weapons, n.d. (c. September 7, 1959).

with selected NATO countries jeopardized disarmament.⁷⁵ The bilaterals were components of Eisenhower's efforts to reassure allies about the US nuclear umbrella. The administration planned to allow the armed forces of NATO states to train for the future use of American nuclear weapons but the weapons would nominally remain under American control and under NATO's rubric. This was a bid to undercut demand for independent nuclear deterrents. The administration was 'walking on a tight-rope.'⁷⁶ Unless both houses of Congress voted to disapprove of the agreements 60 days after they were filed, they would come into effect.⁷⁷ Humphrey's high-profile, but ultimately futile, campaign to veto the bilaterals captured headlines in July 1959.

Aiken instinctively expressed concern to the American Ambassador about the 'potential adverse effects' on non-dissemination efforts.⁷⁸ However, he recalibrated after his officials advised against an 'unbalanced & indeed inaccurate' reading of the deals. Regardless, Aiken was advised 'a "strong" denunciation on our part could lead only a rebuff & a "mind your own business".'⁷⁹ Conversations with Canada revealed that access to NATO nuclear weapons on Canada's territory was non-negotiable.⁸⁰ If the US failed to reach agreements with skittish NATO states, they might follow Gaullist France to develop national deterrents. The Irish understood Stockholm would not support action against NATO nuclear sharing.⁸¹ Aiken changed tack and offered assurances that non-dissemination would not jeopardize the US right to deploy nuclear weapons in allied territory if the host agreed not to manufacture nuclear weapons.⁸²

Aiken also tackled US concerns about inspection by revising the draft resolution to request the TNDC consider dissemination, including monitoring.⁸³ By September 24, Christian Herter ruefully concluded it was impossible to oppose Ireland. He preferred no resolution, but it was

⁷⁵ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/5, Boland to Cremin, July 1, 1959 & enclosed Memo from Mr. Keating, June 29, 1959.

⁷⁶ Melissen, "Nuclearizing NATO, 1957-1959: The 'Anglo-Saxons', Nuclear Sharing and the Fourth Country Problem," *Review of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (1994), 263.

⁷⁷ *New York Times*, "James P. Warburg letter the editor," June 30, 1959; *New York Times*, "Humphrey urges atom aid debate," July 13, 1959; *The Irish Times*, "Senator queries nuclear pacts," July 13, 1959.

⁷⁸ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/5, MacWhite to all missions, July 14, 1959.

⁷⁹ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/5, MacWhite to PSM, July 11, 1959.

⁸⁰ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Kiernan Report P.R. 19/59, August 21, 1959.

⁸¹ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/5, Brennan to Cremin, August 24, 1959.

⁸² NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Note by Cremin [interview with FRG Ambassador], August 25, 1959.

⁸³ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 17, August 5, 1959; NAI, NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Cremin to Hearne, August 10, 1959 & Kennedy to Cremin, July 27, 1959.

‘essentially [a] referral resolution’ to the TNDC, so voting for it ‘would not involve [a] commitment on substance.’⁸⁴ Aiken was ‘greatly pleased’ when Lodge finally informed him on October 23 that the US would support the draft.⁸⁵ The US estimated there was no choice but to accept the resolution and it was preferable to alternatives that ‘might attempt to put UNGA squarely on record against any transfer or spread of weapons.’⁸⁶ Britain followed the US as it fitted Harold Macmillan’s efforts to reduce tensions. The rest of NATO fell into line.

French Objections

However, French President, Charles de Gaulle, presented a dilemma. France held a special sentimental position in Irish nationalist memory. In a material sense, France was also a core member of the European Economic Community (founded in 1957). The EEC was crucial to Ireland’s trade relations as it moved towards export-led economic recovery under the new Taoiseach Seán Lemass. De Gaulle had returned to power in 1958 to restore French ‘grandeur’, and a national deterrent was central to this. Aiken ‘assumed all along that it was ‘unrealistic’ to prevent France’s acquisition of atomic weapons.’⁸⁷ He informed the French and other delegations during the 13th session (1958) that there was no intention to exclude France from the club.⁸⁸ Aiken name-checked France as a member of the nuclear club in his milestone speech to the UNGA on September 19, 1958,⁸⁹ but most governments overlooked this, dictating reinforcement of the Irish message in 1959 to defuse French doubts.⁹⁰ Aiken was levelheaded, recognizing the absence of French public opinion in favor of restricting nuclear tests and non-proliferation.⁹¹ The Irish underscored to the Quai d’Orsay, in July 1959, that nuclear restriction would not apply to France.⁹² The Irish draft resolution in 1959 included France in the nuclear club member in anticipation of the anticipated French tests in Reggane,⁹³ but France still reserved its attitude until the final vote in the UN.

⁸⁴ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 19, September 24, 1959.

⁸⁵ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 23, October 23, 1959, 3–4.

⁸⁶ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 19, September 24, 1959.

⁸⁷ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Cremin minute, August 6, 1959.

⁸⁸ NAI, TSCH/S/160051/A, DEA Report on the Thirteenth General Assembly of the United Nations, 12.

⁸⁹ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Cremin minute, August 6, 1959, 4.

⁹⁰ NAI, DFA 6/440/8/4, MacWhite to Hearne, July 17, 1959.

⁹¹ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Fay to Cremin, PR 19/59, August 7, 1959, 3; Ibid., Fay to Cremin, PR 13/59, July 7, 1959, 4; Ibid., Fay to Cremin, 121/5-PR 15/59, July 16, 1959; Ibid., MacWhite to all Missions, September 1, 1959.

⁹² NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Fay to Cremin, July 7, 1959, 1.

⁹³ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, MacWhite to Ambassador Washington, July 17, 1959 & MacWhite to All Missions except Berne, July 18, 1959.

Neutral and the Non-aligned Objections

The essential problem was that the first French test was scheduled for early 1960, and the buildup to it was a spoiler for Ireland's non-dissemination proposal in the 14th session in late 1959. An Afro-Asian campaign against the Sahara tests gained momentum placing Ireland in the horns of dilemma. Ireland did not wish to alienate the French or the Afro-Asians. The Irish solution was that for health reasons it would have preferred no tests, but it qualified this to state that it did not question the French right to test, acknowledging the French were on the cusp. Instead, Aiken appealed to France for restraint, to take all necessary health precautions, not to test in the atmosphere and to conduct tests underground. This fragile balance allowed Ireland to support the Moroccan led 22-power Afro-Asian resolution in the First Committee calling for France to protect public health.⁹⁴

That Irish also had to monitor Sweden's intentions. Not only was Sweden a policy entrepreneur in the field of constructive middle power politics, but it was a nuclear threshold state that potentially possessed the means to manufacture atomic weapons.⁹⁵ Irish estimates were that Sweden occupied a 'very special position', and they noted how elements of Swedish opinion were advocating crossing the Rubicon.⁹⁶ However, the Irish were buoyed when in mid-November 1959 the government party's (Social Democrats) Atomic Weapon Committee postponed a decision.⁹⁷ As Thomas Jonter has concluded, there was no technological urgency about a Swedish decision to acquire nuclear weapons until 1961 when plutonium became available.⁹⁸

At long last, Ireland's diligence was rewarded. The UN First Committee adopted the Irish resolution (by 66 votes to nil with 13 abstentions on 16 November. The latter group consisted of the Eastern bloc (excluding Yugoslavia), France, Spain, Peru, and Nationalist China,

⁹⁴ See NAI, TSCH/S/160051/A, Report on the Fourteenth General Assembly of the United Nations, 40–2. See also NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Memorandum for the Government, the General Assembly of the United Nations (XIV session), French Nuclear Tests in the Sahara, September 3, 1959.

⁹⁵ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/2, Press cutting, "Big Rise in Radioactivity after Soviet Tests," *London Times*, 21 Nov. 1958; NAI, DFA/6/440/8/2/, Press cutting, "The Nuclear Test Stakes," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1959, A14.

⁹⁶ See Irish acknowledgement of this NAI, TSCH/S/160051A, DEA report on the Thirteenth General Assembly of the United Nations, 12, 19; NAI, TSCH/S/1650051/A, DEA report on the Fourteenth General Assembly of the United Nations, 50.

⁹⁷ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Chargé d'Affaires to Secretary, November 16, 1959.

⁹⁸ See chapter 6 Thomas Jonter, "Sweden: Nuclear Acquisition or Disarmament?" See also Jonter, *The Key to Nuclear Restraint*, 148.

concerned about NATO nuclear sharing.⁹⁹ Aiken's posture at the plenary on 20 November was that the resolution was a limited step. Even if a global non-dissemination deal failed to deliver or was breached, the nuclear powers and the world had nothing to lose and much to gain from seeking to stabilize the nuclear order. Support for the resolution increased to 68 in the plenary vote, so the landmark Resolution 1380 passed.¹⁰⁰

Setbacks and Renewed Hopes, 1960

Next Irish attention turned to the TNDC in the expectation that it would consider the question in line with the desire of Resolution 1380 (XIV). The TNDC convened on 15 March 1960. Unproductive discussions of the Eastern and Western plans for general and complete disarmament dominated before the TNDC went into recess and the Four Power Summit in Paris commenced in May.¹⁰¹ The ignominious collapse of the East-West summit on foot of the shooting down of Gary Powers U-2 photographic reconnaissance plane scuppered the fleeting Cold War thaw. The TNDC collapsed. In the estimation of Dag Hammarskjöld, any possibility of progress on disarmament and a test ban was put on hold until after the US Presidential elections and the settling in of a new US administration.¹⁰² Khrushchev was in a combative mood taking advantage of American embarrassment over the U-2 incident and the final lame-duck months of the Eisenhower administration.

Regardless, the Irish were not discouraged. In July, Boland counselled for a 'major intervention' as the developments underscored the advantages of partial disarmament and confidence-building proposals, until 'the tremendous obstacles' blocking general and complete disarmament were overcome.¹⁰³ Then, on 20 September 1960, Boland was elected President of the UNGA's 15th session.¹⁰⁴ The US, and most West European countries and NATO backed him, as did many Latin American and moderate Afro-Asian states.¹⁰⁵ This wide level of support was an endorsement for Ireland's acceptability as a moderate uncommitted state. Therefore, in September 1960, the DEA put forward a draft resolution that went 'considerably further' than

⁹⁹ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/4, Cremin to Taoiseach, November 17, 1959.

¹⁰⁰ UNGA, 14th session, 841st Plenary Meeting November 20, 1959, Agenda Item 67, 589–90.

¹⁰¹ Manathunga, "The Evolution of Irish Disarmament Initiatives," 108–9; Keesing's Research Report, *Disarmament: Negotiations and Treaties, 1946-1971* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 204–21.

¹⁰² NAI, DFA/6/440/8/6, Boland to Cremin, June 17, 1960.

¹⁰³ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, Boland to O'Brien, July 7, 1960.

¹⁰⁴ Frederick H. Boland, in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, accessed November 25, 2022, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/boland-frederick-h-a0761>.

¹⁰⁵ Skelly, *Irish Diplomacy*, 270.

the limited 1959's Resolution 1380. It was time 'to register progress' in the campaign to negotiate a non-proliferation agreement. To facilitate this, nuclear powers should voluntarily pledge not to hand over control of nuclear weapons, and non-nuclear powers to not acquire them.¹⁰⁶

The outlook was positive when the British Ambassador, Sir Ian MacLennan, informed Cremin on September 13 that London had 'become rather more favourable'. MacLennan claimed this arose from estimations 'it might help Mr Khrushchev in his dealings with Mao Tse-Tung if, in replying to any request from the latter to give China the bomb, he (Mr. Khrushchev) could allege an international undertaking not to do so.'¹⁰⁷

Aiken's address to the UNGA on October 6, 1960, underlined that non-proliferation was an indispensable element of his incrementalism. Invoking the memory of the paralysis of the League in the mid-1930s, he envisioned the UN had to surmount Cold War polemics. The UN's function was to restrain the forces of 'anarchy and violence', but it could only achieve that gradually. To that end, 'smaller countries' had a responsibility to cooperate with the nuclear powers to prevent a Superpower confrontation during the Congo Crisis (which erupted in July 1960), and to prevent 'indiscriminate destruction' and minimize 'further flash points.'¹⁰⁸ Speaking at the First Committee on 28 October 1960, Aiken's graduated approach was at the forefront. The task was to 'live with the bomb' by negotiating a reciprocal restriction agreement between nuclear and non-nuclear states and creating disarmed regional zones. On these foundations, progress would follow.¹⁰⁹

By this point, the text of the Irish draft resolution was advanced. It lamented the TNDC's failure before it had time to consider proliferation in line with resolution 1380 (XIV) and urged all governments to pursue a pact appealing for 'a temporary and voluntary' pledge between nuclear and non-nuclear powers.¹¹⁰ Reinforced by British advice on the draft's language, and London's intercessions with Washington, on October 31, 1960 Ireland submitted the resolution

¹⁰⁶ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, O'Brien to Boland, September 12, 1960.

¹⁰⁷ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, Cremin Note, September 15, 1960.

¹⁰⁸ UNGA, 15th session, 890th Plenary Meeting, October 6, 1960, 478–9.

¹⁰⁹ UNGA, 15th session, First Committee, 1096th Meeting, October 28, 1960, 76–7.

¹¹⁰ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, O'Brien to Boland, September 12, 1960 (with proposed draft resolution attached)

for UN consideration.¹¹¹ To assist London's intermediation with the US, the Irish amended the draft resolution again on November 1, to add nuance to the draft's request that nuclear powers refrain from transmitting nuclear information. To this end, they employed the word 'relinquish' instead of 'handing over' information or weapons. The British intimated they intended to vote for the resolution.¹¹² Simultaneously, the Americans informed the Irish UN delegation that they would not oppose it. Calculations were that the Soviets would abstain, but Poland might support the resolution.¹¹³ On foot of this, Japan, a firm American ally with a staunch anti-nuclear population, felt empowered to co-sponsor the resolution in mid-November.¹¹⁴ The Irish position gained three additional co-sponsors, Ghana, Mexico, and Morocco.

But almost as soon as the tantalizing prospect of NATO and US support materialized, on 16 November, the mortified MacLennan informed Cremin, that contrary to earlier indications, opposition persisted among NATO partners, noting the US 'particularly had objections.' MacLennan expressed 'deep personal regrets,' but Britain could not vote for the resolution, after all; it would find itself 'out on a limb'. It would abstain in line with the US and NATO, although 'the idea behind the resolution is good.'¹¹⁵

Irish probes of the US delegation in New York shed no light on the US volte face. Irish speculation was that the US wanted to 'hold the threat of a nuclear-power West Germany against the Soviets.'¹¹⁶ Bohlen, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State and the Acting Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs, informed the Irish embassy in Washington on December 14 that while the US would not act contrary to the spirit of Aiken's resolution, and the Russians were not negotiating in good faith in talks on testing, so the administration could not commit to a new policy when a new administration was about to enter office. In addition, Bohlen pointed to a new State Department proposal, the NATO Multilateral Nuclear Force (MLF). The aim was to reassure partners by creating a centralized NATO force to diminish demands for national deterrents. Bohlen talked about the 'unification' of all

¹¹¹ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/1, A/4680, December 20, 1960, 6; NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, Telegram from PMUN to DEA, September 4, 1960.

¹¹² NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, Telegram 185, Estereo to Uneireann, November 1, 1960; Ibid., Telegram 190, Uneireann to Estereo, November 2, 1960; Ibid., Anderson to Ronan, November 1, 1960; Ibid., Ronan to Anderson, November 5, 1960.

¹¹³ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, Telegram 190, Uneireann to Estereo, November 2, 1960.

¹¹⁴ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, Chargé d'Affaires Canberra, D/0, to Secretary DEA, November 16, 1960.

¹¹⁵ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/8/2, Cremin to Aiken, November 17, 1960.

¹¹⁶ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, 2/8, JR minute, n.d.

Western nuclear forces in NATO under SACEUR as ‘the greatest safeguard of all and it will remove the probability, almost the certainty, of Western Germany having to be admitted to the so-called Nuclear Club.’ State was nervous that Aiken’s resolution could thwart this.¹¹⁷ The Secretary of State, Herter, and the Under Secretary of State, C. Douglas Dillon, disliked Ireland’s shift away from the simple deferral procedure of 1959.¹¹⁸ They prevailed over the US mission in New York which favored support for the resolution noting a positive vote would position the US ‘on [the] side of [the] angels’ on an issue possessing ‘tremendously emotional overtones.’¹¹⁹

So, while the UN plenary passed the Irish-led Five Power resolution on December 20 with 68 votes to 0, the number of abstentions increased to 26 compared to the 1959 vote. That reflected that the resolution went further than the 1959 referral tactic.¹²⁰ The voting pattern had reversed, with the US and many NATO members, in addition to the Philippines, South Africa, China, Australia, France and many Latin American countries, abstaining. But the Soviet bloc now voted for the resolution. The vote consolidated the rising tide demanding non-proliferation after the ill-fated TNDC. Revelations about a possible Israeli nuclear weapons programme involving French assistance added to international anxieties.¹²¹

Despite US efforts to pull rank and enforce a unanimous NATO abstentionist line, a handful of Western-aligned states voted in favor. In retrospect, this was a departure. The Eisenhower administration believed that Aiken was misdirected, although well-intentioned. Moreover, Ireland had a powerful sleeping partner, Britain, who could not declare publicly in favor of the resolution. This was evidence of submerged differences between Britain, the junior partner in the Special Relationship, and the US, concerning nuclear matters and Cold War management under Macmillan.

Following the General Assembly’s adoption of the resolution in 1960, Aiken planned for the Irish-led Five Powers to persuade other governments to make simultaneous voluntary and

¹¹⁷ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/2, 2/8, December 14, 1960.

¹¹⁸ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 25, October 15, 1960; 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 27, November 8, 1960; 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 29, November 16, 1960.

¹¹⁹ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 26, November 1, 1960.

¹²⁰ See Skelly, *Irish Diplomacy*, 261.

¹²¹ UNGA, Fifteenth session Official Records, First Committee, December 19, 1960, 284.

unilateral declarations to abide by the operative part of the resolution.¹²² But the co-sponsors response to the Irish proposal were generally slow, reluctant and tepid,¹²³ while Japan politely refused.¹²⁴ Unless the United States shifted course, unilateral declarations were a ‘non-starter’ as Japan’s reaction pointed to the response of the US bloc.¹²⁵

The Kennedy Administration and the Adoption of Resolution 1665

The arrival of JFK in January 1961 with a more ‘hopeful’ message in favor of relieving international tensions and expressions for progress on arms control augured well.¹²⁶ But the abortive intervention in the Bay of Pigs (April) followed by Khrushchev’s savaging of Kennedy at the Vienna Summit (June), the building of Berlin Wall (July) and the Soviet Union’s announcement of the ending of its voluntary test moratorium (August) prevented steps forward.¹²⁷ Unperturbed, Aiken requested the item’s inscription on the agenda of the 16th UNGA rather than suspending the matter of nonproliferation, estimating that the matter was too important.¹²⁸

The Irish retreated from the 1960 resolution’s language in a key respect, neglecting British advice, with unintended effects. The 1961 draft invited nuclear powers ‘not to give’ weapons to non-nuclear powers instead of ‘not relinquishing control’. The change almost scuttled the effort, even though the US was prepared to back the Irish resolution as it was.¹²⁹ By the early autumn, the Kennedy administration had defined its defense and alliance policies after months of reviews. It renovated the US attitude to non-proliferation. Gone was ambivalence towards the nuclearization of allies. Kennedy and his Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, adopted an unmistakable non-proliferation philosophy. A reinforcement of centralized American control

¹²² NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/1, Submission to the Government, Prevention of the Wider Dissemination of Nuclear Weapons, December 31, 1960; Ibid., O’Brien to Boland, January 3, 1961; Ibid., Ó Nualláin to Private Secretary, Minister for External Affairs, January 6, 1961. A detailed published account of this Irish initiative is provided by Manathunga, “The Evolution of Irish Disarmament Initiatives,” 111–2.

¹²³ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/1, Nervo to Boland, January 18, 1961, Ibid., Boland to Cremin, May 11, 1961.

¹²⁴ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/1, Memorandum concerning the Japanese Government’s views on the suggested Irish draft declaration, January 25, 1961.

¹²⁵ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/7/1, O’Brien to Cremin, 11 Feb. 1961; Ibid., O’Brien to Cremin, May 17, 1961;

¹²⁶ DIFP, XI, Doc. No. 355, January 24, 1961, 470–2.

¹²⁷ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10/1, Draft, The Prevention of the Wider Dissemination of Nuclear Weapons, c. August 30, 1961.

¹²⁸ NAI, NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10/1, A/4845, August 16, 1961; Ibid., NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10/1, Ronan to all Missions abroad, August 15, 1961; Ibid., Aide Memoire, DFA, August 17, 1961; NSA, 60th, Stockdale/Dublin to State Department, August 24, 1961, Desp. No. 48.

¹²⁹ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 33, September 25, 1961.

to prevent allies from effectively using American nuclear weapons, information and technology emerged in 1961. The US Presidency took the unprecedented step of establishing an arms control agency (in September 1961).¹³⁰ The import of this US makeover became apparent to the Irish by degrees in late 1961.

What it would mean was that the critical impediment to Aiken now was not the US, it was its NATO allies.¹³¹ As the Berlin Crisis mounted, many Western Europeans reasserted their need to access NATO nuclear weapons under sharing arrangements. They fretted about abandonment by the US and worried about the implications of the Irish proposal for the Multilateral Force (MLF) concept that the Eisenhower administration had introduced. In simple terms, MLF was a projected multinational, integrated NATO nuclear force involving broad European participation. NATO as an organization would control the deterrent, and the decision to use it would be with NATO SACEUR as originally proposed in 1960. It could hedge against a US strategic retreat from Europe and obviate demands for national deterrents. The Kennedy administration intimated that it was favorable to the MLF concept in 1961.¹³² But this was a feeble commitment for political rather than military reasons. (The aim of the conjuring trick was to erode proliferation by granted allies token access or symbolic involvement in a multinational nuclear force that no European state controlled independently.)

NATO Secretary General Dirk Stikker, Belgium and the Netherlands contended that the Irish resolution was in ‘basic contradiction’ with US efforts to develop NATO as a multilateral nuclear power. In contrast, Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, and the Department of State contended the resolution applied to national forces and not multinational entities such as NATO’s MLF.¹³³ The problem was less about the Irish amending their resolution in any fundamental or important way. It was more about manufacturing consensus among NATO members on an American or British interpretation of it.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Nicholas L. Miller, *Stopping the Bomb: The Sources and Effectiveness of US Nonproliferation Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2018), 45–7; Marc Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 304–5.

¹³¹ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 37, October 20, 1961.

¹³² There is an extensive literature on this such as: Susanna Schrafstetter and Stephen Robert Twigge, *Avoiding Armageddon: Europe, the United States, and the Struggle for Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1945-1970* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 136–9; Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 52–3, 60–2.

¹³³ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 35, October 11, 1961.

¹³⁴ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 38, October 20, 1961.

Washington was categorical: the resolution was ‘not inconsistent with [the] participation of NATO’s non-nuclear nations in either present stockpile arrangements for any multilateral arrangements that might be envisaged.’¹³⁵ Despite this, most of NATO would not support it without amendment.¹³⁶ The US went along with a UK stratagem of proposing a limited amendment to the Irish to allay American allies fears, although many wanted a more extensive revision of the Irish resolution than the UK’s minimal finessing.¹³⁷ The other NATO members ‘reluctantly’ accepted the UK amendment on 25 October as the solution, except for France and Portugal, who still saw it as perilously ambiguous.¹³⁸

There was no indication that Irish sources were aware of the large scale internal NATO deliberations until the Anglo-American missions to the UN met with Seán Ronan on 27 October to secure the necessary revision to satisfy NATO.¹³⁹ The Canadians and Dutch made similar points to the British and Americans.¹⁴⁰ All four delegations attached ‘considerable importance’ to the unhelpful ambiguity of the word ‘accept’ which would store up complications in the parliaments of NATO states.¹⁴¹

Aiken instructed that the resolution should instead read that non-nuclear states ‘undertake not to make or acquire possession of such weapons’.¹⁴² This initially triggered ‘concern’ for Rusk, who surmised it would displease allies and US policy. Moreover, US nuclear law referred ‘to acquisition of control rather than possession’.¹⁴³ Notwithstanding that Aiken and the Irish had played the game sufficiently well to make the resolution palatable, so that when it circulated to the First Committee on 17 November it ‘commanded wide if not unanimous support’.¹⁴⁴ To deflect France’s intention to abstain, the Irish delegation adopted a ‘procedural legerdemain’ of proposing the resolution’s adoption by acclamation at the General Assembly plenary, to

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 39, October 25, 1961, Section One.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 41, October 27, 1961.

¹⁴⁰ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10/1, Ronan to Secretary, J.41/61, October 28, 1961.

¹⁴¹ 60th Anniversary, Doc. 42, November 7, 1961

¹⁴² 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 43, November 13, 1961; NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10/1, Text of clear cable to delegation to the UN General Assembly, No. 306, November 7, 1961.

¹⁴³ 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 44, 14 Nov. 1961. See also 60th Anniversary, NSA, Doc. 43, November 13, 1961.

¹⁴⁴ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10/1, Ronan to Secretary, December 5, 1961, 3.

which the French grudgingly agreed.¹⁴⁵ Resolution 1665 (XIV) was passed on 4 December 1961.

The entire episode in 1961 reveals that Dean Rusk's power as Secretary of State was indispensable in supporting the Irish resolution throughout October 1961 against the dissenting views of most US allies, including France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Luxembourg. It illustrated a sea change in the Kennedy Administration as JFK was the first president to strongly underline the dangers of nuclear proliferation. But it was Dean Rusk and the US, supported by Britain, together with measured accommodation by Aiken that eventually surmounted the objections in several NATO capitals.

Aiken and the NPT Negotiations 1962-8

Aiken's prognosis remained after 1962: the international community had to identify and solve problems 'one by one', constructing 'areas of law' (functional or regional), and uphold the United Nations as a global institution as the guarantor of international order and peace. In this way, tensions could 'subside'.¹⁴⁶ He was matter-of-fact – general and complete disarmament was not imminent but the window of opportunity to stop nonproliferation was closing rapidly. He regarded resolution 1665 (XIV) as 'definitive', but there was 'no magic wand' to bring it about.¹⁴⁷

At first, the prospects for nonproliferation appeared to rally. The Eighteen-National Disarmament Committee (ENDC), which was endorsed by the UNGA, following the urging of Washington and Moscow, had begun its work in March 1962, and non-proliferation was part of its agenda. The 'US was keen on' Ireland becoming a member, but Aiken politely declined.¹⁴⁸ The Department was underfunded and understaffed and had no Disarmament/NonProliferation section; it simply lacked the capacity to engage in detailed and prolonged disarmament negotiations. The US and USSR were co-chairmen of the ENDC and both of their

¹⁴⁵ Skelly, *Irish diplomacy*, 263.

¹⁴⁶ NAI, DFA/2006/44/448, Statement by Aiken in the Disarmament Commission of the UN, May 12, 1965, *passim*.

¹⁴⁷ NAI, DFA/2006/44/448, Statement by Aiken in the Disarmament Commission of the UN, May 12, 1965, 2.

¹⁴⁸ DIFP, XII, Doc. No. 95, 133.

draft treaties on general and complete disarmament included nonproliferation as one of the first steps towards disarmament.¹⁴⁹ Thus, there was a vital bipolar convergence which could serve as a basis. Aiken, rather than making a formal request to the ENDC directed Irish diplomats to make representations to the members of the ENDC to fulfil UNGA Resolution 1665 (XVI).¹⁵⁰

East-West détente developed in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, impelled by the dramatization of the sobering consequences of nuclear brinksmanship. Aiken welcomed the resulting Moscow Limited Test Ban Treaty as ‘the first break-through’ in the ‘long search’ for some nuclear weapons agreement. He qualified that it was of ‘psychological’ value, but it was not an intractable barrier to proliferation. He prognosticated a spread of nuclear weapons ‘in geometrical progression in ever widening circles throughout the world’. Referencing the Missile Crisis as a demonstration of the ease with which the ‘uneasy balance of power’ could be upset, he said it accentuated the need to give immediate effect to resolution 1665 (XVI) in a global pact.¹⁵¹ He reasoned that such a pact would make the next logical step to the LTBT.

Regardless of some hopeful outward indications in 1963 and 1964 according to the Irish Department of External Affairs,¹⁵² the insoluble disagreement between the US and USSR about the MLF remained. That made progress on non-proliferation ‘most difficult’, despite the atmosphere of détente and a mutual agreement on the importance of pursuing nonproliferation.¹⁵³ Aiken was, therefore, diffident in expressing views on the MLF publicly. He was in no mood to be drawn into a most divisive controversy between the US/NATO and USSR: did resolution 1665 (XIV) permit the US to transfer nuclear weapons to the proposed MLF? Instead, he sidestepped it. There was no advantage in becoming entangled in the interminable wrangle. In 1964, all Irish missions were directed on Aiken’s behalf that the MLF was a ‘hypothetical proposition’. Irish representatives should limit themselves to the observation that all states ought to comply with Resolution 1665 (XIV) immediately. Any arrangements agreed upon as part of that should not breach the resolution. Time did not allow

¹⁴⁹ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10 II, Memo, The Prevention of the Wider Dissemination of Nuclear Weapons, n.d.

¹⁵⁰ NAI, DFA/2006/44/448, Molloy to Ambassador/Washington, March 2, 1962.

¹⁵¹ UNGA, 18th Session, 1226th Plenary Meeting, agenda item 9, October 3, 1962, 1–2.

¹⁵² NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10 II, Extract from Memo from Govt. dated November 13, 1964, 19th session of UNGA.

¹⁵³ NAI, DFA/6/440/8/10 II, Memo, The Prevention of the Wider Dissemination of Nuclear Weapons, n.d.

‘to delay action because of a future possible contingency.’¹⁵⁴ Abstract problems should not obstruct the search for and implementation of practical solutions, in effect.¹⁵⁵

In any event, the MLF did not come into being owing to a lack of enthusiasm among America’s European partners, including eventually West Germany. The first Chinese test on 16 October refocused US and international attention on the presumed perils of proliferation, leading to the Gilpatric report to President Johnson in January 1965. Gilpatric advised the prioritization of non-proliferation as a strategic priority necessitating a retreat from the MLF and the establishment of the Nuclear Planning Group, which unblocked the US-Soviet logjam over the NPT. In that sense Aiken was in tune with the new undercurrents when he urged the UN Disarmament Commission in May 1965 that the nuclear powers proceed to negotiate the NPT with all haste. That would reduce the chances of nuclear weapons ‘being used somewhere at some time by a lunatic national leader or revolutionary’.¹⁵⁶ He pressed nuclear powers to offer non-nuclear states positive security guarantees.¹⁵⁷ If the efforts to negotiate a treaty succeeded it would have a positive effect on reducing tension in the international security environment comparable to the LTBT.¹⁵⁸ He grew more insistent at the UN First Committee in November 1966 and declared it might be feasible to keep the peace between five nuclear powers. But at some point, beyond that, an inevitable calamity was inevitable as the uneasy strategic balance would be destabilized by proliferation.¹⁵⁹

Aiken greeted news of the opening of the Treaty of Tlatelolco establishing a NWFZ in Latin America for signing in June 1967 as a ‘psychological stimulant’ to impel the finalization of the ongoing non-proliferation talks, and adding to the Antarctic Treaty (1959), LTBT (1963) and Outer Space Treaty (1967).¹⁶⁰ The ENDC met the deadline of March 1968 set by the UNGA to produce a draft NPT and it opened for signature on 1 July 1968. In remarks to the First Committee of the UN on 6 May 1968, Aiken commended the US, USSR, and Britain for surmounting their differences and displaying wisdom. Acknowledging that some delegations

¹⁵⁴ NAI, DFA/2006/44/448, Ronan to all missions, October 22, 1962.

¹⁵⁵ NAI, DFA/440/8/10 III, Seán Ronan, Comments upon Draft Non-Dissemination Resolution currently under consideration by 8 ‘non-aligned’ Members of the ENDC, June 4, 1965, 1.

¹⁵⁶ NAI, DFA/2006/44/448, Statement by Aiken in the Disarmament Commission of the UN, May 12, 1965, 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ UNGA, 21st Session, First Committee, 1441st meeting, November 3, 1966, 83.

¹⁶⁰ NAI, DFA/2006/44/448, Statements and Speeches, Department of External Affairs, June 1967.

may not have been fully satisfied with all the clauses, he counselled self-control and repeated the advice of his Canadian counterpart to ‘put progress before perfection’.¹⁶¹ He reckoned that there was a ‘growing realisation’ that acquiring nuclear weapons increased risk, not security. In recognition of Aiken’s catalytic role in articulating and formulating the proliferation hazard and putting forward an outline solution with the unanimous backing of the UN, he was invited to sign the treaty in Moscow on 30 June 1968.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, Irish neutrality was a critical component in the eventual success of Aiken’s campaign that led to the general assembly resolution 1665 (XIV). It endowed Ireland with credibility among the strengthening decolonized contingent of independent states at the UN after 1955. Decolonization transformed the Western ‘old [white] men’s club’, and the automatic US majority, requiring a retuning to the new balance in the UNGA. Ireland could claim affinity as a postcolonial state. Aiken, a former republican revolutionary, and the unrepentant defender of wartime neutrality, possessed cachet, although he had renounced political violence decades earlier. His steadfastness in forging an uncommitted outlook also won respect in the Soviet bloc.

Simultaneously, Ireland’s Western links granted it the ability to negotiate with the Americans and retain ties with many countries of the British Commonwealth, even though it had left that body. Its idiosyncratic, but intimate, relationship with Britain was a diplomatic asset that would assist Aiken’s efforts to assuage Washington and NATO’s apprehensions about non-proliferation and finesse the texts of resolutions. To that extent, to borrow from the contemporary lexicon, Aiken’s neutral Ireland possessed latent ‘soft power’ at a hinge point in global governance. The UN was transforming from a restricted body dominated by the Northern hemisphere. Aiken and O’Brien recognized Ireland’s latent power and actualized it to transform Ireland into a prospective bridgebuilder and a catalyst for change. Aiken captured and articulated the intuitive, but as yet inchoate concerns, about the spread of nuclear weapons. He was impelled by the need to mitigate a conspicuously crisis-ridden phase in the Cold War, occasioned by the Soviet Union’s erosion of American nuclear superiority, and the temptation of allies to engage in nuclear hedging.

¹⁶¹ NAI, DFA/2006/44/448, Statement by Aiken in the First Committee, May 6, 1968.

Overall, although Ireland was a small state not prepared to invest a significant proportion of its diplomatic resources in the interminable discussions about nuclear weapons, Aiken's foreign policy propelled the nonproliferation campaign from 1958-61, which he estimated to be in Ireland's enlightened self-interest. Operationally, Aiken recognized the interests of the US and NATO had to be accommodated and recognized that some modulation of the resolution was necessary to surmount their criticisms. In that, he displayed realism and unquenchable patience and perseverance. He succeeded in securing a non-proliferation resolution in 1961, although Ireland possessed only restricted diplomatic resources. Finally, he estimated that the crucial final steps to unblocking the path to a pact lay with the nuclear powers, because the key to non-proliferation was uniting Moscow and Washington who would, in turn, convince their allies and non-nuclear powers to accept the NPT. That came after the Chinese test of 1964, which occasioned Washington's prioritization of nonproliferation and its abandonment of the MLF.

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This general includes several Irish Department of External Affairs documents illuminating Frank Aiken's approach.

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