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Editorial

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As we approach the year 2025, the international order finds itself at a critical juncture, contending with an increasingly multipolar world. It is tempting to adopt a simplistic analysis of the current global tensions—framing them as a confrontation between the East and the West or positioning the West against the Rest, or hastily drawing parallels with the Cold War. Nevertheless, such reductionist reasoning obscures the unique and complex realities of today's geopolitical landscape. It is imperative that we examine this situation with greater nuance.

Complex and intersecting transformations undeniably shape today's global dynamics. The repercussions could be profoundly detrimental if geoeconomic competition, realpolitik and weaponised interdependence are allowed to reshape international society. If left unchecked, these forces could undermine the architecture of globalisation, fragmenting the world into competing blocs. An inclusive global order that accommodates a variety of perspectives and addresses collective challenges is essential for humanity to prosper. The expansion of BRICS on 1 January 2024 from its original five members (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) to include Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates signals an attempt to reduce dependence on Western-dominated institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Smaller nations, such as Ireland, depend on the stable, rules-based multilateral order. It is in their best interest to actively enhance international cooperation in a way that accurately reflects contemporary realities and eschews false universalism. Any revision of the multilateral order needs to be fair, equitable and sustainable.

This year's annual conference was organised around the theme 'The West or the Rest? Identity, Ideology, Institutions'. 'The West' is a bewildering term that has shapeshifted, waxed and waned across time 'from Plato to NATO', as David Gress memorably put it in his 1998 book of the same title. 'The West' draws its artificial singularity from the imagined other, the 'East'. It is a loaded term and reminds us that terms and concepts are not neutral. There is a long and meandering history of the notion of 'the West' or 'Western civilisation' from its presumed mythical Greco-Roman origins to the present. Naoise Mac Sweeney, the plenary speaker at *ISIA*'s annual conference, elaborated on that in her recent book, *The West: A new history of an old idea* (2023). She revealed that modern conceptions of 'the West' are precisely that, *modern*. Cherished assumptions that Western civilisation and Europe are based on democracy, justice and human rights bear only a limited relationship to the racialism, power politics, absolutism and imperialism that permeated its earlier manifestations.

Four papers delivered at 'The West or the Rest?' conference and published as articles in this volume are united by their critical examination of Western-centric mindsets and recognition of non-Western perspectives or alternate visions. The articles collectively challenge mainstream Western self-images. **Jon Thares Davidann** addresses 'The Myth of Western Superiority', challenging the assumption that Westernisation was and is the only pathway to modernity, exploring the life histories and observations of the Japanese reformer and educator Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) and the American journalist Marguerite Harrison (1879–1967). Despite witnessing incalculable technological differences between

Japan and the West in the 1860s, such as concrete cities and extensive railroad systems, Fukuzawa rejected the notion of inherent Western superiority. A pragmatist, he argued for the selective adaptation of Western advances while retaining Japan's distinctiveness and character. Later, Harrison, drawing on her extensive first-hand experience of Asia in the 1920s, rejected notions of Western racial superiority and contradicted Western conceptions of Asia. She recognised that Asia was undergoing intense transformations on the road to becoming a global force, but that it would not be in the image of the West.

Manimporok adopts another perspective on the turn of the twentieth century. He highlights how Japanese *hyakushō* (sea folk) in the Arafura Sea, namely pearl divers, navigated freely across various states and European empires' territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They evaded international borders and law, Western empires and the Japanese state. A consideration of their lives overturns prevailing conceptions of centre-periphery dynamics and notions of racial and social stratification at the time. The piece shows how the *hyakushō* did not adhere to expected norms, moulding their own communities. As largely autonomous transnational agents, they hint at more complex narratives of modernisation and globalisation that undermine the monotone of 'the West versus the Rest'.

Next, **Jan Niklas Huhn** clarifies how the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) constructed a 'third way' between the two blocs during the Cold War. Through scrutinising the first five NAM summit declarations, beginning with Bandung (1955), Huhn maps the shaping of NAM's identity. He clarifies how NAM nations defined their identities against 'the West', as its 'Other'. They employed a global populist discourse, sidestepping entrapment in the bipolar Cold War discourse, collectively pressuring 'the West' to deliver on its rhetorical value system. This drove the global discourse of decolonisation, equality, diversity, peace and economic justice.

The contribution by **Dorothea Gail** is a natural follow-on from Huhn. It takes Panjak Mishra's recent essay 'The Shoah after Gaza' in the *London Review of Books* as its starting point. Gail argues that Western moral frameworks (as part of the much-vaunted liberal international order) stand accused of double standards in their rhetorical promotion of human rights enforcement and democracy, particularly during the current Gaza conflict. She sketches how emerging powers from the Global South, such as South Africa, Brazil and India may increasingly adopt global moral leadership roles. America and 'the Global West' are losing global institutional, material and moral power, allowing the opening of a space to develop new frameworks for international cooperation. Therefore, Gail contends that universal values can no longer be interpreted through Western lenses.

Collectively, the articles by Davidann, Mamimporok, Huhn and Gail destabilise common notions of Western dominance or superiority. They point to a transition from Western hegemony to a multipolar world order where Western claims are increasingly contested.

Then tánaiste **Micheál Martin's** address at the annual conference aligned with some of their thinking. He asserted that Ireland was adaptable to the fluid and volatile international environment due to its national identity, history, and culture. However, Martin dismissed the 'West versus the Rest' binary as simplistic, highlighting Ireland's tradition of advocating for cooperation, dialogue, respect for differences, international law, global justice, equality, and effective international institutions. He argued that there is no contradiction between Ireland's commitment to contemporary European values and broader international cooperation.

Of course, Ireland can claim a tradition of independence and critical thinking on some international issues, which can put it at odds with its Western neighbours. For example, the Irish government has consistently promoted the human and political rights of Palestinians and Israel's fulfilment of its obligations under international law. It balances that with condemning terrorism and supporting Israel's right to security within recognised borders.

Deirdre Ní Fhallúin's article examines how the practice of Irish diplomacy evolved from 2000 to 2020, navigating 'rough seas' since the beginning of the new millennium. This period has been marked by challenges such as 9/11, the Great Recession (2007–09), Brexit (2016), the COVID-19 pandemic, and the prolonged suspensions of the Northern Ireland Parliament or Stormont (2002–07, 2017–20, 2022–24). Through interviews with senior diplomats, Ní Fhallúin investigates the implications of changes within Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs, including its substantial expansion abroad and strengthening its relations with other government departments as the distinction between foreign and domestic policy has blurred. Overall, Ní Fhallúin argues that Ireland has capitalised on its traditional diplomatic strengths. A key aspect is its reliance on cooperation and interdependence rather than 'hard power'. Irish diplomats thrive in open, networked, and informal environments, utilising their soft interpersonal and intercultural skills. Consequently, Irish diplomacy is well-positioned, though some issues warrant further attention. These include the challenges of balancing trade and human rights, aligning the foreign and domestic aspects of complex problems (such as climate change, migration, and military security), fostering indigenous Irish foreign policy expertise and tackling information overload.

Two critical contemporary international issues are explored in the following two articles. **John Ryan** examines the paradoxical dynamics between the US and China as rivals and partners in the global economy. The article analyses three main aspects: the US policy of engagement with China, the US dollar's declining global reserve status, and China's ambivalence towards RMB internationalisation. A central claim is that China grapples with transitioning from capital investment to driving domestic demand and elevating workforce skills. Ryan contends that China's more forceful political stance, particularly in the South China Sea, along with economic headwinds, including high debt levels and enforced decoupling from the US, are hurting its potential to become the world's largest economy. Regardless, China represents a formidable competitor and the second term of Donald J. Trump as US president and his 'America First' policy forebodes heightened tensions.

Climate change is the second pressing international issue appraised. **Dug Cubie** uses Ireland as his primary case study to examine the interconnected domestic and international legal implications of sea-level rise and human mobility. Climate change challenges the Department of Foreign Affairs as it seeks to criss-cross between the domestic and international levels to broker practical solutions. Like many global issues, climate change is multifaceted. Public diplomacy is necessary to secure the buy-in of domestic audiences. Adding to the obstacles, international legal frameworks addressing climate change, including sea-level rise and population displacements, consist predominantly of non-binding soft law instruments. According to Cubie, it is in the Irish interest to promote international cooperative solutions to reduce the magnitude of climate change while also fulfilling the country's legal and humanitarian obligations, including dealing with climate change refugees.

The focus of the next two articles switches to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. **Nandini Gupta** examines women's grassroots peacebuilding efforts through the Peace People organisation Máiréad Maguire and Betty Williams organised in 1976. The article focuses on the use of compassionate listening, personal truth narratives, and dialogue across communities while respecting differences and seeking common ground. It also explores the economic empowerment of women to tackle poverty and division. **Nusi Cornelissens** and **Matthew Milliken** analyse a neglected peacebuilding initiative driven by civil society in the Netherlands which organised recuperative cross-community holidays for Northern Irish children after 1972. The Dutch aimed to provide assistance based on their national historical experience with pillarisation, humanitarianism and reconciliation.

The two articles examine different approaches to peacebuilding, using distinct methodologies and perspectives. Gupta emphasises women's activism within Irish society

(endogenous), oral history and theoretical frameworks such as 'Politics of Compassion' and 'Transversal Politics'. Cornelissens and Milliken, on the other hand, focus on international humanitarian intervention (exogenous) but adopt an empirical methodology drawing heavily on the records of Dutch organisations. However, they also draw on some oral histories. The two articles show how two initiatives sought to address the human costs of the conflict, build bridges and break cycles of division.

The final two research pieces shed new light on the origins of the Irish Free State's diplomacy in the 1920s. While **Patrick Duffy** revises the historical orthodoxy connected with Irish preparations, publicity and diplomacy surrounding the Irish Boundary Commission, **Owen Delaney** breaks new ground to explore Irish-Turkish para-diplomacy and the complications arising from the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Lausanne was the final peace treaty involving Turkey as the successor to the Ottoman Empire after World War One. Both articles illustrate Ireland's budding international presence and its use of media, propaganda and international negotiations as vehicles to advance national interests.

Duffy reveals how the Irish state approached the Boundary Commission negotiations strategically rather than viewing the process as merely a technical fulfilment of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This refutes the historical orthodoxy. Duffy also claims that an essential motive for Irish membership in the League of Nations was to prevent Britain from defining the Boundary Commission as a domestic issue. Irish officials saw the League as a potential arbitrator in the boundary dispute, although events prevented the actualisation of this aim.

Delaney's excavation of Irish-Turkish interactions and diplomacy from the end of World War I to the Irish state's ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1924 offers many insights. While there was some Turkish public interest in the Irish War of Independence, as evidenced in Turkish newspapers, this was motivated by Turkish self-interest rather than solidarity. Likewise, Delaney demonstrates how Dublin's ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne was necessary for the pact to come into effect. That granted it diplomatic leverage with London to advance passport and citizenship rights and refuse participation in British military actions (military sovereignty). Duffy suggests that it contributed to a tacit compromise with London that led to the appointment of Timothy Smiddy as the Free State's inaugural Minister Plenipotentiary. (He was appointed to Washington, DC.) Thus, Lausanne is an early and overlooked milestone crucial to understanding Ireland's diplomatic evolution.

The final two contributions evaluate Ireland's record of international engagement in 2023**. Kenneth McDonagh**'s annual review of foreign relations traces Ireland's responses to the Russo-Ukrainian War, the Hamas massacre of 7 October 2023, and the beginning of the deadly Israeli siege and offensive against Gaza. The complexities enveloping Irish neutrality were on display as the government threaded a needle between the Scylla of domestic sentiment and the Charybdis of geopolitics. As McDonagh illustrates, widespread sensitivities about neutrality detracted from productive public dialogue and learning as part of the Consultative Forum on International Security Policy. Likewise, he shows how Brexit remained a central factor for Irish foreign relations, particularly concerning Northern Ireland. American protectionism was also prevalent during the year, even under the US President, Joe Biden, a Democrat, and it jeopardised the pipeline of US FDI. By 2023 and 2024, FDI created few new jobs in Ireland.

Patrick Paul Walsh and **Ciara Whelan**'s review points to the difficulty Ireland had in administering ODA during a period of pronounced international volatility and humanitarian crises, namely the Russo-Ukrainian war and the war in Gaza. The Ukraine crisis distorted Ireland's ODA in 2023. It may appear that Ireland neared the 0.7% spending SDG target of GNI, but when Ukraine-related funding was stripped out, it was just 0.38%. The review also establishes Ireland was only meeting 15% of its SDG targets by 2023. Moreover, sizeable tranches of ODA were filtered multilaterally or transmitted via NGOs and

civil society actors. While this is explicable and logical, it inhibits traceability and a detailed assessment of the effectiveness of Irish funding.

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