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Editorial

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Last year's editorial highlighted the growing impression of polycrises. The notion appeared to capture the *zeitgeist* as one of volatility and confusion, with numerous but poorly understood, inter-related shocks.

In 2023, more unsettling phenomena fuelled the sense of 'polycrises'. The pogrom massacre of Jews since the Holocaust set off the daily horrors of mass civilian death in the Hamas-Israeli War. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are rising. Simultaneously, the AI 'revolution' beckons, and public intellectuals and commentators spar about its implications. The erosion of nuclear arms control continues apace, and states are modernising and boosting their arsenals.

Until very recently, the social scientific orthodoxy held that state and non-state violence in conflicts was waning, representing a mere trifle by historical standards. But this article of faith has worn away. The outbreak of the first interstate war in Europe since World War Two (the Russo-Ukrainian War) in 2022 shocked Europeans. According to the statistics collected by the University of Uppsala Conflict Data Program (<https://ucdp.uu.se/>), the world has witnessed a sustained uptick in the number of conflicts and fatalities since 2010, and the process has accelerated. 2022, the latest year for which statistics were available at the time of writing, was the worst since 1993, the year of the Rwandan genocide. The trend is a disturbing indicator of the deteriorating health of the international order.

All the phenomena and events above defy the facile explanations, simple narratives and word bites that steep contemporary propaganda wars. Worse still, all of these occur during a period of intensifying environmental degradation and climate anxiety. In such a milieu, when faith in multilateralism is questioned, Tánaiste Micheál Martin addressed the committee's annual conference (2023), affirming the Irish devotion to a rules-based international society. His speech is reproduced as the introductory article in this journal. Let's be clear: we have no other option but to promote multilateral cooperation and international law. We are collectively responsible for defending and improving the global multilateral order. As currently constituted, it has many imperfections. These require discussion and rectification, but we must recognise that post-1945 multilateralism represented a fundamental step forward in the global history of humanity. Let's value and improve what we inherited rather than allow it to fall into an irreparable state.

The country fastened on the vision of a just multilateral order soon after achieving independence, but long before it was globally popular. It strived for and gained entry to the League of Nations in 1923, and remained faithful to it, even when the League system disintegrated and conflict enveloped humanity during the Second World War. It is correct to note that the League's structures were profoundly flawed and weak, but it planted several internationalist ideals in popular consciousness. Ireland consolidated its record after 1955 by joining the United Nations. That Ireland supports international law and human rights regardless of the blame games and propaganda wars suffusing conflict is unsurprising. Indeed, it was among the first nations to despatch humanitarian aid to devastated Germany in 1946. Germany, and other members of the Axis, were in an Allied blind spot. Ireland was a

herald and first responder to the central European humanitarian crisis. Since 1980, Ireland has steered Europe towards a two-state solution in the Middle East and a focus on human rights.

Robust adherence to a human-centred multilateral system is essential. It addresses a drawback of the notion of polycrises and comparable terms, such as permacrisis. Those terms can engender fatalism if they become corneal transplants. They are but lenses, mere analytical tools. Each generation faces challenges, and this one has potent technological, multilateral, and economic capabilities to tackle the ones confronting it.

Despite its convoluted problem set, this global generation is a product of a unique past. It is the artefact of a period of human flourishing unparalleled in history that coincided with a grand experiment, a global multilateral order. It is tempting for people and populists to summon and weaponise past injustices to perpetuate new miseries and compete for the moral high ground, falling into a classic ‘history trap’. Unhappily, the past is punctuated by these depressing spectacles. On the other hand, destructive cycles are repeatedly broken in history by those open to broader perspectives. Patterns of self-destruction can be disrupted by refusing to fall into deterministic and self-absorbed readings (and narratives) of history. Perceived past wrongs do not grant later generations a writ to commit new injustices. Each generation has opportunities and options to build a better, inclusive future based on agreed rules and values.

The most dangerous risk is not climate change or AI, or war; it is a retreat into global fragmentation as homo sapiens seek refuge in psychologically cosy identities and simple narratives. This leads to a decay in international order and cooperation. The enigma is that humanity’s positive and negative capacities have grown exponentially and in complex ways. Returning to imagined golden pasts, tribalism or the metaphorical ‘law of the jungle’ is not the solution, especially with humanity’s unmatched destructive capacities.

Thus, it is apt that this year’s conference was entitled ‘Human (in)security in an unsettled world’. Inclusive visions of security and global governance are paramount in the atmosphere of numerous interlocking human and environmental crises. The conference addressed the multiple contemporary (in)securities to detect more effective security responses.

The first piece by **John Morrissey** takes on the big question of seeking to predict what human security is in the Anthropocene. Reasoning that the concept is essential to deal with the multiple intersecting crises, he calls for a transformation in governmental responsibility—statist conceptions of security are too limited. Instead, a total rethink and an inclusive and sensitive focus on human security are called for.

Lorraine Elliott is similarly dissatisfied with the constricted definition and implementation of *human security*, notwithstanding its perennial invocation in the theory and practice of global governance. The concept was introduced in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report* (HDR) 1993 to expand traditional understandings of international security. Adopting a critical theory approach, Elliott finds that a minimalist human security model still prevails. This demands ‘unsettling’. The 1993 people-centred refocus on security was not delivered. Sovereignty consciousness and technocratic interests played a part in retarding its fuller implementation. Bottom-up emancipation is lacking, and she worries that the emphasis is on *global* security rather than *human* security, leaving the ‘people’ out of the equation. Overall, the invisibility of marginalised people in international security conceptions and practices contradicts the initial people-centred, bottom-up intent of ‘human security’ set out by the UN.

Renata Dwan draws out one of the implications of statism. She invokes Gabriel García Márquez’s novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* to question the prospects of the UN Security Council, highlighted for its inaction during the Ukraine crisis. Dwan’s question is fitting given the Security Council’s enduring ineffectiveness in managing interstate crises.

Since its creation, but especially in the last decade, that has prompted the relocation of many of its tasks to subsidiary bodies and regional organisations, as it sidestepped the impasses between the permanent members of the Security Council (the P5). Given this indifferent record, Dwan asks: can we reimagine the Security Council as a platform to enhance the transparency of the crisis management activities of other multilateral and regional organisations? Might the Security Council aid communication between the P5 to control nuclear escalation? Or can meaningful reform of the Security Council occur? While the Ukraine crisis should be embraced as an opportunity to rethink its role, nothing is simple, just like Márquez's novel.

Next, **Mina Hosseini** reviews the discussions for a Pandemic Treaty. She exposes the opposing expert opinions about the global capacity to learn from the COVID-19 experience, promote health solidarity, and diminish limiting self-regarding forces. Based on the prevalent dissatisfaction about meagre international coordination during COVID-19, can humanity learn that global health solidarity is not charity? Hosseini's interim review of the negotiations points to a mixed picture and some rolling back and softening of a human-rights-based and solidaristic treaty.

Reading **Gerry Kearns and Andrew Tucker's** paper is interesting in this respect. They review the UN and international responses to HIV/AIDS since the 1980s. Kearns and Tucker, contend that national interests hindered the promise of the UN human rights-based methods in the 1990s. However, 9/11 was a watershed. They submit the US enhanced its image after 9/11 with the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR). This US-centred approach contrasts in many ways to the liberal multilateral strategy of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Programme on AIDS (GPA). The superior resources devoted to PEPFAR, dwarfed the size of UN aid, and transmitted a US Christian-based morality and belief system. Likewise, PEPFAR has tended to shield and advance US commercial and other interests in sub-Saharan Africa.

The subsequent two papers take a different tack. A team of psychologists (**Michelle Cowley-Cunningham, Alex Carey and Elaine Rogers**) take a child-centred approach to climate anxiety. They give a voice to the disenfranchised in line with Lorraine Elliot's earlier exhortation. Children in the Global South are most at risk of the adverse effects of climate change. This inequity is a human rights issue that impacts the child's rights as defined by the UN convention. Thus, they plead for furnishing ample resources to educate and empower children in the Global South to mitigate climate change and nurture sensitive consumer choices. This would require a redistribution of resources worldwide.

Elise Lefeuvre probes whether Ireland is well-positioned to develop offshore wind energy in line with the government's ambitious goals. Will it meet its commitment under the European Green Deal to achieve emission neutrality by 2050? Ireland is betting on offshore wind, intending to take advantage of its long coastline and wide Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Irish energy reshuffle has begun. Lefeuvre identifies ample challenges, such as high infrastructural investment and a need for systematic planning, but her prognosis is optimistic. She calculates that the institutional, planning, environmental and technological solutions are proceeding expertly, although the transition is still at an early phase. Ireland must retain recent economic and financial vitality to underwrite the high cost of the clean energy transition. Additionally, there are unknowable risks, not least the intermittent nature of wind and solar sources, and the technological solutions are still evolving. Ireland will depend upon natural gas for backup electricity generation until hydrogen-generated energy becomes a reality. Overall, Lefeuvre delivers a positive assessment of Ireland's transition to date. It should transform Ireland's energy security and transform it into a net energy exporter.

Next, **Conor Gearty**, in a tour d'horizon, is critical of anti-terrorism laws' definition, nature and origins. He lays out an agenda for unpacking the concept and legal frameworks.

He prods the continuities and discontinuities from the colonial era to the Cold War and the twenty-first century. His thesis is that anti-terrorism laws are a historical product adapted by states from their colonial and Cold War coercive frameworks to defeat ‘enemies within’. He poses the tantalising question: Are the laws that evolved locally and incrementally to respond to political crime a good fit to address recent global terrorism driven by religious radicals? This question has grown in importance since 7 October.

Pat Brereton’s consideration of post-COVID war films is apt against the backdrop of the Russo-Ukraine and Israeli-Hamas conflicts, considering Western audiences had grown complacent about warfare. He interrogates three contrasting films. *Quo Vadis, Aida?* is an insider account of a witness to the 1995 massacre in Srebrenica and evokes a vivid sense of abandonment triggered by the UN’s impotence to halt mass murder. It also juxtaposes this with the post-war life of victims living side-by-side with the mass murderers. The German reworking of the iconic *All Quiet on the Western Front* reprises the horror and banality of industrial killing. In contrast, the Hollywood blockbuster *Top Gun: Maverick* is an escapist heroic adventure. Brereton captures that the three films are ‘New Wine in Old Bottles’: they draw on traditional approaches – insider accounts, anti-war brutal realism, and stories of individual heroism. Brereton observes films don’t lend themselves to audiences seeking solutions to conflict; they remain mass entertainment vehicles.

The following three articles provide new research and insights into the history of Irish diplomacy and its relations with the world. **Jonas Hirschi** explores Switzerland’s tardy recognition of Ireland and the exchange of diplomats in 1939/40. Ireland and Switzerland shared similar geopolitical dilemmas, and Ireland emulated Swiss neutrality during the Second World War. However, Hirschi’s findings indicate that Switzerland was standoffish, and its behaviour in the Irish case does not support its later self-image as a friend of the weak. Berne hesitated to recognise Dublin after 1919, alive to its material interest in cordial Swiss-British relations. It initiated limited cooperation with Irish governments on the Anglo-Irish Treaty’s signature. After Ireland joined the League in 1923, its League Mission made some connectivity and personal relations possible, but anything more was formally outside its multilateral remit. A Swiss Consul General opened in Dublin in 1934 to promote trade before a divided Swiss Federal Council controversially decided in March 1939 to open a legation in Dublin despite the limited economic and political bilateral relations. In contrast, Ireland displayed no reluctance in opening in relations when the Swiss were ready.

Erik Stewart revisits Ireland’s attitudes to a singularly controversial international crisis in the run-up to World War Two and its aftermath. While international historians will perpetually debate whether Neville Chamberlain inadvertently incited Hitler to continue his coercive campaign by sanctifying Czechoslovakia’s breakup in 1938, the Irish response has received relatively little consideration. Stewart finds that Irish disapproval of Hitler’s coercive diplomacy did not prevent de Valera from approving appeasement during the 1938 Munich Crisis. Stewart makes the case that Ireland’s nationalism and irredentism complicated its response to Hitler’s aggressiveness at a watershed moment.

Hugh Hanley sheds new light on Conor Cruise O’Brien’s career. The contradiction between O’Brien’s early career conducting anti-partitionist propaganda for the Department of External Affairs and his later rejection of irredentism is intriguing. But Hanley views it as a false reading. In particular, Hanley contests findings that O’Brien solely authored or championed an unpublished anti-partitionist manuscript on Irish history for the Department of External Affairs, his so-called ‘Lost Book’. Hanley reconstructs the serpentine narrative between 1949 and 1953. He shows the proposal for the book originated with a prominent Irish-American Democrat, Ed Flynn, a friend of Seán MacBride. The upshot was a shared departmental writing project, which senior officers eventually hesitated to publish, after the Irish government was replaced in 1951 and a leading Irish-American politician could not be

identified to stand as its author. Throughout the saga, staff at the Washington embassy lobbied to publish the book. O'Brien was, at best, indifferent, while the assistant secretary was unimpressed. The 'Lost Book' was forgotten until historians unearthed it and incorrectly attributed it to O'Brien.

The final two pieces are staples of the journal and essential reference points. They are the annual reviews by specialists in Irish foreign policy and Overseas Development Aid (ODA). **Patrick Walsh and Ciara Whelan** review ODA in 2022 against the backdrop of previous annual reviews, which noted an uninterrupted falloff in Irish real spending after 2008 and a shift towards channelling Irish funding through multilateral channels. They report a conspicuous growth in support in 2022, reflecting the striking upsurge in humanitarian crises in Eastern Europe and the Horn of Africa. Funds were also required to mitigate the effects of natural disasters in Afghanistan and Tonga. Including Ukrainian refugee costs in Ireland in ODA figures is permitted under OECD accounting rules and in line with other countries. That contributed significantly to an increase in bilateral spending. Still, there was also some expansion in bilateral funding to Ireland's longstanding partner countries in sub-Saharan Africa since 2021, after extended decline and stagnation in expenditure. Overall, humanitarian crises generated more demand for ODA, while the government was positioned to assist given its favourable fiscal situation.