

06 July 2023

Submission to Consultative Forum on International Security Policy

The government's Consultative Forum on Neutrality held in June was nothing more than a pretence at consultation. The forums were a poor substitute for the Citizens Assembly, which the government originally promised but now clearly fears would recommend continued neutrality.

The government-appointed chairperson, Dame Louise Richardson DBE, who will write the report making recommendations to the government, holds US as well as Irish citizenship. She has clearly been chosen because she can be relied upon to make the recommendations the government seeks.

In 2022, the British government approved the awarding of a Damehood (Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire) to Ms Richardson by Queen Elizabeth II.

Ms Richardson fully identifies with US foreign policy and militarism. Writing about the US invasion of Afghanistan following 9/11, she noted: "We did not use the mechanism of NATO or any other international institution to fashion or implement a response. We felt strong enough to react on our own, and so we did."



Writing about the overthrow of the Chilean government in 1973 by the military with US connivance, and about the US attempted overthrow of the Cuban government in 1961 and of the attempted overthrow of the Nicaraguan government by the US-back Contras from 1979–90, Ms Richardson has written, uncritically, that "An examination of these cases reveals that the United States had very good reasons to object to the governments of Chile, Cuba, and Nicaragua. Their ideological orientation was inimical to its own, so it supported local groups that used whatever means were available to them to try to bring them down." (What Terrorists Want, Random House, 2006, p. 52)

Ms Richardson, an academic, has also expressed the view that universities should undertake research to inform government policy. In "What Terrorists Want", she wrote:

"On another occasion a member of the State Department's Office of Counterterrorism visited Harvard to find out what terrorism research was being conducted there. He complained bitterly about how we were not being helpful, going off doing research wherever we liked instead of focusing on the government's policy concerns. I argued back just as vehemently that it was not in our interest, and I didn't think it was even in his, to turn universities into the research arm of the government. Later at an academic conference, in a talk entitled 'Long Live the Gap,' I argued for preserving the distance between government policy and academic research. Experience since September 11, 2001, has taught me to moderate this view. Had the American government's policy in the past few years been informed by the views of the terrorism studies community, it would have been a very different policy indeed." (What Terrorists Want, Random House, 2006, p. xix)

If this is the record of the chairperson of the neutrality consultative forum, is there any wonder what result it will come out with?

We believe now is the time to stand up for Irish neutrality rather than erode it. While a Citizens' Assembly would have been a huge improvement on the Consultative Forum, People Before Profit believes we need to enshrine our neutrality in our constitution and pull out of all European defence organisations and alliances including PESCO and Partnership for Peace.

People Before Profit Statement on Irish Neutrality

The end of the Cold War brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union was supposed to inaugurate a new era of global peace – the age of globalisation. Instead, the 21st century has been characterised by a succession of wars and military interventions. The current debate on Irish neutrality comes in the context of this new age of war. Not only is the war in Ukraine the largest military conflict in Europe since the Second World War but many commentators and international relations analysts speak about the emergence of a ‘new Cold War’ pitting the United States (and its allies) against China (and its allies).



It is in this context of a projected global war – cold or hot – that Ireland is coming under pressure to abandon its commitment to neutrality. Within Ireland the moves to end neutrality are coming from the Irish political elite, not from Irish civil society. Ireland, we are told, needs to join NATO in order to protect its security and to uphold the values of freedom and democracy. The question that the Irish public needs to address is whether joining NATO strengthens or weakens our

security and our democracy. To answer these questions, we need to understand how and why the widely proclaimed new era of peace morphed into a new century of war.

The age of ‘globalisation’ was also known as the ‘unipolar moment’, a period where the USA was the only major global power, economically, politically and militarily. The US had the world’s largest manufacturing economy, the US dollar was at the heart of global finance, and it also possessed the world’s most powerful military. It was widely assumed in the US and in the European capitals that American power and global peace were more or less synonymous.

In reality, the unipolar moment was short-lived, and it laid the seeds for a new era of intense inter-state rivalry. US shifted production abroad to lower-wage countries, most notably China. It does not seem to have occurred to the Americans that the Chinese might learn from this and use the experience to create a more technologically advanced economy.

Crucially important too was the fact that the unipolar moment undermined a key foundation of American global power. During the Cold War decades, the Soviet Union and China were perceived as systemic threats to capitalist states and to private property owners in general. This perceived systemic threat gave the US huge leverage over other formally independent states and enhanced America’s exceptional power. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was a prime example of this.



NATO was supposed to protect Western Europe against Soviet Communism. From its inception, NATO also possessed another function which was to maintain a continuity of US power within Europe. In the words of Lord Ismay, the first Secretary General of NATO, the purpose of the alliance was to “*keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down*”.

The collapse of Soviet Communism and the absorption of China into the world market changed all this. The US might well be the primary power, but it was no longer considered indispensable by other powers. Within the American ruling class, a powerful current emerged – neo-conservatism – which argued that the US would have to assert its military power much more aggressively if the US were to retain its global leadership role and all the advantages that came with that. This neo-conservative current came to acquire huge influence within both the Republican and Democrat parties.



After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was considerable debate in Europe about the future of NATO, but instead of disbanding, NATO expanded eastwards. Whereas countries like Ireland and Sweden had joined the European Union in the 1970s and 1980s without having to join NATO, new entrants to the EU in Eastern Europe were compelled to first join NATO.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is widely used to illustrate the merits of NATO membership but there is a stronger argument to suggest that far from encouraging peace, it was NATO's expansion eastwards which provoked the current war. In 1990, the Soviet Union pulled its troops out of Eastern Europe after the US Secretary of State Baker promised Gorbachev that the US would not seek to expand eastwards. No sooner had the Soviet Union collapsed than these promises were abandoned, and NATO began its eastward march. Leading US diplomats and international relations scholars warned about the dangers of NATO pursuing this route, but their warnings were ignored.

The reality of NATO is very different from its declared purpose of protecting democracy and providing security for its members:

- By joining NATO, a state curtails its own sovereignty, significantly reducing democracy.
- The leading power in NATO – the United States – has carried out over forty coup d'états against other governments, including many democratically elected ones.
- NATO itself has at various times included military dictatorships among its European members (Greece and Turkey).

The US projects itself as the central upholder of peace but in fact since the Second World War it has been the most aggressive state anywhere in the world. From the beginning of this century it has caused enormous damage as a result of its invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and its military assaults on Libya, Syria and Somalia.



The current global situation is very different to the 20th century Cold War. China does not represent a systemic threat to the United States or to global capitalism. On the contrary, the economic rise of China has been hugely beneficial to global capitalism, not least to American investors. So why was the globalisation project abandoned by Washington? What went wrong?

The turn against China began under the Obama presidency which sought to exclude China from a trade agreement of Pacific states. It was intensified by Trump who claimed that China has stolen American jobs and American ideas. To the surprise of many observers, the Biden presidency went further introducing a whole series of measures seeking to undermine the Chinese economy, in effect initiating a trade war.



Washington's drive against China came in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008. That crisis showed the world the fragility of the American financial order and the resilience of Chinese manufacturing. China's unforgivable crime is that it has now become the world's largest economy (in terms of purchasing power – GDP/PPP). Germany and Japan had previously been significant economic competitors of the US, but they were both militarily subordinate to America and more easily 'contained'. The US does not have that sort of leverage with China.

However, precisely because China is so integrated into the global market any attempt to isolate China economically will have major economic repercussions. Not only does a 'new Cold War' risk a hugely destructive military conflict – including the possibility of a nuclear Armageddon – but even without an actual military conflict it will be tremendously disruptive, in economic and political terms.



In truth, it seems unlikely that a new Cold War between the US and China will divide the world in two. On the contrary, it is increasingly apparent that most of the Global South has no wish to take sides in this conflict. The drive for a new cold war is actually hastening the rise of a multipolar world order. Even in Europe where the political elite is remarkably subservient to the US, Europe's business elite is very uncomfortable with attempts to end trade with China, and if this push to isolate China intensifies, these conflicts within the European elite are likely to deepen. The current situation is more reminiscent of the period leading up to the First World War, when the declining hegemonic power seeks to consolidate an alliance against rising challengers. If this trade war does escalate into a full-scale conflict between America and China, it will not end well for anybody.

The pressure on Ireland to join NATO comes against this background. If Ireland does join NATO we will be abandoning all democratic decision-making on the most important choice a state can make – peace or war. We will be handing control over our security to the world's most belligerent power. We will also be offering our territory to others to build military bases, including the placing of nuclear weapons on our soil. We will also be spending more and more money on purchasing weapons when we should be preparing to deal with climate change. What could possibly go wrong?

