

# Irish neutrality

## A very short guide



- The foundations of Irish military and foreign policy neutrality were set before partition. Wolfe Tone addressed the issue in the 18th century. Republicans (as with the Irish Citizen Army, photo left) had the concept of serving ‘neither King nor Kaiser’.

- It is true that after independence an important reason for not engaging in any military treaty with Britain was the desire not to copperfasten partition by doing so—but this was not the only reason.

- Eamon de Valera, after he became head of government in 1932, played a prominent role in the League of Nations, including as its President.

- The First World War - a clash of empires - called itself 'the war to end wars', but in fact sowed the seeds of further conflicts, particularly World War Two. The Irish Free State maintained neutrality during that war, chiefly to avoid a repetition of the Civil War, but in many indirect ways aided the Allies against fascism.

- Ireland became a member of the United Nations in 1955 and has been involved in military peacekeeping operations in the entire period since 1958.

- Ireland played an important role in the development of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), launching the process at the UN in 1958 which led to the treaty coming into force in 1970.

- Ireland has continued to back disarmament initiatives such as the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008 with a key conference taking place in Dublin.

- EEC/EU membership in 1973 has led to attempts to bring a common foreign policy and, increasingly, common military policies both through the evolution of EU military cooperation but also dovetailing with NATO. There has been a significant but unstated move away from previous policies and this has included involvement with NATO's ‘Partnership for Peace’ (sic).

- The Irish Government's greatest departure from neutrality is arguably the provision of Shannon Airport ‘with no questions asked’ as a transit point for the US military during the Afghan and Iraq wars. Several million US troops have passed through Shannon and it has also been used for illegal rendition of prisoners.

- Despite all this, Irish neutrality remains a popular policy with the public in the Republic—though peace activists would, obviously, take its logic much further.