ARCO Submission to the Consultative Forum on International Security Policy.

Section 1.   Introduction.

1.1   Ireland's National Security Strategy[1] is a national responsibility, and the State's strategy should be informed by, and complement the European Union's Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (2016), and its associated strategies covering areas such as Internal Security, Energy Security and Maritime Security. The State must also be mindful of its active membership of, and support of the United Nations as the principal organisation for the conduct of international relations since its formation at the end of the second world war in 1945.

1.2   From a strategic perspective, a National Security Strategy provides for the Government's usage of all instruments of power, including economic, diplomatic, informational, justice and military, in order to secure national security objectives. These instruments are complementary. Universally, nations employ them in varying combinations as components within National Security Strategies. It is also directly connected with and provides an ongoing influence over the State's International Security Policy and broader Foreign Policy concerns.

1.3   Ireland, while not involved in formal defence or security alliances, is a contributor to international peace support and military peacekeeping operations through our active membership of the United Nations, and our engagement with the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO's Partnership for Peace (NATO-PfP). This has allowed Ireland to be a small but active contributor in the realm of international security, and to consistently deploy military peacekeeping forces and expertise to conflict and post-conflict peace support operations. However, the recent shifts in the Geo-political order may indicate that the previous environment for such agreed international peace support operations may have changed substantially, being replaced by a confrontational and bellicose approach to international relations and conflict resolution.

1.4   <u>The Geopolitical Environment</u>.   Ireland, in common with many other western democracies has had to confront and engage with the emergence, after decades of relative geopolitical stability in Europe, of an extremely unstable and dynamic eruption of economic and political disruption in recent years. This has been caused in part, by the impact of the global Coronavirus epidemic and its attendant economic and social aftershocks, and the accelerating impacts of severe climate change. These events have been exacerbated by the rise of political populism, autocracies and nationalistic

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[1] Despite a consultation process in 2019, Ireland has yet to publish a National Security Strategy.

extremism, and the connected gradual retreat of western political and democratic structures and liberal values.

1.5   This is a multi-faceted, heavily interconnected, and dynamic international environment where, the impacts of climate and environmental degradation, collapse of governance in developing regions, economic and conflict driven migration, superpower rivalry and competition, political and economic instability, intractable regional conflicts, global pandemics etc, have all contributed to arguably the most unstable period in global international affairs since 1945.

1.6   The single greatest driver of security instability in Europe, has been the outbreak in March 2022, for the first time in over 75 years of a major conventional land war in Europe involving a major military superpower. The Russian invasion of, and ongoing military conflict in Ukraine has forced a sudden and fundamental re-think by Western democracies, NATO, and the EU regarding their current and future Defence and Security policies and alliance arrangements. Long-standing neutral European Nations such as Sweden and Finland have quickly dropped decades of military neutrality and applied to join NATO in the face of this emergence of direct superpower military aggression.

1.7   Ireland's separation from direct involvement in European and North Atlantic Security and Defence arrangements does not remove or inoculate it against the serious impacts of this extensive crisis. In a highly inter-connected and globalised trading environment, we are an affluent Western democracy with an open, technologically advanced economy, and are particularly vulnerable to the effects of this new age of international disruption and instability.

1.8   Should the Consultative Forum on International Security Policy decide to consider the post Ukrainian conflict arrangements as part of its report, an assessment of the possible power arrangements and relationships that will emerge should inform this work. While this will be extremely difficult to predict given the ongoing conflict, Ireland's active engagement at the UN, as EU and OSCE members, and our active support of other regional and international bodies will enable us to contribute actively to any post conflict order that emerges.

1.9   Historical, divisive, and unsettled on-island political questions persist, and peace and security are maintained through a fragile international agreement. Two jurisdictions are extant, and a quarter of the island is an integral part of the NATO alliance. It is incumbent on the Forum to take cognisance of this unique dimension to Ireland consideration of an international security policy.

1.10   ARCO has advanced previous submissions regarding a National Security Strategy (https://arcoireland.com/arcos-submission-national-security-strategy/) in 2019 and the Commission on the Defence Forces (https://arcoireland.com/arcos-submission-on-the-commission-on-the-defence-forces/) in 2021, and now wishes to submit its views on the future direction of Ireland's International Security Policy to the Consultative Forum.

Section 2.   The Task for the CFISP – Realigning Ireland's Approach to Security Policy.

2.1   ARCO would argue that any reappraisal of our International Security Policy through the CFISP process should consider the strong linkage between how we engage on security issues with our international and regional partners and the requirement to tie this into our own national security structures and policies. ARCO envisages that eventually, Ireland's 2019 National Security Strategy process will produce an updated threat evaluation, and this will derive from a revised analysis of the contemporary (2023) political and geopolitical operating environment, will identify strategic objectives based on Ireland's values and interests, and subsequently provide for the means to achieve these objectives from the optimum instruments of our power, (both physical and diplomatic) to ensure that the critical requirement for our own and our wider neighbourhood's ongoing security are addressed.

2.2   <u>The Critical Requirement</u>.   ARCO would contend that the critical requirement of any worthwhile discussion on Ireland's security and defence policy is to avoid the political and emotional bear-trap of the issue of our 'neutrality.' That is not to say that the issue of neutrality must not be reflected and reviewed by the CFISP process, but rather that the term has often been misunderstood by much of the Irish public in any debate on defence and security in Ireland. It is often treated as being a solemn national unshakable principle, and enshrined constitutionally, when it is really nothing of the sort. It is a policy choice or decision (as is the alternative policy choice of deciding to join a military alliance) designed to meet a defined national purpose, the defence and protection of the State and its people.

2.3   This focus on being 'outside of regional defence arrangements,' has the effect of diverting any discussion on National defence capability and Policy down a rabbit hole of historical issues and political principles, rather than any mature reflection on the actual issue in the 21st Century geopolitical environment. Military Neutrality is not a sacred cow but must rather be seen merely as one of a range of optional practical policy tools, available at a particular time - reflecting a defined and politically considered national strategy of military non-alignment. Military Neutrality not a defence policy in itself.

2.4   The actual urgent requirement is to discuss and review what are the higher level national and international security factors in the current unstable international environment, and what may emerge in the post Ukrainian conflict period. We can then start a more nuanced and practical assessment of what we need to do to address the issue of our national and international security, what are the new structures we need develop to manage our security, the additional and enhanced capabilities, and resources we need to procure and deploy, and what are the most practical and financially viable policies to adopt.

2.5   <u>A National Culture of Confusion on Defence and Security Issues</u>?   Further to the point being made above, it is worthwhile to review the proposition that traditionally there is a lack of public understanding of the issues that constitute National security

and defence in Ireland. Compared with most western countries who have had a history of involvement and experience of the horrors of conventional war within a living generation or two, and also have had a significant part of their older population experience military life through national service, Ireland has experienced one hundred years of relative peace. Only a very small fraction of the overall population has any real knowledge or experience of military life or of modern defence and security issues, and many people have little insight and interest into how we protect ourselves as an independent non-aligned state. This is unlike our European neighbours whose history and general understanding of security needs and national stability is reflected in much larger comparative public spending on defence, and more intensive attention to deterrence, defence, and security by their governments.

2.6   This is reflected in the relative paucity of serious debate at a political level on defence issues in Ireland, where any analysis of security and the Defence Forces even within the Dáil, often tends to get bogged down on less than strategic issues such as the Neutrality argument, and in more local or military pay issues. There are only a handful of <u>Oireachtas Members</u> with any experience of (or professional understanding of) Military, Security, or Intelligence matters.

2.7   Historically, National Security has been a low priority issue for Ireland. It has resulted in a situation where we have been able to quietly shelter ourselves under a friendly allied defence umbrella paid for by foreign taxpayers, even while nominally maintaining our independent non-aligned status. We are, in short, able to extol our neutrality without ever properly providing or paying for it, while emphasising we are not politically non-aligned [2]. Notwithstanding the clear popularity of remaining militarily neutral amongst the Irish public as evidenced in opinion polls, Irish politicians need to lead on the issue of defining what we really mean by this military and defence spending reticence, while being actively and openly non-neutral with our EU partners in a political sense[3].

2.8   <u>The Cultural Fog - 'Neutrality Issue Groupthink.'</u>   Irish National Security Policy has often been dominated by a comfortable misunderstanding of what true military neutrality requires. We have used the concept of self-regarded neutrality as a symbol of political virtue, but unlike the other comparative European neutral States (Austria, Switzerland, and until the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Sweden, and Finland), we have never structured or resourced the appropriate military forces and national security agencies to actually provide for deterrence and to defend this military neutrality. We have, it can be strongly contended, evolved a national groupthink on our concept of neutrality, where we can use it to avoid any serious, informed debate on defence and security, while knowingly and irresponsibly exploiting the protection of our European neighbours. We have also consciously avoided the consequences of this cognitive denial, how our avoidance of our defence and security responsibilities impacts on the security of our European neighbours, and their perception of our quiet exploitation of their responsible approach to regional defence and security, while avoiding providing

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[2] *'Is Ireland Really 'Neutral'?* D. Driscoll – Irish Studies in International Affairs; Vol.1, No.3 (1982) Pps 55-61. Pub. Royal irish Academy.
[3] *'Ireland's Neutrality Policy is a Permanent Hold-My-Beer Posture.'* Irish Times. Opinion - 01 April 2023

properly for it ourselves.

2.9   Military Neutrality as a considered tool of National Security Policy is an <u>entirely justifiable and acceptable option</u> in addressing our defence and security responsibility, <u>once it is cogently and robustly defined, and most importantly, properly, and consistently resourced</u>. If the CFISP process becomes in any way mired down in arguments around the 'tradition of Irish neutrality' and the social evil of engaging in military alliances, then we will fail to address the actual central issue. That is identifying how we are to approach our own national and international security in a new, unstable environment of conventional and asymmetric conflict allied with a rapidly growing range of climatic, economic, and technological threats. Ireland must not let this sudden quantum change and critical juncture pass with our traditional hesitantly passive attitude of "let's see what happens.' We must address this issue of our future International and National Security Policy in a determined and positive manner now.

Section 3.   **The Security and Defence Relationship.**

3.1   <u>The Core Task - National Security</u>.   One of the primary responsibilities for any Nation State is the protection of its territorial integrity, population, and national infrastructure against both natural and malicious threats. If a Nation and its Governments become complacent or static in their engagement with this sphere of responsibility, then the risk of serious shock to a Nation's physical, social or economic security by a sudden change in the threat environment is greatly increased. The current geo-political conflict and security instability in eastern Europe, and more widely in the South China Sea and Eastern Africa and the Sahel is a stark instance of the challenges of this dynamic environment.

3.2   National and International Security and Defence in the 21st Century is a complex Issue. For western democracies with open economies, it is rarely a single issue such as a military or internal security threat. Rather, National and International Security needs require a wide range of responses in order to identify and protect against the full spectrum of threats. (These include economic recessions, climate change, narcotics, social unrest and extremism, resource competition, electoral interference, trade disruption, espionage, international organised crime, military aggression – both passive and active), pollution, rapid technological change, energy security, pandemics).

3.3   In a globalised and highly connected world, the ability of individual Nation States (outside of a few large Superpowers) to address these security threats and concerns individually is extremely challenging. While responses such as the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) can be effective these require a strong level of commitment and agreed resource allocation to operate. While particular national nuances and interpretations can be accommodated, there is an unwritten understanding and expectation that the partners involved will, at a minimum, take a serious and committed approach to their own security, and that of their neighbours' security concerns as well.

3.4   <u>The Security and Defence Interrelationship</u>.   The conjoined spheres of Security and Defence have traditionally been close bedfellows for Governments over the recent centuries. What has changed in recent decades is the increased broadening of the meaning of security and the increasing range and nature of the threats that need to be addressed. Likewise, Defence has broadened from the activities of military forces into a far wider field involving technological and non-kinetic asymmetric threats. We can define national security as the broad end-state we wish to maintain, protection for our population, society, economy and desired way of life and government. This is based on regular, detailed assessments of all possible threats natural, accidental, and deliberate, that threaten this security.

3.5   Defence is more closely defined, as the active measures and resources devoted to achieving the end state of National Security. This can include maintaining effective Defence Forces, mitigation of climate change impacts, pandemic planning and protection resources, and protection against natural disasters. It also includes an

active set of economic intelligence and protection systems, along with planning for secure energy and vital services supply. There is little utility in a National Security Strategy or Policy correctly identifying and analysing potential threats and risk areas, without also developing effective defence structures and resources to directly address them. The military organisational structure, allied to its agility to respond to a whole range of threats provides an ideal platform upon which to build national resilience to respond to shocks whether in the purely defence domain or otherwise. Such capability would also provide Ireland with a credible deployment capability in support of peacekeeping, nation building and humanitarian responses, without compromising the neutrality or military alliance debate, as well as natural, accidental, and deliberate shocks within the national domain.

3.6   It can be strongly contended that we now need to examine a radically different approach to how we manage National Security in Ireland, and how we contribute actively to International Security in the evolving, highly volatile, geopolitical environment. We need to take a more comprehensive and visibly active approach to the analysis, management and planning of our own Security and engagement with our European neighbours. If the complex and hybrid nature of the modern security threat ecosystem is accepted, then it is fair to advocate that the correct response is a properly constituted, empowered, and resourced National Security Agency which can co-ordinate our policy and protective measures across a range of defence, security and environmental areas and be the principal advisor to Government in the development and management of our National Security Response.

Section 4.   The Current Geopolitical Environment.

4.1   Going forward from 2023, Western Democratic Nations will seek to significantly rebalance and review their strategies and policies in the Geopolitical and Security fields as the impacts of Environmental Change, Economic Disruption, Migration, and Resource conflicts are exacerbated directly by regional conflicts (Ukraine and East Africa) and regions of increasing, often irresolvable tension (Taiwan, North Korea). As a militarily non-aligned but politically allied member of the EU, of the OSCE, and the family of Western democracies, Ireland must also fundamentally reappraise its approach to International Security, building on our traditional reputation for supporting Peace Support Operations, but taking active cognisance that a new and highly unstable geopolitical paradigm has now emerged.

4.2   <u>End of an Era of Post War Co-Operation</u>?   Since 1945, despite very clear divisions between the communist powers (Soviet Union, China), and the largely democratic Western Powers dominated by the US and by the NATO Alliance, there has been a tacit understanding of the need for co-operation and dialogue to resolve regional conflicts and to prevent tensions spinning uncontrollably into nuclear armed confrontation.
Recent years have seen a very clear breakdown of the traditional platforms of geo-political relationships and rise of more competitive, bellicose and hostile messaging between the larger Regional Powers.

4.3   <u>Decline of the UN and Regional Co-Operation</u>.   Even at the heights of the Cold War in the 1960s and 70s when proxy wars, coups and revolutions in the developing world, and active espionage programs indicated very active competition and rivalry amongst superpowers and lower ranking post-colonial powers, there were areas and agreed forums of negotiation and debate. The United Nations Security Council and General Assembly, along with other regional diplomatic agencies, provided a flawed, but agreed and usually workable platforms for dialogue and conflict resolution. But the traditional bodies for international co-operation have been rendered largely irrelevant in this new environment of aggressive assertiveness. The use of economic and political sanctions authorised by the UN General Assembly is often ignored or quietly bypassed, rendering the sanctioning of rogue states such as North Korea, and belligerent actors such as Iran and Syria less effective. The veto system on the UN Security Council has rendered any internationally agreed resolution almost impossible in this new age of confrontation (with particular implications for Irish Foreign Policy independence – see 'Triple Lock' discussed below at paragraph 5.9). It is pertinent that despite myriad areas of tension and open conflicts around the globe, no new UN Peacekeeping Mission has been authorised since 2014[4] (MINUSCA), and only five in the 21st Century (All in African Continent Conflict Zones).

4.4   <u>'Great Power' Relations and Instability</u>.   Once the balance between competition and hostile assertiveness amongst the larger powers (which predominated between 1990 and 2020) started to move into clear instability, then a range of related factors

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[4] UNDPO List of Peacekeeping Operations. (https://peacekeeping.un.org)

often quickly become more influential and amplified the problem. Thus, as the Chinese subjugation of internal unrest (Uighur Minority and Hong Kong democratic protests) was completed, increasingly assertive (and aggressive) behaviour and activity over dominance of the South China Sea, was seen. This included the isolation and intended re-occupation of Taiwan, with parallel use of the client 'rogue state' in North Korea being used to challenge US and Japanese interests in the Northwest Pacific. Likewise, the Russian State embarked on an aggressive confrontation with the West through the armed invasion of a major neighbouring state, both spuriously justified and militarily inept. Nevertheless, this invasion greatly disrupted world trade, seriously threatened western energy security, and drove more previously neutral EU nations (Sweden and Finland) into joining (and reinvigorating) NATO.

4.5   The result of these two recent developments, when taken with US internal democratic instability and increasingly divisive politics, the impact of Brexit on EU cohesion (and more immediately on Anglo-Irish Relations), civil war in Syria, and across the Sahel, along with the burgeoning threats of rapid Climate Change on migration and conflict, all lead to the conclusion, that the old paradigm of International Security is broken, and Ireland, along with the rest of the European Union and wider democratic states, must adapt to the new, highly unstable geopolitical environment.

4.6   This new, emergent state of 'conflict crisis' that we must engage in, has to be assessed against a backdrop of some additional relevant political factors and current developments. While by no means an exhaustive list, these include:

- The Rise of Populism and Authoritarianism. In the field of political systems and culture, there has been a steady decline in the numbers of States in the developed world practicing a democratic, liberal political model in the face of the emergence of, and increasing support for, more populist and authoritarian models. By their nature, these regimes are more reactive to populist social pressures, and often less constrained by the lack of effective political opposition, independent media scrutiny and independent judicial systems, making them more disruptive and less dependable and collegial in political and diplomatic efforts at conflict prevention and solution.

- Perceptions of Western Democratic Weakness. Hand in hand with the above, is a perception by autocratic regimes that Western Democratic States are politically soft, unaligned, and unassertive, and will often appease and give way to aggressive and robust diplomatic and military activity. The EU, NATO, and Western unified reaction to Russian aggression in Ukraine has moderated this view significantly, but it easier for autocratic states such as China to be tempted to drive-on assertive regional power projection, against local disunity and unaligned policy responses by democratic allies.

- Asymmetric and Non-Conventional Warfare as Active State Policy. While no State will admit it, there has been clear proliferation in the use of hostile asymmetric weapons and covert campaigns against perceived opposing

states. This can range from cyber, hacking and ransom attacks on key IT systems and infrastructure (often masquerading as criminal ransom attacks) to political disinformation, electoral interference, economic and industrial espionage (and possible sabotage), reconnaissance and mapping of critical civilian infrastructure, and information and media operations to amplify political, economic, and social unrest.

- <u>The Re-emergence of Large State Military Aggressio</u>n. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine was the first example of a major military power using direct, conventional military force against a 'neutral' neighbouring state since the end of World War 2. This war has been continuing for over 16 months and shows little sign of a decisive outcome. This demonstrates that conventional military action by large powers is once again seen as a geopolitical option with consequent impacts on military and defence spending for many States.

- <u>Climate Change, Resource Wars and Migration</u>. The backdrop to all of the above factors, is the rapid emergence of severe, and possibly irreversible Climate Change and Global Warming. This is quickly exacerbating regional conflicts over water and other critical natural resources and is a strong trigger for burgeoning migration and refugee movements. This not only pressurises the political and economic situation in neighbouring states, but can trigger socially divisive attitudes, and empower extremist political reactions in the West to increasing migration flows into Europe by politically and economically displaced migrants from the crisis areas.

4.7   <u>The United Nations and Future Conflict Resolution and Arms Control</u>. From the 1940s up to the present decade the United Nations has provided for the most part, a broadly agreed, and stable platform and structure to manage inter-state rivalries and conflicts, supported effective peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and vitally, helped to control the proliferation and management of weapons of mass destruction, both nuclear, chemical, and biological. The UN was able to exploit a common understanding and acceptance that direct superpower conflict was unthinkable, and that restricting the possession of WMDs was universally desirable, except for a small number of states such as Iran and North Korea.

4.8   Recent years have seen an emerging fundamental change to this paradigm. This has seen for example, an economically powerful, and politically aggressive Chinese State, adopt a more forceful and pro-active Foreign Policy in Asia, while an economically weakening and politically unconfident Russia has aggressively tried to reassert its dominance of its Western European flank with military aggression and asymmetric activity (Cyber warfare, espionage and energy embargoes), often against the western democratic world. In this changed environment, armed conflict involving the major powers has become increasingly possible, and the bellicosity of some powers on controversial issues of their own national concern and interests have rendered traditional diplomatic contact and dialogue at the UN often ineffective. The veto system for permanent members of the UN Security Council has now become a

serious barrier to effective multi-lateral diplomacy.

4.9   As a Nation strongly committed to the UN and its activities, this gradual degradation of the UN has serious implications for Ireland's International Security Policy and international relations. It is effectively increasing our dependence on our membership of the EU to formulate and express our own Foreign Policy. The departure of the UK from the EU in 2016 has further complicated the geopolitical and security space in which we must operate.

Section 5.   Identifying Ireland's Modern Security Situation.

5.1   <u>How We Are Perceived</u>.   Ireland has traditionally presented itself as being aligned closely with EU Common Foreign and Defence Policy and initiatives, the OSCE, while remaining militarily neutral and outside North Atlantic and European Alliances such as NATO. This has been a worthwhile approach for our Foreign Policy for many decades and was generally uncontentious with the various geo-political blocks and rival powers for much of second half of the 20th Century. It has been a flexible, quietly unobtrusive approach which has attracted little overt outside criticism, but more damagingly, has fostered an environment within this country where international defence and security issues are rarely seriously discussed or understood. That this position can be realistically maintained or is a rational policy and approach for the next decade is very questionable, as Ireland's clear criticism of Russian Military aggression against Ukraine and support of the EU response reflects a clearly non-nuanced position.

5.2   Whether we are perceived as being really fully 'neutral' in the wider world now is a moot point. It is arguable that in Russia, China and in much of the Developing World nations (many of whom have not condemned the Russian aggression), we are generally seen as part of the 'Western Block,' and our military neutrality is either not generally perceived or is considered irrelevant. It would be fair to say that historically we have been seen as a more detached and unaligned player at the UN in the fields of Peace Support and Conflict Prevention activities, and our commitment to, and professionalism in Peacekeeping Operations has been unimpeachable for such a militarily weak Nation. But as this formerly central forum for conflict resolution and diplomacy has visibly declined in effectiveness in the last decade, this advantage has been significantly devalued.

5.3   <u>Ireland's Approach to Defence and Security</u>.   Ireland's traditional approach to its own defence and security could be best described as 'pragmatically reactive.' As regional and global conflicts and emergencies came and went (such as World War 2, 1939-45), the Government embarked on hurried mobilisations and attempts to acquire defensive equipment. While the outbreak of civil unrest and conflict in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998 saw a significant increase in Defence Forces strength (since again greatly reduced), and the procurement of low-intensity conflict military equipment, the state has never equipped its Defence Forces with conventional equipment to any significant extent. The military professionalism and high standards of education and training of the Defence Forces however was widely respected and recognised, especially on Peace Keeping and Conflict Prevention missions (with UN, EU, OSCE, and NATO PfP operations).

5.4   From a conventional Armed Forces point of view, Defence capability has rarely been seriously addressed and maintained by Irish Governments outside of periods of crisis. Over the past two decades, a series of strength reductions, forces downsizing, and a failure through poor remuneration and working conditions to competitively recruit

and retain personnel has resulted in a serious decline in Military capability. As stated in paragraph 2.8 above, Ireland has claimed a policy of Military Neutrality without ever seriously funding its military in a way that it could cogently defend that neutrality. We might publicly compare our neutrality to that of Switzerland, Austria, Finland, and Sweden (until the latter two opted to abandon military neutrality and join NATO in 2022 in the face of Russian Military aggression), but we never resourced our deterrence and defence capability as a neutral state in a responsible manner as they did.

5.5   Thus, Army Formations are equipped with only limited low level air defence, light artillery, and light, wheeled armoured vehicles. The Air Corps had no primary radar system, or air interdiction capability, only limited numbers of light helicopters, and a pair of Maritime Patrol Aircraft to police a huge maritime economic zone. The Naval Service was limited to a flotilla of small to medium Offshore Patrol Vessels with very limited armament and surveillance systems, effectively capable of only Coast Guard and low level 'constabulary' naval roles. In recent years, the inability of the State to control its own airspace, territorial seas or sub surface maritime zone has become so marked that a long overdue military investment and reform process has at least commenced[5].

5.6   This was the minimum response a modern, wealthy democratic western nation could make when a dispassionate, accurate assessment declared that the country was effectively not so much militarily neutral as effectively defenceless. But even the level of ambition chosen by Government following the Commission on the Future of the Defence Forces, may not be enough to effectively address capability deficiencies. In the dynamic geo-political environment of the last two years, further and regular Defence and Security Reviews may well become the norm, along with strict oversight of implementation of recommendations.

5.7   What is often not properly considered if we analyse the current defence and security situation in Ireland, is how these impact on our European and North Atlantic neighbour's security. It can be strongly argued that we are clearly a weak link in any overall chain of security in the Northeastern Atlantic, and with a huge percentage of trans-Atlantic data cables running through our waters (some landing in Ireland), along with a very large amount of the world's top IT and Pharmaceutical companies located here. Our identified inability to secure our own airspace and sub-surface territorial seas has a clear implication for wider European and North Atlantic security concerns. We already have recent evidence of Russian vessels conducting surveillance and mapping of these critical cables and power connectors. If the economically critical trans-Atlantic data cables are vulnerable to attack or interference, it is a very major issue for our neighbours, including EU Member States, and their legitimate expectation that we should be at least capable of monitoring and protecting theses cables. Ireland, by not urgently addressing this defensive vulnerability, is compromising their own national security, and playing into the hands of bad actors. How does this effect our political allies,' especially EU Member States,' perception of

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[5] Report on The Commission on the Defence Forces 2022.

us, and how would that impact on our International Security relationships and Policy?

5.8   <u>Military and Political Neutrality</u>.   Whether there is an intellectual disparity regarding the integrity of being politically allied, but militarily non allied is an interesting issue for debate, especially in the new, more volatile geo-political paradigm. Can we continue to extol our defensive neutrality while not really resourcing a cogent and coherent defence policy and the necessary forces and capabilities that it requires? How does this dichotomy reflect on our national integrity? Is this an ethically defendable position? If we chose to remain neutral and outside any military alliance, then we need to clearly define how we combine being politically allied with our EU partners while maintaining a separate but responsible defence and security capability. This is entirely achievable in diplomatic terms, there is currently no evident external pressure on us to join any defence alliance such as NATO but requires an honest and forthright policy discussion within the State and with our EU partners.

5.9   <u>The Irish 'Triple Lock' Problem</u>.   The degrading of the functional capability international institutions such as the UN for peacekeeping operations as discussed above in paragraph 4.3 has specific Foreign and Security Policy implications for Ireland. Since 1960, and restated in 2006[6], Ireland has followed a policy of not deploying any group of more than twelve military personnel without a government decision, the approval of the Dáil, and most pertinently, a formal UN Mandate. This was always a highly constricting legal device, but now clearly means that any of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have an effective veto over a critical area of Irish Foreign Policy and government decisions on military deployments. The ability to deploy any meaningful and capable military force or Unit to a crisis event, (including rescue or recovery of Irish citizens from conflict zones) is thus circumscribed by the ability of a large power to veto the necessary UN mandate.

5.10   ARCO suggests that the Triple Lock mechanism is clearly no longer fit for purpose and merits serious consideration in the context of Ireland's future International Security Policy. It prevents the rapid deployment of even small military missions to crisis zones (as happened during the recent effort to evacuate Irish Citizens in imminent danger from Khartoum, Sudan), and it gives Large Powers at the UN Security Council an unacceptable control over significant aspects of our independent foreign policy. The Government could consider removing the UN Mandate requirement and return the procedure for deployment of military personnel to just requiring Government and Dáil approval for all levels of Defence Forces overseas deployment. This would permit deployments where morally and ethically indicated and would be the act of a confident, truly neutral State. Alternatively, if the removal of the Triple Lock is too politically contentious, the requirement for a UN SC mandate, could be replaced by a Decision of the EU Council to deploy an EU mission. Ideally this would be supported by a matching UN mandate, but whilst desirable, this should not be legally binding on an Irish Government to deploy personnel or assets to a conflict zone.

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[6] Defence (Amendment) (No.2) Act 1960 and Defence (Amendment) Act 2006

Section 6.   Security Threats and ISP – The Environment for Ireland 2023-2028.

6.1   ARCO submitted a list of comprehensive security threats in its submission on Ireland's National Security Strategy in 2019[7]. This clearly listed the range of evident security threats and risks across a wide range of direct, asymmetric, environmental, kinetic, climatic, economic, natural disasters, espionage, and transnational criminality spheres. Since then, a number of these threats have become even more prominent in the area of International Security. The following categories are considered to be of prescient importance in 2023, and for the near to medium future.

6.2   <u>Military Conflicts and Global Impacts.</u>   The Russian military invasion of Ukraine marks a watershed in the use of military force by a major power in recent times. The economic disruptions, particularly to European energy security, are very significant. If the increasingly belligerent Chinese attitude towards military control of the South China Sea and its posture to re-assimilate Taiwan were to tip over into military conflict, the impact could spread globally beyond Southeast Asia, probably involving the US and Australasia. The economic impact on critical microprocessor production (Taiwan produces 60% of the world's semiconductors, and 90% of the most advanced[8]), would be economically devastating on a global scale. As an international IT hub, and still struggling to secure our own energy demands, Ireland is clearly very vulnerable to the increased threat of regional conflict volatility involving major powers.

6.3   <u>The Non-Conventional (Asymmetric) Threat</u>.   While the threat of direct military action against Ireland remains low, this geographically enhanced advantage is more than replaced by the very pertinent threat of asymmetric warfare. Threats in the areas of covert action, cyber warfare, information and dis-information operations, political interference, industrial and economic espionage and sabotage, satellite, and space disruption, all allow bad actors, both state sponsored and non-state, to directly threaten the social cohesion, politics, and economies of targeted Nations.

6.4   Ireland remains vulnerable to state sponsored and criminal cyber-attack on our critical, health, banking, national infrastructure, and financial IT systems. With key transatlantic lines of communication crossing our national airspace and maritime zone (Air Lanes, IT Data Cables) any asymmetric threat to our Air Traffic Control, State Energy and IT systems impacts directly on our European and North American neighbours. While we have taken steps to better resource and organise our Cyber Deterrence and Protection, this clearly cannot be effectively achieved without close international co-operation. This has a direct implication for our International Security Policy. We cannot remain 'neutral' in this field of defence and security. We must integrate into EU Cyber Defence Structures.

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[7] ARCO Submission on National Security Strategy – 28 December 2019, Pps 3-4.
[8] The Economist, March 6th, 2023.

6.5   <u>Covert Action against Critical Infrastructure</u>.   As noted above Ireland's key position in trans-Atlantic communications systems and air lanes, means that we are a direct factor in wider Western and EU Security and remain a vulnerable node to external attack on both EU and NATO members. Ongoing Russian surveillance activity in our maritime EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) has underlined how our lack of any military sub-surface and air interdiction capability means that we are effectively reliant on other States and Alliances for our security against covert action and surveillance. This is exacerbated by our undeveloped approach to Intelligence Gathering and Analysis (See Para 6.13 below).

6.6   <u>Non-Conventional (Conflict) and Organised Crime</u>.   Ireland has a long history of combatting and managing non-conventional action generated internally. While the relatively small foreign immigrant population and lack (to date) of organised extreme right- or left-wing political groups reduces the potential to be drawn into wider campaigns of Fundamentalism or Political terrorist activity. However, the activities of highly active and trans-national organised crime gangs (some of whom are Irish) can often drift into the realms of social and weaponised terrorism. While it is a problem for national policing, state intelligence and policing co-ordination structures need to be constantly reviewed as part of our ISP process.

6.7   <u>Cyber Warfare and Criminality</u>.   The major cyber-attack on the State's critical HSE infrastructure in May 2021 was a signal event not only in the damage it caused to a key national health system, but in illustrating how vulnerable many Irish IT systems were to malicious attack. From the ISP point of view, the 2021 cyber ransomware attack originated from a 'criminal hacker group' based in Russia. Given the overwhelming State control (and direct involvement) of such activity in Russia, at best this attack could be described as a 'tolerated' hostile act against a neutral country by Russia using criminal assets, at worst it could be described as effectively a direct 'act of war' against Ireland, limited to one key infrastructure area as part of a broader asymmetric probing of western nation's defences and stability by the Russian State. Either way, it underlines our vulnerabilities and impacts on the political and diplomatic aspects of our future ISP as well as our security reform requirements.

6.8   <u>Political Stability – The impact of Artificial Intelligence</u>.   Closely linked to the sections above identifying cyber threats to Ireland's and Europe's IT systems is the emergence in recent years of massive technological advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning in computing and digital data processing systems. It is now universally accepted that this technological advance is a paradigm shift in how humankind can use, and also be effected by our technological advances. The speed of development and deployment of these technologies and their ability to self-learn and correct their own weaknesses, is now happening at an exponential rate, far faster than was envisioned even by its creators, and is now permeating across a vast range of social and technological areas. This means that governments, scientists, and regulators are struggling not just to catch up on the runaway development of these technologies, but to even understand and assess how much impact they will have on our society and civilisation. As a key location for leading edge technology companies, Ireland will have to examine closely the potential of AI to impact on employment

levels, social cohesion, verification of academic standards, media veracity, and in particular, enhanced threats to our cyber defences of critical infrastructure and government systems. The potential for social and political disruption is hard to assess at present, but due to lagging regulation and oversight, is potentially highly dangerous.

6.9   <u>Maritime Security, Economic Stability and Trade Disruption.</u>   While any threat analysis in the maritime area has covered the vulnerabilities of undersea data and power cables and future offshore energy infrastructure, we also must consider the vital issue of normal maritime trade. As recognised in the White Paper on Defence 2015 (para 2.2.3) Ireland is an island trading nation and highly reliant on the unimpeded movement of goods for our economic well-being. Almost 99% of our goods by volume and 95% by value travel in and out of Ireland by sea). The high reliance on these sea lanes of communication presents a vulnerability that could be exploited. Were this traffic to be interrupted significantly Ireland would economically suffocate rapidly. While the current threat may be low the effect would be very high. The spectrum of threats could range from industrial disputes, protests, accidents including ship casualties, cyber-attacks on infrastructure and shipping ICT systems (as has happened in other States already) to the use or mere threat of kinetic attacks using IEDs or conventional weapons to close navigational channels or ports.

6.10   Brexit demonstrated very clearly our reliance on sea trade particularly the short sea routes to our continental partners. Maintenance of freedom of navigation on the High Seas, Territorial Waters and Ports is a vital national interest and should be considered as such in any National Security Policy. This must be reflected in our International Security Policy and general Foreign Policy as maintenance of freedom of navigation is becoming an issue in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, with clear global implications.

6.11   The maritime environment is by its nature an international space involving interactions and often cooperation with others, and with its own coda of law and regulation. Every shipping route, every data cable, every power, or gas interconnector to this island comes from and to another State, so must involve mutual dependence and cooperation as inherent factors. In our situation the EU is a significant player in all Member States marine space particularly in the area of resource management (e.g., The Common Fisheries Policy), maritime safety and environmental protection. The enforcement of so-called "EU Law" is a matter for the Member State with some EU assistance (e.g., by the European Fishery Control Agency). This may even be welcomed by some as relieving the State of a burden, but accepting the loss of national agency over a valuable national resource should be treated with caution. This re-emphasises the need for Ireland as nation with a very large maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to have a well-resourced and highly capable Navy.

6.12   Ireland has a Maritime Security Strategy – as a Member State we endorsed the EU Maritime Security Strategy in 2014[9] and its revision in 2018, and its current review.

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[9] White Paper on Defence 2015 para 3.4.4

We should continue to actively engage with the policies and initiatives in the Action Plan from that Strategy rather than simply sign off on it passively as a Member State. There is a claim to "strongly support it" in a recent Defence White Paper, but this actually requires embracing its practical outcomes. This should include participation in the EU's PESCO projects that clearly enhance our ability to meet our responsibilities in the maritime domain.

6.13   <u>Espionage and Intelligence Security</u>. Ireland is marked by our lack of a recognisable National Security Intelligence Agency. We have relied on a Garda/police Intelligence function, focussed largely on organised crime and internal terrorism, along with a (largely unconnected) relatively small Military Intelligence Section, providing intelligence support and geopolitical security analysis (along with analysis from DFA and the EU Military Staff) for overseas peace support deployments, and other limited military intelligence liaison duties. This divided and small-scale approach to national intelligence structures could be said to indicate an undeveloped conceptualisation in our National Security information systems, and by implication, creating vulnerabilities to that of our neighbours' security as well. We have for example, a seriously limited capability to monitor and police foreign espionage activity in Ireland. The implications for our ISP relationships are clear.

6.14   Almost every modern western state has senior-level intelligence co-ordination and analysis functions gathered into civilian controlled overarching organisations, such as a National Security and Intelligence Agency. These can gather and organise the activities and output of a range of national economic, police, military, cyber, and geopolitical intelligence and information resources and agencies and be the principal advisor to the Government across all areas of intelligence and security, both civilian and security arm based. Such an agency should be able to crystalise and analyse intelligence, threats both natural, climate based, economic, policing, terrorism, cyber, military and subsequently co-ordinate state responses.

6.15   If the modern cross-sectoral range of issues and threats for our National Security are evident, Ireland needs to seriously consider whether it should form an information and intelligence analysis based, National Security and Intelligence Agency. This would be managed by a professionally qualified, high-level appointee, and possibly located in the Dept of The Taoiseach for maximum coordination across the various State Departments and Agencies and oversight by the Cabinet. This is not advocating developing a national espionage capability, but rather a focussed analysis and intelligence processing capability, which could improve professional links with other EU intelligence agencies to enhance our national security picture. It could also provide an enhanced capability to monitor foreign intelligence and espionage activities on our national territory. Most importantly, it would indicate a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to intelligence and security, and visibly underline an independent capability approach to our wider national security.

6.16   <u>Climate Change – The Global Threat</u>. Nothing illustrates the multi-factorial, multi-threat environment faced in developing a coherent International Security Policy than the rapidly accelerating pace of catastrophic Climate Change. As the pace of climate

warming impacts increases, Nations and the Global collective struggle often without worthwhile advances, to react to the pace of the change. It is a huge struggle to agree coherent and effective changes to emissions control and resource management to ameliorate the worst effects, particularly in the developing world. Without addressing the various threats in detail, there is the rapidly evolving issue of populations being displaced in huge numbers by global warming, as traditional regional agricultures and economies fail, and large areas of the world in the equatorial regions become slowly but steadily uninhabitable.

6.17   <u>Political Stability and Migration</u>.   There can now be little doubt that climate-based, economic migration and refugee movements, along with conflict driven population displacement is not only impacting on neighbouring regions but driving political change in the developed world as significant illegal migration (often both economic and human rights abuses based) starts to impact at European and North American Borders. Apart from resourcing the management of the struggling immigration systems, the impact of these migration flows from the developing world to wealthy countries can be seen in the rise of extremist and nationalist political parties and movements across Europe, cynically exploiting a public unease with external, often culturally different migration, and turning it into increasingly socially divisive political activity (we have seen some emerging instances of this here in Ireland in recent months). This trend can often be seen in the rise of populist and authoritarian politics, using a social fear of migration impacts to secure political power and anti-democratic change.

6.18   <u>The On-island Question</u>.   As a politically divided island with the possibility of a form of re-unification at some point in the future, Ireland needs to consider that the current six counties as part of the United Kingdom are part of the NATO defensive alliance. This means that in any notional discussion of closer political links, the issue of the security of the entire island and its peoples comes into sharp focus. How would a militarily neutral Irish State theoretically seeking future peaceful re-unification, negotiate the difficult issue of Northern Ireland's membership through the UK of NATO?

Section 7.   The Concept of Hybrid Defence and Security.

7.1   The central thrust of this submission has been that any consideration of Ireland's International Security Policy is inextricably linked to our own National Security and Defence Policy. In a globalised world, with our very open, trading economy strongly based in international IT Commerce, Pharmaceuticals and Agricultural Exports, our security is dependent on how we interact with our EU partners, the wider 'western' world, and globally across all continents. If we do not look after our own security properly and professionally, then we will be unable to contribute to global peace and security in a worthwhile manner. In the current divisive and volatile geo-political environment, it will mean we are not taken seriously.

7.2   The old (largely 19th and 20th Century) paradigm of physical security of a State using just Diplomatic, Military and Intelligence resources is now effectively obsolete. In its place is a new paradigm of 'Hybrid Security' encompassing not only the original physical defensive assets but also protecting the State against a much wider range of natural, economic, and actual intentional threats. Hybrid Defence takes consideration of the societal impacts of economic recession, cyber-attacks on critical state and financial systems, natural disasters, political extremism, climate change, terrorism, uncontrolled migration, covert on-line political interference, financial and trade disruption, energy security, along with the traditional threats of military aggression, diplomatic conflict, and espionage.

7.3   To meet this new, more dynamic, and cross-sectoral security requirement needs highly flexible national security and intelligence structures irrespective of the size of the State. A robust, well-structured, and technically agile Defence Forces is a critical backbone for National resilience, but equally the State needs command and control structures that can co-ordinate the security challenge across all of the States areas of activity, Civilian, Law Enforcement, Economic, Environmental and Military.

7.4   A well-structured, professionally managed National Security Agency along with a supporting National Intelligence Agency would be able to assess threats, across all sectors, co-ordinate planning, review national defence resources and processes, and provide reliable professional information and advice to Government. It would also indicate to our partners and the wider international community a substantial high-level revision in our approach to our own National Security, and that of our partners and neighbours.

Section 8.   Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1   ARCO contends that the global geo-political scenario in 2023 is a greatly changed and highly unstable one, with a major conventional land war ongoing on the European continent. This is unlikely to revert to a situation of relative calm such as in the 1990s to 2010s for some years. A deep reappraisal of Ireland's International and National Security Policy is both warranted and urgently required.

8.2   In a globalised and highly connected world, an open trading economy with very substantial IT, Cyber Communication, Pharmaceutical and Agricultural parameters, commercial trade cannot remain unattached and uninvolved with the economic and security concerns of our EU partners and the wider western democracies. Our security situation is an intrinsic part of their security situation, as theirs is of ours.

8.3   Ireland's approach to International Security Policy (ISP) and that of its own National Security Strategy are inextricably linked. The State cannot apply a coherent ISP in European and International Affairs without a coherent, capable, and well-resourced approach to its own security. We will not be taken seriously if we continue a passive, inadequately resourced, and irresponsible approach to our own National protection, and that of our regional neighbours.

8.4   Ireland's traditional quiet ambiguity in being politically highly aligned (with the EU) but militarily neutral (without any adequate spending on defence and security) cannot be sustained in the new security environment. It now requires a fundamental national reappraisal of what type and level of National security and defence we need to provide, and how that can be best achieved. Military neutrality is a means, not an end. It is just one alternative policy option (as is membership of a military alliance) to achieve a nationally defined and desired security end-state.

8.5   Ireland has effectively three options to address this urgent security requirement. We can either:
    a. Choose to do nothing radical, and effectively passively outsource our security and defence to our neighbours, who cannot afford to compromise their regional security by leaving a glaring vulnerability on their transatlantic lines of communication and airspace.
    b. Create a proper security architecture and resource an appropriate independent military deterrence and defence capability outside of a formal military alliance, while remaining politically aligned and in broad co-operation with our EU partners security policy
    c. Achieve an acceptable level of national security by joining a military alliance (NATO).

8.6   The first option is irresponsible and unacceptable for any wealthy sovereign nation and should be immediately discounted. The second would retain our neutrality more effectively and allow coherent, structured, and valuable co-ordination with our EU Partners and neighbours. The third option would achieve security but at a cost to our policy independence, and would be difficult to achieve politically, as there is general

public support for retaining our military neutrality as well as our membership of the EU. There will be a financial cost in increased defence budgets to achieving the second option, but this has already been generally accepted by Government in 2022. The debate is around whether that decision and the Level of Ambition chosen Level of Ambition 2 (LoA), will be sufficient to adequately address the current serious degradation in Irish Defence capability over the coming 5 years.

8.7   ARCO would argue that the creation of a high-level National Defence Agency, led by a senior security professional, with a small subordinate National Intelligence Analysis Agency would be a significant step forward in restructuring our national security architecture to address the new and emerging hybrid, cyber and asymmetric threat environment. It would also be a clear signal on a changed governmental approach to our own and international security concerns.

8.8   ARCO has no preferred position on whether the option of retaining properly resourced military neutrality or consideration of joining the NATO military alliance is chosen, arguably either one is a coherent policy option to achieve a desired security end state. But both options would require a substantial increase in defence spending to reconstitute and properly develop an effective Defence Forces capability degraded by decades of chronic under-investment and an exodus of key personnel. Political parties advocating full military neutrality as our national policy, should consequently, also back that up by adopting a policy to move our defence capability to the maximal level of ambition (LoA 3) as outlined in the recent report by the Commission on the Defence Forces (2022).

8.9   ARCO supports the continuing active engagement by Ireland in all forums and organisations dealing with International Relations. However, the undermining of the UN Security Council by some of its permanent members use of the veto has rendered the maintenance of the 'Triple Lock' unworkable, occasionally when military interventions are morally and ethically required. Accordingly, consideration of legislative change and/or replacement is needed, to restore our ability to make independent decisions on military deployments, especially in such circumstances.

ENDS.