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BEYOND NEUTRALITY: THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN IRISH DEFENCE AND SECURITY POLICY

MA Thesis

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared the following thesis independently. The views of other authors and data from all external sources, literary or otherwise, have been cited.

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Abstract

What lies behind Ireland's anomalous approach to its defence and security policy? Why does a state which is otherwise politically aligned and integrated with its regional neighbours behave so differently, investing and cooperating to such limited extents, where defence and security are concerned? This is a question which has not garnered significant academic attention, and one the body of scholarship produced to date has struggled to answer. This study departs from the approach of previous scholarship in examining Irish behaviour through the lens of ontological security. By analysing elite Irish discourse on defence and security between 2014 and 2023, it illustrates the link between Irish identity constructions and policymaking in the defence and security sphere, highlighting the discursive 'field of action' generated for elite decision-makers by Ireland's sense of self as an actor in the international community. It alleges that this sense of self perceives Ireland as a peace promoter and moral authority, one which is not entirely included in the Western European security space, and that such an identity precludes Ireland from shaping its policy in a manner similar to that of other Western European states. Prior to 2022, Irish ontological security was preserved through the maintenance of low military capability and limited international cooperation: from 2022, amid Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Irish 'field of action' is found to have partially expanded to incorporate greater scope for investment and cooperation, but with the underlying identity tenets remaining the same.

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Introduction

Where state defence and security policies are concerned, it is surely not controversial to say that the situation in Western Europe is a largely straightforward and well-understood one. In the Cold War period, most states married European political integration through the European Economic Community with military alignment through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Those who did not, including Switzerland, Austria, Finland and Sweden, formed the core interest of the International Relations sub-discipline of neutrality studies, with a wide and comprehensive body of scholarship being built up for all cases over the decades (Agius 2011; Binnendijk & Rodiham 2020; Blydal 2012; Dreyer & Jesse 2014; Fischer 1982; Luif 1986; Möller & Bjereld 2010; Rendl 1998; Salonius-Pasternak 2018). The case which did not fit neatly into either category, and which was subjected to the least academic inquiry, was Ireland: though it never sought to join NATO, Ireland formed part of the first membership enlargement of the European Economic Community in 1973, and would be the only non-NATO member-state in the Community for the following 22 years. Its neutrality was neither externally-enforced in the manner of Finnish and Austrian neutrality, nor part of a societal 'total defence' concept in the Swiss mould: in fact, Ireland was notable for its very low investment in material defence capabilities and in the general absence of defence and security as issues of political salience in public discourse. In contrast to the rest of Western Europe at the time, it was said in the 1970s that Ireland "does not talk about" its defence and security "much and thinks about it even less" (Keatinge 1972, 438).

In the more than fifty years which have passed since those words were written, the Western European political and security landscape has undergone very significant changes, as has scholarship of those Western European states which remained or remain outside of NATO. Despite these changes, the general situation surrounding Irish security and defence policy has remained largely the same: Ireland's approach is still anomalous in the regional context. Its level of military expenditure has remained exceptionally low by EU and Western European standards, with its 2023 expenditure equating to 0.23% of Irish Gross Domestic Product. This proportion is less than half that of the EU's second-lowest spender (Malta, 0.5% of GDP) (World Bank 2024). In Western Europe and the EU, its armed forces personnel strength of 13,550 is larger only than that of Luxembourg and Malta (World Population Review 2024).[1] It is one of only four EU member-states (along with Austria, Cyprus and Malta) which remains

[1] Iceland does not have an army of its own.

outside of NATO, and it does not pursue mutual/collective defence arrangements with any other state. The Partnership for Peace framework under which its relations with NATO are conducted is the same framework as that which governs NATO relations with states such as Switzerland, Serbia and Turkmenistan. Though it opted into the European Union's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) programme upon its launch in 2017, the number of projects in which it is actively involved has consistently been among the lowest of all participating member-states (European Council 2023).

This picture of low domestic investment and limited international cooperation is all the more remarkable when contrasted with Ireland's wider modern status as a European Union and Eurozone member-state, with an open economy driven by foreign direct investment and globalised sectors such as IT and financial services. Though Keatinge could write in 1972 that Ireland was "not significantly involved" in the European political sphere, "even outside the area of security" (446), such an assertion written now could not be further from the truth. Irish defence and security policy is now even more exceptional when compared to other sectors of Irish behaviour than it was in the past. In its geographical and political context, Irish defence and security policy is a true anomaly. The question of what lies behind this anomaly is the launchpad of this research study.

This study proposes that the 'back box' of domestic Irish factors be opened and an analysis performed on Irish defence and security not from the external, comparative perspective presented above, but from the internal perspective of Ireland itself. This is done through the use of identity, and more specifically, of ontological security theory. A burgeoning theoretical field within constructivist scholarship, ontological security operates on the assumption that states, as well as providing for their physical defence and security, also provide for the security of their sense of self as an actor in the international community. It follows from the broader constructivist assumptions of the inherent subjectivity of actors' interpretation of the world around them, a subjectivity which is informed by actors' own assumptions, experiences and biases. It suggests that state behaviour in defence and security is not merely geared towards preserving the state's territory, but also towards behaving in a manner which aligns with the state's identity. With this in mind, the following research question is pursued: "How do Irish identity perceptions influence Ireland's defence and security policy?"

Where academic scholarship on Irish defence and security policy is concerned, an approach focused on ontological security is both novel and necessary, as previous work on the topic has

struggled to come to grips with Ireland's so-called "singular stance" (Jesse 2007). Certainly, the realist paradigm which long predominated in security studies fails to provide much insight into Irish behaviour. A parsimonious realist analysis would dictate that Ireland, like all states, tailors its approach to defence according to its hard military capabilities and the severity of the threats it faces: therefore, its low defence investment and limited cooperation with other states results from Ireland not being subjected to the same threats as the rest of Western Europe. Alternatively, these threats are present, but simply not acknowledged or responded to in the manner they should be – in other words, Ireland's approach is misguided or irrational (Salmon 1989). For quite obvious reasons, neither of these potential explanations withstand much scrutiny. It is highly doubtful that the profile and severity of threats facing Ireland would be significantly different to Western European NATO member-states such as Portugal or Iceland, while any theory which cannot offer a satisfactory explanation of a certain phenomenon beyond irrationality on the part of the actor itself ought to be treated with significant caution.

Beyond this realist analysis, scholarship on Irish policy has focused to an almost excessive degree on Ireland's 'neutral' status, with the main debate appearing to concern whether Ireland could be deemed a 'proper' neutral country (eg. Salmon 1989; McSweeney 1985; Keatinge 1972; Raymond 1983-84): the conclusion of many scholars was that it could not. For many years, Ireland's defence and security policy was simply summed up as an 'unprincipled' and 'ad hoc' kind of neutrality which aimed to benefit from the broader Western European security architecture without contributing anything of its own. A broader appraisal of this approach, one which would also include its policy towards its armed forces, capability levels and interactions with other states on information-sharing or other levels, appears not to have been carried out. In recent times, attempts have been made to address this inadequacy by approaching the issues through alternative paradigms: both liberal (Jesse 2006; 2007) and critical theory (Devine 2006; 2008) approaches have certainly gained ground, and the superficial dismissal of Ireland as a misguided case no longer pervades. However, this recent scholarship retains the same focus on 'neutrality' above all else. Such an approach takes Ireland's status as a neutral country as a base assumption and, in this way, is beginning its analysis from the middle of the story, rather than the beginning. The question of why Ireland pursues something it calls 'neutrality' in the first place, and what this 'neutrality' means in Ireland's broader approach to defence and security, is not the focus of the discussion. Therefore, the discussion itself is essentially premised on the wrong questions being asked.

This is something this research study aims to rectify. It argues that, rather than merely constituting a political policy choice, Ireland's approach to its defence and security is a result – and a constituent element in itself – of how the state conceives of itself as an actor in the international community. This self-conception holds that Ireland is a peaceful and morally-righteous international actor, implicated only partially in the European and Western security spheres, which defines its agency in defence and security through its impact on global multilateral organisations and its contribution to peace making and peacekeeping. In this context, Ireland is reluctant to be seen to act assertively in making provisions for its defence, keeping spending low and gearing armed force capabilities towards its international role in peacekeeping missions. It also avoids pursuing close relations or alignment with other states in the defence and security spheres, whether or not those states are otherwise viewed as friends of Ireland in political or cultural terms, lest its moral authority be called into question as a result. Such assertive or aligning actions lie outside the appropriate 'field of action' prescribed by Irish identity, and would have the potential to provoke ontological insecurity if they were pursued. Changes to the Irish approach would have fundamental implications for the perception of what the Irish state 'is' in the minds of those who are part of it and who make decisions on its behalf.

Rather than begin from the premise of Ireland being an 'anomaly,' the approach pursued here attempts to analyse defence and security as it appears to Ireland itself, in the context of its wider perceptions, assumptions and fears of the world and its place within it. It takes the focus away from neutrality as the determining factor behind Irish behaviour, with a view towards examining factors which motivate Ireland to pursue a kind of policy it regards as 'neutrality' in the first place. It aims to add further credence to ontological security and state identity as conceptual tools for International Relations scholarship, tools which can challenge long-standing assumptions and solve outstanding puzzles of state behaviour and relations in many spheres, including defence and security. By approaching such puzzles from the perspective of state actors' identity-related 'field of action,' it is possible to gain insights on phenomena and entire logics of actor behaviour which alternative approaches have long struggled to adequately account for.

In addition, this study hopes to contribute to the rather disparate body of literature on Irish defence and security policy and illustrate the utility of alternative approaches, particularly those which do not privilege 'neutrality' as the overriding focus of inquiry. From a pragmatic political perspective, and with security and defence likely to remain high-profile in both European

academic and political debate in the future, it is important that actors' understanding of their respective positions and priorities is enhanced, particularly when the actor is one pursuing a line as exceptional as the one Ireland continues to pursue. Highlighting the ontological underpinnings of state behaviour and policy-making has the potential to enable academics, policy-makers and the public at large to approach Irish behaviour in a more self-reflexive and, ultimately, more informed manner. Far from being an 'anomaly,' Ireland's approach to its defence and security can be shown to be an explicable practical manifestation of how the state perceives itself as an international actor, with policies which reflect and reinforce the Irish 'sense of self.' It is expected that an analysis rooted in ontological security dynamics will reveal the precise nature of this Irish 'sense of self' and the mechanics of its influence on Ireland's decision-making.

The research study proceeds as follows: first, the theoretical framework on which it is based (ontological security) is presented, with a focus on both the content of the theories themselves and a discussion of their observed implications for International Relations scholarship to this point. This is followed by a description of the deployed research methodology, including details on the selected single-case research design and discourse analysis method. Thirdly, the results of the discourse analysis on the examined corpus of sources are presented and a response to the given research question offered. The study concludes with a discussion of its findings and limitations, with a particular focus on its implications for future scholarship on both ontological security and Irish defence and security policy.

1. Identity, Ontological Security and State Action

This section introduces the primary conceptual framework on which this research study is based: ontological security. It does so in two parts. The first seeks to outline the basis of the theory, examine its primary characteristics and place it within the broader body of constructivist and identity-related research paradigms. It addresses some of the ambiguities and ongoing debates associated with ontological security in the academic field, with a special focus on those debates which relate most closely with the research study pursued here. The second sub-section builds on this theoretical examination to highlight the observed implications of ontological security for state behaviour, illustrating how protecting its stable sense of self can be shown to prove a strong motivating factor behind state decision-making in defence and security matters.

1.1 Ontological Security Theory

The concept of ontological security is one which has its origins in psychoanalysis, having been first coined by the psychiatrist, RD Laing (Zarakol 2010: 6). There it was used in reference to the range of anxieties, often existential in nature, which were said to be evoked in individuals by the cold and depersonalised nature of modernising society, in which traditional sources of continuity had apparently been lost (see Laing 1960). Jacques Lacan and Ashis Nandy were among the other psychiatrists who pioneered use of the concept in the field (Kinnvall & Mitzen 2017: 4). Its transfer to the social sciences is mostly credited to Anthony Giddens (Ejdus 2017: 884), whose works such as *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991) built on this previous scholarship, as well as Giddens' own examinations of psychology and psychoanalysis theory. He helped to articulate the essential idea of ontological security as it is commonly conceived by social scientists today: the need of actors to maintain a stable sense of who they are and their place in the world, in order to realise a sense of agency (Giddens 1991). This feeling of stability is brought about and sustained through actors' own sense of "wholeness" and the routines which define their interactions with the world around them (Mitzen and Kinnvall 2017: 4). These engagements with others are the link between an actor's self-told "autobiography" and their current sense of place in their world (Subotic 2016: 612).

Taking this basic conception of ontological security and applying it to international relations scholarship was enabled by the addition of one final idea: that of state identity.. Just as individuals require a sense of self which is consummate to their perceived place in the world and their relation to other actors, the same is also true for states. Building on the broader concept of the state as a unitary actor, it is suggested that states possess – and need – a sense of self which is associated with particular ideas about its origins, its relations with other states and its place in the world. Maintaining and reinforcing this sense of self is of great importance to states, and they are likely to be favourable towards actions which contribute to these ends (eg Ejdus 2017; Kayhan Pusane and Ilgit 2022; Kinnvall 2004: Mitzen 2006: Krasnodebska 2021; Rumelili 2015; Subotic 2015; Zarakol 2010). In other words, the pursuit of ontological security constitutes a motivating factor in state behaviour (Rumelili 2015: 56).

Though ontological security theory's leap from psychology to international relations may seem like a rather small one, it was enabled by two related developments in political science scholarship, without which it would likely have been impossible. The first of these was unquestionably the Constructivist Turn, a seismic shift in the social sciences which focuses on the ways in which human reality is constituted of constructed ideas, perceptions and interconnected systems of meaning, represented through physical or rhetorical signs, or 'signifiers' (eg Onuf 2013; Hall 1997). Within International Relations, constructivist scholars such as Alexander Wendt (1994) and Peter Katzenstein (1996) paved the way for radical new approaches to be taken in the discipline, and the incorporation of concepts such as state identity into analyses which would have previously focused on realist concepts such as national interests, international anarchy and the balance of power.

Following on from this broader development in the social sciences was the move in international relations scholarship to reexamine Security Studies, a sub-discipline which had previously been dominated by realist analysis of military-strategic issues and which had paid little attention to the meaning of 'security' as an analytical concept in itself. Though isolated attempts at considering this question had been made since as early as 1962 (see Wolfers 1962), it was not until the work of scholars such as Barry Buzan (1984) and Jef Huysmans (1998) that a broader conversation was encouraged on the problems and potential of 'security' and of Security Studies. The conversation included attempts to broaden the research agenda beyond the traditional conception of 'hard' security on the state level, with added qualifiers such as 'human' and 'environmental' being used for the first time. It was in this context that identity began to be considered by scholars as a potential aspect of states' security needs: Johan

Galtung, for example, included identity (along with survival, development and freedom) as one of four "positive goals related to human needs" which he said constitute security (Galtung 1980 and 1985). Without the emergence of constructivism, this development of security as a 'thick' signifier would have been far more limited, or perhaps even unforeseeable.

Why is it important for actors to possess this stable sense of self? In short, it is a matter of agency. Defining a state identity represents a method of "imposing cognitive order on the environment" (Mitzen 2006: 346) and of establishing a certain perspective on reality. This is what Giddens is referring to when he speaks of the ability to "go on" (1991: 35): without this cognitive order, actors are liable to be faced with the oppressive anxiety provoked by an environment full of innumerable potential dangers. State identity brings with it understandings of how a state relates to others, the kinds of challenges it faces and the ways in which it can meet those challenges. These "cognitive boundaries" (Subotic 2016: 613) are vital for channelling and rationalising state's behaviours to themselves, in making certain types of response 'appropriate' and 'natural' and others – which may also be materially feasible – undesirable as 'inappropriate' or 'unnatural.' In this sense, state identity shares parallels with securitisation theory, which relates to how certain issues are discursively treated as matters of 'security,' thereby altering the ways in which they are treated (eg Huysmans 1998; Wæver 1995; Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). Here it is about states seeing certain actions, patterns or relations as helping to shape 'who they are,' and the exact nature of what is included in this set of actions and relations differing for each individual state. It is important that states feel secure in whatever kind of cognitive order they have imposed on their world.

A state facing ontological insecurity is one which experiences a weakening or breakage in these "cognitive boundaries." When external or internal factors challenge a state's identity – be it through the perceived loss of a particular status, the disruption of a behavioural routine or the alteration of a significant positive or negative relationship with another state – its perceived place in its surroundings is uprooted, as is a state's idea of what it 'is' or 'should be.' Without this guiding identity, uncertainty surrounding 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' action increases – uncertainty which leads to uncertainty over action, limiting states' sense of agency. In the case of this study, it is alleged that Irish identity helps to create "cognitive boundaries" which inform Irish decision-makers on the nature of the challenges it faces in defence and security and the range of actions available to the state in meeting those challenges. An ontologically-insecure Ireland would be limited in its capacity to appreciate such challenges or the ways in which it could – or should – respond.

The question of the exact source of ontological security has been open to some debate, with two primary theories proposed. The first of these is more relational in nature. Theorised by Jennifer Mitzen in her influential 2006 article on ontological security, it proposes that actors primarily cater for their ontological security through establishing routines of behaviour, which order their relations and environment in a certain way. In so doing, these routines reinforce, both to themselves and others, states' sense of identity. The role of other actors is crucial to this process, as inter-state relations – be they positive, negative or otherwise – are an important forum for the formation of such behavioural routines. Even a relationship which appears wholly negative in most respects has the capacity to "pacify the cognitive environment" and offer states a clearly prescribed field of action, strengthening their ontological security (Mitzen 2006: 347). The implication of this view for research is a greater emphasis on states' routinised patterns of behaviour and interactions with others, be they cordial or antagonistic.

The alternative theory, for which Brent J. Steele (2008) offers a good foundational basis, is a more internal one, which suggests that ontological security rests on the extent to which a state's own perception of its behaviour, relations or place in the world is compatible with its sense of self. Effectively, a state seeks to behave in a way which 'lives up' to the vision of itself which it possesses, and risks provoking anxiety and shame if its behaviour does not match. The burgeoning field of Narrative Analysis is derived from this idea of ontological security, a field which traces the biographical and historical stories states tell themselves in an effort to shape a certain kind of identity. In Narrative Analysis, struggles with ontological insecurity are seen through the ways these stories are challenged by contradictory factors and are reshaped or maintained.

Of course, these theories are not diametrically opposed, and neither denies the importance of both internal perception and routinised behaviour to ontological security dynamics. Rather, it is a question of emphasis. In the context of this study, the internal interpretation of ontological security promoted by Steele is a more suitable one. The discourses under examination here relate to the ways in which elite voices in Ireland articulate important identity constructions and relate them to state behaviour. What is in question is the 'story Ireland tells itself' about its identity as a state, and how Ireland's actions fit into this story on an ongoing basis. Again, this is not fully opposed to Mitzen's precise conception of the theory: after all, the consistent telling of such an identity 'story' is inherently related to patterns of routinised behaviour and discourse. The difference is that the emphasis is less on Irish routinised interactions with others and more on internal discourse, decision-making and rationalisation.

Ontological security is certainly not unique among scholarly theories in being subjected to such internal contestation. On a more fundamental level, the meaning of 'identity' itself is far from a universally-accepted truth, and it is worth making a terminology-related clarification at this point. Browning and Joenniemi (2016) have problematised the conflation of 'self' and 'identity' which pervades in scholarship on the topic – including Mitzen's work on ontological security. Drawing on Jacques Lacan, they posit that the idea of a single unified self with associated identity characteristics is a fabricated construct in itself, one which is used by individuals to deflect from the unattainability of the kind of 'wholeness' which is referred-to in ontological security theory. Instead, actors attach themselves to certain behaviours and patterns in an effort to conjure a particular identity, one which may not be the only identity prevailing for an actor at any one time. There is a key dichotomy between a single self which is static and a range of potential identities which are numerous, fluid and occasionally contradictory. One can relate this point to the broader argument of Brubaker and Cooper (2000) that 'identity' as a term is overly burdened with contrasting and potentially-conflicting meanings. These various connotations stretch the term beyond reason and ultimately blunt its effectiveness as a concept with explanatory power. The conflation of a core and static 'self' with constructed 'identities' is just one of the ways in which problems can ensue.

This issue should not, however, preclude the use of 'identity' altogether. Instead, it is merely necessary to clarify what is meant – and not meant – by the term's deployment in context. This study utilises 'identity' in the sense of a "self-understanding" proposed by Brubaker and Cooper (2000): in this sense, it "designates what might be called "situated subjectivity": one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (17). This understanding of the term avoids reification by acknowledging identity as a construct which can potentially be subject to change, while also highlighting its very real capacity to shape actors' perception and action. The inherently auto-referential nature of this idea of identity may potentially be problematic in other cases, but for the purposes of this study, it functions well: after all, the research question fundamentally relates to how Ireland perceives its identity and how this perception impacts on its behaviour, not whether such an identity is acknowledged by others – or, indeed, if it is 'true' in any objective sense.

Despite these alternative views on what is precisely meant by 'identity' and 'ontological security,' there is considerably more agreement among constructivist scholars on what ontological security can offer as a theory with insightful or explanatory power. In a practical sense, ontological security is an effective bridge between state identity and security, and more

broadly, between state identity and behaviour. It highlights that a state's security concerns do not merely revolve around threats to physical harm, or to the wellbeing of its society, but also around threats to the state's sense of self. As well as emphasising this important link, however, the theory underscores "that the pursuits of ontological and physical security in international relations are characterised by different dynamics, processes, acts, and discourses (Rumelili 2015: 54)." In other words, the ways in which states approach their physical and ontological security are often quite different from one another, and ought to be analysed in their own right. For example, a state joining an international coalition engaged in conflict in a faraway part of the world may not be doing so out of any urgent need to protect its physical security, which might be entirely unaffected by the conflict, but out of an acute ontological security need to be an active military power with the ability to take action on the international stage.

Taking this idea further, it follows that these different approaches may not be compatible with one another: actions which may serve to benefit physical security may threaten ontological security, or vice versa. Mitzen (2006) is particularly keen to highlight the important implication of this idea: that ontological and physical security seeking do not merely represent differing processes, but may also come into conflict with one another. It is conceivable that a state may experience greater stability in their ontological security through maintaining a "harmful or self-defeating relationship" than they would by seeking a change to the status quo, and this may even extend to situations of conflict (342). The certainty of such situations, which may potentially pose a significant threat to state security in other ways, may be preferable to the uncertainty which would be brought about by significant change. This is a dynamic to state behaviour which realist analysis cannot adequately account for.

As is the case with many concepts in the field, the scholarly debate about ontological security is far from closed, with disagreement among both its detractors and its proponents. It is not immune to the problem of allocating agents or structures primary prominence in analysis: are ontological insecurities fuelled by the nature of the international system, or is this very system a product of the battle with insecurity which state identities constantly wage? (Zarakol 2010: 6) The treatment of the state as a single actor, an 'individual' in the larger 'community' of states, has also not been carried out without comment. Steele notes that analysing the identity of a state as a single unitary concept conceals the vast range of conflicting narratives and identities which are present within a state's society (2008: 17). According to this argument, that conception which is taken as the sole identity of a state in fact represents the hegemonic conception which has gained prominence over others.

Furthermore, there is a related challenge associated with treating collective actors like states in an "anthropomorphised" manner (Ejdus 2017: 885), as though they were capable of behaving and experiencing emotion in an animate, human-like way (Rumelili 2015: 17). In response to this criticism, Krasnodebska (2021) notes that debates within states around identity constructions, which may include a variety of competing notions, are nonetheless defined by certain common themes and ideas which can be pinpointed as the 'primary' constructions under analysis. Though this rebuttal may seem rather simplistic, one can argue – and indeed, this research would agree – that analysing the identity components which prevail at the decision-making level of a state does not deny the possibility for competing narratives existing at other levels. In assessing state behaviour and policy-making, however, which is primarily dictated by individual actors at the elite level, it is appropriate to focus on the state identity which prevails there.

An additional critique of the theory concerns its implications for understandings of identity evolution. This critique posits that, if maintaining stability in a state's identity increases its ontological security, then the ultimate goal of a state in this regard should be to prevent all movement and changes to its identity entirely. This essentialises a static identity as the key to maintaining ontological security, with anything less than that representing a threat. Ontological security scholars such as Mitzen (2006: 344) have dismissed this concern, noting that evolution to a state identity is an inevitable and necessary process, but it is true that determining where to draw the line between the natural process of identity evolution and the supposedly negative state of ontological insecurity is very difficult. Certainly, one can point to the speed at which potential changes or evolution might occur, or the severity to which a new identity construction might depart from other pre-existing ones. Ultimately, however, seeking to draw such a definitive line misses the point. Just as absolute physical security is an impossible goal, states also cannot permanently avoid all potential sources of ontological insecurity or aim to protect an identity construction from any and all change. Imagining how such an effort would be made is quite inconceivable. Rather it is a question of increased or decreased senses of ontological security, and of identity constructions which are changing in a gradual or in a rapid, destabilising manner.

1.2 Ontological Security Practice: Policy & Behaviour

This section turns from the theory-based discussion of identity and ontological security to consider these theories' implications for state action. It offers an impression of the available ontological security literature and aims to illustrate the link which has been highlighted between states' identities and their approach to policy. This shows the benefits of a research approach based in the ontological security paradigm for analysing state defence and security policy, vis à vis approaches based in purely realist or liberal ones. This section also places the case of Ireland within this broader context, showing how ontological security theory can help to fill the gaps left by other research paradigms in the study of Irish defence and security policy.

Ontological security represents one of the ways in which identity and policy can be successfully linked, in illustrating how a desire to protect identity conceptions influences state behaviour. As previously discussed, it is intended to offer insights on state behaviour in many different contexts, and not merely that of security policy itself. For example, Zarakol's insightful research of identity-related insecurities in Japan and Turkey's relations towards the Euro-Atlantic West has shown how such insecurities manifest in those states' ongoing reluctance to address or apologise for past state crimes (Zarakol 2010). This is clearly not what orthodox security studies would call a 'security issue,' but is nevertheless an important component of how those states present themselves to the wider international community and define their own place within it. In turn, this self-definition is utilised to explain an otherwise apparently counter-intuitive pattern of behaviour, one which negatively impacts relations with the Western World which these states largely seek to protect and enhance. In its capacity to offer insights in this regard, ontological security has proven an insightful lens of analysis.

That said, many of the most notable applications of the theory to date have been in studies which have not strayed too far from the more traditional realms of security studies. Germany has long been perhaps the standout empirical example of identity being successfully related to policy behaviour which appears contradictory from other theoretical standpoints (eg Hampton & Peifer 2007; Habermas 1995; Berger 1997; Berger 1998), and ontological security has recently been utilised to further develop this analysis. Regina Karp (2018) illustrates how German identity in the post-WWII period is premised on integration in and support for the broader Euro-Atlantic political community, with Germany viewing itself as a vehicle for promoting consensus and solidarity among the community's various members, and not as a

leader in its own right. Changes in the geopolitical landscape in the decades since the end of the Cold War have altered expectations of Germany among its neighbours and allies in Europe and the broader West, but these have not been mirrored by evolution in the German sense of self. What has been seen in recent years, according to her analysis, is an ongoing struggle to rationalise the new circumstances of how Germany is viewed by others with Germany's own self-identity, amid the ontological insecurity provoked by the disconnect between these two visions. More recently, the announcement of a *Zeitenwende* ('historical turning point') by Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in spring 2022 potentially represents the beginning of a new period in this process, in which German identity relates to the wider world and the country's appropriate 'field of action' in a new way. One would expect future scholarship on the German case to assess the extent of the *Zeitenwende*'s impact in this regard.

While Germany's material capabilities would make its assumption of a more dominant position in overall European affairs a possibility, the sense of self-identity to which Germany is attached prevents it from exploiting this possibility. This makes it notable as a case of a materially powerful state which is precluded from exploiting this material advantage by ontological security concerns. Often it is the case that the identity and ontological security discourses of a state produce a more nuanced picture: Hagström (2021) illustrates how top-level elite discourses in the United States and China blend ideas of strength and weakness in shaping their respective states' 'fields of action,' creating notions of what he calls "Great Power Narcissism." These discourses have a more enabling effect in defining states' space for potential policy choice.

At the other end of the spectrum to cases such as Germany are those in which ontological security concerns do not merely leave open the possibility for exerting a state's material capabilities on others, but demand it. The potential power of such self-identity narratives is shown by Krasnodebska (2021) in her exploration of how Russian self-identity is strongly linked with "close hierarchical relations to its neighbourhood" and views of Western Europe and the United States as "significant Others" (136) – views which were challenged by Ukraine signalling its intention to move closer to the European Union in 2013-14. In the face of this external challenge to its ontological security, Russia pursued escalating military and political confrontation, culminating in large-scale military aggression against Ukraine from 2014 onwards. Though Krasnodebska's analysis predates the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, one could say that the ontological security argument for Russia's actions

remains convincing, perhaps to an even greater extent than before. They also call to mind the aforementioned danger of states becoming habitually accustomed to confrontational relations and behaviour: without an antagonistic construction of the Euro-Atlantic West, Russia would not have a strong significant Other against which its Self can be defined, a scenario which one would imagine would significantly alter its behaviour towards both its near neighbours and the international community more generally.

Insightful as this analysis is, it perhaps represents a case of ontological security theory adding further understandings to state behaviour, rather than altering such understandings entirely. After all, scholars from such 'anti-constructivist' paradigms as offensive realism (eg Mearsheimer 2014) have also examined Russian behaviour towards Ukraine in their own theoretical terms. As with any theory, one of the most beneficial contributions which can potentially be made by ontological security theory is in its capacity to offer understandings of state behaviour which might otherwise appear contradictory under other theoretical paradigms: in other words, when it appears to solve puzzles theoretical perspectives like realism, liberalism and rational choice theory cannot solve. When the puzzle in question relates quite literally to questions of state death and survival, the utility of such a theory is only enhanced further. A superb example of this is brought forward by Steele (2008: 94-113) in recounting the case of Belgium in the early part of the First World War, one which is worth referencing in a measure of detail.

In August 1914, the Belgian government was issued with an ultimatum by Germany, alleging that France was planning an imminent invasion of Germany through Belgian territory. Though this obliged Germany to send its own forces into Belgium to meet the attack, the ultimatum insisted that Germany intended no threat to the independence of the Belgian state – which had operated as a self-declared "perpetually neutral" one for the preceding decades – and was willing to evacuate residents and provide compensation for damages sustained during the military operation (99-100). Despite their premise for entering the country being highly spurious, Germany hoped its military superiority would convince Belgium to simply accede to their demands, or even to "bandwagon" (99) with Germany in its attack on France. Instead, Belgium rejected the German ultimatum and opted to attempt to oppose the incursion by force. The invasion that followed led to the four-year occupation of the country, the devastation of several Belgian cities, massive destruction of infrastructure and the loss of thousands of lives. The population suffered many instances of acts which would later be regarded as war crimes. Though it is impossible to say what exactly would have occurred had Belgium chosen not to

resist and to accede to the ultimatum, in full or in part, what cannot be doubted is that its decision had dire consequences for the country and its people.

The classic realist analysis of the case would assert that Belgium made a grave error. It likely failed to appreciate the disparity between its forces and those of Germany, or placed unrealistic faith in the principle of neutrality in wartime. As a state facing a military threat from a vastly more powerful neighbour, Belgium arguably faced a choice between occupation partly on its own terms and occupation fully on the terms of Germany. Opting to fight a war it could not possibly win ensured that the latter outcome was the one which transpired.

As referenced elsewhere in this study, however, any argument which concludes that an actor simply acted irrationally ought to be scrutinised further. When such further scrutiny is applied to the Belgian case from an ontological security perspective, far more aspects of the story are brought to light. From the time of its independence in the early nineteenth century, Belgium had solidified its place in the European international system through an identity as a sovereign and "perpetually neutral" state (98). This identity was affirmed through Belgian discourse and its behaviour on the international stage, while also being reaffirmed through recognition from its neighbours, in instances such as the 1907 Hague Conventions. When Belgium was presented with the German ultimatum, as illustrated by Steele, the debate in elite circles on how to respond focused not merely on the potential material consequences for the state, but also the consequences for 'Belgium' as an idea, for the self-perception of the nation. There was a motivation "to protect not only *what*" Belgium was, "but *who* it was as a state within European society" (101). Much was made of Belgium's respected international position as a neutral state, and the honour and duty obligations which came with such a position. To accept the German demand would be to profoundly violate Belgian neutrality, as would seeking help from France, the UK or other European powers to combat the threat. From this perspective, Belgium's decision to attempt to oppose the invasion and defend its neutrality by force – even though their chances of success were extremely small – can be understood not as a miscalculation or act of naïveté, but as a political choice founded on explicable logic. Though the physical integrity of Belgium was lost, 'Belgium' as a political idea and national identity could remain intact.

This case is worth mentioning in some detail, as it is valuable for this study in three key respects. Firstly, it is arguably the most prominent case of ontological security theory offering a convincing interpretation of an empirical case for which no other theory had offered one before. Secondly, it is a stark illustration of the important implication of the theory in the

International Relations context regarding physical and ontological security considerations. In 1914 Belgium faced a very stark choice between compromising on the essence of its identity to minimise physical harm and upholding its national self-image at potentially far greater physical cost. There was no way for both concerns to be satisfied in anything approaching an equal manner. Faced with this choice, Belgium prioritised its ontological security concerns, running the risk of complete state death in the process. It is perhaps one of the most potent empirical examples of state action in the face of such a dilemma, and from an academic perspective, of how ontological security theory allows such apparently-puzzling action to be explained. Thirdly, the case of Belgium in 1914 shares certain parallels with that of Ireland today, in that neither state possessed or possess either a capable military deterrent or a stated reliance on assistance from stronger neighbours. Both states shaped or shape their defence policy not only according to the prevailing 'hard' security environment, but according to their identity.

Of course, an obvious further parallel between both cases is their common self-identification as neutral states. Indeed, neutrality studies has benefitted extensively from the emergence of ontological security theory and of state identity theory more generally, which have helped the area to expand beyond the rather narrow confines in which it previously operated. Formally, a state's decision to declare itself neutral was theorised as a pragmatic political choice for states incapable of providing for their own security purely through military means and reluctant to rely on external protection offered by an alliance, with the danger of being drawn into conflict which comes with it (eg Ogley 1970; Baker Fox 1959). Instead, neutral states hoped to ensure their survival by avoiding antagonising potential threats and maintaining a relatively well-armed and capable military deterrent, making the potential costs of an invasion too high to be worth bearing. A distinction was drawn between 'buffer' states (those located between Great Powers) and 'rim' states (states located on the edges of or out of regions where Great Power competition could take place), with the conclusion that neutrality had reasonable chances of success for 'rim' states, but for buffer states was likely to end in violation by another Power (Beyer & Hoffmann, 2011: 288). In this rather raw sense, the experiences of European neutral states in World War One mirrored this theory: while states such as the Netherlands and Spain were able to maintain their neutrality, as a state which was effectively 'in the way,' Belgium saw its neutrality violated.

This conception of neutrality was pervasive (and reasonably persuasive) during the Cold War. Since then, however, it has appeared more and more reductive, as the expectations of the

traditional conception were confounded on two sides: firstly, membership of the NATO alliance increased significantly during the 1990s and 2000s, despite the Cold War conflict which had spurred its creation having ended and tensions having been significantly reduced: secondly, those states which had supposedly remained neutral during the Cold War out of a concern not to antagonise one side or the other remained outside of NATO, even though the reduced Russian threat meant this compromise no longer needed to be made.

In fact, the fracturing of 'neutrality' as an analytical concept was taken much further than this, as the variety of defence and security policy stances which were grouped together under the banner of 'neutral' stances was shown to be very wide: from high military expenditure and the pursuit of a credible deterrent (Switzerland and Finland) to very low expenditure and a minimal deterrent (Ireland); reasonably close cooperation with alliances such as NATO (Sweden and Finland) to very restricted cooperation (Ireland); very active involvement in global peacekeeping deployments through the United Nations (Ireland) to no cooperation whatsoever (Switzerland prior to UN accession in 2002). Neutrality studies' aim to illustrate the large variety of different conditions, understandings and of implications for defence and security policy associated with neutrality also had the effect of weakening the term's conceptual value: the more flexible a concept becomes, the more explanatory power it loses. If states with such disparate approaches to their defence and security policies could be drawn together under a single analytical category as 'neutral states,' then one could legitimately question the extent to which this analytical category was and is truly valuable as such, beyond its barest modern understanding: non-membership of military alliances. This begs the question whether it is of benefit to study these cases through their neutrality, or whether an alternative approach may be more promising.

In response to this, some scholars proposed new terms such as "post-neutrality" (Agius 2011). Goetschel (1999) even went so far as to ask if neutrality itself was a "dead concept" (Agius and Devine 2011). Somewhat opposed to this, however, was a concurrent move towards understanding neutrality through the lens of identity. These studies operated primarily on the domestic state level and sought to examine whether and to what extent a state's self-identity was related to its neutrality, as well as the implications of such a relation for the state's behaviour. Understood in these terms, neutrality can be shown to reflect or comprise an important element of state identity, related to identity concepts such as self-sufficiency, moral authority, stability and defensive military prowess. It is an explicit and demonstrative means

by which states can illustrate distinctiveness or non-association from a particular international grouping in favour of a more 'global' stance.

In this way, Swiss (Dreyer & Jesse 2014), Finnish (Binnendijk & Rodiham 2020; Salonius-Pasternak 2018) and Swedish neutrality (Möller & Bjereld 2010; Blydal 2012; Agius 2011; Wæver 2002) were all shown to have strong links to how each of those states viewed their appropriate international roles, and even how they carried out their internal governance: Möller and Bjereld's (2010) deployment of the concept of institutionalisation is used to good effect in this respect. Similarly, an identity lens can also be used to examine states' decisions to avoid neutrality in favour of alignment, where membership of a military alliance is consummate with states' sense of belonging to a particular international group. The accession of many states in Central and Eastern Europe to NATO in the 1990s and 2000s, for example, could be viewed not just as a pragmatic military choice, but as part of their ideational 'Return to Europe,' their broader desire to see an identity as an integral part of the broader European political space realised in practical terms.

Of all the former and current neutral states which have been included in neutrality studies (which largely focuses on European cases), Ireland has perhaps suffered the most from the term's conceptual fuzziness. As previously mentioned, virtually all previous attempts to examine Irish defence and security policy have revolved around its self-described neutrality, with realist conceptions pervading until recently. Acknowledging the poor fit of Ireland in typical prevailing conceptions of the defence and security policies of neutral states, Neal G. Jesse (2006) took an alternative route in arguing that Irish neutrality was founded on a liberal view of the international system. Rather than seek to provide for its defence by maintaining a credible military deterrent, Ireland's very small armed forces and limited capabilities leave it virtually unable to repel any kind of concerted attack. Instead, Ireland directs significant political capital towards regional stability through international organisations such as the United Nations and OSCE, while using a portion of its military capabilities for peacekeeping efforts abroad. There is no doubt that such an analysis represented a significant advance on what had been offered previously, and comes far closer to what is being argued in this study. Jesse's liberal analysis offers a potential explanation for Ireland's low military capabilities and active international profile, but his reasoning is correlational rather than causal. A counter-argument may question the extent to which Irish involvement in international organisations truly outstrips that of other developed and integrated Western European states in real terms – states which also see NATO involvement as part of this integration.

The limited body of constructivist research on the topic has not contradicted Jesse's analysis per se, but has rather sought to fill in some of its gaps: Devine's (2008) critical social constructivist work incorporated public discourse to the debate, suggesting that a stable perception of Irish neutrality in the state's public opinion is based on concepts such as nonaggression and anti-imperialism, which underpin neutrality's high level of public support. Hers is one of the very few pieces of research which has acknowledged the relevance of conceptual tenets such as these to the question of Irish defence and security policy, but it does not bring in identity as a potential factor or go as far as attempting to link these concepts to Irish policy behaviour beyond its military non-alignment: in fact, her research alleges a disconnect between a more stable conception grounded in identity which is held by the public, and a more pragmatic, changeable view among the political elite.

Taking an approach founded on state identity and ontological security theory offers the possibility to refine and harmonise the intriguing but disparate assessments offered by other paradigms. Jesse's analysis makes sense on a theoretical level but warrants closer scrutiny. Devine's analysis raises these conceptual visions of Ireland's 'sense of self,' but does not call them as such or attempt to follow through on the implications of her findings beyond Irish military non-alignment. In previous work in this area, Irish identity has played a very small role, and has traditionally only appeared in the assertion that Ireland pursued neutrality in order to differentiate itself from the United Kingdom (UK, Jesse 2006). This suggestion, while not without historical merit, is of significantly less use to the current context, in which the UK's prominence in Irish economic and political affairs is much lower than it had been in the past. Assessing Irish behaviour in this area through ontological security asks whether the conceptual tenets noted by Devine are not merely present in the public imagination, but also form part of the role Ireland envisages for itself on the international stage, and whether this role leads to the policy choices which are noted by Jesse and which form the research puzzle of this study.

As was noted in the introduction, ontological security allows the right question to be asked of Irish defence and security policy: what is the thinking behind it? Why does Ireland behave in the manner that it does? The expectation of ontological security theory is that state behaviour is linked to a conception of identity which drives states to behave in a manner which aligns with its self-perception, as a failure to align in this way poses a risk to ontological security and, as a result, a state's ability to realise its agency. In the Irish context, it is expected that Irish identity is characterised in a way which compels Ireland to invest comparatively sparingly in its armed forces and to limit its involvement in military cooperation and engagement with other

states, as alternative courses of action would undermine Ireland's conception of itself as a state in the international community.

Taking this approach allows analysis to be taken beyond the rather narrow question of neutrality and for Irish defence and security policy behaviour to be examined in a broader and more complete manner. It responds to the well-established failure of realist paradigms to adequately address the research issue, and both refines and builds on the efforts of liberal and critical analyses in this regard. The remainder of the research study is dedicated to the methodological application of the theoretical constructs detailed here and their practical realisation with respect to Irish defence and security policy.

2. Methodology

The following section presents the 'practicalities' of the research study, detailing how the theoretical framework outlined previously is applied to the selected case in an effort to offer solutions to the research puzzle. It outlines the study's single-case research design, case selection, discourse analysis method and body of data sources utilised, with the aim in each case being to 'describe' and 'explain:' describe what is meant by each aspect of the selected methodology and explain why it is used in favour of other possible alternatives.

2.1 Research Design

The research is conceived as a Single-Case study. This choice was primarily dictated by the nature of the research puzzle, which is focused on a single case which is anomalous in its relevant broader context. Though it is regarded as a somewhat controversial approach by certain sectors of social science scholarship, particularly those of a positivist disposition (eg King, Keohane and Verba 1994), the single-case study is a popular and theoretically-appropriate choice for research with ontological security-related or generally constructivist lines of inquiry (eg Karp 2018, Krasnodebska 2021, Dreyer & Jesse 2014). Though it is almost certain that no actor's identity is entirely unique, and that some actors may share a number of commonalities, the philosophy of such kinds of research values the uniqueness of each potential case and privileges exploration of particularities over their simplification for comparison's sake. It allows the particular and unique aspects of the given case to be explored more fully, without the generalisation and blurring of distinctions which is almost always necessary when seeking to collate research on several cases.

Such an approach is particularly appropriate where studies of supposedly anomalous cases (cases which do not appear to adhere to the same theoretical expectations or show the same empirical characteristics as other apparently-comparable cases) are concerned: it is their particularities which make them worthy of examination as cases in the first place. These types of study are concerned with accounting for this anomalous nature through the deployment of new research methods or theory: in this case, through the use of ontological security. It must also be noted, however, that the single-case approach does not make such research completely

stand-alone in character. Though his general argument is more positivist in nature, Gerring's (2004) assertion that case studies can elucidate insights applicable to a wider body of similar cases also rings true for much interpretivist and constructivist research. As previously referenced, the study is located within the wider bodies of literature on ontological security and on identity and state behaviour, while also offering an alternative to neutrality-based approaches which have been utilised previously. Though the end result might be shown to differ from other otherwise-comparable cases, an anomalous case study can nevertheless illustrate processes and theoretical insights which can apply to a far broader range of cases.

2.2 Case Selection: Ireland

Ireland is the single case under examination in the research. The approach of the case under study is seen to differ significantly from its geographical and political peers in the area of defence and security, while being far less anomalous in most other respects. Were it the case that similar traits were also displayed by other cases in the wider Western European/Euro-Atlantic Region, there may be an argument for their inclusion in this study: however, by the reckoning of this researcher and others (eg Jesse 2007), no comparable cases are evident.

As described in this study's Introduction, Ireland has a long history of very low investment in its armed forces and maintaining limited military capabilities when compared to other countries in Western Europe or the EU. Its involvement in EU-led PESCO projects is among the most limited of any EU member-state, while it maintains quite distant relations with the primary defence alliance of the Euro-Atlantic West, NATO. This position of relative isolation and inactivity has persisted despite the state having become considerably integrated in the Euro-Atlantic West in economic, political and other spheres. Therefore, Ireland has the potential to be a particularly powerful case of the extent to which a state's identity may lead it to behave in ways which may appear unexpected when compared to apparently-similar cases, or indeed to the theoretical expectations of other research paradigms.

In addition, it has already been noted how previous scholarship on the Irish case in this area has presented a very patchy and incomplete picture. Both from an academic and more practical policy and political-interest perspective, it appears necessary that efforts be made to attempt to

'fill in the gaps' and offer understandings which are cohesive, convincing and well-grounded in both contemporary theory and research of current practice.

2.3 Discourse Analysis

The research method utilised in this study is Discourse Analysis. The selected corpus of sources is subjected to this analysis so that the constructions of Irish identity relevant to its defence and security policy can be gleaned from Irish discourse on the topic, and the link between these constructions and the policy behaviour displayed by Ireland can be examined.

This methodology originates from the same core constructivist tenets as identity theory and ontological security, and it represents a very useful method through which these phenomena can be studied. Its origins lie in the writings of French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose work such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) first drew attention to the role of power in generating and perpetuating definitions of knowledge. All subsequent schools of Discourse Analysis thought, including structuralism, post-structuralism and critical theory, stem from Foucault's basic assertion that knowledge is not an objective and constant entity which exists independently of humans, but is determined by those which the material or discursive power to define it. 'Discourse' – which has been variously defined as "ways of being in the world" (Gee 1996: viii), "systems of statements for the organisation of practice" (Bartleson 1995: 71), "a structure of meaning-in-use" (Weldes & Saco 1996: 373) and "systems of meaning-production" (Shepherd 2008: 10) – is a vital medium through which this knowledge definition activity is carried out. This idea of formation/production is a crucial one for differentiating theories of discourse from other language theories – and for linking Discourse Analysis to the study of identity. It is suggested that discourses constitute a 'meaning-making' practice, in shaping the potentially-endless possibilities of human perception of the world into a particular knowable and understandable form. The establishment and expression of self-understanding also represents a form of 'meaning-making' in this way, in defining an actor or group's view of the world and of their place within it. Discourse is therefore and important avenue through which identity constructions can be formulated and reinforced – making Discourse Analysis a useful way to place such constructions and their effects under examination.

Partly as a result of its desire to do away with the 'theory-methodology' distinction, and partly because of its more general 'anti-establishment' origins, Discourse Analysis practitioners long held an "internal aversion" towards formalising specific methodology (Dunn & Neumann 2016: 23). Though it can be argued that a certain level of discursivity is necessary in an analysis of discourse, that is not to say that the researcher should not deploy specific methods or philosophy to their work. Given the nature of the sources of discourse under study, a certain amount can be gleaned from explicit utterances by voices in the discourse. The analysis identifies utterances which specifically mention terms such as "values," "principles" and "identity," as well as those which refer to an Irish Self in a named ("Ireland") or collective first person ("we," "us," "our,") manner. In the context of behaviour, these features can be related to terms indicating longevity ("we have always done X") or inspiring particular emotions. Naturally, this explicit kind of discourse is also utilised in cases where utterances link policy behaviour with identity constructions ("we cannot do X because we are Y").

This use of explicit language forms an important part of the discourse analysis method deployed in this study. In addition, however, it is necessary to look beyond explicit utterances and assess what can be gleaned implicitly from broader discourse. This study uses the concept of deictic positioning, where discursive constructions are placed on deictic planes at relative proximity or distance from the Self, which is particularly helpful in this regard. It allows concepts, events or actors to be related to the Irish Self as features helping to compose its identity and 'place in the world' (see Chilton 2003). The analysis also pays close attention to the discursively-defined 'field of action' evident in the sources, assessing how utterances frame potential courses of Irish action as 'appropriate' or' inappropriate' – and exclude further courses altogether. In a more general sense, there is a guiding necessity to focus not on Irish behaviour per se, but on the identity discourse which informs and frames this behaviour: in other words, to focus not on what Ireland 'does,' but what it 'is,' according to its own domestic discourse. This necessity is what informs the selection of discourse analysis techniques for this study.

Such techniques demonstrate why Discourse Analysis represents a far more suitable approach to the given research question than a methodology such as Content Analysis, which is limited by the imperative to focus on that which is explicitly stated: the meaning of the language itself is what is under scrutiny, and not the meaning-making processes which underpin it. Within the broader constructivist paradigm, the Narrative Analysis method potentially represented an alternative approach: a related methodology to Discourse Analysis, it has been used to great effect by scholars of identity such as Subotic (2016) and Somers (1994). Rather than focus on

constructions formulated through discourse, this method focuses on self-understanding rooted in a state's auto-biographical conception of its origins and time-honoured characteristics. In this sense, ontological security-seeking presents itself as attempts to utilise (and potentially adapt) state narratives to provide "continuity, a sense of routine, familiarity, and calm" amid policy change or upheaval (Subotic 2016: 611). Though it has proven to be a laudable approach for ontological security research, its focus is weighted more heavily on the origins of identity and the ways in which it is presented or manipulated to serve contemporary aims. This makes it less suitable for approaching the particular research question of this study, which is primarily concerned with how self-understandings influence an actor's view of its environment and behaviour towards it. The difference between the two is slight, but significant. An additional factor counting against Narrative Analysis is its theoretical assertion that narratives are primarily utilised to inform and justify behaviour at "times of great crises" (Subotic 2016: 611). In a practical sense, executing narrative analysis on the Irish case in particular may have been challenged by the lack of strong 'crisis points' around which such a narrative construction might be formed: instead, this research alleges that Ireland's identity presents certain ontological security imperatives and informs its behaviour on an ongoing basis, and not at particular periods of crisis per se.

As a native English speaker and national of the state under examination, this researcher is well-placed to bring the high degree of cultural competence necessary for the selection, interpretation and analysis of the relevant sources. Naturally, this level of personal closeness to the case under study also brings with it a risk of 'homeblindness,' whereby the researcher does not maintain the necessary academic distance from their research subject to be able to observe all potentially-noteworthy aspects of the source material. A researcher studying their 'home' country' has particular responsibilities to resist partiality and to be aware of the potential for their own assumptions and identity constructions to overlap with those of the case under study, making them more difficult to analyse from a somewhat removed academic standpoint. In this case, it is hoped that a self-reflexive approach to such risks and a less Irish-specific perspective borne of time spent living and working abroad help to mitigate against the danger of reproducing one's own identity constructions rather than analysing them.

2.4 Data Sources

The Discourse Analysis of the research study is carried out on elite discourse source texts from Irish representative and decision-making actors. The focus on elite-level discourse is deliberate: as previously referenced in the theory section, the study bases its analysis of Irish identity on that articulated by bodies and individuals designated to represent Ireland internationally and to formulate its defence and security policy. They are the actors with direct responsibility for Irish state policy, and the discursive identity articulated by them is – nominally, at least – representative of the Irish nation as a whole. That is not to say that such a focus comes without limitations. Such elite-level discourse is political by nature and is often 'planned' in ways which more organic discourse such as informal discussions or posts on social media is not. Political discourse can be driven by motivations to echo the desires of the electorate, but also to legitimise government decision-making and prepare the ground for future policy. In addition, it can be assumed to be the 'sharp end of the wedge:' approaches which are broadened to include sources such as media and popular culture could be expected to generate far more varied results.

That said, discourse at the top decision-making level is not produced in a vacuum, and in a democratic society with considerable freedom of expression, it can be assumed to bear significant relation to that which exists at other social levels. Broadening the source base to include lower-level discourse inevitably involves incorporating discourses which are marginal, contradictory or fully opposed to those of official sources. While such discourses are undoubtedly important in their own right, in a study such as this one, which searches for self-understanding and ontological security concerns with the capacity to impact on state behaviour, elite-level discourse is a sensible place to look.

The corpus of data sources includes proceedings from the Dáil and Seanad (lower and upper houses of parliament) and from sittings of those Oireachtas Committees relevant to Irish security and defence. During the 31st Dáil (2011-2016), this involved examining proceedings from both the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality. From the 32nd Dáil onwards, the area was handled by a single committee, that on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence (2016-2020) and then on Foreign Affairs and Defence (2020-2023). Given the very high volume of parliamentary debates which took place during the time period under examination, the precise selection of Dáil and Seanad debates for analysis

is thematically guided by the content of Oireachtas committee sessions: if topical/insightful discourse appears in Oireachtas committee sessions at a particular date, the concurrent parliamentary debates are analysed. In addition, Irish contributions to the United Nations Security Council are examined: though the United Nations is a less direct vehicle for executing policy decisions, it represents an opportunity for states to present themselves to the international community in the manner in which they would like to be viewed by others. Ireland's two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the Security Council (2021-23), the body explicitly dedicated to international security, is particularly helpful to this study's aims. Government policy documents such as Green and White Papers are also included, with the speeches and publications listed on the websites of the relevant government departments (Foreign Affairs and Defence) utilised for analysis. The overall corpus encompasses approximately 190 individually-analysed sources of discourse. All sources are accessed through official open-source websites run by the Government of Ireland and United Nations, which can be assumed to be reliable and comprehensive.

Where temporal scope is concerned, sources dating from the beginning of 2014 to the end of 2023 are utilised, giving an overall period of ten calendar years. The choice of a single unbroken temporal scope rather than several segmented periods is partly motivated by the nature of the case under examination: as previously referenced, Ireland has not experienced a single or small number of clear 'moments' or 'periods of crisis' around which one would expect increased attempts to define identity constructions and engage in ontological security-seeking more clearly. Instead, it is expected that an analysis of lower-intensity discourse needs to take place over a longer time period. This period must be of sufficient length to present an adequate number of source texts and observations and extend as close to the present as is practically feasible: part of this study's criticism of previous attempts to study Irish identity in defence and security lies in their reliance on outdated concepts which are less relevant to the current context. Such a concern needed to be addressed here.

In addition, the selection of a ten-year temporal scope allows the research to incorporate and examine evolution of Irish identity conceptions, rather than merely offering the 'snapshot' which a shorter scope would produce. Indeed, one would be very surprised were a particular understanding of identity not to evolve in any way over a full decade, especially one in which the potential list of externally relevant factors and events is quite long. Between 2014 and 2023, Irish discourse had the potential to be affected by such factors as a spike in Islamist terrorism activity in Europe, Russia's annexation of Crimea and pursual of war-by-proxy in Donbas, the

UK's decision to leave the European Union, the deterioration of the bilateral Ireland-Russia relationship and Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As it was not apparent at the outset of the research which of these events or trends may have had the most notable effect – or indeed, whether other unanticipated events may have proven more significant – adherence to a single timespan represents a more prudent approach.

3. Irish Identity Constructions: Peace, Morality, Liminality

This section marks the first fully empirical section of this research study, in which the results of the discourse analysis carried out on the corpus of sources are presented. In order to assess the role and impact of identity constructions on Irish defence and security policy, it is first necessary to articulate what constitutes these constructions – in other words, to articulate how Ireland actually views itself as an actor in the international community. As previously referenced, academic scholarship on this topic has been quite minimal, with the consequence that secondary literature alone cannot be relied-upon to offer a sufficiently detailed impression of Irish identity in this sphere. With this in mind, the remainder of the study proceeds as follows: firstly, an analysis is carried out on the most prominent and relevant concepts which compose Irish identity in the defence and security realm, executed under the headings of 'peace promoter,' 'moral authority' and 'liminality:' then, it is illustrated how this state identity influenced discourse on policy-making in the period under examination, from 2014 to 2023, under the headings of 'national defence policy' and 'international cooperation.'

It is necessary to highlight at the outset that 'neutrality' is deliberately not chosen as a conceptual tenet in itself. As has been stressed previously, this study's research agenda involves refocusing 'neutrality' as an element of Irish policy behaviour elicited by identity and ontological security considerations: 'neutrality' is not viewed as an identity in its own right, but as a framing signifier of how Ireland behaves in accordance with its identity. In practice, 'neutrality' is used in the discourse as both a description of Irish military alignment and as a kind of catch-all term for Irish identity in the defence and security sphere. This dual use makes its thickness as a signifier very considerable – too considerable for it to be useful as an analytical category. Instead, it is more practically beneficial and theoretically consistent to separate 'neutrality as policy behaviour' from 'neutrality as identity,' and to assess the more specific identity constructions to which voices in the discourse refer when they speak about 'Irish neutrality.'

It is also worth noting that the list of three broad identity constructions utilised here is by no means intended to be exhaustive: this study does not claim to have attempted a comprehensive examination of Irish national identity in all its aspects, and even if it did, presenting a

comprehensive list of characteristics of an identity in this way would be both practically difficult and theoretically problematic. Instead, the following conceptual tenets – as derived from the discourse analysis undertaken in this study – are chosen as the most prominent elements which define Irish perceptions of itself relative to the wider world and the elements with the greatest relevance for Irish defence and security policy behaviour. Naturally, there are overlaps between these constructions, as they constitute mutually-enforcing aspects of a single broader identity. However, they remain helpful as distinct categories for the purpose of a detailed analysis such as this one.

3.1 Peace Promotion

The first of these headings relates to Ireland as a promoter of peace. Once could argue that such a construction is not remarkable in itself, as there is a global norm regarding the necessity for peace and immorality of overt armed aggression which virtually all states regard themselves as adhering to – even those engaging in armed conflict. Irish identity, however, holds that the state is not a mere passive adherent to peaceful norms, but is an active promoter of peace. The state's actions on the international stage are aimed at this active promotion, and Ireland perceives itself as having a notable positive effect on the achievement and maintenance of peace in various parts of the world. While other states may claim to value peace in an abstract sense, Ireland sees itself as 'standing for peace' in a way which many other international actors do not.

The primary manifestation of this identity as a peace promoter is Ireland's involvement in peacekeeping activity. Discourse on Irish peace promotion is replete with references to both Ireland's record of unbroken involvement in UN peacekeeping missions going back to 1958 and to the number of individual completed tours by Defence Forces personnel in UN peacekeeping missions since then, which had exceeded 63,000 by the beginning of the time period under examination here (Shatter 2014). These are married with uses of adjectives such as "deep," "long-standing" and "committed" (Coveney 2022b), all of which serve to portray peacekeeping as a long-established characteristic of Ireland's international presence, something Ireland has 'always done.' This also carries the implication that involvement in peacekeeping is not a political choice which is open to potential change, but is an inherent aspect of Irish identity.

Peacekeeping is also regarded by Ireland as an important aspect of its international image. Ireland views itself as being known as an active peace promoter and links this characteristic to the level of esteem in which it is held by others. It is cited as being a contributing factor in Ireland's election to the UN Security Council for 2021-22 (Coveney 2023), and peacekeeping and peacebuilding were subsequently made an Irish priority during its tenure on the UN Council, during which it proposed a resolution on the issue. Minister Coveney noted in an appearance before the Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee that this was only the second time an Irish resolution had been passed by the Council, marking it out as a distinctive area of particular relevance to the country (Coveney 2022b). Ireland is said to possess a "reputation as one of the pre-eminent contributors to peacekeeping in the globe" (Carthy 2023). Implicit in the discourse is the suggestion that Ireland offers more than it might be expected to offer in this area, given its size, and is exceptional in its dedication and commitment to UN peacekeeping missions.

Pride is a fundamental aspect of any national identity or myth (Bendix 1980; Dimitrova-Grajzl et. al. 2016), being one of the primary positive or motivating emotions invoked by a collective identity, and it is always revealing to examine those aspects of a national identity narrative which are valorised as characteristics at nation 'is' or 'should be' proud of. The role and actions of a state's armed forces are a common feature of such discourses (eg Smith and Jarkko 1998), and Ireland is not atypical in this regard. However, it is notable that invocations of pride are primarily made in the Defence Forces' peacekeeping efforts abroad, rather than in their functions in defending the state itself. Activities of peacekeeping missions are extensively praised in speeches and departmental and government reports, with celebration of both the contribution to peace in the areas being served and the way in which peacekeeping reflects positively on Ireland itself. Frequently this activity is identified quite directly with the public at home, with references to the communities across the country which had provided servicepeople to peacekeeping missions, and the discourse is characterised by expressions of pride and gratitude "we" or "the Irish people" make towards the Defence Forces on peacekeeping duty (eg Smith 2015). This service is valorised not only for its signification of a commitment to serving Ireland, but also of a commitment to peace as a cause. The discourse does not distinguish strongly between these values where Defence Force activities in general are concerned. Peacekeeping is the primary activity with which the Defence Forces are associated, and serving on a peacekeeping mission is deemed equivalent to serving the cause of the state.

As well as its centrality to the role of the Defence Forces and to the Irish presence internationally, peacekeeping and peace promotion is also linked more fundamentally to characteristics of the Irish as people. This is done through the relation of peace to other aspects of wider Irish identity and narrative, including national character and the autobiographical national myth. Rhetorical links are often drawn to Ireland's past experience of conflict, particularly in the twentieth century, with greater relative prominence afforded to the legacy of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. On this basis, Ireland is described as a nation which has a proven history in 'fighting for peace,' which "understands" and "knows the value of peace," allowing it to bring a sincerity and authority in peace efforts borne of lived experience (Byrne-Nason 2022a). Such a narrative is said to be acknowledged both by Ireland itself and by others, with the appointment of a former Minister for Foreign Affairs (Éamonn Gilmore) as a special EU envoy to peace talks in Colombia cited as proof of the fact (Higgins 2019).

This activity is also portrayed as in keeping with the Irish national character. Voices in the discourse establish this connection by tapping into other aspects of the identity of the Self which would be recognisable to the public at large, such as the importance of building community and of cooperative social relations. The following utterances, by Teachtaí Dála (TDs, members of parliament) Pat Buckley and Seán Barrett respectively, illustrates this feature of the discourse well:

> Other nations will go into a village, make a lot of noise, set up a perimeter and try to police people. The Irish way was that the little jeep pulled up outside the village and the soldiers kicked a football into the square (Buckley 2018).

> It is innate in our people that we are very good at peacekeeping. Sitting down, having a cup of tea and a chat and getting information is every bit as important as having spies on the ground. It is unique (Barrett 2017).

In this way, the Irish peacekeepers are contrasted with the more disruptive and heavy-handed forces of other nations, with Ireland's style of peacekeeping described as being based on non-confrontation and openness, as well as behavioural patterns ("cup of tea and a chat") recognisable in the Irish sense of self. The discourse holds that these qualities, inherent as they are to Ireland itself, are qualities which Ireland also brings to its peacekeeping behaviour. It suggests that the role of international peacekeeper is an appropriate one for the Irish as a people, with the "Irish way" giving it an advantage over other states in this work. This natural suitability for peacekeeping is implied to be part of Ireland's reason for engaging in the activity so extensively and for its success over a long period.

3.2 Moral Authority

The second significant identity construction relates to Ireland's broader role in the international community: the state's status as a moral authority. In addition to its status as an active peace promoter, Ireland perceives itself as a state which is on the 'right' side of moral arguments in international affairs and which is a vocal advocate of moral issues on the international stage. A prominent feature of discourse surrounding Irish neutrality is the definition of the country's status as "military neutrality" or "military non-alignment," a qualification made to distinguish Ireland's defence and security behaviour from its broader behaviour in international affairs. This is often accompanied by the insistence that the nation is not 'politically' or 'morally neutral.' As phrased by Minister of State for European Affairs Thomas Byrne in a 2022 Dáil debate, it is important that people do "not confuse military neutrality with taking no sides when there is a clear question of right and wrong" (Byrne 2022). It is clear that this distinction, and that perceiving itself as having a correct position in cases of 'right and wrong,' plays an important role in Irish identity.

As is the case with peace activism, one could argue that modern international norms compel all states to emphasise their concern for moral values and human rights and to stress their commitment to multilateralism. Again, what elevates these traits in the Irish case from norm-following behaviour to components of national identity is the nation's self-proclaimed longevity and inherent commitment to the role, described as having been a "cornerstone" of Irish foreign policy since the state's foundation (Brophy 2020). Adjectives such as "committed," "permanent" and "reliable" are frequently utilised (eg Coveney 2021b), with language also extending as far as linking positions on ethical practice to the inherent make-up of the Irish nation: in an address during Ireland's month-long presidency of the UN Security Council in September 2021, Ambassador Byrne Nason declared that "multilateralism is in our DNA" (Byrne-Nason 2021a), while Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs Colm Brophy labelled Ireland's overseas development programme "an important statement of who we are as a people" (Brophy 2021). Again, such discourse stresses that commitment to the right values is not merely a choice or policy, but an inherent part of what makes Ireland what it is.

A key element of the discourse expressing this identity construction in particular is Ireland's size. The discourse is littered with references to Ireland as a 'small country,' 'small island' or

'minnow,' while its geographic isolation compared to the rest of Europe is also a feature, albeit one less commonly used. As a signifier in the discourse, "small" is related to physical weakness, but is not a negative term in itself. Instead, it implies that Ireland is a non-threatening international actor, one without the capacity or intention to behave antagonistically towards others. In a similar way, this also lends it a degree of innocence, with the implication that it is not a 'power' in a realist sense and does not pursue hidden strategic interests. Therefore, its efforts can be trusted as genuine. To a lesser extent, national autobiography and narrative also play into this discursive feature, with references to the past poverty and economic stagnation suffered by the nation as a means of emphasising humble origins.

This discourse of smallness is constantly juxtaposed with language of strength where international issues of morality, human rights and advocacy are concerned. Minister for Foreign Affairs Charles "Charlie" Flanagan noted that "it is something of a cliché to say that we punch above our weight," and this is a sentiment which features very prominently (Flanagan 2015). Ireland perceives itself as a country which is a strong global promoter of morally upstanding values such as multilateralism, human rights, aid and international justice instruments such as the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice. Its time on the UN Security Council in 2021-22 was used to focus largely on such issues, with particular recurring emphasis on humanitarianism in conflict and gender equality. Ireland perceives itself as having a disproportionately loud and influential voice on such matters relative to its "small" size, and that this voice is respected by others: it is described as a "reality…that [Ireland] enjoys a very high and widely acknowledged reputation over a range of issues" (Flanagan 2015). Its role in leading negotiations for the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development is used as proof of this reputation.

Connected to this discourse of praise for Ireland's international role is a clear assignment of agency to the Self. In matters of morality Ireland perceives itself to be a "leader" in many respects. Its past activity is often anecdotally referenced in this way, such as Éamon de Valera's prominent role in the League of Nations in the 1930s, while the figure of Frank Aiken, Ireland's Minister for External (Foreign) Affairs for fifteen years between 1951 and 1969, is even more anecdotally significant. His work in the United Nations and for multilateralism in general is reified in the discourse, with his speeches being quoted in a way which serves to highlight both the large impact Ireland has had and the length of time over which this impact has been sustained. Aiken's 1958 proposals at the United Nations are termed the 'Irish Resolutions' and are linked directly to the subsequent creation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear

Weapons (Smith 2019). From an analytical perspective, whether or not Ireland's role is viewed in such significant terms by the rest of the international community is not the primary concern. What is significant is the message such discourse conveys regarding Ireland's perception of its own ability to lead on global moral issues and its belief in such a perception being shared by others in the international community.

This identity of moral strength and a legacy of past success is carried over into discussions on contemporary issues. The long-running Israel-Palestine conflict represents a clear example in this regard, with Minister Coveney referring to what Ireland can do to "change the direction of global policy" towards Ireland's stated position of advocating for a Two-State solution (Coveney 2020). This claim remains within the realm of accepted discourse, and is appropriate based on Ireland's moral responsibility towards conflict resolution. Such claims would not be made by an actor which perceived itself as incapable of affecting such change. There is similar discourse evident regarding Ireland's relationship with China, which is said to be important so Ireland can "be effective in bringing about change in areas where [it has] concern" (ibid.). This discourse clearly places the Self as an actor with considerable capacity to engage with the most powerful states in the global system, and one which is compelled to do so in defence of the humanitarian principles it champions.

3.3 Liminality

The third identity construction detailed here bears close relation to the two previously discussed but is perhaps the one which carries the most contention and least clarity in Irish discourse: its liminality vis à vis the Western World. Though its definition varies depending on the academic discipline in which it is used, the Cambridge dictionary's basic definition of 'liminality' refers to the state of being "between or belonging to two different places, states etc" (Cambridge Dictionary 2024). Where Irish identity is concerned, the theme of liminality raises its head in relation to Ireland's perceived inclusion or non-inclusion in the political and cultural community known as the Western World. Though Irish identity is firmly rooted in inclusion in the West in political, cultural and other spheres, this deictic placement is far more unclear in defence and security, with Ireland instead operating in a liminal space neither entirely within nor outside the Western community.

The question of affinity is an important one for all national identities, relating as it does to a group's feelings of belonging and its relation with other actors located within, close to or far removed from the Self. Where exactly these other actors are discursively located is an important aspect of the capacity of identity and identity-related discourses to shape perceptions of the physical world: though a state may share a common geographical space with many neighbouring states, the discursive 'closeness' of these neighbours can vary widely, with some closely related to the Self as 'friends' and others discursively distanced as Others either unrelated, or even opposed to, the Self. These discourses are ultimately what define a state's place within the broader international community and what help to inform its appropriate behaviour towards other actors.

The Western World is a powerful example of how the discursive and identity-based proximity of states can differ quite significantly from the geographical one. Though European states which define themselves as members of The West may be closer to North Africa or the Middle East in geographical terms, it is likely that their discursively-defined place in the world will situate them far away from neighbours there, and far closer to fellow Western countries such as the United States or New Zealand. As the West possesses no unified definition of characteristics or membership, its conceptualisation is done through discourses which construct the meaning and define the boundaries of the term.

The analysis of this study confirms that Ireland defines itself as a Western country in most respects. Its membership of the European Union plays a strong role in Irish identity, with Europe and the EU discursively located within the boundaries of the Self. There is frequent interchanging of collective pronouns ("we," "us") with individual ones ("Ireland" and "European Union" or "EU"), and the interests or behaviour of the Union and of Ireland are often treated as one and the same. Expressions of pride in Ireland's EU membership are particularly notable in discourse based in global fora such as the United Nations, with a clear effort made to discursively demonstrate an affinity to its fellow member-states which is closer than that which it feels for others. This is particularly notable in discourse surrounding the United Kingdom's protracted exit process from the EU, during which Ireland is a fully integrated part of a European Self, placed apart from the UK as an Other.

Though Europe and the European Union are the primary labels used to express Irish membership of the Western World, there is also identification with other states commonly regarded as part of the Western World, including, most significantly, the United States (US). In

political and cultural spheres, the discursive position of the US relative to Ireland is very close: during a speech at Georgetown University in Washington D.C., Minister of State for European Affairs Helen McEntee described the United States as Ireland's "closest ally and…dearest friend" (McEntee 2019). In most respects, Irish identity holds a positive and emotionally affectionate attachment to the United States, to the extent that a privileged position relative to other European states is assumed to be held by Ireland within US foreign policy: in the same speech, Minister McEntee described Ireland as both "part of Europe" and "inextricably bound to America" (ibid.).

However, this discourse of inclusion in the Western World is very significantly caveated in defence and security matters. This ought not to be assumed as an automatic consequence of Ireland's non-membership of NATO: it is entirely possible that a state may choose to remain outside the predominant Western military alliance in favour of accounting for its defence alone, while also maintaining a close deictic positioning and friendly affinity towards the alliance itself. Arguably this could be said to have applied to Sweden and Finland prior to their NATO accession in 2022-24 and to apply to states such as Australia today. However, this is not the case for Ireland. Instead, 'NATO' is located far from the deictic centre, at significant remove from the Self. Though 'Ireland,' 'Europe' and 'The West' comprise of a common space in political and other senses, when viewed in terms of defence and security, 'Ireland' is not an integral part of the Euro-Atlantic space, but is rather on the fringes, neither entirely included nor excluded.

This self-undermining of membership of the Western World is closely related to the other identity constructions previously described. As a state with a global outlook, Ireland treats defence and security as global concerns, requiring global responses: discourse frequently refers to Ireland's support for greater cooperation between the EU and UN on matters of peace and security (Byrne-Nason 2022d), while there is considerable discursive attention paid to conflicts of varying geographical or geopolitical proximity, such as the Syrian Civil War, Israel-Palestine conflict and instability in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. There is a certain degree of discursive distinction made between insecurity "on the borders of the EU" and that seen elsewhere, but as a feature of the discourse this is not particularly strong, with cases such as the post-2014 conflict in Ukraine not localised as a challenge with direct relevance for the country (Kehoe 2017). Instead, emphasis is placed on worldwide issues with conflict and instability in more abstracted terms. Though political challenges faced by Europe are

interpreted as directly impacting Ireland as a constituent part of the European Self, in challenges to defence and security, a greater degree of separation is evident.

Irish moral authority also plays a role. It is notable how the wider Western World – and occasionally even the rest of the European Union – are discursively distanced from the Self on moral grounds, with Ireland being positioned as a more morally innocent and principled actor. This is partly rooted in national autobiography: Green Party leader Éamon Ryan (who held a cabinet post between 2007 and 2011 in a Fianna Fáil-led government and would return to cabinet in the 3-party coalition government formed in 2020) noted in 2017 that the history of Europe is one defined by "military adventurism, in particular in North Africa, the Middle East and border areas." This is something that "cannot be ignored" (E. Ryan 2017). In contrast, Irish identity often incorporates claims to a post-colonial legacy, one which can be used to relate Ireland less closely to the Western World and more closely to the broader international community. For example, a 2021 address made by President Michael D. Higgins was said to have "noted the striking parallels in the histories of Mexico and Ireland, which include colonisation, emigration, poverty and exclusion" (Byrne-Nason 2021d). Similar remarks were also made by Tánaiste Micheál Martin in a 2023 speech at the University of the Western Cape, in which he recalled Ireland's "shared experiences of colonialism, struggle and challenge" with many African countries (Martin 2023g). Such discourse disassociates Ireland from possible perceptions of the West as an oppressor or selfish actor, stressing that Ireland is not 'tainted' by such a legacy in the same way. One might also venture that this claim to a post-colonial identity is relevant for Ireland's aforementioned interest and assignment of agency with regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Emphasis is also placed on instances of current political debate in which Ireland is a 'more moral' actor. In abstaining on a UK resolution to the UN Security Council on sanctions against the Houthi rebels in Yemen – of which the USA and France were both in favour - Ambassador Byrne-Nason explained the Irish position through its greater humanitarian concerns for the effect of sanctions on civilians living in areas under Houthi control (Byrne-Nason 2022d). Pride was also taken in Ireland being the only country - "standing alone" – which refused to sanction an extension to the exemption of senior Taliban leaders from travel bans, owing to the group's record of human rights abuses (Coveney 2022d).

Of particular note is the state's involvement in disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation activism, which is often carried out in opposition to the positions of most of the rest of the

Western World. In pushing for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons alongside Brazil, Mexico, Austria, South Africa and Nigeria, there is no effort to invoke commonality with Europe or the Western World, but instead to reference 'like-minded states' with a similar stance on the issue. The actors which are rendered as Other in the discourse are "large states" and those which do not take up their "responsibility" to work towards nuclear disarmament (Cannon 2019). In fact, discourse on this topic is one in which Europe and The West are implicitly placed quite far away from the deictic centre, included under the moniker of "Nuclear Weapons states and…their military allies" (ibid.). This Other is stigmatised for not taking the more moral position.

In theory, it is feasible to draw sharp distinctions between identity affinities in political/cultural and in security/morality terms: indeed, this is exactly what Irish deictic self-placement in relation to the broader Western World attempts to achieve. In practice, however, making such a complete distinction is difficult to do, a difficulty which is reflected in the often-incoherent discourse surrounding Irish liminality in the Euro-Atlantic security space. As a self-described active and committed European Union member-state, it is discursively appropriate that Ireland be a strong contributor to initiatives such as the Common Defence and Security Policy and that it take responsibility towards contributing to European peace and security. However, for most of the time period under examination in this study, the practical form such a contribution ought to take is not discussed in detail. The need to be a positive political contributor is contrasted with the significant ambiguity over Ireland's appropriate role in defence and security matters, with the result that the state's position is somewhat unclear. Similarly, the inherent contradiction in placing the EU and NATO at such differing proximities to the deictic centre, despite the membership of both organisations overlapping hugely, is not addressed: the moral reservations which inhibit Irish identification with the Western World in defence and security terms are absent in the definition of the state's political affinity to the West. In the latter discourse, they simply do not play a role.

As previously referenced in this study, state identity and ontological security theory are not prejudiced against change. They do not assume that a state's identity constructions remain static over time, nor do they stipulate that the way states find meaning in such constructions in their policy behaviour remains fixed. Evolution is an important part of both phenomena, and the charting of such evolution forms part of the task of any researcher aiming to examine state behaviour from an ontological security perspective. While Irish identity as a peace promoter and moral authority remained largely consistent in character over the course of the time period

under examination in this study, Irish liminality vis à vis the Western World exhibited more notable change over the course of the 2014-23 period, with an overall discursive move closer to the West being observed. This was likely provoked by events following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, the manner of which is described in more detail in the discussion of Irish policy behaviour which follows this section. It is perhaps not surprising, however, that this identity construction in particular has exhibited the most change over this period: after all, it is far more feasible to alter a concept or position which is inherently ill-defined than one which is defined more clearly.

At this point, it is helpful to briefly summarise what has been established in this section. Ireland's identity as an actor in the global community is theorised as being founded on peace activism, moral authority and incomplete affiliation to the Western World. Ireland sees itself as a geographically small country which has come from a place of weakness and disadvantage compared to the rest of Western Europe. Its past conflict and colonial experiences are perceived as lending it a perspective which is distinct from that of its regional neighbours, as well as a particular conviction and credibility in its efforts towards peace and moral justice. Ireland views itself to be distinguished in its peacekeeping record and to possess a disproportionately loud voice on moral issues, a voice which is heeded and for which Ireland is recognised by the international community at large. This voice is also distinct from that of the broader Western World, a collective which Ireland is proud to be a part of in a political sense, but which it is not associated with in defence and security terms. Instead, Ireland sees itself as a more innocent and morally righteous international actor, with a focus on peace and security on a global scale.

It goes without saying that these constructions are analysed in a manner which attempts to adhere as faithfully as possibly to that in which they appear in the discourse, with no attempt made to pass judgement on their 'truth' or 'inaccuracy:' whether or not Ireland's peacekeeping contribution is 'really' disproportionately large, its moral authority is recognised by other states or its position is viewed as distinct from that of the broader Western World is not assessed. Making such assessments is not the point of the exercise. What is relevant, and what is alleged to influence Irish policy behaviour, is how Ireland views itself and its own identity, and not whether or not such views are 'correct.' The manner of this influence is what will be examined in the section which follows.

4. Identity In Action: Irish Defence & Security Policy, 2014-2023

The following section builds on the analysis of identity constructions carried out previously. It aims to relate the core elements of Irish identity to Irish policy behaviour in the area of defence and security. With the research puzzle and question in mind, it is worth reiterating the theoretical expectation that Irish identity and the ontological security considerations which arise from it have a perceptible impact on Irish decision-making and behaviour. The remainder of this research study is dedicated to examining how this theoretical expectation bears out in Irish policy behaviour between 2014 and 2023. To assess this in more detail, discourse is analysed under two distinct headings: national defence policy and international cooperation. The selection of these headings is done primarily for organisational reasons, allowing for clearer presentation of Irish policy behaviour in the two decision-making 'realms' which together make up a state's provision of its own defence and security: provision through its own domestic choices and activity and provision through its engagement with other states.

Overall, discourse in this area is found to illustrate the key point made by state identity and ontological security theory: the discursive realm of Irish defence and security policy is shaped quite significantly by perceptions of Ireland's place in the wider world and the concepts and values which 'Ireland' represents. The need for Ireland to act in a way which is consummate with these perceptions plays a notable role in how decision-makers justify decisions, how their rationale is explained, and how opposition representatives criticise such decisions in political debate. They also shape a discursive 'field of action' which imposes natural limits on the policy decisions available to elite decision-makers. The effects of identity on policy behaviour are found to be prevalent throughout the whole time period under examination.

This being said, the exact nature of this effect is found not to be consistent over the entirety of the period under analysis. Though identity can be counted as a highly significant factor with the capacity to shape state decision-making and behaviour, no theory of identity would claim it to be the only factor. The final two years of the period under analysis (2022-23) coincide with a large-scale external event, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and it is against this backdrop that notable differences are observed in how constructions of Irish identity are utilised and related to discourse on 'appropriate' policy behaviour. It is not that the identity

constructions outlined in the previous section have been transformed or their relevance reduced. Instead, it is the 'field of action' created by identity for policy-makers which is found to undergo greater change.

There is a general broadening of this 'field of action' to accommodate discourse related to increasing defence investment and capabilities to a greater extent than previously, and the same can be said for references to international cooperation as it relates to sharing of information and expertise. Additionally, there is a deliberate effort on the part of elite decision-makers in particular to alter the pre-existing boundaries of 'appropriate' policy behaviour, in response to perceived changes in the external security environment. This altered framing of discourse on Irish defence and security is evident in virtually every studied source in the final two years of the time period under examination. However, this broadening of the discursive 'field of action' is not without its limits, as the identity constructions primarily informing these discursive boundaries are not found to have changed significantly. This finding is not inconsistent with the theoretical provisions for evolution in ontological security theory, and illustrating the nature of this change forms part of the aims of the analysis which follows.

4.1 National Defence Policy, 2014-2021

The first proposed analytical heading is national defence policy. What is meant by this term is the body of state policy relating purely to a state's own provision of the defence of its territory, and not that relating to international deployments, international cooperation, peacekeeping or broader geostrategic activity abroad. In practical terms, this means the inclusion of decisions on defence expenditure, armed force size, structure, capabilities and infrastructure, as well as actions relating to security threats facing Ireland.

It is important to highlight at the outset that, for much of the time period under examination in this study, Irish elite-level discourse on national defence policy is frequently notable by its absence: defence-related issues are not subjected to extensive parliamentary debates or frequently referenced in speeches by elite decision-makers. Though there can be many reasons why an issue may be treated in this way by a given discourse, including the suppression of potential alternative discourses by a dominant one, in this case it is likely that the lack of references to Irish national defence policy indicates a broad consensus on the existing state

positions. Discourse on the area, to the extent that it takes place at all, is predominantly related to administrative and governance-related matters such as Defence Forces salaries and pensions: in 2015, a government review had identified significant issues with pay, conditions, recruitment and retention within the Irish Defence Forces, which subsequently entered elite discourse as matters requiring government attention.

Aside from these governance-based issues, discourse on defence policy is strongly influenced by concerns for Irish identity in security and defence. Defence expenditure offers an illustrative example in this regard. Throughout the period, Ireland's defence spending in terms relative to economic indicators like GDP remains exceptionally low in comparison with other Western European and EU states (World Bank 2024). Discussions on expenditure frequently illicit concern that increasing Irish defence spending has the potential to threaten Irish ontological security: in a 2017 debate in the Dáil chamber, opposition Sinn Féin TD Aengus Ó Snodaigh alleged that a proposal to increase the Irish defence budget to 2% of GDP was driven by pressure from those EU member-states which were also part of NATO and who had "committed" to the further defence increases called for by then-US President Donald Trump (Ó Snodaigh 2017). The implications of this utterance lean heavily on established signifiers in Irish identity discourse, suggesting a move towards the deictically-remote NATO alliance and an "erosion" of Ireland's reified status of neutrality (ibid.). These prospects have the potential to destabilise Irish ontological security if realised by the spending increase being discussed.

For those wishing to contemplate spending increases, this is done in the context of Ireland's appropriate role: when Defence Minister Simon Coveney stated his belief that Ireland "should spend a little more" in its defence budget, this utterance was immediately justified by a concern to "increase… peacekeeping capacity and ensure [Ireland] can…protect members of the Defence Forces when they are in action." In addition, he insisted that his wish to see an increase in spending did not make him a "warmongerer" (Coveney 2015a). In order to remain 'appropriate' to the discourse, it was necessary for the Minister's suggestion to be related to a valued element of Irish identity, namely its peace activism. Increasing defence expenditure in itself held discursive connotations with the potential to threaten Irish ontological security, connotations which needed to be addressed.

Ireland's deictic self-placement also contributes to its treatment of national defence policy, particularly regarding the perception of threats. Though it would be an exaggeration to say that no discursive distinction is made between the security situations within Europe and outside of

it, the discourse nevertheless places Ireland primarily in a global security space rather than a specifically European one. For example, the 2015 foreign policy document, *The Global Island*, lists Russia's annexation of Crimea and pursuit of a proxy-war in eastern Ukraine as the third significant conflict causing instability in the broader security environment, following the Syrian Civil War and the Israel-Palestine conflict. The "re-emergence of tensions with Russia" is described as "a new regional challenge for Europe and for Ireland" (Government of Ireland 2015a: 32). Though this was not intended as an explicit 'ranking' of conflicts per se, one can at least ascertain that the Ukrainian conflict is not privileged in the discourse as holding particular relevance for Ireland, above and beyond that of the conflicts in the Middle East. As previously referenced, Ireland's identity as a 'global island' means that it does not significantly privilege instability in other parts of Europe as relating to the interests of the Self.

This speaks to a broader feature of Ireland's approach to defence and security in this period, an approach which is also partly related to this deictic self-placement: the relative absence of 'Ireland' as a subject of its own defence and security policy. Overall, discourse on the subject operates in abstracted terms, dealing with abstracted threats which are related to the Self in implicit rather than explicit ways. The following utterance by Paul Kehoe TD, Minister of State at the Department of Defence, is indicative of this discursive style:

> All of us here are fully aware that threats to international peace and security are complex, multidimensional, interrelated and transnational in nature. The ever-changing complex and intertwined nature of threats to our citizens, individual states and to international peace and security must be acknowledged (Kehoe 2017).

There is clearly no suggestion that Ireland refutes the potential for threats to be posed to its security, but nor does such an utterance place the Self as a strong subject of these threats. Instead, Ireland's concerns are in line with a general threat to "international peace and security," while the threats themselves are highly abstracted by technical adjectives and given no descriptive substance. This utterance forms part of a longer address advocating continuing Irish cooperation with EU partners, but the aim of such cooperation, the potential threats which this activity might be expected to combat or guard against, is not stated. The challenges facing Ireland are often described as common to states in many parts of the world, with globalisation causing national, regional and global security to be "intertwined" to a greater extent than before (Government of Ireland 2015b: 3). This globalisation, as well as "the complexity of contemporary conflicts and crises" is said to require a "comprehensive approach" in response – an approach which is not described in discursively concrete terms (Kehoe 2019). Such

language is not related to the Self in anything more than an implicit sense, and there are no specific sources or variants of threats which are concretely identified as facing the state.

This could be contrasted with the actions of other states at the time, in response to the growing terrorism threat facing Western Europe, as well as the military actions of some NATO member-states taken against the so-called Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. For these states, such issues are highly localised and cognitively related to the Self as posing a direct threat, requiring a direct response. Their role in Irish discourse, however, is very different. Though the very mention of such threats constitutes an acknowledgement of their relevance to some degree, their relation to the Self is quite weak, and they do not play a significant role as 'antagonistic' elements guiding and motivating policy decisions around national defence issues. It is perhaps even useful to call the concepts of securitisation and desecuritisation to mind: if the securitisation of an issue involves its extraction from 'normal' politics as a particularly important and urgent issue of existential importance, and the desecuritisation of an issue is the opposite of this discursive practice, then Ireland could potentially be described as having a partially 'desecuritised' defence and security discourse. Irish defence provision is not truly portrayed in urgent or existential terms, but is a component of state decision-making among others, necessary for its own sake.

There is evidence of evolution in this discourse by the year 2021. In May of that year, the Health Service Executive (HSE, national health service) was the target of a large-scale cyberattack which affected hospital IT systems for a number of weeks. By this time, 'cyber security' had already begun to be treated as a concrete threat discursively relevant to the Self, a discursive feature which only became more common following the attack. It is cited by Minister Coveney as "one of the top two or three priorities" in defence by March 2021 (Coveney 2021a), and the same minister declared twelve months later that "there is a significant cyber risk to Ireland" (Coveney 2022a). However, even after an overt attack such as that carried out on the health service, elements of this 'desecuritised' security discourse can still be seen. In the first Dáil debate following the attack, it is presented as a technical and logistical challenge within the purview of the Department of Communications. Taoiseach Micheál Martin normalised the issue as something faced by "every state, system and private sector operator" and referred to the attack as the work of "criminals" (Martin 2021). Language of being the victim of aggression and facing a challenge to national security does not prominently appear, and nor does language casting the event as a securitised issue in need of an urgent security response. Instead, it is an issue in the purviews of criminal justice and IT system maintenance.

Though discourse around ‘cyber security’ was among the first to show greater securitisation characteristics, this was not a complete and immediate shift.

Despite this sign of change, the discourse on Irish national defence policy in 2021 could reasonably be said to be consistent with that which predominated previously, in the 2014-20 period. At this time, Ireland’s security needs did not feature prominently in discourse surrounding areas such as Defence Forces expenditure, with a far greater focus on the needs of Ireland’s peacekeeping missions and its fulfilment of its role as a peace promoter. In this discursive frame, it is appropriate that defence expenditure be increased if it benefits Ireland’s efforts at peacekeeping in other countries, which contributes to global peace and security and enhances the state’s international reputation. Peace and Moral Authority are acceptable subjects of such policy decisions, while Ireland’s national security is regarded as an indirect benefactor of these efforts, or is not referenced at all. As a more globally-orientated actor partly outside of the European-Western security space, it is not incumbent on Ireland to respond in any particular manner to security events in Europe, but rather to maintain focus on wider global security.

However, the final two years of the time period under examination are characterised by marked changes in discourse surrounding Irish national defence and security policy. From early 2022 onwards, the issue takes far greater prominence in the discourse of Irish elite decision-makers in general, while the link between Irish identity and defence and security behaviour is shaped in a very different way. As previously discussed, it is not the identity constructions themselves which are profoundly changed or nullified: Irish peace promotion and moral authority remain constant features as before, while Irish liminality vis à vis the Western World also continues to feature, albeit in a somewhat reduced form. What is different is how this identity shapes and ‘ought to’ shape Ireland’s approach to its defence and security, and the space of ‘appropriate’ policy behaviour which is created by such identity constructions.

4.2 National Defence Policy, 2022-2023

It is glaringly apparent that Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine from 24th February 2022 onwards is not externalised from the Self in the manner of the previous conflict in Ukraine in 2014-21, but is discursively defined as bearing direct relevance to Ireland. Fine Gael TD and former Minister for Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan goes so far as to describe it as a war “on

our territory" (Flanagan 2023a). The 'territory' in this case is a reference to Europe, with Ireland very clearly being included as part of the European Self. Ukraine is described as being part of "our shared European family" (Martin 2023b), with the usage of words such as "we," "us" and "our" in relation to Europe found to increase notably in defence and security discourse. The new security reality in Europe is directly cited as posing a challenge to Ireland, being labelled a "wake-up call" (Flanagan 2023b).

In response to this new situation, there is a notable discursive shift in the manner in which the Defence Forces is described and discussed. Language surrounding government policy on the Defence Forces becomes more active, with terms such as 'growing,' 'expanding' and 'developing' being afforded greater prominence. The concept of 'defence capability' is used to a vastly greater extent than was previously observed, while there is also an attempt to create greater urgency around the issue and describe it in more assertive terms: in his foreword to the Department of Defence's Strategy Statement for the 2023-26 period, Minister Micheál Martin wrote about the "unprecedented investment" which government had committed to making in the Defence Forces, "the largest increase in Defence spending in the history of the state." This increase is made with the aim of "transforming our Defence Forces" (Government of Ireland 2023: 1). The discursive shift transcends party-political lines, with opposition TDs using historically low levels of defence spending as a reason to criticise government policy, and the move towards more active defence and security policy is even urged on moral lines: Seán Haughey TD declared that it would be "negligent and irresponsible" of government not to assess the threats posed by the new security reality and prepare new policy responses accordingly (Haughey 2023).

In contrast to the previous pattern of discourse, which related national defence policy to highly abstracted potential threats or to the concrete needs of Ireland's peacekeeping activities, policy decisions in this period are more firmly linked to named and specified threats. The previously mentioned cyberattack on the Health Service Executive is often cited, in a less technical and more securitised way than before, while Ireland's close dependence on digital sectors and role in the global digital economy are framed as assets which must be protected. Far from being an abstracted or notional threat, discourse frequently notes that an attack "could happen again next year and even tonight with our national grid or our transport infrastructure" (Berry 2022).

International events play a role in this framing: for example, Tánaiste Micheál Martin noted that the 2022 attack on the NordStream pipeline in the Baltic Sea meant that Ireland "cannot

ignore the particular vulnerabilities posed to energy and communications infrastructure, across Europe, and most especially in the waters of the North Atlantic, close to our shores" (Martin 2023d). In this way, the Irish Self is very unambiguously brought into the broader European discursive security space, with Ireland's proximity to undersea cables in the North Atlantic Ocean directly related to that of other European countries to undersea infrastructure off their respective coasts. When paired with such explicit relations to the Self, language about Ireland being "vulnerable" or facing threats is made vastly more urgent and impactful. Directly emphasising this new urgency plays a role in its own right, as utterances such as that of Tánaiste Micheál Martin illustrate:

> Discussions on Ireland's international security policy may sometimes seem theoretical, but the implications of our choices are important – important for the State and for the lived reality of each and every one of us that share this precious island" (Martin 2023e).

It is notable how none of the cited utterances were accompanied by explicit mentions of Ireland's peacekeeping activities or its international cooperation for global peace and security. The discursive focus could remain on Irish defence needs without a qualifying remark being needed, with the aforementioned direct and tangible threats replacing such qualifiers as the justifiers of Irish national defence policy. While such discourse was likely inhibited by ontological security concerns over Irish defence and security behaviour, the discursive boundaries of what is and is not deemed 'appropriate' in relation to this identity have quite clearly moved. With Ireland having become a more pronounced subject in its own security and defence discourse, its national defence imperative is now deemed an 'appropriate' focus of policy behaviour, one which does not put Irish ontological security at risk.

When relating this new discourse to concrete policy changes, it is necessary to caveat the discussion by stressing the relatively short time period which is being referred-to, spanning spring 2022 to the end of 2023. Given the time required to enact any kind of significant changes to defence infrastructure, personnel or capability levels, it is difficult to adjudicate on the true significance of policy changes over this time period. Rhetorically, there are stated plans to increase annual defence expenditure to €1.9 billion by 2028, a rise of €800 million on 2022 levels, and to achieve a net increase of 6000 personnel across the permanent Defence Forces and Defence Forces Reserves by that date (Coveney 2022c). There is a commitment to acquire primary radar capability, with maritime radar also being considered (Martin 2023a). Whether or not such verbal commitments are translated into concrete policy action remains to be seen, as does whether or not such changes come to truly constitute a differing approach to Irish

national defence or a continuation of previous practice, albeit from a higher basic capability level. For the purposes of this study, it is notable how elite discourse can declare such commitments without apparently provoking ontological security concerns, with Irish national defence provision partially decoupled from its identity constructions of peace promotion and moral authority.

4.3 International Cooperation, 2014-2021

The second analytical category deployed in this analysis is international cooperation. This term is intended to cover those aspects of defence and security policy not previously examined, namely the nature of engagement between Ireland and other states in activities such as joint training programmes, joint deployments, capability harmonisation and information-sharing. It is not intended to analyse adversarial or competitive engagement, but engagement between states which would otherwise be regarded as having affinity to the Self – in other words, the rest of the Western World.

For decades, restricted international cooperation has arguably been the most important single element of Ireland's understanding of neutrality. It has been established that, while working with other states in peacekeeping efforts is accepted – indeed not just accepted but venerated – cooperation with the same states for defence purposes poses a challenge or outright threat to Irish identity as a peaceful and morally authoritative state. It is not seen as appropriate for Ireland to pursue close relations with any other states in defence and security, as it is important for Ireland's moral authority that it remain an "independent, neutral and non-aligned country…a voice on the edge of Europe calling out on a regular basis to say "not in this way"" (E. Ryan 2017).

In contrast to their usage in virtually every subject area, the terms 'EU' and 'European' are frequently removed from the discursive Self in discussions on defence and security. However, the most emotive term of all is 'EU-' or 'European Army.' This term occupies a highly prominent place in the discourse as a signifier of many of the ontological security threats posed by potential international cooperation: the loss of Ireland's acknowledged international reputation as an independent 'neutral' actor; this loss being involuntary and unwanted by the Irish people, with the usage alongside phrases such as "pushed into" and "dragged into" (eg

O'Sullivan 2018; Daly 2015); the forces being led by other states in Europe, depriving Ireland of its agency; and these leading states seeking to use the forces for causes other than European defence, with connotations of 'militarisation,' damaging Irish moral authority.

Such is the strength of this concept as a negative signifier, it is employed almost constantly by discourses seeking to advocate for less Irish involvement in defence projects on an EU level, and never by those advocating for more, as this would immediately and severely damage their credibility. In a similar way as is done regarding the protection of Irish neutrality, it is usual for elite decision-makers to offer assurances that any government plans do not represent moves towards the creation of a 'European Army,' and that any plans from other EU member-states along these lines will be resisted strongly by Ireland: Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney's insistence that the PESCO programme "has absolutely nothing to do with the creation of an EU army" is typical of such utterances (Coveney 2017). If concepts such as 'neutrality' and 'peacekeeping' are the most reified in Irish defence and security discourses, 'European Army' is the concept at the opposite end of the scale.

The strong attachment to Irish moral authority and its reluctance to be included in the Western defence sphere do not mean that Ireland completely avoids all engagement with other states in defence and security matters. Indeed, Ireland opted to join the European Union's PESCO project upon its foundation in 2017, having previously been involved in the European Defence Association, and has also been part of a Partnership for Peace arrangement with NATO since the 1990s. Elite discourse also includes features such as declared support for Common Security and Defence Policy and the assertation that Ireland has a stake in aiding the provision of security to European citizens. However, the state's overall level of engagement with these programmes remains among the lowest among all EU member-states, while details on the form such a provision of security to European citizens might take are not generally discussed – and have the potential to evoke strong emotive discourse when they are. It is illustrative to consider an extract from the 2015 White Paper on Defence in this regard:

> The degree to which Ireland is prepared to share the burden of EU co-operation and solidarity in the security and defence field, in particular through contributions to military operations and capabilities, significantly influences perceptions of Ireland's credibility and commitment as a member state within the Union. (Government of Ireland 2015b: 28).

Utterances such as these highlight the partial internal conflict between competing aspects of Ireland's identity as both an integrated and committed member of the EU in political terms and

as a non-associated actor in the defence and security sphere. It is implied that involvement in defence matters is advisable for strengthening Ireland's reputation and political position within the EU, rather than for its security and defence needs, which are a separate matter.

To an even greater extent than this political inclusion, justification for any activity in which Ireland does become involved is rooted in familiar tenets of Irish identity. As an active supporter of peace and committed peacekeeping nation, Ireland may partake in international programmes if such participation benefits the Defence Forces' capabilities while engaged in UN missions. PESCO, for example, is described as "a tool for member states to jointly develop the essential capabilities necessary to carry out peacekeeping tasks" and can "only operate in that context" (Coveney 2018), while Ireland's involvement in the European Defence Agency is specifically "to support the development of Defence Forces capabilities for peacekeeping and international crisis management operations" (Kehoe 2016). Proponents advocate Irish participation through the need to ensure Irish peacekeepers are adequately equipped and that their interoperability with other nations' forces on peacekeeping missions is at a high level. Ireland can also have a positive impact on the development of programmes such as PESCO through its involvement, shaping them according to Irish values. However, even with such argumentation, any such utterances from elite decision-makers are routinely followed by denials that programmes such as PESCO have any impact on Irish neutrality or will lead to an 'EU/European Army.' It is necessary that fears for Irish ontological security through participation be directly assuaged in this way.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, such fears are a very prominent feature of elite opposition discourse on such activity. However, these fears are not merely expressed by opposition politicians seeking to critique government policy, but also by voices within government itself. The contributions of Seán Barrett TD to the Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence in the 2016-2019 period are worth examining in this regard. These contributions often directly opposed Irish involvement with European or NATO states in military programmes with Ireland's global reputation as a moral authority and peacekeeper. Deputy Barrett claims that Ireland is "one of the most powerful peacekeeping nations in the world," a status of which the nation should be very proud and which it should work hard to promote both among the public at home and among the international community (Barrett 2016a). Ireland's position outside the so-called "European army brigade" represents a source of great strength, "the one thing that has helped [Ireland] in mission after mission in terms of peacekeeping and respect throughout

the world." It is important that Ireland "be extremely careful that [it is] not being dragged along with the others" (Barrett 2016b; 2017).

Deputy Barrett did not hold a cabinet position during the time period under examination in this study, and it is true that utterances from sitting cabinet members do not contrast Irish moral authority with international cooperation in a manner as bald as this. However, Deputy Barrett previously held the position of Minister for Defence between 1995 and 1997 and was a member of the ruling Fine Gael party at the time these utterances were made. Furthermore, it appears he was not explicitly breaking his party whip by making such contributions. This analysis argues that these contributions represent the most explicit examples of a phenomenon which is underlying throughout discourse on international cooperation, and influences approaches to decision-making from government and opposition alike. Though sitting cabinet members refrain from such explicit language, the accommodation of utterances from voices such as Deputy Barrett suggests that the broad perception of the potential ontological security threat posed by excessive international engagement is present at the elite decision-making level.

A key feature of this discourse is an embedded opposition of the peaceful and moral Irish Self with an Other which is more morally suspect. Deputy Barrett references the "games" played by others in military matters, while phrases such as "militarisation" also appear in the discourse (O'Sullivan 2017). There is a suggestion that Western military cooperation and NATO represent something morally dubious, which Ireland should be reluctant to become involved with for fear of negatively affecting both its own sense of moral authority and the respected position of moral authority it enjoys in the international community. The EU's Battle Group programme is a case in point, with the programme cast in almost suspicious terms by opposition discourse as a vehicle through which the EU can move towards united military forces or become assertively involved in conflicts elsewhere. Indeed, the name 'Battle Group' is challenging for both government and opposition alike, with Minister Coveney accepting it "conjures an image of an army going to war," which is "not what the UN battle groups concept is all about" (Coveney 2015b). Relating Ireland to warfare in this way is thoroughly problematic in virtually all cases.

When examining any discourse or narrative, it is natural that certain discursive features will display inconsistencies or differences depending on factors like the discourse's producer and its context. Where international cooperation is concerned, there is a certain difference to be observed between official Irish state publications and verbal discourse such as speeches, Dáil

debates and Oireachtas committee sessions. Whereas official publications such as the Department of Defence's Annual Reports and Strategy Statements display somewhat more assertive language on the value of international cooperation, this is not mirrored when such publications are presented to the Dáil or referenced in speeches by senior decision-makers. Phrases such as the previously quoted "contributions to military operations and capabilities" in the EU do not appear in verbal public discourse (Government of Ireland 2015b: 28), with a particularly noticeable gap evident in the frequency and prominence of references to Ireland's Partnership for Peace activity: though this is often cited in Annual Reports, it is virtually non-existent in Oireachtas Committees and Dáil debates. This is indicative of the deictic placement of the EU and NATO relative to the Self, with NATO being so remote as to not warrant considerable mention: from a pragmatic political perspective, it is possible that government does not want to introduce the Partnership for Peace as a prominent discursive feature because of the dissent it might provoke.

Building on this point, there is a clear general party-political divide evident in the discourse on international cooperation in defence and security matters. Such discourse on the elite level normally takes place in the context of government presenting or defending its plans, with opposition representatives mounting criticism of such plans: in practice, this means government representatives defending Ireland's current level of international engagement or advocating for an increase, and opposition representatives calling for a reduction in this engagement. In examining the role of identity, however, it is necessary to draw the analytical focus away from party-political competition and towards the identity-related assumptions and characteristics which are prevalent across the discourse, from both government and opposition. In this case, it is clear that Irish identity casts international cooperation in a somewhat problematic light. Opposition discourse acts as a resistant force on government plans to increase cooperation with other European states, voicing as it does the ontological fear of Ireland being seen to undermine its neutrality, and with it the state's position of moral authority which does "not take a triumphalist, macho view of [its] military strength" (B. Ryan 2017). This concern also impacts government decision-making on the issue, and any decisions taken must be justified to the broader public in these terms. As is the case with policy decisions related to national defence, international cooperation is assessed and rationalised through the prisms of Irish identity.

4.4 International Cooperation, 2022-2023

As was the case with national defence policy, the analysis offered heretofore pertains to the 2014-2021 period. Over this period, any changes to the overall discourse were small-scale and more evolutionary in nature. In the final two years of the time period under examination, a far more significant shift is evident, triggered to a large extent by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The previously-referenced inclusion of Ireland in the European and Western security space has notable implications for the way cooperation is discussed, to the extent that the party-political aspect of the discourse becomes a less prominent feature. While references to items such as PESCO or Battle Groups previously elicited strong reactions from opposition representatives and frequent expressions of concern for Irish ontological security, in the final two years examined, such references did not provoke such strong responses. In one appearance before the Oireachtas Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, for example, Tánaiste Micheál Martin discussed EU Battle Groups and Irish officials working at the NATO-accredited Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn without stressing their lack of impact on Irish neutrality, and he was not questioned or challenged by any committee member for failing to address this point (Martin 2023a). There appears to be a broader consensus surrounding the necessity for a certain level of this cooperation activity to take place.

Linked with this is the quite strong presence of 'reassessment' or 'wake-up call' as an emergent theme in the discourse. The discursive shift is not a phenomenon noticeable only through external or retrospective analysis such as is being pursued here: it is acknowledged frequently in the discourse itself, which often features utterances stressing that Ireland must be "honest" with itself about its international cooperation, and its defence and security in general (eg Coveney 2022a). There is greater emphasis on Ireland's military weakness as a stand-alone actor, accompanied by acknowledgements that it is incapable of providing for its own defence to any considerable extent (ibid.). In this context, it is appropriate that it reconsider the areas in which it may work with other states to strengthen its overall security. Given its rather early emergence as a concrete localised threat in the discourse, it is unsurprising that cyber security features strongly in this regard: Ireland's involvement in the Hybrid Centre of Excellence in Helsinki is said to "ensure that" Ireland is "learning from other states" and to "provide [it] with additional expertise and practical capabilities to counter hybrid threats, including through

information sharing and training" (Coveney 2022c). Cooperation in this field is taken out of the realm of ontologically-problematic discourse on account of cyber security being related to the Self as a threat in need of a security response. This need is what renders it an 'appropriate' aspect of policy behaviour which does not challenge Irish identity in the way it might previously have done.

In fact, it is not merely that voices in the discourse self-reflexively note the changes that have taken place. It is not a stretch to suggest that this shift in discourse on Irish defence and security is a deliberate government action in itself, driven by elite decision-makers at the apex of Irish defence and security discourse. There is considerable evidence of a conscious effort being made on the part of elite decision-makers to encourage debate about Irish defence and security policy, with a Consultative Forum on the issue having been convened in Cork, Galway and Dublin across four days in June 2023. This does not mean the sidelining of Irish identity as a factor, however: indeed, the explicit invocation of Irish identity forms part of these discursive efforts. The constructions themselves are not under fire, but there is clearly a desire to more clearly redefine what these constructions mean – and do not mean – for Irish defence and security policy. Utterances such as that by Tánaiste Micheál Martin are instructive in this regard:

> The choice is not between being a vocal and convinced supporter of the UN Charter and the global multilateral system, or unquestioningly taking on the mantle of another country's foreign and security policy. The choice is not one in which military neutrality is a talisman that allows us to do good in the world, whereas any other security policy choice would mean abandoning our commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes and international humanitarian law and human rights. Our belief in a rules bases international order goes to the core of who we are as a people. But it is not a magic charm." (Martin 2023d)

There is a great deal to be highlighted in utterances such as this one. Very direct references are made to the identity constructions previously analysed in this study, of Ireland as a "convinced supporter" of the values of the United Nations, a country that is vocal on moral issues, that contributes to peace efforts and 'does good' in the world. These are placed alongside direct articulations of Irish ontological security concerns such as being drawn into a defence alliance "unquestioningly" and "abandoning" its peace promotion, along with quite aggressive efforts to challenge the assumption of innocence and non-involvement in the Western security sphere carried by the Irish conception of neutrality: labelling this assumption a "talisman" and "magic charm" could hardly be less subtle. The explicit aim of utterances like this is to decouple a debate around Irish defence and security policy from these ontological security fears, and to

create space for this debate to take place by discursively minimising its effects on the Irish sense of self. While previous references to international cooperation or considerations of Ireland's place in the world were inherently linked to Irish peace promotion, moral authority and its relation to the broader Western World, such utterances attempt to alter this aspect of the discourse.

However, limits to this new form of discourse are to be seen, which illustrate that a complete break with pre-established Irish identity constructions, or indeed with the previous pattern of decision-making discourse, has not occurred. The potency of negative signifiers such as 'NATO' and 'EU/European Army' has not changed: Tánaiste Micheál Martin opened his address to the Dáil on the upcoming Consultative Forum on Defence and Security policy by dismissing the notion it was "part of the latest secret plan by the government to join NATO," while 'EU/European Army' was avoided in his address entirely (Martin 2023d).

Ireland's support for Ukraine also acts as a useful example. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Ireland participated fully in EU sanctions on Russia, and accepted more than 100,000 Ukrainian refugees fleeing the continent, the highest number in proportion to national population of any country in Western Europe (Statista 2024). Rhetorically it has been fully in-line with the political position of the rest of the Western World, Ambassador Byrne-Nason declaring to the UN Security Council that "Ireland stands full square in unwavering solidarity with the people of Ukraine" (Byrne-Nason 2022c). However, the prospect of offering lethal military aid to Ukraine is completely absent from discourse on the issue, or on Irish defence and security in general. Though non-lethal aid has been supplied, the role this plays in discourse on Ireland's contribution to Ukrainian efforts is small, with the acceptance of refugees and support for international judicial proceedings against figures such as Russian President Vladimir Putin featuring far more prominently. For example, Ireland's support for Ukraine's cases at the International Court of Justice and European Court of Human Rights are cited as proof of the state "continu[ing] to support Ukraine for as long as it takes," as well as Ireland's desire to "defend the multilateral system" (Martin 2023c). Ireland's response to the issue is in line with its identity as a moral authority with a considerable commitment to humanitarianism and the multilateral rules-based international system. Despite the very considerable acknowledged threat to Irish security posed by the war (eg Martin 2023f), this does not provoke any mention in the discourse of lethal military aid being supplied, let alone its consideration as a policy choice. Ireland's moral responsibility towards assisting Ukraine is framed within pre-established Irish values and its sense of self.

Related to this is the broader point on policy action which was previously made in relation to national defence policy: though the discursive shift and role of Irish identity constructions have been significant, this level of change has not been matched in Irish behaviour to date. In July 2022, Ireland increased its full participation in PESCO projects from 1 to 5, with one of those projects subsequently coming to an end. As of May 2023, its full participation in 4 projects was the lowest of any active PESCO participating state, alongside Slovakia (European Council 2023). There have been no stated plans to increase engagement with NATO through the Partnership for Peace or other mechanisms, while a fundamental alignment change akin to Sweden and Finland's decisions to join NATO following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has shown no signs of occurring.

That said, the emergence of new strands to discourse on Ireland's international cooperation is worth noting. One in particular is the partial deployment of moral authority in a manner which reverses its typical implication of precluding a move away from Irish neutrality into one which leaves such a move open. In his capacity as Chairperson of the Oireachtas Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, former Minister for Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan suggested that Ireland's geographical position and its being surrounded by NATO member-states "could be interpreted as providing us with a luxury to avoid taking difficult positions and making difficult choices" (Flanagan 2023b), while Independent TD Cathal Berry has queried whether Ireland was considered a "burden" on the rest of the European Union owing to its low level of defence capability (Berry 2023). Rather than be based on Irish moral authority and partial non-inclusion in the Western security sphere, such utterances instead portray Ireland's strategic position as a form of opportunism opposed to, rather than in line with, the more 'moral' position of contributing to the broader European security sphere Ireland is a part of. Though this theme is by no means widespread or pervasive in the discourse, it is certainly worth highlighting for its potential to challenge established assumptions surrounding Irish non-participation in defence cooperation. Even the fact that such utterances appear in the discourse is a sign of the change which has taken place. And while concrete policy change has been relatively limited, it is possible that such discursive change may 'prepare the ground' for more significant changes in policy in future.

Conclusion

This research study has examined Irish defence and security policy through the prisms of identity and ontological security. After presenting its research puzzle and its proposed novel approach, it offered a detailed overview of ontological security theory, illustrating its key features and utility for International Relations scholarship. This was followed by a description of the utilised research methodology, before the results of the analysis of elite Irish discourse on defence and security between 2014 and 2023 were presented. This was carried out through an overview of the identity constructions key to the Irish 'sense of self' in defence and security, followed by a detailed examination of the ways in which such constructions influenced Irish discourse and behaviour in this policy sphere. However, a research study such as this must always end by returning to the beginning. The research question posed in the Introduction referred to the ways in which Irish identity influenced the state's behaviour in defence and security policy. Taking the preceding analysis into account, an answer to this question must be presented.

This study has illustrated that identity and ontological security have a notable influence on shaping Irish behaviour in the defence and security policy sphere. Ireland's particular identity constructions, as a peace-promoting and morally-upstanding internation actor which operates partly outside the Western security space, have an undeniably prominent influence on how defence and security are debated in Ireland, how views are formulated and how actions are rationalised. A 'field of action' for Irish policy-makers is found to have been discursively created by Irish identity constructions, one which permits and values certain policy actions as 'appropriate' to Ireland and stigmatises others as not consummate with Irish definitions of itself as an actor in the international community. It has been shown how this 'field of action' shapes policy discourse among both government and opposition.

The boundaries of this 'field of action' are found to have developed over the period of time under study. In the period spanning 2014 to 2021, Irish policy towards its Defence Forces was focused on its role as a peacekeeping nation, with decisions around investment and capabilities being informed and explained by peacekeeping activity. This did not entirely preclude increases in investment or equipment procurement, but meant that any decisions in this regard needed to be framed in terms of the peacekeeping activity for which Ireland lauded its Defence Forces. This peacekeeping activity was also the primary 'appropriate' forum for engagement between

Ireland and other states in the military sphere, with engagement otherwise possessing the potential to provoke significant ontological security fears: the prospect of being drawn into a 'European/EU Army,' undermining Irish moral authority and strategic independence, is found to have been a prominent concern of discourse and decision-making on Irish engagement with bodies such as the European Defence Association and the PESCO programme.

This field of action was found to have expanded in the last two years of the time period under examination, coinciding with the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Subsequently, 'Ireland' as a subject features more prominently in discourse on Irish defence and security policy, with a stronger relation of Ireland to the wider European security sphere. As a result, there is greater discursive space to discuss Irish domestic defence capabilities and requirements, without the need to invoke Irish peacekeeping activity. The same can be said for international cooperation, with involvement in common military programmes and information-sharing made less discursively problematic, without the same requirement to reference Irish neutrality and the dangers of a 'European/EU Army' on the horizon. The period also witnessed an explicit effort on the part of elite voices in Irish discourse to encourage debate around the state's defence and security policy. Though this effort partly aimed to target certain assumptions related to Irish identity in defence and security, denying that they constituted a kind of "magic charm" (Martin 2023d), it also operated within a field of 'appropriate' discourse shaped by the pre-existing identity constructions relating to Ireland in the defence and security sphere. More broadly, it is found that the shift in discourse in the 2022-23 period centres on changes in how Irish identity is said to relate to policy action, and not in Irish identity itself.

Once again, it is important to stress that the alterations to this 'field of action' in the 2022-23 period do not negate or undermine the overall findings of this research study. Though the precise nature of the link between Irish identity constructions and policy-making has changed, the fact that this link is present and influential for Irish behaviour has not. In fact, it is arguably an added insight of this study to be able to illustrate the different ways in which an identity-related 'field of action' for policy-making can be articulated, proving that the behavioural implications of a given identity are neither self-evident nor permanent. This makes the manner of such articulation a highly worthy focus of scholarship, as evidenced by this study.

As with any piece of academic research, a number of limitations inherent to this study ought to be highlighted. As referenced previously, a discourse analysis undertaken on the researcher's own personal country or group context carries with it inherent risks of 'homeblindness' and a

blurring of objective analytical and subjective personal boundaries. This researcher has endeavoured to mitigate against these risks, and given the significant benefits brought by a researcher to an analysis of their home country in cultural competence terms, it is a risk which is worth taking. Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of this or any other researcher in such a position, it is a limitation which must be borne in mind.

Additionally, it is necessary to clarify the overall nature of analysis which is enabled by the selected research design and methodology. As previously noted, theories of identity and ontological security are not overtly causal in nature, and discourse analysis also does not function according to this logic. Analysis of the type pursued in this study is not driven by the need to find 'smoking gun' evidence of identity concerns being the articulated causal factor behind policy decisions and state behaviour – indeed, its logic does not make such a finding ontologically possible. Instead, it seeks to establish the discursive boundaries which Irish identity constructions place on its behaviour towards its defence and security. It is argued that, while such discursive boundaries may not be the explicit causal factor behind such behaviour, they form an assumed, pervading framework within which Irish perceptions are formed and decisions are made. Arguably this presents a stronger case than that which an argument based on standard causality would present, as it does not merely claim to identify specific external causal factors leading to specific policies, but helps to form a broader understanding of Irish defence and security policy – and indeed, of 'Ireland' – as concepts in their own right.

Finally, there is a further limitation of this study which this researcher was not in a position to prevent: it has perhaps been undertaken too soon. Though the analysis has indicated significant alterations to Irish discourse on defence and security since 2022, these discursive changes have yet to be fully translated into concrete policy change: put simply, it is too early to tell how this altered discourse will develop and what its effects on Irish behaviour will be. Future scholarship will also need to ask whether the identity constructions detailed in this study – which, it is argued here, did not change fundamentally over the course of the period in question – are evolving more notably, a process which could have profound implications for Irish defence and security behaviour. The analysis presented here would seem to indicate a dramatic shift in policy, along the lines of a 'total defence' strategy or pursuit of NATO membership, is unlikely to be drawn within the 'field of action' provided by current Irish identity constructions. However, changes in this regard can never be entirely ruled out. In any case, this study points to the necessity for future analyses and forecasts of Irish policy behaviour to consider identity

and ontological security as important factors in their analysis, factors with a capacity to continue shaping Ireland's responses to defence and security challenges in future.

On a broader theoretical point, the approach pursued in this study offers further weight to identity and ontological security as theories relating to state practice in International Relations, illustrating their capacity to offer insights on cases and puzzles which alternative theories cannot. Viewed in these terms, Irish defence and security policy does not appear to be founded on aimless or erroneous political calculation, and nor is it a simple result of a lack of interest on the part of Irish decision-makers: indeed, the area is found to be a significant one where the reinforcement of Irish identity as a peace enforcer, moral authority and liminal actor vis à vis the Western World are concerned. It is hoped that such findings could be incorporated into future studies of the topic, with approaches which follow this study's lead in taking the theoretical focus away from 'neutrality' in favour of a more comprehensive policy appraisal.

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