

**THE IRISH
REPUBLIC, THE
UNITED STATES
AND
THE IRAQ WAR:
A Critical Appraisal**

**Prepared for the Irish Anti-War Movement
by**

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'Spectacular domination's first priority was to eradicate historical knowledge in general; beginning with just about all rational information and commentary on the recent past. The evidence for this is so glaring it hardly needs further explanation. With consummate skill the spectacle organises ignorance of what is about to happen and, immediately afterwards, the forgetting of whatever has nonetheless been understood. The more important something is, the more it is hidden...

Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 1988

Preface

When the US military seized Baghdad in April of this year, the politicians who had advocated war claimed that their strategy had been entirely vindicated. As images of the choreographed moment in which a jubilant crowd dragged a statue of Saddam Hussein to the ground were beamed across the globe, the warmongers in Washington and London crowed that they had swiftly removed a monster from power and made the world a rather safer for all of us. While the political climate appeared for a time to be shifting in their favour, the characteristic hubris of the hawks led to a series of distinctly rash admissions that would once again harden international opinion against them. The most important of these perhaps was the acknowledgement of Donald Rumsfeld towards the end of May that weapons of mass destruction were unlikely ever to be found in Iraq. The blatant admission of the hawks that their principal rationale for the military campaign was in fact entirely bogus reignited a political debate about the war that had previously appeared to be on the wane. In the United Kingdom, the realisation that those in favour of military action against Iraq have been somewhat economical with the truth has sparked a political scandal that has dogged Tony Blair all summer and which threatens ultimately to sweep him from office. In the United States, the rationale for going to war has begun to be questioned in a way that would have been unthinkable perhaps only a few months ago.

In the Irish Republic, in contrast, the realisation that the war on Iraq was spun out of half truths and outright lies has yet to produce a sustained political debate. While Irish journalists have covered extensively the unravelling of the case for war, they have done so in a manner that suggests that it is merely an item of foreign news that has little bearing upon the political life of the twenty six counties. In reality, however, the lies that have poured out of the imperial centres of Washington and London have a significance that is rather closer to home. The ongoing war in Iraq is, after all, one in which the Irish Republic played a substantial ideological and material role. In spite of its public equivocation, the Irish government actually supported the illegal military assault upon the people of Iraq both in principle – that principle being the right of the United States to act however the hell it likes – and in practice – by ignoring the will of the Irish people and allowing tens of thousands of American troops to pass through Shannon airport. The escalating revelations concerning the fabrication of evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq exposes Irish foreign policy as even more iniquitous than we had already suspected. In the last few months, the Irish government has not merely supported an illegal war but an illegal war that was manufactured out of barefaced

lies. One might have thought that this particular revelation would have revived public debate about the conduct of Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats throughout the Iraq crisis. It would not have been entirely unreasonable perhaps to have expected journalists to have been keen to interrogate ministers as to how it feels to have been duped by their supposed friends in Washington and London. In practice, however, the response of the Irish media to what might be regarded as the biggest political scandal of the day was, with a few honourable exceptions, the lamentable and predictable one of almost complete indifference.

It was against this particular backdrop that the steering committee of the Irish Anti-War Movement convened in early June to discuss how events had unfolded over the previous few weeks. It was agreed that the IAWM should seek to spark a public debate that would hopefully ensure that the Irish government would at last be called to account for the appalling manner in which it had handled the crisis over Iraq. One of the means towards this particular end that was devised was the compilation of a dossier that would chronicle the evasions, ambivalence and hypocrisy that have become the hallmark of contemporary Irish foreign policy. Although the dossier was originally conceived as a fairly concise document, the body of evidence damning the Irish government turned out to be so substantial that it quickly grew and eventually weighed in at a hefty 15,000 words.

In an effort to reach as wide an audience as possible, a press conference was called for July 1st in order to officially launch the dossier. While we were not exactly expecting to be overwhelmed with media attention, their lack of interest in what we regard as the biggest political scandal of recent times was truly staggering nonetheless. Only two journalists deemed the information contained in the dossier to be sufficiently important to bother turning up to its launch. Appalled but undeterred by the indifference of the corporate media we decided to stage a photo opportunity a fortnight later in the hope of generating some interest. On the day that the authors, accompanied by the Green TD John Gormley, handed the dossier in to the Department of Foreign Affairs not one journalist was there to witness the event. Although a couple of radio stations were prepared to take up the issues raised in the dossier, the response of the Irish media in general to its publication was one of almost complete silence. It would seem that Irish journalists regard the fact that their government was hoodwinked into colluding in the commission of an illegal war to be insufficiently important to be considered a live story.

Over the course of the summer, many people within the anti-war movement have impressed upon us the importance of disseminating the information contained in the dossier as widely as possible. In an attempt to reach a broader audience we decided to publish the dossier in the form of a pamphlet. All of the proceeds raised by the publication of this pamphlet will go to help the IAWM in its campaign of resistance to the warmongering of Bush and Blair, Cowen and Ahern.

Anyone who cannot afford to buy the pamphlet is welcome to download it from our website (www.irishantiwar.org).

A great deal has happened of course since we put the finishing touches to the dossier in the closing days of June this year. The furious row between the BBC and Downing Street over allegations that official accounts of the military capability of Iraq had been "sexed up" initiated a tragic sequence of events that eventually ensured Tony Blair became only the second British premier to appear before a judicial enquiry. The inevitable resistance of ordinary Iraqis to the invasion of their country has produced a stream of American casualties that has caused the previously spectacular popularity

ratings of George W Bush to tumble. And the realisation that it cannot maintain control alone has prompted Washington to seek to pressure the United Nations to volunteer for the role of subcontractor in the illegal occupation of Iraq.

While there have been many developments since we completed the dossier that follows, the importance and veracity of the arguments and evidence that it contains remain undiminished. The case that we make in the dossier represents not merely a critique about the conduct of Irish foreign policy in the recent past but also a declaration of concern about the form it is likely to take in the near future.

In the last couple of weeks, there has been speculation in the media that Irish troops might form part of an international coalition to serve in Iraq under the auspices of the United Nations. The debate concerning the possible role of the UN in Iraq has a considerable course to run and its outcome remains far from certain. It is hard to shake the suspicion, however, that we are currently being softened up for the prospect that in the near future Irish men and women may serve in a UN operation whose purpose and effect is to shore up American imperialism. Such an outcome would mark yet another new low in the seemingly unpunctuated deterioration of Irish foreign policy.

It is our view that most Irish people aspire to play an independent and progressive role in the world. The tens of thousands who turned out on February 15th this year provide as compelling proof of this as one could imagine. The authors of a genuinely anti-imperialist Irish foreign policy will not course be the political class or the corporate media but rather the ordinary people living on this island. If Ireland is to play a part in the creation of a just and sustainable world we need a popular, vibrant and diverse movement implacably opposed to imperialism and war. It is hoped that the production of this pamphlet will make a small contribution to the life of that movement.

Kieran Allen & Colin Coulter
September 8 2003.

1. Introduction

Over the last year, international relations have been dominated and bedevilled by the crisis that broke over Iraq. The frequently acrimonious debate ostensibly concerned with how best to disarm the regime of Saddam Hussein exposed and inflamed deep divisions within the western world. The prospect of what many regarded as an unjust war against the beleaguered people of Iraq drew disaffected citizens out onto the streets in their millions to protest. The decision of the United States to start the bombing in the face of overwhelming opposition across the globe revealed the true scale of the imperial desire of the sole remaining military superpower.

In view of its size, the Republic of Ireland can ordinarily expect to play only a relatively marginal role in the affairs of the wider world. The disputes that centred upon Iraq would, however, afford the state a rather more central role in the course of international relations. The decision of the United States to take the case for disarming the Saddam regime to the United Nations came at a time when the Irish Republic sat on that organisation's executive body, the Security Council. Ireland was, therefore, privy to the prolonged diplomatic wrangles that were – at the level of performance at least – intended to bring a peaceful resolution to the Iraqi crisis. It was also, however, closely associated with the logistical details that ultimately enabled the demands and interests of the United States to be prosecuted not through patient negotiation but rather through force of arms. In spite of its status as a formally neutral state, the Republic of Ireland actually played a crucial role in the transport to the Persian Gulf of US military personnel who would in time unleash untold horror upon the people of Iraq. In the first four months of this year alone, some 47,958 American troops passed through Shannon airport on their way to participate in an illegal and immoral war¹.

The recent war in the Persian Gulf was then of enormous significance not least because it was one in which the Irish government was singularly and profoundly implicated. In this dossier, the Irish Anti-War Movement sets out to document the ways in which the current coalition of Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats related to, and participated in, the crisis that overtook Iraq. The information that we present here amounts to nothing less than a damning indictment of recent Irish foreign policy. A close examination of its record in relation to Iraq exposes an Irish government characterised by ambivalence, opportunism, hypocrisy and spinelessness.

Earlier this month, the Irish coalition government issued a report intended as a judgement of how it had performed in the first year of its second term in office. The authors of the report noted not unreasonably that the 'ultimate test' of any government is to be found in how it responds to unexpected crises such as that over Iraq. It is the view of the Irish Anti-War Movement that the Irish government failed the challenge posed by the Iraqi crisis miserably. So miserably in fact that we would have to consider the present administration as being entirely unworthy of the trust that the Irish people have mistakenly placed in them.

2. Collusion and Cover-Up at Shannon

At first, the Irish government attempted to conceal the true scale of its involvement in the preparations of the US military for war. During the last Gulf War in 1990, Shannon had been used by US aircraft for re-fuelling but the practice had not become a major issue in the public mind. There is some evidence to suggest that this time around the government was keen to ensure that the assistance being offered to the American military would be equally uncontroversial.

Reports of sightings of US planes began to accumulate towards the end of September 2002. From October 2002 on, spotters from the *Re-Fuelling Peace* group began to post their reports on the Indymedia website. The activists were routinely harassed by airport police who continually moved them on as they sought to make their observations.

On November 12 2002, Finian McGrath, TD raised a question with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Cowen, about the recent high incidence of foreign military aircraft flying over Annaghdown, County Galway. The Minister responded that as the Deputy had not given details of the incidents, he was 'not in a position to provide any more specific information on the issue'. He went on, however, to categorically insist that **'there has not been any significant change in the pattern of over flights and landings by foreign military aircraft in recent months'**.²

The Irish government is bound by the Air Navigation Foreign Military Aircraft Order of 1952 which is pursuant to the Air Navigation and Transport Act 1946. Regulation 3 of the Order states that no 'foreign military aircraft shall fly over or land in the State save on the express invitation or with the express permission of the Minister'. The government also has to abide by the Air Navigation Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods Act 1973. This prohibits the carrying of 'munitions of war' except where the Minister has given an exemption. If Shannon was being used to transport US troops and munitions to Iraq, then clearly the government had to give specific permission for this to occur.

On November 26 2002, the Green Party TD John Gormley asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if foreign aircraft overflying or landing at Shannon were following the relevant legal guidelines – that they were unarmed, carrying no arms, ammunition or explosives and did not form part of a military operation. He also asked specifically if the Irish government had carried out checks to ensure that foreign planes were complying with Irish law.

The reply that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Cowen, provided was simply extraordinary. He stated that:

'Permission for landings and over flights is normally granted to foreign military aircraft on the basis that the aircraft is unarmed, does not carry arms ammunition or explosives and does not form part of a military exercise or operation'.³

He went on, however, to state that the government had **'accepted in good faith ...that the details supplied to the Department of Foreign Affairs by diplomatic missions were accurate. In this situation checks of the nature referred to by the Deputy are not conducted'**⁴

The statement is extraordinary for two reasons:

First, it was already public knowledge that US troops who were using Shannon were taking part in a military build-up in preparation for war against Iraq. Contrary to Mr Cowen's statement, they were quite clearly 'part of a military exercise or operation'.

Second, Mr Cowen has never produced the details of the requests by diplomatic missions for permission to use Shannon airport. There is no way, therefore, of independently verifying that the Irish government and the relevant foreign states had in fact acted in 'good faith'. In view of the other lies that have emerged since the end of the Iraqi war, it is incumbent on Mr Cowen to produce these requests for the use of Shannon.

The political context in which the use of Shannon by the US military took place was fundamentally transformed by the growing tide of public unease at what was happening at the airport. The various demonstrations that were organised thwarted the clear ambition of the Irish government to keep its collaboration with the US war drive under wraps. The growing focus on Shannon also meant that Mr Cowen could no longer expect to get away with the kinds of half truths that he had consistently issued in the closing months of 2002.

As more and more people became aware of the nature and scale of US military activity at Shannon, journalists from *the Observer* newspaper began to investigate what was happening at the airport. Their story, which appeared in the edition of January 12 2003, indicated that thousands of US troops had passed through Shannon and that employees at the airport had seen them with weapons. One worker was quoted as saying, 'Several of the transport planes using the airport carry only weaponry. But the troops arriving in Ireland are fully armed.'⁵ Another commented that 'Aer Rianta and the police have introduced a policy of turning a blind eye to what is happening here. I have seen guns and weapons. There isn't a great effort to hide them'.⁶

This story indicated that either Mr Cowen had been economical with the truth on November 26 2002 or else he had been misinformed by the diplomatic mission in which he had placed his trust. Yet, instead of investigating how it had been misled or how it might, deliberately or accidentally, have misled the Irish public, the government hastened to regularise the situation by giving themselves legal cover.

On January 13 2003, the day after the revelations in *the Observer*, Mr Cowen issued a statement which:

- (i) Confirmed that Shannon was being used as a transit by the US military;
- (ii) Claimed that none of the military planes 'in the recent past' was declared as carrying munitions;
- (iii) Acknowledged that, contrary to his statement on November 26 2002, 'troops travelling on civilian aircraft are sometimes accompanied by their personal weapons'.⁷

The final admission here constituted an acknowledgement that the US military had broken Irish law and that their diplomatic mission may have supplied incorrect information to the Irish government. Yet, instead of questioning these missions, Mr Cowen excused the bearing of weapons by American troops by claiming that (a) the soldiers 'do not carry ammunition' and (b) the personal weapons are carried in the hold of the aircraft. In terms of his statement of November 26 2002, however, these two claims

were entirely beside the point.

It now appeared that permission was being granted for the landing at Shannon of US military aircraft which were carrying weapons and which were taking part in a military operation.

Cowen also used his statement on January 13 2003, to seal another legal breach in the approach that the Irish government had taken. The use of Shannon by US troops in full uniform was illegal under the Defence Act of 1954. The Foreign Minister now confirmed, however, that 'US troops have been permitted to wear uniforms in the transit areas of Irish airports'.

What had therefore started as a denial that anything unusual was happening at Shannon had ended up with an attempt to normalise practices at the airport once they had become a matter of public knowledge and political controversy. The manner in which the government dealt with the issue, therefore, provides an instructive case study in the ways in which public opinion is open to manipulation.

The final element of this strategy of regularising the irregular occurred when the Dáil was finally convened to debate the issue on March 20 2003. The resolution to allow the US military continued use of Shannon contained the following important justification. It asserted that the Dáil:

'Recalls the long standing arrangements for the over flight and landing in Ireland of US military and civilian aircraft and supports the decision of the government to maintain these arrangements'⁸

In excess of 30,000 US troops had passed through Shannon from January 1 2003 to the time of this debate. Yet the government presented the matter as part of 'long-standing arrangements'. As we have just seen, these arrangements were supposed to be that foreign troops passing through Irish airports did not carry munitions of war or were not taking part in a military exercise. Yet, despite the revelations which had provoked the debate, Mr Ahern continued to stress the continuities with the past.

However, a document from the security policy section of the Department of Foreign Affairs dated December 16 2002 revealed that what was occurring at Shannon was not in fact normal but rather entirely exceptional. The text noted quite explicitly that, 'on an exceptional basis', a decision was taken to provide landing and refuelling facilities pursuant to the State's obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1368, which requested states to work together to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks on September 11 2001. It also stated that while the Irish government is 'fully committed to Ireland's policy of military neutrality', it is 'is not and never has been neutral in the face of international terrorism or in its support for the UN'.

The document therefore confirmed two important issues:

- (i) That the use of Shannon was exceptional – and not just part of 'long standing' arrangements.
- (ii) That the specific justification of this exceptional use was (a) support for a fight against terrorism and (b) complying with UN obligations.

However, neither of these justifications for Shannon's use held up. No serious evidence has ever been produced to show that the Iraqi regime was involved in attacks on September 11 2001 or that it was linked to terrorist operations against the US. In addition, contrary to the government's expectations in October 2002, the war did not

receive UN backing – the US and UK mainly fought alone, and there was no UN obligation to support them. Once again, the official justification for allowing Shannon to be used by the US military turned out to involve a large element of deception.

Throughout the whole period of the controversy, the government consistently denied that large scale munitions were being transported through Shannon airport. Mr Cowen, for example, stated that 'it is simply not the case that the US is using Shannon to transit large quantities of arms to the Gulf.'⁹ In view of the inaccuracies that have been documented already, there are now substantial grounds for scepticism on this score. Shannon was, after all, one of the major European hubs for the US war effort. Moreover, there is independent testimony from observers such as Tim Hourigan who made several sightings of cargo jets operated by Evergreen International. This corporation appeared in Shannon in the run up to the war against Iraq after it received a \$75 million contract from the US Air Mobility Command to transport cargo for US armed forces.¹⁰

One can only ask: If the Irish public were misled about the use of Shannon by US troops might they not also have been misled to this day about the level of military cargo that was transported through the airport?

3. Official Explanations for Allowing the US Military to Use Shannon

In his speech to the Dáil on March 20 2003, the Taoiseach outlined a number of further reasons for allowing the US military to continue to use Shannon airport. These are considered in the discussion that follows.

First, Mr Ahern sought to justify the decision on Shannon on the grounds that Iraq 'has shown a willingness given the opportunity to strike directly against US targets.' This claim is simply factually incorrect. No reliable evidence has ever emerged that suggests that Iraq has planned attacks against the United States or has offered assistance to those with plans to do so. In fact, on October 7 2002, the head of the CIA, George Tenet, was forced to make public a private letter he had written to the Bush administration. In his correspondence, Tenet offered the view that 'Iraq appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or chemical and biological weapons against the US.'¹¹

Second, the Taoiseach asserted that US military personnel should be allowed to pass through Shannon because they were on their way to depose a venal and dangerous regime. Mr Ahern noted that the tyranny of Saddam Hussein had 'shown a willingness to use weapons of mass destruction against its enemies and against its own people'. This at least had a grain of truth. Iraq had used chemical weapons against Iran and against its Kurdish opposition. In one infamous example, Saddam Hussein's forces attacked the town on Halabja on March 15 1988 after its Kurdish population co-operated with Iranian forces.

At no point, however, in his condemnation of the brutality of the Iraqi regime did Mr Ahern acknowledge that he had been part of a government that had sanctioned support for Saddam Hussein *after* these dreadful crimes. The Irish state encouraged the domestic beef industry to sell its products to the Iraqi army and facilitated the process through the Export Credit Insurance scheme. Of the IR£298 million in this fund for all Irish exporters, a staggering IR£145 million was earmarked for the Iraqi market alone. As Fintan O'Toole pointed out, the 'evidence of the Halabja massacre made no difference whatsoever to the Irish government's determination to do everything possible to help Saddam Hussein's regime.'¹²

Third, Mr Ahern sought to legitimise what was going on at Shannon airport by pointing out that Iraq was in breach of UN resolutions and arguing that the US was acting to enforce compliance and thereby underwrite the authority of the UN. It should be remembered, however, that Israel has violated rather more directives from the UN than Iraq. A UN resolution calling on Israel to grant the right to return to Palestinian refugees expelled in 1948 has, for example, been passed no fewer than 28 times. It has, however, been ignored by Israel on every single occasion and the US has done nothing to persuade it to comply.

The Taoiseach also neglected to note that the current US administration has made a specialty of tearing up international treaties. Since he came to office, George Bush has blocked a treaty on biological weapons; torn up the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and refused to back the Kyoto accord on greenhouse gases.

4. Defining the Crisis – Weapons of Mass Distraction

The most vociferous advocates of the case for war consistently offered a very particular definition of the nature of the international crisis over Iraq. While figures within the Bush and Blair administrations often sought to underline the tyrannical nature of the Saddam regime they were at pains to emphasise that the principal cause for concern was the existence of 'weapons of mass destruction'. It was argued repeatedly that Baghdad had defied the will of the 'international community' in order to retain substantial stocks of biological and chemical weapons. When US Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed the United Nations Security Council on February 5th this year, he offered a slick presentation of what he considered to be compelling and verifiable evidence of the arsenal as the disposal of Saddam. It was contended not only that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction but also that it intended to use these resources both against its neighbours and upon other targets rather further afield. The counsel of Washington was that the threat that Baghdad posed to regional and international security was sufficiently substantial and immediate to warrant swift and decisive action to disarm the Saddam regime.

The particular definition of the 'Iraqi problem' that emanated from Washington and London was one that was more or less swallowed whole in Dublin. The Irish government was consistently willing to simply accept on face value the insistence of Bush and Blair that Baghdad remained in possession of a formidable arsenal of chemical, biological and other proscribed weapons. In a series of speeches, the Irish Foreign Minister, for instance, asserted without equivocation the view that Saddam was in control of a substantial body of weapons of mass destruction. The denials routinely issued by Baghdad were summarily dismissed as 'simply not believable'.

... To this day, **there is no guarantee that Iraq no longer possesses these dreadful and illegal weapons. Instead, there is good reason to suspect that Iraq has continued to pursue this programme,** (Mr Cowen Dáil Eireann, October 23 2002).

... **Iraq's account so far is simply not believable.** And that is not acceptable. The arms inspectors are not in Iraq to play hide-and-seek with the authorities. They are there to verify that Iraq's claims to have disarmed are true and can be demonstrated. It is not the inspectors job to search for evidence of Iraqi wrong-doing and deception. It is for the Iraqis to prove that they have in fact done what they claim to have done. **The Iraqis were known to be in possession of well-documented quantities of weapons. Where are those weapons now? The sums have to add up.** Dr Blix has made it clear that, as of now, they do not add up. Instead, there are glaring discrepancies, (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, January 29 2003).

...In April 1991, the Security Council adopted resolution 687 requiring Iraq to get rid of its weapons of mass destruction. **Twelve years passed during which Iraq made no effort to comply. On the contrary, Iraq has used every means at its disposal to conceal its weapons, to obstruct the arms inspectors, and to thwart the will of the international community. This is a regime which launched two wars in the past, and has used poi-**

son gas against its neighbour and its own people, (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, February 11 2003).

Senior figures within the Irish government seemed willing to accept not only that Iraq remained in possession of weapons of mass destruction but also that it was intent on using these in the near future. In the public pronouncements of the Taoiseach and Foreign Minister, Iraq was routinely depicted as a potential aggressor that represented a singular threat to the stability of the Middle East and beyond.

...**The proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction - chemical, biological and nuclear - is, of course, an issue that goes far beyond Iraq. They represent a major threat to international peace and security...** (Mr Cowen, United Nations General Assembly, September 13 2002).

This attempted proliferation is an issue that goes far beyond Iraq. **These weapons are a major threat to both regional and international security.** The very attempt by Iraq to obtain such weapons, in violation of its freely accepted treaty obligations, erodes the international instruments aiming to control the spread of these weapons and ultimately to eliminate them.

There can be no doubt that Iraq is willing to use these weapons.

... **Ireland shares in the growing international consensus that the Iraqi regime poses a potential threat to regional security.** Iraq has so far consistently failed to meet its obligations under international law and the relevant Security Council Resolutions. (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, October 23 2002).

Ireland shares in the growing international consensus that the Iraqi regime poses a potential threat to regional security.

... [the Draft UN Resolution] recognises the threat which Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose to international peace and security, (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, November 6 2002).

.... **Iraq's continued defiance of the lawful decisions of the Security Council is a challenge to the authority of the Council and the legitimacy of the post-war international order. It undermines confidence in the rule of law and the efficacy of international arms control regimes. This defiance is ultimately as much a threat to international security as is the possession of weapons of mass destruction.**

But the possession of these dreadful weapons is the immediate threat which must be dealt with, (Mr Cowen, January 29 2003).

The Iraqi regime has a proven record of seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction. It has shown a willingness to use such weapons against its enemies and even against its own people. It has defeated all efforts to make sure that it surrender these weapons. It has shown a willingness, given the opportunity, to strike directly against US targets. (Mr Ahern, Dáil Eireann, March 20 2003).

The unquestioning faith in the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that the Irish government expressed in the months that preceded the war has of course proved subsequently to have been entirely misplaced. Those hawks in Washington and

London who most strenuously advocated the use of force did so principally on the grounds that the preservation of global order demanded the disarming and dismantling of the Saddam regime. In the three months since the war began, however, not a single jot of evidence has been unearthed that points to the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. As time passes, the prospect that the 'coalition of the willing' will uncover the arsenal that would substantiate their original claim of the need to go to war appears ever more remote. Even the singularly belligerent US Secretary of State for Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, has stated in public that weapons of mass destruction may have already been destroyed and that there is every chance that none will ever be uncovered in Iraq¹³.

The failure of chemical and biological weapons to materialise has invited a critical reappraisal of the intentions and pronouncements of those who most fervently made the case that Saddam could only be disarmed through means of force. Some of the most telling criticism of the decision to go to war has come from the most unlikely of sources¹⁴. In the last few weeks members of the intelligence services in both the US and UK have expressed misgivings at the ways in which information passed on in advance of the conflict was used by their respective governments. The decision last autumn of British Prime Minister Tony Blair to repeat in public a wholly unsubstantiated claim that the Saddam regime had the facility to deploy chemical and biological weapons within forty five minutes has been singled out as especially irresponsible¹⁵.

The revelations of those intelligence agents who have recently chosen to break cover casts the intentions of those who most strenuously advanced the case for the forceful disarmament of Iraq in a rather less altruistic light than they have us suppose. It would now seem clear that senior politicians in Washington and London manipulated intelligence in order to manufacture a war that was formally intended to eliminate a chemical and biological arsenal which they were only too aware did not in all likelihood exist¹⁶. Whatever this war was about it seems certain that it was not one prompted by the perils of weapons of mass destruction.

As the crisis over Iraq unfolded over the last year, the Irish government made it clear that those who sought to make the case for military action did so for entirely honourable reasons. On the day the war began, for instance, Mr Cowen informed the Dáil that while he regretted the course that those states that had initiated hostilities had taken, he believed they were acting in good faith. Three months on, the trust that the Foreign Minister placed in the intentions of the US and its allies seems distinctly naive.

The growing body of evidence that suggests that the case for war was spun out of fabrication and overstatement appears though to have made little impact upon the outlook and conduct of the Irish government. The revelation that Bush and Blair have been distinctly economical with the truth might reasonably have been expected to have drawn a critical response from official circles in Dublin. The attempts of the US and UK to convince the 'international community' of the immediate danger posed by Iraqi weapons of mass destruction were of course designed to construct as broad a collation as possible of countries willing to offer military and ideological support to the campaign against the Saddam regime. Had the tortuous diplomatic process that unfolded during the winter and spring worked out in the way that Washington and London had envisaged then the 'coalition of the willing' that would have been put together would

have included the Republic of Ireland. The passing of a second Security Council Resolution would have enabled the Irish government to offer military support to those who sought to remove Saddam through means of force. Irish troops might well have been sent to the Persian Gulf to fight in a war that was motivated by evidence that would soon transpire to be a tissue of lies.

The fabrications and exaggerations in which Washington and London engaged in their anxiety to manufacture a rationale for going to war against Iraq might then, under slightly different but entirely conceivable circumstances, have had grave moral and political repercussions for the Irish government and people. If the diplomatic process had produced an alternative outcome, the supposedly neutral country of the Irish Republic might have participated directly in the assault upon Iraq. Only the schisms that existed within the UN Security Council prevented Irish troops serving in a wholly immoral and illegal war.

One might reasonably have assumed that the realisation that the US and UK had in effect lied in order to persuade Ireland and countless other countries into a coalition of the gullible might have proved deeply offensive to the Irish government¹⁷. The growing realisation that figures within the Bush and Blair administrations had doctored intelligence data in order to devise an entirely bogus rationale for war has apparently, however, engendered little consternation within the political establishment in Dublin. The prospect that he was misled and that he subsequently proceeded to mislead the Dáil on the issue of weapons of mass destruction would appear to have caused little anxiety to the Taoiseach. When confronted by the Socialist Party TD, Mr Joe Higgins, about the failure of biological and chemical weapons to materialise in Iraq, Mr Ahern characteristically resorted to evasion in the guise of a wholly irrelevant account of the barbarism that defined the regime of Saddam Hussein¹⁸. Asked on the RTE television programme Prime Time about the prospect that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction had in fact been destroyed before the war, the Taoiseach simply chose to dodge the question and offer the view that it was right to 'support our friends'¹⁹.

It should come as no surprise then to discover that to date not one member of the Irish government has asked the obvious and pressing question of why it was that the US and UK went to war in order to eliminate weapons of mass destruction from a country that clearly does not possess any. Indeed, senior figures within Fianna Fáil continue to behave in a way that almost implies that an arsenal of chemical and biological weapons still exists in Iraq. In a recent speech to the Congress of the World Association of Newspapers, for example, the Taoiseach dropped a reference to weapons of mass destruction without even seeing fit to mention that weapons inspectors operating in Iraq keep drawing blanks²⁰.

5. Resolving the Crisis – The Tarnished Authority of the United Nations

From the outset, the Irish government explicitly and consistently argued that there was only one process and medium through which the crisis over Iraq could be properly resolved. Time and again, the Taoiseach and Foreign Minister stressed that only a resolution brokered through the offices of the United Nations could ensure both a just outcome and lasting stability in the world.

We are at a defining moment in international relations. Events in the coming months will have an important impact on world security for years, possibly decades, to come. **A united approach by the United Nations, which results in the full implementation of United Nations resolutions in relation to Iraq, will be a signal that a multilateral approach to world security is both viable and effective.**

A result that sees the United Nations marginalised, or sees United Nations resolutions flouted can only signal a move to a more dangerous world environment (Mr Ahern, Dáil Eireann, February 18 2003).

Our goal is the goal of the United Nations: the disarmament of the Iraqi regime, by peaceful means if at all possible. For the United Nations to be effective; for the United Nations to be respected, it must be united in purpose as well as in name. The brutal regime in Iraq poses precisely the kind of threat to international peace and security that the United Nations was created to deal with, (Mr Ahern, the White House, Washington DC, March 13 2003).

The unanimous support that Resolution 1441 secured in the UN Security Council was greeted in Dublin as an important step forward. The Irish government expressed agreement with the view that there was an urgent need for Iraq to be disarmed and stated its hope that disarmament could be accomplished through exclusively peaceful means. Both the Taoiseach and Foreign Minister declared their support for the teams of weapons inspectors operating in Iraq and emphasised that they should be afforded sufficient time to complete their task. In a statement to the Dáil on October 23 2002, Mr Cowen underlined the official view that the purpose of Resolution 1441 was simply that of disarmament and – presumably referring to the demands for regime change from the more hawkish sections of American opinion – ‘nothing more’.

... Ireland wants very much to see a peaceful solution to this crisis. We are working together with the other members of the Security Council to accomplish this objective. This goal is the overwhelming wish of the international community. **The purpose of the UN Resolutions is to bring about disarmament. Nothing more.** Ireland is working within the framework of these Resolutions. We do not see that there is a UN mandate for any further end, such as regime change. We believe that UN action against Iraq should be halted as soon as Iraq comes into compliance with the Resolutions of the Security Council and implements the Council’s decisions in full (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, October 23 2002).

... The clear outcome of this meeting was to state again **the European Union objective of**

full and effective Iraqi disarmament and the desire to achieve this peacefully.

The Governments position, set out by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Dáil last Tuesday, is that inspections should continue for as long as the inspectors feel that they are productive, but that they cannot continue indefinitely in the face of Iraqi non-compliance (Mr Ahern, February 18 2003).

... It is a matter of the greatest regret to Ireland that the Iraqi crisis has now reached a point where military conflict has begun. This is exactly the outcome which we had worked to avoid during our time on the Security Council and since. **The Government have consistently opposed the use of force, except as a last resort after all other possible means have been tried and failed** (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, March 20 2003).

Should the efforts of the weapons inspectors to disarm the Saddam regime prove unsuccessful, the government stressed, a further Resolution of the Security Council would be required if hostilities against Iraq were to commence. In the absence of a second UN Resolution a declaration of war would be illegitimate and would not receive the support of the Irish government.

... There is no definitive position of the international community on what is still a hypothetical question. Regardless of the legal arguments which have been advanced on both sides, **Ireland considers that there is an overriding political need for the Security Council to determine whether its Resolutions have been breached and to take a further decision on what measures should be adopted in response,** (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, January 29 2003).

... Ireland has repeatedly stated its view that if Iraq continues in its non-compliance, a second Security Council resolution should be adopted. The arguments as to whether a second resolution is a legal necessity are a distraction from the real point. **The compelling political reality is that a second resolution would signal the unity and resolve of the international community, and the clear legitimacy of any subsequent military action,** (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, February 11 2003).

... Ireland has repeatedly stated its view that if Iraq continued in its non-compliance, a second Security Council resolution should be adopted. **We believe that this is what should have been done. The United States and Britain have long held the view that earlier Security Council Resolutions already mandate the use of force, and that no further authorisation is required. They are now acting on this belief. It is clear that there is no generally accepted view on the validity of the different interpretations and it is unlikely that agreement on this point can be reached** (Mr Cowen, Dáil Eireann, March 20 2003).

Ireland made its position clear in the Security Council, immediately after the vote. **We said it was for the UN Security Council to determine what action should be taken in the event of continued Iraqi non-compliance.**

Other members of the Council, most notably the United States, stated their view that a second resolution was not a precondition for military action. They pointed to their strong conviction that there was an outstanding mandate for the use of force based on previous Resolutions. They were not willing to bind themselves to the obligation of waiting for a future Resolution, which, in their view, might unreasonably be denied.

The fact is there is no clear legal consensus on whether such a mandate exists. The arguments advanced by the Coalition are supported by a number of countries which are not par-

participating in military action. Ireland, however, cannot participate in a military campaign without an explicit, further UN mandate.

... arguments advanced by the Coalition are supported by a number of countries which are not participating in military action. Ireland, however, cannot participate in a military campaign without an explicit, further UN mandate.

...
Our position on this conflict is clear. The Government regrets that the United States led coalition has found it necessary to launch the campaign in the absence of agreement on a further Resolution.

I said some weeks ago that a second Resolution was a political imperative. In its absence we have to conduct ourselves in a manner which is in keeping with our Constitution and with our interests and we will do so, (Mr Ahern, Dáil Eireann, March 20 2003).

The response of the Irish political establishment to the Iraqi crisis was then an apparently principled one that rested upon the need to exhaust all peaceful means of resolution and the imperative of respecting the authority of the United Nations. While members of the Irish government were consistent with regard to the process they identified as capable of resolving the dispute over disarmament, they proved rather less so in terms of their response to how the United States chose to engage with that process. In the autumn of 2002, Tony Blair managed to persuade George W Bush that their mutual ambition of toppling Saddam Hussein would be best served through the forging of an international consensus through the offices of the United Nations. The decision of the US to at least go through the motions of seeking a Security Council Resolution that seemed to promise that Iraq could be disarmed without going to war was warmly greeted in official circles in Dublin. In his address to the National Committee on American Foreign Policy on November 25 2002, for instance, Irish Foreign Minister Mr Cowen spoke of the diplomatic course pursued by Washington in terms that bordered upon the obsequious.

No issue in the Security Council over the two years since Ireland became a member has been more difficult than Iraq. **So let me say clearly where Ireland stands. We believe President Bush was entirely right to come to the United Nations in September and to say to the Council: "assume your responsibilities."** We consider Resolution 1441, adopted unanimously, to be rigorous but fair in its demands of Iraq. Saddam Hussein will be making a terrible mistake if he does not fulfil in every respect the disarmament requirements now unambiguously set out, and if he does not fully cooperate with the UN Inspectors.

... I know that the patience of many in the United States was strained by the weeks of diplomatic bartering in the Council. All I can say is: the strain was shared by all of us, including the people of Ireland who followed day to day developments closely. The Council has spoken unanimously. Its demands are unequivocal and clear. The Inspectors are back. Iraq must comply. If it does not comply there will be serious consequences. **The judgement of President Bush to come to the United Nations has been fully vindicated.** And so has the central role of the Security Council as the cornerstone of international peace

and security, (Mr Cowen, the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. New York. November 25 2002)

The commitment of the US and its satellites to working through the UN would of course prove to be simply strategic and reasonably short-lived. Unable to secure a second Security Council Resolution, Washington decided to dispense with the diplomatic wrangles and to pursue its interests through the exercise of overwhelming military force. The decision of the US and its allies to go to war might reasonably have been expected to have posed enormous difficulties for the Dublin government. Mr Cowen and Mr Ahern had after all repeatedly stated that a second Security Council Resolution was essential to legitimise war and to allow the participation of Irish troops. In light of this, it might not have been unreasonable to assume that Dublin would have regarded the conflict as illegal and immoral and would have communicated this to the belligerents. The actual response of the Irish establishment was predictably different.

In a statement to the Dáil on January 29 2003, Mr Cowen noted, without even a trace of irony, that the Irish government is not required to 'uncritically support US foreign policy'. Such declarations of independence have, however, failed to prompt Irish politicians to offer any real criticism of Washington. The course upon which the US embarked when it declared war on Iraq clearly violated the principles that the Irish government has repeatedly claimed to hold dear. In acting to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein without the approval of the Security Council, Bush and Blair inflicted irreparable damage upon what remains of the integrity and unity of the UN. Although the US had evidently adopted a course that the Irish government had explicitly declared to be unacceptable, there was not so much as a murmur of criticism of Washington from official circles in Dublin. Speaking in the Dáil on the day the way began, the Taoiseach could only summon sufficient integrity to suggest that the unilateralist approach of the US was one that he 'regrets'.

The lack of principle and courage that the government exhibited throughout the Iraq crisis recently drew a stinging rebuke from Nelson Mandela²¹. In Galway to receive an honorary degree, the former South African President emphasised the importance of the United Nations in the preservation of peace in the world. In a thinly veiled reference to the United States, Mr Mandela asserted that those states that seek to circumvent the UN represent a threat to global order. The Nobel Peace Prize winner noted that such perilous unilateralism demands the silence of others and exalted countries to have the courage to take an independent line and speak out against 'what is wrong'. Within the confines of diplomatic protocol and language it is hard to imagine a visiting dignitary offering a more withering critique of the spinelessness of recent Irish foreign policy.

6. The Meanings of Neutrality

The events that surrounded the war in Iraq generated considerable debate about the nature and status of Ireland's role in the wider world. The foreign policy of the Irish Republic has been traditionally characterised by an ill-defined notion of 'neutrality'. The idea that Ireland represents a neutral country has been severely damaged, however, by the decision of the government to allow the US military to land, refuel and, allegedly, train at Shannon airport. The revelation that thousands of American troops were routinely passing through the state en route to the Persian Gulf inevitably inflamed a large swathe of Irish popular opinion. The criticism that was aired by anti-war activists and in time by sections of the media began to bring matters of foreign policy to the very centre of political debate in Ireland. Initially, the response of the government was to seek to avoid the issue of Shannon in the hope that it might quickly disappear. The anxiety expressed by a growing body of citizens and journalists meant, however, that senior Irish politicians were unable to escape a debate on the status of Irish neutrality, the prospect of which clearly made them very nervous indeed.

In the early months of this year, the issues that were signified by the passage of US troops through Shannon came to dominate public life in the state. The response of the government to the revived debate on neutrality was inevitably marked by a lack of both clarity and principle. The statements of Ministers included two distinctive interpretations of the issue of Shannon which are worth drawing out for closer consideration.

The first of these sought simply to insist that the movement of US troops and equipment through Ireland had no significance whatsoever. The Foreign Minister, Mr Cowen, stated repeatedly that the activities in which the US military had been engaging had been going on for many years without a great deal of controversy. The government was keen to depict the use the stopover of US troops as merely a routine commercial practice that should be consigned to the category of custom and practice. The 'logic' of official reasoning seemed to assert that the American military has passed through Shannon many times in the past and if we were neutral before then surely we must be neutral still.

Shannon is one of a number of European airports used for many years as a transit by US aircraft, mainly for the transit of military personnel to a wide range of destinations. It appears that Shannon is chosen by the US because it offers quick turn-around with efficient and friendly service (Mr Cowen, Dáil Éireann, January 13 2003).

Ireland's geographical position places it on the main flight path between North America and Europe. Shannon was initially developed as a refuelling point for Transatlantic flights when limited aircraft range obliged most aircraft to touch down in Ireland when travelling to and from the US.

For many decades, military aircraft of various nationalities have been refuelling at Shannon or, as aircraft ranges have extended, overflying Ireland on their way to or from North America. There has also been a practice, again going back decades, for civilian aircraft carrying US and Canadian military personnel and civilian staff to refuel at Shannon on their way to and from various bases around the world. Shannon has continued to be popular

because of its efficient and friendly service. This business has brought jobs and income to the wider Shannon area and generated revenue for Aer Rianta.

...The practice of facilitating the overflight and landing of US military aircraft and personnel dates back to a time before not a few of us in this House were even born. This practice continued throughout the Cold War, and all the conflicts, wars and upheavals of the last fifty years. It has been maintained under successive governments, comprising various political parties. Claims that this Government has adopted a new policy which undermines Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality are nonsense. (Mr Cowen, Dáil Éireann, January 29 2003).

The second response of the Irish government to the debate on neutrality was no more convincing but potentially a lot more sinister. While the official position was to hold the line that Irish neutrality remained stoutly intact there was also a discernible shift in the discourse of certain prominent political figures. As the debate stoked by events at Shannon gathered pace, the Irish Foreign Minister came increasingly to draw a distinction between two unspecified versions of neutrality. In statements in the Dáil and elsewhere, Mr Cowen was wont to assert that while the Irish Republic was militarily neutral it was not politically so. While the distinction has never been clearly explained, it suggests a range of possibilities which are profoundly troubling. At best, it might be intended simply to acknowledge that the Irish Republic has certain cultural and strategic connections to other western states. At worst it could – as the Green TD John Gormley²² has pointed out – be taken to suggest that while we may not yet formally belong to any military alliance this is merely a matter of time and detail. It is hardly surprising then that the inscrutable distinction between military and political neutrality that the Foreign Minister has chosen to invoke has heightened the anxieties of those who consider that the Irish Republic is gradually and inexorably being drawn into the institutions of western military hegemony.

Although shifts in official discourse were clearly discernible, the government line throughout the Shannon controversy remained consistent in at least one crucial regard. Time and again, the Taoiseach and Foreign Minister asserted that allowing the US military to refuel in County Clare did not amount to participation in the war against Iraq. In spite of the fact that tens of thousands of American troops had passed through the state, it was claimed, the status of the Irish Republic as a neutral country remained firmly intact.

In 1990/1991, the then Government made clear the position that the extension of overflight and landing facilities at Shannon did not give rise to any question of Ireland's declaring war or participating in a war in the Persian Gulf. The Government have decided that they will continue to make these peripheral facilities available. **This does not change our general policy of military neutrality. Ireland will not participate in this conflict and we have undertaken no commitments** (Mr Cowen, Dáil Éireann, March 20 2003).

The professions of neutrality that were routinely issued by the Irish political establishment fail to stand up of course to even the most cursory examination. The decision to go to war against Iraq that the Bush administration evidently took some time last year

necessarily entailed an enormous logistical operation. The massing of forces in the Persian Gulf inevitably demanded that large numbers of US troops be allowed safe passage through places like Shannon airport. If countries such as our own had not cooperated then the American military operation against Iraq could not have proceeded with the speed and ferocity that it did. The official claim that allowing US troops to use an Irish airport as one of their principal staging posts en route to the Persian Gulf did not amount to participation in the war is one, therefore, that simply makes no sense whatsoever. The logistical details that constitute preparation for war cannot logically be separated from the conduct of war that they allow. If American soldiers had not been able to pass through places like Shannon airport would not be in a position as we speak to shoot dead unarmed civilians on the streets of Fallujah, Mosul and Baghdad.

The absurdity of the claim made by the Dublin government that assisting those preparing for war does not constitute participation in war becomes immediately apparent when we draw comparisons with other realms and instances of politically motivated violence. Take, by way of example, the person who offers their home as shelter to Republican gunmen in the full knowledge that the latter are intent on killing police officers in the six counties. Would that individual be considered to shoulder some responsibility for the deaths that might subsequently occur? Would a court of law accept the argument of the hospitable sympathiser when he claims that although he offered safe passage to those who carried out the crimes, he cannot be considered to have been involved in them? Hardly.

The argument that allowing the US military to use Shannon airport fails to accord not only with commonsense but also, more crucially, with the terms of international law. The Hague Convention of 1907 sets out the meanings and obligations of 'neutrality' within international law. The Irish government is required to acknowledge and respect these provisions under the terms of Article 29.3 of the Constitution. One of the strictures of the Hague Convention determines that a 'neutral state may not permit the movement of large numbers of troops or munitions of one belligerent State through its territory en route to a theatre of war with another'. In allowing US military personnel and hardware to pass through Shannon airport, the Irish government has clearly violated this established tenet and practice of international law. The claims of the political establishment that the Irish Republic remains a neutral state should be regarded, therefore, as entirely threadbare. This particular reading was endorsed during the recent important case that the anti-war activist Ed Horgan brought to the Irish High Court. In his judgement, Justice Kearns noted that the passage of large numbers of American soldiers through the state meant that the Irish Republic could not, in terms of the definitions offered in the Hague Convention, be considered a neutral country.

7. Absolving the Official Conscience – the Conduct of the War and Its Aftermath

On March 20 2003, the Taoiseach placed a motion before the Dáil which set out the official position on the war that had broken out only a matter of hours earlier. The terms of the motion set out the principles that the Irish government hoped would govern the conduct of the war and the subsequent reconstruction of Iraq. Three of the commitments and aspirations expressed by Mr Ahern are germane to our discussion here and are therefore drawn out for closer examination below.

First, the Taoiseach expressed the commitment of the Irish government to 'the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq'. The idea expressed here that the affairs and future of Iraq is a matter for the people who live there is of course entirely honourable and reasonable. It is, however, a principle that is unlikely ever to be properly realised. Since the downfall of Saddam Hussein, the United States has set about installing a distinctly colonial mode of governance²³. All of the principal positions of political and bureaucratic authority in Iraq are currently held by Americans. While Washington talks a great deal about the transition to democracy in Iraq such a process is likely to be both tortuous and partial. It is hard to imagine a future in which Iraq is administered in a manner other than that of a colonial possession of the United States.

The manner in which the United States has conducted – and presumably will continue to conduct – itself since the toppling of Saddam clearly violates those principles of sovereignty and independence to which the Irish government has professed its allegiance. The profoundly colonial approach that the Bush administration has taken to the reconstruction of Iraq has, entirely predictably, failed to draw criticism from the political establishment in Dublin. The Irish government is only too quick to express its belief in the sanctity of democracy. In practice, though, it seems quite prepared to accept the abuse of autocratic authority as long as it carries the endorsement of the United States.

Second, Mr Ahern called on all participants in the Iraqi war to 'respect the provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular, the Geneva Conventions'. This perfectly respectable demand on the part of the Irish government would almost inevitably, however, fall upon deaf ears. The United States and its allies predictably claimed to have conducted an impeccably humane and civilised military campaign. In reality, however, the coalition of the willing engaged in countless practices that would seem to contravene international law. The following are just a few examples:

(i) the United States failed to fulfil its obligation under article 43 of the Hague Convention and article 6 of the Fourth Geneva Convention to maintain, as far as possible, public order and safety. While American soldiers devoted their energies to securing the oil fields, armed mobs were given free rein to loot shops, museums and hospitals.

(ii) the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which the United States

is a signatory, prohibits the arbitrary taking of life by, among others, the forces of the state. Nonetheless, American troops have shot dead unarmed Iraqi civilians on a number of occasions and most dramatically in Fallujah in April.

(iii) articles 55 and 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention oblige all occupying powers to ensure food and medical supplies to the general population and to maintain hospitals and other medical services 'to the fullest extent of the means available to it'. It is abundantly clear that the United States and its allies have failed to live up to these crucial legal obligations. For long periods, the ordinary people of Iraq have been denied electricity, food and safe drinking water. While American soldiers were quick to secure the Ministry of Oil in Baghdad they were rather slower when it came to protecting Iraqi hospitals. The budget that was garnered to allow the United States to bombard Iraq inevitably dwarfs that which will be devoted to reconstructing the country.

The list could of course go on and on. The crucial point to note though is that the US and UK have infringed various codes of international law that determine the conduct of war. It is with crushing inevitability that we have to note that to date no establishment politician in the Irish Republic has been moved to raise questions as to the conduct in Iraq of American soldiers who may well have enjoyed a brief stopover in Shannon. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that supposedly cherished principles are quickly jettisoned by the Irish government when they raise the uncomfortable prospect of having to raise criticisms of that 'beacon of justice and liberty' the United States²⁴.

Third, the Taoiseach appealed to 'the United Nations to assume a central role in securing the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people and the reconstruction of Iraq'. It is, however, deeply unlikely that the UN will be able to exercise a great deal of influence upon the development of Iraq in the years to come. The hubris and ambition of the political and military establishment in Washington are currently such that it will not countenance any challenge to its authority, in newly 'liberated' Iraq not least. It has been evident all along that the United States was extremely wary of allowing the UN a role in the rebuilding of Iraq. The Bush administration has of course been especially reluctant to allow the return of weapons inspectors to complete their work. On the face of it, the advent of Security Council Resolution 1483 would seem to mark a change of heart in Washington that will enable the UN to play a more active part in the future of Iraq. It remains likely though that the roles afforded to the UN will be those that serve the strategic interests of the United States and fail to impede upon American authority. The most likely role for the United Nations is as handmaiden to the real imperial power. Only the most impressionable would expect such an outcome to be greeted with criticism from the Irish government.

8. The Future of Shannon Airport

Throughout the entire period of the crisis over Iraq, the Irish government sought to suggest that efforts to halt the use of Shannon by the US military would have grave economic repercussions, not least at the airport itself. Establishment politicians were keen to depict themselves as having the best interests of Shannon at heart and to denounce anti-war protestors as irresponsible individuals concerned merely with moral posturing.

The attempts of the government to establish a conflict of interests between those who are economically dependent upon Shannon airport and those opposed to its employment as a staging post for American troops were always completely disingenuous. The main union that represents workers at the airport, SIPTU, was in fact an affiliate of the anti-war movement. Moreover, speakers at demonstrations in Shannon were at pains to point out that they saw the airport workers as their allies and wanted to maintain the transatlantic stop over.

In the months that led up to the war in the Persian Gulf, Ministers were keen to portray themselves as protecting the interests of those who are dependent upon Shannon airport for their livelihood. Once the initial hostilities in Iraq had come to a close, however, the government began to show its true colours.

Transport Minister Seamus Brennan has announced recently that he would not oppose an 'open skies' policy which would in practice entail the removal of the transatlantic stopover. The adoption of this strategy would inevitably spell devastation for Shannon airport. Commentators have suggested that the future of the airport might lie in providing facilities for low cost airlines or else concentrating on seasonal package holidays. In both cases, the likely effect on employees would be a growth in contract, seasonal and low paid employment.

While the strategy announced by the government appeared to come out of the blue, there are good grounds for believing that it had been set on this course of action for quite some time. The World Economic Forum has drawn up a report known as the Lisbon Review which evaluates the commitments made at a summit of EU governments in March 2000. In Lisbon, EU heads of state declared their ambition to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world by 2010'.

The WEF claims that a road map for reaching this goal was also agreed. Among the elements of this master plan were specific measures to advance de-regulation and an agreed timetable stipulating when they should be achieved. Significantly, 2004 was set as the date for the realisation of a Single European Sky, that is, the full de-regulation of all flights in Europe.

In other words, the Irish government knew for some time that the open skies policy was in train. Ministers must have known that this would mean the abolition of the transatlantic stop over at Shannon. However, they only chose to break the news to Shannon employees after the US led war against Iraq finished its first phase.

The evidence of the duplicity and hypocrisy of this current government continues to accumulate.

9. The Wrong People in the Dock – Drop the Charges Against Anti-War Activists

Article 2 of the Hague Convention states that belligerent states 'are forbidden to move troops or convoy of either munitions of war or supplies across the territory of a Neutral Power'. In light of this particular provision, there are only two possible interpretations of the use of Shannon by the American military. Either the Irish Republic is no longer a neutral state or the United States has broken an established practice under international law. If the former is the case then the Irish government should say so. If the latter is the case then legal proceedings should proceed immediately.

The issues that were raised by American troops passing through Shannon represented – and were understood to represent – a potentially fatal problem for politicians running a state that is after all meant to be neutral. The initial response of the government when questions began to be asked at what was happening at the airport was to attempt to conceal the matter in the hope that it would disappear. When an increasingly outraged public began to insist that the issue of our participation in the US war drive would not simply go away the response of establishment politicians was to resort to half truths and increasingly spurious justifications.

What were Irish people to do when many perceived that their government seemed to be more answerable to the US embassy than their own electorate?

The Irish Anti-War Movement called huge demonstrations to indicate the scale of public opposition. On February 15 2003, more than 100 000 people came on to the streets of Dublin to express their disgust at the warmongering of the United States and the collusion of the Irish government.

Other activists such as Mary Kelly and five members of the Catholic Workers Movement felt morally obligated to take direct action to try to halt Ireland's involvement in war. They have cited in their defence the Nuremberg Charter which authorises individuals to act when international law has been breached. As Justice Jackson, Chief Prosecutor in the 1945 Nuremberg War Crimes Trial put it, the 'very essence of the Nuremberg Charter is that individuals have international duties which transcend national obligations of obedience imposed by the individual state'.

There is of course a great deal of debate about the status of international law. There are also very few who would compare what happened recently in Iraq to the genocide conducted by the Nazi regime. However, the military campaign against the Saddam regime was a brutal, illegal and immoral war in which more than 10,000 people lost their lives. The pretext for that war – the search for weapons of mass destruction - has now been entirely discredited. With it has gone any plausible justification for granting the US military permission to refuel at Shannon airport.

This now raises serious questions about why the public prosecutor is continuing to hound those who attempted to disable the war planes using Shannon. There are in fact good grounds for believing that he should be scrutinising the conduct of his own government rather than those citizens whose actions accorded with views of most Irish people.

We therefore call for the immediate dropping of charges against all those who took

part in direct action and civil disobedience at Shannon airport. We suggest that a sustained campaign of public pressure now needs to be mounted in support of the defendants.

The people in the dock should not be Irish citizens who acted out of conscience to prevent an illegal and immoral war but rather Irish politicians who acted without conscience in support of it.

10. Conclusion

The Irish government released a report on its progress since being returned to office a year earlier. Amid the predictable stream of self-praise, the coalition partners took time to reflect upon the recent course of Irish foreign policy. While acknowledging that the Iraq crisis had represented a singular challenge, the Taoiseach and Tanaiste felt justified in concluding that their response had been 'both sensible and principled'

The evidence that we have presented in this dossier suggests a rather less flattering evaluation of recent Irish foreign policy. The manner in which it has responded to the international crisis over Iraq has served merely to highlight yet further the distinctly iniquitous nature of the present Irish government. While many adjectives might be employed to describe the recent course of Irish foreign policy neither 'sensible' nor 'principled' would really be appropriate. The conduct of the political establishment in Dublin has evidently and consistently been determined not by the welfare of the Irish people but rather by the insatiable imperial demands of that small band of right wing fanatics that currently runs the United States. While the Irish government has ceaselessly emphasised that international crises such as that over Iraq can only be resolved through the United Nations, it has remained silent as what remains of the credibility and authority of that organisation evaporates in the face of American unilateralism. Although quick to highlight the suffering that the people of Iraq endured under the regime of Saddam Hussein, senior politicians in Dublin appear to remain oblivious to the deaths of Iraqi civilians at the hands of a seemingly unaccountable US military.

The information that we have assembled in this document offers a damning judgement of those who have shaped current Irish foreign policy. The critique that we have advanced is prompted not only by a deep disgust about what has happened in the recent past but also a genuine concern about what is likely to happen in the near future. Those who conceived of the audaciously ill-named 'war on terror' stated explicitly from the outset that it would be a 'war without end'. The imperial designs of those who have usurped power in Washington simply have no bounds. In the years to come, there will be plenty of other wars that will require large bodies of American troops to pass through the regional airports of supposedly neutral states.

The future into which we face then is one that will almost inevitably be marred by further crisis and conflict. In light of the distinctly fraught nature of international relations, there is a critical need for a radical reappraisal of Irish foreign policy. The political establishment in Dublin has perennially sought to depict the Irish Republic as an independent force for good in the world. In recent years, however, the words and deeds of the Irish government have been prompted not by the interests of the powerless and oppressed but rather those of the powerful and oppressive. If the Irish Republic is to provide a genuinely independent and progressive voice during the perilous times that undoubtedly lie ahead then the conduct of Irish foreign policy needs to be radically transformed. The compilation of this dossier represents in part an attempt to sustain a debate that might in time produce such an outcome.

Appendix: Recommendations

1. Matters arising from the use of Shannon airport by the US military

We call upon the government to acknowledge:

- that by allowing the US military to use Shannon airport it made a substantial and direct contribution to an illegal war;
 - that by allowing the US military to use Shannon it was in breach of the Irish Constitution and the Irish tradition of neutrality;
 - that by allowing US troops to carry weapons and wear uniforms in public areas of Shannon airport it was in breach of domestic law;
- and
- that it deliberately misled the Dáil and the Irish people about the scale and nature of US military activities at Shannon.

In light of the above, we demand that:

- the government apologises to the Dáil and the Irish people for having misled them on what was happening at Shannon airport;
 - the Dáil foreign affairs committee should thoroughly investigate the use of Shannon by the US military and that it should call before it the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs;
 - the Attorney General should investigate immediately the breaches of domestic law that resulted from the use of Shannon by the US military;
- and
- the advice that the Attorney General gave the government on the legality of the Iraqi war should be published and put before the Dáil foreign affairs committee.

2. Matters pertaining to weapons of mass destruction

We call upon the government to acknowledge:

- that to date no weapons of mass destruction have been uncovered in Iraq;
 - that figures within the US and UK administrations fabricated evidence of weapons of mass destruction in order to manufacture consent for a war against Iraq;
- and
- that under different circumstances these fabrications might have led the Irish Republic into an illegal war.

In light of the above we demand that the government:

- immediately demands an explanation and apology from the US and UK governments in relation to the fabrication of evidence of weapons of mass destruction;
- and
- apologises to the Dáil and the Irish people for having, inadvertently or otherwise, misled

them on the matter of weapons of mass destruction.

3. Matters pertaining to the United Nations

We call upon the government to:

- acknowledge that it consistently argued that *only* a resolution brokered through the United Nations could constitute a just and lasting outcome to the Iraq crisis;
- affirm the assertion of Mr Nelson Mandela that those countries that circumvent the United Nations are a threat to global stability;

and

- affirm the assertion of Mr Nelson Mandela that countries should have the courage to take an independent course and speak out against the wrongs committed by the powerful.

In light of the above we demand that the government:

- condemns the unilateral decision of the UK and US governments to go to war against Iraq;
- and
- declares this decision to have been immoral and illegal.

4. Matters pertaining to Irish neutrality

We call upon the government to:

- acknowledge that the tradition of Irish foreign policy has been one of neutrality;
- acknowledge that in allowing tens of thousands of American troops to pass through Shannon airport it violated that tradition of neutrality;
- acknowledge that in allowing tens of thousands of American troops to pass through Shannon airport it violated the strictures of the 1907 Hague Convention in relation to the conduct of neutral states;
- and
- clarify what it means when it draws a distinction between military and political neutrality.

In light of the above we demand that:

- the tradition of neutrality should be given legal status and enshrined in the Constitution.

5. Matters pertaining to the conduct and aftermath of the Iraq war

We call upon the government to acknowledge that:

- it demanded that the 'coalition of the willing' should respect the sovereignty and independence of the Iraqi people;
- it demanded that combatants should observe the codes of international law and, in particular, those of the Geneva Convention;
- it demanded that the United Nations should be afforded a principal role in the reconstruction

of Iraq;

and

- all three of these demands have been systematically violated or ignored.

In light of the above we demand that the government:

- condemn the conduct of the US and UK during and after the Iraq war;
- and
- denounce the war and the subsequent occupation of Iraq as illegal

6. Matters pertaining to the prosecution of anti-war activists

We call upon the government to acknowledge that:

- anti-war activists facing criminal prosecution for direct actions at Shannon airport were acting in accordance with the views of the majority of Irish people;
- and

- anti-war activists facing criminal prosecution for direct actions at Shannon airport were acting as a matter of conscience and in order to prevent the commission of much greater crimes.

In light of the above we demand that the government:

- drops immediately all charges against those involved in direct actions at Shannon airport and awards them full legal costs.

Appendix C: Summary of Key Recommendations

In light of the evidence that we have presented in our dossier, we demand that:

- the government apologises to the Dáil and the Irish people for having misled them on the scale and nature of US military activity at Shannon airport
- the Dail foreign affairs committee thoroughly investigate the use of Shannon by the US military and that it should call before it the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs
- the Attorney General investigate immediately the breaches of domestic law that resulted from the use of Shannon by the US military
- the advice that the Attorney General gave the government on the legality of the Iraqi war should be published in full and put before the Dáil foreign affairs committee
- the government immediately demands an explanation and apology from the US and UK governments in relation to the fabrication of evidence of weapons of mass destruction
- the government apologises to the Dáil and the Irish people for having, inadvertently or otherwise, misled them on the matter of weapons of mass destruction
- the tradition of neutrality should be given legal status and enshrined in the Constitution
- the government condemns the abuse of human rights laws by the US and UK military in Iraq
- the government drops immediately all charges against those involved in direct actions at Shannon airport and awards them full legal costs.

Notes

- 1 These figures were provided by Aer Rianta and reported in the *Limerick Post*, Friday June 20 2003.
- 2 Dáil Debates Vol. 557 12 November 2002
- 3 Dáil Debates Vol. 558 26 November 2003
- 4 *ibid*
- 5 'Staff at Shannon Confirm Law is being Flouted', *Observer* January 12th 2003.
- 6 *ibid*
- 7 Embassy of Ireland, Washington 'Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on US Overflights and Situation in Iraq' 13 January 2003
- 8 Dáil Debates 20th March 2003
- 9 Embassy of Ireland, Washington 'Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on US Overflights and Situation in Iraq', January 13 2003.
- 10 'Shannon Garda Asked to Investigate Aircraft' *Indymedia*, January 14th.
- 11 Quoted in Stop the War against Iraq -The Case against Bush and Blair (London: SWP, 2002) p 3
- 12 F. O'Toole, *Meanwhile Back at the Ranch: The Politics of Irish Beef*, (London: Vintage 1995), p. 205.
- 13 Michael White and Nicholas Watt, 'Blair faces revolt as US admits doubts', *The Guardian*, Thursday May 29, 2003.
- 14 Sarah Left, 'WMD in Iraq: who said what, and when', *The Guardian*, Thursday May 29, 2003.
- 15 Raymond Whitaker, Paul Lashmar and Andy McSmith, "Revealed: How Blair used discredited WMD 'evidence'", *The Independent on Sunday*, June 1 2003.
- 16 Glen Ragwala, 'The lies that led us into war...'. *The Independent on Sunday*, June 1 2003.
- 17 Even some of those who were unequivocally supportive of the war are increasingly outraged at the likelihood that talk of 'weapons of mass destruction' was in fact merely a ruse to secure a war motivated by other concerns. See, for instance, David Aaronovitch, 'Those weapons had better be there ...', *The Guardian*, April 29 2003.
- 18 Dail Debate, 28 May 2003.
- 19 See the letter by Ed Horgan to *the Irish Times*, June 26 2003.
- 20 'At the same time, if globalisation created unprecedented opportunity, it is also accompanied, worldwide, by difficult and resilient challenges. These include lack of development and economic marginalisation for billions of people; international terrorism; **weapons of mass destruction**; and organised crime to name but a few of the more prominent'. (Mr Ahern, World Association of Newspapers Congress, RDS, Dublin, June 9 2003).
- 21 Lorna Siggins, 'Mandela calls for a defence of the UN', *Irish Times*, June 21 2003.
- 22 See, for instance, his speech in the Dáil on February 18 2003, when he commented that the distinction about neutrality 'is unique to this country and is the sort of Irish solution to an Irish problem that has typified Irish foreign policy for decades. To any impartial or objective observer, it means we are not yet members of a military alliance, but everything else goes'.
- 23 Seamus Milne, 'The right to resist'. *The Guardian*, June 19 2003.
- 24 This phrase appeared in speech that was delivered in the White House a week before the United States chose to overturn international law and opinion and launch unilateral strikes upon Iraq. The address witnessed the Taoiseach at his most craven as he remarked: 'The world acknowledges the United States, with its immense power and its **status as a beacon of justice and liberty**, as a leader within the United Nations'.

Title: The Irish Republic, The United States and The Iraq War: A Critical Appraisal

Organisation: Irish Anti-War Movement

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Date: 2003

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