

Triple Lock Fact Sheet

April 2026

Introduction

On 28 February 2026, the US and Israel launched an illegal assault on Iran that ignited a regional war with global ramifications. In response, at least eight European states deployed warships to the eastern Mediterranean. In the weeks that followed the Irish government failed to condemn the illegal US - Israeli strikes and refused to characterise them as illegal even though the UN Secretary General had recognised them as such. This failure comes at a time when the government is in the process of revoking legislation known as the Triple Lock that has kept Irish troops out of illegal wars. Without it there will be no impediment to where Irish troops may be deployed. If the government 'can't say' that a war is illegal, how can it decide whether to deploy troops to it?

This fact sheet was compiled in an effort to respond to the many questions that arose about the Triple Lock during the Neutrality Roadshow, an initiative that travelled around Ireland hosting conversations on the importance of safeguarding the Triple Lock and strengthening Irish neutrality.



What is the Triple Lock?

[The Triple Lock](#) concerns the deployment of Irish troops on overseas missions. It sets out that for more than 12 Irish troops to be dispatched on overseas missions there must be:

- (1) Cabinet/government approval
- (2) Dáil Éireann approval
- (3) The mission must have a United Nations (UN) mandate from the Security Council or General Assembly.

The Triple Lock is a safeguard that keeps Irish troops out of illegal wars by ensuring that their deployment is in line with the UN Charter. The UN dimension of the Triple Lock has become intolerable for the government and it now plans to remove it.

When did Ireland begin deploying troops overseas?

Ireland [joined](#) the UN in 1955, began [deploying](#) troops on UN peace-keeping missions in 1958, and in 1960 introduced [legislation](#) which committed the state to deploying troops on UN mandated missions only.

Why did Ireland commit to deploying troops only under a UN mandate?

The UN was born out of the ashes of World War II '[to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war](#)'. By committing to UN mandated missions only, Ireland, as a neutral country in the volatile post WWII - Cold War era, was essentially saying that its engagement in multilateral affairs would be guided by international law and a desire to keep the peace.

When did the term Triple Lock come about? How does it relate to the Nice and Lisbon Treaties?

In 2001, the electorate voted [No](#) to Nice because of fears that it would undermine

neutrality. In 2002, at a European Council meeting in Seville [a National Declaration](#) was made stating that: ‘the participation of ... the Irish Defence Forces in overseas operations, including those carried out under the European security and defence policy, requires

- a. the authorisation of the operation by the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations,
- b. the agreement of the Irish Government and
- c. the approval of Dáil Éireann, in accordance with Irish law’

This Declaration, which became known as the Triple Lock, was a repackaging of the 1960 Act. On the basis of this Declaration the electorate voted in favour of Nice II. Following the rejection of Lisbon I in 2008, Ireland’s commitment to the Triple Lock was reaffirmed, including in the [referendum booklets](#) distributed to each household before the second referendum. On this basis the electorate voted yes to Lisbon II and [a protocol](#) was attached to the Treaty asserting that it ‘[does not affect or prejudice Ireland’s traditional policy of military neutrality](#).’

How does a UN mandated mission come about?

The UN [Security Council](#) (UNSC) is responsible for international peace and security. It has 15 members, five of whom are permanent (P5) and hold veto powers. UN missions are authorised by the Security Council, though the UN General Assembly may approve missions under the [Uniting for Peace](#) framework. NATO and EU led missions may, at times, have a UN mandate.

The government claims that UN P5 members have a veto over Irish troop deployment. Is this true?

No. This argument is misleading and false. It is designed to have people believe that P5 members specifically authorise or veto the deployment of Irish troops overseas. This is not the case. The UNSC authorises or vetoes missions as a whole. It does not specifically authorise or veto Ireland’s participation in a mission.

The wording of the Seville Declaration reflects this where it says ‘the authorisation of the operation’. It does not say the authorisation of Irish troops.

If a mission were vetoed it either wouldn’t take place or if it were operational it would be wound down. In such a situation, no state would have a mandate to deploy troops and to do so outside the UN system would be in contravention of the UN Charter.

Are P5 vetoes of missions common?

No. In 1999 China [vetoed](#) the continuation of a UN mission in Macedonia in a dispute regarding Taiwan. There are no other examples of a peacekeeping mission being vetoed.

The government says the UNSC is in deadlock, no new missions have been approved since 2014 and therefore Ireland must be able to deploy troops without a UN mandate Is this true?

No. There are currently [11 active UN peace-keeping missions](#) around the world. Their mandates are renewed annually at the UNSC without issue. Ireland can deploy to all of these missions without impediment.

Moreover, of the 284 resolutions brought before the UNSC between 2020 and 2024, 264 [passed](#) with no P5 member exercising a veto.

UNSC vetoes can be highly contentious and deeply problematic but those issues will not be resolved by Ireland acting outside a UN mandate.

So what will happen if Ireland defies a UN veto and acts outside a UN mandate?

If a P5 member vetoes a mission and Irish troops deploy under another mandate, for example as part of an EU or NATO led mission,, that would mean Irish troops are deployed on foreign soil in the knowledge that this is against the express wishes of a global superpower and in breach of the UN charter.

The government claims that it must dismantle the Triple Lock to ‘take back our sovereignty’. Is this true?

No. There is no relationship between the UN and Irish sovereignty. In our Constitution, sovereignty is vested in the people. When we exercised our sovereign right to vote in the Nice and Lisbon referendums, we did so on the basis that the Triple Lock would be maintained. The Triple Lock, therefore, is not an external imposition on the state, it was created in response to a demand from the people. Thus far there has been no demand from the people - the sovereign - to remove it.

Removing the Triple Lock sounds highly undemocratic. Is it?

Yes. The people of Ireland approved two EU treaties only once guarantees in the form of the Triple Lock were given. Removing it without consulting the people is an affront to the democratic process.

Who decides when Irish troops are deployed?

All decisions on troop deployment rest solely with the Irish government. The Triple Lock simply commits the government to deploying troops on UN mandated missions only. Moreover, in light of the evolving nature of UN missions, for example the recently approved [Gaza stabilisation force](#), the government should exercise caution when deploying troops overseas, even when a UN mandate has been secured.

The government says the world has changed and the Triple Lock is no longer fit for purpose. What does this mean?

When the government says the Triple Lock is no longer fit for purpose it is essentially saying that the UN is no longer fit for purpose, though the UN was designed precisely for the purpose of dealing with geopolitical tension through dialogue and diplomacy,

and thereby avoiding unsanctioned military deployments and war.

At present, the world is experiencing heightened instability and the normalisation of war and genocide. This is precisely because states are undermining the UN system, not because of it. If states continue along this trajectory geopolitical tensions will continue to increase rather than dissipate. It is the responsibility of each state to redouble efforts to uphold international law, not to find work-arounds so they can operate outside it. This is essentially what removing the Triple Lock would amount to.

The government says the Triple Lock and neutrality are unrelated. Is this true?

No, neutrality and the Triple Lock are intrinsically linked. Consider for example if a mission to Ukraine or Palestine were vetoed by Russia or the US respectively, and Ireland were to deploy as part of a force operating outside the UN system, that would see Ireland:

- Participating in a military operation that is expressly opposed by a global superpower and a party to the conflict.
- Becoming embroiled in a mission that is not a traditional peace-keeping mission but a peace-enforcement war- fighting operation that is very unlikely to bring about peace.
- Losing its neutral status under international law by taking sides in a conflict.

The government uses the term ‘military neutrality’ and defines it as being ‘characterised by non-membership of military alliances or mutual defence arrangements’. What does this mean?

The term ‘military neutrality’ has no basis in international law. The term ‘neutrality’ does.

Neutrality is ‘the legal status arising from the abstention of a state from all participation in a war between other states.’ It is anchored in customary international law and

codified in international treaties. There is also a UN resolution on neutrality, which sets out that ‘national policies of neutrality are aimed at promoting the use of preventive diplomacy, including through the prevention of conflict, mediation, good offices, fact-finding missions, negotiation, the use of special envoys, informal consultations, peace-building and targeted development activities.’

In respect of domestic law, in *Horgan v. An Taoiseach* 2003, though the plaintiff ultimately lost the case, the High Court found that the practice of allowing US military use of Shannon Airport was not compatible with international law.

There is no basis in international law for ‘military neutrality’ and less so for the government’s characterisation of it as non-membership of military alliances such as NATO. Nevertheless, this flawed definition has been deployed by successive governments to permit incremental engagement in military structures while maintaining the facade that the state is neutral. This is a strategic decision to offset the public outrage that would follow if the government were honest about the extent to which it has been actively eroding neutrality for decades and betraying the will of the people.

If neutrality were defined as ‘non membership of NATO’ this would see the vast majority of the world’s 193 states being classified as ‘militarily neutral.’

The Taoiseach recently claimed that Ireland can be both militarily neutral while also militarily standing with a country at war. Is this possible?

No. These are opposing concepts. It is delusional to claim that Ireland can hold both positions at once.

Does the Triple Lock impede Ireland from evacuating Irish citizens?

No. [Article 3 \(1\)\(f\) of the Defence Amendment Act 2006](#) permits the deployment of troops overseas to undertake ‘humanitarian tasks in response to an actual or potential disaster or emergency.’

Would the Triple Lock impede Ireland from responding to an attack on undersea infrastructure in Irish waters?

No. The Triple Lock concerns overseas deployment and is not engaged when troops deploy in Irish waters.

Would the Triple Lock impede Ireland from defending itself if it were attacked?

No. The Triple Lock concerns overseas deployment and is unrelated to Ireland's capacity to defend its territorial integrity.

Do Irish troops currently participate in EU and NATO-led activities?

Yes. Irish troops regularly participate in EU Battlegroup (EUBG) and NATO-led training exercises though full deployment on missions would be impeded by the Triple Lock unless a UN mandate were secured.

EUBGs are predominantly composed of NATO forces and structured for deployment to combat zones. They focus on the interoperability of troops and compatibility of military equipment across EU states. Ireland participates in the [Coalition of the Willing](#), which has openly spoken of plans to deploy troops to Ukraine and recently suggested [engaging](#) the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEP).

Is the government's increase in military spending linked to its embrace of EU military structures?

Yes. Increased military spending and targeted procurement of military equipment should be understood, not as part of a strategy to defend the state, but rather to ensure Ireland's seamless military integration into NATO-led operations and EU military structures. This is being done without becoming a full member of NATO and

thereby avoiding the scrutiny, oversight, accountability and public uproar that would accompany full integration. It is essentially de facto NATO membership by the backdoor and is much more dangerous. Meanwhile the government continues to say Ireland is 'militarily neutral' and has no plans to join NATO.

So how can Ireland defend itself?

Regardless of how much Ireland, as a small state that is not a military power, invests in military equipment, it is unlikely to deter a nuclear superpower from invading the country if it deems it necessary to do so for its military objectives. Our best defence is our neutrality. That means not posing a threat to other states and not participating in military alliances.

A robust understanding of security would see investment in measures that actually keep people safe - housing, health care, social services and climate crisis policies - not in militarised security, which will only increase the likelihood of Ireland becoming a target while being insufficient to defend the country if it comes under attack.

What will happen if the Triple Lock goes?

This or any future government will be able to deploy troops outside of the UN system to war-fighting missions on EU or NATO mandated missions. This would signal the death knell on Irish neutrality and usher in the most significant policy shift since the foundation of the state.

So, in conclusion, is Ireland safer with the Triple Lock?

Yes. Removing it will put people in harm's way. It is therefore essential that we protect the Triple Lock as a bare minimum, particularly considering that neutrality is not protected in the Constitution. We must reclaim and strengthen Irish neutrality by prohibiting the use of Shannon airport by the US and other militaries, withdrawing from EU military structures and demanding a full British withdrawal from Ireland.

**For further information
and updates see:**

Instagram: [@neutrality_now](#)

Website: www.keepirelandneutral.ie



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