



Working Papers in International Studies
Centre for International Studies
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Irish Nationalism
and the Israel-Palestinian conflict

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Working paper 2 of 2007

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Political actors in Northern Ireland, like those in most conflicts, have drawn international comparisons to their situation with other high profile situations. While there have been few formal proposals to directly import solutions from other conflicts there have been many attempts to use international comparison to explain the origin and nature of the conflict and to seek to gain sympathy by linking the Northern Ireland conflict to one of which a targeted audience has more knowledge and/ or strong views. There have also been attempts to promote other policy objectives via association with international events or organisations. This article seeks to examine the manner in which Irish nationalists have made links with the Israel-Palestinian conflict. It analyses two separate components of Irish nationalism. The foreign policy of the Republic of Ireland is analysed not only as the official expression of moderate Irish nationalism but also because it sets a broader ideological context within which even more radical voices are situated. Secondly it examines how Sinn Féin, as the largest expression of radical Irish nationalism and the majority party among the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, have sought to utilise comparison with the Palestinian cause in their political discourse over the period of the recent conflict and peace process.

There are of course also lively academic debates around the validity of such international comparisons. While a lot of academic writing on Northern Ireland tried to avoid the inevitable controversies of such comparison by focusing on the specificity of the Northern Ireland case and perhaps weakening its contribution to analysis of the conflict, there were significant debates in particular about the impact of settler colonial ideology, the role of consociational theory and in the 1990s the utility of comparative study of peace processes, in particular the Northern Ireland South African and Middle East cases.¹ However as such comparisons have been well articulated elsewhere, this chapter focuses on the particular comparisons and linkages made by political actors.

Ulster Unionists and Israel

While the focus of this article is Irish nationalism and their identification with the Palestinian cause this requires some contextualisation and in particular a brief analysis of the mirroring support by Ulster unionists for the state of Israel. Prior to the end of the Cold War, unionists had made limited use of international contacts. Ulster unionists have traditionally seen the wider international community as unsympathetic. They have frequently been described as having a ‘siege’ mentality – and not just by opponents.² Such parallels as were drawn tended to be with what were perceived as similar communities under siege such as Israel, Turkish Cypriots and apartheid South Africa or other ‘abandoned’ British settlers such as the white community in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.³ Ulster unionists have also seen the Northern Ireland conflict as classically ‘asymmetric’. Unionist politician Clifford Smyth quotes an Admiral Hugo Hendrik Bierman of the then South African Navy: ‘in the nature of this protracted war

¹ For good reviews of such literature see John McGarry *Northern Ireland and the Divided World* (Oxford University Press, 2001); John McGarry, John and Brendan O’Leary *Explaining Northern Ireland*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) and Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen (eds.) *A farewell to arms? : beyond the Good Friday Agreement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

² See Aughey, Arthur *Under Siege: Ulster Unionism and the Anglo-Irish Agreements*. (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1989).

³ Pamela Clayton, *Enemies and Passing Friends: settler ideologies in twentieth century Ulster*. (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 40-6. For direct examples see also *Combat*, August 1974 and September 1974; Jim Kilfedder, House of Commons, 6 March 1978, vol., 945, col. 1003; David Trimble, House of Commons, 30 October 1996, col. 633.

our enemies have the opportunity to attack time and again and to lose, whereas we shall have but one opportunity to lose'.⁴ In a similar vein and of direct relevance to this volume The Orange Order, comparing Northern Ireland to Israel, said: 'Having been betrayed before they [the Ulster people] are very alert now, for as Louis Gardner wrote, 'Ulster, like Israel, can only lose once'.⁵

Ulster Unionists perceived Britain to be under pressure from an international community sympathetic to Irish nationalism and they had an exaggerated sense of the diplomatic pressure flowing from such sympathy. Nonetheless unionists saw successive British Governments as being capable of negotiating a United Ireland without any significant threat to their own position, or to the rest of the British state. This view is expressed in various ways but generally emphasises that Northern Ireland is kept at arms length or is treated differently from England, Scotland or Wales.⁶ Unionists regularly drew attention to the record of the British Government in 'abandoning' its supporters in settler colonies when it decided to withdraw – again emphasising the identification with 'settlers' under siege. Independent unionist MP Jim Kilfedder for example said, 'all over the world where Britain has been kicked in the teeth by violence she has surrendered to the terrorists. Northern Ireland ...is no exception', and 'Northern Ireland will not be treated as the Khyber Pass and the North West Frontier of the 1970s, providing reminiscences for Ministers and for military mess dinners.' In response to guarantees from British ministers about unionists' position he retorted: 'were not such assurances given from these Dispatch Boxes to the unfortunate people of Kenya who were humiliated by the Mau-Mau ? But subsequently those evil men were welcomed by politicians here who had earlier condemned them.'⁷ Again the 'people' of Kenya in Kilfedder eyes were all settlers.

Ulster Unionists quite unselfconsciously moved between making common cause with traditional 'settler colonial' situations such as Rhodesia and Kenya to identification with isolated Israel, under siege in a hostile region. As white rule became not only discredited but increasingly unstable it was clear that drawing such parallels did the unionist cause more harm than good and nostalgia for colonialism is rarely heard after the 1980s. However parallels with Israel are still regularly drawn by mainstream unionist politicians and they remain strong supporters of Israeli state policy. Senior Ulster unionist Stephen King referred to 'Unionists' predominant identification with Israel'⁸ Dean Godson, Trimble's biographer claimed that 'Northern Ireland is one of the very few parts of Europe where there is a very wide measure of popular support in the majority community for the State of Israel.'⁹ Indeed in 2002 Belfast was

⁴ *Protestant Telegraph*, 15 June 1974.

⁵ Martin Smyth, Introduction to Orange Order pamphlet *The Twelfth*, 1982

⁶ For example see Arthur Aughey 'The Idea of the Union' in John Wilson Foster (ed.) *The Idea of the Union: Statements and Critiques in Support of the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. (Vancouver: Belcouver Press, 1995) and for some direct examples see Ian Paisley, House of Commons, 6 March 1972, vol. 832, col. 1040; James Kilfedder, House of Commons, 28 November 1974, vol. 882, col. 842 and 6 February 1976 *Co. Down Spectator*; Enoch Powell, House of Commons, 10 February 1987, vol. 110, col. 277.

⁷ For this and other examples see House of Commons, 28 March 1972 vol. 834, col. 283; 7 April 1977, vol. 929, col. 1390; 6 March 1978, vol. 945, col. 1003.

⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 April 2003. See also Stephen King and Bob McCartney MP, *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 October 2001.

⁹ Dean Godson is Associate Editor of the *Spectator*. His latest book is *Himself Alone: David Trimble & the Ordeal of Unionism* (2004), a study of the former Ulster Unionist Party leader. This *Jerusalem Viewpoints* is based on his presentation at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs on 2 September 2004. <http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp523.htm>

festooned with Israeli flags in unionist areas – prompting a wave of Palestinian flags in nationalist districts. The Israeli flags were backed up by supportive graffiti such as ‘Go on Sharon’ and ‘The West Bank of the Lagan [a unionist area] backs Ariel Sharon’.¹⁰ Again, after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006 there was widespread unionist support for Israel.¹¹ However there are signs of one or two cracks in this previous almost universal support. David Ervine of the small Progressive Unionist Party attended a protest rally during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006¹² and Ulster Unionist MP John Taylor, a member of the Middle East sub-committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in a statement on the death of Arafat, said his legacy was ‘the international community’s acceptance of the principle of an independent sovereign state of Palestine’ and that ‘A great memorial to his life would be the creation of a democratic Palestine’.¹³ While Taylor is well known for his maverick views it was still a very rare example of some support for Palestinians from a senior unionist figure.

The support for Israel and the Palestinians by unionists and nationalists respectively is therefore more than a simple reflection of ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’. Just as many unionists make common cause with Israel as an isolated state, based on settlers and their descendants and surrounded by hostile forces Irish nationalists saw the Palestinian cause through the lens of a nation struggling to achieve statehood and/or within a wider anti-imperialist ideology.

Moderate Nationalism and its support for Palestinian statehood

Moderate Irish nationalism, as represented through the Irish Government and Irish foreign policy has long expressed its support for Palestinian statehood and this inevitably also frames the context within which northern nationalists make common cause with Palestinians.¹⁴ The Irish Government has since 1967 supported UN resolution 242 and explicitly called for a full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. It balanced this position with support for Israel’s right to exist in security.¹⁵ Ireland had in fact recognised Israel in 1963 and despite its position on Palestinian self-determination was one of very few countries acceptable to both Israel and Egypt (UAR) as a country to provide troops to the expanded UNTSO after the 1967 war. Indeed while the numbers involved had been small up to that point Ireland had military officers in the region since the formation of the UNOGIL observer mission in 1958.¹⁶

This position has been maintained by all governments and is the context for regular statements on the Israel-Palestine conflict. In 2004 then Foreign Minister Brian Cowen made a statement welcoming the Geneva Initiative and the Saudi / Arab

¹⁰ *The Irish Times* 6 July 2002

¹¹ e.g. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/5246330.stm

¹² *Belfast Telegraph* 9 August 2006

¹³ *Irish News* 12 November 2004

¹⁴ This section focuses on Irish state policy but the SDLP in Northern Ireland shares a similar perspective. See statements in *Irish News* 12 November 2004.

¹⁵ eg Statement by Minister for Foreign affairs Garret FitzGerald in Dáil Éireann - Volume 275, col 925, 5 November 1974.

¹⁶ Richard E. M. Heaslip, Ireland’s first engagement in United Nations peacekeeping operations: an assessment, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 17:31-42, 2006

League plan and criticised in very strong terms the Israeli security wall.¹⁷ The succeeding Minister Dermot Ahern intervened during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 2006 saying 'I have condemned and I condemn again today the rising toll of death and destruction, the blockade of Lebanon, the desperate conditions under which 1.5 million Palestinians are living under effective siege in Gaza.'¹⁸ This political support is also seen in the Irish official development aid budget. In 2006, the budget includes provision for over €4 million to be spent in the Palestinian territories, including support for UNRWA.¹⁹ Previous development aid support has been given to UNRWA, Ministry of Education for the Palestinian Authority, UNDP, Bethlehem University and local civil society organisations.²⁰

This level of diplomatic support for Palestinian self determination, combined with recognition of Israel's right to exist in security has been consistent over many years. In seeking an explanation for this position it is possible to look at a number of broader themes in Irish foreign policy. It certainly draws on Ireland's own history and reflects a context where Irish foreign policy maintained a broad support for movements for national self determination.²¹ This was true in sub Saharan Africa in the late 1950s and 1960s. It formed the context for the intervention in the Congo in the 1960s, to prevent what was seen as a colonial attempt to divide the country and in addition allowed the Irish state, as a relatively new UN member, to show support for the emerging concept of peacekeeping. In more recent years it was reflected in policies on Cyprus, East Timor and Western Sahara.

Irish foreign policy on Palestine is also a reflection of and consistent with support for other strong themes within modern Irish foreign policy – a concern with conflict resolution, strong support for the United Nations, for international law and for human rights. Comments by ministers often refer back to UN Security Council Resolutions, the judgement of the International Court of Justice (on the wall) and the humanitarian condition of Palestinian refugees and those living in the occupied territories. The 1996 White Paper on Irish foreign policy, while acknowledging the duty of a state to protect its national interests, set out this self image as follows:

Ireland's foreign policy is about much more than self-interest. For many of us it is a statement of the kind of people we are. Irish people are committed to the principles set out in Article 29 of the [Irish] Constitution for the conduct of international relations: the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality.²²

In late 2000, just before Ireland joined the Security Council, Minister for Foreign Affairs Brian Cowen argued against an analysis of foreign policy on the basis of values versus interests. He said it was not an either/or situation because small states could not compete in a power-seeking international system run by realist principles. Ireland, he argued, 'like most small nations has always known that a multilateral rules-based international order *is* in our national interest. We would like to think, and

¹⁷ Statement to Seanad Éireann by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Brian Cowen 4 February 2004. available on website www.dfa.ie

¹⁸ 18 July 2004 <http://www.dfa.ie/information/display.asp?ID=2118>

¹⁹ <http://www.dfa.ie/information/display.asp?ID=2119>

²⁰ <http://www.dfa.ie/information/display.asp?ID=1239>

²¹ See Patrick Keatinge. *A place among the nations : issues of Irish foreign policy*. (Dublin : Institute of Public Administration, 1978).

²² *White Paper on Irish Foreign Policy* (Dublin: Government Publications, 1996), para one.

I believe with much justification that we have demonstrated this, that our commitment to liberal internationalism is also based on principle.’²³

It is also possible to argue as Rory Miller has done that Ireland’s position on Palestine has been beneficial to the development of its economic relationships with the wider Arab World.²⁴ The 1996 White Paper, indeed, acknowledges that ‘Ireland is small and hugely dependent on external trade for its well-being’.²⁵ While it is difficult to separate the importance of different motivating factors in foreign policy some indications can be drawn by comparison with other cases. For example when Ireland was on the UN security council in 2001-2, Ireland seriously annoyed a stronger trade partner (Morocco) to support Polisario on the question of Western Sahara. Indeed on the UN Security Council in 2001-2 Ireland in many respects was the leading supporter of the Polisario position, with no obvious ‘realist’ benefits.²⁶

Clearly as a small state Ireland has had limited opportunities to influence politics in the Middle East. It has sought to strengthen EU intervention but in common with its diplomatic approach on all issues of EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) it is not the policy of the Irish government to articulate an ‘opening position’ on EU negotiations on foreign policy statements and the Government tends to loyally support CFSP positions once agreed. While it is widely reported that Ireland adopts a position of support for the Palestinians in such talks there is limited public detail on the degrees of difference between the Irish approach and what is ultimately agreed at EU level. However in a review of developments in EU foreign policy in the 1980s, former Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald asserted

There was a major shift in European foreign policy [in the 1970s] which eventually secured the assent of all the member states although at the start of that period only three countries, France, Italy and Ireland held the position of seeing the Palestinian problem as one of fundamental importance requiring action to provide the Palestinians with a homeland and a State of their own whereas the majority of States saw it still as a refugee problem. From that position these countries have shifted towards the position which we then held.²⁷

A little more detail is revealed by Ireland’s most recent period on the UN Security Council which provided a context whereby Ireland had some degree of influence at the highest levels of international politics and was also doing so in a much more open forum than the Council of EU Foreign Ministers. The detail of the Irish position was indeed articulated at length over this period. The changes to the Council’s membership in January 2001, and Ireland’s broad support for the rights of the Palestinian people altered the previous balance on the Council. The US had become more wary of using its Security Council veto to block resolutions that are critical of Israel, being a little more conscious, in the immediate post 9-11 period (if not later) of the negative impact such vetoes have in the Arab world and internationally. In the Security Council term before Ireland’s membership, a Palestinian-promoted motion proposed in December 2000 calling for a UN Observer Force in the Occupied

²³ Brian Cowen, ‘Challenges to Liberal Internationalism’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 12 (2001), 2.

²⁴ Rory Miller ‘The politics of trade and diplomacy: Ireland's evolving relationship with the Muslim Middle East’ *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol 15 (2004), pp 123-145.

²⁵ *White Paper*, para 2

²⁶ John Doyle, ‘Irish diplomacy on the UN Security Council 2001-2: Foreign policy-making in the light of day’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol 15 (2004), pp 73-101

²⁷ Dáil Éireann Debates – Vol. 371, col. 2279, 22 April 1987

Territories got only eight votes, and so the US did not have to veto, as nine positive votes from among the 15 members are required to pass a resolution. Ireland's support for the idea of Palestinian statehood, meant that a passing majority of nine votes was now more likely—potentially forcing the US to engage more fully.

The first significant Council discussion on Palestine during Ireland's term was in March 2001. Ireland's statements with regard to the Palestinian issue²⁸ stressed five key themes: firstly the right of the Security Council to concern itself with the Middle East; secondly, Israel's right to security within recognised borders; thirdly, the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to a state; fourthly, condemnation of terrorism, the counter-productive nature of Palestinian violence, Israel's excessive reaction to such violence and illegal Israeli settlements; and finally Israel's right to defend itself along with its obligation to do so in accordance with international humanitarian law. Ireland abstained on this draft resolution, which sought to deploy UN observers in the occupied Palestinian territories without Israeli agreement, as they believed that no state would deploy troops in such circumstances.

Ireland's support for Palestinian statehood was demonstrated most clearly in December 2001 when Ireland's support for a draft resolution promoted by the Arab states encouraged three other non-permanent Council members to vote in favour, seeing Ireland's lead as giving them diplomatic cover, despite a certain US veto (and obvious British displeasure).²⁹ The vetoing of this draft resolution and a recognition that there was now a majority on the Council in favour of moderate motions critical of Israel were important factors in pressurising the US towards supporting the principle of Palestinian statehood. In March 2002, faced with a moderate Arab resolution that it would again have had to veto to defeat, the US introduced its own draft, which endorsed the principle of Palestinian statehood and welcomed the involvement of the Quartet as a mediating group in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.³⁰ The US also introduced its own draft of proposed resolutions dealing with the conflict on three occasions in late March/April 2002: calling for an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian cities and welcoming Secretary-General Annan's initiative to send a fact-finding mission to Jenin to investigate claims of an Israeli massacre of civilians in that city.³¹ In late 2002, however, following the killing of UN employees by Israeli forces, the US shifted back to more traditional defence of Israel and vetoed a draft resolution, one that had been supported by Ireland.³²

Obviously Ireland was not the only player, or even the most significant factor in the changing politics of UN and US positions on the Middle East, however notwithstanding considerable pressure from the USA, Ireland held a fairly consistently pro-Palestinian position on the Council and by helping to create a block of nine positive votes had some degree of influence over US strategy at this time. An analysis of Irish foreign policy on the Palestinian question shows therefore that it is maintained even when realist considerations (such as not annoying the USA) were at stake. Therefore while trade links with the Arab world are not irrelevant to Ireland's position on Palestine, the willingness to pursue this policy in the face of considerable

²⁸ For details see, for example, statements and vetoed resolution on 15 and 27 March. 2001, available at <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>.

²⁹ See Security Council report for 14 December 2001, available at <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>.

³⁰ Ultimately, resolution 1397, based on the US draft, was adopted on 12 March 2002.

³¹ Resolutions 1402, 1403 and 1405, adopted on 29 March, 9 April and 19 April, respectively.

³² See Security Council reports for 20 December 2002, available at <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>.

pressure from the USA indicates that its roots in Irish foreign policy are deeper and more fundamental and draw on themes other than economic self interest.

Sinn Féin and the Palestinian Question

An analysis of Sinn Féin's position on the Middle East offers a different perspective to that of the Irish state's foreign policy, given the party's links to the IRA and their espousal of a more militant politics on Irish unity and international affairs. Sinn Féin has elaborated a consistent position in support of the PLO and Palestinian statehood and while its position goes beyond that articulated by the Irish state it is not fundamentally in contradiction with it. There are three key dimensions to Sinn Féin's use of the Palestinian question over the past thirty years, which follow more or less chronologically. Firstly there is a linking of the IRA and the PLO as 'equivalent' armed national liberation movements and the use of an internationalist policy on questions such as Palestinian statehood in an effort to defend Sinn Féin from attacks by others on the left who sought to dismiss them as inward looking conservative nationalists. Secondly there were strong links between the Northern Ireland, South African and Oslo peace processes in the early to mid 1990s. Thirdly in the aftermath of the 1998 Belfast Agreement links with radical causes and involvement in international attempts at conflict resolution, serve to strengthen the Sinn Féin leaderships claims to remain 'radical' in their politics, while also strengthening their claim to be peacemakers.

The outbreak of the modern conflict in the late 1960s and occurred around self conscious use of a 'civil rights' discourse and early international comparisons were inevitably with the situation of blacks in the southern states of the USA. The very title Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, the tactics of peaceful marches and the focus on issues such as discrimination in jobs, housing, voting and police behaviour sought to draw on the international sympathy and focus on the USA, to raise the international profile of Northern Ireland and to try and embarrass the British Government into a programme of reform. This comparison continued throughout the conflict. Orange Order³³ marches through nationalist areas have been compared to the Klu Kluk Klan marching through Harlem and a senior member of the Clinton administration allegedly compared the then Northern Ireland police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), to leaving Alabama and Georgia with all white cops'.³⁴ As the conflict developed, Republicans continued this focus but also added a more anti-imperialist and revolutionary rhetoric. This saw the use of images of figures such as Che Guevara and expressions of 'solidarity' with leftist movements in Latin America but by far the most common comparison throughout the following decades was with the ANC struggle against apartheid. This was regularly seen in publications, on painted murals in nationalist areas and in speeches by senior Sinn Féin leaders. It was in this wider context that comparisons with the Palestinian struggle for statehood and with the PLO itself were made

In the early years of the conflict, Sinn Féin and the IRA sought to link their campaign for Irish unity to that of the Palestinians for statehood and in particular sought to link

³³ The Orange Order is a unionist organisation, which is explicitly anti-Catholic and whose main activity consists of public 'parades'. There are other 3000 such parades each year – about 50 of the most contentious ones going directly through nationalist communities.

³⁴ See John McGarry (ed.) *Northern Ireland and the Divided World: Post Agreement Northern Ireland in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.4.

the IRA and the PLO. This is mostly strongly seen in the 1970s and early 1980s and its most visible manifestation was in murals in nationalist areas. One prominent example in Belfast depicted armed IRA and PLO members under the slogan 'IRA-PLO one struggle'.³⁵ By linking their wider political strategy to organisations and 'struggles' which were widely supported in Ireland such as those of the ANC and PLO. Sinn Féin sought to provide a wider political context for their politics. This was regularly seen in the weekly Sinn Féin newspaper *An Phoblacht* and became stronger as the organisation moved to the left under the influence of the Adams leadership in the 1980s. Interestingly the comparison with the PLO continued in *An Phoblacht* throughout this period, notwithstanding the reliance of the IRA on fund raising among the Irish diaspora in the USA, where links with Palestinians would hardly have been popular.

During the 1990s there was a widespread academic and public discourse on the interconnections and possible lessons to be learned by a comparative study of the then emerging peace processes in South Africa, Northern Ireland and the Oslo process in the Middle East. This type of comparison went well beyond those who used it for nationalist rhetoric. Some such as Michael Cox argued that the previous attempts by Sinn Féin to link themselves to the ANC and PLO created its own pressure in a reverse fashion in the 1990s. If the IRA campaign was in part justified by some comparison to the ANC and PLO then the ANC and PLO involvement in peace processes added to the other pressures on the Sinn Féin leadership to do likewise.³⁶ However the Sinn Féin leadership played up these comparisons and regularly referred to them in their public speeches and publicity.³⁷ The South African example link was the more enduring as its peace process obviously succeeded and was then used after the end of apartheid as both an example and a lever. However links with the Palestinian cause continues right through this period. This helped them to cement the Irish process and helped persuade their own supporters that this was a road they could go on given the widespread support for the PLO and ANC among their target voters.

In the post Agreement (and post armed conflict) era in Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin has sought to present an image of their party as both continuing their radical tradition, in a context where they may fear losing some of their more militant supporters and has in parallel sought to strengthen their image as 'peace-makers' and international actors by a regular engagement in other conflicts. On the question of maintaining a radical political agenda this is obviously primarily reflected in domestic policy and in their continuing campaign on Irish unity³⁸, however international politics gives a wider context to Sinn Féin's politics and allows them use international situations to build their domestic support base among key target audiences. Sinn Féin continues to articulate a leftist position, consistent with the 'anti-globalisation' movement in the post 1998 Agreement era. It is highly critical of the global economic system and of the dominant role of the USA, despite the considerable significance which they attach

³⁵ Reproduced on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/recent/troubles/gallery/nationalist/gall4.shtml>

³⁶ Cox, Michael (1997) 'Bringing in the International: the IRA cease-fire and the end of the Cold War', *International Affairs*, 73:4 and Cox, Michael (1998) 'Northern Ireland: the war that came in from the cold', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 9: 73-84.

³⁷ See Irish Times 22 December 22 1994 and 28 September 1994 for examples relating to Middle East. There were also 441 references to Palestine on the SF website as of September 2006. Links with the ANC were even more prominent in Sinn Fein publicity – see for example Adams meeting Mandela 20 June 20, 1995 and Ramaposa in Belfast 30 April 1998.

³⁸ For a wider discussion see John Doyle *After conflict - placing the Sinn Féin party in a comparative politics context*. Working paper in international studies, Centre for International Studies Dublin City University. <http://www.dcu.ie/~cis/publications.htm>

to a strategic involvement with the United States regarding the peace process. The party was very active in the anti-war movement on Iraq – providing speakers for all of the major rallies and opposing the use of Shannon airport by the US military and they have a highly critical position of US foreign policy in the Middle East in particular.³⁹ More explicit links with the Palestinian cause continued throughout this time period. Sinn Féin have called for an end to Israel's preferential trade access to the EU until they withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza.⁴⁰ Dr Jamal Zahalka, a member of the Palestinian Authority, spoke at the 'Bloody Sunday' anniversary march in 2005 one of the most high profile republican events.⁴¹ Gerry Adams condemned Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 2006⁴², while party spokesperson on foreign affairs Aengus O Snodaigh TD attacked the EU over their decision to suspend funds to the Palestinian authority after the election of Hamas⁴³

Inevitably these policy positions are used against them in the USA but there is no evidence that the party has sought to distance itself from these policies or demote their profile. Neither is there any evidence that the party feels itself under pressure to do so from its support base. The domestic importance of their international positions is sometimes lost on Sinn Féin's political opponents and even some of its international support. There was, for example, considerable debate about Gerry Adams' visit to Cuba in 2001 and his very public and friendly reception by Fidel Castro. Supporters of the peace process in the US Congress were very vocal in their attacks on the visit.⁴⁴ Despite this, Sinn Féin not only proceeded with the visit but promoted it heavily via their press office. The 2002 general election manifesto showed no sign that the party was concerned that their position on Cuba was a problem for them and they explicitly called for an end to the United States' embargo of Cuba.⁴⁵ Likewise an examination of editorials in conservative newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph*⁴⁶ shows little evidence that a repetition of 'attacks' linking Sinn Féin to organisations such as the PLO is regarded as entirely positive publicity by Sinn Féin in the Irish domestic context.

In the aftermath of the 9-11 attacks there was clearly a much more limited political space for any return to 'armed struggle'. However as Western policy makers struggled to come to terms with the threat of al Qaeda, it was contrasted by some commentators with 'old' terrorism – which was perceived (rightly or wrongly) to have more rational political aims around which government could negotiate, compared to al Qaeda. The *Daily Telegraph* attacked what it perceived to be the influence of this sort of logic in the British government in an editorial in 2003 saying

Mr Blair also appears to believe that clear distinctions can be made between different kinds of terrorism. This holds that terrorism for no discernible, rational purpose (such as September 11) is beyond the pale. By contrast, terrorism that has clear political purpose (a united Ireland as

³⁹ For example Sinn Féin (2002) *Building an Ireland of Equals*.

⁴⁰ <http://www.sinnfein.ie/news/detail/6773>, statement issued 5 October 2004; similar 5 August 2004.

⁴¹ *Irish News* 29 January 05

⁴² *Irish News* 9 August 2006.

⁴³ 26 April 2006, in full on Sinn Féin website www.sinnfein.ie

⁴⁴ *Belfast News Letter* 24 Dec 2001; *Irish News* 17 Dec 2001

⁴⁵ Sinn Féin (2002) *Building an Ireland of Equals*. [Manifesto for the general election in the Republic of Ireland].

⁴⁶ eg editorial *Daily Telegraph* 27 February 2001 attacks Sinn Féin saying 'Their natural allies are other 'national liberation movements', such as ETA, the PLO, the PFLP and the Sandinistas.'

demanded by the IRA, a Palestinian state as demanded by the PLO and Hamas) can be conciliated.⁴⁷

The domestic impacts of links with popular international causes are cemented by the party's high profile involvement in international conflict resolution attempts. There is little doubt that Sinn Féin played a positive role in the Basque Country where they had long standing ties to Basque militants in Batasuna. The initial forum where supporters of Batasuna and the moderate Basque nationalists discussed the possibilities of a post-ceasefire common strategy was called the 'Irish Forum', such was the level of involvement by Irish nationalists.⁴⁸ Senior negotiator Martin McGuinness has also been involved in the Tamil-Sri Lanka conflict with a number of visits to the area. While the involvement of Sinn Féin in the Israel-Palestinian conflict has been marginal compared to these other examples, the 2006 visit by Gerry Adams to the region was presented in this light.⁴⁹ A senior Sinn Féin figure, writing in the local press explicitly did so

At great personal risk Martin McGuinness visited Sri Lanka and spoke to the country's president and the Tiger Tamils about making peace between enemies. Gerry Adams's trip to the Middle East was as perilous. He also recently visited the Basque country and Spain following ETA's decision to ceasefire.⁵⁰

This international involvement serves to heighten the party's profile, to constantly remind Irish voters of the party's involvement in the Northern Ireland peace process and to link them centrally with ongoing issues of concern for potential supporters in a manner which is rarely open to opposition politicians. For those with whom they build links the perceived 'success' of the Irish peace process in the international media allows other groups to use this opportunity to pressurise their own local state actors. For example Basques welcomed the involvement of Sinn Féin as they could contrast the refusal of the PP Spanish Government to engage in any talks, with the willingness of the British to do so in Northern Ireland. It also strengthened the case of those advocating an ETA ceasefire as the IRA was held in high regard by most ETA members. During Gerry Adams' visit to Palestine in 2006, Sinn Féin compared the attempts to isolate the Hamas led government with their own isolation prior to the beginning of the peace process, arguing that it would not work and should be abandoned.⁵¹

Irish nationalism's engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict, for both the Irish Government and for Sinn Féin has arisen from strong themes which are also visible in other contexts. For the Irish state, their position in support of Palestinian statehood (and Israel's security) has been consistently expressed over many years, even at times (such as their Security Council term) when there was considerable pressure from the USA to refrain from doing so. Give the close links between Ireland and the US and the high level of US investment in Ireland this might be expected to have a defining influence on foreign policy decisions. However ultimately the support for Palestinian's right to statehood was deemed of such importance as to risk some tensions with the USA. This went beyond the particulars of the Palestinian question and was based on a firm belief that this is of fundamental importance in the context of both the current international security situation and in order to strengthen the UN

⁴⁷ 7 April 2003

⁴⁸ See article by Paddy Woodworth, *The Irish Times* 17 September 1998

⁴⁹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/5318978.stm

⁵⁰ *Irish News* 7 Sept 2006

⁵¹ *Irish News* 7 Sept 2006

system and international law more broadly. Sinn Féin, while having a similar position on the fundamentals of the issue, use a more radical rhetoric, historically supporting the PLO's campaign (unlike the Irish Government) and attacking the Irish Government / EU decisions to suspend funding to the Palestinian Authority after the Hamas victory in the 2006 elections. They also place the Palestinian question in a wider context, in particular in their case, within their critique of US foreign policy and within an international profile which draws on the anti-globalisation movement on the one hand while continuing in parallel to build alliances with groups such as the Palestinians and Basques in conflict resolution.