60th Anniversary of Irish Resolution: A Forerunner of the NPT

Minister for External Affairs Frank Aiken signing the Nonproliferation Treaty at the Moscow signing ceremony on 1 July 1968. Owing to his role in promoting nuclear nonproliferation at the United Nations during 1958-1961, he was the first person to sign the Treaty. (Photo from Frank Aiken Papers, Archives, University College Dublin, item number P106/6942)

Edited by William Burr

For more information, contact:
202-994-7000 or nsarchiv@gwu.edu

Foreign Minister Aiken Saw International Nonproliferation Agreement Producing “Pax Atomica” and Reducing Risk of Nuclear War

Initially State Department Saw Resolution as “Dangerous,” But Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Saw It As a “Real Bell Ringer in International Politics”

Resolution Approved at U.N. in 1961 After NATO Nuclear Concerns Addressed

Washington D.C., October 29, 2018 — Sixty years ago, in October 1958, Irish Minister of External Affairs Frank Aiken bought before the United Nations the first version of a resolution addressing the dangers of nuclear proliferation. U.S. State Department officials initially found it “potentially dangerous” and “disruptive,” but three years later the U.S. government voted, with the rest of the U.N. General Assembly, in favor of the “Irish Resolution,” which is widely regarded as the forerunner of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).
Today, on the resolution’s anniversary, the National Security Archive publishes for the first time declassified U.S. government documents on developments in U.S. policy toward the resolution – from initial hostility to eventual support – including records of discussions with Aiken and other Irish officials over the resolution and its wording.

According to the declassified documents, what made Aiken interested in an international nonproliferation agreement was that if the “Nuclear Club” grew larger than four members (U.S, U.K., Soviet Union, and prospectively France), “control over nuclear weapons will have become impossible,” and the probability of nuclear conflict would increase, one that he saw increasing in geometric proportions. Aiken told U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge that a non-transfer agreement that froze the size of the “Nuclear Club” could create a “‘Pax Atomica’” and “enduring stability.” He believed that the Soviet Union would be supportive of a nonproliferation agreement because the Soviets “do not wish to transfer weapons” to China, which “would lead to loss of Russian control,” and were "terrified" of the prospect of a nuclear-armed West Germany. It was such considerations that motivated Aiken to introduce a nonproliferation resolution to the UN General Assembly each year from 1958 to 1961.

Overview

By supporting nonproliferation at the UN, Aiken, an important figure in the Irish independence movement, took a step that raised his country’s “international profile as a small but confident actor on the world stage.” A major study of the resolution written in 1990 characterized it as an “historic landmark”: equivalent to the first draft of the NPT because it required the nuclear weapons states not to proliferate nuclear capabilities and non-weapons states not to acquire or produce nuclear weapons. Another study underlines Aiken’s importance in bringing the dangers of nuclear proliferation squarely before the United Nations and by differentiating the goal of nuclear nonproliferation from nuclear disarmament. Aiken treated nonproliferation as an objective that had to be pursued separately, but that was also a step toward more sweeping measures to reduce and eliminate the nuclear danger.[1]

During the Eisenhower administration, Aiken’s proposal met both U.S. ambivalence and opposition. It made State Department officials uncomfortable because they did not believe that a nonproliferation agreement could be verified. Even more important was the concern that the resolution was incompatible with developing U.S. arrangements to share nuclear weapons with NATO allies in the event of a world war. Later seen at stake was the proposed NATO multilateral force. Thus, the State Department worried that the resolution would make the U.S. “vulnerable to attacks that we are in fact contributing to [the] spread of nuclear weapons through [the] NATO atomic stockpile program.” Yet, some did not like the idea of Washington voting against a nonproliferation, an idea that Lodge saw as a “real bell ringer in international politics.”

Not wanting to cast a negative vote that could damage the U.S. image, Washington abstained from the General Assembly votes in 1958 and 1960. In 1959, however, it
supported Aiken’s resolution because it was procedural in nature and did not require specific U.S. approval of the content. The text referred the problem of nonproliferation to the U.N.’s 10 Nation Disarmament Committee which would study it and make recommendations.

In 1960, Ambassador Lodge recommended support of the resolution because the language was more consistent with U.S. policy but the State Department turned his advice down. By contrast, the Kennedy administration, also deeply concerned about nuclear proliferation, was more willing than its predecessor to work with Aiken on the text of the resolution. It recognized that he was not trying to undermine U.S. nuclear deployments and nuclear sharing arrangements with NATO countries. Indeed, Aiken was willing to accomodate NATO interests to win the support of the United States and other alliance members.[2]

For Rusk’s State Department some tweaks in the language were enough to satisfy NATO interests. One change related to the responsibilities of the nuclear powers: by changing not to “give” nuclear weapons to non-nuclear states to “not to relinquish control over” nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the Dutch and other key NATO allies strongly lobbied for an additional tweak before they could vote for the resolution. Thus, in the language about the responsibilities of non-nuclear weapons states, the Netherlands proposed adding a word to the phrase: “calls all states not possessing nuclear weapons to undertake not to accept or make such weapons.” The British proposed, with the support of the Dutch and other NATO allies, inserting the word “control” after “accept.” The phrase “accept control” (with appropriate stylistic modifications) would protect nuclear sharing arrangements because it was the United States, not the non-nuclear NATO partners, that had custody and control over the use of the weapons. The U.S. and the British proposed “accept control” to the Irish and Aiken agreed.

The Irish resolution had competition: a nonproliferation resolution proposed by the Swedish government, which Washington opposed because it included language that was incompatible with NATO nuclear stockpile arrangements.[3] While Moscow supported and Washington opposed the Swedish resolution, both voted for the Irish resolution; it was the first time they voted the same way on an arms control issue at the United Nations, Cold War tensions over Berlin and other issues notwithstanding. Their support for the resolution, passed by acclamation at the General Assembly in December 1961, was a portent of future U.S.-Soviet understandings on nuclear test bans and nuclear nonproliferation, among other issues, although it would take a dangerous crisis over Cuba to make both sides more interested in such understandings.

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty negotiated seven years later embodied the basic principles of the Irish Resolution, including treaty language tailored to accommodate U.S. nuclear deployments in NATO Europe. Ireland’s contribution to nonproliferation policy was evident at the three NPT signing ceremonies held on 1 July 1968 in Washington, London, and Moscow, with Irish diplomats attending all three. Frank Aiken was the first minister to sign the Treaty at the Moscow ceremony, later presenting Foreign Minister
Andrey Gromyko with Ireland’s instrument of ratification, making Ireland the first country
to ratify the Treaty.[4]

READ THE DOCUMENTS

1958

Document 01
U.S. Delegation to the United Nations telegram DELGA 86, 5 October 1958, Confidential

1958-10-05
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 320/10-558
A few weeks after Aiken gave a major speech[5] to the U.N. General Assembly on restricting membership in the "Nuclear Club," the U.S. Mission at the U.N. learned that he was preparing a resolution to ask the nuclear powers to not make nuclear weapons available to others and that the non-weapons states "refrain from any effort to develop nuclear weapons." In a conversation with U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Henry Cabot Lodge, Aiken said he favored "limiting [the] possession of nuclear weapons" to the U.S., United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union, enforced by an international inspection system to make sure "no one else had them." According to Aiken, India was already "extracting military valuable plutonium" but that was mistaken because India did not have the technology to produce plutonium in quantity until the 1960s.

Document 02
State Department telegram GADEL 35 to U.S. Delegation to the United Nations, 5 October 1958, Confidential

1958-10-05
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 320/10-658
Quickly responding to the October 5 telegram, the Department described the proposed resolution as "potentially dangerous" and "disruptive"; the delegation should try to "dissuade" Aiken from going ahead. Any provision enjoining the U.S. from making nuclear weapons available to other countries was unacceptable because the "US must reserve [the] right to do so to maintain defense arrangements." While Washington was sympathetic to "preventing spread nuclear weapons production capability to other countries" that could be "realistically accomplished in framework of disarmament agreement that provides for thorough inspection and restrictions on other elements," such as military forces. Still officially resistant to the idea of a nuclear taboo, the
Department also warned against "singling out nuclear weapons for separate treatment, since it would strengthen Soviet campaign for prohibition use these weapons and inhibits West's reliance on them for deterrence."

Document 03
U.S. Delegation to the United Nations telegram DELGA 107, 7 October 1958, Confidential

1958-10-07
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 320/7-558
That afternoon, Aiken gave Lodge's deputy, James Wadsworth, a copy of the proposed resolution. The operative language, in paragraph 4, called upon the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and France "to declare and undertake that they shall not supply nuclear weapons" or equipment, information, or technical assistance "for the purpose of enabling another state to produce nuclear weapons." In addition, the resolution called upon "all other states to declare and undertake that they shall not produce nuclear weapons or seek to obtain such weapons."

Document 04
U.S. Delegation to the United Nations telegram DELGA 108, 7 October 1958, Confidential

1958-10-07
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 320/10-758
Meeting with Aiken, Wadsworth found that he was "not impressed" by U.S. arguments against the resolution. For example, Aiken disagreed that the resolution would restrict U.S. freedom of action: Washington could "reserve [the] right to make nuclear weapons available to other countries in war situations." As for the impact on the Geneva talks, Aiken questioned the possibility of avoiding controversy over disarmament issues "no matter what resolutions might be adopted or withheld." Believing that it would be "futile" to keep arguing, Wadsworth recommended that the U.S. "regretfully must oppose introduction of resolution."

Document 05
U.S. Delegation to the United Nations telegram DELGA 168, 14 October 1958, Confidential
The following week, Aiken gave Lodge a copy of a revised version of the resolution; rather than calling for declarations by the nuclear and non-nuclear states, it proposed the creation of an ad hoc commission to study the "dangers inherent in the further dissemination of nuclear weapons." What changed his mind is not clear, but perhaps he was searching for something that Washington and the NATO countries could accept.

Document 06
U.S. Delegation to the United Nations telegram DELGA 169, 14 October 1958, Confidential

Meeting with British diplomats, Lodge found agreement that the Aiken's revised version was also "unacceptable," especially the preambular language calling for the "prohibition" of nuclear weapons. Both London and Washington would try to convince Aiken not to introduce the resolution.

Document 07
U.S. Delegation to the United Nations telegram DELGA 182, 15 October 1958, Confidential

Aiken developed an additional proposal to amend a U.S. proposed resolution, then before the General Assembly, to ban nuclear weapons testing. The amendments called upon the states involved in test ban talks to agree not to "supply other states with nuclear weapons" during both the negotiations and "the period of suspension of tests that may result therefrom." Moreover, the nuclear states would agree not to manufacture nuclear weapons for the same time periods.
Meeting with Aiken, the counselor to the U.S. mission, James William Barco, urged him to drop both the resolution and the amendments. Finding Aiken undeterred, Barco told him that he was instructed "most 'solemnly' to inform [him] that his proposal created serious difficulties for us." While the U.S. "did not want nuclear weapons to spread any more than [Aiken] did," in the absence of "controls and other types of disarmament," the Soviet Union could evade an agreement. Aiken disagreed, arguing that his proposals "would not harm us" and the United States would not give nuclear weapons to others in any event.

Aiken had already submitted the resolution to the UNGA and was going to present the amendments the next day. To get State Department views on his next move, Barco persuaded Aiken to wait until Friday morning.

Replying to the Mission's latest telegram (Document 8) the Department asked for detailed information on support for the Irish resolution and amendments. "In any canvassing you should continue make clear US strongly objects to Irish proposal." With a possible vote coming on, the State Department wanted to "consider tactics."
Finding "little positive support" for the Irish resolution, Lodge reported that both of Aiken's proposals could be "beaten." Yet, delegations from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, including some allies, would support the resolution because they "do not want to vote against something designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons." Highly concerned, Lodge wrote that "I have not found any argument that I can use publicly to explain vote against Irish proposals that would sound reasonable and persuasive and not make us appear before world opinion to support spread of nuclear weapons."

Document 11
State Department telegram GADEL 67 to U.S. Mission to the United States, 24 October 1958, Secret

1958-10-24

In response to Lodge's concerns, the Department provided talking points for the mission to use when arguing against the Irish resolution; these elaborated on the critique sent on 2 October (Document 2). The message included secret background on a "further reason," which was implicit in the earlier message, on why the United States "cannot subscribe to Irish resolution." That was because Washington and its NATO allies were "working out arrangements ... for [the] storage of nuclear weapons ...for use of forces of other NATO countries in time of war." While the United States retained custody of the weapons as required by law, "we would be vulnerable to attacks that we are in fact contributing to [the] spread of nuclear weapons through [the] NATO atomic stockpile program."

Document 12
U.S. Mission to the United Nations Telegram DELGA 335 to State Department, "USUN Information Digest No. 87," 1 November 1958, Official Use Only, Excerpt

1958-11-01
In part because of U.S. opposition, on 31 October 1958 Aiken withdrew the resolution from further consideration by the General Assembly. Instead, he asked for a vote solely on the second paragraph, on the danger of nuclear proliferation. The mini-resolution carried by 37 to 0 with the U.S. and 43 other countries abstaining. Very likely, the concerns that Lodge expressed shaped the decision to abstain rather than vote against Aiken's language. [6]

Document 13
U.S. Mission to the United Nations Telegram DELGA 340 to State Department, "Disarmament," 3 November 1958, Confidential

1958-11-03

13th GA 10/30/58-11/18/58
A few days after the vote, Aiken called on Lodge to urge U.S. support for an international non-transfer agreement. Concerned that the Geneva test ban talks could break down, Aiken believed that cooperation on armaments control was possible, including U.S.-Soviet agreement on the non-transfer of nuclear weapons. In addition, he "believes this could lead to 'Pax Atomica' and enduring stability." Moreover, if more than four powers (including the French) acquired nuclear weapons, Aiken feared that "control over nuclear weapons will have become impossible." Based on his talks with Valarian Zorin he found that the Soviets were interested and that they had their own reasons to support a nonproliferation agreement: to avoid transfer of weapons to China and because they feared "German possession." Lodge observed that Aiken's proposal was a "real bell ringer in international politics" that should not be underestimated.

II. 1959

Document 14
U.S. Embassy Ireland telegram 2 to State Department, 2 July 1959, Confidential

1959-07-02
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 700.5611/7-259
With plans to re-introduce a resolution on nonproliferation, Aiken began to lobby foreign ambassadors. The resolution had the same first paragraph as in 1958 but included new
language calling on the nuclear weapons states to "refrain from handing over control of such weapons" to non-weapons states and the non-weapons states "to refrain from manufacturing them in the future." Because the 1959 resolution included a proposal to refer the problem of nuclear proliferation for review by a "disarmament commission" it contained the seeds for eventual U.S. support.

Document 15
Department of State telegram 4 to U.S. Embassy Ireland, 13 July 1959, Confidential

1959-07-13
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 700.5611/7-259
To discuss the resolution, State Department officials met with Irish diplomats. While supporting Ireland's nonproliferation objectives, the U.S. side found Aiken's proposal "unacceptable" because it could not 'accept obligations in field of disarmament which are not subject to control and verification." U.S. officials were also critical because the resolution put the U.S. and the Soviet Union on the "same plane" (a hint of moral equivalence) and would also provide Moscow with a "useful platform [to] launch propaganda attack on present US policy deploying nuclear weapons abroad and training US allies in use such weapons in event war." The Irish acknowledged the difficulties of detecting the transfer of nuclear weapons but argued that "the adverse psychological effect of [the] detection of violation of Irish resolution would deter [the] USSR."

Document 16
U.S. Delegation to the United Nations telegram 75 to the State Department, 21 July 1959, Confidential

1959-07-21
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 320/7-2159
A member of Ireland's U.N. delegation passed on a copy of the latest version of Aiken's resolution, explaining that his government sought a "frank exchange leading to [a] resolution to which U.S. would not object."
U.S. Embassy Ireland Despatch 44 to the State Department, "Irish Draft Resolution on Nuclear Club. Revision No. 2," 6 August 1959, Secret

1959-08-06
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 700.5611/8-659

U.S. Ambassador Scott McLeod had a lengthy conversation with Aiken about the resolution. Aiken was "annoyed" by the U.S. argument that the resolution "would tend to place the United States on the same plane as the Soviets." For Aiken, that "could never be the Irish position", for example, in light of his speeches denouncing the 1956 invasion of Hungary. As before, Aiken worried that small powers that did not have the "responsibilities" of the great powers acquired nuclear weapons they could "touch off a general conflagration." As examples, he mentioned Swedish and possibly Japanese interest in nuclear weapons. Aiken also believed that Washington's position on inspection and controls "was far too rigid to lead to agreement" which made it possible for both sides to use it as an "excuse for failing to reach" disarmament.

As he had before, Aiken argued that if the nuclear club was limited to four members (including France), there would be an "obvious advantage to world peace." The Soviets would be interested and so would Western European governments, which are "still most fearful of the intentions of West Germany."

Memorandum of Conversation, "Irish Disarmament Resolution at 14th General Assembly," 1 September 1959, with British Note Attached, Confidential

1959-09-01
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 600.0012/9-159

The British presented their strong objections to the resolution. In part they found it "unrealistic," more suitable for the "final stage" of comprehensive disarmament because "the control required to ensure that nuclear weapons are not passed on to other countries would involve a complete count of the nuclear armouries of the nuclear powers and a continuing check on them."

State Department telegram DELGA 22 to U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 18 September 1959, Confidential
1959-09-18
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 600.0012/9-1859
As reflected in this cable, Aiken gave Secretary of State Herter the latest version of the resolution.

Document 20
State Department telegram 277 to U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 24 September 1959, Confidential

1959-09-18
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 600.0012/9-1859
The State Department relayed its negative views on the resolution, but it found it "extremely difficult" to oppose a resolution on the non-transfer of nuclear weapons. As the language of the resolution was "much better than previous versions" and it was a resolution to refer the issue to the 10-nation disarmament committee a U.S. vote for it would not involve a commitment on the "substance" of the resolution. The U.S. position, however, would not be finalized until it had consulted the British and the French.

Document 21
State Department telegram 1452 to U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 2 October 1959, Confidential

1959-10-02
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 600.0012/9-3059
The Department decided that it could endorse the resolution: it "can be supported as a referral resolution." If Washington informed the Irish that it had U.S. support, that could "prevent further efforts to tinker with text which could result in less satisfactory resolution." The problem was getting the French government to go along with the U.S. position.

Document 22
State Department telegram GADEL 53 to U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 16 October 1959, Confidential
1959-10-16
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 600.0012/10-1659
The problem with French opposition had not been resolved, but Herter instructed the U.S. delegation to tell the Irish that Washington intended to support the procedural resolution; a U.S. endorsement "reflects our willingness to refer this subject to a group which is competent to discuss in this case the 10-nation disarmament group, rather than a judgment on its substance."

Document 23
U.S. Mission to U.N. telegram DELGA 244 to State Department, 23 October 1959, Confidential

1959-10-23
Ambassador Lodge informed the British, French, and the Irish that the U.S. would vote for the Irish resolution as a "referral" to the disarmament committee. "Aiken was greatly pleased."

On 20 November 1959, the General Assembly adopted the resolution by a vote of 68 to 0, with 12 nations abstaining

III. 1960

Document 24
U.S. Mission to the United Nations telegram 1012 to the State Department, 14 October 1960, Confidential

1960-10-14
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 700.5611/10-1460
With the resolution under consideration again at the General Assembly, the U.S. Mission was not sure whether Aiken would accept a "referral procedure this year." Lodge thought that was unlikely because there was no likely forum for referral and in light of Soviet
Premier Khrushchev's speech calling for action to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. He asked for early consideration of the resolution because there was a "real danger" that the U.S. could be put in the "position of appearing to oppose efforts [to] prevent spread of nuclear weapons."

Document 25
State Department telegram 928 to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 15 October 1960, Confidential

1960-10-15
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 700.5611/10-760
The Department instructed Lodge and the delegation to express sympathy with Ireland's goals and support for a procedural resolution, although prospects were not favorable. Instead of a nonproliferation resolution, Washington favored a "three-pronged attack" on nuclear tests, fissionable material production, and nuclear weapons stockpiles.

Document 26
U.S. Mission to the United Nations telegram 1209 to the State Department, 1 November 1960, Confidential

1960-11-01
Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 600.0012/11-160
At the request of the British, the Irish changed some of the language in the fourth paragraph of the draft resolution. Instead of "refraining from handing over" nuclear weapons, the nuclear weapons states would "refrain from relinquishing" nuclear weapons to non-weapons states. The U.S. mission believed that Washington should support the text because opposing it "would give [an] unfortunate appearance" if the British voted differently on matters that "deal with one of [the] fundamental aspects" of disarmament.

Document 27
State Department telegram TOPOL 650 to the U.S. Embassy in France, 8 November 1960, Confidential
With the British and several NATO allies interested in voting for the resolution, the State Department wanted to persuade them to abstain. To help them “fully appreciate [the] restrictive implications” of the resolution, the State Department provided talking points. In light of U.S. interest in creating a NATO multilateral force and other possible arrangements to expand nuclear stockpile arrangements, “we believe it highly undesirable to undertake implied moral commitments of this nature which, without time limits, would impose limitations on ability free world states in future to take steps which we might regard as necessary for up-to-date individual or collective self-defense.”

Document 28
State Department telegram 926 to U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 16 November 1960, Confidential

The State Department informed the U.S. mission that the British had rethought their position on the resolution and decided to abstain because a "possible split in votes of NATO powers would give impression to world of policy split." The Australians were also abstaining and had worked to persuade the British to do the same.

Document 29
U.S. Mission to NATO telegram POLTO 716 to the State Department, 16 November 1960, Confidential

As reflected in this telegram, discussions among political advisers at the North Atlantic Council indicated that some governments, such as Canada and Norway, were leaning toward the Irish resolution while others, such as the Netherlands, believed that modifications in the language could make it supportable, especially because the second operative paragraph did not "necessarily conflict with establishment possible NATO nuclear deterrent." The Irish, however, had declined to change the language further.
because they feared that "others would suspect 'sinister' motive." Other governments - Italy, France, and Greece - had decided to abstain as had the British and Belgians. The U. S. representative "expressed doubt that changes of kind suggested would entirely obviate problems" with the text.

**Document 30**

*Bureau of European Affairs, Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, 14 December 1960*

1960-12-14

Source: National Archives, Record Group 59 (RG 59), Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 600.0012/12-1460

A week before the vote on the resolution, Irish Ambassador to the UN Frederick Boland told Acting Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Charles E. Bohlen, Irish Ambassador to the UN Frederick Boland that Aiken had been “encouraged by the Canadian decision to support the resolution and hopes that the U.S. will also change its attitude.” Bohlen gave no reason for hope, criticizing "unenforceable declaratory resolutions on disarmament" and also noting that the resolution could be "interpreted as barring our program for a NATO nuclear stockpile." What a difference a new government would make, because the incoming Kennedy administration supported operative language that was the same as the 1960 resolution.

Noting Soviet support for the resolution, Boland suggested, and Bohlen agreed, that it provided Moscow an excuse for not giving nuclear weapons to China. That horse had already left the barn, however, because the Soviets had provided the Chinese with much of the technology needed to build a device.[7]

**IV. 1961**

**Document 31**

*U.S. Embassy to Ireland Despatch 48 to State Department, "UNGA -- 16th Session: Irish Item on Preventing Wider Dissemination of Nuclear Weapons," 24 August 1961, Confidential*

1961-08-24

Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 303/8-2461
U.S. Ambassador to Ireland Grant Stockdale forwarded to the State Department an aide-memoire from the Department of External Affairs and the latest version of the Irish resolution (corrected by a follow-on telegram).

Document 32
U.S. Embassy to Ireland telegram 55 to State Department, 13 September 1961, Confidential

1961-09-13
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 303/9-1361
This telegram corrected the "operative" part of the Irish resolution so that it read: the nuclear weapons states "would undertake between themselves not to give nuclear weapons to non-nuclear states and non-nuclear states would not to accept or to take nuclear weapons." For reasons that are obscure, Aiken did not use the 1960 operative language about "relinquishing control to any nation not possessing [nuclear weapons] and whereby Powers not possessing such weapons would refrain from manufacturing them."

Document 33
State Department telegram 64 to U.S. Embassy Ireland, 25 September 1961, Confidential

1961-09-25
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 303/9-2561
The British found the latest version of the resolution "much more dangerous" than the 1960 version, in part because of the phrase "not to give" which London found incompatible with NATO nuclear arrangements. The Kennedy administration, however, was less critical and found the resolution acceptable as long as the Irish substituted the words "not to relinquish control over" for "not to give" in the second paragraph of the operative section concerning the responsibilities of the nuclear weapons states. Implicitly, that would be compatible with the proposed multilateral force (and ongoing nuclear sharing arrangements) because individual members would not have control over the weapons. Washington would support the resolution if the British and the French did as well.

Ronald Spiers drafted this telegram at "D," the U.S. Disarmament Administration, which the Eisenhower administration had created in late 1960 in response to Congressional pressure for progress on arms control. The September 1961 Arms Control and Disarmament Act quickly turned "D" into the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.[8]
A report by Edward Prince, a U.S. diplomat at the Embassy in Dublin, assessed an article by Frank Aiken in The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, “Can We Limit the Nuclear Club". According to Aiken, the resolution aimed addressed "a double risk: independent manufacture by small nations and nuclear powers giving the weapons to smaller allies." According to Aiken, the “probability of war would grow in geometric-rather than in direct arithmetic proportion to the increase in the number of nuclear powers.” He further argued that the resolution would not interfere with existing nuclear sharing and deployment arrangements: “as long as the nuclear powers retain control.” Prince was critical of Aiken’s line of argument, e.g., the “pious but wholly unrealistic hope” that non-nuclear nations would “not undertake a nuclear weapons program because of the assurances given that its neighbors will not press on with similar programs.”

At the North Atlantic Council, U.S. representative Thomas Finletter announced U.S. support for an amended Irish resolution, as did the British. The Belgians and the Dutch, including Secretary General Stikker, were troubled because they saw a "basic contradiction between acceptance [of the] commitment in Irish resolution and development [of] NATO nuclear strength." The possibility of an interpretive statement was under consideration but that would not be enough, the Belgians and Dutch believed. According to Belgium’s Ambassador to NATO André de Staercke, both the U.S. and the Belgians and Dutch would be affected: "the non-nuclear NATO countries would be committing themselves not [to] accept" the weapons." U.S. deputy ambassador Elbridge Durbrow opined that the "strong concern reflected here, which goes to essence of NATO defense effort, strongly argues for delay in committing ourselves to [the] Irish resolution."
To address Stikker's concerns, the British proposed amending paragraph 3 of the resolution so that it included the words "control of" after "accept" [nuclear weapons]. NATO was divided over the change, with Stikker wanting it to read "full control" while others found the British proposal acceptable. According to Finletter, "with no change at all from present language I think there will be very few NATO votes for resolution."

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Adlai Stevenson cast doubt on the interpretive statement mentioned by the U.S. NATO mission because anything that brought nuclear sharing arrangements under General Assembly consideration "could provoke awkward discussion." The message included language recently proposed by the Canadians, who like the other NATO partners were concerned about the resolution's wording.

To respond to NATO concerns, the State Department asked U.S. representatives to explain to the North Atlantic Council that the Irish resolution was "not inconsistent with [the] participation of NATO's non-nuclear nations in either present stockpile arrangements or any multilateral arrangements that might be envisaged." The language about "control of" proposed by the British was not essential. Nevertheless, the
Department could accept it after more was learned about the thinking of the other NATO governments. The Department did want to "state forcefully [to the NAC] that where Irish language may appear vague, [the] important point is that NATO group agree among themselves on interpretation."

Future Ambassador James E. Goodby drafted this cable at the very recently created ACDA.

Document 39
U.S. Mission to NATO POLTO Circular 34 to State Department, "NAC Meeting, October 25-Irish Resolution on Dissemination of Nuclear Weapons," 25 October 1961, Confidential

1961-10-25
Source: National Archives, State Department Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 375/10-2561
Debate in NATO'S high-level North Atlantic Council indicated strong support for the British amendment. While U.S. ambassador Thomas Finletter argued that it was the U.S. view that even without changes, the resolution was "not inconsistent with participation in present stockpile arrangements or other multilateral arrangements that might be envisaged," the other Council members objected to voting for the resolution with a "mental reservation." According to the Dutch representative, the resolution as constituted "would be interpreted by, large number of non-NATO countries as divergent even with collective arrangements existing or envisaged for NATO." The implication was that the resolution could give the Soviet bloc political leverage against nuclear-sharing arrangements. Moreover, Council members worried that the resolution could have a negative impact on public support in NATO countries for the Berlin Crisis military buildup. Finletter advised the Department that he was "sincerely disturbed at implications [of] this consultation" and asked that Secretary Rusk be informed directly.

Document 40
State Department circular telegram 780 to Certain American Diplomatic Posts, 26 October 1961, Confidential

1961-10-26
With the strong NATO sentiment in support of the British amendments, the State Department directed the U.S. Mission to "inform NAC members we [are] advising UK here
that we support their approaching Irish" with their suggestion to insert the words "control of" after "accept."

Document 41
S. Mission to the United Nations telegram 1381 to State Department, 27 October 1961, Confidential

1961-10-27
Meeting with Irish diplomat Sean Ronan, Shattuck of the British mission and David Popper of the U.S. Mission explained their government's preferences for the resolution's language, including adding the word "control of" after "accept." Ronan said that he believed that change would be accepted, although Aiken would have the final say about any changes in the text. According to Popper, "We emphasized present text RES acceptable to US and UK with our proposed changes."

Document 42
S. Mission to the United Nations telegram 1523 to State Department, 7 November 1961, Confidential

1961-11-07
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 700.5611/11-761
Deputy Ambassador George Arthur Plimpton reported that after consultations with Dublin, Ronan presented the latest version of the resolution's operative paragraphs. Incorporating the British proposal, a key sentence read that states "not possessing nuclear weapons would undertake not to acquire control of or to make such weapons." According to Plimpton, "believe new OP paragraphs 2 and 3 now entirely acceptable."

Document 43
S. Mission to the United Nations telegram 1612 to State Department, 13 November 1961, Confidential

1961-11-13
Another meeting with Ronan brought up several issues. Instead of "accept control" in the operative paragraph, the Irish proposed "accept possession," a change that U.S. delegation officials believed would "present difficulties." Moreover, the third operative paragraph concerning verification and control procedures had been redrafted so that it would be "applicable to non-nuclear states." Ronan had previously said that the problem with "making both nuclear and non-nuclear powers subject to measures [of] inspection and control was that nuclear powers unable [to] agree on what these measures should be and thus any action precluded."

**Document 44**
**State Department telegram 1240 to U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 14 November 1961, Confidential**

1961-11-14
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 700.5611/11-1361 1961-11-14
The State Department was uncomfortable with using “possession” instead of “control,” in part because it would “trouble allies.” The word “control” was a “somewhat broader concept and ... is [the] real key to [the] problem Irish are attacking.” Moreover, using the word “possession” had the implication that U.S. nuclear weapons should not be located on the territory of allies. Ronan should be told that Washington would reconsider support if “control” was not used. Another problem was that specifying that verification and control provisions only applied to non-nuclear countries could “prejudge the outcome of negotiations.” It was better to have a “more generalized reference to control.”

**Document 45**
**S. Mission to the United Nations telegram 1683 to State Department, 17 November 1961, Official Use Only**

1961-11-17
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 700.5611/11-1761 1961-11-17
Ronan brought back a near-final version that walked back "possession." Moreover, the Irish dropped the language about verification and control, replacing it with general language about urging "all states to cooperate to these ends" of nonproliferation.
Document 46
State Department telegram 1309 to U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 20 November 1961, Confidential

1961-11-20
Based on the most recent text, the State Department asked the Mission to consult with the British delegation and then inform the Irish that they had U.S. support. A few weeks later, on 5 December 1961, the U.N. General Assembly approved the Irish Resolution by acclamation.

Aftermath

Document 47
Memorandum of Conversation, "Courtesy Call by the Irish Minister for External Affairs," 19 December 1961, Official Use Only

1961-12-19
Source: RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 611.40a/12-1961
During a courtesy visit to the State Department, Aiken and Rusk discussed the problem of nuclear nonproliferation. Aiken believed that "some agreement" along the lines of the Irish resolution was possible. Rusk supported that goal but observed that "it was a little difficult to know how to proceed when a country like France did what it had done" ([that is, developed nuclear weapons). When Rusk mentioned the importance of a disarmament agreement, Aiken observed that the "Great Powers would never accept general and complete disarmament." In the end, Aiken and Rusk agreed on the importance of arms limitations and, in a suggestion of colonialist/big power thinking, of keeping nuclear weapons away from "lesser powers," especially African. Given Aiken's anti-imperialist politics, that statement may have been more Rusk than Aiken.

Document 48
The Irish resolution remained on the minds of U.S. officials. On 8 August 1962, Rusk met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin for discussions of arms control measures, including nuclear proliferation. The next day, as was his practice, Rusk briefed British, French, and West German diplomats on the talks. According to Rusk's account, he told Dobrynin that it "was desirable to move ahead in accordance with the Irish Resolution by means of arrangements whereby existing nuclear powers would not transfer nuclear weapons to other nations and others would not develop nuclear weapons of their own." Although the State Department record of the Rusk-Dobrynin conversation on "non-diffusion" does not specifically mention the Irish resolution, it was part of the subtext.
Ambassador to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge participating in a UN TV series “Dateline UN,” 29 September 1958. Lodge was sympathetic to Aiken’s nonproliferation resolution, but could not persuade the State Department to support it in 1960 (Image from Still Pictures Branch, U.S. National Archives, RG 59-50)
The White House left the 1961 negotiations over the Irish Resolution to the State Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, although President Kennedy met Frank Aiken during a visit to Ireland. On 27 June 1963, U.S. Ambassador Matthew McCloskey, Naval Aide Captain Tazewell Shepard, Aiken, and Kennedy visited the Commodore John Barry (USN) Memorial at Crescent Quay in Wexford, Ireland. Barry was a key figure in the creation of the U.S. Navy during the Revolutionary War. (Photo from John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Accession Number KN-C29831)

Notes


[5]. Hunt, at 29-30, characterizes the speech as a “milestone.”

[6]. Hunt, 42.
