

Neutrality and Security

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As the current government seeks to dismantle the triple lock and boost our military spending, we need to think more carefully about what security means in a modern world.

Many think that our security depends on being more militarily aligned with other European countries or possibly NATO and with enhancing our military strength. If any world super power decided our Western European island was required for their strategic security then our current military would not be an obstacle. That will not change by investing more in our military, unless we decided to hugely invest for decades. I believe investing in our military power over homes, transport and infrastructure would be a folly. So our motivation to arm-up is to convince potential military allies that we are a contributing partner, but that only increases chances that we will get drawn into future conflicts.

But I believe our security lies elsewhere. A key vulnerability is that our food and our energy is mostly imported. We saw this in a small way with the conflict in Ukraine, as gas and food prices climbed. We import 80% of the food we eat. While price hikes are unpleasant, a conflict closer to home could leave supermarket shelves bare, and you can not eat a jet-fighter.

If we want to be secure in a time of more global turmoil we need to grow more food. In a country with a strong agricultural base, we just need to pivot a little from an export-oriented beef and dairy farming to tillage for the domestic market.

Our second weakness is our fossil fuel dependency. The current government wants to increase this dependency by supporting a gas import terminal on the Shannon. There are seven countries in the world that now use no fossil fuels to power their grid. We need to join them by doubling down on wind and solar so the lights stay on no matter what chaos happens abroad.

Almost all modern wars are either funded by fossil fuel states or are fought to access more oil resources. Anything we can do to reduce our reliance upon fossil fuel will remove reasons for war. That is a better path than squaring up to the biggest bully in the room when we are not equipped for a fight.

Finally, many argue that neutrality is outdated in the 21st Century. I would suggest the opposite is true as never before has the world order needed independent voices that articulate neutrality. In a descending world of argument and bitterness, the long held position of neutrality allows us to engage internationally without being drawn into conflicts not of our making.