CrossMark

Irish Historical Studies (2020), 44 (165), 41–56. © Irish Historical Studies Publications Ltd 2020
doi:10.1017/ihs.2020.4

Addressing the Irish world: Éamon de Valera's 'Cuban policy' as a global case study

DARRAGH GANNON*
Queen's University Belfast

ABSTRACT. *Writing in* Nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858–1928*, Tom Garvin observed that 'well over 40 per cent, perhaps 50 per cent, had lived outside Ireland for considerable periods … foreign experience was very important in the development of the leaders'. The impact of 'foreign experience' on leading nationalist revolutionaries, this article submits,* pace *Garvin, could have proved influential in the development of the Irish Revolution more widely. Between June 1919 and December 1920, Éamon de Valera toured the United States. From New York City to Salt Lake City, Alabama to Montana, the self-proclaimed president of the Irish republic addressed 'Ireland' in hundreds of interviews and speeches. Of these myriad public statements, his Cuban missive, notably, crossed national boundaries. Comparing Ireland's geostrategic relationship with Great Britain to that of Cuba and the United States, de Valera's argument for an independent Irish republic was made in the Americas. How did de Valera's movement across the U.S. alter his political views of Ireland? How were presentations of de Valera's 'Cuban policy' mediated across the 'Irish world'? How did discourse on the Monroe Doctrine inform Anglo-Irish negotiations between Truce and Treaty? Exploring de Valera's 'Cuban policy' as global case study, this article concludes, ultimately, can shift the historiographical significance of 'foreign experience' from nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland to the flows and circulation of transnational revolution.*

Éamon de Valera's tour of America between June 1919 and December 1920 would prove one of the most divisive events in the history of the Irish Revolution. His extended visit to the United States would reinforce differences of perspective on the significance of 'long distance nationalism'. To some nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland, and their historians, de Valera's War of Independence was denoted by absence, a self-enforced 'exile' which removed him from the violent reality of revolution on the island.[1] To many Irish nationalists in the United States, and their historians, conversely, de Valera's presence in America highlighted the diasporic experience of the War of Independence, framing the political lobbying and public campaigning of Irish nationalists across the

* *School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast, D.Gannon@qub.ac.uk*

[1] For the 'exile' thesis see Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2002), p. 165; Charles Townshend, *The republic: the fight for Irish independence, 1918–1923* (London, 2013), pp 70–1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Atlantic as 'emigrant' success story.[2] Whether as 'exile' or 'emigrant', de Valera's tour of the United States would draw significant contemporary news coverage, and subsequent historiographical comment, on the geographical reach of the Irish Revolution.

Departing from Dublin, as 'president of Dáil Éireann', in May 1919, de Valera was unveiled to the world as 'President of the Irish Republic' on his arrival in New York on 23 June. Over a thousand people gathered at Manhattan's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel to attend his inaugural press conference. 'From today I am in America as the official head of the republic established by the will of the Irish people in accordance with the principles of self-determination', de Valera announced, 'we seek the aid of America … I feel that the American press will do its duty for me.'[3] Subsequent meetings with de Valera on his fifth-floor Waldorf Hotel suite would be presented as interviews with the 'President of the Irish Republic' in the 'Irish White House'.[4] 'We had styled de Valera president of the Republic of Ireland', I.R.B. envoy to the United States Patrick McCartan later reflected, 'he had assumed that title. The press conceded it to him'.[5] De Valera's presidential profile was developed further by his publicity-driven campaign team. Harry Boland and Liam Mellows served as advance agents for de Valera's speaking engagements, prepping local committees on de Valera's political credentials, and pre-circulating typescript copies of his remarks. The resourceful Tyrone-born Philadelphia-based entrepreneur Joseph McGarrity, meanwhile, turned his *Irish Press* newspaper into de Valera's unofficial campaign gazette, with the help of lifelong-friend and fellow Fenian, Patrick McCartan. Collectively, they cultivated the persona of the 'President of the Irish Republic'. Over time, de Valera would grow into the performance, and the self-importance, of that title.

De Valera's platform, to secure official U.S. recognition of the Irish republic, popular American support for the Irish case, and funding for the republican counter-state, was underpinned by a formidable political tour across the United States. Between June and August 1919 alone, he travelled over 6,000 miles coast-to-coast, addressing the case for the Irish republic to tens of thousands at Boston's Fenway Park, New York's Madison Square Garden, Chicago's Wrigley Field, and San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, among countless public statements. 'It was a spectacular performance', adjudged F. M. Carroll, 'de Valera's travels throughout America, more than any event since the 1916 Rising, dramatised for the American people the dimensions of the Irish struggle.'[6] The visible presence of the 'president of the Irish Republic' in the United States maintained 'Ireland' as international cause célèbre, in 1919.

This 'presidential campaign' was supported, in principle, by the Irish-American leadership of the Friends of Irish Freedom, Judge Daniel Cohalan and John Devoy, who enhanced de Valera's repute in Devoy's influential New York newspaper, the *Gaelic American*: 'Eamonn [*sic*] De Valera has had a most spectacular career. He

[2] For the 'emigrant' thesis see Robert Schmuhl, *Ireland's exiled children: America and the Easter Rising* (Oxford, 2016), pp 129–30; David Brundage, *Irish nationalists in America: the politics of exile, 1798–1998* (Oxford, 2016), pp 149–50.

[3] *New York Times*, 24 June 1919.

[4] Dave Hannigan, *De Valera in America* (New York, 2008), p. 14.

[5] Patrick McCartan, *With de Valera in America* (New York, 1932), p. 147.

[6] F. M. Carroll, *American opinion and the Irish question, 1910–1923* (Dublin, 1978), p. 150.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

has risen to the leadership of the Irish people more rapidly than any man in Irish history'.[7] Devoy's indomitable personality and Fenian outlook maintained a rigorous Irish political organisation in New York. Further, Cohalan's 'Tammany Hall' connections gave the Friends of Irish Freedom access to the political establishment in New York, and the corridors of power in Washington, D.C. Devoy and Cohalan, together, were the perfect 'running mates' for 'President de Valera'. Tensions emerged in the fall of 1919, however, over the direction of the republican movement in the United States. Cohalan's vehement opposition to Woodrow Wilson and his proposed League of Nations, conflicted with de Valera's ambitions for Wilsonian recognition. Control over the Friends of Irish Freedom, and the monies raised by their Irish Victory Fund, consequently, subjected the movement in the U.S. to a conflict between Irish- or American- first politics.[8] Maintaining displays of diaspora unity in public, de Valera wrote privately to members of the Dáil cabinet in Dublin to allay concerns over any potential suggestion of hyphenated politics. 'What I say in America is what I say in Ireland', he assured Arthur Griffith, 'summarized news cables [are] well calculated to give rise to false impressions.'[9] However, as David Brundage would later observe, 'in America as in Ireland itself, nationalism was never the unmediated expression of some kind of primordial Irish identity … it was, rather, an ongoing work of political imagination and discursive intervention'.[10] De Valera's 'Cuban interview' instanced this argument.

I

On 5 February 1920, de Valera gave an exclusive interview to the *Westminster Gazette*'s W. J. Hernan, in which he addressed the subject of 'Irish freedom and British security':

> If it were really her independence and her simple right to life as a national state that Britain wanted to safeguard, she could easily make provision for that without in any way infringing upon the equally sacred right of Ireland to its independence and to its life.
>
> The United States, by the Monroe Doctrine, made provision for its security without depriving the Latin republics of the South of their independence and their life. The United States safeguarded itself from the possible use of the island of Cuba as a base for an attack by a foreign power by stipulating:
>
> 'That the government of Cuba shall never enter into any treaty or other compact with any foreign power or powers which will impair or tend to impair the independence of Cuba, nor in any manner authorise or permit any foreign power or powers to obtain, by colonisation or for military or naval purposes or otherwise, lodgement in control over any portion of said island.'
>
> Why doesn't Britain do thus with Ireland as the United States did with

[7] *Gaelic American*, 28 June 1919.

[8] See Michael Doorley, *Irish-American diaspora nationalism: the Friends of Irish Freedom* (Dublin, 2005).

[9] Éamon de Valera to Arthur Griffith, 21 Aug. 1919 (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann secretariat, DE 2/245).

[10] Brundage, *Irish nationalists in America*, p. 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Cuba? Why doesn't Britain declare a Monroe Doctrine for the two neighbouring islands? The people of Ireland, so far from objecting, would co-operate with their whole soul in a regional understanding of that sort.[11]

De Valera's 'Cuban interview', as it would soon become known, was premised on the evolution of the United States' foreign policy in South and Central America over the 'long' nineteenth century. In 1823, American President James Monroe had declared in Congress that, henceforth, the U.S. would view European colonisation anywhere in the Americas as the 'manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States'.[12] Latin American countries, according to this doctrine, were to come under the U.S. 'sphere of influence'. Implementations of this doctrine, however, could range from multilateralism to colonialism. In April 1898 the U.S. intervened in the Cuban War of Independence against Spanish rule, securing the defeat of Spain, and Cuba's declaration as a 'self-governing colony' under American influence. Within the framework of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States Congress passed the Platt amendment on 2 March 1901, recognising Cuban independence on seven conditions. The first, quoted by de Valera in his *Westminster Gazette* interview, stated that the government of Cuba would not consent to political control or military influence over its territory by a 'foreign power'. The remainder of the agreement, however, gave the United States the unilateral right to transgress Cuban territory, as explicitly set out in condition three: 'That the government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty.'[13] 'Cuban status', and the realpolitik of the Monroe Doctrine, would remain a foreign policy ambiguity well into the twentieth century. As Gretchen Murphy concluded in relation to America's geo-strategic position, 'the Monroe Doctrine's flexibility has always provided its power'.[14]

The Monroe Doctrine's flexibility, further, would prove problematic in the aftermath of de Valera's interview with the *Westminster Gazette*. First published in the *New York Globe*, under the headline 'Compromise suggested by Irish', de Valera's now précised interview read as a climb down from the rock of the Irish republic. The newspaper's editor forwarded the view that de Valera had proposed 'the granting of complete independence to Ireland on the same basis as the independence granted to Cuba'.[15] This would be the interpretation adopted by Devoy in the columns of the *Gaelic American* in the weeks which followed. In spite of de Valera's sole reference to the first condition of the Platt amendment, the Clan na Gael leader issued scathing attacks on the president's 'Cuban interview': 'you cannot cite the Platt amendment without bringing in the whole text of it, which gives the United States rights in Cuba which it would be suicidal to give to England in Ireland'; 'it would give England the right to intervene in Ireland as the United States has

[11] *Speeches and statements made by Eamon de Valera, 1917–73*, ed. Maurice Moynihan (Dublin, 1980), p. 33.
[12] Elmer Plischke, *U.S. Department of State: a reference history* (Westport, CT, 1999), p. 70.
[13] Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba and the United States: ties of singular intimacy* (Athens, GA, 2003), p. 110.
[14] Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric imaginings: the Monroe Doctrine and narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham, 2005), p. viii.
[15] *New York Globe*, 6 Feb. 1920.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

frequently intervened in San Domingo'.[16] The public recrimination over 'Cuba' between the de Valera faction and the Devoy faction would come to define the Irish republican campaign in the United States over the course of the Irish Revolution, dividing its political organisation, policies, and potential influence in the 1920 U.S. presidential election.

Survey histories of the Irish revolutionary period have situated the issue of 'Cuba' within the established narrative of partisan Irish-American politics.[17] Biographical accounts of de Valera, similarly, have treated the 'Cuban interview' as tangential to the core matter of power politics in relation to diaspora nationalism. 'It was not over fundamentals that the real differences arose', the Earl of Longford and T. P. O'Neill noted in their biography, 'it was largely a question of personalities'.[18] Diarmaid Ferriter's assessment described it as one of the 'inconveniences and flash-points' of his American campaign: '[it] exposed the degree to which rival Irish-American organisations had very different views of how to integrate the Irish issue into American political life'.[19] Ronan Fanning's biography has gone the furthest to date in respect of de Valera's political thought, acknowledging the 'enduring significance' of his Cuban analogy.[20]

II

Conceived from de Valera's reading on Latin America, written for American and British audiences, and circulated around the Irish 'world', the 'Cuban interview' can be more instructively framed as an exemplar of de Valera's developing political thought as he moved across the United States. The *Westminster Gazette* interview presented a single case study in de Valera's considered 'Cuban policy'.

From his very arrival in the United States, de Valera cultivated the politics of 'Pan-Americanism'. This was the idea, expounded by U.S. political leaders from the late-nineteenth century, of strategic cooperation between the American and Latin American nations, with the view to safeguading mutual security and trade interests in the 'Western Hemisphere'.[21] The ideal of 'Pan-Americanism', notably, was championed by Woodrow Wilson, who advocated for U.S. influence in South America both as a guarantor of the independence of Latin American nations, and of 'inter-American harmony' between north and south.[22] To campaign on 'Pan-Americanism' in the United States of 1919 was to appear presidential. Addressing those who had gathered to hear his inaugural speech at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on 23 June, de Valera framed the issue of American support

[16] *Gaelic American*, 21 Feb., 13 Mar. 1920.

[17] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, pp 171–2; Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919–22* (Dublin, 1995), pp 194–5.

[18] Earl of Longford and T. P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 1970), p. 106.

[19] Diarmaid Ferriter, *Judging Dev: a reassessment of the life and legacy of Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 2007), p. 35.

[20] Ronan Fanning, *Éamon de Valera: a will to power* (London, 2015), pp 186–7.

[21] See Arthur Whitaker, *The western hemisphere idea: its rise and decline* (Ithaca, 1954). Other scholars have positioned 'Pan-Americanism' as an extension of American 'imperial' policy. See David Sheinin (ed.), *Beyond the ideal: Pan Americanism in inter-American affairs* (Westport, CT, 2000).

[22] Mark Gilderhus, *Pan American visions: Woodrow Wilson in the western hemisphere, 1913–1921* (Tucson, 1986).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for the Irish republic in the historical context of U.S. recognition of independent republics in South and Central America:

> When other Chancellories and Cabinets callously closed their ears to the agonizing cries of the peoples of Poland, Greece, Hungary and the Latin races of this continent … your nation conscious of its mission listened to them and braved the oppressor's wrath in succouring them … the Latin nations as well as Poland, Hungary and Greece are now free states.[23]

Further statements underlining the historical significance of 'Pan-Americanism' were made in speeches to the mining community of Helena, Montana, the steel-work community of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the port community of Savannah, Georgia, in the months which followed.[24] Raising the claims of Latin American people in the specific spaces of 'white' America reinforced de Valera's 'presidential' standing, above the body politic. Such rhetoric, indeed, marked a significant departure in the public discourse of the republican movement, from the Euro-centricity and racial exclusivity of Sinn Féin propaganda in early 1919. As Gerard Keown has observed, the republican leaders in Ireland viewed themselves 'as a white, European race with a large diaspora in the English-speaking dominions and the United States'.[25] De Valera's identification with Latin America was strengthened by public commentary on his own ethnic background. He was variously introduced to American readers as the son of a Spanish, Cuban or South American immigrant.[26] 'Edward [sic] de Valera is interesting', the *Texas Messenger* reported, 'not merely because of his political significance, but because he himself is such a curious mixture – the Spanish-American-Irish leader'.[27] Such was the credibility of de Valera's Latin image that he was regularly asked by journalists to comment on current affairs in South and Central America, such as the Mexican Civil War.[28] The development of a 'Pan-American' identity was integral to de Valera's evolving presentation as 'president'.

'Very very busy packing ten bags for Washington. Chief is a terrible man for bags, books and notes. Each trip we take no matter how short, take enough books, etc, to fill a room. As usual nearly miss the train.'[29] Harry Boland's diary entry from January 1920 is revealing for its insight into the fundamental dynamic of de Valera's intellectual development in the United States – geographical movement. Campaigning coast to coast, de Valera's tours of the United States – via train – were themselves a political journey. The intensity of travel between American cities effectively necessitated the usage of train compartments as library, study, and office. 'We are typing this on the train to Philadelphia', de Valera advised Arthur Griffith in February 1920, 'will have to get off in a few minutes so it will be

[23] *New York Tribune*, 24 June 1919.
[24] *Anaconda Standard*, 31 July 1919; *Pittsburgh Press*, 5 Oct. 1919; *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 Apr. 1920.
[25] Gerard Keown, *First of the small nations: the beginnings of Irish foreign policy in the inter-war years* (Oxford, 2016), p. 82.
[26] *Baltimore Sun*, 22 June 1919; *Iowa Gazette*, 25 June 1919; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 29 June 1919.
[27] *Texas Messenger*, 2 July 1919.
[28] *El Paso Herald*, 17 July 1919.
[29] Harry Boland diary, 26 Jan. 1920 (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/1169d).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

incomplete.'[30] Scheduled train stops, meanwhile, provided opportunities to acquire local reading materials. 'Busy day shopping for de Valera', Harry Boland recorded of Washington D.C., 'Chief raids book store, 2 hours in store, emerges. 16 books on Ireland.'[31]

De Valera's papers, indeed, reveal the voluminous tour 'library' of a capacious reader. Chief amongst de Valera's 'American collection', significantly, were titles on U.S.-Latin American relations. De Valera's 'Cuban bibliography' ranged from political histories to edited volumes of contemporary speeches and biographies of political figures.[32] A studious note taker, de Valera's archived jottings indicate the emergence of an empirically-sourced 'Cuban policy'. His annotations to one text read: 'presidents are no infallible guides for the future as no two cases are identical and in some respects the Irish case is unique; but precedents are useful as revealing established principles'.[33] In a loose folio attached to these notes, de Valera had elsewhere mused: 'America had first and alone recognised the independence of South American states and braved the ire of Spain'.[34] In a draft article, de Valera had compared Ireland with Latin America's 'small nations': 'the population of Ireland is greater than that of Chile, Costa Rica, Eduador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, San Salvador and Uruguay, all sovereign states on the American continent'.[35] 'The immediate recognition of the Irish Republic', he reasoned in one document, 'would be in strict accordance with 1. American History and the spirit of American institutions 2. The definite diplomatic tradition of the United States … from Jefferson and Hamilton emanated the policy of "de facto" recognition'.[36] The example of Latin America, de Valera's ongoing research suggested, offered historical precedent by which to leverage American policy towards recognition of the Irish republic.

Far from the reductive analogy of historical caricature, de Valera's 'Cuban interview' emerged from a developing 'Pan-American' strategy for securing Irish independence. His intensive reading into the United States' historic relationship with the Latin American nations formed the basis for the 'South American strand' of that strategy. Recognition of the Irish Republic by the Latin American republics, according to de Valera's reading, would pressure the United States to offer similar diplomatic recognition, in the interest of maintaining mutual safeguards for the security of the 'Western Hemisphere'. Working in transit, Harry Boland secured translations of Dáil Éireann documents into Spanish for circulation 'in the South American republics'.[37] By March 1920, de Valera had thought through his 'South American project'.[38] Writing to the Dáil cabinet, he requested approval for a South American tour, for which he would require 'data [from Dublin] dealing with all Departments set up by Dáil in so far as they tend to assume de facto

[30] Éamon de Valera to Arthur Griffith, Feb. 1920 (ibid., P150/1134).
[31] Harry Boland diary, 18 Dec. 1919 (ibid., P150/1169d).
[32] F. W. Gibbs, *Recognition: a chapter from the history of the North American & South American states* (London, 1863); *The works of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (7 vols, New York, 1904–5); Louis Arthur Coolidge, *Orville H. Platt of Connecticut: the story of a life unselfishly devoted to the public service* (New York, 1910).
[33] Éamon de Valera annotations, n.d. (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/674).
[34] Éamon de Valera note, n.d. (ibid., P150/674).
[35] Éamon de Valera draft article 'Is the Irish nation a small nation?', n.d. (ibid., P150/704).
[36] Éamon de Valera annotations, n.d. (ibid., P150/674).
[37] Harry Boland to Michael Collins, 13 Jan. 1920 (ibid., P150/1125).
[38] Éamon de Valera to Dáil Éireann cabinet, 10 Mar. 1920 (ibid., P150/727).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

government of the country'.[39] The presentation of such information to the officials of South American states, de Valera suggested, would legitimise the appeal for 'de facto recognition' from the Latin republics. Reviewing his proposal in June 1920, the Dáil cabinet advised: 'your presence in the United States at the present juncture is of more importance than a visit to South America'.[40] De Valera would postpone his tour of Latin America indefinitely. The republics of South and Central America, nonetheless, remained of interest to de Valera's 'Pan-American' strategy for recognition of the Irish republic. Dáil Éireann resolutions, indeed, would continue to be sent to the Washington embassies of Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Columbia, and Mexico, on de Valera's request, long after his departure from the United States in December 1920.[41] De Valera's nuanced reading of 'Pan-Americanism' informed the formulation of the 'South American strand' to his 'Cuban policy' for securing recognition of the Irish republic.

The Wilsonian imperative to imbue 'Pan-Americanism' with an American moral obligation to foster the development of political independence among Latin American nations, moreover, cohered de Valera's political thought around the 'American strand' of his emergent 'Cuban policy'. '[Recognition] *may* be a moral intervention, intended to show sympathies', he had noted in his extensive reading on South America, 'since the time of Jefferson, with very few lapses, the United States have followed the settled policy of de facto recognition without intervention'.[42] This Latin American formula for American recognition of the Irish republic, de Valera considered, would negate U.S. concerns over any consequent commitment to military action against Great Britain. The United States should recognise the de facto independence of the Irish republic, as it had done previously in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Consistent with this strategy, de Valera submitted a proposal to the American president in October 1920, entitled *Ireland's request to the government of the United States of America for recognition as a sovereign independent state*. Paramount to de Valera's case was the historic relationship between the United States and the republics of South and Central America. The platform rhetoric of his earlier campaign was reproduced in the text: 'if the argument that Britain seeks to have applied to Ireland were accepted in the case of other countries … the countries of Latin America [would] still be subject to Spain'. So too was the reading material that de Valera had consumed on America and the Latin republics: 'it is apparent that the United States has clear diplomatic tradition in the policy of recognition of new states when they have established themselves *de facto*, notwithstanding the inevitable protests of the "parent" states'. More significant still, de Valera repeated his *Westminster Gazette* reference to the provisions of the Monroe Doctrine, and the Platt amendment, in relation to supporting Great Britain's security requirements: 'Ireland is quite ready by treaty to insure England's safety and legitimate security against the danger of foreign powers seeking to use Ireland as a base of attack against her.'[43] The strategic development of de

[39] Harry Boland to Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Apr. 1920 (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann secretariat papers, DE 2/245).

[40] Diarmuid O'Hegarty to Éamon de Valera, 8 June 1920 (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/729).

[41] Collection of Dáil Éireann resolutions, Apr.–Aug. 1921 (ibid., P150/1357).

[42] Éamon de Valera note, n.d. (ibid., P150/674).

[43] Éamon de Valera, *Ireland's request to the government of the United States of America for recognition as a sovereign independent state* (Washington D.C., 1920), pp 10–17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Valera's 'Cuban policy' was underpinned by historical and contemporary conceptions of 'Pan-Americanism' in the United States.

Writing on the 'American identity' of Éamon de Valera, Owen Dudley Edwards observed that although de Valera was Irish, 'his American origins, his American yearning and – in 1919–20 – his American education made him wear his Irishness with a difference'.[44] De Valera's experience of the United States, beyond the Irish-American political mainstream, imbued him with a greater transnational 'American identity' than has heretofore been acknowledged. Reading, writing, and reciting the arguments for the independence of the Latin republics informed his broader 'Cuban policy' for recognition of the Irish republic in 1920. Specifically, it altered his geographical frame of reference for the development of constitutional accommodations between the Irish republic and the United Kingdom. De Valera's 'Pan-American' education further distanced him from the body of Irish-American opinion. Politically-driven, and independently-minded, de Valera's intellectual preoccupation with 'Cuba' gradually disassociated him from deference to Irish-American politics. He now assumed the greater political interest, and political standing, of an American president.

III

De Valera's interview with the *Westminster Gazette* in February 1920 served as a Cuban kite. Drafting his official biography in the late 1960s, Longford and O'Neill noted that an interview was arranged with W. J. Hernan 'in which he [de Valera] announced terms upon which the Irish Republic would be willing to open negotiations and conclude peace with Great Britain'.[45] De Valera would distance himself from this narrative in the final edition, positioning his interview as intended for Irish audiences 'where he knew his argument would be understood'.[46] This interpretation, however, is undermined by both the content, and context, of his comments. The subject of de Valera's remarks (British security concerns) was evidently prepared with a British readership in mind. His decision to award this interview to the *Westminster Gazette*, indeed, suggested that he had a specific British readership in mind. Appealing to readers across the aisle, but principally members of the British Liberal Party, the *Westminster Gazette* was known as one of London's most influential 'clubland papers'.[47] Counting David Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, and Herbert Asquith among its daily readers, the paper was notable for its extensive reporting of political speeches and statements. De Valera's interview, consequently, would be expected to receive additional editorial space in the pages of the *Westminster Gazette*. Published on 7 February, under the headline 'How de Valera would safeguard England', the newspaper framed the Cuban analogy as a 'remarkable development of de Valera's views on Ireland … de Valera has endeavoured to remove one of the substantial fears in regard to Ireland, and that on

[44] Owen Dudley Edwards, 'The American identity of de Valera' in Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (eds), *De Valera's Irelands* (Cork, 2003), p. 28.

[45] Frank Pakenham and T. P. O'Neill, 'American soil' notes, n.d. (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/706).

[46] Longford & O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera*, p. 103.

[47] Stephen Koss, *The nineteenth century: the rise and fall of the political press in Britain* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1981), p. 361.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

practical and tested lines'.[48] The *Westminster Gazette*'s reading of de Valera's comments underlined the contemporary view of his 'Cuban interview', as an overture to the British government for the opening of political negotiations. 'There is de Valera who is making speeches about Cuba', David Lloyd George later commented, 'for the moment he represents political opinion among the Catholic nationalists'.[49]

But de Valera's 'Cuban interview' was not representative of Irish-American nationalists. More specifically, his solo-run on Cuba with the view to negotiating an accommodation with the British government was unsupportable on the part of Daniel Cohalan and John Devoy. Their public attacks on de Valera in the *Gaelic American* were brought into focus in their private correspondence. Writing to Judge Cohalan on 20 February, de Valera asserted his authority over the application of the Cuban analogy: 'I am definitely responsible to them [the Irish people], and *I alone* am responsible. It is my obvious duty to select such instruments as may be available for the task set me.'[50] The individual responses of Cohalan and Devoy evidenced antipathy to the 'Cuban interview' on account of Havana's subordinate status to the United States, and de Valera's single-handed approach to the British government. 'A British Monroe Doctrine that would make Ireland the ally of England, and thus buttress the falling British Empire … would be so immoral', Cohalan replied to de Valera; 'you are woefully out of touch with the spirit of the country in which you are sojourning'.[51] Devoy echoed these sentiments in a letter to a colleague: 'he gives the proposition to an English paper – it is being freely discussed now in England and Ireland – but an Irish paper in America has no right to say a word except in approval … his motto is "the King can do no wrong" and the motto of his heelers is the Wilsonian one, "Stand behind the President"'.[52] Éamon de Valera's intellectual journey from the politics of Irish-America to the politics of Latin America, undertaken beyond the interference of John Devoy and Daniel Cohalan, was re-oriented towards British political opinion. In both this new British direction, and its Cuban inflection, the New York leadership found further evidence of de Valera 'the Chief'.

Irish-American opinion, however, was not synonymous with 'New York-Ireland'. De Valera's exhaustive tour of the United States had mobilised unprecedented Irish nationalist support from the west coast to the deep south, encouraging localised responses to the 'Cuban interview'. Irish-American views were to be found beyond the 'Tammany' politics of the five boroughs, and the pages of the *Gaelic American*, in other sources of public opinion. As Kevin Kenny has observed, 'Irish-American ethnic identity needs to be understood as historical, contingent and contested, rather than essential, fixed, and agreed upon.'[53] Moving further south evidences alternative perspectives. The Philadelphia-based duo of McGarrity and McCartan, unsurprisingly, offered a ringing endorsement of de Valera's Cuban analogy in the *Irish Press*: 'he has demolished for all time the English Government's strongest argument against the recognition of the Republic of Ireland … in this statement, obvious though its truth was, President de Valera has proved himself to be a

[48] *Westminster Gazette*, 7 Feb. 1920.
[49] Thomas Jones, *Whitehall diary, vol. iii: Ireland, 1918–1925*, ed. Keith Middlemas (London, 1971), p. 34.
[50] Éamon de Valera to Daniel Cohalan, 20 Feb. 1920 (American Irish Historical Society, NY (A.I.H.S.), Friends of Irish Freedom papers, box 4, folder 1).
[51] Daniel Cohalan to Éamon de Valera, 22 Feb. 1920 (ibid., box 4, folder 1).
[52] John Devoy to a 'colleague', 26 Feb. 1920 (ibid., box 4, folder 1).
[53] Kevin Kenny, *Making sense of the Molly Maguires* (Oxford, 1998), p. 9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

statesman'.[54] These views were echoed in the Ancient Order of Hibernians-led *Kentucky Irish American:* 'this is a fine statesmanlike solution of difficulties to which England can well afford to hearken; a solution which would bring about the independence of Ireland, establish faith and loyalty and mutual support between the two countries'.[55] Other responses were less direct. In a series of articles published in May 1920, entitled 'The American view on Irish freedom', the leader of the Oklahoma Friends of Irish Freedom offered implicit support for de Valera's position: 'we may discount wholly all the hysteria we hear about Ireland being a continual menace to Great Britain if she were granted her freedom … America might just as well fear a serious attack from Cuba as England worry about Ireland'.[56] Irish-America, more broadly, however, appeared divided on the *Westminster Gazette* interview. De Valera and Devoy both received mail from across the country which tended to reinforce their own perspectives. Writing from Portland, Oregon, Irish-American supporter Thomas Mannix advised Devoy: 'He [de Valera] belongs to the second generation. *Don't let him compromise* … Oregon is with de Valera of course but with you most'.[57] Cleveland-based Ohio Clan na Gael organiser John Walsh strengthened Devoy's conviction: 'the Judge's letter is a masterpiece and if the First Citizen of the I.R. is not completely intoxicated with egotism, it should make him pause and think'.[58] Elsewhere in Ohio, however, de Valera received support from John Castellini, the Cincinatti-based organiser of the American Commission on Irish Independence: 'you should hold steadfast, doing that which your conscience dictates for the good of the Cause'.[59] Irish-America was divided, not necessarily between north and south, but by individual, local, and regional relationships with the respective New York leaderships of Devoy and de Valera. Devoy would capture this vast spectrum of Irish-American opinion in a revealing letter:

> A large number will stand by him [de Valera], some because they think his proposition a wonderful stroke of 'policy', others for the sake of presenting a united front to the enemy, others still out of enmity to John Devoy … but every day thinking men are coming round to the view that de Valera's action is a serious danger to the National Cause.[60]

De Valera's February 1920 interview on the Platt amendment constituted the first Treaty split. The 'Cuban interview', and Irish-American responses to it, seriously threatened the public appearance of Irish national unity for the first time. De Valera and the Dáil cabinet immediately went into emergency response mode. The publication of Devoy's attacks prompted urgent briefings of the Dáil leadership in Dublin from de Valera and his associates. 'I am sending on the last three issues', Harry Boland hurriedly wired to Michael Collins, 'they seized on this opportunity

[54] *Irish Press*, 21 Feb. 1920.
[55] *Kentucky Irish American*, 6 Mar. 1920.
[56] *Oklahoma Daily Free-Lance*, 4 May 1920.
[57] Thomas Mannix to John Devoy, 5 Mar. 1920 (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/1008).
[58] John Walsh to John Devoy, 31 Mar. 1920 (ibid., P150/1008).
[59] John Castellini to Éamon de Valera, 24 June 1920 (ibid., P150/725).
[60] John Devoy to a 'colleague', 26 Feb. 1920 (A.I.H.S., Friends of Irish Freedom papers, box 4, folder 1).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the *Westminster Gazette* interview to knife us, and to knife Ireland.'[61] De Valera, further, hastily wrote to Arthur Griffith: 'to ease the mind of everybody I want you to know at all times that I never in public or private say or do anything here which is not thoroughly consistent with my attitude at home as you have known it'.[62] Patrick McCartan, meanwhile, was urgently despatched to Dublin to mediate the 'Cuban' narrative to the Dáil cabinet. The republican publicity machine in Ireland now went into collective effect. At a 4 March press conference, Arthur Griffith 'reaffirmed Mr. de Valera's assertion that Ireland was willing to accept a British Monroe Doctrine if she were granted full independence'.[63] Seven days later, an official statement from the Dáil cabinet defending de Valera's position was agreed upon.[64] A private letter to Devoy and Cohalan by Arthur Griffith followed: 'bitter indignation exists in Ireland at the moment over the report of these attacks on the Irish President. Public expression of that indignation I am seeking to avoid'.[65] 'At every stage, no matter what difference is found', Michael Collins would write to Harry Boland, 'your other colleagues and myself have unfailingly endorsed your action and words even when they were not known to us … what you do we regard ourselves as doing'.[66]

Reading between the lines, however, a prevailing tension over de Valera's 'Cuban policy' can be surmised. Reflecting on peace initiatives during the War of Independence, unofficial Dáil emissary to Downing Street, Patrick Moylett, recalled discussing the Cuban initiative privately with Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith: 'Collins was critical of de Valera, Griffith disagreed with him [Collins] … [commenting] "it is our business to be perfectly loyal to him"'.[67] Deputy chairman of Dáil Éireann, J. J. O'Kelly, similarly recorded, 'it struck us all as somewhat inexplicable … when the suggestion came before the Dáil there was no disagreement but certainly no ardour for it … no matter what de Valera did – in the circumstances of the time – we would uphold him'.[68] Such remarks are noteworthy, not because they reinforce republican political conformity, but because they reveal the extent to which de Valera's 'Cuban policy' was considered, in actuality, to have compromised the Irish republic. Indeed, in respect of the later Anglo-Irish Treaty split, it might be observed that those Dáil divisions were foreshadowed in February 1920, not on the basis of personality, but on the basis of political policy. McCartan, who quietly resented de Valera's Cuban analogy ('he had reduced our aim to that of a vassal state before the world'), was tasked with explaining the policy to the Dáil cabinet: 'Countess Markievicz commented that de Valera talked only for himself and could not commit the Dáil even if he wanted to. Count Plunkett and Cathal Brugha showed marked hostility to the proposal, and desired to discuss it separately. But Collins and Griffith shut down the discussion and led in

[61] Harry Boland to Michael Collins, 26 Feb. 1920 (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/1125).
[62] Éamon de Valera to Arthur Griffith, 17 Feb. 1920 (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann secretariat, DE 2/245).
[63] *Irish Independent*, 5 Mar. 1920.
[64] Dáil Éireann cabinet minutes, 11 Mar. 1920 (N.A.I., Dáil Éireann cabinet records, DE 1/2).
[65] Arthur Griffith to John Devoy and Daniel Cohalan, 23 Jun. 1920 (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/1125).
[66] Michael Collins to Harry Boland, 5 Mar. 1920 (ibid., P150/1125).
[67] Patrick Moylett statement (M.A.I., B.M.H., W.S. 767).
[68] J. J. Kelly witness statement (M.A.I., B.M.H., W.S. 384).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the acceptance of de Valera's explanation.' Their constitutional alignments, McCartan later reflected, would prove remarkably prescient:

> I have always remembered that both were then as ready to oppose a compromise on the part of de Valera as they later were to oppose Griffith and Collins. The hostility of Countess Markievicz, Count Plunkett and Cathal Brugha to the Cuban statement left no doubt in my mind that they upheld the sovereign independence of the Republic of Ireland.[69]

The appearance of compromise on 'Cuba' revealed the positioning of Griffith and Collins in the event of a break on the 'Republic' – they would serve, ultimately, as willing voices of political moderation. De Valera had survived the first Dáil divide on the constitutional status of the Irish republic. 'Cuba' would remain a point of reference in his negototiation of Truce and Treaty.

IV

The influence of the 'Cuban policy' in Irish preparations to negotiate the Anglo-Irish Treaty was in evidence from as early as July 1921. Returning from London on 20 July, with the British government's initial proposal of dominion status in hand, de Valera assigned Erskine Childers to review the legal terms of the draft treaty in respect of national defence. Childers's evaluation of the proposal, presented to the Dáil cabinet four days later, included a rigorous critique of the potential to transpose 'Cuban status' to Ireland in relation to geo-strategic security:

> The precedents are not favourable … Cuba is bound to lease and has leased to the United States ports, but the condition is combined with the right of American intervention in the island on domestic grounds, as well as with the obligation on Cuba's part not to enter into any foreign treaty which might endanger her integrity … Cuba is theoretically a sovereign independent state, actually her status appears to be inferior and dependent … the conditions in the case of Cuba are not present in that of Ireland.[70]

Childers's critical review of 'Cuban status' notwithstanding, the relationship between Cuba and the United States on the issues of national defence and security remained essential to de Valera's strategic thinking on sovereignty. Addressing Dáil Éireann in August 1921, he signalled a more accommodating Irish negotiating position, consistent with his earlier public statements in the United States:

> It was ridiculous of course to say that because Ireland was near Britain she should give Britain safeguards. But America demanded such strategic safeguards from the small island of Cuba and those people in America who talk in our favour were the people who could not allow an independent Cuba beside them. England would go on the claim that she had a right to

[69] McCartan, *With de Valera in America*, p. 153.
[70] Erskine Childers memorandum on Irish defence, 25 July 1921 (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/1913).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> protect her own shores and by Ireland resisting that she would tell the world they were resisting something reasonable.[71]

While de Valera infamously did not return to London for the renewal of negotiations in October 1921, Cuba would be made a key reference case study for the Irish plenipotentiaries. The Irish delegation's preparatory notes for the first plenary session contained copies of a draft memorandum entitled 'The United States and Cuba'.[72] Meanwhile, among the Treaty ephemera retained by Robert Barton, and donated to the Bureau of Military History, was a copy of the 1902 treaty between Cuba and the United States.[73] The case for Cuba, developed as a diplomatic strategy to gain recognition for the Irish republic in the United States, now had the potential to impact directly upon the negotiation of Ireland's constitutional relationship with(in) the United Kingdom.

Writing on the 'politics of' the Treaty split, Bill Kissane has observed that, 'by 1921 Sinn Féin had become prisoner of its own rhetoric … the fear of republicans that cooperation within the Empire would mean a loss of Irish nationality showed how far the process of absorption had actually gone'.[74] A notable exception to this politics of introspection was de Valera's concept of 'external association'. According to this formulation, the government of the United Kingdom would recognise the 'Irish Republic' as a sovereign state, the latter independently associating itself with, but remaining constitutionally external to, the British Commonwealth. Presented by the plenipotentiaries as an alternative to dominion status during the Treaty negotiations, and by de Valera himself as an alternative to the Anglo-Irish Treaty ('Document No. 2'), 'external association' has been explained by Nicholas Mansergh as a constitutional compromise, born out of political necessity in Dublin in advance of the London conference.[75] This, however, is to overlook the strategic assurances on mutual defence and security essential to the proposals, and their earlier American origins in the form of a 'Cuban policy'. Unlike the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which imposed a British naval presence in Irish ports in time of war, in addition to the peacetime ports of Cobh, Berehavan, and Lough Swilly, the 'external association' proposals submitted under 'Document No. 2' committed the Irish republic to a shared responsibility for the maintenance of the British 'sphere of influence': 'Ireland shall provide for her own defence by sea, land, and air and shall repel by force any attempt by a foreign Power to violate the integrity of her soil and territorial waters, or to use them for any purpose hostile to Great Britain and the other associated States.'[76] These provisions, intended as a conciliatory offer to strengthen strategic ties with the United Kingdom, closely adhered to the terms and conditions of the Platt amendment, as proposed by de Valera in the United States almost two years previously. Cuban referents, however, held little sway on the floor of Dáil Éireann. Discussion on 'external association', in the aftermath of the Treaty, rather, underlined the innate localism of the debate.

[71] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, ii, 33 (22 Aug. 1921).
[72] Typescript note, 'The United States and Cuba', 1921 (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/1555).
[73] Robert Barton statement (M.A.I., B.M.H., W.S. 979).
[74] Bill Kissane, *The politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford, 2003), p. 63.
[75] Nicholas Mansergh, *The unresolved question: the Anglo-Irish settlement and its undoing, 1912–1972* (New Haven, CT, 1991), pp 181–2.
[76] 'The President's alternative proposals', Jan. 1922 (U.C.D.A., Éamon de Valera papers, P150/1540).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Responding to de Valera's 'Document No. 2', pro-Treaty T.D. Alexander McCabe caustically dismissed this 'Central American brand of freedom': 'I think ninety-nine men out of every hundred, if it were a matter of choice, would vote for ours … [over] a Republic of the Central American variety with all the forms of independence and none of the substance … where is it in Cuba for instance – the *beau idéal* of some prominent members of the opposition?' Responding to de Valera's reply of 'misrepresentation', McCabe laid out his opposition to the policy in more explicitly racial terms: 'give us anything that will stamp us as white men and women, but for Heaven's sake don't give us a Central American Republic'.[77] Considering the defeat of 'external association' in London and Dublin, Michael Hopkinson has concluded that de Valera's proposal 'had considerable limitations as a means of unifying the Sinn Féin movement. It was not easily understood'.[78] Deriving its framework from the constitutional relationships of the Americas, 'external association' lacked political precedent within the United Kingdom polity.

V

The impact of the 'Cuban policy' on Irish politics would extend well beyond the Treaty debates. 'Cuba' would become a metonym for de Valera's alleged compromise of the 'Irish Republic' in Dáil Éireann debates throughout the inter-war period. In a bitter exchange with Arthur Griffith on the latter's election as president of Dáil Éireann in April 1922, de Valera defended his decision to leave parliament in protest: 'I wanted to maintain the Republic until the time people were entitled to speak on this question. That was the only protest I could make against the election of a minister whose policy it was to destroy it, and I made that protest. My statement is on record.' 'So is your Cuban statement', Griffith replied. De Valera's chagrin towards his former ally was patent: 'Oh! You are mean! You are vilely mean! You know you said those who attacked me on that occasion were mainly responsible for the record of terror in Ireland.'[79] The issue of 'Cuba' would once again return to the Dáil chambers following Fianna Fáil's election victory in 1932. In a debate on the removal of the oath of allegiance, Cumann na nGaedheal's Patrick McGilligan objected to the Free State government's decision not to negotiate terms with the British government: 'the President objects to negotiations … the President has had a varying series of phrases as marking what he stood for at different times since 1916. In America there is a speech at any rate on Cuban status'.[80] Further, in a debate on the Free State's introduction of legislation to prevent the movement of Irish and British subjects to Spain through the United Kingdom during the Spanish Civil War, Fine Gael T.D. John O'Sullivan reproached de Valera's Fianna Fáil government: 'I see that his colleague – no, it is the Home Secretary, is going to prosecute all British citizens … I understand he is getting back document No. 2. Is he also getting back to the Cuban position?'[81] The recurrent reference to 'Cuba' in the Dáil debates of the 1920s and 1930s is noteworthy, indicative not

[77] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, ii, 220–1 (4 Jan. 1922).
[78] Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 1988), p. 27.
[79] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, ii, 308–9 (27 Apr. 1922).
[80] Ibid., vii, 1002–3 (29 Apr. 1932).
[81] Ibid., viii, 622 (18 Feb. 1937).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press

only of prevailing Civil War tensions in the decades after the Treaty, but also the suggested strength of antipathy to the 'Cuban policy' between 1920 and 1922.

Éamon de Valera's 'Cuban policy' is a salient case study into the latent conceptual space, yet empirical specificity, of writing the Irish Revolution to scale, as global history. Arriving in New York in June 1919 as 'President of Dáil Éireann', de Valera's movement across the United States piqued his intellectual and political interest in the Latin republics, developing in de Valera a 'Pan-American' worldview, and an American presidential persona. Reading, writing, and reciting the arguments for the independence of the Latin republics, formed part of de Valera's carefully thought-out 'Cuban policy' to achieve recognition of the Irish republic. The 'North American' and 'South American' strands of this policy respectively, were formulated according to precepts of sovereignty, security, and spheres of influence inherent in the historical and contemporary experiences of 'Pan-Americanism'. His 'Cuban interview' with the *Westminster Gazette* in February 1920 constituted one case study in de Valera's politically-sophisticated, sustained 'Cuban policy'. His intellectual preoccupation with 'Cuba' gradually disassociated him from deference to Irish-American politics, reinforcing his increasing belief in the office of the 'President of the Irish Republic'. His political positioning during the 'Cuban interview', and its aftermath, revealed a simultaneous willingness to accommodate British political opinion and negate Irish-American opinion. De Valera's 'Cuban policy' would be transferred to Ireland, in February 1920, out of (American) context, causing the first 'Treaty split' in Dáil Éireann, divisions on the principle of external compromise which presaged eventual Anglo-Irish Treaty alignments in December 1921. The rejection of the Cuban-linked concept of 'external association' at Downing Street and, subsequently, in Dáil Éireann, does not alter the significance of transnational American discourse on independence entering into Irish constitutional debate during the period of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and the later inter-war years. Exploring de Valera's 'Cuban policy' as a global case study can helpfully reconceptualise the intellectual focus of academic scholarship on 'foreign experience' during the Irish Revolution, from nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland to the flows and circulation of transnational revolution.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2020.4 Published online by Cambridge University Press