

### 3.IRL The Pursuit of Sovereignty and the Impact of Partition | Sample answer

#### **During the period 1922-1945, how effective were the governments of both Cosgrave and de Valera in dealing with threats to the security of the state? (2018)**

During the period 1922-1945 the government of both Cosgrave and de Valera faced many threats to the security of the state. The threats came from both home and abroad and included the Army Mutiny of 1923, Communist, Fascist and IRA threats, and World War II. This essay aims to examine how effectively both governments dealt these threats.

The Army Mutiny was the biggest threat to the new Irish Free State. In June 1923 there were about 49,000 men in the Free State Army. Following the end of the Civil war the government wanted to reduce this number to about 20,000. There was growing anger among some officers after hearing this decision. They didn't trust the Minister for Defence, Richard Mulcahy, feeling that he would force many IRA men to retire. The officers had other complaints as well. Soldiers were being forced to take pay cuts. They resented the British officers being brought in to train Irish soldiers. Many also felt that the Government had done little to push for a 32-county republic. In January 1924, Mulcahy received reports that the IRA members within the Army were about to seize barracks in different parts of the country. Their leaders sent a letter to Cosgrave. In the letter they demanded: an end to the demobilisation of the Army; the removal of the army council (they had overseen the running of the army and had a strong IRB presence); and a guarantee of the government's intention to push for a 32-county republic. They threatened a military takeover, which would destroy democracy in the State.

Cosgrave dealt with this threat to the security of the state effectively. Cosgrave favoured negotiations with the mutineers. He appointed Eoin O'Duffy as General Officer of the Army, going over the head of Mulcahy. He promised to set up an inquiry to look into the mutineers' complaints. When army intelligence received word that a group of the mutineers would be meeting in a Dublin hotel, Mulcahy ordered a raid of the hotel which resulted in their arrest. In his report to the cabinet

the following day, Mulcahy used terms such as “troops were dispatched” and “orders were given”, which sounded like he was not in control of the situation. The Vice President Kevin O’Higgins ordered Mulcahy to resign as Minister for Defence. The mutiny raised serious questions about who controlled the Army of the Free State. Up to the crisis the army had been semi-independent. After the crisis, the government was firmly in control of the army.

On the 10 of July 1927, Minister for Home Affairs Kevin O’Higgins was assassinated by two IRA men on his way to mass in Booterstown, Co. Dublin. The attack was not planned; the two men had spotted O’Higgins while on their way to a football match and decided to shoot him. The assassination brought back memories of the civil war, as did the Government’s response. They introduced three bills in the Dáil. The Public Safety Bill made the IRA illegal. The Constitutional Amendment Bill removed the provision for referendum. The Electoral Amendment Bill stated that all elected TD’s must take their seats in the Dáil or resign. A by-election would then be called to fill the vacancy. This forced the members of Fianna Fáil to take the Oath of Allegiance and enter the Dáil, or risk losing their power. The government swiftly dealt with this threat to the Free State.

In 1929 left-wing IRA members including Peadar O’Donnell and Sean MacBride began organising radical left-wing groups. By 1931 Saor Eire became the most prominent left-wing group. Sporadic violence broke out between members of Saor Eire and Cumann na nGaedheal. In March 1931 Saor Eire was accused of murdering a Garda in Tipperary. The Government feared that Saor Eire wanted to launch a “Communist” takeover. Cosgrave acted decisively to prevent this from happening. He convinced the Catholic bishops that a Communist takeover was on the cards. Priests began to condemn Saor Eire from the pulpit. The government then arrested the leaders of Saor Eire and 10 other socialist groups and closed down their newspaper. Within weeks, most of those arrested were released. The hard-line tactics used by Cumann na nGaedheal in its attempt to destroy this left-wing threat angered many people and contributed to the government’s defeat in the 1932 election.

De Valera faced many problems after coming to power in 1932. At first, he supported the IRA, by releasing their prisoners and giving state pensions to their members. The IRA saw Cumann na nGaedheal as its enemy and began to attack and break up party meetings. De Valera and Fianna Fáil did little to stop these attacks. Indeed, Minister for Finance Seán MacEntee referred to Cumann na nGaedheal as “knaves and traitors”. Throughout 1935 and 1936, the IRA upped its level of violence. De Valera had to respond to the IRA lawlessness. He could not allow the IRA to

threaten the security of the state any longer. He declared the IRA an illegal organisation and arrested the IRA Chief of Staff Maurice Twomey.

De Valera also faced a threat from the fascists in Ireland. Eoin O'Duffy, who had been sacked as commissioner of the Gardaí, joined the Army Comrades Association (ACA) and became their leader. O'Duffy admired European leaders such as Benito Mussolini and General Franco and was a supporter of fascism. He renamed the ACA the more militaristic sounding National Guard. The members became known as "The Blueshirts" because of their strict uniform of a blue shirt, black tie and black beret. O'Duffy saw himself holding a similar role to the Fascist dictators of Europe. He called himself the "Green Duce" or "the Chief". O'Duffy and the National Guard posed a real threat to the security of the Irish Free State.

In July 1933, a National Guard march was planned to commemorate the deaths of Kevin O'Higgins, Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins. The planned parade had echoes of Mussolini's 'March on Rome'. De Valera feared a possible coup d'état and swiftly banned the march. He also set up an armed police force named the S Branch and nicknamed the Broy Harriers to defend against the Fascist threat. The following month, the government banned the National Guard. Soon after, Duffy left Ireland and went to Spain to help Franco in the civil war, and the Irish fascist movement fell apart. De Valera had once again successfully defended the Free State.

When war broke out in September of 1939 De Valera announced a policy of neutrality. He quickly set about ensuring this policy's success. The Emergency Powers Bill gave the government a broad range of powers to deal with this threat to security. The Department of Supplies was established to oversee a programme of rationing and strict censorship was enforced. After the fall of France in 1940, the threat of a German invasion increased, and the government began a drive to enlist more members into the army. However, they kept their spending on the military low, and managed to avoid the massive post war debts faced by many nations. De Valera and the Irish Government successfully kept Ireland out of the war, efficiently dealing with the threat to the security of the state.

The Irish Free State faced many threats to security during the period 1922-1945. Politically, the Free State faced a period of division and unrest; Cosgrave and the Cumann na nGaedheal government dealt with the situation, sometimes harshly, but in doing so helped establish a

democratic government. While de Valera's main focus was dismantling the Anglo-Irish Treaty, he too dealt with the threats efficiently and effectively.