

***A Unique Relationship': Celebrating 90 Years of Ireland-U.S. Relations
The First Decades of Irish Diplomacy in America
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**Recognition of the Irish Free State, 1924: The Diplomatic Context to the
Appointment of Timothy Smiddy as the First Irish Minister to the U.S.**

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A state's foreign policy begins with the emergence of statehood and the attendant establishment of government and its institutions. (some institutions will probably have been inherited). Consequently, Ireland did not have a foreign policy prior to 1922 let alone formal relations with other states. However, declarations on external relations had been enunciated by different political groups prior to independence who also saw the need to have representatives abroad.

But it was not until Sinn Fein organised itself into a constituent assembly (Dail Eireann) which met for the first time on 21 January 1919 that the foreign policy of the embryonic state began to emerge. The 'Message to the Free Nations' in 1919 sought international recognition for the first Dail. So Irish foreign policy was born out of a turbulent background – the new government was involved in a war of independence and its parliament was of course in defiance of the British imperial parliament and rule from London.

One of the Dail's next acts was to provide for a foreign minister and to create a diplomatic service to argue the cause of Irish independence.

The Sinn Fein diplomatic service included Harry Boland who was the official representative of Dail Eireann in the US from May 1920 to January 1922. Boland, the mission and the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic established by Eamon de Valera supervised the recognition campaign in the US. Thus, America was at the heart of Irish nationalists' foreign policy and these envoys hoped that US presidents, politicians and the Irish-American diaspora would promote their cause.

Despite Woodrow Wilson's understanding of the Irish cause he was influenced always by the larger picture, namely the re-ordering of the world system and, therefore, his priority was US relations with Britain, something that inevitably disappointed Irish nationalists.

In early 1921 with the war of independence waging, the Irish cause in the US altered from an appeal to the US public for recognition of the new Irish republic to an appeal for humanitarian aid and it provided Irish and Irish-American republican activists in the US with a new opportunity to approach the Harding administration.

During the first months of the Harding administration, the Irish mission had achieved more success than it had for a long while, much to the concern of British diplomats. Not only had they managed to win Harding's endorsement and that of members of his cabinet for a relief campaign but US Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes had formally raised the issues of recognition, legitimacy and relief with British Ambassador Geddes: at the same time,-the

Irish Republicans' propaganda, fund-raising and arms-dealing were officially tolerated. Mary MacSwiney member of the Dail for Cork who also twice toured the US, believed that official recognition of the Irish republic would be achieved by 23 April 1921, Easter Monday, significantly the fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the 1916 rising.¹

But a British counter-offensive with Secretary Hughes ensured that the Harding administration's sympathy for Irish suffering during the War of Independence did not turn into recognition. Moreover, none of the eight resolutions for recognition introduced between March and November 1921 were given hearings or reported from the respective foreign relations committees in Congress: MacSwiney's deadline for securing recognition passed. In August 1921, Boland reported dejectedly to de Valera 'the first bloom of enthusiasm' has faded from the recognition campaign.²

The treaty, as we know, divided Irish republicans, and Dail Eireann, and it split the nascent Irish foreign service. In March 1922, the former Cork professor of economics, economic adviser to the treaty delegation, Timothy A. Smiddy replaced Boland as official representative of Dáil Éireann. He was instructed by Michael Collins, chairman of the Provincial Government, to achieve official US recognition of the Free State and to counteract in every way anti-treaty activism in the US.

When he arrived in the US, Smiddy notified Secretary Hughes in accordance with the procedure regulating the arrival of foreign representatives. Although Hughes did not formally reply to Smiddy, the envoy met with William Castle in the State Department.³ Smiddy found that Castle was 'very sympathetic' and offered to help him 'at any time'. Smiddy believed that the avenue was opened for the establishment of 'orthodox' diplomatic relations as soon as the Free State was formally established in December 1922.⁴

This raises the question why the move did not come until October 1924?

In late December 1922, President Harding sent a message of good will through Ambassador Geddes to President Cosgrave, thereby providing a *de facto* recognition at least.⁵ But by February 1923 Smiddy was becoming impatient and wanted to regularise his position.⁶ He had discovered a 'well-organised plan' by anti-treatyite Joseph McGarrity to prevent US

¹ National Archives of Ireland (hereafter NAI), Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter D/FA), Early Series (hereafter ES), Box 27, file 158, Boland, 15 April 1921; J. Mooney Eichacker, *Irish republican women in America: lecture tours, 1916–25* (2003), p. 133.

² NAI, D/FA, ES, Box 27, file 158, de Valera to Boland, 30 May 1921; Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland*, pp. 204, 203.

³ NARA, RG59, M580/225, 841d.01B11/11, Castle to Hughes, 21 March 1922; *ibid.*, 841d.01B11/12, Castle to Hughes, 22 March 1922. The creation of the Free State also provided the opportunity for other individuals to try and gain advantage. In January 1923, Claude Dawson, a US consul general in Tampico, Mexico requested the State Department to check out the identity and status of M.J. Keaf, who purported to be a Free State representative. A special agent of the State Department based in New York discovered that he was unknown in Irish or British circles and R.S. Sharp concluded that he was more of a 'confidence man than a bona fide representative'. *Ibid.*, M580/225, 841d.01B12/-, Dawson to Hengstler, 19 January 1922; *ibid.*, Sharp to Hengstler, 25 January 1922; *ibid.*, Hughes to Dawson, 25 January 1922.

⁴ NAI, D/FA, ES, 30/199, Smiddy to Gavan Duffy, 28 April 1922. Smiddy's relationship with the US official was not so close as to enable him to spell the American's name correctly. In his dispatch home he referred throughout to 'Cassels' instead of Castle. *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, Hughes to Geddes, 28 December 1922.

⁶ NAI, D/T, S3346, Armstrong to Foreign Office, 27 April 1923; *ibid.*, S1983A, Walshe to Granard, 3 February 1923.

recognition of the Free State. And he believed that British embassy diplomats were working against him to preserve British control over Irish foreign affairs.⁷

The Irish government responded and in February 1923 asked London to have Smiddy appointed ‘agent of this ministry for the purpose of studying the methods of public administration in the United States and looking after financial interests of the Irish Free State.’⁸ Henry Chilton in the British embassy in Washington emphasised to William Castle in the State Department that the appointment had ‘no diplomatic character.’⁹ The consequences of Smiddy’s indeterminate, ambiguous status made the conduct of his every day work difficult.

On the one hand, State Department, Commerce, Justice and Bureau of Investigation officials met him to discuss various issues. On the other hand, on at least two occasions he had to use the services of British Ambassador Geddes to make contact with the State Department. In May 1923, Geddes agreed that Brooks, a first secretary in the embassy, would be available to Smiddy to help with ‘all matters of an Irish nature that need reference to the State Department.’¹⁰

The onset of the summer recess in Congress undoubtedly stalled the recognition campaign as did the fall of Bonar Law’s government, Harding’s unexpected death on 2 August, and Cosgrave’s decision to hold a snap general election in Ireland on 27 August.

The status of the US-Irish relationship was not again discussed in the State Department until December 1923.¹¹ W.R. Vallance, in the Department’s solicitor’s office, clarified that ‘the Irish Free State is considered as one of the component parts of the British empire. The British ambassador and his staff at this capital represent the British empire. The United States does not recognise the so-called ‘Irish Republic’ and does not receive any representative from it.’¹² Effectively, it would seem, any approach for recognition would have to come through the British government.

By February 1924, Smiddy had become exasperated.¹³ He noted accurately that whatever help he got from the British and US officials ‘was purely by act of grace’.¹⁴ He asked Dail Eireann’s Minister for External Affairs, Desmond FitzGerald ‘Is the British Foreign Office ready to present it?’ – meaning the Irish request for recognition to the Coolidge government.¹⁵ It was an apposite comment. On 3 March 1924 the Irish government informed Colonial Secretary Thomas that it would be ‘glad’ if the British government could

⁷ Ibid., 28/185, unnamed memorandum, ‘Recognition of Irish Free State’, 26 June 1923, unsigned report, 28 June 1923. Senator Medill McCormick passed on a copy of a letter from a constituent to Hughes on 30 May 1921, pleading for the US administration to hold elections in Ireland to allow people chose between the ‘so-called Free State and the existing Republic.’ NARA, RG59, M580/225, 841d.01/60, enclosure in McCormick to Hughes, 30 May 1923.

⁸ Ibid., D/FA, ES, 31/200, Walshe to Smiddy, 1 February 1923; *DIFP*, ii, NAI, D/FA, D1976, FitzGerald to Healy, 1 February 1923.

⁹ NARA, RG59, M580/225, 841d.01B11/15, Chilton to Castle, 16 February 1923; *ibid.*, Chilton to Castle, 19 February 1923.

¹⁰ NAI, D/FA, ES, 29/190, Smiddy to FitzGerald, 5 February 1923; *ibid.*, 29/189(7), Smiddy to FitzGerald, 12 May 1923.

¹¹ NARA, RG59, M580/225, 841d.01/67, The Solicitor’s office to Hyde, 27 December 1923.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ NAI, D/FA, ES, 29/191, Smiddy to FitzGerald, 11 February 1924.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; NARA, RG59, M580/225, Phillips to Chapple, 26 January 1924.

immediately ask the US government whether Smiddy would be '*persona grata*' to Coolidge and Hughes.¹⁶

When the US government learnt of the official Irish request, the British view was sought.¹⁷ The matter of the dominions' role and rights in foreign affairs, including the issue of separate diplomatic representation, was a live matter for the British government. Thus, when the British government learned on 13 March 1924, that the Canadian government was considering the appointment of Arthur Currie as its inaugural minister to the US, it forced discussion on the Irish request.¹⁸ Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald received varying advice. Colonial Secretary Thomas recommended the immediate appointment of a Free State minister in Washington.¹⁹ Some Foreign Office officials accepted the principle of separate representation for the Free State but it should be at the lowest possible level, have the least amount of authority and dignity and should have no chance of being accorded the same precedence or equated with the top ranking British officials in the embassy even suggesting that the Free State needed only a 'trade representative' in Washington.²⁰ Senior Foreign Office officials believed that independent dominion representation, such as was being sought would be the end of the empire.²¹

In the end, Ramsay MacDonald saw no alternative but to propose allowing the appointment due to the ongoing instability in the Free State and the need to keep the dominions within the imperial structure. He accepted that the appointment could not be at the level of 'envoy extraordinary', but the Free State minister had to be 'entirely independent', residing outside the British embassy and the British ambassador would have no responsibility for the actions of the Free State minister and he wanted the respective dominion governments including Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa to be contacted for their opinions.²² The Irish government accepted these conditions, and at a key meeting in London on 19 June MacDonald backed Thomas over his Foreign Office officials and some dominion opposition.²³ The focus of attention now switched to Washington.

On 26 June Secretary Hughes told British Ambassador Esme Howard that his government would be 'glad' to receive an Irish minister plenipotentiary.²⁴

Obviously, the British request was not unexpected in Washington. But why did the Coolidge administration readily agree to an Irish Free State minister? First, the British government requested it, second, between March and June 1924, Secretary Hughes had already accepted the Free State as a separate entity in the re-organization of US consular districts in Ireland:

¹⁶ TNA, FO371/9627, Healy to Thomas, 3 March 1924.

¹⁷ HHPL, WRCP, Box 3, England, 1920–25, Castle to Sterling, 12 March 1924.

¹⁸ TNA, FO371/9627, G Warner, 13 March 1924; *ibid.*, Davis to Warner, 11 March 1924.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ TNA, FO371/9627, Warner, 13 March 1924; *ibid.*, Adams, 14 March 1924.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Crowe, 14 March 1924.

²² *Ibid.*, Warner to Davis, 20 March 1924; TNA, CO739/27, Warner to Davis, 20 March 1924.

²³ Foreign Office objections now included the argument that if the irregular campaign in the US 'was to become intense', the Free State representative might 'provide too easy a target' or become involved in 'political intrigue' and damage the Free State government. TNA, FO371/9623, Campbell, 5 June 1924.

²⁴ LC, MD, CEHP, file Great Britain, William Phillips, Office of the Secretary, Memo. of interview with the British interview, 26 June 1924.

Ireland's new status was tellingly revealed when he gave it a separate quota in the 1924 immigration act. Finally, 1924 was a presidential election year: securing every possible vote mattered, even those that seemed firmly wedded to the Democratic Party.

So when Hughes and Castle discussed it on 26 June also, Irish recognition was a foregone conclusion and Smiddy would be an acceptable candidate. ; Castle already found him to be 'an intelligent, straightforward fellow.'²⁵ Hughes reassured Coolidge that the arrangements would not denote any departure from the principle of the diplomatic unity of the British empire..²⁶

Smiddy became Free State minister plenipotentiary to the US on 7 October 1924 and was the first British dominions' representative to attain that status from the US government. Joseph Walshe in the Department of External Affairs in Dublin contentedly commented that America was the only country 'with which our relations are entirely free and independent from any outside control'²⁷

The path had been long and complicated but the willingness of the Irish Free State government to push and cajole the British government, Smiddy's doggedness, the support of MacDonald and Thomas in London, and Howard in Washington all contributed to winning the approval of Hughes and Coolidge.²⁸

²⁵ HHPL, WRCP, WRC diary, 15 August 1923.

²⁶ CCP, roll 116, PPF, 308, Hughes to Coolidge, 26 June 1924.

²⁷ NAI, D/J, Letter Books, 1922–25, Walshe to Secretary, Department of Justice, 21 October 1924.

²⁸ Howard, *Theatre of life*, ii, p. 512.