

YEARBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW — VOLUME 18, 2015  
CORRESPONDENTS' REPORTS

IRELAND<sup>1</sup>

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*White Paper on Defence*

• *White Paper on Defence*, Department of Defence, 2015, <[www.defence.ie](http://www.defence.ie)>

The 2015 *White Paper on Defence* sets out the Government's defence policy for the next decade. It is intended to provide a framework that will enable a flexible and adaptive response to any adverse changes in what is described as a dynamic security environment. It also sets out the security tasks that the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces will undertake in supporting the other departments and agencies which constitute the State's security architecture.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the *White Paper* sets out the Government's policy on the use of defence resources in non-security contexts 'for the benefit of the State'.<sup>3</sup>

The key objectives of the *White Paper* are<sup>4</sup>:

- To provide a medium term policy framework for defence that is flexible and responsive having regard to the dynamic nature of the security environment and the key role that Defence plays in the State's security architecture;
- To give appropriate underpinning to Ireland's engagement in international bodies particularly the United Nations and the European Union;
- To ensure that the stated roles of the Defence Forces are consistent with requirements;
- Building on recent re-organisation measures for the Permanent Defence Force and the Reserve Defence Force, to guide and underpin decisions relating to the capacity of the Defence Organisation to include: corporate skills, organisation, force composition and equipment acquisition over the next ten years;
- To underpin the development of required civil and military capabilities with an appropriate multi-annual resource commitment;
- To sustain and develop the Defence Organisation as one in which people are proud to serve;
- To ensure defence policy contributes in a congruent way with wider social and economic policy.

The previous *White Paper on Defence*, released in 2000, was the first such white paper in Ireland.<sup>5</sup> Since then there have been significant changes in the security environment. For Ireland, a key policy issue has been the developing responses of global and regional security organisations with which Ireland acts in pursuit of international peace and stability,

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by Professor Ray Murphy, Irish Centre for Human Rights, National University of Ireland Galway, Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence* (2015) <[www.defence.ie](http://www.defence.ie)> 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence* (2000) <[www.defence.ie](http://www.defence.ie)>.

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principally the United Nations ('UN'), the European Union ('EU'), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe ('OSCE') and the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation Partnership for Peace (PfP). Political, economic, social and security cooperation within the EU has deepened, underpinned by institutional developments in accordance with successive treaties to which Ireland has subscribed, albeit with specific reservations. The *White Paper* states that threats to the EU are now regarded as threats to Ireland's interests and welfare.<sup>6</sup> These changes have informed, as anticipated in the 2000 *White Paper*, required operational responses and associated capability requirements.

Owing to Ireland's history, the threat of internal subversion of the State was a major factor in Irish defence policy and threat analysis in the past. This has changed significantly in recent times and according to the 2015 *White Paper*, the concept of security has broadened considerably since the end of the Cold War and a more diverse range of issues are now recognised as posing security threats. The White Paper referred to The European Security Strategy<sup>7</sup> which identified a range of less visible security threats, including: terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure and organised crime. Others global threats identified include social and economic threats, transnational organised crime, as well as inter-state conflict, internal conflict, poverty, environmental degradation and deadly infectious diseases.

As reliance on the technologies and services which facilitate global business have increased, new vulnerabilities have arisen.<sup>8</sup> The complexity and transnational nature of many current threats means that no country acting alone can adequately respond to them. In this way collective engagement and a comprehensive range of policy instruments are necessary.<sup>9</sup>

According to the 2015 *White Paper on Defence*:

The EU is now a major player on the world stage with an increasing capacity to influence the international security environment using all of the instruments at its disposal ... known as the "comprehensive approach". Ireland advocates a strong EU contribution to UN peacekeeping and crisis management. Within the framework of multilateralism and collective security and in support of international peace and security, Ireland will continue to contribute to a range of cooperative and collaborative security arrangements within the EU, the UN, the OSCE and bilaterally with other states.<sup>10</sup>

Full participation in the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU (CSDP) has been recognised as important in protecting Irish values and interests. At the same time, support for EU and UN co-operation and collaboration are an integral part of Irish engagement in the UN.

The 2015 *White Paper* acknowledges that the EU now regards military capacity and 'expeditionary potential' – the capacity to deploy to civilian and military operations overseas – as a primary area of development within Common Foreign and Security Policy ('CFSP')/CSDP. If Ireland wishes to be able to safeguard its own security and strategic interests, while at the same time exerting influence within the EU and continuing to play a meaningful role in international peacekeeping, then continued active engagement by Ireland in the Union's CSDP is essential.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence* (2015) <www.defence.ie> 6.

<sup>7</sup> Adopted by the EU Heads of State and Government in 2003. See <www.ec.europa.eu>.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence* (2015) <www.defence.ie> 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 27.

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In this context, participation in EU Battlegroups demonstrates Ireland's commitment to the development of EU capabilities in the area of crisis management.<sup>12</sup> It also contributes to Ireland's overall credibility within the EU. Ireland's active engagement in EU Battlegroups is perceived in Ireland as enhancing its capacity to influence the ongoing development of the EU's rapid response capacity, and in particular, the role that Battlegroups can play in acting as a strategic reserve for UN operations.<sup>13</sup> From a national viewpoint and having regard to the need to minimize threats to the safety of personnel, the Department of Defence is examining an option of maintaining a rapid deployment capacity, at company level,<sup>14</sup> to support or reinforce overseas contingents if the situation requires.<sup>15</sup>

The reduction in the strength of the Defence Forces to around 9,500 personnel and the fiscal challenges still confronting the Irish state are important factors impacting on operational commitments. Ireland is not in a position to participate in self-funded operations and it has a limited number of personnel available for 'overseas operations'. There have been major changes to the organisation and structure of Defence Forces since the 2000 *White Paper on Defence*. The changing operational environment, modernisation and financial constraints have impacted Irish defence policy. The direct impact of the financial crisis since 2008 on all facets of Irish life has been severe. In 2015, defence expenditure (excluding pensions) was approximately 21 per cent less than 2008 expenditure and 14 per cent less than 2007.<sup>16</sup> An immediate consequence of cuts to the defence budget was the decision to reduce overall number of defence forces personnel.<sup>17</sup>

*Ireland and Peacekeeping Operations*

• Defence Forces Press Office, February 2016, <<http://www.military.ie/en/overseas/>>

Since September 2013, the Defence Forces have contributed a contingent to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force ('UNDOF') on the Golan Heights. The strength of the contingent at the end of 2015 was 138 personnel. They are primarily tasked as the Force Mobile Reserve to undertake reinforcement, reaction, escort and other operations throughout UNDOF's Area of Responsibility.

In 2014, Irish peacekeepers came under attack while serving as part of the UNDOF mission. After the withdrawal of Austria and Croatian contingents from UNDOF, it was a company plus of well equipped Irish troops that were called upon to rescue their besieged UN colleagues. Although the mission reflected well on Irish willingness to deploy and prevent the collapse of the UNDOF operation, the clash with Syrian rebel group al Nursra led to a re-evaluation of the Irish participation.<sup>18</sup> Thereafter, a previous almost unwavering commitment

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid 65.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Involving 100 personnel or more.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence* (2015) <[www.defence.ie](http://www.defence.ie)> 65.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>17</sup> In 2013 a revised establishment of 4,069 personnel was introduced for the Reserve Defence Forces.

<sup>18</sup> Minister for Defence, Simon Coveney TD, 'United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) Golan Heights', (Statement, 23 September 2014); F. Gartland, 'Troops role in Golan Heights to be re-evaluated', *The Irish Times* (Dublin), 1 September 2014:

According to Minister Coveney, the Government would have to be satisfied that it [the mission] could be done "in a way that guarantees an acceptable level of risk as opposed to what we have seen in the last two days ... When you have UN posts being directly attacked within a country and within an area that is supposed to be a demilitarised zone well then there are real problems with that and so if Irish troops are to remain part of a mission between Israel and Syria then there will have to be a full re-evaluation by the UN."

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to UN peacekeeping was going to be more conditional. This can be attributed to increased expectations of military capabilities, the need for realistic mandates, risk assessment and the responsibility of the Irish government to ensure it respected the duty of care owed to Irish soldiers.

The Defence Forces also have 10 personnel deployed to the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali).<sup>19</sup> Ireland also contributes seven personnel to EUFOR Althea and 12 personnel to NATO/PfP led KFOR in Kosovo.<sup>20</sup> These are small contributions that generally do not give rise to much controversy.

The 51st Infantry Group deployed to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon ('UNIFIL') mission in Lebanon in November 2015. The Irish contingent, comprising 198 personnel, is part of a joint battalion with Finland. The Finnish-Irish battalion is tasked primarily with patrolling, reconnaissance and occupying two static posts on the 'blue line' separating Israel and Lebanon while operating in close co-ordination and co-operation with the Lebanese armed forces in sector west of UNIFIL's area of operations.

The battalion implements force protection measures appropriate to operational and security developments in the region. The battalion has a wide range of capabilities, affording excellent operational effectiveness while also providing extensive force protection capacity. There is close liaison with the host nation, the Lebanese armed forces and local stakeholders to ensure that all aspects of the mission, including freedom of movement, are achievable. Ireland will take command of the joint contingent in November 2016 and will deploy approximately an additional 160 personnel with the contingent.

RAY MURPHY

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<sup>19</sup> Since 2013, Ireland has been part of the military training mission, EUTM Mali, which trains and advises the Malian Armed Forces. Irish forces have worked alongside British and French forces there. The mission is not involved in combat operations: see <<http://www.military.ie/overseas/current-missions/eutm-mali/>>. Ireland also participated in the EU Training Mission Somalia (EUTM).

<sup>20</sup> The European Union Force Althea ('EUFOR Althea') is a military deployment to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Kosovo Force ('KFOR') is a NATO led peacekeeping force in Kosovo.