



PEACEKEEPING, THE IRISH EXPERIENCE

Colonel Dorcha Lee (retd)

1.INTRODUCTION

It is a great privilege to address the SOCIETATS D'ESTUDIS MILITARS de CATALUNYA on the subject of Ireland's contribution to international peacekeeping.

Since June 1958, not a day has passed without an Irish soldier deployed under the UN flag somewhere around the World. Today, Irish peacekeepers are present in over half the UN's peacekeeping missions, from Mali to Lebanon, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Cyprus. Ireland is the largest per capita contributor in the Western European and Others Grouping at the United Nations.

2.CURRENT DEPLOYMENT

TOTAL ON MISSIONS	579
PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS: UN, EU and NATO PFP	
UNIFIL	373
UNDOF	130
KOSOVO	13
BOSNIA	5
ROME	3
MALI TRAINING MISSION	20
MALI INTELLIGENCE TASK FORCE (Rangers)	14
WESTERN SAHARA MINURS	3
NY	3
UNTSO	12
DR CONGO MONUC	3



In the nineteen eighties Ireland had between 800-850 personnel serving on overseas missions at any one time. Due to prolonged underfunding, the Defence Forces has been greatly reduced in size over the years, and consequently, also, the number of personnel serving on missions is currently varying between 500 and 600, all ranks.

If, however, we were to take a hypothetical EU Member State, with, let us say, a population of about seven-and-a half million people, you would expect that country to maintain about 1,000 personnel abroad on peace support operations.

3.SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT

The election of Ireland to a seat on the UN Security Council (SECCO), for the 2021/22 session, was a great success. The biggest factor in our favour, during the campaign for a seat, was the contribution made over sixty-two years to UN peacekeeping, by the Defence Forces and the Gardai (police). This month, Sept 2021, Ireland holds the rotating Presidency of the SECCO.

Back in the Cold War years, Ireland was a 'world superpower' in UN peace keeping, alongside neutral and non-aligned Austria, Finland, and Sweden. Then, as now, the main purpose of the UN is the preservation of World peace. All its other activities are peripheral to this goal. The Security Council (SECCO) is its most powerful institution and a seat at that table is a presence at the very heart of the UN decision making process. In times of crisis, SECCO is the most important diplomatic forum in the World. It is also where Irish diplomats have played decisive roles in conflict resolution during the three previous occasions when Ireland got a seat. With a seat on SECCO, Ireland is able, once again, to play a frontline role in preserving World Peace.

4.ROLL OF HONOUR

A total of 87 Irish soldiers died while serving with overseas peace support missions. This includes 47 in Lebanon and 26 in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



5. THE TRIPLE LOCK

In order to participate in a peace support operation, Ireland has a self-imposed “Triple Lock” of conditions that must be met. These conditions are, that there has to be:-

- a government decision,
- Dáil (Parliament Lower House) approval and,
- UN authorisation.

Under an amendment to the Defence Act 1960, Dáil approval is required for any mission involving twelve armed personnel or more. So far, this condition has not caused any problem. However, when a rapid reaction is required, this could be a problem if twelve or more personnel were required. It was significant that during the recent evacuation from Kabul, Ireland sent a team of nine rangers (special forces) and two diplomats, nine+ two = 11, the maximum number that could be sent without recalling the Dáil.

The big problem is not Dáil approval but the requirement to have UN authorisation for missions authorised by resolutions of the UN Security Council or the UN General Assembly. Security Council resolutions require the agreement of all five permanent members of the council, (China, France, Russia, Great Britain and the US). Irish participation in an overseas mission will be blocked if even one of the five permanent member states uses its veto.

Such overseas missions can be UN-mandated missions, or UN authorised missions conducted by regional organisations, such as the EU, NATO the AU etc. It is a bizarre situation where we have allowed these five nations the power to decide an Irish foreign policy issue. This has already happened in FYROM (Rep of North Macedonia), in 1999, when China blocked the renewal of the UN mission, in response to FYROM signing a trade deal with Taiwan. As this mission was not UN authorised, Ireland was unable to join the first EU Common Security and Defence Policy mission, Concordia, in 2003.

But what if our vital national interest were at stake? For example, what if hundreds of Irish citizens had to be rescued from a war zone, and a permanent member of the SECCO vetoed an authorising UN Resolution for, let us say, an EU mission? Ireland's credibility in the EU would be undermined if we declined to participate in such a mission. The problem is that



successive Irish Governments are afraid to adjust the Triple Lock in case they are accused of going soft on Irish Neutrality.

6. INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESSES IN THE UN SYSTEM

The three guidelines for deploying and conducting a peace keeping mission are:

- Consent of the parties involved,
- Impartiality,
- Use of force only in self-defence or in defence of the mandate.

These guidelines are necessary restraints but still can limit the UN forces' ability to intervene in crisis situations.

As shown above, the UN is not a democratic organisation, in that the five permanent members of the SECCO, (China, France, Russia, UK and the US), wield disproportionate power. In addition, UN member states may support peacekeeping mandates, and then fail to provide the peacekeeping forces with the resources they need to carry out the mandate. Weak rules of engagement have led to UN troops becoming hostages to fortune, and in some cases literally being taken hostage. Forty-two years ago, this observer explained the peacekeeper's dilemma with the observation that, "***In peacekeeping, he who hesitates, wins, and if the UN gets both sides in a conflict, to hesitate, Peace wins***".

The institutional flaws of the organisation impact all the way down to the peacekeepers 'on the ground', who were left to hold the can. These institutional flaws were responsible for the two most traumatic events in the history of Irish peacekeeping. Both happened in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Sept 1960 a small patrol of eleven Irish soldiers were ambushed by Baluba tribesmen at a place called Niemba. Nine were killed and two survived. In September 1961 a company of 155 Irish soldiers were deployed to protect the white community at a mining town called Jadotville in Katanga Province. This white community did not want or request UN protection. They were employees of the Union **Minière** Company, which was backing an independent Katanga and were opposed to the UN presence. A large force of Katangese Gendarmerie and international mercenaries surrounded and attacked the Irish positions. After five days of intense fighting, the Irish troops ran out of ammunition and water. Two attempts by the UN forces in Katanga, to break through, failed. A ceasefire was agreed but dishonoured by the attacking forces. The company had no viable option but to surrender.

Our Netherlands comrades will always remember the horror of Srebrenica.



7.LESSONS LEARNED FROM OVERSEAS MISSIONS

All UN member states considering taking part in UN peace support missions, or UN authorised missions led by regional organisations, such as NATO and the EU, should be mandate conscious. In particular, care should be taken that the mandate is appropriate to the situation, and that the forces deployed are sufficient and properly equipped to carry out the mandate.

'Mission creep' should be avoided. This is where a mission that has started is given additional tasks but not the additional means to carry out these tasks.

Military peace support missions will not, of themselves, solve a political problem. It can, however, stabilise the security situation, to allow time for negotiated settlements of disputes.

National contingents should be fully equipped before being deployed to a mission. Never trust an international organisation, such as the UN or the EU with promises to provide equipment for their contingents, until the equipment has actually been delivered.

Member states participating in PSOs for the first time are well advised to build up a corporate knowledge of peace keeping first. Officers and NCOs should be sent to training schools and centres, which specialise in peacekeeping, such as the UN Training School Ireland and other similar institutions mainly in the Nordic countries.

Ideally new member states should take part in observer missions first, before participating in 'with troops' missions.

Participating in PSOs is very much about risk sharing. It is not simply good enough to pick the easy and less dangerous roles and leave the more dangerous roles to other countries.

Public support is essential for a democratic nation to take part in a peace support mission. In this regard, the public should be kept informed of the risks involved and understand the sacrifices that may have to be made in the cause of peace.

In Ireland's case, it is still a great source of national pride to see the men and women of our Defence Forces play their part in preserving World Peace.

Newly independent nations also, regard participation in UN peacekeeping missions as the ultimate recognition by the international community of their place in the World. Nations that are still working their way towards independence should take note, that they, too, will be expected to play a similar role in preserving world peace.



8. CONCLUSION

In this presentation I have deliberately struck a cautionary note about participating in peace support operations. However, I want to make a final tribute to the UN organisation itself.

Despite its institutional weaknesses, the UN has managed to be highly effective in preserving World peace. Without successive peacekeeping missions containing world regional conflicts, we could truly have faced Armageddon.

Without the UN, the apocalyptic survivors of World War 3, would, by now, be staggering about the nuclear wastelands, trying to avoid World War 4.

Thank you for your attention.

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