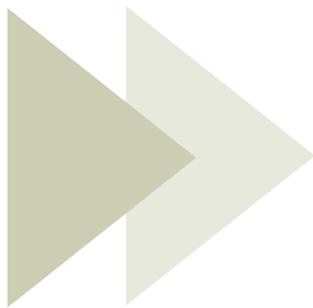


UK Military Attaché,
Colonel Paul Cummings

London Calling

In the final stages of his term as UK military attaché in Ireland, Colonel Paul Cummings shares his thoughts with SIGNAL Magazine.



What is the role of the UK military attaché?

▶▶ Primarily, my role is to be the British Liaison Officer to the Irish Defence Forces. I represent the Chief of Defence Staff, General Sir Michael Walker, and act as his liaison officer to the Department of Defence and Defence Forces Headquarters. My job is to identify ways in which my government might be able to provide assistance to my host; ways in which we can develop from one another by sharing doctrinal and operational experience. I think the key here is not to say, 'I belong to a bigger organisation, we know best and this is how we do it'. The reality is that if you look at the challenges the Defence Forces are facing at the moment, they are almost identical in every sphere, to the challenges that the British Army and its other Services are facing. This can be illustrated in terms of the discipline regulations; bullying and harassment; equal opportunities; limitations of operation resources; regional command and management of infrastructure and estate;

environmental impact and the better use of simulation, better use of a limited number of vehicles – whole fleet management.

We're all going through exactly the same thing and it's a two-way street. I find out that Ireland may need some advice in a particular area and I find what we're doing and we share that information. Likewise my defence forces may have difficulty in a particular aspect and we might talk about, say representation in the forces, and I can go back and say, 'Well this is how the Irish do it...'

It's very much a role of comparing and contrasting, advising and assisting. For example, in the individual and collective training sphere, the Director of Defence Forces Training and I annually identify those areas in which we feel the UK we can offer practical training assistance. So in terms of courses and skills development, we identify how we can help and I request the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence for funding to assist with achieving those aspirations.





The LE Niamh alongside a Royal navy vessel in Belfast. Part of Col Cummings brief is to foster greater cooperation between the Irish and British military.

If we take this year as an example, we have an Irish officer attending the Royal College of Defence Studies, we have one officer just starting the Joint Services Advanced Staff College, and one officer attending a UK funded Staff course in Slovakia. Additionally, we have funded places for officers and NCO's on a variety of career and skills courses – all of which fill particular capability gaps for the Director of Defence Forces Training. One limitation of a smaller army is that it is very difficult to maintain expertise in every military skills requirement. For example, nuclear, chemical and biological warfare, demands a considerable number of experts to conduct high-level instructor courses. Here we can assist by training Defence Forces instructors in these skills. We can share our experiences and we can share our training. The officers and NCO's that we train in the UK have, in the main, returned as instructors in the Defence Forces Training Centre in the Curragh and thereby our investment has been maximised in terms of training output.

On the other side of the coin, we very much look forward to once again taking up the vacancies we were offered by the UN

training school in the Curragh, on the UN International Observers Course. The UK Armed Forces doesn't run a course similar to it, and we try and send two officers every year. Our officers gain enormous insight and

value to the course by sharing those experiences, particularly with students from armies who haven't had the same opportunity of peacekeeping experience in places such as Iraq, Bosnia or Afghanistan.

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experience into the role of UN observer on that course, something that we have comparatively little experience of, and Ireland has enormous experience of, so that is very valuable to us. Likewise, we try and send at least two officers on the International Military Police course, also run at the UN school, each year. We have considerable military police experience in operations, as do the Irish, and we find that we can add

Another part of my role is to be the formal representative for the British Army here in Ireland. I am responsible for liaising with the Department of Foreign Affairs regarding military aircraft movements and RN Ships' visits. There are a significant number of British ex-Forces personnel that are resident here and therefore I am required to support the British Legion, Royal Air Force Association and the other

ex-services organisations, all of which are becoming more integrated with Irish ex-services organisations, which is a great thing to see – similar experiences on operations provides a great bond.

We only have two military attachés resident in Ireland, the UK and the US attachés; the rest are based in London with responsibility for Ireland. What is it that makes it so important that the UK post an attaché here?

▶▶ It's the geographical location, our nearest neighbour, shared cultural and historic experiences and trade links that make the relationship so important to the British Government. In military terms if you look at both armies, they're built on a similar model. We have shared experiences with the UN around the world for many years. We see ourselves organised along similar lines, largely speaking the same language, and inevitably there have been important operational issues relating to border security with Northern Ireland. The resident Defence Attaché can advise and assist or resolve issues as and when they appear.

Is there any input from your office in relation to the Northern Ireland peace process?

▶▶ No, none at all. My direction from CDS is to establish much closer links between the British Services and the Irish Defence Forces on an East-West basis, not on a North-South basis. We're not looking at creating great links with Northern Ireland and the British troops that are stationed there, but with the principal training and operational role of the British Army in the UK and elsewhere.

How do you view the development within an international context in peace enforcement and the role of the Irish Defence Forces, their capabilities currently and how those capabilities could be improved?

▶▶ What I would say is that we are seeing peacekeeping across that world changing its nature. We can see it having to be far more reactive to short-term demands. In future peacekeeping is likely to involve fewer long-term 'set-piece' operations. We will see peacekeeping troops going in to global trouble spots to create the conditions for peace and to prevent further conflict. The recent Congo operation is an example for the future – where an EU force was given a UN mandate to sort out a particular problem within a set time and then come out. In the future I can see more operations of rapid intervention to ensure that a difficult situa-

tion doesn't turn into war. This will have an impact on future equipment and capabilities, which I know are continually reviewed and enhanced where necessary.

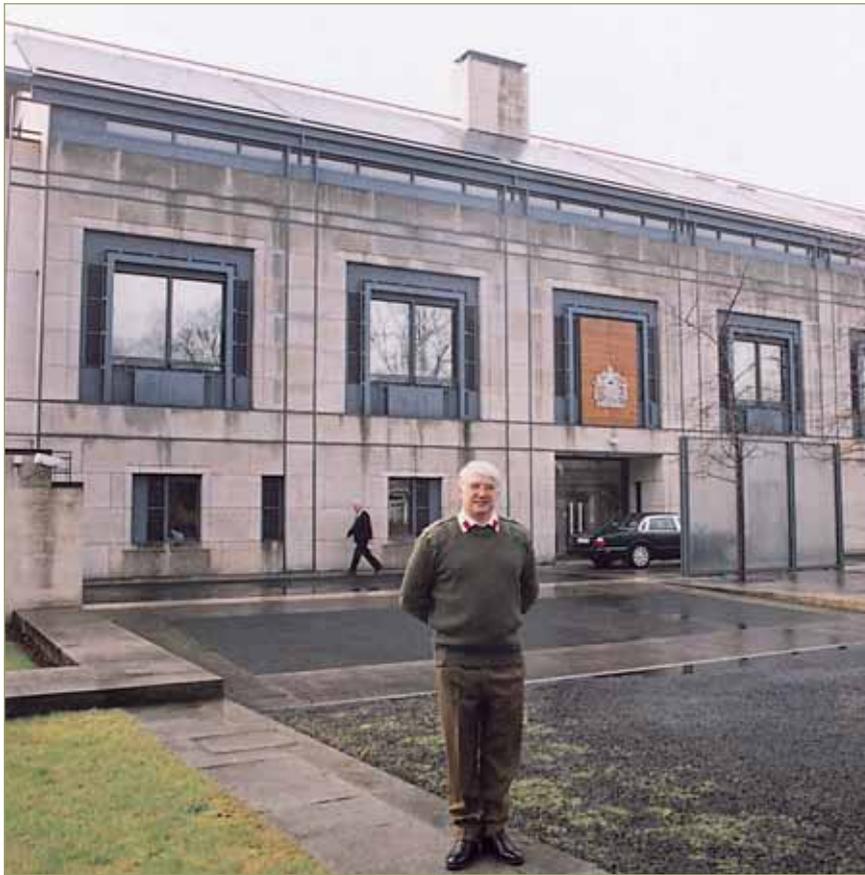
Since the Berlin Wall came down you see nations looking more at rapid reaction, and a greater range of capabilities and thereby options. Warning and preparation

times are likely to be shorter, demanding troops on high readiness capable of intervention at the earliest stage to try and reduce the danger of conflict escalation. We saw that in Liberia and the magnificent response that Ireland was able to make when asked to deploy by the UN. Since I have been here, I have seen Ireland, moving

The officers that we train on the platoon commanders course have generally gone to the Curragh as instructors at the officers school.



"The resident Defence Attaché can advise and assist or resolve issues as and when they appear."



Col Paul Cummings outside the British Embassy in Ballsbridge.

from a long-term deployment in the Lebanon to the deployment in East Timor, which was over fairly rapidly, and UNMEE, in Ethiopia and Eritrea, which also had a clearly defined timescale for Ireland's commitment. I think that this will be the way of the future. Therefore all armies need to ensure that they are able to react quickly, that they are more agile, better trained and well motivated and are able to deploy at very short notice with the right kit.

Would you agree with the deploying of small numbers of troops rather than battalion size?

▶▶ The number of troops that will deploy to any theatre will depend on the operational requirement. In some areas a company size force may be sufficient, in others a battalion will be more effective. Additionally, it is also useful to have a multinational force in some theatres rather than a large force of a single contributing nation because it clearly illustrates wider international commitment. I think that what we will see is a greater ability of Defence Forces to deploy in a variety of roles and organisations.

There are benefits in both types of deployment and the key is that one doesn't want to get in a position where one is bound to deploy either a battalion or a company. Operationally there should be a

range of options continually available that can result in either a force of 800 or a force of 200, whatever might be required. Ireland's current headline goal commitment and operational and training doctrine reflects this requirement for flexibility.

I think that the development of multi-skilling in an army is one aspect of

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efficiency – being able to use troops with greater flexibility without constraining yourself to limited roles. At the same time you need to maintain core skills within an infantry battalion and this requires demanding and continual training to maintain that capability. So there is a balance to be struck. I have been enormously impressed by the enthusiasm and professionalism of the Defence Forces and their ability to deploy at very short notice to new operational environments. It is an excellent

reflection of the way in which the Defence Forces is now training troops and maintaining high-readiness capability.

Overall what is the external view or opinion of the Irish Defence Forces?

▶▶ What I would say is that in the two and a half years that I have been here I have witnessed the way in which the Defence Forces has risen to the many and varied challenges that it has faced – be that in East Timor, in Eritrea, in Kosovo and in Liberia, as well as in a wide range of UN observer missions. I've seen a highly professional organisation that has changed the way in which it operates to meet new demands based on the current crises that are affecting the world and have retained an enormous zest and enthusiasm to maintain the highest level of military skill. I think Ireland gets extremely good value for money from the Defence Forces.

The Irish Defence Forces are different to those of my own country, solely because of the way in which they are structured. But the individual soldier is as well-trained and well-equipped as any in the European theatre. They have purchased excellent equipment, you have been provided with all of the tools necessary to meet the new commitments that you are now facing. And there is a real confidence that I see in the ability of the Defence Forces to meet any demands that may be placed upon them in the future. The army is no longer static. It is at high-readiness and it shows.

The key to Irish peacekeeping is that it has always been a force for good. Ireland is seen internationally as being an honest

broker with an ability and determination to deliver military peacekeeping capability in an open, equitable and just way.

It's unlikely that the Defence vote will increase into the future to generate money for new equipment. With your professional experience of Public Private Partnerships, are they worth investigating?

▶▶ I think that in some major procurement programmes in the future, a private finance

initiative will have to be considered because it is a way of obtaining capability within a limited timeframe. The problem is you do have to go into that with your eyes wide open. PPP demands commercially astute and aware management, because, if you're not careful, what you do is reduce the flexibility within your budget year on year.

hope that the coalition forces are seen as having been a force for good. And that's a challenge that is now facing all commanders on the ground in Iraq, to win the peace. We look to countries like Ireland who have been such exceptional peacekeepers for the example of how best to win hearts and minds in a difficult situation.

gives me an insight into the Defence Forces that is enormously privileged and respected. I like this organisation. I think you've got an extraordinarily capable small Defence Force. I think you box above your weight, I think you get extremely good value for money and that you're seeing well-motivated, young, enthusiastic men and women progressing through the system. One of your strengths are the representative bodies and they are to be congratulated for the work they have done in developing professionalism and capability in the Defence Force. In many ways the indication of the success of RACO is that you don't hear about it very often, because it successfully gets on with its day-to-day business without creating additional problems.

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Accordingly, the more private finance initiatives you have running the more difficult it becomes to deliver flexible and responsive operational capability.

How do you see Britain's role in Iraq at the moment?

▶▶ Britain's role in Iraq, I would hope, will not be a long-term role. The aim must be to see all authority passed to the Iraqis and Iraq becoming a prosperous, stable nation for the future. In the longer term, I would

What are your aspirations for the remainder of your appointment as attaché in Ireland?

▶▶ To continue to provide the best possible service to the Defence Forces and to assist them in meeting the challenges ahead. It's a matter of whatever I can do to help being what this office is about.

The relationship is very good and I do have direct access to the Chief of Staff and I have regular contact with the Minister and Department of Defence officials, which

I notice you have the picture of the Garden of Remembrance behind you. Is there some significance to that?

▶▶ I think it is the most wonderful piece of sculpture and you can read all sorts of things into it. You could talk about freedom, you could talk about nationhood, you could talk about whatever you like. It is so evocative of the spirit of Ireland.

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(L-R) Col Paul Cummings, Colonel (now Brig Gen) Gerry McNamara, Lt Col Ray King, and Col Senan Downes.