

Doing ‘the world’s most important work’ - From Cyprus to Liberia

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This paper outlines part of the history of the involvement of the Irish Defence Forces with United Nations peacekeeping missions. From the earliest experiences of Irish peacekeepers on traditional missions with the UN, to more recent contributions in terms of the provision of training programs or the development of concepts and doctrines for the more complex operations that the UN now has to deal with, it can be seen that Ireland has always had a valuable role in the important work of peacekeeping. The involvement of the Irish Defence Forces in the UN’s operations in Cyprus and Liberia serve as examples in this paper to highlight that role, to demonstrate the changing nature of UN missions and to reinforce how Ireland continues to contribute to the vital work of peacekeeping.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking in Dáil Éireann in 1963, a mere five years after Ireland had embarked on its first peacekeeping effort in support of the United Nations, President John F. Kennedy said ‘from Cork to the Congo, from Galway to the Gaza Strip, from this legislative assembly to the United Nations, Ireland is sending its most talented men to do the world’s most important work—the work of peace’.¹ In the 40-odd years since then, the Irish Defence Forces have participated in 58 missions and developed a style of peacekeeping that has earned, dare I say it, universal respect and admiration and not a little envy. Our Defence Forces have been part of the evolution that has seen UN Blue Helmet operations move from what we now refer to as ‘traditional peacekeeping’ to today’s very complex operations. Hence the title of my talk ‘From Cyprus’, which certainly fits into the traditional peacekeeping genre, ‘To Liberia’, which by any definition



fits the more complex classification. In addition to the evolution of the Blue Helmet concept we have, of course, also in more recent times seen another distinct development; and here I refer to the sub-contracting, by the UN, of peacekeeping missions to organisations such as the EU, AU and NATO.

Today Irish Defence Forces personnel serve with the Blue Helmet force in Liberia, with the UN-authorized, EU-led forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and with the UN authorised, NATO/PfP-led force in Kosovo, in addition to a host of smaller missions. In a task of equal importance to providing troops for peace support operations, our Defence Forces have contributed significantly to the development of doctrine and concepts by providing staff officers to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations

(DPKO), to the EU Military Staff and to NATO/PFP in Brussels. At present the Irish Defence Forces provide a senior officer as chief of staff of the military division of UN DPKO, and in the past few weeks an Irish colonel has been selected by the EU as its first military liaison officer on defence and military matters with the UN in New York.

Ireland has also made a significant contribution to what JFK called the world's most important work through the establishment of our UN training school at the Curragh, where we conduct our mission-specific, pre-deployment training, as well as organising a number of international courses each year, such as the 'International Military Observers and Staff Officers Course', the 'International Military Police Course' or the 'International Human Rights "Train-the-trainers" Course'. Our UN school is also a member of the International Association of Peacekeeping Training Centres, through which we share our considerable experience with the aim of promoting more effective peace operations. In more recent years the school has taken on the role of developing human-rights training for peacekeepers, and this year we made the facilities of the school available to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the conduct of an international instructors' course on human rights for military personnel on peace support operations. In addition to this, we also welcome international students to our senior management course, our 'Command and Staff Course', in the military college at the Curragh. Participation in peace support missions comes at a price—a price that is being paid today by our personnel who, living in austere conditions in hostile environments, deal with uncertainty on a daily basis and bear the pain of separation from loved ones; a pain that is also shared by family and loved ones at home. As with so many other countries, too many of our peacekeepers have had to pay the highest price and have given their lives in the cause of peace. Just one week ago we commemorated the forty-fifth anniversary of the Niemba ambush in the Congo, where we suffered our first casualties overseas and where nine young Irish lives were lost. Already this year 86 UN peacekeepers have lost their lives. Yet we must put this price in context: in the years preceding the deployment of UNMIL, approximately 200,000 Liberian lives were lost in the

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country's ongoing conflict—since deployment the numbers lost can be counted in the tens rather than thousands.

The Changing Nature Of UN Missions

When I visit our overseas missions such as the one in Liberia, I always draw comparisons with my first mission, which was with UNFICYP in Cyprus. It was a traditional peacekeeping mission, established under Chapter 6 of the UN Charter, rooted in the principle of consent—consent, that is, of the opposing sides to our presence; undertaken in strict neutrality; and without the use of force except for the protection of our lives. Our job was simply to keep the peace through monitoring the ceasefire—the business of peace-building and advancing the situation was for somebody else. The force was a well organised one, drawn in the main from European countries, with the force or tactical reserve provided by the Canadians. Today in Liberia we have an operation with integrated civil and military components involved in security, development and state building. The force is organised under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter (peace enforcement), with a clear mandate and robust rules of engagement. Ireland, along with a Swedish company, provides the force tactical reserve—a highly trained and equipped armoured 'Quick Reaction Force'. We are the only European elements within the 15,000 strong force. Indeed, as I speak here today my staff are actively considering a UN request to have this 'Quick Reaction Force' take on a role outside Liberia: the provision of security for the Special Court of Sierra Leone established jointly by the government of Sierra Leone and the UN to try those charged with serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Clearly then, UN peacekeeping has changed dramatically since our first involvement, and the changes have been brought about by shifts in international relations, changing regional security arrangements and indeed the changing nature of conflict, as well as, of course, some hard-learned lessons. The earliest peacekeeping operations that we participated in were set in the context of Cold War dynamics and, as I said, forces established at this time were committed to peacekeeping with no real role in regard to conflict resolution. The ending of the Cold War in the late 1980s opened the door to a new era of UN peacekeeping. Working together in the UN Security Council, the US and Russia began pressing their former clients to resolve differences, while using the UN to oversee the implementation of peace accords. The Irish Defence Forces at this time were heavily committed to the UN force in Lebanon, providing an infantry battalion, command of the force mobile reserve and elements to the force HQs. Our contributions elsewhere were mainly confined to staff officers and observers. Given that the Irish spent 28 years with the 'Interim Force' in Lebanon it would be remiss of me if I were to pass by this contribution without comment. My own personal involvement took me to Lebanon on three separate deployments. During my last tour I had responsibility for contingency planning for UN operations during the Israeli withdrawal, for getting the agreement of Israel and Lebanon to a line of withdrawal and for establishing when the last Israeli troops had moved behind this line. But I will touch on a much earlier development that I feel has relevance today. UNIFIL was never allowed to completely exercise its mandate in the early years because it was being harassed on an ongoing basis by the Palestinian Armed Groups and by the Israeli-sponsored DFF militia. During April 1980 the situation deteriorated in the Irish battalion area, resulting in a number of clashes and

the killing of three Irish soldiers. The Irish government, exasperated by the failure of the UN to deal with the ongoing situation, called a meeting in Dublin of representatives of troop-contributing nations, at which eleven attended. Troops contributed to the United Nations come under the command of the appointed force commander and under the strategic direction of the secretary-general and the Security Council. But of course the electorates of the troop-contributing nations ensure that the home governments continue to carry some responsibility. This Irish initiative certainly acted as a wakeup call to the UN in this regard and, in fairness, better procedures have now been put in place for liaison with troop-contributing nations: to say that those procedures are now appropriate and adequate for situations arising today might, however, be to go a little too far.

Returning to developments outside of UNIFIL, we made a very significant

contribution to the UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia, and also to the Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). These operations, as well as the observer missions in El Salvador, are very good examples

of the wider mandates then being given to UN forces. These missions included tasks such as: the delivery of humanitarian aid; repatriation of refugees; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants; and organising and conducting elections, in addition, of course, to the security role. To accomplish all these tasks required a very diverse organisation of civilians, police and military; and the task of co-ordinating these new multi-dimensional peacekeeping organisations was considerable. But those new UN operations were very successful and this period will certainly go down as a high point of UN peacekeeping. The success of the early 1990s was, however, to be short-lived. The debacle of Somalia, genocide in Rwanda and Srebrenica illustrate the low-point of UN peacekeeping. Enough has already been written and said about these disasters, and suffice to say that they nearly brought about the end of UN peacekeeping. It may well be that the new interpretation of article 2.7 of the Charter providing for involvement in the

internal affairs of countries, including during civil war situations, was underestimated.

In the case of inter-state conflict, there were clear points of contact with regard to who could do business and who could deliver: by and large, attacks on peacekeepers were taboo. In the case of the new intra-state conflicts, agreements on ceasefires meant little to local warlords; and in the civilian/military missions, UN civilians— as much as peacekeepers— were fair game for the various militias. In fact, 210 UN civilians have been killed since 1992. This new situation called for new measures and more robust rules of engagement for the peacekeepers. The Security Council responded to this situation by providing the UN mission in Somalia (UNOSOM II) with a more robust mandate based on Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. The Irish Defence Forces participated in this mission by providing a transport company, and an amendment to the Defence Act by

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Dáil Éireann was required in order to provide the legal basis for our participation.²

Events in Somalia, the Balkans and elsewhere provoked considerable debate on the use of force by peacekeepers. On the question of robust mandates, the Brahimi report on UN peacekeeping concluded that robust rules of engagement are essential for dealing with those who renege on their commitments to a peace accord. Significantly, since the year 2000, of 10 UN missions established, only one has been mandated under Chapter 6. If Srebrenica and Rwanda are associated with the darkest days of UN peacekeeping, the UN mission in East Timor (UNTAET) will go down as one of the more notable success stories. Irish personnel played a significant role in this mission, which was also the first overseas operation on which we deployed a formed sub unit of our special forces. The East Timor mission marked a further development in multi-dimensional operations, in that the UN took on the role of government in the form of a transitional administration.

Of particular significance is, however, the manner in which the perennial problem of slow deployment and build up by UN forces was overcome: Australia was asked to lead a multi-national force (from September 1999 to February 2000), and then to transfer its command and many of its capabilities to the Blue Helmet force. Given the success of this mission, it is little wonder that the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, is so enthusiastic about the EU Battlegroup concept. The UN has indicated that one role for such a proposed force would be to prevent a situation from deteriorating pending arrival of a UN force, and also to transfer some or all of its assets to the incoming UN force.

One cannot look at the recent development of UN peacekeeping without referring to the sub-contracting by the UN to regional organisations. The end of the Cold War, and the war in the Balkans, raised the possibility of NATO involvement

in peacekeeping. By December 1992 NATO indicated that it was 'ready to respond positively to initiatives that the UN Secretary General might take to seek Alliance assistance in the implementation of UN Security Council

resolutions'.⁴ This opened the door to NATO establishing the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia- Herzegovina in 1995 under UN Security Council resolution 1031 and KFOR in Kosovo in 1999, under the same resolution that had established the UN Mission in Kosovo, UNMIK. The Irish Defence Forces provided a military police company to SFOR (the follow-on mission from IFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina), and later a transport company to KFOR in 1999. An infantry group replaced this transport company in 2003. Exposure to these operations marked a new departure for the Irish as well as other non-NATO, traditional UN force-providers such as Finland, Sweden and Austria. The pre-deployment scrutiny, the emphasis on interoperability and having dedicated tactical, operational and strategic reserves were all in marked contrast to the UN experience.

The arrival of NATO on the scene was quickly followed by the EU, with the development of its European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), providing a further

possible option for the UN. Contacts and dialogue between the two organisations (the UN and EU) resulted in the establishment of the EU police mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2003 and in the same year the first autonomous EU military mission, was deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Operation Artemis was established by Security Council resolution 1484 on 30 August 2003 under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter and by the Council joint action (on 5 June 2003), whereby a French-led international task force was sent to counter unrest in Bunia in the DRC. The Security Council established and mandated the force but subcontracted its implementation to the EU. The operation was placed under the political direction of the EU Political and Security Committee, with France acting as the framework nation. Ireland participated by providing staff officers at the operational and tactical headquarters levels. A more recent development with regard to UN–EU relationships has been the takeover by the EU of the NATO role in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Again, we participate in this EUFOR Operation Althea with military police elements, weapons verification teams and staff officers at the force HQs.

So, when we look at UN Blue Helmet forces and the relatively small contribution of European troops there, we must remember that European forces are actively engaged elsewhere in support of the UN; and we should also remember that 40% of the UN peacekeeping budget comes from Europe. So 50 years down the road, what can we say about UN peacekeeping today and what has our experience been? To attempt to answer this, I will return to the UN mission in Liberia, which is today the UN's biggest Blue Helmet force and where we have a significant presence. To my mind, UNMIL reflects the use of the full range of instruments at our disposal for an effective civil/military mission, where security, humanitarian affairs and development are dealt with in a coordinated fashion and where a well-defined strategy has taken the country from the abyss to democratic elections and, hopefully, a bright future. In getting itself established, UNMIL had a number of advantages not normally available to other UN forces. It was a follow-on mission to a West African force that had done some excellent work in bringing a measure of stability to the capital, Monrovia. It had the benefit of a



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team of well qualified staff officers from the stand-by high readiness brigade, who got the headquarters up and running; and it had the support of a sister force in Sierra Leone, (UNAMSIL). On the other hand, it suffered from many of the problems that have always affected UN forces, not least of which are the command and control arrangements.

UNMIL is the biggest mission, but it is only one of 18 missions worldwide, with a combined strength of 83,000 made up of troops, police and civilian personnel, all of whom are managed by a staff of just 650 at the DPKO in New York. This may be considered a very efficient ratio of staff to personnel in the field, but it is not an effective one. UN field commanders do not get the level of support available to NATO or EU forces from their operational headquarters. Yet when one considers that the total UN peacekeeping budget is in the order of \$3.5 billion, I am sure it is the best ratio or arrangement that can be achieved. But surely the UN should be empowered to do better. After 50 years in the business we still do not have a peacekeeping doctrine. Indeed, in his report to the fourth committee of the General Assembly in October last, Under Secretary-General Jean Marie Guéhenno posed the yet-to-be-answered question ‘what do we mean by terms such as “robust peacekeeping” and what does this mean for a police officer or soldier serving in a UN mission?’⁵ Guéhenno has placed development of doctrine as the second of his five priorities for the DPKO going forward from the World Summit.

A peacekeeping doctrine needs to be developed and this should be done in conjunction with those ‘actors’ who carry out peacekeeping tasks on behalf of the UN. But the development of doctrine needs a section staffed by competent and experienced officers dedicated to the task—again a matter of resources. Furthermore, the DPKO needs not just to coordinate with external actors; there is a need for greater coherence within the UN family itself to ensure all the resources of the peacekeeping, humanitarian and development agencies are harnessed to best effect. I recall attending a UN-sponsored course for potential senior commanders and managers in 1998 where the emphasis was on integrated planning and execution. Today, I fear, we are still talking in aspirational terms about an integrated approach. = One example of the benefits of an integrated approach is the interagency approach adopted on DDR and which has resulted in a doctrine that is the basis of a common training programme for UN DDR specialists.

Returning then to UNMIL, it, like so many other UN missions,

also suffered from the slow build up of the force. This took many months to complete and involved some very important enabling capabilities. At the outset the Netherlands provided a Level 3 hospital, without which we could not have participated. A Level 3 hospital is one that provides the highest level of medical support for a UN mission, involving specialised patient treatment, extensive diagnostic services and surgical services. Our early deployment of a Special Forces element as well as the Quick Reaction Force gave the force commander a valuable resource and compensated for the slow build up of the total force. Clearly, the availability of Western niche elements can act as a force multiplier. The various national troop contributions in UNMIL are, by and large, well equipped and very professional. Coming as they do, however, from different countries and cultures, with different equipments, different doctrines and standard operating procedures they are not interoperable. Added to this is the lack of any over the horizon reserve forces. It may well be that there is some interrelationship between these shortcomings and the lack of EU member state contributions to Blue Helmet forces. Force protection and risk management are primary considerations in the planning and conduct of peace support operations today and this is particularly so in the Western world. Of course, risk management is a little easier for regional organisations than for the UN, which will always be open to criticism for not taking action, or on the other hand for taking action without the required capabilities. The Brahimi report has identified many of these difficulties for UN forces, and the DPKO is working assiduously to address them; but of course without greater support it can never fix everything. One shortcoming that has been addressed is the lack of an early warning system; access to the EU's Situation Centre information will go a long way to addressing this. Undoubtedly also there is a huge potential for the UN in the EU Battlegroup concept. It is hard to believe that the lessons learned from Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot be built upon and a suitable arrangement for the political control and strategic direction put in place.

Conclusion

I have taken UNFICYP as the start point in UN peacekeeping in an attempt to

show an orderly development through to UNMIL, but of course there is no straight-line progression. ONUC in the Congo came before UNFICYP and it was a multidimensional concept long before its time. The fact that that UN successfully took over the role of government in East Timor did not make it the preferred option for Liberia. Indeed the very fact that there is room for a traditional Chapter 6 peacekeeping mission in today's world illustrates that each situation merits its own particular response. The experience for our Defence Forces has been extremely valuable. The early days, marked by enthusiasm and naïveté, gave us the opportunity to benchmark ourselves against our European and other comrades and to learn from the experience.

Our overseas experience fed into our internal security role in the 'Aid To Civil Power' (ATCP) operations of the 1970s and 1980s. Our ATCP experience was very valuable in the later multi-dimensional UN missions. Likewise, the decision to make third-level education a prerequisite for our officer corps, starting in the 1960s, paid dividends when these officers, on reaching middle-management positions, had to grapple with situations far beyond the scope of military training. Our participation in the PfP arrangements and our introduction to NATO PfP-led, and later EU-led,

UN-authorized operations again raised the bar in regard to competence and standards, and again I would contend that we have measured up. Our restructuring of the Defence Forces in the 1990s along with our White Paper 2000 gave us the funding to embark on a programme of re-equipment focused on the realities of the more robust peace-support operations of today. The present situation, whereby we participate in both Blue Helmet and regional arrangements, has served us well and allowed us make very significant contributions. I don't think it should ever be a question of Blue Helmet or regional peacekeeping but rather as Under Secretary-General Jean Marie Guéhenno has said 'the issue is how best we can work together in effective multilateralism to advance the cause of peace and global security'. Whether we serve under direct UN leadership or as part of a regional arrangement our model of the successful peacekeeper is now well established. He/she must be a fully trained professional soldier, prepared and equipped for the full spectrum of military operations,

yet must come with a sense of decency, compassion and fair play, as well as an understanding of the culture of the area of operations and a thorough understanding of human-rights legislation. In conclusion, I wonder what was in the minds of those eight officers who left Dublin in 1958 for our first ever overseas deployment, and what they would make of peacekeeping today. We must salute the courage, bravery and sense of adventure of those who embarked on those early missions when the world was far from the global village of today, communications were slow and unreliable and the possibility of returning home, even in the event of the most serious domestic problems, very remote. And yet are today's soldiers to be admired any the less, when they, in today's Ireland of much greater opportunity, sign up to the commitment to deploy overseas not as a matter of choice, but as required, to dangerous and demanding situations, in order to carry on the world's most important work?

Footnotes:

1. Dáil Debates, 28 June 1963. Also available on the <http://www.jfklibrary.org/j062863.htm> (24 February 2006).
2. Defence (Amendment) Act, (1993).
3. United Nations, Report of the panel on United Nations peace operations (New York, 2000). The text of the report is available at http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/ (21 February 2006).
4. NATO, 'Final communiqué of the ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council (including decisions on NATO support for peacekeeping operations under the responsibility of the UN Security Council)', (Brussels, 17 December 1992). The text of the communiqué is available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/b921217a.htm> (21 February 2006).
5. United Nations, 'Remarks of Mr Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General for peacekeeping operations, to the fourth committee of the General Assembly', (New York, 20 October 2005), available at <http://www.un.org.Depts/dpko/dpko/articles/articles201005.htm> (21 February 2006).

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