



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

SERVICE BY THE DEFENCE FORCES

WITH

THE UNITED NATIONS

REPORT TO DÁIL ÉIREANN

2023

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REPORT TO DÁIL ÉIREANN
BY TÁNAISTE MICHEÁL MARTIN TD, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
REGARDING SERVICE BY THE DEFENCE FORCES
WITH THE UNITED NATIONS IN 2023

Introduction

It is a privilege for me as Minister for Defence to put before Dáil Éireann an account of the contribution made by members of the Defence Forces to the various United Nations missions in which they participated in 2023.

The year under review saw an increased focus on the important work of Irish peacekeepers operating in the tense, unpredictable and dynamic environment of the Middle East that escalated in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel on 7th October 2023. A paramount concern for the Government throughout, has been the safety and security of Ireland's Defence Forces' personnel. From the outset, I have been kept apprised of all developments in those areas in which Defence Forces' personnel are deployed. In each of the missions (UNIFIL, UNDOF and UNTSO) Defence Forces' personnel have complied fully with all UN security precautions, including taking shelter in protected positions.

Notwithstanding the many challenges, Irish troops serving overseas continued to make a significant contribution to international peacekeeping throughout 2023 through their participation in UN-led and UN authorised missions.

A further priority for Irish Government in 2023, was continuing to establish all the facts and circumstances relating to the incident that resulted in the horrific killing of Private Sean Rooney on 14th December 2022. I have consistently expressed my determination that no stone is left unturned to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. In July 2023, an initial indictment hearing took place in Lebanon of persons charged in connection with the incident with further hearings taking place in August and December. The matter continues

before the Lebanese judicial system as such it would not be appropriate to comment further, however my Department, the Embassy in Cairo, the Consulate in Beirut and I will continue to do everything in our power to ensure justice is served. I have met with the UN and both the Lebanese Minister for Defence and the Minister for Foreign Affairs on a number of occasions during 2023 and stressed the importance of ensuring that the culprits are brought to Justice. I also stressed the value that must be placed on the lives of our peacekeepers. To date eighty-eight Defence Forces personnel in total have lost their lives while on peacekeeping duty overseas in various missions - 48 have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving the cause of peace in Lebanon.

Ireland has always been a strong supporter of the United Nations and UN Peacekeeping. Our commitment and support for the primary role of the United Nations, in the maintenance of international peace and security, is expressed in Ireland's long-standing and unbroken tradition of participating in UN peacekeeping operations since our first deployment in 1958.

As evidenced in UNIFIL, partnership through joint deployments with other countries continued to be an important element of Ireland's participation in peacekeeping operations. This approach enables the Defence Forces to practice and enhance interoperability with the armed forces from other States, gain an insight into other countries capabilities, training and operations and also enhances Ireland's bilateral relations with our EU partners.

Peacekeeping has helped save countless lives and brought peace and stability to many countries over the decades. A commitment to local communities and to vulnerable citizens lies at the heart of Ireland's engagement crisis management operations.

Our values and principles have guided the actions of our state on the international stage ever since independence – a commitment to multilateralism and to the values of peace, international security, and global justice.

Ireland's commitment to the United Nations and to the values of the United Nations remains unwavering.

The Consultative Forum on International Security Policy, which took place in June 2023 featured a detailed and well-informed discussion on the issue of UN peacekeeping and the Triple Lock, which was reflected in the Chair's subsequent report. Many of the submissions received also highlighted the need to revisit the Triple Lock requirements. As such, one of the key outcomes of the Forum was the need for a new process to replace the current system underpinning the deployment of Irish troops abroad, which effectively allows UN Security Council members to bind Ireland's hands in its international engagement through the exercise of a veto, or threat of same.

Under the UN Charter, the UN Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. In fulfilling its mandate, the Security Council may adopt a range of measures, including the establishment of a UN peace mission or the authorisation of action by a group of States or a regional organisation, such as the European Union or the African Union. However, no new peacekeeping mission has been approved by the UN Security Council since 2014.

The five permanent members (P5) of the Council (China, France, Russia, UK, USA) each have a veto power which they can use to prevent the Security Council from taking decisions, including those related to the mandates of peacekeeping operations.

The Triple Lock requirement for a UN mandate effectively allows UN Security Council P5 members to bind Ireland's hands in its international deployment of the Defence Forces through the exercise of a veto, or threat of same. One of the outcomes of the Forum was the clear need for a new process to replace the current system underpinning the deployment of Irish troops abroad.

Legislative changes are therefore required to ensure that approvals to send Irish troops to overseas missions are governed by national decision-making processes. It is important

to emphasise however that any legislative proposals will remain fully consistent with the principles of the UN Charter and international law.

UN-led Missions

Ireland's main commitments during 2023 were to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was established on 19 March 1978, under United Nations Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426, following the invasion of Lebanon by Israel.

Its mandate was *“to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli Forces, to restore international peace and security and to assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area”*. Ireland participated in UNIFIL from 1978 until 2001 and again during the period October 2006 to October 2007. Following a request from the United Nations and with Dáil Éireann approval, Irish troops returned to serve in Lebanon in May 2011.

From June 2012 to November 2018, Ireland formed part of a joint battalion with Finland in UNIFIL. Following Finland's withdrawal from the joint Irish/Finnish Battalion, Ireland increased the number of personnel deployed to UNIFIL and assumed the full duties and responsibilities of the Irish Battalion for a 12-month period.

In November 2019, a new partnership was formed with Poland and Hungary in UNIFIL comprising the Irish/Polish Battalion (IRISHPOLBATT). Hungarian personnel were also deployed as part of the Polish contingent. As part of a bi-lateral arrangement between

Ireland and Malta, a small number of Maltese military personnel are embedded in the Irish contingent in UNIFIL, further expanding our defence relationship with the Maltese Armed Forces.

During 2023, the 122nd Infantry Battalion deployed to UNIFIL in May 2023 and was replaced by the 123rd Infantry Battalion in November 2023. Nine Armed Forces Malta personnel deployed with both the 122nd and 123rd Infantry Battalions to serve as part of the Irish contingent in UNIFIL. On 31 December 2023 there were 329 Irish personnel serving with the mission. Poland deployed some 470 personnel over two deployments to IRISHPOLBATT during 2023

The Irish/Polish Battalion is based in Sector West of UNIFIL's area of operations, in the vicinity of At Tiri, and with two posts on the 'Blue Line', which separates Lebanon and Israel¹. Personnel are tasked primarily with patrolling, reconnaissance, and occupying static posts while operating in close coordination and cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces in Sector West of UNIFIL's area of operations.

Since the Hamas attack on Israel on 7th October, the situation in the UNIFIL area of operations is tense and remains unpredictable. All reasonable measures are being taken to ensure the safety and security of all peacekeeping personnel.

The presence of the UNIFIL mission is now more than ever, vital to maintaining peace and security, providing support to the Lebanese Government and stability in the wider region.

United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)

The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was established on 31 May 1974 by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 350 (1974), following the agreed

¹ The Blue Line, stretching for 120km along Lebanon's southern frontier, is not a border, but a "line of withdrawal." It was set by the United Nations in 2000 for the practical purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the south of Lebanon. It is without prejudice to future border agreements between these two UN member states.

disengagement of the Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan in May 1974. Since 1974, the mandate of UNDOF has been renewed every six months.

A contingent of the Permanent Defence Force has been deployed to UNDOF since 2013. UNDOF supervises the implementation of the disengagement agreement, maintaining an area of separation between the forces, which is over 75 kilometres long. While the area of separation is governed and policed by the Syrian authorities, no military forces other than UNDOF are permitted within it.

There were two rotations of Irish personnel during 2023. The 67th Infantry Group deployed to UNDOF in April 2023 and was replaced by the 68th Infantry Group in October. The 68th Infantry Group, will be the last large-scale deployment of military personnel to this mission, at least for the present time. On 31 December 2023, a total of 134 Defence Forces personnel were serving with the mission.

The 68th Infantry Group were all based in Camp Faouar on the Syrian side of the Area of Separation. The role of the Irish Infantry Group included the provision of a Quick Reaction Force, which is on standby to assist with the on-going operations within the UNDOF area of responsibility. The Irish Infantry Group was also tasked with carrying out patrols and convoy escorts as necessary.

Following a joint assessment by the Department and the Defence Forces of commitments to overseas missions and on the basis of military advice, the decision has been taken to withdraw the Infantry Group, comprising some 130 Defence Force personnel, from UNDOF with effect from April 2024.

This decision has been taken in order for the Defence Forces to undertake a process of consolidation with regard to their overseas commitments and to prepare for future peace-keeping missions.

Planning for the withdrawal of the current Defence Forces' contingent (the 68th Infantry Group) and their replacement was progressed during 2023. This involved the United

Nations, the Force Headquarters, the current Irish contingent and the replacement Troop Contributing Country with the aim of ensuring a smooth handover that in no way compromises the mission.

Notwithstanding the withdrawal of the Infantry Group, the Defence Forces intend to continue to occupy a small number of staff officer posts at the UNDOF mission HQ which will be dependent on the take-up of these posts by those countries contributing troops to the mission.

United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO)

The Defence Forces have participated in UNTSO since 1958. Working closely with UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) and UNDOF (the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force), UNTSO's main objectives are to monitor ceasefires, supervising armistice agreements and assisting the UN peacekeeping operation in the area.

As of 31 December 2023, a total of twelve (12) members of the Permanent Defence Force were serving with the mission. In 2023, Irish Personnel served in HQ UNTSO in Jerusalem, Observer Group Lebanon (OGL), Observer Group Golan (OGG) in Syria, Observer Group Golan-Tiberias (OGG-T), Observer Group Golan – Damascus (OGG-D), Liaison Office Beirut (LOB) and Liaison Office Cairo (LOC) in Egypt.

Appointment at Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations

The Defence Forces continued to provide one officer of Colonel rank as Military Adviser to the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations (PMUN) in New York during 2023.

As part of our tenure on the United Nations Security Council (2021-2022) and after action follow up, an additional officer, served at the rank of Lt Col, as Deputy Military Adviser to

PMUN in New York and continued in this role throughout 2023. In addition, an Assistant Principal/First Secretary was appointed in 2021 to Ireland's Permanent Representation to the UN as attaché to support the defence aspects of Ireland's Security Council membership and ongoing policy aspects of UN Peacekeeping and overseas operations.

UN Authorised Missions:

International Security Presence in Kosovo (KFOR)

Over the course of the past two decades, the UN has come to increasingly rely on regional organisations including the African Union, the EU and NATO to provide forces to implement and support UN Security Council Resolutions. KFOR is a NATO-led force operating under a UN mandate in Kosovo.

KFOR was established on 10 June 1999, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244, for an initial period of twelve (12) months, to continue thereafter unless the UN Security Council decides otherwise. The role of KFOR is to support the maintenance of civil law and order within Kosovo so as to develop a climate of safety and security.

Ireland has participated in KFOR since August 1999 following Government approval (29 June 1999) and Dáil approval (1 July 1999). The mission is authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. In June 2023, the Government approved the continued provision of up to 13 members of the Permanent Defence Force for service with KFOR for a 12-month period up to June 2024. Defence Forces personnel hold staff appointments in KFOR Headquarters in Pristina.

KFOR, in close co-ordination with the Kosovo Police, continues to work towards maintaining a safe and secure environment. KFOR continues to monitor the security situation on the ground and maintain a deterrent posture to react quickly and decisively as required.

EUFOR's Operation Althea - Bosnia & Herzegovina

The EU operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Operation "Althea" - was established in December 2004, under the authority of UN Security Council Resolution 1575 of 22 November 2004, to replace the NATO-led Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR).

The mandate for this mission has been renewed annually by the UN Security Council. UN Security Council Resolution 2706 (2023), renewed EUFOR's mandate for a further period of 12 months up to November 2024.

Ireland has participated in EUFOR since December 2004, having previously been a participant in SFOR since 1997. Following the downsizing of the Irish contingent in July 2011, a residual component of seven (7) personnel was retained in the Force Headquarters until April 2017. Since April 2017, following a review by the Defence organisation of Defence Forces mission commitments, Ireland's contribution to the EUFOR mission was reduced to five (5) personnel. Irish personnel are based at EUFOR's headquarters in Sarajevo where they provide support to the Mission Commander and the headquarters.

The primary focus of Operation 'ALTHEA' is on the maintenance and stability of a safe and secure environment in the country, especially supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities.

Naval Service EU Naval Mission in the Mediterranean

Operation IRINI, is a UN mandated EU Naval mission in the eastern Mediterranean and its core task is the implementation of the UN arms embargo on Libya with aerial, satellite and maritime assets. Additionally, Operation Irini has a number of secondary tasks: monitoring of oil smuggling from Libya; capacity-building of the Libyan Coastguard; and the detection and monitoring of human smuggling networks. The current mandate of Op Irini expires in March 2025.

In 2023, Ireland had three members of the Defence Forces deployed to the Operational Headquarters (OHQ) in Rome in staff officer posts and a further officer was assigned to the Floating Headquarters.

In addition, following Government and Dáil approval, The L.É. William Butler Yeats and a crew of 58 personnel deployed as part of Operation Irini for a period of 46 days from 21 June- 24 July 2023 demonstrating Ireland's support for the important role the EU can play in support of international peace and security.

It should be noted that while capacity building and training of the Libyan Coastguard is part of Operation Irini's mandate, the Naval Service personnel did not engage in this activity when participating in the mission and Ireland has formally declared caveats to this effect with the Operational Headquarters in Rome.

European Union Training Mission- EUTM Mali

On 17 January 2013, the Council of the European Union established the EU Training Mission (EUTM Mali) in support of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2071 (2012) and 2085 (2012). The objective of the mission is to provide training for the Malian Armed Forces so as to improve their capacity to maintain security in Mali and restore the authority of the Malian Government and the territorial integrity of the Malian State.

In May 2022, a mid-term Strategic Review took place that resulted in significant adaptations to the mission, notably reductions of personnel and activities. EUTM Mali activities in support of the Malian Armed Forces were focused on strategic advice and education only. All operational and non-operational activities were temporarily and reversibly suspended while maintaining the capacity to resume when conditions are met and the EU Political and Security Committee so decides, in order to support the creation of sustainable and capable armed forces under democratic control and in line with international standards.

As a consequence, the number of Defence Force personnel serving with the mission was reduced from twenty in September 2022 (of whom nine (9) occupied staff appointments in the mission Headquarters in Bamako with a further eleven personnel in Koulikoro Training Centre). The number of personnel deployed was reduced to fourteen (14) in October 2022 and was further reduced to eight (8) in March 2023, all of whom were located in Bamako.

In June of 2023, the UN Security Council voted unanimously to terminate the mandate of the 13,000-strong UN Force in Mali (MINUSMA) and the orderly and safe drawdown and withdrawal of its personnel by 31 December, (Ireland had already left this mission in September 2022). With the likely effect of further destabilisation in an already unstable political situation in the country, and reflecting on a strategic review of EUTM Mali, the decision was taken to conclude Defence Forces participation in the mission with effect from September 2023.

EU Training Missions

EU Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine – EUMAM

EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) was established in late 2022. In February 2023, the Government approved the participation of up to 30 Defence Forces' personnel in the Mission.

The primary role of the Defence Forces is to provide training to members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) in one or more EU Member States in which the training will take place.

Since April 2023 one Defence Forces Officer is working in the Military Planning and Conduct Capability in Brussels and three personnel are serving with the Special Training Command in Strasbourg. These personnel have been involved, inter alia, in the identification of suitable training modules that might come within the capacity and capability of the Defence Forces.

On 11 April, the Tánaiste approval was conveyed for the delivery by the Defence Forces to the Ukrainian Armed Forces of two suitable training modules - Tactical Combat Casualty Care/Combat Life Saver and Demining & Clearance. The Tactical Combat Casualty course was successfully delivered together with German Army medical trainers in Dornstadt, Germany under the multinational Special Training Command in Germany.

The Demining and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Clearance training has also been provided by the DF through EUMAM. . That course was successfully hosted in Cyprus from 16 April to 12 May (four weeks), under the coordination responsibility of the Polish Combined Arms Training Command.

Three Combat Lifesaver Courses took place in Germany in June, September and December as well as two Drill Instructor training courses beginning in September and October.

Training activities are evolving regularly, based on UAF requirements. To that end, it is planned to approve the delivery of any further iterations of any of these or similar training courses that come within the capacity and capability of the Defence Forces' and which may arise between now and the end of June 2024

Financial Implications

The UN reimburses some personnel and 'Contingent Owned Equipment' costs in respect of contributions to UN led peacekeeping operations. Rates of reimbursement, fixed in accordance with UN categories of equipment and personnel, are agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Ireland and the UN for each mission. Ireland has an MOU in place with the UN in respect of the UNIFIL and UNDOF missions.

The UN paid reimbursements totalling approximately €14.5 million to Ireland in 2023. €9.2 million was received in respect of UNIFIL troop and equipment costs for the period 01 October 2022 to 30 September 2023. In addition, €5.2 million was received in respect

of UNDOF troop and equipment costs for the period 01 October 2022 to 30 September 2023.

An additional amount of approximately €62,000 was received in 2023 from Germany in respect of Irish Defence Force personnel who were embedded with the German Armed Forces in the MINUSMA mission. These monies were outstanding from 2022 and no further payments are outstanding from the German Armed Forces.

As of 31 December, 2023, the total amount owed to the Department of Defence by the United Nations is estimated to be €3.4 million. Monies owed at year-end are normally reimbursed by the UN in the first quarter of the following year.

Commitment of Defence Forces to United Nations Missions in 2023

On average per month, there were 542 personnel involved in UN-led and UN mandated missions throughout 2023.

Conclusion

Participation by our Defence Forces in overseas peacekeeping missions has helped save countless lives and brought peace and stability to many countries over the decades. It is an essential component of Ireland's foreign policy, driven by the very values and principles that have guided the actions of our State on the international stage since independence.

Peacekeeping has been an important dimension in meeting Ireland's international obligations as a member of the UN and the EU. It is a commitment to multilateralism and to the values of peace, international security, and global justice. Peace is fragile. It cannot and should not be taken for granted. Like so many other things, it can be hard fought and easily lost.

Irish Foreign policy is directed at supporting co-operative arrangements for elective security through the development of international organisations, especially the United Nations, and supporting effective international action in areas such as disarmament, peacekeeping, development and human rights. This approach continues to define Irish priorities within the UN system and Ireland remains willing to play a full role in contributing to the security of Europe and around the world.

For over 65 years, UN peacekeeping operations have enjoyed a special place in the hearts of the Irish people. Irish troops have participated continuously in peace support operations since 1958. Ireland has always accepted the obligations that arise from being part of the world community and tens of thousands of Irish women and men have worn the blue helmet with pride on UN peacekeeping operations over the years.

I would like to take this opportunity to again, commend all the members of the Defence Forces for their commitment to overseas service and to thank them for their significant contribution to UN peacekeeping during the year under review. This commitment to those communities and to vulnerable citizens lies at the heart of Ireland's engagement in UN-Mandated crisis management operations and it has never been more relevant in light of the ongoing situation in the Middle East.

April 2024