

Contributor Profile: Ireland

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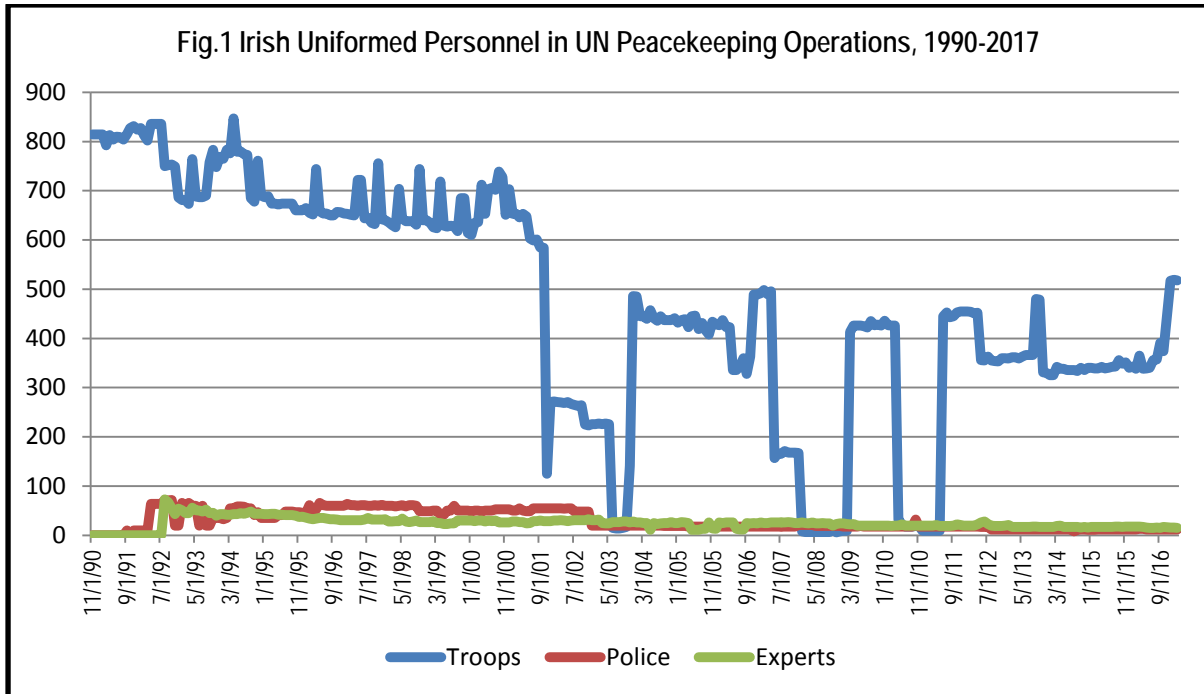
Active Armed Forces ¹	Helicopters + APC's ²	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
9,100 World Ranking (size): 123 Army: 7,300 Navy: 1,100 Air Force: 700	Multi-role: 6 Transport: 2 (light) MOWAG APC (heavy): 80 Light Tactical Armored Vehicles: 27	2016: \$1bn (0.33% of GDP) 2015: \$997m (0.35% of GDP) 2014: \$1.2bn (0.47% of GDP) 2013: \$1.2bn (0.54% of GDP) 2012: \$1.15bn (0.55% of GDP) World Ranking (budget size): 68	545 (31 female) (28 Feb. 2017) Ranking: 41 (6 th largest contributor from EU states)	MINURSO: 3 millex MONUSCO: 3 millex (1 female) UNFICYP: 12 police (3 female) UNIFIL: 378 troops (18 female) UNDOF: 136 troops (9 female) UNTSO: 12 millex	EUFOR (Bosnia & Herzegovina): 7 OSCE (Bosnia-Herzegovina): 1 KFOR: 12 EUTM Mali: 10
Defense Spending / troop 2017: ³ US\$111,444 (compared to global average of approx. US\$77,000)					

Part 1: Recent Trends

Ireland's approach to international security is characterised, *inter alia*, by a willingness to participate in peace operations and by a commitment to achieving collective security through the UN. The decision to participate in UNDOF was an important reaffirmation of Ireland's commitment to UN peacekeeping. The Middle East is an area where Irish forces have served for decades and the decision was consistent with Irish foreign policy objectives in the region. However, the decision not to participate in MINUSMA shows that Ireland is not willing to deploy to any mission area.

The most significant political developments in Irish participation in peace support operations in recent years are the publication of the Government White Paper on Foreign Policy (1996) and a [White Paper on Defence \(2000\)](#) and a [White Paper on Defence \(2015\)](#). Although all were vague in many respects, the chapters dealing with overseas peace support operations did set out the background to Irish involvement, and the factors that inform the government's consideration of requests for troops were enunciated in clear terms. They also detailed the guiding principles the government should consider in deciding whether or not to participate in enforcement operations. Decisions as to the nature of an operation and whether to participate are made on a case to case basis. The most recent White Paper on Defence did not propose any major changes to Irish policy in respect of peacekeeping operations. However, the criteria for participation in international peace operations may be changed if the so called "triple lock" mechanism (see below) is revised to facilitate involvement in non-UN approved operations.

The army is the largest element of the Defence Forces with a strength of around 7,500. During 2013 the Defence Forces underwent organisational changes and became a two brigade structure. In recent years Ireland’s austerity programme has had an impact on the Defence Forces with defence budget reductions and extended procurement policies to spread the cost over a longer period.



In recent years, the Defence Forces have progressed from participation in Chapter VI UN-led peacekeeping missions to deploying highly mobile mechanised units for Chapter VII peace enforcing missions in support of UN mandated operations. These developments reflect the increasing capability and capacity of the Defence Forces to contribute effectively to international peace support operations. Figure 1 shows that the most significant recent deployment is the commitment of a mechanised infantry battalion to UNIFIL in 2011. In 2009, the Government approved Ireland’s participation in the EU Nordic Battle Group. Following Government approval, Ireland will again participate in the Nordic battle group with Sweden acting as the framework nation in 2015 and the German led battle group in 2016.

The [Department of Defence and Defence Forces Strategy Statement 2016-19](#) emphasizes the strategic goal to “deploy Defence Forces capabilities to multi-national peace support, crisis management and humanitarian relief operations in accordance with Government direction and legislative provision”. It also provides that in accordance with the most recent White Paper to progress the development of a new international Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training.

According to the most recent [Department of Defence and Defence Forces Annual Report \(2015\)](#), Ireland’s international defence and security policy context is defined by an active political and operational role in support of the UN, commitments to the UN Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS) and participation in the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and in NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP). The Report refers to Ireland’s “long-standing policy of military neutrality. However, this has never been a limiting

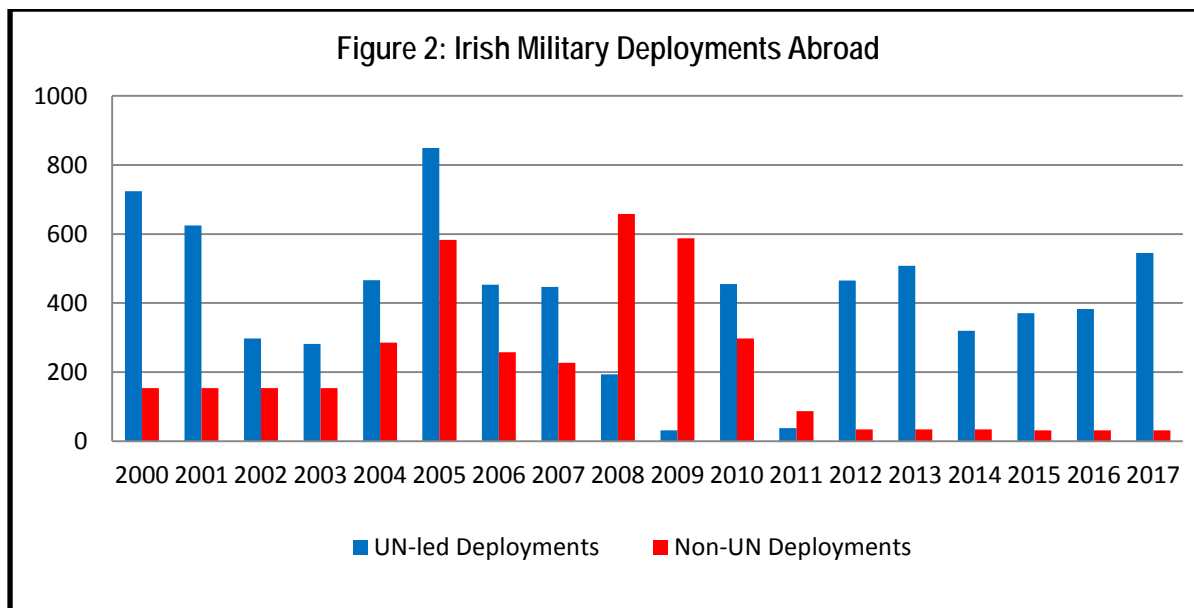
factor in the use of defence as an appropriate tool of international policy in the UN context and in the context of EU membership having regard to the provisions of the EU Treaties”.

In 2010, Ireland abruptly withdrew its mechanised infantry battalion from MINURCAT. Uncertainty over the mandate and the cooperation of the government of Chad led Ireland to make the unilateral decision to withdraw. The withdrawal of the Norwegian Level-II hospital at the same time may also have influenced the decision. The 41 Infantry Group was also withdrawn from KFOR (Kosovo) in April 2010 and not replaced. Financial considerations were the main factor in this decision as the economic crisis have led to downsizing of the Defence Forces from around 18,000 in 1990 to 9,500 today.

Figure 2 shows the major deployments to UNIFIL (ongoing), UNMIL (2003-07), EUFOR Chad/CAR (2008-09), MINURCAT (2009-10), UNIFIL (2011- present) and the more recent commitment to UNDOF. With the withdrawal from MINURCAT, the large contribution to UNIFIL in 2011 suited Ireland as it was familiar with the mission and area of operations. The government and Defence Forces were eager to participate in a UN led mission of this nature.

In 2017, Lebanon and the Golan Heights represented Ireland’s primary missions abroad. Ireland was requested to contribute to UNDOF on the Golan Heights in 2013 and it agreed to provide a mechanised infantry group (company strength). This also contains niche surveillance, explosive ordnance disposal, engineer and medical elements. Similar to the earlier deployment to Liberia, this meant significant exposure to risk. Although the mission reflected well on Irish willingness to deploy and prevent the collapse of the UNDOF operation, a clash with Syrian rebel group al Nusra in 2014 led to a re-evaluation of the Irish participation. Thereafter, the previous almost unwavering commitment would be more conditional. This can be attributed to increased expectations over military capabilities, the need for realistic mandates and the responsibility of the Irish government to ensure it respected the duty of care to Irish soldiers.

From a logistical point of view it was an efficient and cost effective deployment, as Ireland had much of what was needed for this mission in the region owing to the downsizing of the Irish contribution to UNIFIL at the time. This rendered Ireland well placed to supply the equipment and personnel required, given the threat assessment. The contribution to UNIFIL was reduced to a Mechanised Infantry Battalion (minus). The current joint Finnish-Irish contribution to UNIFIL also provides an example of the evolution in Irish participation from stand-alone exclusively Irish battalions, to joint battalions. Ireland took command of the joint contingent, which also contains a platoon from Estonia as part of the Finnish contingent, in November 2016. Hence the increase in the overall Irish contribution to UNIFIL of 378 personnel. The practice of working with the Finns emerged from the experience with KFOR (Kosovo), but it is more a “marriage of convenience” than a policy or strategy driven decision based on common goals. Nonetheless, the arrangement is considered to work and serves the interest of all parties.



Part 2: Decision-Making Process

UN authorization is a key factor in deciding whether or not to participate in peace operations. Before agreeing, certain conditions must be satisfied and these are referred to as the “triple lock”: (1) the operation must be authorized/mandated by the UN; (2) it must be approved by the Government (a recommendation to Government is made by an interdepartmental committee comprised of personnel from Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Defence Forces); and when the size of a Defence Forces contribution is more than twelve personnel, (3) it must be approved by way of a resolution of Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament). Ireland is equally happy to contribute to UN-led and UN-authorized EU operations. The importance of UN approval for to all Defence Forces international operations was evident in the decision by Ireland to enter into a bilateral arrangement with Italy to assist with search and rescue missions for refugees/migrants in the Mediterranean (Operation Pontus). The lack of UN Security Council approval for the EU mission presented Ireland with a political and legal dilemma regarding participation in an operation not formally mandated by the UN. Concluding a bilateral agreement with Italy for this humanitarian mission got around the strictures of the “triple lock” mechanism requirement for participation in such an international humanitarian maritime operation.

An important consideration today is the re-imbursment of costs. As such, while participation in UN-authorized coalitions of the willing is possible, UN-led or UN-authorized EU operations are preferred.

Today, participation is governed by the [Defence \(Amendment\)\(No. 2\) Act, 1960](#) as amended, which was intended as the permanent legislation to authorize the despatch of contingents of the Permanent Defence Force for service outside the State with international forces established by the UN Security Council or the General Assembly, for the performance of duties of a police character.

Despite the ongoing involvement in UN and UN-authorized peace support operations, there is surprisingly little debate on the issue in Ireland. In 1993, Ireland revised and updated the municipal legal basis for troop participation in UN-led operations to allow Ireland to contribute soldiers to UNOSOM II in Somalia (1993-95). This brought about a fundamental change in policy, after which participation in peacekeeping forces not specifically of a police

nature was permitted. At the time, this generated some debate as to whether Ireland should contribute forces to new kinds of military action undertaken by the UN.

Ireland's status as a military neutral state limits the Defence Force's activity abroad and complicates its involvement in UN-authorized peacekeeping missions under Chapter VII. The position regarding Defence Force's potential involvement in non-UN authorized humanitarian operations and EU-led peacekeeping or monitoring missions was unclear. The [Defence \(Amendment\) Act 2006](#) sought to clarify some of these issues. Section 1 defines "International United Nations Force" so as to reflect the changes in UN-supported international peace operations and the increased importance of UN-sanctioned operations conducted by regional organizations. The Act defines such a Force as "an international force or body established, mandated, authorized, endorsed, supported, approved or otherwise sanctioned by a resolution of the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations."

Guidelines for participation in peace support operations

In view of the number, size and complexity of international peace support operations, it was deemed necessary by the Irish Government in 1996 to develop a selective response to requests from the UN based on certain factors:

- assessment of whether a peacekeeping operation is the most appropriate response to the situation;
- consideration of how the mission relates to the priorities of Irish foreign policy;
- the degree of risk involved;
- the extent to which the particular skills or characteristics required relate to Irish capabilities;
- the existence of realistic objectives and a clear mandate which has the potential to contribute to a political solution;
- whether the operation is adequately resourced;
- and the level of existing commitment to peacekeeping operations and security requirements at home.⁴

The [White Paper on Defence 2000](#) outlined additional factors for consideration, including ongoing developments in UN-led peace support operations, the evolution of European security structures, and the resource implications for the defense budget. The guidelines are broad and imprecise and they could thus be used to avoid participation in certain operations. The degree of risk involved to Irish personnel, assessment of whether a peacekeeping operation is the most appropriate response and level of existing Irish commitments are likely to be key factors.

UN peace enforcement operations

Taking into account the experience of UNOSOM II in Somalia, the Irish government's approach to participation in future UN-led enforcement operations will be guided by certain criteria:

- that the operation derives its legitimacy from decisions of the Security Council;
- that the objectives are clear and unambiguous and of sufficiency and urgency and importance to justify the use of force;
- that all other reasonable means of achieving the objectives have tried and failed;
- that the duration of the operation be the minimum necessary to achieve the stated objectives;

- that diplomatic efforts to resolve the underlying disputes should be resumed at the earliest possible moment;
- that the command and control arrangements for the operation are in conformity with the relevant decisions of the Security Council and that the Security Council is kept fully informed of the implementation of its decision.⁵

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political Rationales: Membership in the UN has been a cornerstone of Irish foreign policy since 1955. The maintenance of an effective UN, especially in the area of conflict prevention, forms a key objective of Irish foreign policy within which peacekeeping operations have come to play a central role. Ireland wants to enhance its international prestige and influence by supplying personnel to peace operations. Participation also helped Ireland's case for election to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council, which it did in 1962, in 1981-82 and in 2001-02. There was cross-party support for involvement in peacekeeping operations in the past. However, Irish participation in UNDOF was opposed by Sinn Fein. The potential for Sinn Fein involvement in government as part of a coalition is growing and this could bring a change in foreign policy in the future.

The [2015 Defence White Paper](#) acknowledges that Ireland is also concerned about its image as an EU state. Ireland's willingness to share the burden of EU co-operation and solidarity in the security and defence field, in particular through contributions to military operations, is seen as significantly influencing perceptions of its credibility and commitment within the EU and UN.

Economic Rationales: There are no significant national security or economic rationales for providing UN peacekeepers. In the cases of the UN-mandated but NATO-commanded Stabilisation Force (SFOR) and Kosovo Force (KFOR) missions in the former Yugoslavia, the government agreed to pay all the expenses associated with Irish participation. The recent crisis in the Irish economy would make such an arrangement most unlikely in the foreseeable future. Individuals of all ranks can benefit from "overseas allowances" and this is a factor in individual decisions to volunteer.

Institutional Rationales: The decision to apply for membership in the UN was probably motivated by a fear of Ireland being isolated and denied any role on the world stage. In this way, the decision was based on pragmatic considerations. There are interesting parallels with the debate regarding membership in the NATO-sponsored Partnership for Peace and Irish participation in SFOR and KFOR. There was a fear among officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and the military that if Ireland did not join the Partnership for Peace program, it could become isolated and out of touch with international developments in peacekeeping training and doctrine. It is questionable if such fears were valid.

Participation in EU Battlegroups demonstrates Ireland's commitment to the development of EU capabilities in the area of crisis management, even though they have not been deployed to date. It also contributes to Ireland's overall credibility within the EU. Ireland's engagement in EU Battlegroups is perceived in Ireland as enhancing its capacity to influence the ongoing development of the rapid response capacity of the EU, and in particular, the role that Battlegroups can play in acting as a strategic reserve for UN operations. 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 (100+ personnel), to support or reinforce overseas contingents if the situation so demands.

Normative Rationales: Ireland sees itself as a good international citizen with a vested interest as a small state in UN multilateralism. Today, participation by Defence Forces and Gardai (police) in a range of UN-sponsored activities is commonplace. This involvement has become a significant element of Irish foreign policy, and a concrete manifestation of commitment to the UN and the maintenance of world peace. Furthermore, the effects of Ireland's policies over a range of issues including decolonisation, disarmament, human rights, and its history under colonial rule and non-membership of a military alliance, combined to make it acceptable as a contributor to peacekeeping and related activities.

A key policy issue for Ireland has been the developing responses to the changing security environment of global and regional security organisations with which Ireland acts in pursuit of international peace and stability, principally the UN, the EU, the OSCE and NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP). The 2015 White Paper on Defence identifies threats to the EU as threats to Ireland's interests and welfare. A proactive approach is seen as mitigating security risks at an international level, which is in Ireland's interest. This may involve UN and UN-mandated missions, including military missions, as part of the collective security response. Full participation in the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU (CSDP) linked to Irish engagement in the UN and supporting EU and UN collaboration are seen as key to this. While Ireland is "fully committed to and supportive of the UN based international rules system," it continues to maintain a policy of military neutrality. Furthermore, participation in EU CSDP is perceived as complimentary to Irish support for UN peacekeeping.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Degree of risk to Irish personnel: Although the Irish commitment to the UNOSOM forces in Somalia in the 1990s was quite small (c.180 personnel), the decision to participate had significant political and military implications. It was the first time Irish soldiers participated in a Chapter VII peace enforcement operation and it set a precedent that helped pave the way for the participation in SFOR in the former Yugoslavia. It marked a watershed in Irish involvement in peacekeeping activities, and a realisation that Ireland could be left behind in the changing nature of the international security environment unless it too adapted to events. Though the UN operation in the Congo (ONUC, 1960-4) involved a degree of enforcement action to which the Irish contingent was a party, the decisions to participate in SFOR, KFOR, UNAMET (East Timor) and later Chapter VII missions were conscious decisions made in response to the changed international environment. The issue of risk was raised in September 2014 when Fijian troops were captured and Filipino troops besieged by armed groups on the Golan Heights. The government was reported to be reviewing Irish participation, but in the event a decision was made to continue. Redeployment of the UNDOF force and other security enhancing measures were significant in this decision.

Financial costs: At one time there was controversy regarding Irish participation in UN peacekeeping owing to the backlog in reimbursement of expenses from the UN. Newspaper reports gave the impression that Ireland was losing considerable sums of money, especially in Lebanon. UN delay in reimbursement is raised from time to time in the Irish parliament. The financial implications are not as simple as might appear at first glance, and it can be argued that, far from being a loss-making exercise, UN operations can be a net contributor to the Irish exchequer, especially as commitments were met from within existing resources. This was especially evident in 1986 when the Secretary of the Department of Defence informed the

Committee of Public Account that Ireland had made some £5 million profit from its involvement in UNIFIL, and would at that time have made a further net gain of nearly £16 million if defaulting nations had paid their dues at the UN (see *The Irish Times*, 10 September 1986). In contrast, more recent UN-approved operations in Bosnia and Kosovo were paid for entirely from Ireland's own resources.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

In 2015, defence expenditure (excluding pensions) was approximately 21% less than 2008 expenditure and 14% less than 2007.⁶ An immediate consequence of cuts to the defence budget was the decision to reduce the establishment of the defence forces to 9,500 personnel.⁷ The “downsizing” of the Defence Forces is a major challenge to participation in UN peace operations. The key issue relating to peacekeeping and Irish foreign policy arising from the White Paper on Foreign Policy (1996) was the focus on maintaining military neutrality while fostering a security role within Europe. If the Defence Forces are to retain the skills and reputation acquired to date in the new context of European security, then it may be necessary to participate in the organizations where best contemporary practice is developed. This is all the more so with the UN engaging in more complex peace support operations and regional operations conducted with UN approval. This was a significant development for Ireland that should assist in ensuring that the prominent role played by the Defence Forces to date in peacekeeping operations is not diminished in the future. This is an important consideration as some of Ireland's attributes for traditional peacekeeping, namely the non-membership in NATO and its small armed forces, could be barriers to participation in future UN-authorized but NATO-led regional operations.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

The Defence Forces themselves are strong advocates of participation in UN-led and UN-authorized missions. In this regard they are supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Irish participation in UN-led operations is not a controversial issue, but the growing need of recent years to authorize regional organizations such as NATO or the EU to conduct peace support operations can present certain dilemmas for a country that has sought to avoid controversial decisions on security and defense matters. The national political landscape has changed in recent years with significant growth in support for independent groups and parties, including Sinn Féin. It is difficult to predict how they may respond to future proposals for Irish participation in peacekeeping missions.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

Capabilities: Although the strength of the Defence Forces is small by international standards, the level of training and the equipment issued to ordinary soldiers is high. The Defence Forces have progressed from participation in Chapter VI peacekeeping missions to deploying highly mobile mechanised wheeled infantry units for Chapter VII missions most recently in Syria (Golan Heights), Lebanon and Chad. In the area of logistics, there has been a shift away from traditional reliance on UN support to the Defence Forces, to deploying self-sustaining units to green field sites.

Ireland also has the capability to deploy Explosive Ordnance Disposal/Improvised Explosive Device Disposal components and did so to the first EU Battle Group in January 2008. Irish Special Forces (Army Ranger Wing/ARW) have been deployed on peace support operations. In Liberia, the ARW was designated the Special Operations Task Group and came under the direct command of the Force Commander UNMIL. The ARW was also deployed as part of the Initial EU Entry Force to Chad (EUFOR Chad/CAR) and to East Timor (UNTAET). Also

in Liberia, the 450-strong Infantry Battalion took on the task of providing UNMIL's Quick Reaction Force (QRF). At the heart of the QRF was the Armored Personnel Carrier (APC) Company, equipped with 22 Mowag APC's.

The [2015 White Paper on Defence](#) states that Ireland will continue to participate in NATO's PfP with a view to ensuring that the Defence Forces have the necessary interoperable capabilities to participate in modern, demanding peacekeeping operations alongside other European military forces, in particular those from like-minded states.

Caveats: The safety of Irish personnel is of paramount concern to the Irish government. This is reflected in the use of heavy APC's on peace missions. There may be caveats in missions involving crowd control and the use of force e.g. Kosovo, where national policy did not permit Irish personnel to use gas or rubber bullets.

The small size of the Defence Forces and the economic circumstances of the Irish state are also factors. Ireland is not in a position to participate in self-funded operations and it has a limited number of personnel available for "overseas operations." Similar to other states, Ireland retains national command of Defence Forces personnel when on UN operations. However, Irish participation has always been based on the premise that full operational command in the field must reside with the Force Commander or Head of Mission, as appropriate. Participation in the NATO-led, albeit UN-mandated operations, placed Irish troops under the *de facto* command of NATO for the first time. There are significant legal and constitutional difficulties involved in command and/or control of Irish forces by non-defense force personnel, but successive governments to date have quietly ignored these. Despite this, Irish military and other personnel have adapted successfully to such missions, but there remains an ongoing need to keep up to date in training and to ensure equipment levels and standards complement this.

Part 8: Further Reading

Department of Defence, [White Paper on Defence](#) (Dublin, 2015).

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [The Global Island-Ireland's foreign policy for a changing world](#) (Dublin, 2015).

Department of Foreign Affairs, *Challenges and Opportunities Abroad, White Paper on Foreign Policy* (Dublin, 1996).

Department of Defence, [White Paper on Defence 2000](#) (Dublin, 2000).

Department of Defence and Defence Forces Annual Reports, at <http://www.military.ie/home/>

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS, *The Military Balance 2017* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2017).

² Data provided by the Defence Forces Information Officer, October 2014.

³ Armed Forces Spending is a country's annual total defense budget (in US dollars) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Using figures from IISS, *The Military Balance 2017*. In the case of Ireland, the Defense Budget figure includes about 1000 civilians on the payroll and pensions for retired personnel.

⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs, *Challenges and Opportunities Abroad: White Paper on Foreign Policy*, (Dublin: 1996), pp.194-95, and Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence* (Dublin: 2000), p.63.

⁵ *White Paper on Foreign Policy*, pp.199-200.

⁶ [White Paper on Defence](#) (Dublin, 2015), p.6.

⁷ In 1996, the strength was 12,750, *Defence Forces Review Implementation Plan*, 16.