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Irish Intelligence Staff Work From Kosovo To Kabul

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Irish Intelligence Abroad

Normally associated with routine troop deployments and logistic support to UN peace keeping and peace enforcement missions worldwide, the Irish Defence Forces have recently dramatically expanded their international intelligence presence abroad.

In the wake of 9/11, Ireland's Military Intelligence Directorate was expanded in order to assess emerging threats to the state – both external and internal – posed by global terrorist networks such as Al Qaeda. As an independent state agency, Ireland's military intelligence are focused on long term trends within the global security environment across a broad spectrum of threats, from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons proliferation to the activities, intentions and capabilities of extremist resistance groups and organised criminal gangs.

Ireland's transition to its new-found status as a formidable military intelligence 'player' on the international scene has been facilitated by decades of experience in intelligence operations gained during the troubles along with over forty years of UN service - predominantly to flashpoints in Africa and the Middle East.

Currently, Ireland has Defence Forces personnel engaged in an intelligence capacity in countries as diverse as Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire and Sudan in Africa along with officers placed in key appointments in countries throughout the Middle East including Lebanon, Israel and Syria.

Closer to home, Irish military personnel are engaged in intelligence duties in the European Union's EUFOR mission to Bosnia Herzegovina. Irish officers are also involved in intelligence duties in the NATO-led KFOR mission to Kosovo.

Senior Irish Army officers are also playing a key intelligence role at the headquarters of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul, Afghanistan. Four senior Irish officers are currently functioning as liaison officers between the NATO-led Multinational Brigade in Kabul and local Afghan police and army units. These Irish officers also liaise with the Afghan secret police and their British and US intelligence counterparts operating within Afghanistan. Other Irish army personnel are located within the operations and intelligence staffs of ISAF HQ itself.

The most senior Irish Army officer in Kabul - a Lieutenant Colonel - is responsible for what ISAF refers to as Afghanistan's 'Visitor's Bureau'. In this role, he controls all official movement in and out of Afghanistan by visiting heads of state, politicians, diplomats and media personnel – coordinating their security and travel arrangements.

At the level of the EU's newly formed Military Staff Headquarters in Brussels, a new 'EU Situation Centre' has been established with a 'Crisis Room' dedicated to providing ongoing and updated assessments of current security threats – real and present dangers – that confront the EU. The 'Crisis Room' reports directly to the EU's Military Committee and the EU's Political and Security Committee. The EU Situation Centre's chief of intelligence with responsibility for assessing threats from the Middle East – considered

within the security community to be the most crucial intelligence cell within the EU - is an Irish Lieutenant Colonel especially seconded from the Defence Forces for this purpose.

In parallel with these developments, in an unprecedented move, the Defence Forces at home have also recently sent Irish officers for specialist training with 'major intelligence agencies' in the United States, Britain and Australia. Ireland's Military Intelligence Directorate currently has first hand knowledge of an expanding and migrating international terror network - a 'jihad' which stretches from Africa and Asia through the Middle East to Europe. This so-called 'jihad' is aided and abetted by international criminal gangs and the proceeds derived from drugs smuggling and human trafficking.

Such threats are symptomatic of the new 'asymmetrical' warfare that confronts the EU and its global partners. In the past, the value of intelligence in global conflict was measured in terms of secrecy and exclusive knowledge. In the current 'new world order', the value of intelligence is often best exploited through the timely communication of classified data to strategic partners. In this respect, Ireland would appear to be punching well above its weight in the 'global war on terror'.

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