

# The Workers' Party of Ireland

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## Submission on the Defence (Amendment) Bill 2025, General Scheme

The Workers' Party notes the recent publication of the document Defence (Amendment) Bill 2025, General Scheme – Final Version by the government. This document sets out the government's plan to dismantle the long standing rules and protocols governing the deployment of members of the Irish Defence Forces on overseas missions and to replace them with rules and protocols acceptable to NATO and the EU militarist lobby.

Those who are presently leading the charge to abolish the Triple Lock attempt to portray it as a mere technicality which is not germane to the practise of our neutrality. Others, perversely, attempt to argue that the abolition of the Triple Lock increases our sovereignty, and thus enhances our neutrality. Yet their past utterances tell a very different story. In a Dáil debate in December Taoiseach Micheál Martin described the Triple Lock as being '*at the core of our neutrality*'. In the same debate Deputy Martin, who was Opposition leader at the time, acknowledged that although '*the United Nations is not working as it should*' ... '*we must not abandon it as an essential part of the international system*'. He and his government are now proposing to do exactly that but the arguments set out for doing so are flawed and disingenuous.

In particular, framing the deployment of Irish troops as something that is subject to UN Security Council approval is inaccurate and misleading. To be crystal clear: The Security Council approves peacekeeping missions in general. It does not approve the deployment of a specific states to those missions. Therefore, Irish troop deployment has never been subject to Security Council approval in the way that the government claims. Rather a mission as a whole, irrespective of which nations may eventually participate in it, is approved. The government is well aware of these facts but seek to distort or hide them.

The Workers' Party opposes the dismantling of the Triple Lock and believes that the regime which is proposed to replace it is just one more step in a long orchestrated campaign to completely neutralise the role of the United Nations in international peace keeping and to replace it with the US controlled NATO organisations or with the EU where twenty three of the twenty seven members are also members of the NATO military alliance.

In 2025 we celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the United Nations; the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ireland joining the UN, and the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ireland's first participation in a UN peace keeping mission in Congo (1960 – 1964). Since that time, and specifically in Cyprus and the Middle East, Ireland has had a continuous presence on UN peace keeping missions world wide.

It is generally accepted that Irish troops have behaved in an exemplary, professional, and even-handed manner on all their missions and have represented our country in an honourable fashion. Innumerable surveys have shown that the Irish public are proud of the role that Irish troops played in UN peace missions and want that participation to continue. Equally all

surveys on the subject show a large majority against Ireland's membership of NATO or any other external military alliance.

Within the framework of international organisations, the United Nations holds a unique position. Arising out of the carnage of WWII, and indeed a mere twenty seven years from the end of the equally devastating WWI, the UN was established with the specific purpose of maintaining international peace and security as is clearly set out in the UN Charter and as specifically defined in the Preamble and Article 1.

Since its very foundation acceptance into membership of the UN has been seen as the international symbol for the recognition of independent statehood. UN recognition was a rite of passage for all those countries across Asia and Africa who secured their independence from the European colonial powers in the 1950s, 1960s and indeed since then also. The UN presently has 193 states in membership which makes it by far the largest international representative body in existence, and bestows on it an international and legal status which no other organisation can attempt, or even pretend, to rival. In the context of the debate as to whether to discard participation of UN led missions in favour of EU or NATO led missions it is vital to note that all 193 member states of the UN have signed up to, and accept, the role of the UN in international affairs. This further adds to its unique legal status amongst international organisations.

It must also be acknowledged that for the first forty five years of its existence the UN was faced with the unique dilemma of two huge, nuclear-armed superpowers, both dedicated to completely opposing ideologies, locked in what was dubbed the Cold War. The fact that this global standoff never descended into an horrific, all-consuming World War III has many contributory factors, but it is widely acknowledged that the work of the UN, both publicly and behind the scenes, was a major factor.-

The EU, for example, is a geographically limited club of twenty seven member states, of which Ireland is one. It has a population of just under 450 million people, or less than 6% of the total world population. Putting the EU population in context it is, for example, less than one third of the population of either China or India. In looking at the reality of the foundation of the EU, then known as the EEC, it is noteworthy that five of the six founding members had been colonial powers. Luxemburg was the only exception. While the Treaty of Versailles had stripped Germany of its colonial possessions, four of the EEC's founding members were still colonial powers and all fought vicious colonial wars to maintain these colonies. France's war in Algeria and Belgium's war in Congo stand out for the bloodshed and depredations suffered by the indigenous populations in their fight for freedom.

Equally, NATO is a numerically and geographically limited club of thirty two member states. Twenty three of the EU's twenty seven member states are also members of NATO. The USA has always been the dominant and driving force within NATO, and that this situation has not changed was visibly, and for many member states, humiliatingly, demonstrated at the recent NATO summit in Brussels.

The treatment by President Trump of the other members of NATO, or indeed the treatment by President Biden in 2021 making a unilateral decision to withdraw from Afghanistan shows again the insight of Fianna Fáil leader Eamon de Valera, himself a witness to the destruction of two world wars, when he stated in a Dáil debate (5<sup>th</sup> July 1955): "*A small nation has to be extremely cautious when entering into an alliance which brings it, willy nilly, into these wars*

*... we would not be consulted in how a war should be started – the great powers would do that – and when it ended, no matter who won, .. we would not be consulted as to the terms on which it should end.”* How remarkably accurate his words have proven to be in this case.

The founding charter of NATO, as agreed in 1949, states that its aim is: for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security, and its actions are very closely circumscribed by Article 5 to self defence. However, while NATO has never been called into action for collective self defence, it has acted completely outside its own charter in pursuit of the political and military objectives of the USA and the leading European military powers. The most blatant example of these illegal actions was the attack on Yugoslavia in 1999 in pursuit of the US’s aim of creating a client state in Kosovo. As a result of this intervention the US now operates a large military base at camp Bondsteel in Kosovo, which also doubles as the HQ for the NATO-led KFOR.

In making the political decision as to how Irish troops may in the future be deployed overseas the government is faced with a clear political decision. On the one hand we can choose to remain linked to the United Nations, an organisation of 193 states and with acceptance across all those 193 countries as to its legitimate ability to act as an international agency. On the other hand, we have the largely overlapping organisations of NATO and the EU, representing a mere fraction of the total number of states in existence, and whose only legitimacy to act in international peacekeeping is self-ascribed and in, reality, comes from the military and financial might of the USA and of the larger powers within the EU. The ability of NATO or the EU to interfere in international affairs does not, therefore derive from any legitimate base in international law, international treaties, or indeed from any international acceptance. It is merely a 21<sup>st</sup> century manifestation of the Pax Romano, the Pax Britannica or more latterly the Pax Americana. It is a peace imposed by the dominant imperial power and enforced by the military might of that empire.

It is this stark choice which the Irish government is desperately trying to hide.

The Defence (Amendment) Bill 2025 is the legal mechanism through which this Taoiseach and government intend to dismantle the Triple Lock.

Before we deal with the specifics of this draft piece of legislation there is one important constitutional issue we wish to raise, and we are aware that other organisations and individuals have raised this issue in greater detail. The Triple Lock in its present formulation derives specifically from the desperation of the Bertie Ahern-led Fianna Fáil government to reverse the defeat of the Nice Treaty by the Irish people in 2001, its solemn declaration on neutrality made as part of the 2002 Nice 2 referendum campaign, and the signing of the Seville Declaration arising therefrom.

Again, in 2008 when the Irish electorate rejected the Lisbon Treaty it again did so because of concerns related to Irish neutrality and another Fianna Fáil government under Brian Cowen’s leadership reiterated the solemn commitment given to the Irish people in the context of Nice. The Triple Lock therefore is not an encroachment on Irish sovereignty, it is an expression of it, particularly considering that under Article 6 of Bunreacht na hÉireann sovereignty is vested in the people and referenda are a fundamental part of the democratic process that underpins this sovereignty.

From the above, it is starkly evident that requiring a UN mandate before Irish troops are deployed overseas is not an imposition on Ireland from the Security Council. Rather it is a legal provision created by the Irish state and enshrined in Irish law since 1960 (and reinforced twice since then by Solemn Declaration) when the government of the day committed to sending Irish troops overseas on UN mandated missions only and thereby ensuring that Irish troop deployment would only take place in line with international law. This ensured that Ireland would not become embroiled in foreign wars and thus far, by adhering to these principles, Ireland, in contrast to its European neighbours, has not engaged in wars and conflict overseas.

In terms of the draft legislation itself, and separate from the abolition of the Triple Lock which is our main concern, there are a number of other very worrying items included in the Bill.

Head 6(1) in conjunction with Head 11 sets out the ability of the government to deploy Irish Defence Forces to membership of an International Force, and then defines who these international bodies may be.

Head 11 (a), (b) and (c) are specific in that they set out the UN, the OSCE and the EU as approved organisation under which forces may be deployed. However Head 11(d) is completely vague, merely stating ‘any other regional arrangement or body that operates consistent with the UN charter and international law’. This phraseology is meaningless and is deliberately designed to allow Irish Troops to be deployed to NATO missions or to NATO controlled missions.

6(2) proposes to legalise the situation where the government can essentially present the Dáil with a *Fait Accompli*. This section allows the government to dispatch a contingent of our Defence Forces to an overseas mission without Dáil approval provided they are not deployed before the resolution is passed. This proposal further usurps the power of the Dáil as the Cabinet can dispatch troops to some overseas mission and then present the Dáil with the ultimatum: “the wheels are already in motion and we would look silly to stop now.” This is a particularly underhand and undemocratic proposal.

6(6.b) Contains the anodyne sounding, but deliberately ambiguous wording “*the particular International Force will contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security in conformity with the principles of justice and international law.*”

But who decides this? The UN? NATO? The EU?

Israel says its genocide in Gaza is peacekeeping and is supported in this blatant lie by NATO and the EU Commission and has found a permanent cheerleader in EU Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen.

The recent attacks on Iran (which does not have nuclear weapons) by Israel (which lies about its significant nuclear arsenal) and US (which openly boasts about its vast nuclear capacity) were defended as self-defence by Israel and as defending vital international interests by the USA. Both of these completely illegal actions were openly defended by NATO and the EU Commission.

We are walking into a situation where one side of the conflict, whether that conflict is hot or cold, gets to define who is the aggressor and who is the aggrieved, while the vast bulk of the world's population organised through the UN is sidelined by the most powerful economic and military powers.

The Workers' Party is particularly worried by the provision in the act that Irish forces might be deployed in EU-led military missions. In 2003, when the Nice Treaty entered into force, the EU deployed its first-ever foreign mission to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the 20 years since then it has undertaken more than 40 operations across Europe, Africa and Asia. The stated objectives of these missions include preventing conflict, strengthening international peace and security, supporting the rule of law, and crisis management, among other aims. In reality most of these missions have been into the former colonial territorial possessions of some of the leading EU powers and are aimed at preserving the neo-colonial benefits of the former colonial powers.

A case in point is the EU's Training Mission in the former French colony of Mali. Mali has rich deposits of gold, tungsten, uranium and iron and France has long decided that control of these resources is a vital national interest. In 2013 the EU established a Training Mission in Mali following the 2012 coup. Its mandate was to train the Malian Armed Forces. In reality its function was to defend France's control of Mali's natural resources. Fourteen Irish defence personnel were deployed to Mali. This was reduced to eight in 2023 before the mission was ended in 2024 after the government there made clear its wish to be rid of what it saw as an EU advance occupation force. Even within its declared terms of reference the mission was an abject failure. Over 20,000 soldiers were trained by the EUTM. In 2020, the Malian national security forces, which received training and finance from the EU, were responsible for the killing of hundreds of civilians for which nobody has ever been called to account.

The EU's drive to its consolidation as a regional power that deploys its own military missions, as well as its subservience to US interests and its alignment with NATO, poses a direct challenge to multilateralism and diplomacy. It weakens, undermines and jeopardises the legitimacy and actions of the UN.

It must also be noted that while EU militarisation has significantly ramped up in the last few years, and particularly over the last few months, the path to this militarisation has been clearly mapped out for the last twenty five years and cannot be waved away as 'a necessary response to Russian aggression'. This path to militarisation had started even when President Boris Yeltsin and his coterie of oligarchs were willing dupes of the western powers and their huge transnational corporations. Both the Nice Treaty in 2001, and the Lisbon Treaty in 2008 very clearly mapped out the path to EU militarisation and both were initially rejected by the Irish people. As noted earlier the government of the day responded to those defeats by the Triple Lock declaration by then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in 2002 and its reaffirmation by his successor as Taoiseach, Brian Cowen.

Despite the solemn declarations of Taoisigh Ahern and Cowen the Irish government has, over the last decade, signed up to PESCO, the European Peace Facility (which the EU operates as an off-balance sheet structure), and the European Defence Fund.

All of this is a cost to the Irish people and a cost that will increase substantially over the next number of years. Even if the Republic of Ireland only aimed for the previous NATO objective of

Defence spending being set at 2% of GDP, rather than the present criminal level of 5%, this would push military spending in the direction of €8.5 Bn annually. These extra costs on armaments are being incurred when for example, we cannot keep the Irish fleet, small as it is, on the water because of lack of staff and delayed ship maintenance. Ireland will be paying into the European Defence Fund to subsidise the arms and related military industries in other countries. This also at a time when the Irish Defence Forces are losing specialist workers to private sector poaching. Also, it is worth noting that this increased spending would take place without in any way advancing the pay and conditions of the Defence Forces personnel, and when the recent pandemic, as well as current statistics, starkly demonstrate the dire and structural underfunding of all our public services.

Head 9 The statement in this section that: “*Nothing in this Act shall be construed as thereby authorising the State to become a member of an international organisation of which it is not already a member*” is inserted purely to allow the government to declare: “Look at this. This proves that abolishing the Triple Lock is not the back door into NATO.”

Of course, that provision does nothing of the sort. Yes, it precludes full membership of NATO, except through separate legislation and probably a referendum. But it does not prevent, and indeed specifically facilitates, total collusion with NATO, participation in NATO led missions, and the placing of Irish Defence Force personnel under NATO command. This replicates in every detail the nightmare scenario against which Eamon de Valera railed in the Dáil exactly seventy years ago.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last number of years, as successive FF/FG-led governments attempted to lay the groundwork for this legislation they have repeatedly referred to the necessity to ensure cyber security as a rationale for increased military spending and integration into an EU-led military structure.

As government ministers and spin-doctors well know the issue of cyber security is completely within the jurisdiction of the Garda Síochána nationally and Europol on an EU basis. Thus, the Workers’ Party believes that the Security Forces, either nationally or internationally, do not provide the solution to the threats to our cyber security. As we have seen with the recent Coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021 you cannot fight a virus with tanks, helicopter gunships, or nuclear weapons. Likewise, a computer virus cannot be contained by military force, and any efforts to pretend otherwise is merely self-serving propaganda.

From an Irish point of view, the existence of the massive UK-controlled monitoring station at GCHQ in Cheltenham, allied to the even more massive US-controlled facility in Menwith Hill provide the real threat to our cyber security and should cause us all to stop and think. However, we have not heard, and do not expect to hear, the government raising this issue.