

Commission on the Defence Forces
Public Consultation Response Template

Submission by:

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Introduction

The Workers' Party welcomes this public consultation process which is being conducted as part of a review of the Irish Defence Forces being undertaken by the Commission on the Defence Forces.

It is important in a democratic state that the role and the organisation of the Defence Forces be subject to periodic review and that the public and civic society groups have the opportunity to partake in that review.

The Workers' Party understands that the terms of reference of the present Commission, and therefore the terms of the public consultation process, have been set by government and thus are outside your control. We note, however, that the terms of reference of the present consultation are much narrower than the terms of reference allowed for consultation on the 2015 White Paper on Defence.

In fact, the terms of reference for the public submission template, limited as they are to four very specific areas, could easily be seen as presupposing a common perspective from all participants in the consultation process and anticipating a specific outcome to the process. Accepting that you, the Commission, are operating within the rules set out for you we wish to place on record that we do not feel this is the appropriate process for a public consultation.

We believe that there are number of really important areas that should have been part of the consultation process.

The Irish government recognises that the crisis of global warming is an existentialist crisis for the entire human race. The Irish state is a signatory to the Paris agreement and in the most recent programme for government has signed off on a Green Agenda. How do the Irish Defence Forces, as well as the other EU and US defence forces to whom we are linked through the PfP and EU battle Groups, contribute to the problem of, or solution to, global warming and environmental degradation?

Sadly, all the evidence shows that, internationally, armed forces are some of the major consumers of fossil fuels and equally most major contributors to CO₂ emissions in the world.

Numerous studies have shown that the US Department of Defence [DOD] is by far the largest single corporate consumer of fossil fuels. A US Congressional report in 2012 stated that the Department of Defence consumed about 117 million barrels of oil in 2011, only a little less than all the petrol and diesel use of all cars in Britain the same year. In 2014, another study found that the DOD consumed 87.4 million barrels with nearly half used by the Air Force, and a third burned by the Navy. It is not clear if the fuel consumed by the many subcontractors to the US is included in these figures.

To place DOD fuel use in context the U.S. military accounts for 25% of the total U.S. consumption of oil, which is itself 25% of the total world consumption. The US' Sixth Fleet, is one of the most polluting entities in the Mediterranean Sea. The US Air Force (USAF) is the single largest consumer of jet fuel in the world. Looking at these figures from another perspective US military personnel on active service make up around 0.0002% of the world's population but are part of a military system which generates around 5% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Clearly the Irish Defence Forces are miniscule in comparison to the vast US military machine. However, at this time of global crisis it is appropriate to ask if, in planning for the future, the Irish Defence Forces are part of the solution or part of the problem.

A second, and equally fundamental question not included within the terms of reference of the Commission, is the role of National Armed Forces, and international alliances of armed forces, in a unipolar world. Since the collapse of the USSR and the disbandment of the Warsaw Pact alliance thirty years ago we have been living in a unipolar world. The USA is the sole world military power, standing at the centre of NATO, with over 800 foreign military bases, having supersonic military aircraft circling the globe on a 24-hour basis, and possessing sufficient nuclear capacity to completely destroy the world as we know it several times over.

When this unipolar world emerged, logic would dictate that western military spending would massively decrease and that NATO, ostensibly created to counteract the threat from the now-non-existent USSR, would be disbanded. But nothing of the sort happened. NATO has massively expanded and there is a sustained political and propaganda campaign from, amongst others, certain senior military officers, various politicians, and certain well-funded NGOs demanding that Ireland join NATO. While Ireland has not formally joined NATO we are part of NATO-lite in the form of PfP, as well as signing up to the military conditions in the Lisbon Treaty and participating in EU Battle Groups. We have also allowed the US military to use Shannon Airport as a free of charge transit camp for over 2,000,000 troops over the last 20 years. We do not believe that Ireland should be part of any international military alliance and wish to state that it is regrettable that this issue is not part of the formal consultation process.

The Workers' Party does not believe that Ireland should exclude itself from the international situation or pretend that conflicts do not exist. We believe that Ireland should fully participate, as we have now done for almost 60 years, in the United Nations' Chapter VI peace keeping missions. We have a long and honourable tradition of peace keeping under the UN umbrella and we should strive to maintain that tradition. We do not support Irish Defence Force participation in UN Chapter VII missions. Because the UN has never been allowed to develop the capacity to manage Chapter VII missions it results in these missions being subcontracted to one of the five permanent UN SC members or else to a regional alliance like NATO. We have seen with UN SC resolution 678 (Nov 1990) the disastrous outcomes of this process. As was characterised by UN SC member Yemen such a resolution allowed "*Persons unknown to use means unspecified to achieve goals unstated*" (Gow 1993, 8). WE believe that participation in Chapter VI missions greatly enhanced Ireland's standing and prestige internationally. On it on this progressive path that our Defence Forces should continue.

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- 1. Capabilities** – In this regard, you may wish to consider future integrated capability development and the planning and delivery requirements to support a joint force approach in terms of new equipment, professional military education and training, maintenance and development of infrastructure, developments in military doctrine, and transformative concepts, including specialist capabilities, that prepare and support the Defence Forces for future operations.

The capabilities which we would propose for the Irish Defence Forces, whether in the area of equipment, training, ongoing professional development, or specialist capabilities are predicated on the role or roles which we believe the Irish Defence Forces should fulfil.

Our Defence Forces as presently constituted consists of the Army, Naval Service, Air Corps, Reserve, and Civil Defence.

Ireland is a small, independent and traditionally neutral country. The Workers' Party believes that it is appropriate that the Irish Defence Forces, in the first instance, have the responsibility of protecting the state from external attack.

While constant vigilance is to be commended it must be recognised at this time that the threat of external attack on our borders is virtually nil. We are surrounded on all sides by countries which the Irish state regards as allies, namely: the UK, the EU, and the USA. The USSR, the traditional bogeyman for two generations, ceased to exist 30 years ago. We recognise that leading figures in the US, the UK and the EU have been waging a concerted campaign to demonise Russia and elevate it as a new existential threat to our national security. This of course is nonsense. All independent experts agree that Russia has absolutely no plans, or indeed any interest, in a military confrontation with the EU and NATO. All experts equally agree that while Russia has a limited capacity to ensure its own security and become a minor regional power it has neither the capacity nor the opportunity to successfully attack the EU. Even a cursory look at NATO's own website will show that Russia is surrounded on all its borders by US / NATO military bases with both the most advanced weaponry and also the most advanced spying and surveillance capacity.

Our forces also have a specific responsibility in protecting our maritime borders, preventing illegal fishing by outside fleets in our waters. Illegal fishing by foreign boats has caused, and continues to cause, severe degradation of our marine resources and has caused massive hardship to our fishing crews and workers onshore in the fish-processing industry. In these tasks the front-line responsibility falls on the Naval Service but obviously there is a need for close liaison and cooperation between the Naval Services and Air Corps in this area. Equally our Naval and Air services must be active in preventing our seas and ports being used for the illegal drugs trade or the despicable trade of people smuggling.

The Naval and Air Services must have the resources in terms of ships, aircraft, equipment, personnel and training to carry out these tasks.

The Irish Defence Forces have traditionally provided assistance to the Civil Authority in cases of major accidents, natural disasters, and related situations. This assistance has varied from search and rescue, distribution of food and fuel, or maintenance and repair of endangered or damaged infrastructure. This is an important and valuable service and again the necessary equipment and training should be made available to facilitate this role.

Over the last few years airborne search and rescue services at sea have been privatised, or at least partially privatised. The Workers' Party believes that this process of privatisation is a major mistake. Search and rescue should not be a profit orientated service. Therefore, we believe that the Irish Air Corps should have the responsibility, and the resources, for all airborne search and rescue missions off the Irish coast.



Coimisiún um Óglaigh na hÉireann
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2. Structures – In this regard, you may wish to consider the most effective high-level Command and Control (C2) structures within the Defence Forces to ensure an agile and balanced approach that can function across all domains at home and overseas.

Additionally, you may wish to address appropriate future force structures for the Army (including its brigade structure), the Air Corps, and the Naval Service, individually as component services and collectively as part of an integrated joint force approach.

Furthermore, you may wish to address the changing nature of reservists, which presents an opportunity for the Reserve Defence Force to further integrate and support the Permanent Defence Force through the provision of enhanced collective and specialist capability across all domains.

We refer to the first sentence in this section: you may wish to consider the most effective high-level Command and Control (C2) structures within the Defence Forces to ensure an agile and balanced approach that can function across all domains at home and overseas.

We propose to take this section in two parts.

With regards to the most suitable structure for the Irish Defence Forces to operate to maximum efficiency at 'home' we have already indicated that the structure already existing of the Army, Naval Service, Air Corps, Reserve, and Civil Defence should continue. As regards the structure of the Army we would elaborate that we believe the army should be a Light Infantry based Army. The combined Irish Defence Forces, while having their own internal structures, should have a single Chief of Staff to ensure maximum cooperation and efficiency.

As regards the second part of that option, to: "the most effective high-level Command and Control (C2) structures within the Defence Forces **overseas**" we wish to state that we see this as a leading question which presupposes Irish involvement in overseas and multinational military formations.

The Workers' Party wishes to reiterate that we believe that our international military involvement should be solely through the United Nations which is the only world-wide organisation with almost 200 member states established to maintain international peace and security. We strongly believe that Ireland should not be part of PESCO, PFP, EU Battlegroups or NATO. These views are shared by the great majority of the Irish people and thus we do not accept that our military structures should be constructed to fit a NATO or NATO-lite template.

We refer also to the question as to: the most effective high-level Command and Control (C2) structures within the Defence Forces to ensure an agile and balanced approach that can function across all domains at home and overseas. We welcome the fact that all elements of the Irish Defence Forces would be ready to work together, equipped to work together, and trained to work together. In a small country, with a limited Defence Force then it is imperative that all sections work together at all times. However, we do not feel it is appropriate for us, at this time, to be prescriptive as to what the most appropriate structure would be.

3. Staffing – In this regard you may wish to consider the HR policies that support the requirement for an agile and adaptive modern military force. You may wish to consider issues such as recruitment and retention, organisational culture and values, gender and diversity, career progression, and industrial relations machinery.

The Workers' Party believes that it is correct that staffing levels, staff structure, staff training and the provision of decent wages and conditions for all Defence Force members should be reviewed on a regular and ongoing basis.

However, we believe that the appropriate staffing levels and staff structures for our Defence Forces, to undertake the roles which we believe are appropriate for a neutral country, is a matter for the Oireachtas to decide and the relevant authorities to implement. We strongly emphasise that in arriving at its decision the Oireachtas must take account of the advice of the relevant Ministers and Departments (Defence, Marine / Fisheries, Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform), the relevant staff representative bodies, and also on the advice, if necessary, of the state's industrial relations organisations. In this context the Workers' Party supports the claims of PDFORA for recognition as a Trade Union and for its demands to be given negotiating rights on behalf of its members.



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4. Any other comments you may wish to make in relation to the Defence Forces having regard to the Commission's Terms of Reference

Over the last number of years we have heard an increasing number of militarists and political lobbyists, both in Ireland and overseas, arguing that the threat to cyber security necessitates vastly increased military spending and the modernising and restocking of military arsenals to their fullest capacity.

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 present Coronavirus pandemic 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.

Again, we have heard from establishment sources of the threat to our cyber security by 'non-state actors'. Undoubtedly there are criminal gangs involved in cyber-crime. Such crime ranges across a very broad spectrum and can have single, multiple, organisational or state victims. However, in reality the biggest perpetrators of cybercrime are actually state actors. In particular the security services of the US intercepts and monitors all electronic and cyber communications across the globe and even against friendly states and friendly heads of state as for example was the US monitoring on Chancellor Merkel embarrassingly revealed by Wikileaks some years ago.

From an Irish point of view, the existence of the massive monitoring station at GCHQ in Cheltenham, allied to the even more massive facility in Menwith Hill should cause us all to stop and think. Cyber security is a matter for policing services and for the service providers but is not an excuse to increase military spending or expand the role of the military into civic society.

Over the past number of years the Irish government has 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 in order to bring the Republic of Ireland into line with the NATO objective of Defence spending being set at 2% of GDP. These extra costs 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 is taking place without in any way advancing the pay and conditions of the Defence Forces personnel when the current pandemic has starkly demonstrated the dire and structural underfunding of our public health, education and social housing services.