

# Irish National Security in a Changing World

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# Executive Summary

Ireland is worth protecting. So is the European Union.

The most useful contribution Ireland can make to the defence effort in Europe is to be capable of safeguarding its own jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, it would cease being a strategic blind spot and security burden for our neighbours. This is not only consistent with Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality, but it is also a crucial part of it.

Since independence, Ireland has gone from being a small, agrarian society, almost entirely dependent on the UK, to an export-driven, outward looking nation that is home to some of the largest tech and pharma companies in the world. The transformation has been nothing short of miraculous, and such a valuable economy needs to be protected.

Now an affluent country at the crossroads of global trade and commerce, Ireland has become an island of strategic importance, and therefore, a high value target. Should a hostile nation-state wish to strike at the European Union without triggering NATO retaliation, then Ireland would be an obvious location to consider. With neither NATO Article 5 protection,<sup>2</sup> nor its own credible sovereign deterrent, it is particularly exposed and vulnerable. This is the case for conventional attacks, but also for hybrid or cyberattacks. The unfortunate reality is that Ireland's security governance, infrastructure, and military capabilities are not fit for purpose in the face of current and emerging threats.<sup>3</sup>

As global geopolitics shift rapidly, Ireland's security landscape is undergoing a period of profound change. At a European Council meeting in March 2025,<sup>4</sup> Taoiseach Micheál Martin stated that "Europe must do more to secure its own security and defence," acknowledging that "Ireland is not immune to these threats."<sup>5</sup> A joint Deloitte/IIEA report from December 2025 suggests "Ireland's security environment is at its most complex, most challenging, and most dangerous point in recent history."<sup>6</sup> Such warnings ought to be listened to.

Meanwhile, public opinion on defence matters continues to evolve. During Ireland's recent presidential election, national security featured prominently in debates.<sup>7</sup> Defence, for so long a taboo subject in Ireland, is slowly becoming a more acceptable topic of conversation and just another area of public policy. This is a welcome development.

From education to justice, the Irish state engages with partners across multiple sectors. Defence engagement with international security partners is no different. As a neutral state Ireland is not militarily aligned, but this does not mean it does not interact and learn from other militaries. Indeed, such engagement has been ongoing for more than a century and has been instrumental in modernising Ireland's Defence Forces. Accordingly, any reduction in Ireland's international defence engagement would make us a more isolated, detached and reclusive country. It would serve to undermine our traditional policy of neutrality and would also render us even more defenceless than we currently are.

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1 Ireland is responsible for the policing of 132,000 nautical square miles, or 16% of EU waters, available at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2021-07-14/189/>.

2 Article 5 is the mutual defence clause of the North Atlantic Treaty, the founding treaty of NATO, signed in Washington D.C. on the 4th April 1949, available at <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1949/04/04/the-north-atlantic-treaty>

3 <https://www.ft.com/content/4748d385-877b-40f3-a1ca-0b8ed5177658>

4 The Atlantic Council is an American international affairs think tank founded in 1961 and based in Washington DC.

5 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/press-releases/taoiseach-miche%C3%A1l-martin-attending-special-european-council/>

6 *Secure Together, Enhancing Ireland's Security and Resilience in a Time of Heightened Geopolitical Risk*, IIEA, Dec 2025, pg. 5.

7 Presidential Debate 30 Sept 2025, The Tonight Show, Virgin Media

In response to the altered security environment, eleven key recommendations are proposed:

1. Complete the National Security Strategy as a Matter of Urgency;
2. Create a Standalone Minister for Defence;
3. Stay neutral / military non-aligned and continue to co-operate with our international security partners;
4. Invest in our own Defence Forces;
5. Re-establish Ireland's own air policing service;
6. Remove Ireland's 'Triple Lock' mechanism;
7. Support the manufacture of ethical military equipment by Irish SMEs;
8. Expand the Ireland-UK Defence Memorandum of Understanding;
9. Greater Irish involvement in CSDP and PESCO;
10. Join European Air Transport Command (EATC) in Eindhoven;
11. Convene a Citizens' Assembly to review Ireland's obligations under Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union.

# 1. Introduction

The geopolitical and international security environment has continued to deteriorate in the last three years. The return of the Trump Administration, the widening of the conflict in Ukraine and a major regional war across the Middle East have further destabilised an already volatile world. This has significantly altered the threat landscape across the European Union.<sup>8</sup>

In Ireland, the risk posed by organised crime, drug cartels, international terrorism, climate change and hostile state actors has risen significantly.<sup>9</sup> Recent sovereign airspace incursions and interference with critical undersea infrastructure across the European Union have further highlighted Ireland's vulnerability in this regard.<sup>10</sup> As an export-led economy with no direct road or rail links to the European Union, the security of our air space and maritime area is of profound importance.

Ireland hosts the European headquarters of some of the most innovative technology, data and pharmaceutical companies in the world. Just 10 of these multi-national corporations provided 57% of the €28 billion in Corporation Tax paid to the Irish Exchequer in 2024.<sup>11</sup> These companies rightly insist on a safe and secure environment for their people, premises and intellectual property. It is a pre-condition for Ireland's economic well-being, as well as its energy security and national resilience.

Defence is also fundamental to our international reputation. Defence competence is as much about solidarity as it is about security and as much about credibility as it is about capability. Ireland was confronted with its own security crisis during the Brexit process. At that time, it was feared that the potential return of infrastructure to the Irish border would lead to violence.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Ireland benefited greatly from the unity and support from EU Member States during the Brexit negotiations. This support should now be reciprocated while our eastern neighbours experience a security crisis of their own.

This iteration is an update on a previous paper from three years ago.<sup>13</sup> It reviews more recent geopolitical developments and explores Ireland's current national security posture ahead of assuming the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 01 July 2026.

Five main topics are considered in detail: defence policy changes in other EU Member States, Irish defence developments in the last three years, Irish national defence, Irish defence engagement with global security partners, and Irish defence engagement with the EU.

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8 National Risk Assessment, Overview of Strategic Risks, Government of Ireland, Sept 2024, pg. 9.

9 National Risk Assessment, Overview of Strategic Risks, Government of Ireland, Sept 2024, pg. 11-12.

10 Securing Ireland's Gas Supplies, Dept of Environment, Climate and Communications, pg. 24.

11 Corporation Tax- 2024 Payments and 2023 Returns, Revenue Commissioners Ireland

12 <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/varadkar-warns-eu-a-hard-border-risks-return-to-violence-of-the-past-in-ireland/37436007.html>

13 'Irish Neutrality in a Changing World', Barry Andrews MEP, April 2022.

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8. Expand the Ireland-UK Defence Memorandum of Understanding;
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11. Convene a Citizens' Assembly to review Ireland's obligations under Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union.

## 2. Defence Policy Changes in other EU Member States

*"The only way to avoid danger is to prepare for it"* President Emmanuel Macron, Nov 2025.<sup>14</sup>

In response to the altered geopolitical environment, EU Member States are significantly re-evaluating their own defence policies and practices. This adjustment is being done reluctantly but urgently, because of the Russian advances in Ukraine and the threatened withdrawal of the United States from Europe.

The focus is on rebuilding capacities that have been wound down in recent decades, as the United States is no longer prepared to underwrite European security.<sup>15</sup> As nothing provokes Vladimir Putin more than weakness, the aim is to preserve peace in Europe by re-establishing credible deterrence. The emphasis across Member States is on preparedness, resilience and readiness. Many longstanding historic policies, that have been in place for decades, are being radically overhauled (Table 1). In addition to defence policy changes, Member States have also significantly increased investment in their armed forces. Defence budget increases across the EU are detailed in Figure 1.

Table 1 Defence policy changes in select EU Member States

Country	Significant Defence Policy Changes
Belgium	Re-introduced a form of voluntary military service for all 18-year-olds in 2025. Announced plans to bring defence spending up to 2% of GDP in 2025. <sup>16</sup>
Croatia	Re-introduced mandatory conscription for all 18-year-olds in 2025. Conscientious objectors allowed to perform civilian roles like disaster response. <sup>17</sup>
Denmark	Joined EU Common Security and Defence Policy in July 2022 ending their EU-Defence opt-out. <sup>18</sup> Extended compulsory military conscription to women in 2025. Pledged to increase defence spending to 3% of GDP by 2027. <sup>19</sup>
Estonia	Pledged to increase defence spending to 4% of GDP by 2026. <sup>20</sup>
Finland	Ended policy of neutrality and joined NATO in April 2023. Plans to raise defence spending to 5% of GDP by 2032. <sup>21</sup>
France	Re-introduction of limited, voluntary military service from Summer 2026 <sup>22</sup> having discontinued compulsory conscription in 1997. Has pledged to double military budget by 2027 (in comparison to 2017 levels). <sup>23</sup>
Germany	Re-established limited voluntary national service, having ended compulsory conscription in 2011. From 2026 all 18-year-old German males must complete a digital questionnaire and attend for medical examination. <sup>24</sup>
Netherlands	Re-introduced a form of voluntary military service for all 18-year-olds in 2023. Agreed to increase spending to 3.5% of GDP with another 1.5% allocated to infrastructure that supports military readiness. <sup>25</sup>
Poland	Established a voluntary programme of military training for civilians with emphasis on basic survival, medical skills and cyber awareness. Participants can sign up from one to 30 days of training. <sup>26</sup>
Sweden	Ended policy of neutrality and joined NATO in March 2024. Has agreed to raise defence spending to 3.1% of GDP by 2028. <sup>27</sup>

14 [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2025/11/28/how-the-french-government-is-preparing-the-public-for-the-possibility-of-war\\_6747924\\_5.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2025/11/28/how-the-french-government-is-preparing-the-public-for-the-possibility-of-war_6747924_5.html)

15 United States National Security Strategy, Dec 2025, pg. 27.

16 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belgium-aims-hike-defence-spending-2-gdp-this-year-de-tijd-reports-2025-03-04/>

17 <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2025/11/28/war-is-a-present-reality-military-service-returns-to-europe-as-russia-threat-looms/>

18 <https://www.fmn.dk/en/topics/international-cooperation/eu/>

19 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/19/denmark-to-spend-billions-on-defence-citing-fears-over-russian-rearmament>

20 <https://news.err.ee/1609610003/minister-estonia-s-defense-spending-will-be-over-4-of-gdp-in-2026>

21 <https://militaryni.com/en/news/finland-plans-to-raise-defense-spending-to-5-of-gdp-by-2032/>

22 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0edw7g7z79o>

23 <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2025/07/14/frances-macron-announces-plan-to-accelerate-military-spending/>

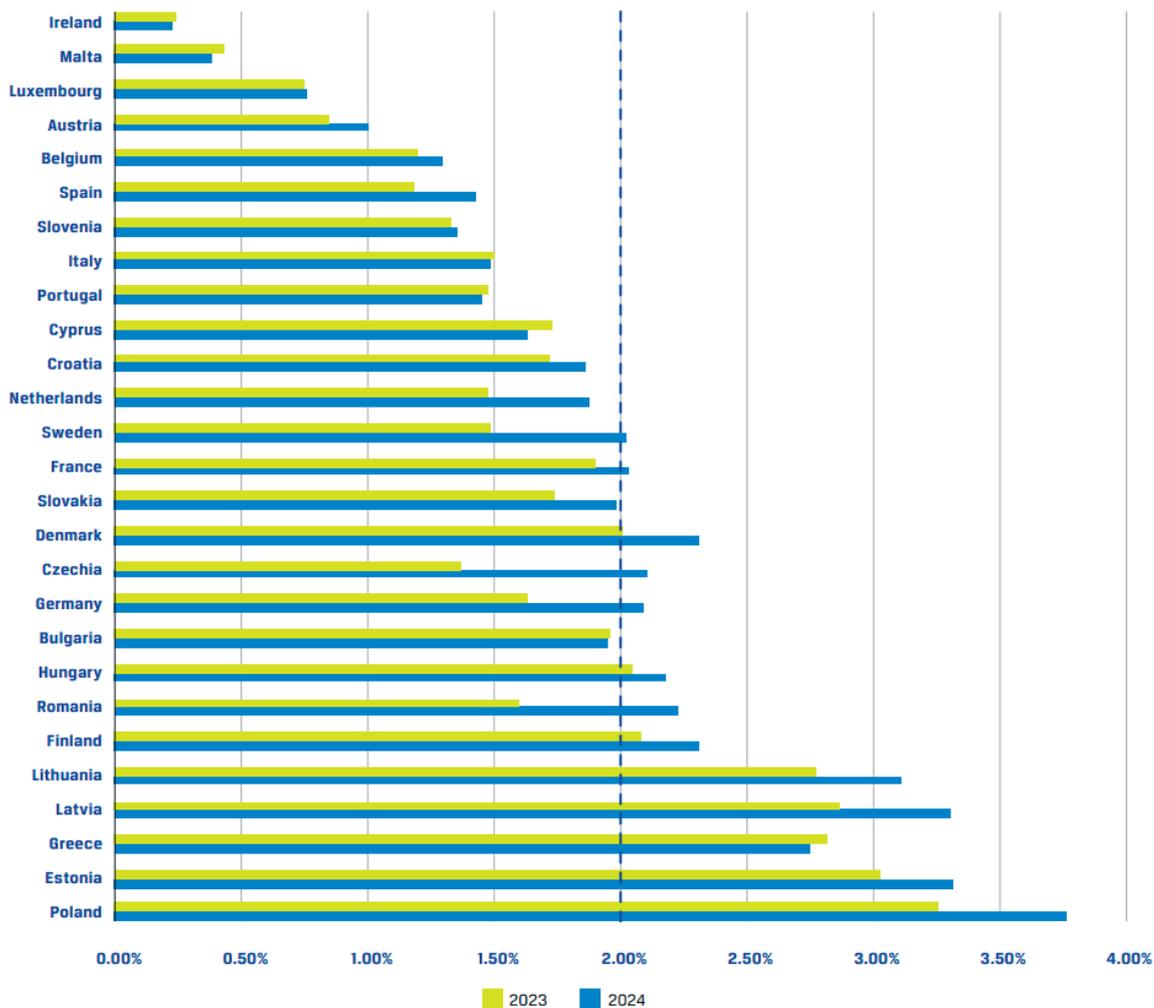
24 <https://www.deutschland.de/en/news/bundestag-approves-law-for-new-military-service>

25 <https://www.politico.eu/article/dutch-caretaker-sets-to-raise-defense-spending-to-3-5-percent-of-gdp/>

26 <https://www.rte.ie/news/analysis-and-comment/2025/12/14/1548788-europe-conscription-incentivised-military-service/>

27 <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/09/15/sweden-boosts-defense-spending-to-2-8-of-gdp-nearing-nato-target/>

Figure 1 Total Defence Expenditure as % of GDP by Member State, 2023-2024



Source: Defence Data 2024-2025, European Defence Agency, pg. 4.

Due to changing circumstances, Ireland has also had to re-evaluate its approach to defence. However, in contrast to what other Member States have been able to achieve in the last three years, Ireland's response has been more muted and comparatively weaker. This will now be outlined in detail in the following chapter.

### 3. Irish Defence Developments in the last 3 years

Considering the altered geopolitical global environment, Ireland, like other Member States, has had to review its own defence policy to ensure it is fit for purpose. Greater engagement with EU institutions and Member States on defence matters is now the norm. Since our first report in 2022,<sup>28</sup> there have been several incremental developments.

In 2023, senior government ministers began attending the annual Munich Security Conference.<sup>29</sup> In the same year, Ireland also joined the European Hybrid Warfare Centre of Excellence in Helsinki,<sup>30</sup> agreed an Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP) with NATO,<sup>31</sup> and joined the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE). The CISE facilitates the communication of maritime intelligence among EU and EEA countries.<sup>32</sup> As an island nation, with significant maritime responsibilities, this is particularly important for Ireland.

This trajectory continued in 2024. Ireland signed a Defence Memorandum of Understanding with Romania,<sup>33</sup> and Defence Forces participation in PESCO was increased to six projects.<sup>34</sup>

Further developments followed in 2025. A new Oireachtas Committee on Defence and National Security was established, General Seán Clancy was elected Chair of the EU Military Committee and,<sup>35</sup> Ireland's first Maritime Security Strategy is due to be published.

Alongside this, the Government has initiated reforms to Ireland's defence governance framework. The Defence (Amendment) Bill 2025, which proposes to amend the 'Triple Lock', has begun its passage through the Oireachtas. Currently, for Ireland to deploy more than 12 military personnel as part of an international peacekeeping force, there is a legal requirement for three self-imposed conditions to be met. The Irish Government must decide, the Dáil must approve and there must be a mandate stemming from the United Nations. Ireland is the only country in the world with such an approval mechanism. Due to ongoing geopolitical tensions and great power rivalries, agreeing peacekeeping mandates for new or existing missions at the United Nations Security Council has become more problematic. While the United National General Assembly technically has the power to approve peacekeeping missions, it has only invoked a Resolution to recommend a peacekeeping mission once, and that was 70 years ago when it established the first UN Emergency Force in the Middle East in 1956. The Assembly then was in the unique position of having the consent of all the parties involved and that of four of the permanent members of the UNSC.

Other countries regard defence as a national competence and the exclusive preserve of national parliaments. Accordingly, the new legislation proposes to change Ireland's approval mechanism to align with international best practice.

From a Defence Forces perspective, there has been moderate improvement in the remuneration, accommodation and access to healthcare for military personnel, as recommended by the Commission on the Defence Forces.<sup>36</sup> There has also been some minor progress in Ireland's military capability, as reflected in recent Government actions to increase defence investment.<sup>37</sup>

28 'Irish Neutrality in a Changing World', Barry Andrews MEP, published April 2022

29 <https://www.gov.ie/ga/roinn-an-taoisigh/preaseisiuinti/taoiseach-leo-varadkar-attending-munich-security-conference/>

30 <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/news/ireland-becomes-a-participating-state-of-hybrid-coe/>

31 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2024-10-17/44/>

32 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy8e5nd3e41o>

33 Statement from Romanian embassy in Dublin on the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Irish Department of Defence and the Romanian Ministry for National Defence available at <https://dublin.mae.ro/en/local-news/2259>

34 Reply of Tánaiste and Minister for Defence to Dail on Question, 21 October 2025 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-10-21/229/>

35 <https://www.europeanmovement.ie/ep-51-general-sean-clancy-chair-of-the-european-union-military-committee/>

36 Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, 08 Feb 2022

37 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-defence/press-releases/minister-for-defence-launches-17-billion-defence-sectoral-national-development-plan-20262030/>

In terms of infrastructure and organisational development, a newly refurbished headquarters and intelligence school have been provided for the Irish Military Intelligence Service (IMIS).<sup>38</sup> In addition, a new Defence Forces Cyber Command has also been established. This will work with the National Cyber Security Centre to enhance Ireland's cyber resilience in accordance with the National Cyber Security Strategy.<sup>39</sup>



Mr Andrius Kubilius, European Commissioner for Defence and Space, meets General Sean Clancy, Chair of the European Union Military Committee

Source: The Chair of the EU Military Committee's X account, <https://x.com/ChairmanEUMC/status/1930324194471924067>

In parallel, the State has also begun to invest in new equipment. Two new Airbus C295 maritime surveillance aircraft have been delivered, and a new dedicated Airbus C295 military transport has also been delivered.<sup>40</sup> Two second-hand naval vessels have been acquired from New Zealand and have been commissioned as LÉ Aoibhinn and LÉ Gobnait.<sup>41</sup> Four new Airbus H145M helicopters have been purchased and are due for delivery in 2027.<sup>42</sup> Two towed sonar arrays have been ordered for Irish naval ships and are due for delivery in 2027 and there are plans to acquire sonobuoys to help detect underwater activity.<sup>43</sup> Four small motor launches have been purchased for the Naval Reserve and a new Falcon 6X strategic jet, to help in evacuation of Irish citizens from emergency situations, was delivered in December 2025.<sup>45</sup>

While this investment is welcome, many of these acquisitions are simply upgrading or routinely replacing existing equipment rather than establishing a new capability. Moreover, the pace of progress is not commensurate with the gravity and urgency of the geopolitical reality. Overall, the investment is small when compared to the scale of defence resourcing across the European Union, as highlighted earlier in this report. The defence capability gap between Ireland and the other Member States therefore continues to widen.

38 <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2025/09/12/irish-intelligence-officers-sent-to-train-at-us-military-facilities/>

39 National Cyber Security Strategy 2019-2024, Mid-term Review May 2023, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, pp. 7-10.

40 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-defence/press-releases/t%C3%A1naiste-and-chief-of-staff-welcome-new-aircraft-for-air-corps/>

41 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-defence/press-releases/t%C3%A1naiste-and-minister-for-defence-miche%C3%A1l-martin-names-the-two-naval-service-inshore-patrol-vessels-ipvs/>

42 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-defence/press-releases/t%C3%A1naiste-announces-four-new-helicopters-for-the-air-corps/>

43 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-defence/press-releases/t%C3%A1naiste-announces-major-new-contract-for-sonar-capability/>

44 <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2026/01/03/ireland-to-deploy-large-numbers-of-undersea-trackers-to-detect-hostile-submarines/>

45 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/naval-service-to-acquire-four-new-boats-over-coming-years-1.4541768>

46 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-defence/press-releases/t%C3%A1naiste-and-chief-of-staff-welcome-new-aircraft-for-air-corps/>

From a public awareness point of view, a Consultative Forum on International Security Policy was held in 2023,<sup>47</sup> chaired by Professor Louise Richardson. A total of 835 submissions were received, and multiple panel discussions on a range of topics took place over four days in Cork, Galway and Dublin. The forum was open to the public and audience participation was encouraged.<sup>48</sup>

Five key areas of agreement were identified from the forum.<sup>49</sup> Pride in Ireland's global reputation in international affairs, the need for much greater investment in our Defence Forces, the benefits to Ireland of multilateral engagement across a range of international institutions, the need for reform of the United Nations and the lack of a popular mandate to change the current policy of neutrality.

Several contested areas were also discussed.<sup>50</sup> The Triple Lock and whether it should be re-considered, NATO as a defensive alliance, and neutrality featured most prominently.

Irish neutrality remains an emotive issue. Ireland's neutrality is not enshrined in our constitution or laws, nor in any international treaty. It is a policy choice that we have made since the Second World War and one that should be constantly evaluated and discussed. Adding to the complexity of the debate is the fact that the word means different things to different people. As Conor Gallagher writes: "There is a seemingly endless variety of types of neutrality: classical neutrality, active neutrality, positive neutrality, permanent neutrality, qualified neutrality, limited neutrality, military neutrality, political neutrality and, one which seems to only be used in Ireland, traditional neutrality."<sup>51</sup>

Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality precludes membership of military alliances or common defence arrangements but permits extensive defence co-operation with like-minded countries and organisations. For instance, Ireland has not joined NATO and does not participate in a common defence arrangement with other EU Member States. The latter was confirmed by the Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon, signed after the Lisbon Treaty was initially rejected by the Irish population.<sup>52</sup> Ireland does however have a Defence Memorandum of Understanding with the UK to underpin and promote defence co-operation on matters of mutual interest.

The Forum concluded that Ireland's "conception of neutrality might more accurately be described as political alignment and military non-alignment. While Ireland's practice of neutrality does not conform to international norms, it remains popular in Ireland."<sup>53</sup>

Public opinion on security and defence continues to evolve. A recent Eurobarometer poll ranked defence and security third in terms of public concerns at an EU level.<sup>54</sup> An Irish Times/Ipsos poll in 2023 revealed majority support (61%) to retain Ireland's current model of neutrality. A majority (55%) also want to see Ireland "significantly increase its military capacity" to defend its airspace and territorial waters.<sup>55</sup> In May 2024, a European Movement Ireland poll on attitudes to the EU across the island of Ireland, showed that a majority of the Irish public now agree that Ireland should involve itself more in defence and security co-operation with the EU (56% agree in ROI and 54% in NI).<sup>56</sup> This is an increase of 7% from the 2023 figure of 49%.<sup>57</sup> This is a welcome development.

47 Consultative Forum on International Security Policy, Prof Dame Louise Richardson, 10 Oct 2023.

48 Consultative Forum on International Security Policy video streams available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-foreign-affairs/publications/consultative-forum-video-streams/>

49 Consultative Forum on International Security Policy, Report to An Tánaiste, pg. 8 - 10.

50 Consultative Forum on International Security Policy, Report to an Tánaiste, pg. 10 - 14.

51 Conor Gallagher, "Is Ireland Neutral", p.4.

52 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOL\\_2013\\_060\\_R\\_0129\\_01](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOL_2013_060_R_0129_01)

53 Ibid., pg. 1.

54 Public Opinion in the European Union, March-April 2025, Eurobarometer Report, pg. 35.

55 <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/06/17/voters-want-to-keep-ireland-neutral-but-increase-investment-in-defence-poll-shows/>

56 EU Poll 2024 Ireland and Northern Ireland, European Movement Ireland, pg. 12

57 EU Poll 2023 Ireland and Northern Ireland, European Movement Ireland, pg. 10.

## 4. Irish National Defence

As a result of Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine and its hybrid campaign across Europe, there has been a renewed focus on the territorial defence of Ireland's jurisdiction on land, sea, air and in cyberspace. Of particular importance is its maritime area. As an island nation, the security of ports and freedom of navigation are vital for the success of Ireland's open economy.



*LÉ James Joyce (P62)*

Source: Irish Defence Forces, <https://www.military.ie/en/news-and-events/news/l-james-joyce-p62-detains-belgian-registered-fishing-vessel.html>

Critical sea-bed infrastructure, like gas pipelines, electricity interconnectors and fibre-optic data cables, are essential for Ireland's energy and economic wellbeing. Yet the Irish Naval Service is not adequately resourced to protect their own waters.<sup>58</sup> Recent high-profile counter-narcotic operations carried out with only minimal assets revealed the threadbare nature of Ireland's armed forces.<sup>59</sup>

Menacing language directed at Ireland from the Russian Embassy in Dublin,<sup>60</sup> coupled with sinister

Russian naval activity near Irish critical seabed infrastructure has further added to these concerns. In November 2024, the Russian spy ship Yantar, which has significant undersea capabilities, loitered over two of Ireland's critical natural gas pipelines in the Irish Sea.<sup>61</sup> During this incident, the inability of the Irish Naval Service to monitor activity beneath the surface was starkly apparent.

While Ireland has historically focused on fishing as the primary use of its maritime space, it is now recognising the broader strategic importance of its marine territory, particularly for energy security and telecommunications. Ireland controls around 16% of EU territorial waters and approximately three-quarters of subsea data cables in the Northern Hemisphere pass near or through Irish waters, making it a critical nexus for international connectivity.<sup>62</sup> These cables are essential for everyday internet traffic and global financial transactions. Concern has been raised internationally about Ireland's limited protective capacity.



*PILATUS PC-9M*

Source: Irish Defence Forces, <https://www.military.ie/en/who-we-are/air-corps/the-fleet/pilatus-pc-9m/>

Similarly, Ireland plans to increase its offshore wind capacity by 5GW by 2030,<sup>63</sup> progressing towards 37GW by 2050,<sup>64</sup> meaning that a significant share of its electricity

<sup>58</sup> The Irish Naval Service has eight ships of which only two can be put to sea at any one time due to lack of crew.

<sup>59</sup> Only one naval ship and one AW139 Air Corps helicopter were available to carry out the boarding of the MV Mathew

<sup>60</sup> On 08 June 2025 an official statement from Yuri Filatov, the Russian Ambassador to Ireland, stated that Ireland would face "a day of reckoning" for supporting Ukraine

<sup>61</sup> Russian Spy Ship escorted away from area with critical cables in Irish Sea, Lisa O'Carroll, 16 Nov 2024, The Guardian newspaper

<sup>62</sup> The Strategic Future of Subsea Cables: Ireland Case Study, Romina Bandura and Thomas Bryja, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 23 July 2025

<sup>63</sup> Programme for Government 2025, Securing Ireland's Future, pg. 53.

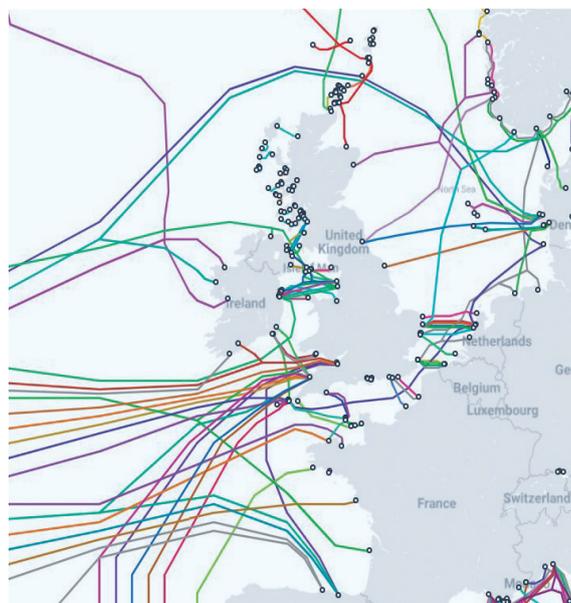
<sup>64</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-enterprise-tourism-and-employment/press-releases/irelands-offshore-wind-strategy-powers-ahead-major-actions-achieved-in-progress-report/>



Source: Irish Defence Forces



National Gas pipeline network of Ireland  
Source: Gas Networks Ireland



North Atlantic fibre-optic data cable map  
Source: www.submarinecablemap.com

will come from its maritime areas. Having neither a single-portfolio Minister for Defence nor a standalone Junior Minister for Defence contributes to a lack of resources and attention. This leaves defence capabilities underfunded and overlooked. The lack of a comprehensive national security or maritime security strategy further complicates a coordinated response from multiple state authorities.

Table 2 Irish undersea infrastructure

	Description	Name	From	To	Remarks
1	Gas	Interconnector 1 (IC1)	Moffat Scotland	Loughshinny, Co. Dublin	
2	Gas	Interconnector 2 (IC2)	Moffat Scotland	Gormanston	
3	Gas	Corrib gas pipeline	Corrib Gas Field	Bellanaboy, Mayo	
4	Electricity	East -West Interconnector	Portan, Ireland	Shotten, Wales	
5	Electricity	Greenlink Interconnector	Fetherard-on-Sea, Wexford	Castlemartin, Wales	
6	Electricity	Arklow bank cable	Arklow Bank Wind farm, Irish Sea	Arklow National Grid Substation	
7	Data Cable	AEC-1	Killala	Shirley, NY, USA	
8	Data Cable	CeltixConnect-1 (CC-1)	Dublin	Holyhead UK	
9	Data Cable	Emerald Bridge Fibres	Clonsaugh	Holyhead UK	
10	Data Cable	ESAT-2	Sandymount	Southport UK	
11	Data Cable	EXA Express	Cork	Halifax, Canada Brean UK	
12	Data Cable	EXA North and South	Dublin	Halifax Canada Southport UK Lynn, MA, USA	
13	Data Cable	Geo-Eirgrid	Lusk	Deeside Clwyd, UK	
14	Data Cable	Havfrue/AEC-2	Lecanvey	Blaabjerg Denmark, Kristiansand, Norway Wall Township, NJ, USA	
15	Data Cable	Havhingsten/CeltixConnect-2 (CC-2)	LoughShinny	Isle of Man Blackpool UK	
16	Data Cable	IRIS	Galway	Thorlakshofn, Iceland	
17	Data Cable	Pan European Crossing (UK-Ireland)	Ballinesker	Bude, UK	
18	Data Cable	Pan European Crossing (UK-Ireland)	Ballygrangans	Whitesands Bay, UK	
19	Data Cable	Rockabill	Portrane	Southport UK	
20	Data Cable	Sirius South	Dublin	Blackpool UK	
21	Data Cable	Solas	Kilmore Quay	Oxwich Bay, UK	
22	Data Cable	Beaufort	Kilmore Quay	Bude, UK Port Eyon, UK	Due 2027
23	Data Cable	Fastnet	Ireland	USA	Due 2028
24	Electricity	Celtic Interconnector	Knockraha (Cork)	La Martyre, France	Due 2028
25	Electricity	Future Wind Farms cables	Irish Sea	East Coast	By 2030

Another key vulnerability is in the air. Irish controlled airspace is a strategic gateway for over 90% of air traffic between Europe and North America.<sup>65</sup> Ireland is the only country in the European Union without a military grade primary radar system. Having no air policing service means it has no means

<sup>65</sup> AirNav Ireland provides air traffic management services for the 451,000km<sup>2</sup> of airspace controlled by Ireland

to deter, detect or disrupt any sovereign airspace violations.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the lack of anti-drone technology is of particular concern. This shortcoming was brought into stark focus during the visit of Ukrainian President Zelensky to Ireland in December 2025.<sup>67</sup> The unchallenged drone incursions into Irish airspace during the visit highlighted the mismatch between the threat posed and the military capacity to counter it.

On land, overseas peacekeeping deployments have had to be scaled back due to lack of personnel. The entire Irish UN contingent in UNDOF Syria had to be withdrawn in 2023 due to the manpower crisis in the Army.<sup>68</sup> This further undermines Ireland’s status as a reliable security provider and good neighbour. It also damages our hard-won reputation for international peacekeeping.

In due regard of the vulnerability-capability gap of Ireland’s defence, the Commission on the Defence Forces was appointed by Government on the 15th of December 2020. The Commission’s subsequent report, published in 2022, highlighted the sorry state of the Irish Defence Forces and concluded it was *“unable to conduct a meaningful defence of the State against a sustained act of aggression from a conventional military force”*.<sup>69</sup>

The report noted that the Defence Forces’ tasks as set out in the White Paper on Defence were not supported by the resources provided, concluding that there was a disconnect between stated policy, resources and capabilities.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, the Commission recommended that the government clarified the level of ambition they wanted for the Defence Forces and outlined three possible options (Table 3).<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the Commission made 69 recommendations across a range of areas on how to improve matters.<sup>72</sup>

Table 3 Levels of Ambition

Level of Ambition	Description	Remarks
LOA 1	Current capability	Aiming to uphold sovereign rights and serving on peace support operations to the same extent as at present.
LOA 2	Enhanced capability	Building on current capability to address specific priority gaps in our ability to deal with an assault on Irish sovereignty and to serve in higher intensity peace support operations.
LOA 3	Conventional capability	Developing full spectrum defence capabilities to protect Ireland and its people to an extent comparable to similar sized countries in Europe.

The Government responded to the Commission’s report with a High-Level Action Plan,<sup>73</sup> deciding to adopt Level of Ambition 2 with a view to progressing to Level of Ambition 3 thereafter. The High-Level Action Plan listed 130 actions. Their implementation is currently underway, albeit at a slow pace.

While EU Member States are increasing the size of their armed forces, the number of Irish troops has fallen by a further 9% since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the publication of the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces.<sup>74</sup> This metric is most disappointing and is of particular concern.

66 Ireland’s token air policing service was disbanded in 1998 with the retirement from service of the Air Corps six Fouga Magister sub-sonic jet aircraft  
 67 Dark Vessel seen near Dublin Bay rogue drone activity, Conor Gallagher & Naomi O’Leary, Irish Times, 11 Dec 2025  
 68 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-defence/press-releases/defence-forces-withdrawal-from-united-nations-disengagement-observer-force-undof/>  
 69 Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, Feb 2022, pg. V.  
 70 White Paper on Defence, August 2015  
 71 White Paper on Defence, August 2015  
 72 Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, Feb 2022, pg. XIV - XXVI.  
 73 Building For The Future- Change From Within, High Level Action for the Report of the Commission on the Defence Forces, 2022.  
 74 Strength of the Permanent Defence Force in Dec 2021 was 8,456. Strength of Permanent Defence Force on 30 Sept 2025 is 7,641, Questions to Minister for Defence, Dáil Éireann, 06 Nov 2025.

The meagre funding provided to the Irish Defence Forces when compared to other EU Member States remains a significant issue. This is the dominant factor preventing the development of basic military capabilities which are the norm in other countries. The ongoing and indeed worsening funding disparity is illustrated in the following table.

Member State	Defence budget 2024 (expected) € billion (% GDP)*	Announcements
AUSTRIA	4.86 (0.99 %)	Austria <a href="#">aims</a> to spend 2 % of its GDP on defence by 2032.
BELGIUM	7.9 (1.3 %)	Belgium <a href="#">aims</a> to reach 2 % of GDP by the end of 2025.
BULGARIA	2.15 (2.18 %)	Bulgaria is <a href="#">projected</a> to raise defence spending to 2.5 % over the next three years, driven by major military equipment purchases.
CROATIA	1.51 (1.81 %)	Croatia aims to <a href="#">increase</a> defence spending to 3 % of GDP by 2030.
CYPRUS	0.55 (1.73 %)	In the 2025 budget, defence expenditure is <a href="#">set</a> at €588.4 million.
CZECHIA	6.37 (2.1 %)	Czechia is <a href="#">aiming</a> to reach around 2.3 % of GDP in 2025.
DENMARK	9.2 (2.37 %)	Denmark plans to increase defence spending by €6.7 billion over two years.
ESTONIA	1.3 (3.43 %)	Estonia <a href="#">aims</a> to up defence spending to 'at least 5.0 % of GDP' from 2026.
FINLAND	6.7 (2.41 %)	Finland <a href="#">plans</a> to raise defence spending to €11 billion by 2032, pushing annual expenditure to 3.3% of GDP.
FRANCE	59.6 (2.06 %)	France intends to <a href="#">increase</a> defence spending to 3.5 % of GDP.
GERMANY	90.6 (2.12 %)	Germany <a href="#">approved</a> a €500 billion spending package to boost military and infrastructure investments, leading to a large defence budget hike.
GREECE	7.1 (3.08 %)	Greece <a href="#">unveiled</a> a €25 billion, 12-year defence plan to modernise its army.
HUNGARY	4.26 (2.11 %)	Defence spending is set to <a href="#">reach</a> HUF1939 billion (€4.8 billion) in 2025.
IRELAND	1.23 (0.24 %)	Ireland <a href="#">plans</a> to increase its defence spending to €3 billion annually.
ITALY	31.96 (1.49 %)	Italy <a href="#">plans</a> to double its defence spending to 3 % of GDP over four years.
LATVIA	1.3 (3.15 %)	Latvia <a href="#">plans</a> to raise its defence budget to 4 % of GDP by next year and has a long-term goal of reaching 5 %.
LITHUANIA	2.13 (2.85 %)	Lithuania <a href="#">pledged</a> to raise defence spending to 5-6 % by 2026.
LUXEMBOURG	0.73 (1.29 %)	Luxembourg <a href="#">plans</a> to reach 2 % of GDP by 2030.
MALTA	0.09 (0.38 %)	Malta's defence spending is <a href="#">set</a> to rise to €95.5 million in 2025.
NETHERLANDS	19.9 (2.05 %)	The Netherlands' defence budget is <a href="#">expected</a> to reach €30 billion in 2029.
POLAND	34 (4.12 %)	Poland <a href="#">became</a> NATO's top defence spender by GDP, allocating 4.12 % in 2024 with plans to reach 4.7 % in 2025.
PORTUGAL	4.3 (1.55 %)	Portugal <a href="#">moved</a> an initial target of reaching 2 % of GDP by 2029 forward, without indicating how much earlier it will be reached.
ROMANIA	8.04 (2.25 %)	Romania <a href="#">announced</a> it aims to reach 3 % of GDP in stages in one to two years.
SLOVAKIA	2.6 (2.00 %)	Slovakia's defence budget is set to <a href="#">reach</a> €2.775 billion in 2025.
SLOVENIA	0.88 (1.29 %)	An initial <a href="#">target</a> of reaching 2 % of GDP by 2030 will be moved forward, to reach 1.6 % in 2026.
SPAIN	19.7 (1.28 %)	Spain <a href="#">aims</a> to reach 2 % of GDP by the end of 2025.
SWEDEN	12.74 (2.14 %)	Sweden <a href="#">aims</a> to reach 3.5 % of GDP by 2030.
TOTAL	326 (1.9 %)	Projected increase by <a href="#">more</a> than €100 billion in real terms by 2027.

\* According to NATO [data](#) (including military pensions) and [IISS military balance](#).

*EU Member States' defence Budgets*

*Source: At a Glance, EU Members States' defence budgets, European Parliament Research Service, May 2025*

Even if Ireland's Defence Forces were properly funded and resourced, some issues are so significant and trans-national that no one nation can tackle them on their own. For instance, critical subsea infrastructure usually connects at least two countries and therefore the importance of collaboration with neighbouring states on defence and security matters is self-evident.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/strategic-future-subsea-cables-ireland-case-study>

## 5. Irish Defence Engagement with Global Security Partners

Ireland engages with partner countries across a range of state sectors. For instance, the Department of Education participates in the Erasmus/Socrates programme and the Department of Justice interacts with Interpol/Europol. In accordance with Ireland's traditional "Meitheal spirit", ESB technicians deploy to the Continent to assist in repairing electricity connections following natural disasters.

Similarly, while Ireland is not militarily aligned, this does not mean it does not interact and learn from other militaries. Indeed, such engagement has been ongoing for more than a century and has been instrumental in modernising Ireland's Defence Forces.

### 5.1 Bilateral Defence Engagement with the UK

Everyone needs good neighbours. Consequently, Ireland's most important defence relationship is with the UK. This has been the case for decades, a reality that has shaped Irish defence for decades. Irish and UK military personnel train regularly in each other's jurisdictions and have deployed together overseas on peacekeeping,<sup>76</sup> Ebola response,<sup>77</sup> and evacuation operations.<sup>78</sup>



*The signing of Irish UK Defence MOU on 19 Jan 2015*  
 Source: Gov UK, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-ireland-sign-historic-defence-agreement>

This defence diplomacy is yet another strand of the deep co-operation between our two islands and peoples.

The formal defence relationship between Dublin and London is underpinned by an agreed Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2015.<sup>79</sup> The published Memorandum deals with training, military education, operations, intelligence sharing, logistics, research and development, joint procurement and situational awareness of the

maritime, air and land domains. It provides a valuable framework to further strengthen defence co-operation and engagement between our two sovereign nations. In support of this relationship, the UK maintains a Defence Attaché in the British embassy in Dublin.

An updated Memorandum is due to be agreed in 2026.<sup>80</sup> This is a useful opportunity to further increase the depth and breadth of this co-operation, particularly from an airspace security point of view.



*LE George Bernard Shaw (P64) and HMS Tyne (P281) on joint exercise June 2020*  
 Source: Royal Navy, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news/2020/june/17/200617-tyne-irish-ship>

76 Irish and UK troops to train Mali military units, available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/2013/0213/367637-irish-and-uk-troops-to-train-mali-military-units/>

77 Army medical team deployed to Sierra Leone, available at: <https://www.imt.ie/news/army-medical-team-deployed-sierra-leone-18-01-2015/>

78 Irish Army personnel to help evacuate citizens from Sudan, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65366442>

79 [https://opac.oireachtas.ie/AWData/Library3/DEFMemorandum\\_of\\_Understanding\\_between\\_the\\_UK\\_and\\_Ireland\\_on\\_the\\_enhancement\\_of\\_bilateral\\_engagement\\_on\\_certain\\_aspects\\_of\\_defence\\_and\\_security\\_co-operation19012015\\_174233.pdf](https://opac.oireachtas.ie/AWData/Library3/DEFMemorandum_of_Understanding_between_the_UK_and_Ireland_on_the_enhancement_of_bilateral_engagement_on_certain_aspects_of_defence_and_security_co-operation19012015_174233.pdf)

80 <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/uk-and-ireland-to-update-defence-agreement/>

## 5.2 Bilateral Defence engagement with the United States

Ireland and the United States share deep historical, cultural and military links. Defence engagement has been ongoing since the Irish military mission to the United States from 1926-1927.<sup>81</sup> US and Irish military personnel regularly train each other's countries. Both militaries exchange students on career courses and have deployed operationally together on peacekeeping and evacuation operations overseas.<sup>82</sup> <sup>83</sup> The relationship is supported institutionally by the presence of a US Defence



*Irish Military Mission to the USA 1926-1927*

Source: *The Military Archives*, <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/en/reading-room-collections/military-mission-temporary-plans-division>

Attaché in the United States embassy in Dublin, who coordinates this important, mutually beneficial relationship.

Shannon Airport is one of Europe's most westerly airports. It is a major refuelling point for transatlantic air travel in both directions. Like the Soviet military transiting to Cuba in the 1980s, the US military has made use of the airport facilities for decades.

Under the terms of the Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952,<sup>84</sup> all foreign military aircraft overflying or landing in the State require diplomatic clearance from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Diplomatic clearance is subject to strict conditions, including that the aircraft is unarmed, carries no arms, ammunition or explosives and that it does not engage in intelligence gathering or form part of a military exercise or operation.

It is expressly prohibited for civil aircraft to carry munitions of war in Irish sovereign territory without an exemption from the Minister for Transport. The system of exemptions is operated under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Orders 1973 and 1989.

<sup>85</sup> <sup>86</sup> <sup>87</sup>



*US Air Force collecting Irish troops to transport them to the Congo*  
Source: *The Military Archives*, <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/en/reading-room-collections/united-nations-operations-in-congo>

Irish military aircraft using US airports for transporting Irish military personnel, munitions and military stores are subject to similar international clearance protocols.

Ireland is one of only six countries whose citizens can avail of pre-clearance for immigration, customs and border controls for access to the United States in their home countries.<sup>88</sup> The arrangement was initially passed by Dail Éireann in 1986,<sup>89</sup> and is now governed under the Aviation (Preclearance) Act 2009.<sup>90</sup> Initially the arrangement was for Shannon Airport only but has since also been extended to Dublin Airport.

<sup>81</sup> Six Irish Defence Forces officers spent nine months with the US Army from 1926-1927 to experience international best practice and to introduce such proficiencies into our own Defence Forces

<sup>82</sup> Irish and US troops have served together in Somalia, Kosovo and Afghanistan

<sup>83</sup> In August 2021 a multi-national force, which also included US and Irish troops, deployed to Kabul to conduct an evacuation operation

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1952/si/74/made/en/print>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1973/si/224/made/en/print>

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1989/si/130/made/en/print>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-transport/publications/the-carriage-of-munitions-of-war-on-civil-aircraft/>

<sup>88</sup> The six countries are Canada, Aruba, The Bahamas, Bermuda, United Arab Emirates and Ireland

<sup>89</sup> US Pre-inspection Facilities at Shannon Airport, Dáil Éireann (24th Dáil), Friday, 6 Jun 1986, Houses of the Oireachtas, available at:

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1986-06-06/3/>

<sup>90</sup> Aviation (Preclearance Act) 2009, available at <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2009/act/16/enacted/en/html>



*Irish sniper team competing in Fort Benning Georgia*

*Source: Irish Defence Forces via X, <https://x.com/defenceforces/status/1527982546226597889/photo/1>*

Shannon Airport has hosted the arrival of every US president since John F. Kennedy in 1963. It has also been used as a useful diplomatic hub in recent years. High-level meetings between President Trump and Taoiseach Leo Varadkar in 2019 and between President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine and Taoiseach Micheál Martin in Feb 2025 have taken place there.<sup>91 92</sup>

### 5.3 Involvement with the United Nations

Ireland has a long and distinguished record of participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations since 1958.<sup>93</sup> All of Ireland's overseas fatalities due to hostile fire have occurred on UN blue beret missions. The sacrifice of these men and their families in the cause of international peace is honoured at military and state occasions throughout the year.



*Irish UN troops UNIFIL Lebanon*

*Source: Irish Defence Forces, <https://www.military.ie/en/news-and-events/news-archive/2020/un-confirms-rotation-dates-for-defence-forces-personnel-deployed-in-lebanon-with-unifil-mission.html>*

While the Defence Forces have contributed significantly to UN peacekeeping, they have also benefitted enormously from it. Interaction with troops from other militaries on UN operations was a great awakening for the Defence Forces when it first began, particularly in Congo.<sup>94</sup> Such invaluable experience continues to contribute to the personal and professional development of individual service personnel, as well as the wider organisation to this day. There is simply no substitute for the international experience acquired in different climates,

91 Donald Trump's first day in Ireland, BBC News, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48536883>

92 Zelensky 'very thankful' for sustained support of Ireland, available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/politics/2025/0227/1499165-taoiseach-meeting/>

93 Ireland's first mission was to the United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL) in 1958

94 Operation des Nations Unies au Congo (ONUC) 1960-1964



*Irish UN troops MINUSMA Mali*  
 Source: Irish Defence Forces, <https://www.military.ie/en/news-and-events/news-archive/2020/irish-personnel-in-minusma.html>

terrain and operational settings.<sup>95</sup> The expeditionary nature of such deployments has also developed the Defence Forces' logistical expertise and capabilities.

Currently Ireland's main troop mission is with UNIFIL in Lebanon where about 350 Irish troops are deployed. UNIFIL's mandate ceases at the end of 2026 so the mission must then close.<sup>96</sup> Despite the wishes of the host nation of Lebanon, Ireland and numerous other countries, it was not possible to extend the mission's mandate due to a threatened veto by the United States.

It is unclear whether Ireland will be able to re-deploy to another peacekeeping operation. Agreeing mandates for new missions at the United Nations Security Council has become more difficult due ongoing geopolitical tensions and great power rivalries. The peacekeeping budget at the United Nations has also been decreased.<sup>97</sup> This is expected to further reduce the scale and scope of blue beret missions. Consequently, the future of UN blue beret peacekeeping operations remains uncertain.

Currently there are 428 Irish troops serving overseas on peacekeeping operations. 366 of these are serving on UN blue beret missions (Table 4). A further 20 Irish troops are serving on UN-mandated missions with regional organisations (Table 5). Of note, 42 other Irish troops are serving abroad in headquarter staff appointments with other international organisations.<sup>98</sup>

*Table 4 Blue beret missions<sup>99</sup>*

	Mission	Number of Irish Troops
1	UNIFIL Lebanon	350
2	UNTSO Middle East	13
3	UNDOF Syria	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>366</b>

*Table 5 UN-mandated missions with Regional Organisations<sup>100</sup>*

	Mission	Number of Irish Troops
1	EUFOR Bosnia and Herzegovina (EU)	5
2	KFOR Kosovo (NATO)	12
3	Op Iriini, EU Naval Mission, Italy (EU)	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>

<sup>95</sup> It is impossible to replicate operating in jungles and deserts at home. Irish UN deployments to East Timor, Liberia, Eritrea, Western Sahara, Somalia and Chad have provided this valuable expertise

<sup>96</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2790, adopted 28 Aug 2025

<sup>97</sup> Funding crisis forces deep cuts to UN peacekeeping missions, published 16 October 2025, available at [news.un.org](https://news.un.org)

<sup>98</sup> Data is based on interview material which supplements and/or updates information from an Oireachtas debate on the 19th March 2025 available at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-03-19/233/>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

## 5.4 NATO/Partnership for Peace.



NATO School Oberammergau  
Source: NATO Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre

Ireland has no plans to sign up to NATO or its Article 5 mutual defence clause. However, Ireland did join the Partnership for Peace (PFP) in 1999. Neutral Switzerland, Austria and Malta are also members. The primary purpose of the PFP is to promote co-operation between NATO member states and non-member states.<sup>101</sup> Its goals are to build trust, enhance stability, and enable joint activities like peacekeeping and crisis management. Participation is completely voluntary and allows partner countries to work with NATO to improve their defence capabilities.

The PFP has been instrumental in enhancing the inter-operability of Irish peacekeeping troops with other European militaries.<sup>102</sup> For instance, the current Irish Battalion in UNIFIL includes Polish, Hungarian and Maltese troops. These different nationalities use compatible equipment and similar operational protocols allowing them to work more effectively together.

Each member state of the PFP negotiates a Memorandum of Understanding (known as an Individually Tailored Partnership Programme) with NATO based on their own national priorities.

Ireland's current ITPP runs from 2024-2028. It has not been published but 22 mutual areas of interest are included. These focus primarily on cyber resilience, security of critical seabed infrastructure, overseas peacekeeping operations, impact of conflict on women and girls, climate change and military training.<sup>103</sup>

Ireland has deployed troops operationally on two NATO-led missions in Kosovo (KFOR) and Afghanistan (ISAF). 13 Irish troops are currently deployed with KFOR. Hundreds of Irish troops have attended training courses in the NATO School in Oberammergau Germany in recent decades.

Interaction with NATO militaries has been a major factor in advancing the modernisation, inter-operability and professionalism of the Irish Defence Forces.

While we have traditionally had extensive military co-operation with the UK, US and the UN, the European Union has started to play an increasingly large role. While a genuine European Defence Union has been a dream of certain EU Member States for decades, it has only gained traction in recent years, with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the recalcitrant nature of the Trump administration. As such, our defence co-operation with the European Union is likely to deepen in the coming years, as more money and focus is spent on the sector.

<sup>101</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_50349.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm)

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.ireland.ie/en/partnership-for-peace-delegation-brussels/ireland-in-the-partnership-for-peace-programme/>

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2024-10-17/44/>

## 6. Irish Defence Engagement with the European Union

Ireland has been a key contributor to the EU's Common Foreign & Security Policy (CFSP) since its creation with the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. The below section outlines some of the main ways in which the Irish Defence Forces engage with the European Union.

### 6.1 EU Common Security and Defence Policy

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was formally established in 2009 with the Treaty of Lisbon.<sup>104</sup> CSDP is a significant component of the broader European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Combined, both policies seek to merge military capabilities with the EU's soft power from diplomacy, development aid, humanitarian assistance, climate action, trade policy and human rights. This blended approach aims to promote peace, stability, and European values globally.

Drawing on both civilian and military expertise, the CSDP allows the Union to respond to international challenges. It provides a framework through which the EU can play a significant role in conflict prevention, crisis management and peace support operations.

Under the CSDP, the EU has launched a wide range of missions and operations. These include military training, anti-piracy operations, border assistance, and support for law enforcement and judicial reforms in post-conflict regions. These missions often take place in partnership with international organisations such as the United Nations and NATO.

Since its first military operation in 2003,<sup>105</sup> the EU has deployed over 40 missions and operations worldwide. Ireland has contributed to civilian and military CSDP missions since they began. Individual Irish officers have been appointed to serve in key EU defence positions, such as Operational Commander of EUFOR Chad in 2007 and Mission Commander of EUTM Somalia in 2011 and 2013. The current Chair of the EU Military Committee (EUMC) is General Seán Clancy.

*Table 6 Irish troop participation in EU military missions<sup>106</sup>*

	Mission	Dates	Total DF personnel previously deployed	DF personnel currently deployed
1	Op Artemis, Democratic Republic of Congo	May-Sep 2003	2	0
2	EUFOR Chad/Central African Republic	2008 - 2009	1,550	0
3	EUTM Somalia	2010 - 2014	36	0
4	EUTM Mali	2013 - 2020	280	0
5	Operation Sophia- EUNAVFOR MED	2015 - 2017	177	0
6	Operation Althea, EUFOR Bosnia and Herzegovina	2004- ongoing	287	5
7	Op Irini EU Naval Mission	2020 - ongoing	27	3
<b>Total</b>			<b>2,359</b>	<b>8</b>

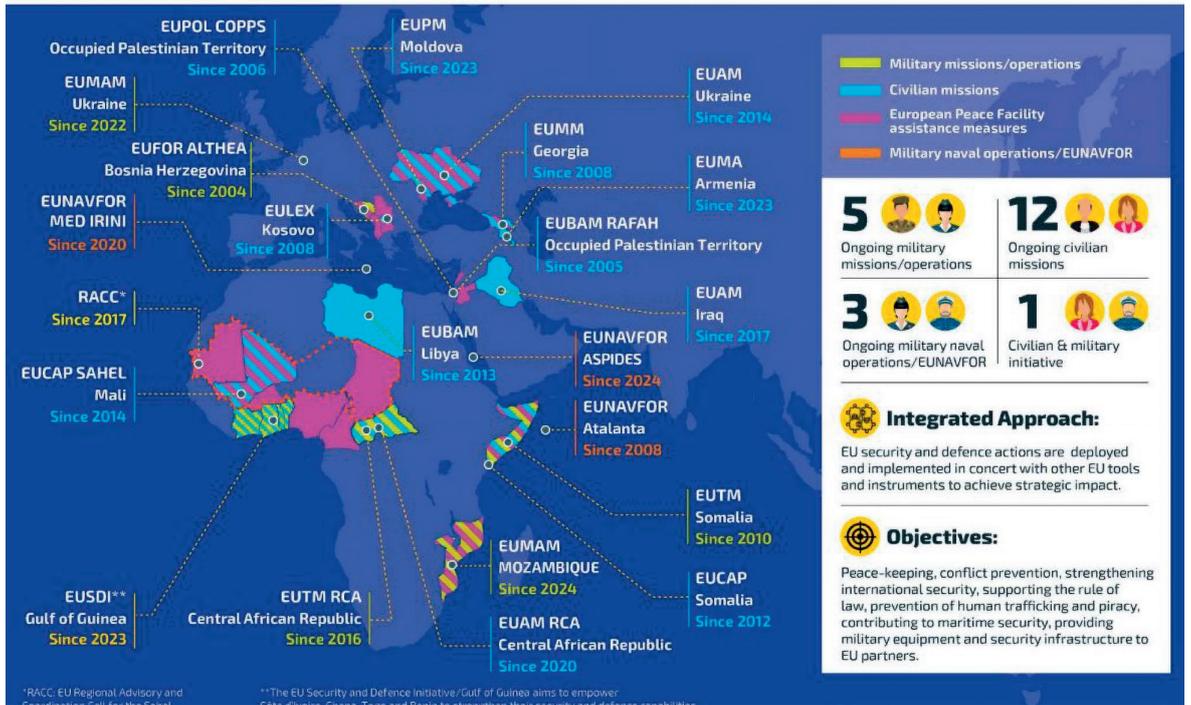
<sup>104</sup> Articles 42-46 of the Lisbon Treaty, 2009.

<sup>105</sup> The EU's first mission was Operation Concordia in what is North Macedonia today

<sup>106</sup> Data is based on interview material which supplements and/or updates information from Defence Forces overseas deployment website available at <https://www.military.ie/en/overseas-deployments/>.

# EU SECURITY AND DEFENCE ENGAGEMENT AROUND THE WORLD

November 2024  
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Source: EEAS, EU COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY (CSDP): Missions and Operations, April 2025

## 6.2 EU Battlegroup (EUBG)



Irish soldier participating in EU Battlegroup 2025  
Source: Irish Defence Forces via Instagram, [https://www.instagram.com/p/DITXkHYog4E/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/DITXkHYog4E/?img_index=1)

The United Nations has no soldiers of its own. It must rely on individual troop contributing nations to provide contingents for each separate mission. The force generation process to establish a new UN mission to respond to an international crisis is complex and can take many months. Meanwhile, the security situation in question deteriorates further.

Following the Balkan wars in the 1990s, it became clear that Europe needed rapid response capabilities to prevent conflicts and manage crises. Thus, the EU Battlegroup concept was born. Small contingents of European troops are now placed on standby and kept at high readiness to deploy for peace support, crisis management and humanitarian operations.

Ireland has been involved in the EU Battlegroup concept since 2008 and places an Irish military contingent on standby for potential rapid deployment every four years. An Irish mechanised company of 170 troops was on high readiness standby for 2025 at 10 days' notice to deploy.<sup>107</sup>

While Irish troops physically remain in Ireland, their vehicles and equipment are already pre-posi-

<sup>107</sup> EU BG possible tasks include peace support, crisis management and humanitarian operations

tioned in Germany to facilitate rapid deployment.<sup>108</sup> Military aircraft from the European Air Transport Command (EATC) in Eindhoven fly to Casement Aerodrome Baldonnel as required. These aircraft transport Irish troops to the continent to link up with their vehicles for exercises during the standby period.

Ireland's involvement in the EUBG concept has been a major catalyst for progress and modernisation of its armed forces over the last 20 years. The logistical, training and operational dividends reaped continue to be significant. Of note, Ireland is not currently a member of the EATC but continues to benefit significantly from the pooled air transport assets at the EATC's disposal.



*Irish troops participating in EU Battlegroup 2025*  
Source: The Irish Defence Forces, [https://www.instagram.com/p/DITXkHYog4E/?img\\_index=4](https://www.instagram.com/p/DITXkHYog4E/?img_index=4)

## 6.3 Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO)

PESCO is a mechanism whereby individual Member States can agree to co-operate with each other on a range of specific defence projects. It is completely voluntary. The intention is to deepen defence co-operation amongst EU Member States who are willing to do so.<sup>109</sup>

Through PESCO, the 26 participating Member States can develop and invest in shared capability projects to enhance the operational readiness of their own armed forces.<sup>110</sup> This also ensures that European contingents deployed on CSDP missions are properly equipped, trained and inter-operable, thus making them more effective.

There are currently 74 PESCO projects being developed. Ireland currently actively participates in only six.<sup>111</sup>

- Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance.
- Maritime Semi-Autonomous Systems for Mine Countermeasures.
- Deployable Military Disaster Relief Capability Package.
- Cyber Threats and Incident Response Information Sharing Platform.
- Critical Seabed Infrastructure Protection.
- Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations.

Ireland has Observer status on 17 other PESCO projects. This allows Ireland to stay informed on the project without committing full resources.

Since its inception in 2017, PESCO has been instrumental in improving the expertise and knowledge base of Ireland's Defence Forces. Despite this, Ireland still has by far the lowest level of participation in PESCO among the Member States involved.

<sup>108</sup> Irish armored and soft skinned vehicles are stored near Frankfurt

<sup>109</sup> [www.pesco.europa.eu](http://www.pesco.europa.eu)

<sup>110</sup> Malta is the only EU Member State that has not yet opted in to PESCO

<sup>111</sup> Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence debate, 02 July, 2024

## 6.4 White Paper for European Defence - Readiness 2030

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine has been a major catalyst for Member States to significantly strengthen and broaden the CSDP. While expeditionary peace support and crisis management operations continue as before, there is understandably now a much greater emphasis on territorial defence.

Having under-invested in defence for decades, Member States of the European Union are now reluctantly and urgently re-investing in their armed forces. This is being done to preserve peace by deterring Russian aggression and to reduce dependencies on the United States.

The most significant recent developments are the establishment of a new European Commissioner for Defence and Space,<sup>112</sup> the creation of new instruments to stimulate European defence industry,<sup>113</sup> and the publication of the White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030.<sup>114</sup>

The White Paper identifies that support for Ukraine is the most immediate and pressing task for European defence. It also acknowledges the escalating hybrid war against Europe which includes arson, cyber-attacks, sabotage, sovereign airspace violations, drone incursions and electronic interference in global navigation and satellite systems. This hybrid activity also involves disinformation campaigns, election interference, political and industrial espionage, and the weaponisation of migration.

The White Paper acknowledges decades of defence under-investment in Europe. It recognises that Europe needs to build up a sufficient deterrence capacity to prevent further conflict and provide the security on which the EU's prosperity depends. Appropriate military capabilities and readiness are required to credibly deter armed aggression. Accordingly, the European defence industrial base must be strengthened as it is currently weak and cannot meet demand while there is a pressing need to replenish stocks of ammunition, weapons and military equipment.

The White Paper identifies seven priority areas where critical capability gaps need to be closed:

- Air and missile defence
- Artillery systems
- Ammunition and missiles
- Drone and counter-drone systems
- Military mobility
- AI, Quantum, Cyber, Electronic Warfare
- Strategic enablers and critical infrastructure protection

The EU Defence Readiness Road Map 2030 lays out the clear objectives and milestones for how the White Paper is to be implemented and how European defence is to be re-built.<sup>115</sup>

## 6.5 Security Action for Europe (SAFE)

A new instrument called Security Action for Europe (SAFE) has been created. This provides a €150 billion leveraged loan facility for Member States to stimulate the EU's defence industrial base. The initiative also encourages Member States to jointly spend and procure defence equipment.<sup>116</sup> The

<sup>112</sup> Mr Andrius Kubilius, European Commissioner for Defence and Space

<sup>113</sup> Security Action for Europe (SAFE)

<sup>114</sup> White Paper for European Defence Readiness- 2030, available at [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6d5db69-e0ab-4bec-9dc0-3867b4373019\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6d5db69-e0ab-4bec-9dc0-3867b4373019_en)

<sup>115</sup> Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030, Brussels 16 Oct 2025

<sup>116</sup> Oireachtas Joint Committee on Defence and National Security, Wednesday, 22 Oct 2025

programme aims to improve on the current inefficient and fragmented approach to procurement, thereby leveraging economies of scale to lower unit costs.

Ireland has signed up to the SAFE instrument. Currently however Ireland's participation is very limited. It is only accessing the joint procurement component of the regulation. Ireland has not opted to apply for any of the long-term funding available. The stated rationale is that Ireland can currently borrow at a lower interest rate on the capital markets and therefore direct funding for defence from the Irish Exchequer is more cost-effective. Applying for funding through SAFE has not been ruled out entirely though.<sup>117</sup> The allocated €1.7 billion in capital funding for defence from 2026-2030 is insufficient to plug capability gaps and address defence deficits. There is clearly an urgent need to source additional defence funding from elsewhere.

## 6.6 European Parliament Security and Defence Committee (SEDE)

Like any national parliamentary committee, the role of the SEDE Committee in the European Parliament is to forensically scrutinise proposed legislation and to provide parliamentary oversight on matters under its remit. The Committee is made of 30 MEPs from across the political spectrum.

The current stated priority for the SEDE Committee is to monitor the implementation of the Versailles Declaration for Europe to enhance European defence. It will also track the implementation of the Strategic Compass, the European Defence Industrial Strategy, the White Paper on European Defence Readiness 2030 and the Rearm Europe Plan.<sup>118</sup>

## 6.7 Support for Ukraine



*Irish Viking vehicle and Giraffe radar donated to Ukraine*  
Source: Irish Defence Forces

Ireland has been a steadfast supporter of Ukraine since Russia's completely unjustified, unprovoked and illegal invasion in 2022. The comprehensive support provided is ongoing and has been political, diplomatic, financial, humanitarian and military in nature.

Over 120,000 displaced Ukrainians have sought refuge in Ireland.<sup>119</sup> Non-lethal military equipment has been donated to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Irish troops continue to train Ukrainian military personnel with the EUMAM training mission,<sup>120</sup> where they deliver training modules in tactical combat casualty care, mine clearance, drill instruction and junior leadership.

<sup>117</sup> Parliamentary Questions, Dáil Éireann, Thursday, 6 Nov 2025, available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-11-06/12/>

<sup>118</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/sede/about>

<sup>119</sup> It is estimated that currently 82,000 displaced Ukrainians remain in Ireland

<sup>120</sup> This is the European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (EUMAM). Military training takes place in locations in Germany and Poland

Ireland has been a consistent supporter of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and is mindful that Ukraine would not have been invaded had they retained their nuclear warheads in the 1990s. Ukraine agreed to return them to Russia in good faith in exchange for security guarantees which turned out to be worthless.<sup>121</sup>

Ireland is strongly supportive of Ukraine joining the European Union and has expressed support for sending Irish peacekeeping troops to Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire.<sup>122</sup>

From February 2022 to December 2025 Ireland has provided a total of €340 million in support to Ukraine either bi-laterally or through EU mechanisms.<sup>123 124</sup>

Table 7 Irish financial support to Ukraine

Support type	Amount	Up to Date
Total financial support	€340m <sup>125</sup>	Up to 02/12/2025
Humanitarian support	€173m <sup>126</sup>	Up to 02/12/2025
Non-lethal military assistance	€166m <sup>127</sup>	Up to 02/12/2025

Table 8 Itemised list of specific support to Ukraine

Type of Support <sup>128</sup>	Date
Ten tonnes of military ration packs <sup>129</sup>	2022
200 sets of military body armour and ballistic helmets <sup>130</sup>	2022
3 Reacher bomb disposal robots <sup>131</sup>	2025
2 mine flails <sup>132</sup>	2024
5 Air Defence Giraffe radars with 5 BV206 Viking tracked vehicles <sup>133</sup>	2025
53 soft skinned military vehicles transported to the Ukrainian border: (including 25 x Ford Ranger, 10 x Ford Transit, 10 x Scania trucks, 4 x ambulances, 1 x recovery truck, 1 x fire tender 2 x DF ambulances) <sup>134</sup>	2024-2025
€1.36m in support for satellite communications equipment <sup>135</sup>	2025
23 training modules delivered by Defence Force personnel instructors to Ukrainian troops in Germany with EUMAM Ukraine. (Approx 700 Ukrainian troops trained in total) <sup>136</sup>	2023-2025

## 6.8 Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Ireland assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 01 July 2026 for a six-month period.<sup>137</sup> This will present several challenges to Ireland from both a security and political point of view. The recent visit of President Zelensky in December 2025 offered a precursor of what

121 Budapest Memorandum was signed in 1994 by the leaders of Ukraine, USA, UK and the Russian Federation. It guaranteed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine in exchange for their nuclear warheads and missiles.

122 Dáil Questions to Tánaiste and Minister for Defence Simon Harris TD, 18 Sept 2025, available at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-09-19/11/>

123 Ireland to give €125m to Ukraine as Zelensky visits Dublin, Gabija Gataveckaite, BBC News, 01 Dec 2025, available at: [www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn41jzw9eyko](http://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn41jzw9eyko)

124 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/speeches/joint-press-conference-with-president-volodymr-zelenskyy-remarks-by-taoiseach-miche%C3%A1l-martin-government-buildings/>

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 Itemised list of support is based on publicly available information and interview material.

129 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-defence/press-releases/minister-for-defence-approves-the-provision-of-specific-additional-support-to-ukraine-including-body-armour-and-meals/>

130 Ibid.

131 <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2025/09/20/government-quietly-donates-air-defence-systems-to-ukraine/>

132 <https://www.rte.ie/news/2024/0226/1434407-taoiseach-paris/>

133 <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2025/02/24/ireland-to-donate-air-defence-systems-to-ukraine-as-war-enters-fourth-year/>

134 Based on interview material.

135 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-01-22/34/>

136 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-01-22/34/>

137 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-foreign-affairs/consultations/irelands-2026-presidency-of-council-of-eu/>

Ireland can expect from a security perspective over the course of the Irish EU Presidency.<sup>138</sup>

Having no direct road or rail connections with any other EU country means that keeping Ireland's airports open will be vital for the successful hosting of summits and important international meetings. Drone incursions have caused significant difficulty during the recent Danish EU Presidency,<sup>139</sup> and it is likely similar interference will occur in Ireland. As a neutral country, seeking operational military assistance may raise constitutional issues and this presents further complications for Ireland.<sup>140</sup>

From a political perspective defence is now a priority area for the majority of the other 26 Member States. This is not the case in Ireland. As a neutral country that has significantly underinvested in defence for decades, this may raise credibility issues when chairing and contributing to meetings on defence matters.

Ireland does have a reputation as an honest broker, however, and through the Presidency, Ireland can help forge consensus on the Defence Omnibus which be in Trilogue during Ireland's presidency, and the next seven-year Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034) which will be negotiated in 2026.

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138 <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2025/1208/1547852-drones-dublin/>

139 <https://www.dw.com/en/denmark-bans-civil-drones-after-more-sightings/a-74166973>

140 <https://www.thejournal.ie/eu-summit-ireland-military-constitutional-6873697-Nov2025/>

## 7. Recommendations

In this section, we have set out a number of recommendations that we believe the Irish Government should undertake in order to better protect our jurisdiction and to properly enforce our neutral position. They are the following:

### 1. **Complete the National Security Strategy as a Matter of Urgency**

As noted by the recent IIEA / Deloitte Report, an “overarching National Security Strategy would serve to create greater direction, alignment, and synergies between existing and future strategies pertaining to security and resilience.”<sup>141</sup> Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, many EU Member States have either published their first ever national security strategy, such as Germany, or else updated it, such as Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Sweden.<sup>142143144145146147</sup>

In its 2025 Programme for Government, the Irish Government committed to producing a “National Security Strategy which reflects the changed geopolitical landscape that Europe and Ireland confront.”<sup>148</sup> Ahead of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2026, the Government should make finishing the National Security Strategy a matter of priority, both for our own security but also as a signal to our European partners.

### 2. **Create a Standalone Minister for Defence**

Currently, the role of Minister of Defence is subsumed into the larger title of Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and Minister for Defence. This means that defence is shared alongside two major other ministries and may find itself competing for time, space and resources. As a matter of national importance, the Irish Government should create either a standalone ministerial position or pair it with a more junior ministry.

Across Europe, there are new and innovative ideas on how to think about defence, both in terms of civil defence and preparedness. Denmark has recently formalised the role of Minister of Resilience and Preparedness, and Sweden has a Minister for Civil Defence, encompassing civil protection, emergency management, and crisis preparedness, more akin to what Ireland may need.<sup>149150</sup>

### 3. **Stay neutral and continue co-operation with our international security partners.**

Changing Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality is neither desirable, nor necessary. The policy is sufficiently flexible to preclude membership of military alliances or common defence arrangements but permit extensive defence co-operation with like-minded countries and organisations.

For instance, Ireland has not joined NATO and does not participate in a common defence arrangement with other EU Member States. Ireland does however have a Defence Memorandum of Understanding with the UK to underpin and promote defence co-operation on matters of mutual interest.

International defence engagement has had an enormously positive and transformative effect on the Defence Forces. Changing Ireland's traditional model of neutrality by reducing co-operation with in-

<sup>141</sup> *Secure Together, Enhancing Ireland's Security and Resilience in a Time of Heightened Geopolitical Risk*, IIEA, Dec 2025, p.20

<sup>142</sup> <https://www.bmz.de/en/ministry/german-national-security-strategy>

<sup>143</sup> [https://www.bmi.gv.at/502/files/240904\\_Sicherheitsstrategie\\_A4\\_EN\\_BF.pdf](https://www.bmi.gv.at/502/files/240904_Sicherheitsstrategie_A4_EN_BF.pdf)

<sup>144</sup> [https://mzv.gov.cz/file/5161068/Security\\_Strategy\\_of\\_the\\_Czech\\_Republic\\_2023.pdf](https://mzv.gov.cz/file/5161068/Security_Strategy_of_the_Czech_Republic_2023.pdf)

<sup>145</sup> <https://um.dk/en/foreign-policy/foreign-and-security-policy-2023>

<sup>146</sup> <https://rvv.fi/en/-/new-security-strategy-for-society-enhances-finland-s-comprehensive-security>

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.government.se/globalassets/government/national-security-strategy.pdf>

<sup>148</sup> Programme for Government, Securing Ireland's Future

<sup>149</sup> <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/regeringen-opretter-tre-nye-ministerposter>

<sup>150</sup> <https://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/>

ternational security partners would make our country more isolated, reclusive and detached. Something we have never been militarily.

Neutrality, or more accurately military non-alignment, is a perfectly reasonable and legitimate defence strategy, if resourced properly. Historically however Ireland has not adequately resourced this policy and consequently has weakened and undermined it.

#### 4. **Invest in our own Defence Forces.**

Ireland invests only 0.2% of its GDP in defence, by far the lowest in Europe. The defence budget for 2026 is only €1.49Bn, the majority of which will be spent on wages and pensions. This chronic under-investment has resulted in meagre and in some areas non-existent defence capability.

Currently with only about 7,500 regular service personnel and 1,500 reservists, Ireland's armed forces are at their lowest strength in over 50 years. While the country has highly professional soldiers, sailors and aviators, there is simply not enough of them, and they are not equipped to fulfil their mandated tasks.

This must change. Ireland should not be defenceless.

Ireland's Defence Forces need to be urgently upgraded to Level of Ambition 3 as outlined by the Commission on the Defence Forces and the necessary funding provided. This would ensure Ireland would have a basic capability to uphold our sovereign rights and enforce our laws within our own jurisdiction on land, sea in the air and in cyberspace. This should not be controversial. It is simply a basic requirement of any modern democracy.

Ireland should consider applying for long-term loans through the EU SAFE mechanism in order to fund an increase in defence capability. There is no provision for the procurement of a frigate with air defence or anti-submarine capability in the defence capital plan 2026-2030. This is a major deficiency.

#### 5. **Re-establish Ireland's own Air Policing Service**

Ireland is the only EU member state without a military grade, primary radar system. This means that the State is unlikely to detect an aircraft that does not co-operate with air traffic control.

It is highly unusual for a country to have no means of detection, intervention and deterrence in its own airspace. Particularly so in Ireland's case, owing to the large volume of transatlantic aircraft passing through its air space. This is as much a flight safety issue as it is a defence issue.

In light of recent airspace violations in Europe and Ireland's inability to prevent munitions being flown through Irish airspace en route to Gaza, it is high time that Ireland re-establishes a basic air policing capability like that which was discontinued in 1998. This would allow Ireland to uphold its sovereign rights and enforce its laws in its own airspace. A comprehensive primary radar system and counter-drone technology must also be urgently acquired to provide a complete air picture of Irish airspace.

As it will take time to re-establish sovereign air policing capability, Ireland should formally agree an interim arrangement with a neighbouring country to provide this vital service, particularly in advance of assuming the Presidency of the Council of the EU on 1 July 2026.



*Irish Air Corps Fouga Magister jet aircraft*

*Source: "Silver Swallows aerobatic team - Irish Air Corps Fouga Magister" by fsll2, CC BY-NC 2.0*

#### 6. **Remove Ireland's 'Triple Lock' mechanism.**

The loss of the UNIFIL mandate, due to a threatened veto from the US, highlights the difficult situation in the United Nations Security Council. However, even if it was functioning, the 'Triple Lock' is not fit for purpose. It dilutes our sovereignty, and it undermines our neutrality. Other countries allow the use of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter to legitimise peacekeeping operations by regional authorities. This provision encourages peacekeeping initiatives by regional entities provided the proposed mission is in keeping with the 'purposes and principles of the United Nations'. As a signatory to the United Nations Charter, Ireland is obliged to uphold its provisions and should therefore adopt a similar approach in accordance with international best practice.

The Defence (Amendment) Bill 2025 proposes to change the 'Triple Lock' is as follows:

- Up to 50 military personnel can be deployed overseas as part of an international force once the Government decides to do so. This will allow for rapid deployment of a small number of personnel if time is of the essence and/or if the Dáil is in recess.
- If more than 50 personnel are being deployed, a Dáil resolution must be passed for this to occur.
- Three more potential Defence Forces overseas tasks are also being provided for in law. This is being done to provide legal clarity to underpin Irish national military operations overseas. These new tasks are evacuation missions, counter-narcotic operations and close protection/bodyguard duties for Irish diplomats and politicians.

It is recommended that this Bill be enacted as soon as possible.

#### 7. **Support the manufacture of ethical military equipment by Irish companies.**

Defence technology companies are an integral part of the defence apparatus of nation states. This is particularly so for neutral countries as providing for their own armed forces promotes autonomy, self-sufficiency and supply chain resilience. As noted in the draft Security Policy Strategy of Switzerland 2026, the defence industry's "performance [...] is crucial for the armed forces' defence capabili-



*Reacher bomb-disposal robot*  
Source: Irish Defence Forces



*Irish naval motor launches made in Valentia*  
Source: Reserve Defence Forces (Ireland) via X, <https://x.com/dfreserve/status/1857499050599395391>

ties.”<sup>151</sup> Procuring equipment made in their own homeland is also viewed as an important expression of their nation’s neutrality, while supporting jobs and promoting local industrial participation.

While there is a thriving defence technology cluster in Northern Ireland, there is also a smaller innovative defence sector in this jurisdiction. For instance, there a number of homegrown companies that work in robotics, boat design and cybersecurity.

Many of these companies manufacture for the Irish Defence Forces and more companies should be supported in doing so.

Regulations need to be updated, the IDA’s and Enterprise Ireland’s mandates<sup>152</sup> need to be changed and a security clearance system for both premises and people need to be established. This would support ethical Irish defence technology companies and further enhance national self-sufficiency.

#### **8. Expand the Ireland-UK Defence Memorandum of Understanding.**

The bilateral relationship between the UK and Ireland is of even greater importance in a post-Brexit landscape where our diplomatic contacts are less frequent. The current Defence Memorandum of Understanding between Ireland and the UK is 10 years old and is expected to be updated in 2026. This is a useful opportunity to further deepen the military co-operation between our two like-minded countries. It would also be a timely occasion to formally agree an air policing arrangement for Irish airspace should the UK be willing to be involved.

As there is a UK Defence Attaché based in the British Embassy in Dublin, Ireland should reciprocate by appointing a Defence Attaché to the Irish Embassy in London without delay.

#### **9. Greater Irish involvement in CSDP and PESCO.**

All EU Member States participate in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), with its significant focus on peace support, crisis management and humanitarian operations abroad.

Such well-resourced missions are particularly suitable for naval and air forces. The benefits accrued by the Irish Army from decades of overseas deployments have been considerable. The Irish Naval Service however has only had one such deployment. The Irish Air Corps has never been assigned operationally to an overseas peace support mission. Accordingly, Irish naval and air assets should be prioritised for future CSDP peace support missions.

<sup>151</sup> The Security Policy Strategy of Switzerland 2026, p.9

<sup>152</sup> The Science and Technology Act 1987, Section 8(5) states that “The Agency shall not engage in or promote any activity of a primarily military relevance without the prior approval of the Government”.

Of the 74 PESCO projects, Ireland only actively participates in six. Considering the very positive effect international defence engagement has had on the Defence Forces, there is a compelling case to be more ambitious. Considering recent events, it is regrettable that Ireland has not yet participated in any of the drone and counter-drone PESCO projects.

Ireland should double the number of PESCO projects it participates in by joining the following six projects:

- Counter Unmanned Aerial System (C-UAS)
- Harbour and Maritime Surveillance Protection
- Cyber Rapid Response Teams and Mutual Assistance in Cyber Security (CRRT)
- European Military Space Surveillance Awareness Network (EU-SSA-N)
- Joint EU Intelligence School (JEIS)
- European Defence Airlift Training Academy (EDA-TA)

#### 10. **Join European Air Transport Command (EATC) in Eindhoven.**

The recent delivery of a new Airbus C295 military transport aircraft to Casement Aerodrome Baldonnel in October 2025 represents a significant capability jump for the Defence Forces. This is the first time Ireland will have a dedicated transport aircraft to move troops, citizens and cargo. For the last 100 years, military personnel have had to depend on the goodwill of other nations to transport their personnel and equipment around the globe.



*Irish Air Corps' new Airbus C-295  
Source: Irish Defence Forces via X*

An opportunity now exists for Ireland to pool its new aircraft and in return, receive formal and structured access to European air transport. Such a proposal was recommended by the Independent Commission on the Defence Forces. The European Air Transport Command<sup>153</sup> is based in Eindhoven. Seven European states participate and make some of their transport aircraft available to fly other nations' personnel. This is on the understanding that they in turn will get access to additional airlift when they themselves require it.

Joining the EATC would significantly improve the Irish Air Corps expertise and experience in strategic airlift. This would aid any future deployment, sustainment and recovery of Irish peacekeeping troops abroad. It would also improve Irish preparedness for the delivery of humanitarian aid or the extraction of Irish citizens during any future international evacuation operation. Significantly, Ireland now has the means to be a net contributor to international evacuation operations and offer seats to other EU countries for the first time in its history.

<sup>153</sup> [www.eatc-mil.com](http://www.eatc-mil.com)

11. **Convene a Citizens' Assembly to review Ireland's obligations under Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union.**

Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union states:

*"If a member state is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States"*

The Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon states that 42.7 does not prejudice the security and defence policy of each Member State and it is up to each Member States to determine the nature of aid or assistance. This has been frequently understood as akin to an 'opt-out', i.e. that we are not obliged to act. However, it does not mean that we would not act voluntarily. This Article causes a particular dilemma for Ireland considering Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its ongoing hybrid campaign across Europe. Should an EU Member State be physically attacked, how should Ireland respond in a manner consistent with its policy of military neutrality? What constitutes an attack? How should other Member States act should Ireland be attacked? What assistance would we be willing to accept from other Member States?

Rather than wait for such an eventuality, a Citizens' Assembly should be convened to debate the topic, listen to expert testimony and make recommendations to the Government. Irish Citizens' Assemblies have been very effective in grappling with controversial and emotive topics in the past. This is another such topic that needs to be addressed in a similarly constructive and respectful manner.

## 8. Conclusion

*“Inter-State war has returned to the continent of Europe and Ireland understands that our geographic position and our policy of military neutrality in itself can no longer mitigate the security risks and threats posed by malign actors.”*<sup>154</sup>

Ireland did not get its independence easily. Now that it has it, it's important to safeguard it.

Like any policy, Ireland's policy of military neutrality must be resourced for it to be successful. Having neither NATO Article 5 protection nor its own credible sovereign deterrent makes Ireland particularly exposed and vulnerable.

The most useful contribution Ireland can make to European security is to protect its own jurisdiction and continue to co-operate extensively with international security partners as it has always done. This approach is not just a feature of Ireland's traditional policy of neutrality but is its very essence. Ireland has, and must, continue to play its part.

To conclude, this paper is intended to generate debate and to continue to normalise the discussion on defence and security. Irrespective of one's position on such matters it is imperative that the on-going discourse is respectful, well-informed and grounded in evidence.

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<sup>154</sup> Defence Policy Review 2024, Government of Ireland, pg. 3.