THE FUTURE OF IRELAND'S MILITARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES WITHIN THE NATO-EU CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

 Irish campaigning groups, including Afri, have long been concerned about what they see as the growing 'militarization' of some Irish foreign policies and actions. This trend is evident in the usage of Shannon airport as a critical staging post for the transit of US troops and supplies involved in the invasion and occupation of Iraq;[1] in the strong *prima facie* evidence that Irish airports have been used for the US policy of 'extraordinary rendition' – the kidnapping and torture of individuals accused of terrorist involvement;[2] and in the growing foothold being established in the Irish economy by companies involved in the commercial arms trade.[3]

While these claims provide an important context against which debates about Irish defence and security policy need to be viewed, it is Ireland's participation in multilateral (NATO and EU) military structures and actions that is the focus of this present paper. The nature of this Irish participation is outlined with reference to both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the EU, with case studies (especially of Kosovo, Afghanistan and Chad) used for illustrative purposes.

NATO

Ireland and NATO

Ireland joined up to NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative in 1999.[4] Irish troops serve at NATO HQ in Brussels under the PfP initiative and participate in training exercises with other NATO forces. Ireland not only uses PfP for training purposes, but Irish troops have served under NATO command, for example in Afghanistan (ISAF,

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[1] Doris, M. (2007) *The Militarisation of Ireland's Foreign and Defence Policy: A Decade of Betrayal and the Challenge of Renewa*l, Afri.

[2] Amnesty International (2008) *State of Denial: Europe's Role in Rendition and Secret Detention*; European Parliament (2007) *Report on the Alleged Use of European Countries by the CIA for the Transportation and Illegal Detention of Prisoners* (2006/2200(INI)), 26th January; Council of Europe (2006) *Alleged Secret Detentions and Unlawful Inter-State Transfers of Detainees Involving Council of Europe Member States*, 12th June; Irish Human Rights Commission (2007) *Extraordinary Rendition: a Review of Ireland's Human Rights Obligations*.

[3] Amnesty International Irish Section (2007) *Controlling a Deadly Trade*.

[4] Franch, S., J. Murray and A. Storey (1999), *Should Ireland Join Nato's Partnership for Peace?*, Afri Position Paper No. 1. PfP membership extends beyond both NATO itself and the EU to embrace most countries in central and eastern Europe.

discussed further below), in Kosovo (KFOR), and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (up to December 2004 when Irish troops came under EU command).

NATO is a highly controversial organisation, seen by its supporters as a bulwark of European and global security, and seen by its critics as a Cold War anachronism that should have been disbanded once that conflict was ended. Debates about its role were highlighted by its controversial intervention vis-à-vis Kosovo in 1999 and subsequent developments in that region.

NATO and Kosovo

The example of Kosovo is a particularly important one because it was the first 'out-of-area' military action waged by NATO as an organisation in its own right, and one that was endorsed by the EU (including Ireland).[5] In the first place, it now seems certain that the entire Kosovo war could have been averted.[6] The Yugoslav government refused to sign the initial (pre-war) Rambouillet peace accord, largely because it contained a NATO-inserted clause that granted NATO troops free access to all Yugoslav territory – this clause was later dropped from the final post-war settlement terms. As Robin Blackburn has observed, "The Serbian delegation, under duress, had been willing to accept the principles of the Rambouillet package, save for the very detailed twenty-fifth chapter on the NATO-led occupation force".[7] The clear implication is that the war was fought because of either a mix-up, or because NATO wanted a war to assert its predominant role in European military and defence arrangements.[8] Former US National Security Advisor Sandy Berger described "bolstering the credibility of NATO" as an objective in its own right of the Kosovo campaign, a factor also openly cited by British Prime Minister Blair at the time.[9] The issue of rationalizing external interventions in the affairs of poor countries for self-serving reasons, discussed in section I of this paper, thus looms large here.

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[5] Maguire, J. (1999) *Defending Peace: For an Alternative to NATO/PfP and a Militarised Europe*, Vote First/Afri, p. 63.

[6] Judah, T. (2000) *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, Yale University Press, 2000.

[7] (1999) 'Kosovo: the War of NATO Expansion', *New Left Review* (235), p. 108.

[8] Lara Marlowe (*Irish Times*, 24th March 2000), reviewing Judah's book (*op. cit.*), leans towards a more conspiratorial interpretation of the evidence than does Judah himself.

[9] Both quoted in Chomsky, N. (2000) *A New Generation Draws the Line: Kosovo, East Timor and the Standards of the West*, Verso, pp. 3, 4.

The conduct of the war was as controversial as its origins. Particularly pertinent here are the allegations of war crimes committed by NATO – such as the killing of fifteen people and the wreaking of damage on a hospital by the cluster bombing of the city of Nis in May 1999;[10] between the end of the war and March 2000 alone, unexploded cluster bombs killed over 50 people in Kosovo.[11] More broadly, there is, at the very least, a strong argument for saying that the Kosovo war accelerated massacres and expulsions already taking place and that it has not contributed to a stable and democratic future for the Balkan region (see below). This is the conclusion arrived at even by an initially enthusiastic supporter of NATO military intervention, Mary Kaldor: "The NATO intervention did not save one Kosovar Albanian. On the contrary, it provided a cover under which the Serbs accelerated ethnic cleansing".[12]

Some of the Kosovars trained by NATO forces as part of that campaign subsequently went on to massacre Serbs.[13] Since 1999, over 200,000 Serbs and other non-Albanians have left Kosovo, while only 16,452 displaced people have returned.[14] Also, US intelligence specifically supported – as part of what was initially an anti-Milosevic strategy and which continued throughout the year 2000 – the Albanian insurgents later to become engaged in a campaign in Macedonia.[15] Writing on the Macedonian conflict, Marianne Osborn describes the "consequences of the Kosovo conflict in Macedonia [as] wide-ranging, severe and profoundly destabilising".[16] NATO and the EU later claimed credit for stifling the Macedonian conflict, an ironic twist given that they had been instrumental in fomenting it in the first place. It was, arguably, the militaristic elements of Kosovar (and later Macedonian) Albanian society that were boosted by the NATO intervention, while the progressive and pacifist Ibrahim Rugova, the late Kosovo President, was marginalised at the time.[17]

NATO intervention has, in summary, according to its critics, generated ongoing instability and violence. Writing in March 2000, the UN Special Investigator for the former Yugoslavia stated, "The bombing hasn't solved any problems… It only multiplied

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[10] Chandler, D. (2000) '"'International Justice'", *New Left Review* 6, pp. 63-4.

[11] Chomsky, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

[12] *Observer*, 18th July 1999, cited in Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

[13] Norton-Taylor, R., *Guardian*, 29th March 2001.

[14] Bancroft, I., *Guardian*, 19th February 2008.

[15] Beaumont, P., E. Vulliamy and P. Beaver, *Observer*, 11th March 2001.

[16] Osborne, M. (2003) *International Intervention and Conflict in Macedonia: Causing Problems… Claiming Solutions*, Afri.

[17] *Ibid.*

the existing problems and created new ones".[18] These problems have recently come once more to the fore in the wake of Kosovo's declaration of independence:

> "After nine years of NATO occupation under a nominal UN administration, crime-ridden Kosovo is more ethnically divided than ever, boasts 50% unemployment and hosts a US military base described by the EU's human rights envoy as a 'smaller version of Guantanamo'".[19]

Furthermore, critics argue that independence for Kosovo opens a pandora's box of potential secessionism and violence throughout the Balkans and elsewhere.[20] Russia explicitly cited the Kosovo precedent as a justification for its support to secessionist regions in Georgia in the summer of 2008.[21]

NATO and Afghanistan

Other NATO interventions are, of course, also controversial, perhaps especially that in Afghanistan (ISAF), which has been characterized by high levels of civilian casualties, as well as concerns about human rights abuses and the resurgence of the drugs trade.[22] The example of Afghanistan has become especially pertinent in the light of Irish soldiers' now documented involvement in the conflict.[23]

One Irish Defence Forces officer is attached to a NATO-led cell in Kabul analyzing insurgents' 'improvised explosive devices' (IEDs) and how NATO casualties from their deployment might be minimized. This cell has concluded that the IEDs are, at least partly, making use of Iranian materials and expertise and are being brought into Afghanistan by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. An Irish officer is also involved in propaganda campaigns against the Taliban, and two others work in the operations section of the ISAF HQ.

Does such involvement by Irish troops contribute to security and development? Tom Clonan[24] suggests that it certainly does contribute to Ireland's own security and well-

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[18] Cited in Chomsky, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[19] Milne, S., *Guardian*, 28th February 2008.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] See, for example, Singh, T., *New Europe*, 20th October 2008.

[22] See, for example, Feffer, J., *Foreign Policy in Focus,* 28th February 2008.

[23] Clonan, T., *Irish Times*, 24th October 2008.

[24] *Ibid.*

being, pointing to the fact that the Taliban is financing its anti-NATO campaign by selling heroin that ends up in Irish, amongst other, cities. He also cites NATO and EU intelligence staff who claim that IEDs developed and honed in Afghanistan could ultimately be used in terror attacks in Europe against countries perceived to be a part of the 'war on terror' (presumably including Ireland).

Yet an alternative argument would be that if the Taliban (formerly a strong opponent of the heroin trade) is financing its insurgency through heroin sales, then the quickest route to ending such sales is to end the insurgency – by ending the occupation and/or negotiating directly with the Taliban (as may now be occurring).[25] In any event, the anti-heroin credentials of NATO forces are cast into doubt by the fact that several post-Taliban government figures (who are thus at least partially NATO allies) have a long history of involvement in the drugs trade.[26] Likewise, the argument that Ireland's own security is protected by involvement in Afghanistan is at least open to debate: does not such involvement actively *render* Ireland a target for terror attacks by radical groups inflamed by Western invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan?

The anger against the West is exacerbated by the scale of the civilian casualties in Afghanistan – the number killed directly by the US and other NATO forces since 2006 is an estimated 3,273, and in 2008 alone some three Afghan civilians have died through actions by NATO and the US for every occupation soldier killed.[27] British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has stated that "What you [British troops] are doing here [in Afghanistan] prevents terrorism coming to the streets of Britain", but Seamus Milne claims that "The opposite is the case" – Western actions in Afghanistan motivate those planning acts of terror in Britain.[28] Might Irish participation in such missions risk the same kind of backlash in Ireland? (And this risk might be heightened if there is seen to be Irish involvement in a 'dossier' claiming to link Iran to attacks in Afghanistan (see above), a dossier that might conceivably be used to justify an attack on Iran). In other words, could it be the case that Irish military policy contributes not only to underdevelopment and insecurity in Afghanistan, but also in Ireland itself?

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[25] Grey, A., *Reuters*, 29th October 2008.

[26] Ali, T. (2008) 'Afghanistan: Mirage of the Good War', *New Left Review* (50)

[27] Milne, S., *Guardian*, 16th October 2008. For a detailed itemization of civilian casualties, see Human Rights Watch (2008) *"Troops in Contact": Airstrikes and Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan*.

[28] Milne, *op. cit.*, 16th October.

EU

The EU's Emerging Military Networks and Capacities

Such rapid change has been occurring in the defence and security policies of the EU that, by 2001, one group of commentators could refer to "Europe's Military Revolution", and state that "there is little doubt that the EU has started off on the path to becoming a military power to be reckoned with".[29]

The EU has by now well established structures in place for defence and security co-ordination. Under the broad rubric of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), there is a full-time EU Military Staff (EUMS) headquartered in Brussels which is responsible for 'command and control' of EU military capabilities – this reports to an EU Military Committee, which in turn reports to the EU Political and Security Committee and from thence upwards to the EU Council of Ministers. Irish army officers serve with the EUMS, and Ireland is represented at all other levels of this network. For example, a representative of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs sits on the Political and Security Committee, responsible for day-to-day co-ordination of the CFSP; and an Irish army officer sits as the representative of the Irish chief of staff on the Military Committee.

In the Lisbon Treaty, a new section entitled 'Provisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy' aimed to bring all elements of the EU's emergent security and defence policy, including the structures described above, within a formal Treaty framework. EU military and civilian assets are to be drawn upon for external missions of "peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter."[30] (The vagueness of references to the United Nations, evident in the preceding extract, is returned to below).

These structures were foreshadowed in the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997; article J.7 of that Treaty stated:

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[29] Andréani, G, C. Bertram and C. Grant (2001) *Europe's Military Revolution*, Centre for European Reform, p. 7.

[30] See Quille, G. (2008) 'The Lisbon Treaty and its Implications for CFSP/ESDP', Briefing Paper prepared for the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence, 4th February.

> "The common foreign and security policy shall include all questions relating to the security of the Union, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy... Questions referred to in this Article shall include humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks, and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking" [the so-called Petersberg Tasks].

EU leaders initially agreed that by 2003, they would be in a position to deploy a 60,000 strong EU military force drawn from member state armies, capable of being deployed within 60 days and maintained in the field for at least a year. It was to have an operational radius of 4,000 kilometres from EU borders.[31] This concept has subsequently been modified into that of 'battle groups', smaller and more mobile forces capable of being deployed within 15 days of agreement by the EU Council of Ministers.

A battle group[32] is a "battalion sized force and reinforced with Combat Support and Combat Service Support elements" which is "designed for a range of possible missions". One battle group will be composed of "+/- 1500 troops" capable of being sustained in the field for 30 days, extendable to 120 days if "re-supplied appropriately". "Prior training and interoperability" are required, and one of its requirements is that it "could be on request of the UN or under UN mandate". Its "potential area" is "outside EU (possibly for long range operations)".

Ireland, along with Sweden, Norway, Finland and Estonia, is a member of the EU's Nordic Battlegroup; Sweden and Finland share Ireland's (nominally) neutral status, while Norway and Estonia are members of NATO. The first EU Battlegroup deployment – to Chad (discussed further below) – is under the command of an Irish Lieutenant General.

The Range of Tasks

The EU's military architecture is claimed to be intended to deal only with the Petersberg Tasks (see above). These, however, potentially constitute a very wide agenda for action. The definition of a humanitarian task, or indeed of peacemaking, is by no means clear-cut: one military analyst has described as "grotesque" the description of an eleven week

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[31] Institute of European Affairs (2000) *European Foreign and Security Policy Newsletter* 3, p. 1.

[32] Quotes in this paragraph are drawn from the EU Council Secretariat Fact Sheet, *Battlegroups,* EU BG 01,
November 2005, http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/BattlegroupsNov05factsheet.pdf

bombing campaign vis-à-vis Kosovo (discussed above) as a humanitarian intervention, but that is exactly how it was described.[33]

Under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty, the range of tasks that EU forces may engage in was to be even further widened to constitute a sort of 'Petersberg Plus'. Article 28B states that EU forces may be deployed on:

> "Joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, <u>military advice and assistance tasks</u>, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilization. All these tasks may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by <u>supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories</u>" (emphasis added).

The underlined text identifies the *new* tasks EU (including Irish) forces could perform. A concern here is that external interventions by the EU are being given a very wide (potential) legitimizing framework and agenda for action. For example, claiming to be assisting a third country government to combat terrorism through the provision of military advice and assistance raises fears of autocratic rulers being facilitated to suppress opposition (a prospect discussed further below in the contact of the intervention in Chad).

'Structured Cooperation', the Question of a UN Mandate and the Relationship with NATO

There is no EU Treaty stipulation for an EU military intervention to have a UN *mandate* in place; Ireland, consistent with the so-called 'triple lock' mechanism,[34] continues to insist that its own troops would never be deployed without such a mandate. Minister for Defence Willie O'Dea has claimed that:

> "The triple-lock of UN, Government and Dáil approval will continue. Participation of our troops in individual missions will be decided by our own national decision-making process, on a case-by-case basis. A UN mandate will be

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[33] MccGwire, M. (2000) 'Why Did We Bomb Belgrade?', *International Affairs* 76 (1), p. 22.

[34] The Irish Government moved to assuage concerns about Ireland's increasing enmeshment in EU military structures through Declarations attached to the Nice Treaty in the run-up to the second Nice Treaty referendum in 2002. These declarations stipulated that Ireland may only participate in an EU military action if it is UN-mandated, and if there is both government and Dáil approval (the 'triple lock' mechanism).

a pre-requisite for our participation in any battlegroup peace support operation, just as it is now."[35]

But, under proposals for so-called 'structured cooperation', there is nothing to prevent troops from other countries (backed up, in effect, by Irish planning and financial resources) drawing on the support of the EU infrastructure to launch such an intervention. In the Lisbon Treaty, for example, in contrast to its relative neglect of the UN (rhetorically cited, but substantively absent),[36] a protocol on 'structured co-operation' declares that "a more assertive union [EU] role ... will contribute to the vitality of a renewed Atlantic Alliance [NATO], in accordance with the Berlin Plus arrangements (the sharing of EU and NATO military assets) ...". A NATO-EU Capability Group helps ensure that EU military resources are made available to NATO, and vice versa.[37] The NATO Secretary-General has stated that he "would like to see much more pooling of our [NATO and EU] capabilities, especially in areas such as… transport helicopters, or in research and development, or in harmonizing our force structures and training methods".[38] Many commentators have concerns about enhancing the vitality of NATO because of its track record in the Balkans and Afghanistan (see above) and the fact that it retains a commitment to the 'first use' of nuclear weapons.

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[35] *Irish Times,* 10th February 2006.

[36] Save for "a number of more or less vague formulations about acting in accordance with principles of the UN Charter and the important role of the Security Council" – Sjostedt, J. (2008) 'The Lisbon Treaty – Centralization and Neoliberalism', paper prepared for the Swedish Delegation of the European United Left and Nordic Green Left groupings at the European Parliament, p. 13.

[37] See, Imbrie, A. (2008) 'NATO and the Afghan Insurgency: Looking Ahead to Bucharest', BASIC Papers on International Security Policy, 25th March.

[38] Quoted in John, M. (2008), *Reuters*, 15th March.

The EU Intervention in Chad

The EU's military intervention in Chad (EUFOR), ostensibly intended to protect refugees from the Sudan and displaced people within Chad itself, involves over 400 Irish soldiers.[39] French troops stationed in Chad have for many years been instrumental in keeping the dictator Idriss Déby in power. When Déby's regime was attacked in January 2008, French troops helped defend the airport, directly fired on rebels, and ferried ammunition to government troops. French Green MEP Marie-Anne Isler-Béguin claims that "At the moment, we [France] are basically supporting a dictator", a contention supported by the NGO Survie France which accuses the French government of protesting Déby's persecution and detention of political opponents under the cover of the rebel attacks while consistently providing him with the wherewithal to make such repression possible.[40]

Déby's regime is not only corrupt and repressive, it also helps foment conflict in Darfur in the neighbouring Sudan. The Human Rights Watch *World Report* for 2008 states that:

> "The Chadian government has been responsible for human rights abuses against both combatants and non-combatants during military operations against Darfur-based rebel groups. In northern and northeastern Chad insurgents wounded or captured during a rebel offensive in late 2006 were subject to summary execution and torture at the hands of Chadian government soldiers. In the southeast civilians complain of extrajudicial killings, rape, beatings, arbitrary arrests, extortion and property theft in the wake of counterinsurgency sweeps conducted by government security forces, including government-backed militia groups. These violations have been met by near total impunity and have forced thousands of civilians into involuntary displacement, both internally and across the border into Sudan".[41]

Rebels in Chad – themselves guilty of human rights abuses – see the French as their enemy, hardly surprisingly given the activities of French forces over the years. It is feared that the rebels will not distinguish between French troops shoring up Déby and those nominally serving under an EU flag. Dutch members of parliament have expressed

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[39] This section is partly based on articles in the *Irish Times* by Lara Marlowe on 28th and 29th January, and 20th March, 2008.

[40] In Cronin, D. (2008) 'Supporting a Dictator in Chad', *Inter Press Service*, 31st March, and press release from Survie France 'Chad: Disappearance of Inbi Oumar Mahamat Saleh; France once again compromised', 5th September 2008.

[41] Available at http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/chad17744.htm

concern about Dutch participation in the mission for precisely this reason.[42] A German MEP has, for similar reasons, described the EU mission as "highly irresponsible".[43]

A report for the Small Arms Survey provides the clearest documentation to date of the extent to which the EUFOR Mission was designed to further French foreign policy objectives by 'multilateralising' French support for the Chadian regime, and concludes that "If French support for the Chadian government persists, there is a real risk that EUFOR will become a party to this conflict".[44] There are some indications that, to date, Irish and other EUFOR troops *may* have been able to establish their neutrality to some of the Chadian rebel groups.[45]

Nonetheless, the fact remains that intelligence is shared between the EU force and longer-standing French contingents, while existing French assets (including aircraft and camp facilities) have been made available to the EU operation. More than half the EU force is French; and while an Irishman has overall command of the operation, his headquarters is in France and the commander of forces on the ground is French: "The neutrality of the force is more and more open to question given the pre-eminence of French troops in its ranks".[46] As a leading expert on France's Africa policy has put it, "Idriss Déby is hanging to power by the skin of his teeth but he is likely to hang on only as long as Paris and Brussels continue to support him under some kind of a pseudo-humanitarian face-saving dispensation."[47]

Might Ireland's relatively oft-cited record of impartial participation in UN peacekeeping be compromised by participation in EU operations that could serve as fig-leaves for the promotion of the interests of the French state, or of other EU states? The question has relevance for the security and development of people in Chad and elsewhere in the

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[42] As reported on www.euobserver.com, 19th March 2008.

[43] In Cronin, *op. cit.*

[44] Tubiana, J. (2008) *The Chad-Sudan Proxy War and the 'Darfurization' of Chad: Myths and Reality*, Small Arms Survey, p. 58. This scenario should be seen against the backdrop of frequent criticisms of French foreign policy towards Africa in particular, with French diplomatic or commercial interests being seen to override humanitarian or developmental considerations in countries such as Rwanda and the Central African Republic; see, for example, Prunier, G. (1995) *The Rwanda Crisis 1959-1994: History of a Genocide*, Hurst and Company, and Munie, V. (2008) 'Central African Republic: France's Long Hand', *allAfrica*, 29th May.

[45] *Sunday Business Post*, 22nd June 2008.

[46] Tubiana, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[47] Prunier, G. (2008) 'Chad: Between Sudan's Blitzkrieg and Darfur's War', www.opendemocracy.net, 19th February.

Global South, and whether existing military entanglements are the best means of promoting such ends.

CONCLUSION

Concerns about the trends evident in Irish military and defence policy may be summarized as follows.

First, through closer association with NATO, Ireland could be argued to be endorsing a militaristic and interventionist approach to international security (evident in the Kosovo and Afghan interventions) that rationalizes the external restructuring of poorer countries and turns them into *de facto* colonies of Western powers, while fuelling anger in the non-Western world in ways that could rebound negatively on Western (including Irish) security.

Second, by expanding the range of tasks that EU and Irish forces may engage in overseas (and the reasons that may be adduced to justify such interventions), Ireland is opening itself up to participation in self-serving interventions designed to extend, at least in part, the interests of Western powers (such as those of France vis-à-vis Chad) rather than the genuine development and security interests of people in developing countries.

The period of reflection following the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty provides us with an opportunity to change course, and to move towards, at the very least, a less aggressive and militaristic policy stance. It is an opportunity we should seize wholeheartedly.