

Chief of Staff's Introductory Remarks -
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence
15th November 2018

A Cathaoirleach agus a Dhaoíní Uaisle, ba mhaith liom ar dtús mo bhuíochas a ghabháil libh as ucht an cuireadh a thug sibh dom labhairt anseo inniú.

I am honoured to address you today and I thank you for your invitation. I would also like to introduce the other members of the General Staff who join me today, Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) Major General Kevin Cotter and Assistant Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Peter O'Halloran. Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations) Major General Kieran Brennan is currently on duty in South Lebanon.

Today I will speak about the magnificent men and women that comprise *Óglaigh na hÉireann*, and the importance of continuing to attract, develop, retain and, above all, value our personnel. I will speak about our transformation programme and its importance in ensuring resilience in a world of ever-increasing complexity. When I close I will be happy to take your questions. But first I will begin by outlining some of the threats that Ireland faces in the defence and security domain and how we respond.

The Defence Forces are a key component of the State's security architecture and the bedrock that underpins our sovereignty. We operate against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving security and threat environment - according to the Global Peace Index, while Ireland is in the top 5% of most peaceful countries, 2018 is the fourth successive year in global peace deterioration. This new environment presents risks to national and international peace and security, and includes threats posed by:

- state and non-state actors;
- hybrid threats cross cutting a number of sectors (including cyber and espionage);
- national and transnational violent extremism, terrorism and organised crime;
- environmental factors such as climate change and global population growth; and
- the uncertainty associated with Brexit.

A key responsibility of the Defence Forces is remaining 'fit for purpose' in this ever changing security environment. The DF plays its part in addressing these threats by two main means - by maintaining appropriate military capabilities and by providing military advice to the Minister and the Government.

In order to maintain appropriate military capabilities, our personnel use our unique range of assets on land, sea and air to provide the military capability to defend Ireland and its assigned interests internationally¹. We do this for example by supporting An Garda Síochána in Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP). In 2017 alone, we conducted in excess of 3,400 ATCP operations on foot of requests from the Gardaí. We provide specialist services such as Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance support, Special Operations Forces contingent capability and Engineer Special Search Teams. We secure vital installations and provide escorts. Our Navy and Air Corps patrol our maritime jurisdiction, one of the most hostile in the world. They also carry out maritime defence and security operations, in an area almost three times the size of Germany at almost one million square kilometres, upholding our sovereign rights in particular in fisheries and countering illegal narcotics as well as delivering specialist diving services. To date in 2018, our Air Corps have carried out over 4,500 missions, delivering Emergency Aeromedical Support as well as many other services such as cross border support in fire-fighting. As you might

¹ In line with White Paper 2015, the mission of the DF is "to provide the military capability to defend Ireland and assigned interests internationally".

expect we train for evolving threats², remaining operationally ready to deliver robust military capabilities. Our work in Aid to the Civil Authority³ (ATCA) also helps to keep the Irish people safe, and to protect their livelihoods⁴, as we have seen across the country during recent severe weather events.

Internationally, this year, Ireland celebrates its 60th year of unbroken service with the UN in some of the most volatile areas in the World, an unparalleled record and a remarkable achievement for such a small State. We have completed nearly 70,000 individual tours of duty overseas⁵, with 87 members of Óglaigh na hÉireann paying the ultimate price. We have added to Ireland's reputation as a major contributor to international peace, security and humanitarian efforts⁶ and proven Ireland's commitment to the principles of the UN⁷ and of the EU⁸ and in particular to multilateralism. Apart from delivering on Government policy⁹ and contributing to international peace and security and conflict resolution, our overseas service is vital to the maintenance of our operational capabilities, so that we are better able to perform at home in the delivery of defence, security and government services. Our Peacekeeping record is a key strand of the Government's strategy for securing a seat on the UN Security Council and I was pleased earlier this year to attend the launch of Ireland's bid in New York. As I speak to you today we have a battalion operating with UNIFIL in South Lebanon, a Quick Reaction Force operating in Western Syria with UNDOF, and a training team operating in Mali with the EU mission there. Over the last three years we have had a Naval Service ship operating in the Mediterranean, and in that context have been involved in the rescue of about 18,000 civilians, including many vulnerable women and children.

The other way that we play our part in addressing current threats is through the provision of military advice, sometimes verbally, other times written. In either case the General Staff provides this advice in a professional, considered manner, on foot of evidenced-based analysis¹⁰. I offer considered military advice on behalf of the General Staff to inform Ministerial and Governmental decisions. Once those decisions are made, we provide the leadership, implementing those decisions in full, obeying all lawful orders without fear or favour, as is our duty.

I want to say a few words about our people, of whom I am immensely proud. The Defence Forces is a unique organisation and is different from any other public service body. Our personnel have no rights to join a trade union, they have no right to strike, can be called upon 24/7/365¹¹ and are subject to military law. They have an unlimited liability contract, which requires them to face hardship and danger for the benefit of others. For all these reasons, I need to continue to ensure:

- that our personnel are trained and developed to the highest national and international standards¹²;
- that our personnel are provided with the very best personal and professional supports, equipment and facilities, and,
- that our personnel are valued.

² Such as during Exercise 'Ullamh' last year.

³ Our assistance to national and local authorities in times of crisis proves yet again our relevance to the people of Ireland - turning our aspiration to "*Strengthen Our Nation*" into reality.

⁴ The Government's Summer Economic Statement underlines the need to build capacity to withstand shocks, to take measures that enhance the resilience of the economy and to preserve a safe and secure environment. DF efforts in both ATCP and ATCA contribute to this 'whole of government' approach, and help to protect both the citizen and the Irish economy.

⁵ On average this year, the DF has had over 600 personnel serving overseas in 13 different missions in 13 countries and on one sea.

⁶ The UN has often specifically requested Irish troops and commanders for demanding and sensitive roles.

⁷ For example, by providing human rights, gender and protection of civilians training to the Malian Armed Forces.

⁸ In Mali for example, the EU Training Mission is helping the host nation authorities to tackle these security challenges at source, while at the same time promoting the EU integrated approach.

⁹ In the coming years, for example, the DF will play its part in implementing the *Global Ireland 2025* plan, to increase the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint.

¹⁰ Cabinet Committee 'F' provides another forum for the provision of military advice.

¹¹ Military personnel do not earn overtime, but do receive military service and other allowances.

¹² This must include the provision of opportunities for continuous personal and professional development.

Our personnel are highly skilled professionals, whether serving in line or technical appointments. Their rigorous training, education and development, their unparalleled operational experience, their diplomatic skills, their loyalty, their can-do attitude and their unflinching devotion to duty is of immense value and a unique strength of our State. These outstanding qualities have made them highly sought-after by employers in both the state and private sector¹³. While the reinvestment of these skills back to civil society strengthens Ireland, a key challenge facing the Defence Forces today is the retention of appropriate levels of highly skilled and experienced men and women, both line and technical. Similar to other areas of the public service, the process of restoring pay to the level that pertained before the economic downturn has commenced. Although this pay restoration is welcome, we are competing in a very buoyant jobs market, and current rates of pay present significant challenges for our personnel, and therefore for our organisation.

The recruitment and retention challenges facing the Defence Forces were recognised in the Public Sector Pay Commission report of May 2017. Subsequently, Government tasked the Pay Commission with examining these issues in more detail. In this context the General Staff has worked with Departmental Officials to prepare a joint submission to the Commission. As the work of the Commission is underway it would be inappropriate to go into the detail of the submission. However as Chief of Staff, together with my colleagues on the General Staff, I hope to have the opportunity to address the Commission in the coming months. I look forward to the outcome of the Commission's work, which I hope will provide the basis for addressing these issues in the Defence Forces.

On a related matter, recently the Minister published the Report of the Review of the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Forces¹⁴. This provides a means for the determination of claims and proposals from the representative and official sides relating to remuneration and conditions of service¹⁵. I must commend our representative associations, RACO and PDFORRA - they are essential stakeholders in this process. I also commend RDFRA.

All that said, there is more to retention than pay, and we have been working very hard on advancing a wide range of initiatives to improve non-pay retention factors. For example, with the Department of Defence, we have been reviewing service contracts and in the New Year we hope to play our part in reviewing our promotion system, in cooperation with the Representative Associations.

For our part, I have been implementing various family friendly initiatives, such as postings closer to home and three month overseas appointments. We have also been:

- improving our internal communications;
- placing more emphasis on health and well-being;
- enhancing opportunities for the personal and professional development of our people;
- driving our innovation programme¹⁶, including through the Chief of Staff's Innovation Awards; and
- We have been working to embed our values in everything we do, through our Values Champions Awards and our Values in Action programme.

Notwithstanding all these positive developments, we are still facing significant challenges. This is why we need:

¹³ The DF is now competing for talent in an economy where the employment rate is close to its highest level ever (Source - Summer Economic Statement of DPER and Department of Finance).

¹⁴ DF personnel have access to representation through RACO and PDFORRA, access to a statutory redress of wrongs scheme and to the Defence Forces' Ombudsman.

¹⁵ The General Staff engaged with the Chairman and worked in partnership with him, Department of Defence colleagues and all other stakeholders as he prepared his report which was published on 2nd Oct 2018.

¹⁶ Apart from improving our capabilities, our work in this space should also lead in time to commercial spin-offs that will contribute to employment, economic growth and stability. It also enables us to prepare for the future and helps us to look beyond the walls of our installations. For this reason, the Defence Organisation has established a Defence Enterprise Committee and has been creating Innovation Networks with like-minded organisations.

- to attract the best talent, especially when there is a buoyant jobs market in competing sectors;
- to nurture job satisfaction by acknowledging the quality of our personnel, the demanding nature of their roles and their unique loyalty and commitment to the State; and
- to ensure that the Government and the Citizen get the best return on the significant investment that the State has made into their training, education and expertise.

Finally I want to touch briefly on the issue of Transformation. So that we can develop both our capabilities and our people, we will continue to implement our strategic plans and to give military advice on the allocation of Defence resources. As it states in the White Paper, Ireland's investment in Defence is low relative to international comparisons. Against the backdrop of the evolving threat environment, we will continue to make the best use of our allocated resources, for instance through our capital investment programme:

- In the Army, the emphasis is on force protection¹⁷;
- In the Air Corps, on new aircraft¹⁸;
- While in the Naval Service, the focus is also on fleet replacement¹⁹.

Of course, one of the main ways in which we are transforming is through implementation of the policy decisions contained in the 2015 White Paper on Defence²⁰. For example, we have projects on-going that focus on:

- The doubling of the Army Ranger Wing;
- High level command and control of the Defence Forces;
- Strategic HR policies;
- The proposed Institute for Peace Support and Leadership;
- our built infrastructure²¹;
- our Veterans;
- our Gender, Equality and Diversity Agenda²²; and
- our Reserve Defence Forces.

On the subject of the Reserve, as a former reservist myself I am particularly proud of the excellent contribution that the RDF has made to Óglaigh na hÉireann over many years. In recent times they have proven their worth again and again, providing real added value both in terms of manpower (during Storm Emma) and technical expertise (for example in Cyber Defence). Our intention is to do more to make the most of our Reserve personnel, who have a huge amount to contribute. To that end I have recently appointed a Director with specific responsibility for the Reserve, and we are continuing to work on improving our Single Force Framework to maximise the utility of the RDF, for example through the proposed Specialist Reserve.

Under the leadership of the Minister with Responsibility for Defence in keeping with my responsibility under the Defence Act and working with the Secretary General, I am absolutely

¹⁷ For example, the refurbishment of our Armoured Personnel Carriers, the procurement of armoured utility and logistics vehicles, and the planned purchase of new, improved body armour.

¹⁸ This is with a view to improving our air capabilities and capacity for joint operations.

¹⁹ This includes a large multirole vessel that will provide more scope for enhanced joint and humanitarian operations.

²⁰ The White Paper Programme consists of 94 projects that should be completed over the 10 year notional lifespan of the programme. By the end of this year, we hope to have about 12 projects completed and closed, and roughly 50% of all projects will either be completed or active.

²¹ Military authorities have been working with their counterparts in the Department of Defence on delivering an ambitious programme to modernise our facilities, including accommodation, training facilities and medical aid posts. This plan aims to redress reduced investment in these facilities during the recessionary period.

²² For many years *Óglaigh Na hÉireann* has been a public sector leader in the practical application of Ireland's policies on Gender, Equality and Diversity. We see the recruitment of more females for the DF as a critical capability issue. While we still have some way to go, especially on gender balance, our approach in this space is so advanced that we have been assisting other countries with their policies, for example, the Canadian Peacekeeping Training Centre. I am happy to report that the DF LGBTQA network was established in 2016. In the international arena, we have used the National Action Plan on UNSCR1325 to inform the development of our own Action Plan, now in its second iteration.

committed to nurturing a vibrant Defence Forces, both permanent and reserve, that continues to meet the Constitutional requirements of Government and the expectations of the citizen.

I want to close today by acknowledging again that we have been dealing with some significant challenges in recent years. During that time, there has been one constant - that is the absolute loyalty, dedication and professionalism of our soldiers, sailors and aircrew, of whom we should all be rightly proud. They are the reason why the DF is one of the most trusted institutions in the Irish public service²³. The certainty that they have provided since independence has been done within a resource envelope that represents excellent value for money for the Irish citizen. They continue to be key guarantors of the defence, security and wellbeing of the Irish People and the sovereignty of the Republic.

As the World evolves, so too must we evolve so that we remain 'fit for purpose' in the 21st Century. So that we can transform, I will continue to advocate on the need to be competitive enough to retain our experienced personnel, both line and technical, and to attract new entrants, so that we can guarantee defence and security services for the State and for every Irish citizen.

- whether it is on land, in our airspace or hundreds of miles offshore,
- whether it is overseas service in conflict zones,
- or at home ensuring national security and resilience...

Our men and women stand ready, in the best traditions of Óglaigh na hÉireann, to "*strengthen our nation by inspiring pride and leading excellence*".

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee today and I am very happy to take questions from the committee members.

²³ For example, according to data contained in the *Generation Why?* survey conducted across Europe amongst under 35s.