

Strategic Narratives in Ireland's Defence Forces

A research project by Dr. John Hogan, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Ireland has a long and distinguished tradition of military service, both at home and abroad. From contributions to United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world to the Defence Forces' roles in protecting the state and supporting Irish foreign policy, that service has taken many forms. But what shapes how Irish soldiers think about defence and security? And does the official view – the one reflected in military doctrine and government policy – match the experiences and perspectives of those who have actually served?

This project sets out to answer those questions. It compares the *official* approach to defence and security – as set out in Defence Forces doctrine and government policy – with the *lived* approach: the values, beliefs, and narratives that soldiers themselves have developed through their careers and experiences.

Official positions on how and why Ireland engages in peacekeeping and other defence activities are relatively well documented. What is less explored is how those positions are understood, interpreted, or sometimes questioned by the men and women who serve. Soldiers may share the broad goals of official policy, but they may also have views that differ in important ways – on tactics, on Ireland's role in the world, on what makes the Irish approach to defence distinctive, or on aspects of service that official documents simply don't capture.

A number of factors are commonly cited as shaping Ireland's approach to defence and security – among them, Ireland's own history as a colonised nation, its membership of the European Union, and its long-standing commitment to international law and neutrality. This project is interested in whether and how those factors resonate with soldiers themselves, and what narratives – perhaps less visible in official policy – emerge from their experiences on the ground.

To carry out this research, I am hoping to speak with active and retired members of the Irish Defence Forces. The retired officers of the Association of Retired Commissioned Officers represent an invaluable source of experience and insight, and I would welcome the opportunity to speak with any members who are willing to share their perspectives. Interviews will be conversational in nature, and participants are welcome to raise any issues they consider relevant to Ireland's approach to defence and security.

This project has received full ethics approval from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Participants' anonymity is guaranteed, and all interview data will be stored and handled in accordance with appropriate ethical standards.

If you are interested in taking part, or would like more information, please contact Dr. John Hogan at j.hogan@vu.nl.