

Ireland on the Coattails of NATO

By [News Beacon Ireland](#)

Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

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by Shannonwatch

It will probably surprise many people to know that at least seven Irish Government officials, including one military officer, attended events related to the NATO Summit in Newport, Wales this week. It didn't get much coverage in the mainstream Irish media, probably because the government told them not to cover it, but it's something that should be highlighted and challenged.

In answer to a question from Clare Daly TD, Simon Coveney who is our Minister for Agriculture and other stuff that the government doesn't think is very important (food, the marine and defence), explained that Ireland was invited to attend two meetings at Newport, one for contributors to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, and one for Defence Ministers from what are called "Partner" countries.

He went on to explain that in accordance with "usual practice", an invitation was extended to the Taoiseach [Prime minister] to attend a meeting "on the margins of the NATO Summit between NATO Heads of State and Government and non-NATO countries that contribute to the ISAF mission". This meeting took place on Thursday, 4 September and Ireland was represented at it by a senior official from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

A total of four officials from DFAT attended the Not-Quite-NATO-But-Would-Like-To-Be meetings which were held "in advance of the Summit" (lest anyone think they had anything to do with the Summit!). And Minister Coveney, along with three officials from the Department of Defence (one military), attended the Defence Ministers meeting.

The Minister went on to give the following by way of reassuring explanation for why Ireland was at the NATO get-together:

"Ireland's relations with NATO are conducted within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and Partnership for Peace (PfP), which we joined in 1999. Our continued participation in both of these foras enables us to continue to develop the capabilities of Ireland's Permanent Defence Force for peacekeeping, conflict prevention and crisis management operations under UN mandates, thus improving the quality of our contribution to UN missions and to UN-mandated missions led by regional organisations such as the EU and NATO. The EAPC is a forum for consultation involving all PfP participants on a wide range of issues, from peacekeeping to women, peace and security to disaster relief."

Before getting into peacekeeping, women, security and disaster relief, here's a reminder of

what PfP and EAPC are all about. The following succinct description is taken from the [Swedish government offices website](#) (emphasis added here):

“PfP was created in 1994 as concrete military and confidence-building security cooperation in Europe. PfP is a practically oriented programme for cooperation between NATO and non-NATO countries in Europe, Central Asia and southern Caucasus. **For some countries the partnership has been a preparation for NATO membership.** For other countries, such as Sweden, it has instead been the prime instrument for developing the military and civil interoperability that countries must have in order to be able to contribute to international crisis management and peace support operations.”

EAPC, which was set up in 1997 is described as

“... the political framework for PfP cooperation. It is a forum for consultation on various issues between NATO and Partner countries. **EAPC and PfP are not independent institutions but are linked to the NATO structure.** The basic principle for this cooperation is voluntary participation, which means that each individual Partner country decides the extent of its involvement in this cooperation.”

So back to Minister Coveney’s newset favourite topics of peacekeeping, women, security and disaster relief. PfP and EAPC’s big brother NATO has engaged in a series of military actions around the globe that has not only impinged upon the sovereignty of other nations, but has proved to be a serious threat to them all. Their 2011 air strikes in Libya, for example, were responsible for dozens of civilian deaths including women, children and other non-combatants in an externally instigated civil conflict according to a 2012 [Human Rights Watch report](#). The human rights organisation charged NATO with failure to investigate its unlawful attacks, and with ignoring the civilian deaths.

Much of what we read about NATO gives a different impression – like the [article by Ellen Hallams and Benjamin Schreer](#) which was published in the supposedly independent Chatham House’s *International Affairs* journal. It claims that the air strikes were “instrumental in protecting civilians and ousting the Qadhafi regime” but neglects to mention the civilian deaths from the air strikes. But the article does reveal the true purpose of NATO. It describes its role as one of “burden-sharing” from a US perspective, noting that projected US defence cuts of up to \$1 trillion over the coming decade will inevitably lead to greater expectations of their European allies. US leadership of NATO is culturally and structurally deeply embedded within the alliance it claims. As such, the only role that NATO and the satellite structures like PfP and EAPC play is to further US imperialist interests globally.

Finally, one wonders if Minister Coveney has talked to anyone in Libya about peacekeeping and conflict prevention. Has he asked the women of Afghanistan or Iraq, where thousands have been forced to change religion, and have been abused and murdered as a direct or indirect result of invasion by the US and its NATO burden-sharing allies, what they think of their efforts in support of women, peace and security?

We suspect not.

However since Minister Coveney is a member of a political party that has discussed opening

accession talks with NATO, we imagine he may have been quite happy to be at the party in Wales. He may not have been very focused on the lucrative arms trading that has become a feature of NATO membership and “partnering”, but there are plenty of companies here that are. And we suspect that he would not have objected to the part of the [NATO Summit Declaration](#) that says they agree to “reverse the trend of declining defence budgets, to make the most effective use of our funds and to further a more balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities”.

Our Fine Gael/Labour government is more than happy to “share responsibilities” with NATO. But the evidence from polls conducted in recent years indicates that the Irish people are not. It goes against their humanity and their experience of oppression. It puts them on the side of aggression and it makes them complicit in the death and suffering of too many people.

And thats why we need to highlight and challenge the government\media message that its ok to want to be with NATO.

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