

Twelve Years of Occupation and War Crimes in Afghanistan. Commemoration in Ireland

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The twelfth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan was marked by a peace vigil at Shannon on Oct 13th that was attended by close to 40 people. Gardai maintained an overt presence, despite the peaceful nature of this and all previous vigils. They were reminded of their responsibilities to uphold the law by those attending the vigil, and to end the practice of turning a blind eye to the warplanes passing through Shannon. As always, they maintained a stony silence when asked if they were concerned in any way about who or what might be on those planes.



Tens of thousands of lives have been lost in Afghanistan over the last twelve years, and hundreds of thousands more have been destroyed because of the direct consequences of war and the war-induced breakdown of public health, security, and infrastructure. Shannon has had a central role in all this, as over the last twelve years millions of armed troops have turned the airport into a staging post for U.S. military operations abroad. The occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, for which Shannon provided logistical support, have been characterised by war crimes, human rights abuse (including kidnapping and torture by the U.S. authorities) and costs mounting to trillions of dollars. And these costs have of course been borne by the people of the U.S., Ireland and every other country now suffering the pain of austerity.

Support for today's anti-war demonstration at Shannon was evident as passers-by acknowledged and encouraged those taking part. This was hardly surprising, given the findings of the recent [PANA poll](#) which showed that over three quarters of Irish people believe Ireland should have a policy of neutrality.



Given the behaviour of the Gardai at Shannon over the last twelve years, and given the numerous references by members of the force to "advice" and "instructions" and "protocols" relating to the searching of planes and the policing of anti-war demonstrations, their attitude was sadly also not surprising. For the duration of the vigil they erected barriers

at an arbitrary point before the airport entrance, and refused to let demonstrators past it. When asked why they were doing so, they simply refused to answer.

What was even more bizarre was the spurious arrest of two members of Shannonwatch prior to the vigil today, under the Public Order Act. They were at the airport taking photographs, which is not illegal, but were handcuffed, taken into custody and released around an hour later. There were no U.S. military aircraft evident at the airport at the time, so the bizarre behaviour of the Gardai may have more to do with the presence of two luxurious Middle East VIP jets, registrations N777AS and N757MA.

If the Airport Police and Gardai had anticipated a security risk from someone taking photos of one of these aircraft someone in authority could have declared the car park in which the arrests took place to be a temporarily restricted area. They are entitled and empowered to restrict certain areas for a limited time but they didn't do that, Nonetheless the arresting officer did his best to convince the Shannonwatch members that the place was permanently restricted (which it isn't) and that they had broken the law by being there (which they hadn't).

It's not the sort of security that the U.S. military would expect at one of their airbases, but it's what they've got at Shannon.

About the authors: Shannonwatch is a group of human rights and anti-war activists based in the mid-West of Ireland. Email: shannonwatch@gmail.com

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