

# US Military Operations and Shannon Airport (Ireland)



***“Part of the US military conveyor-belt of death”***  
Scott Ritter, former UN weapons inspector in Iraq speaking about Shannon Airport (July 2003)

***“The use of Shannon Airport by the US military is directly linked with the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, a region that has been destabilised and devastated beyond recognition by US military activity.”***  
Mick Wallace TD, Dáil Éireann (October 2014)

***“If Shannon was being used by any other group to cause the type of damage that the 2.25 million US troops that have passed through Shannon have caused, then the US would rightly identify it as a target.”***  
Dr Tom Clonan, Security Analyst, Ennis Court (February 2015)



*The erosion of Irish neutrality is inextricably linked to the daily use of Shannon Airport by the US military for almost two decades. It is effectively a forward operating base used to support their operations in the Middle East, with approximately three million US troops and their weapons, regular US Air Force/Navy cargo planes, and an unknown number of CIA extraordinary rendition flights passing through since 2002.*

*Two Articles of the Irish Constitution have been repeatedly and consistently undermined through this misuse of a civilian airport. Article 28.3.1 says war shall not be declared and the State shall not participate in any war save with the assent of Dáil Éireann (Irish parliament). Article 29 affirms the State's devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality, and its adherence to the principles of the peaceful settlement of international disputes by international arbitration or judicial determination. Despite this, Shannon has provided direct support for ground offensives and bombing campaigns, and has been complicit in the deaths and displacement of millions of people.*

### **August 1990**

At the start of the Gulf War, civilian flights carrying US troops on their way to the Gulf were permitted to land at Shannon. This continued up to the end of February 1991.

The war was waged by coalition forces from 35 nations, led by the US. It was in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait.

### **October 2001**

Following the passing of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1368 Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (Fianna Fail) conveyed to the US Secretary of State that normal conditions for overflight and landing of US military aircraft would be waived by Ireland. As a result, US troops were permitted to transit through Shannon on their way to Afghanistan.

Resolution 1368 was intended to combat threats to international peace and security in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The US misused it to claim legitimacy for its invasion of Afghanistan.

Despite a High Court ruling in *Dubsy vs Government of Ireland* that the military operation in Afghanistan could not be considered a war, the claim by President George W. Bush that the mission was "to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime" indicated otherwise. Irish support for unilateral US military action in Afghanistan at that time demonstrated a serious disregard for international institutions.

### **November 2001**

The first protests at the use of Shannon Airport by US planes involved in the war in Afghanistan took place.

### **December 2002**

A briefing document prepared by the security policy section of the Department of Foreign Affairs stated that foreign military aircraft were only permitted to use Irish airspace or landing facilities if they are unarmed and carry no arms, ammunition or explosives and do not engage in intelligence gathering. This condition has been repeated by every government since.

### **January 2003**

Minister for Foreign Affairs Brian Cowen (Fianna Fail) confirmed that Shannon was being used by the US military, and that troops travelling on civilian aircraft are "sometimes



accompanied by their personal weapons". These are military contracted aircraft and as such are technically not classified as military aircraft.

The Minister also confirmed that US troops were permitted to wear uniforms in the transit areas of Irish airports.

### **February 2003**

Approximately 100,000 people gathered in Dublin on 15th February to oppose the impending US led invasion of Iraq. As with Afghanistan, this further example of the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive war has been widely criticised as lacking the authority of the UNSC and being in breach of international law.

The use of Shannon Airport as a stopover for US troops was a huge reason for the size of the Dublin march.

### **March 2003**

Dáil Éireann effectively agreed to participate in the US invasion of Iraq by supporting the Government's decision to maintain what it called "long standing arrangements for the overflight and landing of United States military aircraft". This was misleading as such overflights and landing facilities were previously granted only on a very limited basis and were never intended for participation in war.

As the Bush administration was preparing to attack Iraq, it was becoming increasingly clear that it was doing so on the basis of flawed allegations against Saddam Hussein. These allegations had been challenged, and in some cases disproved, by the United Nations, European governments and even US intelligence reports.

## April 2003

A High Court judgement in *Horgan vs. An Taoiseach et al.* stated that by allowing US troops to use Shannon Airport on their way to and from the war in Iraq, Ireland was in breach of the Hague Convention (V) Respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land.

However, with regard to Article 28 of the Constitution, the ruling stated that the Court could not, without proof of quite exceptional circumstances, accept the contention that it should decide what constitutes participation in a war.

## 2005

At its peak there were on average over 6,500 US troops a week plus their weapons passing through the Shannon Airport, as well as contracted cargo planes and other military aircraft.

## April 2006

Amnesty International reported that US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) aircraft involved in extraordinary rendition had landed and refuelled at Shannon Airport repeatedly in the previous five years. Extraordinary rendition involved the forcible kidnapping of individuals by the US or its proxies, and their transfer to a secret prison in another State where they were tortured, with no recourse to the courts or to lawyers or to any protection of their human rights.

Two months later a Council of Europe report by Swiss Senator Dick Marty identified Ireland as one of 14 European states that colluded in rendition. The Government insisted that no prisoners passed through Shannon Airport on the rendition flights. The basis for such a claim is highly questionable given the lack of inspection of suspected rendition aircraft at the airport.

No investigation was undertaken by the government at the time, or by any Irish government since. They claimed to have diplomatic assurances from the US administration that Irish airports were not being used by the CIA for rendition flights. Despite a series of written requests from the Irish Human Rights Commission these assurances were never produced.

## July 2006

A group of 5 Catholic Workers known as the Pitstop Ploughshares who made their way into Shannon Airport and damaged a United States Navy C-40 transport aircraft in February 2003 were finally acquitted after 2 mistrials. They were acquitted on the basis that they were acting to save lives and property in Iraq and Ireland.

## January 2008

Local peace and human rights activist group Shannonwatch started monthly vigils at the airport to protest against its use by the US military. These have been running ever since.

## September 2009

The Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin (Fianna Fail) confirmed that US officers of military rank are permanently based at Shannon Airport. Their role is to assist with the transit of US government or government-contracted flights carrying US government officials, civilian and military personnel and cargo through the airport. The arrangement was in operation since 2003 and was done without Oireachtas approval.

## March 2010

At the annual presentation of shamrock to the US President by the Taoiseach Brian Cowan on St Patrick's Day, President Barack

Obama thanked the Irish Government for allowing US troops to stop off at Shannon Airport on their way to and from Iraq and Afghanistan.

## August 2012

Seventeen months after presenting two wheelbarrows of information to the Gardai (police), Shannonwatch received a brief half-page response that said "No evidence has been uncovered by the Gardai which indicate [sic] any alleged breach of Irish & International laws resulting from the transit of armed U.S. troops & CIA associated aircraft in connection with wars and military aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, and in connection with unlawful detention and torture of prisoners at Guantanamo prison and elsewhere".

The dismissal of a large volume of material outlining breaches of the laws of aviation, humanitarianism, human rights and neutrality at Shannon was a disappointing indictment of Irish complicity in US wars of aggression and occupation, particularly in the Middle East.

## September 2013

A side-mounted 30mm cannon photographed on a United States Air Force (USAF) AC-130W Hercules turbo-prop aircraft at Shannon on Sept 5 was described by the Fine Gael/Labour government as an "administrative error". The aircraft was specifically modified to include a precision strike package for close air support missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The government continued to claim that US military aircraft landing at Shannon are unarmed and carry no arms, ammunition or explosives and do not engage in intelligence gathering.

Meanwhile a Red C poll commissioned by the Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA) found that 78% of Irish people support a policy of Irish neutrality.

## July 2014

TDs Clare Daly and Mick Wallace were arrested at Shannon Airport after attempting to search two US military planes. In explaining why they took this action, Mick Wallace said because the authorities won't search the planes to find out if there are weapons on board "people like us have to do it".

## 2015

The official count of US troops that passed through Shannon Airport since 2002 exceeded 2.5 million. These troops were all on US military contracted aircraft operated by companies like Omni Air International. They did not include special operations forces on Hercules C-130 and other military transport aircraft passing through Shannon.

## January 2017

Shannon (and Dublin) Airport began operating US President Trump's ban on people from seven Muslim countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen) entering the US. The ban breached international refugee law, which requires the international community to take in war refugees on humanitarian grounds.

US immigration preclearance facilities have been in operation at Dublin and Shannon airports for many years. As a result, Ireland is one of the few countries in the world where passengers travelling to the US can clear immigration at the point of departure rather than when they arrive in the

country. On the advice of the Attorney General the government claimed that the Irish authorities had no jurisdiction over the implementation of the policies at US immigration pre-clearance facilities on Irish soil (despite the fact that they breached international law).

### March 2019

Two members of Veterans for Peace, Ken Mayers and Tarak Kauff, were arrested after going onto the airfield at Shannon Airport to demand that the Gardai inspect a US military contracted plane believed to be carrying troops and weapons. After being detained in Limerick Prison for 11 days, their passports were confiscated by the State, forcing them to remain in Ireland without trial for over 8 months.

### May 2019

In an exit poll conducted for RTÉ and TG4 during the local and European Parliament elections, 82% of voters polled said Ireland should remain a neutral country in all aspects.

### March 2020

US troops transiting through Shannon Airport were directed to remain on board their aircraft as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless Omni Air International troop carriers continued to make regular stops at Shannon on their way to and from the US, the Middle East, and European countries including Bulgaria and Poland. A new coalition government made up of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Green Party continued to permit the US military to use Shannon Airport.

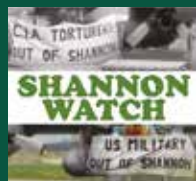
It is estimated that over 3 million US troops have gone through Shannon Airport since 2002. The exact figure is unknown as figures are only supplied for military contracted flights (technically classified as "civil"). Since these aircraft have the troop's personal weapons on board, the flights must be given prior permission to land by the Minister for Transport. Permits must also be given for flights carrying weapons through Irish airspace.

The US military account for well over 90% of all flights requesting permits to carry munitions through Irish airspace and airports.

In addition to the US troop carriers using Shannon, aircraft operated directly by the US Air Force and Navy also land there. In 2017 the official figure for US military aircraft landings at Shannon was 402 (an average of more than one/day).

Year	Number of troops through Shannon on military contracted planes	Permits issued for the carriage of munitions of war
2002	73,000	
2003	122,000	
2004	159,000	
2005	341,000	
2006	281,000	
2007	263,000	1495
2008	256,000	1359
2009	265,000	1276
2010	229,000	1307
2011	250,000	1382
2012	101,108	807
2013	69,840	693
2014	55,405	584
2015	63,549	812
2016	48,648	813
2017	60,968	919
2018	93,852	1054
2019	86,653	1075

While it's not possible to identify the number of deaths linked to troops and equipment that passed through Shannon this century, a November 2019 report by Professors Neta C. Crawford and Catherine Lutz of the Costs of War project estimated the number of direct war deaths in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen post 9/11 as between 770,000 and 801,000. This does not include indirect deaths, such as those caused by loss of access to food and water, war-related disease, displacement, etc. The part played by Shannon Airport in the wars that caused these deaths is in direct contravention of the State's claims to promote peace, stability and human rights.



### Shannonwatch

Shannonwatch campaigns to end the US military use of Shannon Airport and to demand accountability for the airport's complicity in human rights abuse and war. It opposes the participation of Ireland in all regional military alliances and structures, including those of the EU and NATO. It holds peace demonstrations at Shannon Airport on the second Sunday of every month from 2 to 3pm.

Contact: Shannonwatch, PO Box 476, Limerick DSU, Dock Road, Limerick, Ireland

Tel: (+353) (0)87 8225087 Email [shannonwatch@gmail.com](mailto:shannonwatch@gmail.com) Website: [www.shannonwatch.org](http://www.shannonwatch.org)



### Peace and Neutrality Alliance

The Peace & Neutrality Alliance campaigns for the right of the Irish people to have their own independent foreign policy, with positive neutrality as a key component, pursued primarily through a reformed United Nations.

Contact: PANA, Dalkey Business Centre, 17 Castle Street, Co. Dublin, Ireland

Tel: (+353) (0)1 2351512, Email: [info@pana.ie](mailto:info@pana.ie), Website: [www.pana.ie](http://www.pana.ie)