



Óglaigh na hÉireann



THE BIGGER PICTURE

Colonel Liam MacNamee talks to SIGNAL about the work of the Defence Forces' Strategic Planning Office and its roles in the evolving defence environment.

With almost four decades of service in the Defence Forces, Colonel Liam MacNamee is well aware of the strategic issues affecting the organisation. As the Director of the Strategic Planning Office (SPO) in the Defence Forces, his role is to research and formulate strategic advice, plans and control measures in the area of military contribution to Defence Policy, Defence Forces Strategy, Combat Development Planning and Resource Management, in order to provide proactive support to the Chief of Staff in his executive duties. The MacNamee family name has served the

Defence Forces for three generations; his late father Hugh who retired in 1977, Liam, and his son Colin, who is currently serving with KFOR in Kosovo. Liam MacNamee's career has taken him from a variety of roles at home starting in the First Cavalry Squadron in Fermoy as a Troop Commander to overseas postings in places such as Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Syria and the former Yugoslavia. He has worked in the Strategic Planning Office before, having served there as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1996 as a Senior Staff Officer. SIGNAL spoke to him about the roles of the SPO.

The Strategic Planning Office

The office was first set up in 1996. Following the reorganisation of the Defence Forces in 1998 the office was formally established. The main function of the SPO is to assist and support the Chief of Staff (COS) in his strategic management of the Defence Forces. A principal function of the office is to ensure that the strategic goals of the organisation as specified in the 2000 White Paper on Defence are implemented and evaluated. While the mission statement reflects the formal role of the SPO, in practice the work of the SPO broadly falls into two main areas: Defence Forces

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strategic management and policy support to the Chief of Staff; and international defence and security policy with the main focus on the continuing development of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

"During the recent EU Irish Presidency the

Resource Management in the Defence Forces as a strategic goal."

The Defence Forces therefore, has a well developed system of long-term and short-term policy planning documents. "I believe the annual planning process which

this represent and is this an opportunity to examine sections/units that are undermanned or under-ranked at present?

"I think we have moved forward from the point in the recent past where the organisation and structures of armed forces more or less remained static; to the current scenario where the defence and security environment is far more fluid and the disposition, doctrine, training and equipment of forces must evolve to meet these changes. That's a very important fact to realise. There has to be an assessment on a fairly regular basis of both the domestic and international environment. Over recent years we have been quite successful in initiating, taking ownership and managing change, although we face many similar challenges regarding change as does any other organisation. Military personnel are receptive in relation to change and I think this is also reflected clearly in our overseas operational deployments. To my mind, developing capability is the key challenge coupled with the flexibility to react to different situations as required. The Government's international commitment to both the UN under the United Nations Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS) and the EU under the European Security Defence Policy means that we must ensure that we develop the required capabilities both on an individual and collective basis."

Within the European context, what are the imminent challenges for the Defence Forces, both in terms of our commitments to European military development and potential flashpoints that may require the

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office participated in a wide range of related activities including the running of a high level EU-UN seminar in Dublin for all EU member states, UN officials and other interested organisations."

The White Paper set out the organisation's plan over a ten-year period to 2010. "We are now nearing the midway stage and a review of the implementation of this important policy document will be completed during 2005. The office is also involved in the formulation of Defence Forces Strategy Statements, which are published every three to five years, and reflect changes within the Defence Forces and inputs arising from the Programme for Government. One such change that has been made in the current Strategy Statement is the inclusion for the first time of the Human Resources Goal which emphasises the importance of Human

we have allows the Chief of Staff to establish his priorities for the forthcoming year. This provides for a programme of annual planning not only at Defence Forces Headquarters but also in the Brigades, the Defence Forces Training Centre, the Air Corps and Naval Service. These are all linked to the goals of the White Paper and Strategy Statements."

The White Paper set out parameters based on the situation at the time, but since then worldwide events, such as 9/11, have reshaped and refocused certain elements of both short-term and long-term strategic planning and thinking.

Roles And Challenges

A review of the Defence Forces arising from the White Paper is due in order to reflect the reduction of 1000 personnel in organisational terms. What challenges does



Col. Liam McNamee, bottom right, with the 75th Irish Infantry Battalion in the Lebanon in 1994

deployment of Irish peacekeepers?

The EU established a military goal through a European Council decision taken in Helsinki in 1999 known as the Helsinki Headline Goal. The Helsinki Headline Goal commits member states of the EU to provide 60,000 troops within 60 days for a range of crisis management activities. These activities are known as the Petersberg Tasks and provide for a wide spectrum of crises management operations. Within that commitment, Ireland has said that it will provide 850 troops through a 'palette of forces' offer. This includes a commitment to provide up to a 300 strong rapid response company at ten days notice, which must be able to respond quickly to a range of operations including evacuation and rescue tasks. "ESDP has its roots in the Balkans conflict in the early 1990's, arising from the inability of EU Member States to act coherently or intervene militarily in that conflict. Since then, the

management difficulties. The EU has declared itself to be operational within certain shortfalls and limitations. However it has agreed in June 2004 on a new Headline Goal 2010, which widens the spectrum of crises management operations to which the EU should have the capability to respond." The new Headline Goal 2010 also reflects the provisions of the European Security Strategy and the development of the Battle Group concept.

Public Sector Decentralisation

The move of Defence Forces Headquarters (DFHQ) and the Department of Defence to the Curragh and Newbridge respectively has been announced under the auspices of the Government's decision on decentralisation. What effect will decentralisation have on the Defence Forces? "The two main issues to be faced are infrastructure and personnel. The

we are in the process of approving the site and other details with officials from OPW." The process of examining the building requirements and all the issues that go with it are quite well advanced. Moving Defence Forces Headquarters is quite a substantial undertaking. "While DFHQ has just under 300 personnel it also has a number of support elements without which it could not properly function. The largest of these is the Defence Forces Communications and Information Systems Company. In essence, the whole project means we will have to consider the movement of in excess of 450 people. That will mean a variety of challenges. The Curragh is familiar to most Defence Force personnel as it is our largest military establishment and many of those who are moving there will have trained or worked there at some stage in their careers. The Defence Forces Training Centre will of course have to make its own adjustments to the influx of so many more inhabitants. A new partnership sub-committee of the Defence Forces Partnership Steering Group has been set up to deal with the myriad of personnel issues that will arise in an effort to help overcome these problems. I think that's a positive development."

Under decentralisation, DFHQ and the Department of Defence will be physically separated, as they are both moving to separate locations. Splitting the management of such a large organisation is not in line with the practice of other armed forces. Having been co-located for so long will there be problems with having the two

It has already been decided that the three principal officers of Defence Forces Headquarters, the Chief of Staff, the two Deputy Chiefs of Staff and their immediate staffs will have offices in the Department of Defence new offices in Newbridge.

EU has been doing further work on capability development so it can deal with terrorist threats and other crisis

current situation is that we will be moving most elements of DFHQ to the Curragh. A number of sites have been examined and

elements separated, albeit by a modest distance?

“Some people have said that this will provide difficulties in future working relationships, however, it has already been decided that the three principal officers of Defence Forces Headquarters, the Chief of Staff, the two Deputy Chiefs of Staff and their immediate staffs will have offices in the Department of Defence new offices in Newbridge. This will maintain the important linkage between the civil and military element at the highest level.” The timeframe for decentralisation has been outlined recently in a sequencing timetable issued by the Flynn Committee, which is responsible to Government for the decentralisation process. “Bearing in mind planning and building norms, the process is likely to be completed in a two to three year timeframe.”

Future Challenges

What are the immediate challenges for the SPO? “I think the continuing examination and analysis of the overall strategic requirements for the organisation is essential. We need to continually look at how we can match the resources available to the Defence Forces with its current requirements at home and abroad and to meet any future tasks given by Government. That’s the most pressing challenge. We also need to keep abreast of the changes within the ESDP and UN commitments to ensure that we can further develop our capabilities on a professional level and are interoperable with other member states in terms of equipment, training, manpower and doctrine. The planning process that has commenced should be developed to fully ensure that the Defence Forces are properly focused through a targeted system of planning, prioritising and reporting cycles.”



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