

# Mothers Against Genocide members arrested in Dublin as Irish government moves to drop neutrality “triple lock”

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Peaceful supporters of the Mothers Against Genocide group were arrested outside the Oireachtas (Irish parliament) last week. Around 40 mostly female protesters had participated in an overnight Mothers’ Day encampment at the gates to Leinster House. They placed pictures of Palestinian children murdered by the Israeli armed forces across the parliamentary gates and laid a pair of small shoes and a flower for every child.

Eleven people, ten women and one man, were seized when they tried to prevent gardaí (police) from removing the images by sitting in front of the gates cradling pillows to resemble the shrouded corpses of dead children. Three more were arrested around the protest. A number of those arrested were strip searched, including one Palestinian woman who was subject to a cavity search—considered by Amnesty International to be sexual violence. Her hijab was removed, later returned. Three people were charged with public order offences.

The brutal and vindictive measures taken against those protesting the greatest war crime of the 21st century underscore the Irish government’s ever deeper complicity in imperialist militarism, including the Gaza slaughter.

Mothers Against Genocide were protesting in support of an already toothless Occupied Territories Bill, which seeks to bar commerce with areas illegally occupied by Israel. Ireland, subject to centuries of brutal domination by British imperialism, has the highest level of protest of the Gaza genocide, per capita, of any country in the world. Despite the bill’s token character, the Irish government has come under pressure from Israel and the United States to drop the measure, which has been stalled since 2020.

Further neutralising the Occupied Territories Bill is one of a series of accelerating shifts in Ireland’s “defence” policy aimed at maintaining the country’s relationship

with its fractious imperialist masters on both sides of the Atlantic and in the face of mass popular hostility to war.

In March, Simon Harris, the Tánaiste (deputy prime minister), in New York for St Patrick’s Day, told reporters that the Fine Gael-Fianna Fail coalition “was in the business of wanting to provide more in terms of practical assistance” to NATO’s war in Ukraine. The government agreed earlier in March to spend €100 million, on top of €250 million already handed over, on supposedly “non-lethal” support. That amount could rise to €315 million, as Ireland will have to contribute towards the European Union’s (EU) €20 billion for Ukraine, currently under discussion.

Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Andrii Sybhiat previously outlined to Harris that his priority is “Ireland funding electronic warfare, including jamming equipment and UAVs (drones) and armoured personnel carriers”.

The government intends to hand over many of its aging Giraffe Mark IV radar air defence systems. Over the three years of war, Ireland has donated tonnes of ready-to-eat meals, 200 units of body armour, 30 military vehicles, mine flails and training to 730 troops in combat casualty care and demining. The nature of these items makes clear that the “non-lethal” label is meaningless, other than for the purposes of hoodwinking the Irish population.

Spending on Ireland’s military has also been increasing annually, albeit from a very low starting point. In 2019, the defence sector cost €756 million, 0.21 percent of GDP. By 2022, €1.1 billion was spent and in July of last year the Irish government announced plans to increase this to €1.5 billion by 2028.

Far greater increases are likely. A 2022 report from the Commission on Defence Forces set out three “levels of ambition” on arms spending, starting with the current position, level one, and escalating to “enhanced

capability” at level two. Level three envisaged “full spectrum defence capabilities to protect Ireland... comparable to similar sized countries in Europe.”

This would entail a “substantial mechanised component of the Army offering state of the art force protection, communications, ISTAR [Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance] and firepower”, a fleet of 12 ships, a squadron of 12 to 14 combat aircraft, transport helicopters, a cyber command and an “Army Ranger Wing” of special forces. Cost was estimated at €3 billion, or nearly three times the expenditure in 2022. Harris has repeatedly made clear his preference for the highest possible level of expenditure.

Ireland, despite its official neutrality, has played a major role in all the imperialist bloodbaths of the last quarter century. The country joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme in 1999 and the EU’s PESCO military cooperation structure in 2017. Shannon Airport, located in the west of Ireland, has been used by the US military as a stopover for troop-carrying and CIA rendition flights to and from wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Since 2002, close to 3 million US troops have gone through the airport, 220,000 of them in the last three years.

An unknown volume of military hardware and weaponry has stopped over at Shannon or transited Irish airspace. A recent debate on an Air Navigation and Transport (Arms Embargo) Bill introduced into the Seanad by independent senators aimed at preventing arms flights to Israel drew out figures from the Department of Transport. 1,354 flights were authorised to carry weapons or munitions in 2024. This represented a 14 percent increase on the previous year and a 67 percent rise since 2016. Despite government denials, some of the equipment on these flights will certainly have been used to massacre Palestinian children.

This is the context of a government bill, launched early March, to dispense with the “triple lock” on overseas peace keeping operations. The “triple lock” refers to the requirement, since 2001, that any deployment of more than 12 troops can only be despatched following an Irish government decision, a vote in the Dáil (parliament) and with the backing of a United Nations (UN) mandate. The government is seeking to remove the UN requirement on an explicitly anti-Russian basis. “We don’t believe that Putin or other leaders should have a veto on whether our troops can be deployed”, said Harris when introducing the legislation.

The government is also seeking to increase the number of troops that can be deployed without a vote in the Dáil

to 50.

An Open Letter and petition to the Taoiseach signed by groups such as Code Pink, Veterans for Peace, the International Peace Bureau and hundreds of academics opposing the change noted that 75 percent of the population support neutrality. The groups called for a referendum to incorporate neutrality into the Irish constitution and for “global leaders to courageously face down warmongers and redouble their commitment to peace and neutrality, to genuine multilateralism, and to upholding the rule of law.”

“Protecting the Triple Lock”, the letter continued, “would send a message to the Irish people and to the global community that Ireland intends to do precisely that.”

The appeal is misdirected. No illusions should be held in the ability of the Irish capitalist state, run in the interests of the venal Irish bourgeoisie, to function as a representative instrument of mass anti-war sentiment. As evidenced by its willingness to trample over the views of most of the population, the Irish political establishment will dispense with democracy should its essential interests demand it.

The task of opposing genocide and war falls to the Irish and international working class, seeking to mobilise its independent social power against war and its origins in the outmoded capitalist nation state system.



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