

The Financial Cost of Ireland's Support for the United States Military



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U.S. military use of Shannon Airport and Irish airspace costs the Irish state in excess of €4 million euro a year. This is as a result of the Garda policing arrangements at the airport, the use of the Defence Forces to provide additional security, and air traffic subsidies to the U.S. military. When once-off equipment costs such as special security fencing are taken into account the figure is likely to be much higher.

1. Policing

The Department of Justice paid out a total of almost €3 million for policing arrangements at Shannon Airport in 2009 and 2010. This included salaries and allowances, overtime, travel and subsistence expenses and other non-pay expenditure. While the cost of salaries dropped from over €1.6 million in 2009 to half a million in 2010, the overtime bill was more or less the same for both years (€394,000 in 2009 and €322,000 in 2010)¹.

The policing figures for Shannon Airport for 2006, 2007 and 2008 respectively were €4 million, 2.5 million and €2 million. The exceptionally high figure for 2006 is due to the visit of US President George W. Bush in March of that year².

In 2008, another planned stopover by George W. Bush cost the Irish taxpayer a staggering €150,000. The stopover did not even take place³.

In total over €10.5 million was spent policing Shannon Airport in the five years from 2006 to 2010. Full Garda costs are not available for the years prior to 2006. However it is known that the figures for 2003, 2004 and 2005 *excluding basic salaries* are in excess of €700,000 for each year⁴.

This means that on average €847,000 a year has been spent on Garda overtime and expenses at Shannon Airport since it became involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The full breakdown of costs for 2003 to 2010 inclusive is given in Table 1.

Year	Salary Costs	Non-salary Costs	TOTAL
2003	Figure not available	€762,999	
2004	Figure not available	€975,091	
2005	Figure not available	€738,018	
2006	€2,142,553	€1,938,184	€4,080,737
2007	€1,385,742	€1,172,573	€2,558,315
2008	€1,284,205	€762,753	€2,046,958
2009	€1,649,435	€442,022	€2,091,457
2010	€507,382	€350,937	€ 858,319

Table 1: Garda Siochana (policing) costs at Shannon Airport

While much has been made of the cost of securing Shannon Airport against the threat of attack from “anti-war protestors”, the real cause of the millions of euro of expenditure every year is the fact that the airport is being used by the world’s largest army. The Minister with responsibility for policing explained in 2006 that

the Garda authorities are required to allocate resources in an appropriate fashion to, inter alia, protect critical State infrastructures in accordance with assessed threat, so it is the latter which ultimately determines the associated costs. I am satisfied that Garda policing arrangements at Shannon Airport remain both necessary and appropriate⁵

Evidence gathered over the years by Shannonwatch indicates that protecting US Air Force and Navy aircraft is deemed to be one such “necessary” and “appropriate” use of taxpayers’ money. While it should be the responsibility of an airline operator to pay for any additional security required, the figures above would suggest that the US military or their carriers (primarily Omni Air International) do not foot the security bill at Shannon. Furthermore it is not clear what the “assessed threat” relating to aircraft like the one shown in Figure 1 below is, or how the threat is assessed.



Figure 1: US Air Force Executive Jet at Shannon Airport with Garda protection (29 Sep 2005)

The average annual cost of services provided by the Gardai at Shannon Airport since 2006 is €2.3 million.

2. Irish Army

The Irish Army is also deployed at Shannon to “provide assistance in securing the Airport”. Such assistance has been rendered by the Defence Forces since 5 February 2003. It was described by Minister for Defence Willie O’Dea as follows in 2006,

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces is the provision of aid to the civil power (meaning in practice to assist, when requested, an Garda Síochána), which duties include the protection and guarding of vital installations, the provision of certain security escorts etc.

The cost of the army protection provided at Shannon Airport since 2006 is €1.4 million^{6 7}. This is an average of €285,000 a year.

Year	Costs
2006	€403,375
2007	€275,054
2008	€286,273
2009	€258,040
2010	€203,366

Table 2: Irish army costs for Shannon Airport

The items taken into consideration when calculating the costs in Table 2 are security duty allowance, rations and fuel⁸. As in the case of policing costs (Gardai), the true cost to the state would include salaries which would make the figures must higher. These figures are not available.

Figure 2 below shows a US military aircraft with both army *and* Garda vehicles in attendance. Again it is not known why multiple levels of security are being applied, or if the US military is covering any of the cost.



Figure 2: US Hercules C-130 with Garda protection (6 Nov 2009)

The average annual cost of services provided by the Irish Army at Shannon Airport since 2006 is over €0.25 million.

3. Air Traffic Control – Military Flights

Between 2003 and 2010 it has cost the Irish state €25 million to cover the costs of foreign military aircraft using Irish-administered airspace. This covers the military owned and operated aircraft as opposed to the civilian troop carriers. A large percentage of these are U.S. planes en route to Europe and the war zones in the Middle East and southwest Asia.

The €25 million cost is due to Ireland's participation in a multilateral Eurocontrol agreement. Eurocontrol, which is the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation, is an intergovernmental organisation made up of 39 Member States and the European Community

⁹.

The Minister for Transport Martin Cullen explained how the Eurocontrol agreement works in a reply to a parliamentary question from Michael D. Higgins in 2006:

Under a Eurocontrol, European organisation for the safety of air navigation, multilateral agreement to which Ireland is a party, various categories of flights — flights under visual flight rules, flights performed by small aircraft, flights performed for the transport of Heads of State and search and rescue flights — are exempt from paying en-route charges. In the case of other categories — military flights, training flights, flights performed to test air navigation equipment and circular flights — states have the option to exempt such flights from payment of the en-route charge. In common with most Eurocontrol member states, Ireland exempts all such flights, including military flights of member states of Eurocontrol, United States and Canada, from payment of the en-route charge and this arrangement has applied since Ireland joined the Eurocontrol en-route charging scheme in the early 1970's. Because of this

*arrangement the IAA costs in relation to military flights are met from my Department's Vote.*¹⁰

The exemption of US military flights from charges was also noted by the then Minister of State for Transport, Ivor Callely, in 2005:

*In common with most Eurocontrol member states, Ireland exempts all such flights, including military flights of member states of Eurocontrol, United States and Canada, from payment of the en route charge and this arrangement has applied since Ireland joined the Eurocontrol en route charging scheme in the early 1970s.*¹¹

The Eurocontrol agreement is a reciprocal agreement but there is very little benefit accruing to Ireland from its covering of the air-traffic costs of foreign military flights through its airspace. As Harry Browne notes in a 2011 [Politico.ie article](#)¹², the only military aircraft Ireland has that spends time in foreign airspace are the government jet and the occasional air corps plane. Therefore we get very little in return for covering the very many transatlantic flights of the US military.

While this imbalance makes little sense from an exchequer point of view, the situation regarding U.S. military planes is particularly irrational. Because they are not a member of Eurocontrol, Ireland does not have to cover the cost of its military flights. However the state has chosen to do so.

The air charge payments are not exactly advertised by the government. But you will find them buried deep in the Transport section of the Book of Estimates, under "Civil Aviation". They are innocuously called "*Payments to the Irish Aviation Authority in respect of exempt services*".

The reason for these payments is as follows. The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) provides air traffic control and communications services to all aircraft passing through Irish controlled airspace (en route) and aircraft landing and taking off from Irish airports (terminal). Their costs in regard to military flights are met from the Department of Transport's budget – hence the payments to the IAA.

The costs for each year since 2003 are given in Table 3.

Year	Cost ¹³
2003	€2,751,000 ¹⁴
2004	€4,612,000 ¹⁵
2005	€3,156,000 ¹⁶
2006	€2,466,000 ¹⁷
2007	€2,930,000 ¹⁸
2008	€3,003,000 ¹⁹
2009	€3,283,000 ²⁰
2010	€2,809,000 ²¹

Table 3: Payments by the Department of Transport to the Irish Aviation Authority

Calculating the cost to the Irish State of US Military Flights

In 2001 the Department of Transport paid the IAA €1,539,000 for the exempt services. This is €1.2 million less than 2003, the year in which the Iraq war started, and €1.6 million less than the average annual cost since then. In other words US military flights relating to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost the Irish state an average of €1.6 million a year since 2003.

It is worth noting that other European neutral countries, particularly Austria, Finland and Switzerland do not give free passage to US military flights. This was confirmed by the then Minister for Transport Martin Cullen in a Dáil debate in May 2005²².

So-called "reciprocal" fee waiver agreements are highly advantageous to countries like the United States that have very large armies and air forces, while being of virtually no benefit to countries like Ireland whose miniscule number of military aircraft rarely travel to the United States (except for the Government executive jet). By waiving US military charges Ireland is losing a substantial amount of fees that should be paid by the US air force (and navy). Because Ireland professes to be a neutral state, like Austria, Finland and Switzerland, it should not be subsidising the US military financially.

4. Troop Carrier Income and Costs

In the few cases where the State is likely to benefit financially from the U.S. war traffic, it is reluctant to give details. In reply to a parliamentary question by Aengus O'Snodaigh TD that asked if the operators carrying US troops and cargo through Shannon Airport pay landing fees and air traffic control fees, the Minister for Transport deferred to the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) and the IAA²³. The DAA said that *landing and parking fees* are applied in the case of the main U.S. troop carrier, Omni Air International, but that "for confidentiality and commercial sensitivity reasons it is not appropriate for DAA to disclose the amount of fees paid by any individual customer at any of it [sic] airports".

For regulatory purposes, airport charges also include charges for the use of an *air bridge and passenger processing charges*. The DAA did not indicate if the troop carriers pay these.

The IAA, which imposes air traffic control fees, was equally vague. They said that Omni Air International pays the standard *en-route and terminal air navigation charges* to the Irish Aviation Authority in respect of all flights through Irish controlled airspace and in respect of all flights into/from state airports. Once again they said that "[i]t is not possible to disclose the amount paid by individual airlines because such information is commercially sensitive".

This suggests that the troop carriers are not exempt from air charges in the way that military flights are, but there is a lack of transparency around the details of charges paid and income to the state.

5. Conclusion

It is regularly claimed by politicians and others that the US military business at Shannon is good for the economy. Notwithstanding the immorality of any financial gain from war and human rights abuse, it would appear that the claims may not even be true. The average cost of Garda and Irish army security at the airport, up to and including 2010, is €2.4 million a year. US army and navy aircraft cost the state in the order of €1.6 million a year in air traffic-related charges. And the government, the state departments and the semi-state bodies with responsibility for air traffic charges all refuse to say how much the US troop carriers pay to use the airport.

Given these facts it is difficult to see where the financial benefit of having the US military at Shannon is for the Irish state.

¹ Written answer from Minister for Justice Alan Shatter to parliamentary question from Pádraig MacLochlainn TD (Sinn Fein), 12 July 2011. Available from <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2011-07-12.1622.0>.

² Written answer from Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform Dermot Ahern to parliamentary question from Paul Gogarty TD (Green Party), 9 June 2009. Available from: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2009-06-09.1743.0>.

³ Written answer from Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform Brian Lenihan to parliamentary question from Martin Ferris TD (Sinn Fein), 17 April 2008. Available from: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2008-04-17.651.0>.

⁴ Written answer from Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform Michael McDowell to parliamentary question from Trevor Sargent TD (Green Party) on 24 October 2006. Available from: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2006-10-24.895.0>.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Written answer from Minister for Defence Willie O'Dea to parliamentary question from Paul Gogarty TD (Green Party), 9 June 2009. Available from: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2009-06-09.2156.0>.

⁷ Written answer from Minister for Defence Alan Shatter to parliamentary question from Pádraig MacLochlainn TD (Sinn Fein), 12 July 2011. Available from <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2011-07-12.1704.0>.

⁸ See answer from Minister for Defence Willie O'Dea to parliamentary question from Paul Gogarty TD (Green Party), 9 June 2009 (<http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2009-06-09.2156.0>).

⁹ The Eurocontrol website is <http://www.eurocontrol.int>.

¹⁰ Written answer from Minister for Transport Martin Cullen to question from Michael D. Higgins TD (Labour), 12 May 2005. Available from <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2005/05/12/00043.asp>.

¹¹ Written answer of Minister of State at the Department of Transport Ivor Callely to parliamentary questions from Michael D. Higgins TD (Labour) and Eamonn Ryan TD (Green Party), 14 June 2005. Available from <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2005-06-14.1911.0>.

¹² "The High Cost of US Military Overflights", Harry Browne, 9th June 2011. Published in *Politico*. Available at <http://www.politico.ie/irish-politics/7576-us-military-overflights-ireland.html>.

¹³ Minister for Transport Martin Cullen noted in 2005 that payments are made to the IAA in respect of exempted flights on a monthly basis in arrears and are subject to reconciliation in the following year. See <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2005/05/12/00043.asp>.

¹⁴ From the 2004 Revised Estimates for Public Services. Available from <http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Revised-Estimates-Volume-2004-Pages-33-232-pdf-Document.pdf>.

¹⁵ From the 2005 Revised Estimates for Public Services. Available from <http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Revised-Estimates-for-Public-Expenditure-2005.pdf>.

¹⁶ From the 2006 Revised Estimates for Public Services. Available from <http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Revised-Estimates-2006.pdf>.

¹⁷ From the 2007 Revised Estimates for Public Services. Available from <http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Revised-Estimates-for-Public-Services-2007..pdf>.

¹⁸ From the 2008 Estimates for Public Services and Summary Public Capital Programme. Available from <http://www.budget.gov.ie/budgets/2008/Documents/2008EstimatesforPublicServices&SummaryPublicCapitalProgramme.pdf>.

¹⁹ From the 2009 Revised Estimates for Public Services. Available from <http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Revised-Estimates-for-Public-Services-2009.pdf>.

²⁰ From the 2010 Revised Estimates for Public Services. Available from <http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Revised-Estimates-Volume-2010.pdf>.

²¹ From the 2010 Revised Estimates for Public Services. Available from <http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011-REV.pdf>.

²² See answer from Minister for Transport Martin Cullen to question from Michael D. Higgins TD (Labour), 12 May 2005 (<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2005/05/12/00043.asp>).

²³ Written answer from Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Leo Varadkar to parliamentary question from Aengus O'Snodaigh TD (Sinn Fein), 17 May 2011. Available from: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2011-05-17.2036.0>.