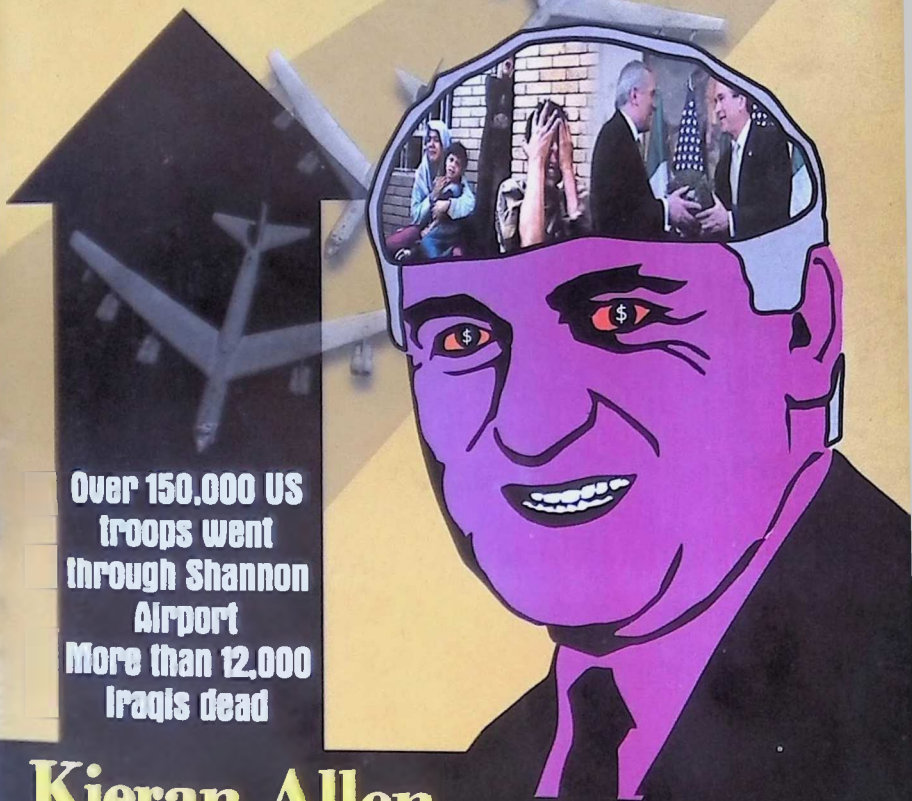


THE US MILITARY & SHANNON AIRPORT



Over 150,000 US
troops went
through Shannon
Airport
More than 12,000
Iraqis dead

Kieran Allen

The US Military and Shannon Airport

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CHAPTER 1:

Blood Money

Something very rotten is happening at Shannon airport.

Founded in 1942, the airport has given a boost to development of the Limerick-Clare region. It has a huge runway and magnificent cargo facilities. It pioneered the first duty free shops in the world. It is linked to an Export Processing Zone, which has been copied in other developing countries. In the eighties, Shannon airport became an important hub for the Russian airline, Aeroflot, connecting passengers from as far a field as Vietnam and Cuba to Moscow.

However, today Shannon airport is gaining a different reputation. It has become a base for the US war on Iraq. In the words of Richard Haass, a special envoy to Northern Ireland and a top strategist at the US State Department,

Shannon is extremely useful, given the capacity of the airport and its location. Are there alternatives or substitutes? Yes. Would they be as good? No. Shannon is one of the most capable facilities in this part of the world¹

He was talking about transporting soldiers and weaponry for Iraq.

Scott Ritter, a former UN weapons inspector in Iraq and a critic of the war is blunter. Shannon, he claims, has become 'part of the US military conveyor-belt of death'.²

It all began covertly.

During the Gulf War in 1991, Shannon was used to re-fuel US warplanes. Some were involved in the infamous 'turkey shoot' when thousands of retreating Iraqi conscripts were slaughtered as they fled Basra. But, aside from the protests of the anti-war movement, there was little comment in the Irish media at the time.

The Irish government tried to hide US military involvement in Shannon in the run up to the Second Gulf War. In November 2002, when independent TD Finian McGrath raised a specific sighting of military aircraft, he was told a blatant lie in the Dail by Foreign Minister, Brian Cowan who stated that, 'There has not been any

significant change in the pattern of overflights and landings by foreign military aircraft in recent months³

Figures subsequently released showed that 41 foreign military aircraft had landed at Shannon the previous month.⁴

Later, Green TD John Gormley asked if the military aircraft had complied with Irish law by not having arms or munitions on board. Once again, Brian Cowan told a half truth when he said that the government has accepted 'in good faith' the details about their contents supplied by 'diplomatic missions'⁵. It was nonsense – the planes were stuffed full of weapons.

On January 12 2003, the *Observer* newspaper revealed what was happening at Shannon when it quoted workers who spoke out. One worker said, 'Several of the transport planes using the airport carry only weaponry. But the troops arriving in Ireland are fully armed'. Another said, 'Aer Rianta and the police have introduced a policy of turning a blind eye to what is happening here. I have seen guns and weapons. There isn't a great effort to hide them'.⁶

The Irish Anti-War Movement had begun organizing protests at the airport in the previous months. This drew attention to the airport and, thanks to the whistle blowers among the staff, the real story came out.

Table 1 illustrates the known facts about Shannon's involvement in the war.

Table 1

Year	Military Aircraft Landings	Civilian Aircraft with Munitions	Number of US Troops using Shannon
2000	456		53,500
2001	489		89,963
2002	553	1	73,000
2003	391	612	125,855
2004	1,026		143,188

(Figures supplied to author from Department of Foreign Affairs, Aer Rianta. Figures for 2004 are projected figures based on first three months)

The figures are shocking for two main reasons.

First, they show that Shannon has become a central hub for the US war. About one in four US troops who served in Iraq have passed through Shannon. In March, 2004 – the latest monthly figures, – a staggering 16,000 troops went through. That is nearly 12 percent of the serving occupation force in just one month.

The troops come in special military charter flights. At least three carriers have been identified by peace camp observers. They are ATA (American Trans Air) World Airways and North American. These ferry troops from bases such as Forth Bragg, which houses an airborne division and the US Special Operation Command, to the war zone.

The military cargo is ferried in by companies such as Evergreen International, which has a US\$75 million dollar contract with the US Air Mobility Command to transport cargo for the US armed forces.



Devastation in Fallujah

Aside from personal arms and ammunition, the weapons transported most certainly include mortars, radar seekers and helicopter parts.⁷ But nobody can really be sure about the other contents as the Irish government refuses to check the cargo. There is a high probability that

the napalm, cruise missiles and radioactive depleted uranium have been carried through Shannon

The scale of the operation indicates that Shannon now rivals Frankfurt as the central hub for US operations passing through Europe.

Second, the figures illustrate that the pattern of US military involvement has not decreased since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. At various times, the war in Iraq has been declared over. But none of this has affected the militarisation of Shannon airport. The numbers of military aircraft and troops passing through shows a steady increase.

Shannon is now set for a permanent US presence even though the Irish government originally justified it by claiming it was an emergency measure to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction.

There is some evidence that even more sinister developments are happening at Shannon. Documents reveal that on one occasion the government allowed 28 Patriot missiles to pass through Shannon even though each of these missiles contained 44kg of high explosives and almost 500kg of rocket fuel.⁸

More generally Shannon also seems to be used as a covert link that connects military operations between the US and Israel.⁹

The authorities at the airport have done their best to shield the military activities from full view. On one occasion, a fire developed in the cockpit of a US 747 – but fire tenders were not allowed near it.¹⁰ Peace monitors who have tried to observe have been asked to leave the airport by ‘Special agents’ who refuse to identify themselves.¹¹

How did all this come about when Ireland is officially a neutral country? After all, Austria and Switzerland, which are both neutral countries, refused to allow US planes to over fly their territorial space or land at their facilities.

The answer is that the government, firstly, lied about what was happening, then broke their own laws and then drip fed out the information so that they could erode basic principles of neutrality.

The Lies: In January 2003, for example, Foreign Minister Brian Cowen said ‘it is simply not the case that the US is using Shannon to transit large quantities of arms to the Gulf’¹²

Breaking Laws: Foreign troops are not supposed to wear uniform on Irish soil, according to the Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft)

Act 1952 – except with the permission of a government minister.

But the Irish government let US troops enter Ireland in uniform – when they had no permission to do so. When it finally gave permission, it carefully inserted the term ‘vicinity’ of Shannon airport. This means that US troops in uniform can regularly stay at Clare Inn, Newmarket on Fergus.

It also knew they were carrying weapons – which was contrary to Irish law – but it turned a blind eye until they retrospectively legalised the practice.

Drip feed: The government first claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and that UN sponsored action was necessary to deal with this. Then, when Britain and the US went to war without UN sanction, Bertie Ahern claimed that Shannon could be used anyway.

A Department of Foreign Affairs document also claimed that Shannon could also be used by the US ‘on an exceptional basis’, pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1368.¹³ This resolution requested states to work together to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks on 9/11. But Iraq had nothing to do with those attacks – and as we have seen, what was supposed to be ‘exceptional’ has turned into the norm.

Once the full extent of Ireland’s involvement in the Iraq war came out, the government tried to normalise it, Bertie Ahern claimed that ‘we have many precedents over the past 45 years or so. We have had issues around Vietnam, in Kosovo – we did use our flyover space and not only that, landing rights’.¹⁴

Shannon may have been used covertly by US forces with the connivance of the Irish government. But the publicly stated position of previous governments has been to view landings by military aircraft or aircraft carrying soldiers on their way to a war as a breach of Irish neutrality. Vincent Browne has provided a number of examples to show how this was the official practice up to now.

In 1959, for example, Cornelius Cremin, secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs put it like this,

It is known that we give permission for the landing in our territory of unarmed military planes engaged on peaceful duty e.g. US army planes carrying US personnel for leave in Ireland or in transit to the USA. It is quite another thing to give permission not only to aircraft engaged in

warlike exercises to land on our territory but also to use our territory as a refueling base for such exercises.¹⁵

When the right wing Fine Gael Minister Patrick Cooney was asked about the subject in 1983, he again spelled out the longstanding policy of neutrality on over flights and landings of military aircraft:

The over flights or military landing must not be an integral part of training manoeuvres by foreign military aircraft; likewise, clearance is not granted where a troop - carrying aircraft is en route to military exercises.¹⁶

In 1989, Fianna Fail Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Lenihan, repeated these criteria about military over flights and landings stating 'the aircraft [must] be unarmed, not carry arms, ammunition or explosives and not engage in intelligence gathering'¹⁷

Note that in these statements the focus is on issues like military exercises or intelligence gathering. There was no question of even contemplating using Irish airports to facilitate participation in a war. The reason is obvious: a policy of neutrality, at a minimal level, must mean banning foreign military aircraft or civilian aircraft carrying soldiers using Ireland *if they are participating in a war or a major military exercise*.

Yet it is precisely this policy which the present government is reversing. It has turned Ireland's second biggest airport into a military pit stop. The reason came out when one government source eventually told the *Irish Times*. 'Our bottom line is we will do what the Americans want'¹⁸

What corporate America and the Pentagon really want is to ring the world with military bases so as to gridlock the globe with their power. Currently, the Pentagon owns or rents 702 overseas bases in about 130 countries. The British empire directly colonised the world and ran countries from London. The US empire prefers to bind countries to it by demanding a tangible sign of loyalty through letting their troops in. As Chalmers Johnson put it,

Once upon a time, you could trace the spread of imperialism by counting colonies. America's version of the colony is the military base. By following the changing politics of global basing, one can learn much about our ever-larger imperial stance and the militarism that grows with it.¹⁹

At present, the Pentagon is re-structuring their use of military bases as part of Donald Rumsfeld's 'military transformation'. According to Loren Thompson, a military analyst at the Lexington Institute 'it is all part of a grandiose plan for re-organising the cold war military infrastructure into a leaner, meaner operation'.²⁰ US troops are being withdrawn from the large city-like fortresses that dot the German landscape and will instead use smaller 'forward operating locations' where pre-positioned equipment will await the soldiers as they drop in on their way to the trouble spots on the US empire.²¹ More soldiers will also return to rapid deployment bases like Fort Bragg from where they will jump off to participate in new conflicts. The aim is a more mobile imperial force that is no longer just facing one Cold War enemy.

Viewed from this perspective, Shannon is being transformed into a 'forward operating location' for the US army. It is ideal in this regard because it has a large cargo facility; its staff speak English and the Irish government have shown a willingness to turn a blind eye to any operations there. Instead of leaving from a German base to fight in Iran, Georgia or Iran, for example, they will be deployed from Fort Bragg and stop-over at Shannon for refuelling and other support services.

By allowing Shannon to become a US military base, the Irish ruling elite show their willingness to pay tribute to their imperial masters. In the jargon of the Pentagon, they create yet another 'footprint' or 'Lilly pad' for the US military machine.

This is the real scandal that is happening at Shannon.

1 F. Sheahan 'US flights bypass Shannon over attacks' *Irish Examiner* 5 February 2004

2 'Who are the War Criminals? Who has violated international Law?' Speech by Mary Kelly at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India 13 June 2004. See www.globalresearch.ca/articles/KEL106A.html

3 *Dail Eireann Volume 557* 12 November Written Answers

4 *Dail Eireann Volume 565* 9 April 2003 Written answers

5 *Dail Eireann Volume 558* 26 November 2002 Written answers

6 'Staff at Shannon Confirm Law is being Flouted' *Observer* January 13 2003

7 P. Leahy, 'State blocked US planes carrying landmines' *Sunday Business Post* 20 April 2003

8 'Patriot Missiles pass through Shannon' *Irish Examiner* 3 September 2003.

9 See P. Leahy 'State Blocked US planes carrying landmines' *Sunday Business Post* 20 April 2003

10 R. de Rosa, 'Neutrality? They don't know the meaning of the word' *An Poblacht* 23 January 2003

11 T. Hourigan 'Shannon Monitors come face to face with US troops in Shannon' *Indymedia* 31 Oct 2002.

12 Statement by Minister for Foreign Affairs on US Overflights and Situation in Iraq 13 January 2003

- 13 M. Carolan 'Court told troops rarely used Shannon' *Irish Times* 5 April 2004
 14 M. Brennock. 'Taoiseach sets stage for controversial debate on Shannon' *Irish Times* 14 March 2003.
 15 Quoted in V. Browne 'Sea Change on Shannon over flights' *Irish Times* 9 April 2003
 16 *ibid*
 17 *ibid*
 18 M Brennock. 'Taoiseach Sets stage for controversial debate on Shannon' *Irish Times* 14 March 2003
 19 C. Johnson 'America's Empire of Bases' on Irish Anti-War Movement website.
 20 P. Spiegel. 'US troops withdrawal part of a plan to revamp cold war military infrastructure' *Financial Times* 16 August 2004
 21 *ibid*

CHAPTER 2:

Banned From County Clare

Eoin Dubsy did not agree with US warplanes using Shannon. He climbed over a fence and spray painted a USAF Hercules jet on the runway. It was his form of non-violent direct action resistance.

He was duly summoned to appear before Justice Joseph Mangan at the Shannon District Court and found guilty over his action. He was fined €1,000 and given a six months suspended prison sentence. But something unusual happened – Eoin Dubsy was ordered to stay out of Clare for two years.

Without much discussion, Judge Joseph Mangan had imposed a form of internal exile. Eoin Dubsy was not allowed to visit friends in Clare, go to the Cliffs of Moher, or to hear a Clare set in a local pub. He was excluded from a whole county!

Eoin Dubsy is the not the only person to be subject to exclusion orders. Approximately 30 people have been banned from County Clare – many by the same Judge Mangan.

Sometimes the ban is imposed as part of bail conditions. On other occasions it is added after conviction for a minor offence. Between the term spent on bail and the extra punishment, it can mean that people are banned from Clare for up to four years.

District Court judges have an awesome power. They preside over the most common courts – but they are not required to issue written reasons for their decisions. Judge Mangan was therefore able to introduce a form of internal exile- without having to publicly record his reasons for so doing.

Internal exile was used as a form of punishment in the old Soviet Union because the regime wanted to control the movement of its population. But few people are aware that the practice has been introduced in Ireland. One man, Eoin Rice, went on hunger strike when it was imposed on him. But very few newspapers reported the case.

The presence of US troops in Shannon and the growing opposition to them has led to an attack on the right to protest. Ireland's support for

the 'war on terrorism' is corroding civil liberties and creating the atmosphere for a very repressive state. The assault on civil rights works at many different levels.

There is, firstly, the monitoring of the population of Shannon. Shannon airport is surrounded by a large expanse of open land, which has become a sanctuary for wildlife. Traditionally, people went on walks there, visited the airport, engaged in plane spotting.

But the steady militarisation of the airport has meant restrictions on their movement. Those entering the wider airport area are stopped, observed and generally discouraged from walking about in a public common area.

When George Bush visited Shannon, every single house was visited by the Garda and residents were asked to provide details on their jobs, cars and other items. They were asked to obtain a pass to enter and leave their own town. As one resident put it, 'Not since the Black and Tans has this happened'. This huge data gathering exercise was probably made available to US officials who supervised the visit. The information has also been stored for the future. Anti-war activists in the area have had their houses visited by the police.

The Bush visit cost €4.9 million – or €272,00 for every hour.¹ The squandering of this vast amount of money is in sharp contrast to the absence of a proper ambulance service in the town. One family campaigned for this service after one of their children died because they did not get to the hospital on time. The money spent on the Bush visit could have been paid for a new ambulance service!

Protests in Shannon are met by a heavy presence of riot police who are kitted out as robo cops. When Bush visited, a column of tanks was even deployed to intimidate protestors. Buses and cars going to protests at Shannon are regularly stopped and searched. Yet the very same Gardai who search cars of protestors refuse to search planes carrying munitions of war – to even see if their contents are what the US embassy has declared.

Restrictions On The Right To Free Speech

On February 15 2003, over one hundred thousand people marched in Dublin against the war on Iraq and the presence of US troops at Shannon airport. It was the largest ever protest in recent Irish history –

and it scared the political elite.

Ever since then, there has been a concerted campaign to restrict publicity on details about protests. The aim is to cut back on the numbers attending.

In Galway, the local city council introduced a bye-law to ban the distribution of leaflets. It also stated that no person shall 'hold or address a public meeting or religious service on recreational open space involving not less than 100 people except with the written permission of the Council'.² Groupings that wished to protest about the policies of Galway City Council would first have to obtain written permission from said council! Bizarrely, the bye law also restricted swimming, kite flying and skate boarding.

Galway was the chosen venue for the EU Ministers meeting in January 2004 – which partially explains why the City Council wanted the restrictions! Fortunately, a large campaign came into existence in the city and defeated many of the proposals.

Unfortunately, however, restrictions on free speech in Dublin got through. In the run up to the Bush visit, Dublin City Council again invoked a bye law to restrict posterage. They ruled that no posters could be erected in Dublin unless prior approval was obtained from the council or they were relating to an official election campaign.

Prior approval was, naturally, not granted for anti-war posters. However, when a number of TDs and activists staged a public defiance of this ban, the council did nothing to prosecute. They knew their restrictions could be challenged under the constitutional right of freedom of assembly.

Instead council staff were instructed to remove posters from lampposts in Dublin. Often under the cover of darkness or very early in the morning, council staff removed thousands of posters in an attempt to scuttle anti-war protests.

The Stop Bush Campaign attempted to get around this ban by designating themselves as a 'third party' who had an interest in the elections and called for a vote against the government.

Despite availing of this perfectly legal measure, the council continued to rip down anti-war posters.

Then, in a bizarre Kafkaesque twist, advertisements for an Irish Anti-War Movement concert with Christy Moore, Damian Rice and

others were banned from the airwaves by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. The radio station Newstalk106 referred the advertisements to the BCI and were told not to run them. Anti-war advertising was now deemed to be political and had to be banned.

It is common practice for authoritarians all over the world to ban free speech. Often they do not assert their right to censor as this appears far too outrageous. Instead they use bureaucratic rules or put a gloss on their actions by using innocuous phrases such as 'preventing litter'. But the overall effect is to set an example for every petty bureaucrat to also define what is and what is not acceptable. Here is just one example of how this atmosphere of censorship percolates through in Ireland today:

I was at the concert on Sunday night with a slew of friends. We got 'Stop Bush' posters and plastered them throughout UCD campus that night, until we ran out of sellotape. Next morning we awoke to continue the job until one mediocre individual in the employment of UCD, told us we had no right to do so and that, I quote, 'We have a lot of Americans staying here this summer and you are very rude to be offending them'.

The posters, as we all know, said 'Stop Bush' not 'Stop 280 million Americans'. At any rate, I refused to take them down, told her it was my democratic right to protest, and left it at that. Well, I didn't really. I took out some more posters and plastered our flat with them. I knew she couldn't get us in our own flat. I was wrong. This morning at 8am she let herself into our apartment and tore down our posters because, she reiterated to my flatmate, they were offensive to the Americans in Ireland.³

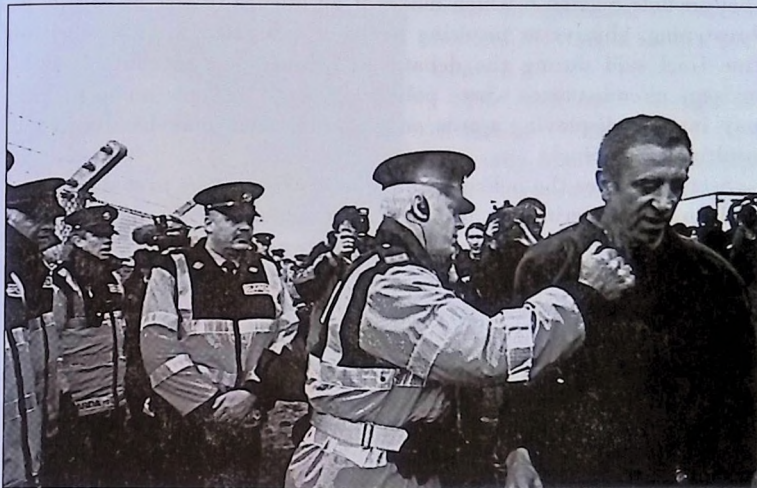
The poster ban in Dublin still remains in place. It is now up to the left majority on the council made up of Labour, Greens and Sinn Fein to get rid of it!

The Public Order Act

The attacks on free speech are meant to prevent information on protests getting out. But other tactics were used to try to break the will of activists. The principal device used is the Public Order Act.

The act was originally introduced in 1993 as a private members bill by the Progressive Democrats. It was modelled on a British measure of the same name, which was introduced in the wake of the miners' strike in 1986. Originally, the Fianna Fail Justice Minister Maire Geoghehan

Quinn opposed the bill, claiming that the British Act was not needed here because Ireland had not experienced the same sort of social tensions.



Garda presence at Shannon protest

However a few months afterwards she did an about turn and incorporated elements of the PD's proposal into her own bill. Mary Harney was quick to remind her of her U turn and indicated the real purpose of the bill.

In recent years there were serious inner city riots throughout Britain. There was also serious public disorder occasioned by the miners' strike and strikes in the printing industry as well as public demonstrations and unrest on a large scale against the poll tax. The Minister went on to say it would be wrong to suppose that we are dealing with the sort of problems that existed in Britain. We do not have problems of that kind in Ireland, *however, legislation should be in place in advance of such problems arising so that we do not have to rush it through the House.* [emphasis added]⁴

The Public Order Act was initially justified as a measure to deal with anti-social behaviour. But soon after its introduction workers at TEAM

Aer Lingus were threatened with it as they protested over a possible closure.

The provisions of the Public Order Act are open to wide scale abuse. They include Section 6 which makes it an offence to 'use or engage in threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour' Gay Mitchell of Fine Gael said during the debate on its introduction that 'I could envisage circumstances where political protests or trade union pickets may involve displaying words on placards which may be considered insulting or obscene'.⁵

Section 8 gives the police virtually unlimited powers to move people on who are 'loitering' or who use 'threatening, abusive or insulting words'. Failure to comply can mean a sentence of six months in jails.

Section 14 defines as a riot, a gathering of 12 people or more who have a 'common purpose' to 'threaten to use unlawful violence'. It is immaterial if all the 12 use violence or not – they can all be branded as involved in a riot and face a penalty of 10 years in jail.

Since the war on terrorism was declared after September 11, there has been a marked increase in the use of the Public Order Act against political activists. Cases include: two members of the Irish Anti-War Movement who organised a peaceful demonstration from the US embassy to the British embassy; 14 activists from Globalise Resistance who protested at a conference on privatisation; 8 people who took part in a Critical Mass bike ride;

Once again, Irish support for a war to create a new US empire has led to an attack on civil rights at home.

Criminalisation

Mary Kelly has courage. Her government colluded in a war – despite the wishes of the majority. Yet she did what she could as an individual to physically stop this. She was motivated by the Nuremberg judgement which states that 'individuals have international duties which transcend national obligations of obedience. Therefore [individuals] have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity occurring'.⁶

In line with this she took an axe and smashed the nose-cone of a US warplane at Shannon, temporarily de-commissioning it.

For this action, Mary Kelly is being criminalised. She was brought

before a District Court in Kilrush, where the judge falsely stated to the jury that she had 'admitted to a crime'.⁷ Despite the bias, however, a jury of local people failed to reach an agreement to convict her and she walked away a free woman.



Mary Kelly

The Irish state, though, is extremely vindictive – especially when its relationship with corporate America is challenged. The attorney general could have dropped the case – but instead he sought a re-trial. The political elite want to make an example of Mary Kelly because she dared to stand up for her beliefs.

In the early hours of Monday 3 February 2003, five members of the Catholic Workers Movement also cut their way into Shannon

airport. They poured human blood on the runaway that was servicing US military flights. They built a shrine and then began to dismantle a warplane that was under repair.

Once again these brave, religiously motivated people were subjected to a process of criminalisation. To date their case has not been heard – but they have been made subject to very restrictive bail conditions. Meanwhile those who actually helped warplanes to bomb innocent civilians are being treated as respectable members of society.

All wars lead to a loss of civil liberties. They create authoritarian states that wield more power over individuals. Ireland has joined this war – not of course by sending troops, but slyly and cutely as benefits a ruling elite which is steeped in corruption and greed.

They say they have opened Shannon to the US military just 'to make a bit of money'. In reality, they are paying their tokens to their imperial

overlords. They are answerable not to Irish democracy – but to the empire to which they are tied, as James Connolly once put it, by ‘a thousand economic strings’.⁸ We will pay the price through the erosion of our civil rights. This is why it is so important to stop activists being criminalised and to roll back the repressive laws that are being introduced.

1 J Breslin ‘Garda Bill for Bush Visit and May Day hits €12’ *Irish Examiner* July 3 2004

2 Litter and Parks Bye-Laws A Shocking Attack on Civil Liberties, *Indymedia* August 27 2003

3 From Irish Anti-War Movement website

4 Dail Debates Vol. 433 2 July 1993

5 Dail Debates Vol.434. 20 October 1993

6 ‘Who are the War Criminals? Who has violated International Law? Speech by Mary Kelly at the World Social Forum, Mumbai, India 13 June 2004

7 ‘Mary Kelly Trial’ *Indymedia* July 4 2003

8 J. Connolly. *Labour and Irish History* (London: Bookmarks 1987) p. 24

CHAPTER THREE

A Dead Issue

Bertie Ahern has claimed that Shannon has become a ‘dead issue’. The reason, apparently, is that sovereignty has returned to Iraq and the US is only assisting a friendly government. Moreover, this handover of power, which took place on June 28 2004, has the sanction of the United Nations. According to this version of events, the US is no longer fighting an imperial war so there is no problem with their use of Shannon airport.

This, however, is a fiction because no real handover of power has taken place in Iraq. It is a puppet state of the US.

George Kennan, a former top US diplomat defined a puppet state when he described the theoretically independent government of Slovakia under German domination in 1939:

In internal matters, it has exactly the same independence as a dog on a leash. As long as the dog trots quietly and cheerfully at his masters side – and in the same direction – he is quite free; if he starts out on any tangents of his own, he feels the pull at once.¹

This describes exactly what happens in Iraq.

There are still 140,000 US troops in Iraq plus another 20,000 ‘Coalition’ troops from countries which support the US. The US has built a number of major bases and shows no sign of leaving. Despite its claiming sovereignty, the interim Iraqi administration has no control over these troops.

The troops are not answerable to Iraqi law – even if they murder innocent civilians. Shockingly, the same terms of immunity also apply to 20,000 private military contractors and mercenaries.

The Iraqi government does not even control Iraqi troops. In March 2004, the former US administrator for Iraq, Paul Bremer issued a lengthy edict consolidating control of all Iraqi troops and security forces under the Ministry of Defence, then headed by Iyad Allawi. However, buried in the document was an emergency decree ceding all ‘operational control’ to senior US military commanders.² Responsibility for training the new Iraqi forces rests with the US Major General David Petraeus.

He is building up an elite Intervention Unit of 6,500 soldiers 'who can move quickly to suppress insurgencies in urban areas'.³

The new Iraqi government is headed by Iyad Allawi, who was handpicked by the US authorities. He was a former member of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party and one unnamed US intelligence officer told the New York journalist Seymour Hersh, that 'Allawi helped to get Saddam into power'.⁴ He broke with Saddam in the early 1970s and set up the Iraqi National Accord, mainly composed of ex-Iraqi officers. In 1992, he was recruited as a CIA agent and sent agents into Baghdad to plant bombs. According to one former CIA agent, Robert Baer, one of those bombing missions blew up schoolchildren on a bus.⁵

Another former CIA case officer, Reuel Marx Gerecht, says: 'Two things stand out about Allawi. One, he likes to think of himself as a man of ideas. And, two, his strongest virtue is that he is a thug'.⁶

Allawi's other main way of helping the CIA, and the British M15 with whom he also worked, was to supply information that justified the war on Iraq. He was responsible for the astounding claim that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, which could be unleashed on Britain within 45 minutes.

During the period of direct US rule, Allawi made little attempt to build a political base in Iraq society, mainly avoiding the press. Instead, he spent much of his time in Jordan, Britain and the US where he spent a reported \$300,000 dollars on New York and Washington lobbyists to 'enhance his image higher up the geo-political food chain'.⁷

As soon as the handover took place, Allawi set out to become the new strongman of Iraq – modelling himself on his former master Saddam Hussein. He restored the death penalty – and in one shocking incident, which has been documented by the *Sydney Herald Tribune*, he personally shot six reported insurgents in a Baghdad police station.⁸ He has re-imposed martial law and is now restoring the secret police, recruiting many former Saddam Hussein supporters in the process.

This unelected tyrant, who has no popular base, is now the face of the so-called sovereign Iraq.

Even if he were not a loyal puppet of the US, he is still hemmed in by a legal and administrative structure that guarantees their domination.

The former US overlord, Paul Bremer, passed 97 new laws and regulations, which he identified as 'binding instructions or directives to

the Iraq people'.⁹ The only person who can overturn these laws is Allawi. The philosophy behind these laws, which is described in Order 39, is to manage the 'transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy'.¹⁰ The same order allows for the privatisation of Iraq's 200 state owned enterprises; 100 percent foreign ownership of Iraq business; and unrestricted repatriation of profits. Order Number 40, cuts the tax on profits from 40 percent to 15 percent. Order No. 12 suspends all tariffs on goods entering Iraq so that US companies can flood the market with cheap consumer goods, which wipe out domestic producers.

This amounts to a barely concealed attempt to plunder Iraq and drive its people into poverty.

Christian Aid has already revealed that €20 billion of the Development Fund of Iraq was spent with virtually no accountability or transparency. The Development Fund was established from the revenues of Iraq's oil industry and was supposed to be used for reconstruction. The neo-conservatives who advocated the invasion were clear from the very start that, as Paul Wolfowitz put it in 2003, 'The Second Iraq war wouldn't be overly expensive for American taxpayers [because] we are dealing with a country that can finance its own reconstruction'.¹¹ So they were determined to use the revenues from oil to pay for the damage their bombs created.

The 're-construction' effort has been mainly about helping US companies rather than the Iraqi people.

The largest single recipient of the re-construction funds was Halliburton – the former company of the US Vice President Dick Cheney. Halliburton doctored prices to charge up to ten times what Iraq companies charge – yet they still won the contracts for re-construction.

Other US companies which have gained from the re-construction fund include: Fluor, which was supposed to re-construct the country's water and electricity – neither of which it has done to date; the Washington Group whose CEO was a Bush 'pioneer' or fundraiser; Bechtel who got a \$680 million contract to build water and sewerage systems. It contributed \$1.3 million to Bush's Republican Party – and Iraqis complain the drinking water it provides is worse than that under Saddam Hussein.

Bechtel is notorious for taking over public water systems and then jacking up the price of water. In February 2000, riots broke out in

Cochabamba in Bolivia after Bechtel put up the price of water. One 17 year old boy was killed and over a hundred injured as troops tried to crush the revolt. But eventually Bechtel was forced to leave the country.

Today Iraq faces the same sort of economic colonisation. Iraqis have already endured terrible suffering because of the war – now they face the slow, painful grind of deprivation. First came the military take over by the US – then the economic occupation by companies like Bechtel.

One of the British companies to gain a contract to provide security was Aegis, whose founder Tim Spicer was involved in gun running in Sierra Leone.

No wonder the *Economist* magazine described the legal and institutional groundwork laid by the Coalition Provisional Authority – as the regime run by Paul Bremer was known – as ‘a capitalist dream ... The kind of wish list that foreign investors and donor agencies dream of for developing markets.’¹²

In addition to this plunder, Iraq will continue to support a huge US administrative structure that surrounds and guides the so-called sovereign government.

US minders, known as ‘inspector-generals’ have been appointed for five year terms in every Iraqi ministry, with oversight power. Iraqi ministers have nominally the power to ignore their advice or even sack them – but they are so dependent on US political and economic backing that this is unlikely.

One of the most powerful groups which was appointed by the US is the electoral commission. This can disqualify parties and candidates, connected to armed militias. Using this excuse, the most popular politician in the Shiite community, Muqtada Al Sadr, has been disqualified. But there are no restrictions on political parties which rely heavily on funding from the US or Saudi Arabia.

The real centre of power in Iraq will remain the US embassy. This is the largest in the world and will house 3,000 staff. Most of these will undergo intense training in Washington before they return to a cushioned life in Baghdad’s International Zone – a highly protected central zone that used to be known as the Green Zone.

At the centre of this huge apparatus, occupying a former palace of Saddam Hussein is the US Ambassador, John Negroponte. Negroponte is the ideal candidate for a colonial administration because he previously

encouraged the use of death squads against left wing opponents. Between 1981 and 1985, Negroponte served as Ambassador to Honduras where he helped to shore up the brutal dictatorship of General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez. He fully supported the intelligence unit of the Honduran Army, Battalion 3-16 which was trained by the CIA and the Argentinian military in the arts of torture and kidnapping. He also supervised the creation of the El Aguacate Airbase, which was used as a base by the right wing contra terrorists who tried to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Excavations in 2001, found 186 corpses at the same base.

One writer, Tim Allen, summed up how Negroponte used Honduras to enforce a brutal policy on Central America in then 1980s:

The high-level planning, money and arms for those wars flowed from Washington, but much of the on-the-ground, logistics for the deployment of intelligence, arms and soldiers was run out of Honduras ... So crammed was the tiny country with US bases and weapons that it was dubbed USS Honduras, as if it were simply an off-shore staging ground. The captain of this ship, Negroponte was in charge of the US Embassy when, according to a 1995 four part series in the *Baltimore Sun*, hundreds of Hondurans were kidnapped, tortured and killed by Battalion 3-16, a secret army intelligence unit trained and supported by the Central Intelligence Agency.¹³

With his huge embassy in the protected foreign zone, Negroponte will apply the same tactics in Iraq. He will be at the shoulder of the Iraqi strongman, Allawi, advising him on how to crush opponents by the most brutal methods. (When he was recently asked, for example, about Allawi’s execution of six insurgents, he did not even bother to deny that the incident took place). He will supervise the training of the Iraqi police to take over where the US left off at the torture centre of Abu Ghraib. He will use Iraq as a base to de-stabilise the surrounding region. In brief, he will operate as a terrorist agent on a giant scale.

This, then, is the new Iraq that Bertie Ahern is supporting. By allowing US soldiers and warplanes to use Shannon, he is colluding in the sham of Iraqi sovereignty. This is scandalous when one considers Ireland’s history.

As Britain’s oldest former colony, most of the Irish people know all about fake handovers of power. They detest imperial control and

support the right of every people around the world to determine their own future. Ahern, however, is no longer answerable to the Irish people when it comes to foreign policy. His master is corporate America and his methods are those of deception and lies. Far from being a 'dead issue', the continuing use of Shannon to bolster the US empire is very much alive.

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CHAPTER 4:

Routine Business?

'It's routine business for Shannon airport and I think the focus by members of the anti-war lobby has been more anti-American than anti-war'. This is what the Clare Fianna Fail TD, Tony Killeen claimed.

It's the pretty typical case that Fianna Fail politicians make. There is nothing unusual going in Shannon – just a few thousand soldiers passing through on 'routine business' and a chance for the airport to make a bit of money. And it provides jobs.

Fianna Fail politics sometimes appeal to a form of nationalism where foreign policy is considered irrelevant. As long as the Irish 'are getting something out of it', it must be o.k. The problem with this gombeen mentality is that it blocks out the reality behind the blood money. It avoids looking at the real consequences of the use of Shannon. So let's look at the real costs of this terrible war.

The Costs of War

The Iraqi people have suffered the most. About 12,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed as a direct result of the US invasion and the subsequent occupation. A further 40,000 people have been injured. Many have been treated in hospitals which have been destroyed through bombing and looting.

The Pentagon estimates that the US and Britain used between 1,100 and 2,200 tons of depleted uranium weaponry in the conflict. Many scientists blame a much smaller amount of DU for causing a seven fold increase in birth defects in Basra and Southern Iraq during the first Gulf War.

The war has broken apart the fabric of Iraqi society. Murder, rape and kidnapping have sky rocketed since March 2003. Violent deaths rose from an average of 14 per month in 2002 to 357 per month in 2003.

No wonder a recent poll showed that 55 percent of Iraqis would feel safer if the US and other foreign troops left.

The war has also brought huge suffering for the US soldiers that pass through Shannon. Over one thousand troops have been killed and

almost 10,000 have been injured.

The Bush regime was keen to send soldiers to Iraq but is less interested when they are killed or injured. It has banned photographs of flag draped coffins arriving back home at air force bases. 17 percent of the soldiers who return from Iraq have been diagnosed with post traumatic stress.¹

James Meek, a journalist with the *Guardian*, spent some days with a US Marine platoon near al Karmah and captured their mood of confusion:

A young machine gunner from South Texas, Lance Corporal Gregory Farias is loyal to the US military presence in Iraq. He believes in the mission...That doesn't mean he's confident about the way it's going in Karmah. 'It's really frustrating 'cause I mean we can't find these guys. They shoot at us all the time, they run away, we try to figure out who it is, we interrogate people – do they know who it was. No, nobody knows who it was, yeah? Ali Baba, the bad guy, nobody wants to know where they are, you know, so we're basically on our own, trying to figure this out, trying to get this puzzle together, where they're at and you know its frustrating 'cause we can't operate like we should be, cause we're more worried about getting blown up and trying to find these bombs on the side of the road instead of going on patrol and trying to find these guys.

Just before we part Farias grew a little more thoughtful and melancholy 'I don't want to get killed here. I don't want to die here. You know. This is the last place I'd probably ever want to die. You know, it's just – I want to go home'.²

And this was a soldier who supported the war!

According to Lorreta Schwartz Nobel, author of a recent book about hunger in America, the lower ranks of the US army are basically the working poor. 'Some of these kids see this as a way out, out of poverty, a way to fulfil the American dream so to speak' She interviewed families at the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps base and found that many go hungry 'For several days at the end of each pay check period, they often have almost nothing to eat – sometimes absolutely nothing. That's when they turn up desperate at food pantries, soup kitchens, bread lines, because they've literally run out'.³

Some of the troops who pass through Shannon are not even US citizens. Many joined up because Bush brought in a special measure to

fast track citizenship for those who served in the military after September 11. 32,099 non-Americans serve in the US armed forces and they are over-represented in the combat units.⁴ Only one family member of the US Congress has served in this war!

This then is the human cargo that Tony Kileen and his friends want 'to make a few bob from'.

Transport to torture

Shannon airport was probably used to transport soldiers and private contractors who took part in the horrific torture at Abu Ghraib prison. The US authorities pretend that the torture was the work of a few 'bad apples'. But nothing could be further from the truth.

They knew at the highest level knew what was going on. The Red Cross compiled reports on torture as early as April 2003. Their officials then met with top American officials in Iraq and Washington. But the first response of the US military was to curtail Red Cross inspections!⁵

In October 2003, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, head of the coalition forces in Iraq, issued an order giving military intelligence control over every aspect of prison conditions at Abu Ghraib, with the explicit aim of manipulating the 'internees' emotions and weaknesses'.⁶

Command of the prison was in the hands of a Major General Geoffrey Miller, who was formerly the chief warden of Guantanamo Bay. According to a Col. Thomas Pappas, who spoke to the *Washington Post*, Miller urged him to use guard dogs on the prisoners. He said that 'they had used military working dogs in Giutmo (the nickname for Guantanamo Bay) and they were effective in setting the atmosphere for which, you know, you could get information'⁷

In January 2004, Major General Taguba drew up a report that found that 'sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses' were inflicted on Iraqi prisoners.⁸ 200 pages of that report are still missing.

Since the early sixties the CIA have experimented with forms of torture which induce a 'debility-dependence-dread state' – the most famous of these techniques are compiled in the manual *KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation*. The overall aim is to break down the adult personality; to invoke an extreme form of dependency and disorientation. These old techniques were given a peculiar twist when the US army occupied Iraq.

One of the books which was the single most popular text on the native population was, *The Arab Mind*, written by an anthropologist, Raphael Patel. It is used as a textbook at the JFK special warfare school in Fort Bragg. The book claims that the Arabs have an all-encompassing preoccupation with sex.

It is a classic imperialist tract which reduced 'the natives' to a set of definable weakness that can be manipulated. The book influenced US officers to believe that Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation and that the only thing Arabs understand is force, shame and humiliation.⁹

All of this helps to explain the bizarre tortures imposed on prisoners at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere. There was a *pattern* of beatings, extreme sensory deprivation, attacks by military dogs – and sexual humiliation which was photographed and distributed to other prisoners. The aim was to literally drive the prisoners mad with pain and humiliation so that they confessed to their captors.

Orders for this did not come from 21 year old privates such as Lydie England. They came from the very top.

The Irish authorities, who allowed US troops to pass through Shannon, were collaborators in these terrible practices.

Imprisonment without End

Prisoners have been transported from Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay. There is a high probability that a number of them passed through Shannon – because the Irish government instructed the Gardai not to search any of the cargo or civilian planes which are chartered by the US military.

Recently three British detainees – known as the Tipton three – were released from Guantanamo Bay and have compiled an extensive dossier about the abuses they suffered. Here Victoria Brittain, who has written a play about Guantanamo, summarises some of their experience;

They were transported from Afghanistan to Cuba, forced to wear goggles and earmuffs, with their hands taped very tightly, and forced to sit for hours and hours before being loaded onto the plane.

On the plane they had to sit in this rigid way and often were not allowed to go to the toilet. Before they got on the plane, they had 'cavity

searches' which were repeated when they were naked after arriving in Guantanamo.

This was an effort to humiliate them

The men were shackled a lot of the time. They were beaten for the smallest infringements. People were kept for very long periods in solitary confinement – often naked for months. The detainees were put in a small cell that had full air conditioning. They describe their teeth chattering as they tried to sleep and get away from the cold.

What they found most terrifying was the interrogations... in the interrogation there were threats: 'We can keep you forever' 'We can kill you – nobody would ever know' Food was withheld so people got very weak. Some prisoners were moved from one cell to another every two hours, so they never got sleep.¹⁰

Guantanamo is a living hell. George Bush signed an order depriving the prisoners of any rights under the Geneva conventions. The US authorities say they will be kept until the 'war against terrorism' comes to an end – without lawyers, visitors or any rights associated with prisoners of war.

Yet the Irish government is turning a blind eye to this human traffic that passes through Shannon.

And for what?

This is the real face of the suffering that Fianna Fail and PD politicians do not speak of. The lies about weapons of mass destruction have fallen apart. But they still pretend that the war was a good thing because it removed Saddam Hussein.

But Saddam Hussein only came to power with the help of the CIA – and he was actively supported when he was their ally in a war against Iran. Corporate America has no problem with tyrants and bullies – it actively supports dictators in Pakistan or Uzbekistan, for example.

The only condition, though, is that these thugs must be 'our thugs'!

Oil was the real reason for this bloody war. Iraq has the misfortune of being second only to Saudi Arabia in oil reserves – and 90 percent of the country has not been explored. The US, by contrast, is the largest net importer of oil and by 2025 imports will be needed to meet 70 percent of its domestic demand.

Bush hoped that control of Iraq oil would help bring down oil prices and give the US extra leverage over its economic rivals. In 1990, for example, Dick Cheney the current US Vice President, said 'Whoever controls the flow of Persian Gulf oil has a stranglehold not only on our economy but also on the other countries of the world'.¹¹

Over the past decades, the US has used its control over Gulf oil to its advantage. In the 1970s, the US agreed with the Saudis that oil would be traded in dollars. This has allowed American governments to print dollars to cover huge trading deficits and earn all sorts of fees from the inflow of dollars. It helped establish what one writer called 'The Dollar-Wall Street Regime', which placed the US at the centre of the world's financial markets.¹²

In recent years, the US deficit and level of debt has spiralled out of control. Simultaneously, the euro made its appearance as possible rival to the dollar. In 1999, Iran mooted pricing its oil in euros and in late 2000 Saddam Hussein made the switch for Iraqi oil.

Ever since, the two countries have joined the 'axis of evil'.

The war was fought for oil and US financial dominance. Yet today the whole project is unravelling as oil prices rise and the US finds its debt rising with every soldier it sends to Iraq.

Far from colluding in this bloody and doomed project, Ireland should break away. That means telling the US to take its military machine out of Shannon.

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CHAPTER 5:

Would they take away our Jobs?

Michael Smith, the Defence Minister when the US began its attack on Iraq, cut straight to the point. 'We have a lot of contact with America, a lot of business with America, we have a lot of people in this country who depend on America for their jobs', he said, and then went on to add that there is 'no such thing ... as complete military neutrality'.¹

The meaning was clear: we are dependent on America investment, so we have to toe the line on foreign policy.

It is a line of argument that government ministers regularly use – and not just about the war. Anyone who looks for better environmental controls: for recognition of unions; for better pay and conditions is often told that we should be 'grateful' for the jobs provided by US companies. If we get too 'bolshie', they will up and leave. So we better be content with our lot.

It is a form of blackmail to which we should not succumb.

US Investment and Irish Jobs

The Irish economy is certainly very dependent on US investment, which tends to be concentrated in three areas – chemicals, computers and electronics. These are the most dynamic sectors, accounting for 40 percent of Irish economic growth during the nineties.² Overall the amount of US capital deployed per worker is a full seven times the EU average.³

However, it is a long way from recognising these facts to the assertion that a) we should be 'grateful' to US investors b) we should follow their government on foreign policy.

In the first instance, we have nothing to be grateful for. Quite the reverse. It is the US companies who should be grateful – for the extraordinary generosity that Irish society has displayed towards them.



Shannon Airport

They enjoy a tax rate that is lower than any other EU country, bar some of the new accession states (which may bring future problems for the Irish economy). Tax on corporation profits is just 10 percent – many other EU countries charge around 30 percent. However, even this official figure is an under-estimate as tax agreements between Ireland and the US allow for even lower effective tax rates to be achieved.

US companies also receive very high grants – the exact figures are not even disclosed to the Irish people. The recent expansion of the Fab 24 plant at Intel, for example, was subsidised by over €100 million in grants.¹

They enjoy relatively low labour costs compared to many other EU countries. Irish workers tend to work longer hours; their wages are restrained by near permanent social partnership agreements; spending on social security is seven percentage points below the EU average.⁵

No wonder then, that US companies in Ireland are making a 25

percent rate of return on their investment – that is double the return for Portugal, three times Spain and five times Britain.⁶

The figures may be somewhat exaggerated because US multinationals engage in a policy of ‘transfer-pricing’ – artificially lowering or raising the price of components sold within a company – to claim bigger profits in Ireland where tax rates are low. But there is little doubt they are making huge profits and Ireland *gives* US companies a lot. Denis O Hearn summed it up,

Arguably, Ireland’s most important function within the Atlantic ‘new economy’ of the 1990s was as a site where US companies would shift their products into Europe, while accumulating profits in order to avoid taxation.⁷

The Atlantic tax haven does not come for free because the Irish people subsidise tax cuts granted to US business by putting up with poor public services. Public services can only be paid for from taxation. If you cut taxes on profits, someone, somewhere has to pay by putting up with longer waiting lists for hospitals or overcrowded schools or run down social housing.

Ireland’s tax take is the fourth lowest in the world and, at 33.9 percent of GNP, is 7.5 percent below the EU average.⁸ The main reason is that tax on wealth and company profits has been slashed.

Not surprising, then, we also hold records for closing hospital beds; for overcrowded class rooms; for dearer childcare costs because there are few publicly funded crèches. In brief, we subsidise foreign and native business in a myriad of ways.

So, why be grateful!

And why consider tailoring our foreign policy to that of the US simply because of the pattern of investment here.

If US companies make a fantastic rate of profit through our generosity – why would they pull out if they disagree with our foreign policy! After all, the bottom line is profit – as we are repeatedly told.

In 2003, the US House of Representatives changed the name of the chips in their canteen from ‘French Fries’ to ‘Freedom Fries’. French champagne was poured down the drains in number of publicity stunts. These absurd gestures were meant to convey US anger at French foreign policy on Iraq.

Yet in the same year US investment flows to France rose by more

than 10 percent.

The pattern was repeated all over Europe. Even as Donald Rumsfeld was lambasting 'old Europe' for not toeing the US line on Iraq, US investment continued to flow to the continent.

A recent report summed up the pattern as follows:

For transatlantic relations, 2003 was a year of political bust and economic boom. Even as transatlantic bickering engendered by America's war with Iraq plunged political relations to one of their lowest points in six decades, the economic ties that bind the United States and Europe together only grew stronger in 2003.⁹

This evidence shows conclusively that Ireland could have taken a stronger stance against the Iraq war by asserting its own policy of neutrality and closing Shannon to the US war machine. There would have been no effect on US investment because it enjoys such advantageous economic conditions here.



US Secretary Colin Powell with US troops at Shannon Airport

When Ireland was a British colony, there was always someone who

warned that the 'master would not be pleased'. They pretended to have the best interests of the peasants and tenants at heart but always urged submission. In reality, they were the landlords' agents.

Ahern and Fianna Fail play the same role today. They constantly warn that corporate America would not be pleased. They exaggerate the power of these corporations and misinterpret their motives – all to engender submission. They claim to speak for the interests of the Irish people – but they wave the bogey of jobs losses to gain compliance for their real masters.

We need to liberate our minds from these fears.

The Future of Shannon

But what of Shannon airport? Don't the revenues from the US military help maintain the 500 direct jobs and a further 1,700 other indirect jobs? And isn't the anti-war movement endangering the future of the airport?

Shannon airport, however, is a perfectly viable airport that does not have to rely on US military operations.

Military cargo only accounted for 1.5 per cent of its throughput in 2002 while soldiers made up only 3.1 per cent of its passengers.¹⁰ This figure rose during the second Gulf War – but only marginally as a percentage of overall airport traffic.¹¹

Therefore, a very small proportion of Shannon's business has a much wider effect on the overall state of the airport. The airport is being militarised. There are greater restrictions the freedom of movement. There are increased fears that Shannon could become the target of a terrorist attack because of this traffic.

Moreover, the revenue 'earned' from this military traffic is being subsidised by the Irish taxpayer.

About €1.25 million, a year is given as a subsidy to military aircraft that are exempt from fees normally paid by civilian aircraft.¹² The figure refers to the cost of military over flights – known as en route charges and significantly, communications fees.

The Transport Minister recently explained to the Dail why this was the case:

Ireland also exempts military aircraft flights from payment of the communications charges ... Efforts to collect this charge in the early 1990s were unsuccessful and, following advice from the Attorney

General debts then outstanding were written off with the agreement of the Department of Finance and a decision taken to cease the communications fees to military aircraft.¹³

In simple language: they would not pay, so we dropped the bill. Remember this next time you are faced with a bin charges bill. Explain to the local authorities that foreign military would not pay their communications fees, so the Department of Finance agreed to drop them. And you would like to follow the same example!

The militarisation of Shannon has also led to greater security costs. When US envoy Richard Haass complained of a 'breach of security' in 2003, 120 army troops were deployed to Shannon.¹⁴ The Garda overtime bill in 2003 cost over €1 million. This is in addition to the cost of policing the regular demonstrations that occur there.

What a tremendous waste of resources that could be used to expand and develop this wonderful airport.

The threat to the future of Shannon does not come from the peace movement – but from the very government that is a lap dog for the Pentagon. The plans of the current government for the airline industry represent a real danger to the workers at Shannon.

Shannon airport grew initially because of its 'stop over' status. Under a bilateral agreement between the Republic and the US, half of all flights between Ireland and the US must allow passengers to disembark at Shannon.

However, on 5 June 2003, Transport Minister Seamus Brennan announced that he was giving up on this policy. To facilitate an 'open skies' policy between the US and EU, he would no longer insist on the 'stop-over'. In about two or three years, Shannon's status will be completely changed.

As if this was not enough, the same minister also set about breaking up Aer Rianta, the state company that runs Dublin, Shannon and Cork airports. Aer Rianta is the jewel in the crown of Irish state companies. It has invested over €500 million in Dublin, Shannon and Cork airports at no cost to the taxpayer. It has paid back over €300 million in dividends to the state in recent years. In addition, it maintains some of the lowest landing charges in Europe.

But Aer Rianta has an important commercial enemy. Ryanair's Michael O'Leary is involved in a long argument with the state company

to reduce their landing charges further. He also wants to build a second private terminal airport at Dublin airport. He has donated €63,000 to the Progressive Democrats – who, lo and behold, favour the break up of Aer Rianta and its eventual privatisation.

In 2004, the PDs have finally won the argument in the government to break up Aer Rianta. But this poses a deadly threat to the future of Shannon.

Shannon already faces a very uncertain future with the ending of the stopover policy. It will now have to stand alone – without the benefit of cross subsidies from the rest of the state company. Centralised services, which benefit from economies of scale, will end.

Separately managed airport terminals have been a failure in Toronto, Brussels, Birmingham and Zurich. Yet this is the future which this government is imposing on Shannon. As SIPTU put it, 'Outside the Aer Rianta group, Shannon will become more like Knock or Kerry airports'.¹⁵

Professor Austin Smyth from the National Institute of Transport and Logistics has said that if Aer Rianta is broken up, the future of Shannon and Cork airports would lie in low cost airlines. 'The problem is when you become dependent on them it's difficult to get enough to maintain your bottom line' he said, citing the example of Belfast's Aldergrove which has seen its profits decline.¹⁶

Reliance on low cost airlines will also mean lower wages and more 'flexible' use of contract labour to service seasonal fluctuations.

Government policy offers a bleak future for Shannon airport and its staff. The airport will stagger from crisis to crisis relying, on more low cost airlines – and increasingly military aircraft. Eventually it will be probably be privatised after some spurious crisis over funding.

All of this shows there is a real need for an alliance between the anti-war movement and the employees at Shannon airport. The Irish Anti-War Movement has already pledged to support the workers at Shannon in their resistance to government plans. Both the workers and the peace movement want to see a proper state funded airport that guarantees good conditions to its staff and is not reliant on military aircraft or low cost carriers.

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CHAPTER 6:

How to Get US troops out of Shannon

All the evidence shows that the Irish government has no intention of asking US troops to leave Shannon – no matter how many atrocities that may be committed. In the longer term, their embrace of neo-liberal economics may dovetail with changes in the US military strategy.

With the break up of Aer Rianta, Shannon may be run down and made more dependent on low cost airlines and increased military use. Simultaneously, the withdrawal of large numbers of US troops from their military bases in 'Old Europe' may mean that Shannon will assume a greater importance as a 'footprint' for transporting large numbers of US troops to new war zones.

Yet there is a lot we can achieve if we organise and act together. All governments try to convince people that, once they have made a decision, there is nothing that the people can do. They want to disempower us by suggesting that protest is futile. Demonstrations, they claim, are fine for letting off steam – but afterwards it is 'business as usual'.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Almost every major reform in our society – from the right to vote to legislation restricting the length of the working day – was won through mass protests.

The huge anti-war demonstrations in Ireland have also been a success. They have shown people that they are not alone in their ideas. They have given thousands the courage to become local activists, carrying arguments to their workmates and friends which has helped to shift the mood against war. They have also frightened this government – and this explains their increased use of repression.

We need to deepen this campaign and make the issue of US troops in Shannon a national scandal that people will no longer stand for. This will involve a combination of activities and events that will increase public pressure on this government.

The Irish Anti-War Movement is launching a campaign that will seek to unite many disparate elements into a movement that will force the US troops out of Shannon. We want to link up with the workers in the airport – whose future is threatened by privatisation policies. We want to bring the best of Ireland's musicians together into a festival that celebrates opposition to the misuse of Shannon. We want to raise the issue in town councils, women's organisations, trade unions, community groups so that there is a loud collective voice telling the US war machine to get out.

How You Can Help:



Iraq Veterans Against War protest in America

Join or get an anti-war group going in your area: Most major towns in Ireland have an anti-war group. You can contact the Irish Anti-War Movement for information on the one in your area by e-mailing secretary@irishantiwar.org or phoning (01) 872 7912 or 087 6490261 or by writing to IAWM, PO Box 9260, Dublin 1. If you want to get a local group going with a few friends, we will give you advice on how to get organised.

- **Information is power. Distribute the fact sheet on Shannon.** There is a media blackout on what is happening at Shannon – and the political establishment want to keep it like this

The Irish Anti-War Movement has produced a fact-sheet. You can

order copies of this fact sheet and distribute it to your workmates, neighbours and friends. Contact us by email, phone or post.

- **Gather support for the national petition to stop Irish facilities being used for foreign wars.** Ireland is officially a neutral country – but the government continually makes a mockery of this tradition. It gets away with this, because there is a loophole in the constitution that allows the Dail to give its assent to war.

This needs to be changed so that we restrict their right to manoeuvre. The Irish Anti-War Movement has launched a petition to call for a new amendment to the constitution. The wording of the petition is as follows:

We, the undersigned, deplore the US occupation of Iraq and call for the removal of US troops.

We further call for an amendment to the Constitution of Ireland to clearly enshrine in it the principles of Irish Neutrality. We call for an amendment to ensure that no Irish territory, Irish Airport, Airspace, Seaport or Waters can be used for the preparation or furtherance of acts of aggression by a foreign power.

You can get multiple copies of the petition from the Irish Anti-War Movement.

- **Make your opposition visible. There is no business as usual!** The Irish Anti-War Movement has produced thousands of posters, T-shirts and badges to make our opposition to war visible. Get the posters up in your local café, college, or shops. And wear the badges!

- **Commit your organisation to opposing the US troops in Shannon.** The best way to do this is to present a resolution at an open meeting. Once it is passed, make sure it is publicised and inform the Irish Anti-War Movement. Here is a model resolution you can use.

That this union/branch/council notes the clear evidence that lies were used to justify the invasion of Iraq and the thousands of lives that have been wasted as a consequence.

We restate our opposition to the war and ongoing occupation, thus demand, an end to the use of Shannon Airport in pursuing these aims.

Furthermore, we support the Irish Anti War Movement's campaign to have the constitution amended to specifically rule out future logistical support for such wars.

We recognise the vital role played by Shannon Airport in the economic life of the Mid-West and support the workers there in their fight to defend jobs and working conditions and demand that the government guarantees its ongoing use for civilian purposes.



- Support the big public events to show our opposition to Irish support for war. The Irish Anti-War Movement will be holding public meetings, marches and other protest activities. These will be publicised well in advance. You can check our web site regularly to find out what is happening in your area. Go to <http://irishantiwar.org>
- Not just words – act !

Many political parties have spoken on anti-war platforms – and the Irish Anti-War Movement has been glad of their support. But we are coming to a crucial juncture in Irish politics in the coming year or two. Fianna Fail and the PDs are deeply unpopular and may be thrown out of office. *Now is the time for all the parties that spoke at anti-war events to make it clear that they will not support any government that permits US troops to remain at Shannon.* The Irish Anti-War Movement calls on these parties to make their position on this issue known now – and we urge our supporters to also press for clarification.

**THE
IRISH
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NEEDS

YOU

Join the Irish Anti-War Movement. Send €10 (waged) or €5 to
IAWM PO Box 9260 Dublin 1 E-mail: secretary@irishantiwar.org
Phone: (01) 872 7912 or 087-6490261

Ireland is supposed to be a neutral country. But our government has involved us in a dirty colonial war. Each month, approximately 16,000 US troops pass through Shannon airport on their way to Iraq.

Other planes use Shannon to transport weapons and munitions.

Bertie Ahern claims that 'it is a dead issue'—that it is just normal business.

But UCD sociologist Kieran Allen disputes this claim.

In a piercing critique he argues that what is happening at Shannon is a national scandal which needs to be halted.

Title: The US Military & Shannon Airport
Organisation: Irish Anti-War Movement
Author: Kieran Allen
Date: 2004

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