Wikileaks comes to Ireland

The Shannon connection

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The latest Wikileaks release of "diplomatic" communications has unearthed some new information about the US military's use of Shannon airport. Whilst the Irish government have always tried to downplay the role that Shannon airport plays in the mass murder of people of colour and the geopolitical power plays of the US and UK, it was clear in 2005, when this cable was written, that Shannon airport was a significant "stopover" for the US industrial-military complex

> "*For the United States, geography makes Shannon a key transit point for military flights and military contract flights carrying personnel and materiel to Iraq and the Middle East/Gulf theatre in the global war on terror, as well as to Europe and Africa. In 2005, roughly 340,000 U.S. troops passed through Shannon on nearly 2,500 contract carrier flights; about 450 equipment-related/distinguished-visitor transit milair (sic) flights and thousands of airspace overflights also took place.*"

Whilst none of this may be news to the many peace and anti-war activists involved in trying to take direct actions at the airport itself, the extent to which the FF government bent over backward for the US military is indeed shocking. Despite the not guilty verdict of the five peace activists who openly smashed up a US military plane, and a march of over 100,000 demanding that the US not launch a war in Iraq, the leaked memo shows that the Irish government went completely against the wishes of the people. It is also clear that US "diplomats" — or let's call them what they are, spies for the furtherance of US capitalist interests — were playing very close attention to the the peace and anti-war activists in Ireland.

> "*4. (SBU) For segments of the Irish public, however, the visibility of U.S. troops at Shannon has made the airport a symbol of Irish complicity in perceived U.S. wrongdoing in the Gulf/Middle East. This popular sentiment was manifest in the July 25 jury decision to acquit the "Shannon Five," a group of anti-war protesters who damaged a U.S. naval aircraft at the airport in 2003 in the belief that they would prevent loss of life in Iraq (ref A). Members of the Shannon Five have subsequently called for a mass demonstration in Dublin on September 23 (capitalizing on publicity for the September 21–24 Ryder Cup tournament and the return of university students) as part of a campaign to "demilitarize" the airport. Although it is by no means clear that any protest will reach "mass" proportions, participation in the planned protest will likely draw from a vocal anti-war lobby that has demonstrated against U.S. use of Shannon from the start of the Iraq War up through the recent Lebanon conflict."*

The US couldn't be more explicit about the role of its puppets sitting in government, to the extent that it names the individual

ministers who went so far as to question the legality of the acquittal of the "Shannon 5".

> "*The Irish Government consistently has acted to ensure continued U.S. military transits at Shannon in the face of public criticism. Since the Shannon Five decision, for example, Irish authorities have upgraded airport security, doubling the number of police and military personnel patrolling the facility and introducing rigorous checks at the parking lot and perimeter fence...Moreover, despite a general Government reluctance to challenge independent court decisions, Defence Minister Willie O'Dea and governing Fianna Fail party politicians have publicly questioned the legal merits of the Shannon Five jury decision. These public statements track with representations to the Irish Parliament by Government ministers over recent years and months in defence of U.S. practices at Shannon, including by Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern, who cited U.S. assurances on renditions this past year to rebuff calls for random aircraft checks. In parliamentary debate this spring, Minister of State for Europe, Noel Treacy, dismissed renewed calls for random inspections following the transit of a U.S. military prisoner that occurred without prior notification to the Irish Government (ref B)."*

One law for some and one for another, eh Willie? The Irish state refused to check for "renditions" — the US practice of kidnapping "suspects" to outsource their torture at various points around the globe — and blew off calls from the population to carry out those checks.

Also included was something new to the author — that the US were using Shannon airport to equip the Israeli army:

"In an August 30 meeting with the DCM and emboff (sic), DFA Political Director Rory Montgomery said that the Department of Transport's more encompassing approach to munitions of war and notification requirements reflected the Irish Government's interest in knowing the full scope of military materiel transiting Ireland. He recalled that the February shipment through Shannon of U.S. Apache helicopters to/from Israel, which the U.S. contract carrier had not listed as munitions of war, elicited parliamentary criticism and highlighted the need for clarity about the nature of materiel in transit (ref C). More expansive notification requirements that would apply to all countries would "make it easier" for the Irish Government to decide on allowable shipments, while remaining predisposed to respond quickly and positively to U.S. transit requests, said Montgomery. He added that the DFA would recommend that the Department of Transport consult with Post in the process of clarifying and publishing guidance on munitions of war. The DCM noted Post's intention to confer with the Transport Department, and he emphasized that broader notification requirements would make it more cumbersome to process materiel shipments, with the possibility that U.S. military planners would consider alternatives to Shannon as a transit hub"

It's worth noting, given the context of cuts, and austerity and pain we are in now, that these people not only turned a blind eye to murder and torture, but they actively repressed the part of the population that were trying to do something about it. They sought to keep the US using Shannon regardless of the human cost, or how we felt as people, over who should have control. The idea that they have the capacity to attack the most

vulnerable in Ireland with savage cuts takes a new perspective when we know that the government's own policies around the US are literally the stuff of the murder of tens of thousands of our fellow human beings. These things are connected to the valueless and visionless mindset our our political and economic system.

Perhaps of importance to the grassroots anti-war activists is the last paragraph, which shows how close we came to making the US withdraw from Shannon.

> *"..we would appreciate Washington's judgement as to whether the process of notification of almost everything of a military nature (including by contract carriers) through Shannon is becoming too difficult to make the airport a preferred transit stop"*

Though history will always be debated , it seems even clear now that the SWP-led IAWM made a strategic mistake in refusing to support popular and mass direct actions in Shannon airport earlier this decade. Whilst anarchists and many others were willing, and did, bring the protests to Shannon and directly affect the US military machine, the SWP/IAWM's instrumental (and some would say sectarian) desire to control the "movement" ultimately contributed to the demise of a genuinely open and democratic antiwar movement. Regardless, these are lessons to learn from, and whilst the left can try to learn from our past experiences, we can see yet again that the state puts humanity way down the list. Individuals have been named here and perhaps it's time there was a bit of catch up on them for this. They still have blood on their hands.