



COVID-19 RELATED QUERY

Department of Defence Internal Reference Number: DCQ19

Name of TD making query: Mr. Duncan Smith TD

Query Received: To ask the Minister for Defence the up to date position with the return of Irish troops, currently on UN missions during this pandemic

Reply:

Given the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis, and in order to mitigate its transmission and ensure the continued operation of all missions, the United Nations Secretary General, on 5 April, 2020, advised all troop contributors and mission commanders of his plans to suspend all rotations and leave for military personnel serving in UN missions until 30 June. The UN direction will impact over 100,000 UN uniformed personnel from over 120 countries serving world-wide.

The moratorium on upcoming rotations and leave is designed to ensure the continued operations of essential peacekeeping missions, to protect vulnerable populations in conflict zones and to maintain international peace and security. It is also designed to ensure the health and wellbeing of personnel deployed on UN operations by limiting movement of personnel into mission areas.

The UN Secretary General has advised that in certain limited and extenuating circumstances, it may be determined that units or uniformed personnel must be deployed or rotated, in order to continue to deliver on the mission mandate. In such circumstances and where a rotation is vital to maintain a critical operational capability, an exemption may be granted. Such an exemption will only be granted, however, where the requisite quarantine requirements for incoming and rotating contingents can also be guaranteed and in accordance with the requirements of the host state. Decisions on any exemption will be taken by the UN Headquarters in New York on a proposal from the Force Commander.

The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces have been examining the impact of the UN decision on Defence Forces personnel currently serving with UN missions. We are also examining the impact it may have on future deployments, so as to advise personnel and families accordingly. Personnel deployed overseas have been briefed by their commanders in the mission areas.

Force Commanders in UN missions are currently preparing their plans with a view to addressing the direction of the UN Secretary General. There is ongoing engagement within the missions and with UN

mission commanders where the Defence Forces are deployed to ensure that Defence Forces rotations can take place as close as possible to the original planned dates and in accordance with the direction of the UN Secretary General.

Insofar as is practicable, within current restrictions, we have been successful in rotating Defence Forces personnel on their due dates or as required.

- We have had a successful rotation of the Defence Forces contingent in UNDOF on 4/5 April, while observing all quarantine restrictions for the rotating contingents. Returning personnel self-isolated at home or, where that was not possible, were accommodated in military facilities.
- On foot of a significant reduction in training activities in the EU Training Mission in Mali, the EU decided to reduce the number of training personnel in the mission while maintaining essential advisory and support capabilities. As a result, seven Defence Forces personnel were withdrawn and flown on a Spanish military aircraft to Madrid where they were met by the Air Corps Casa aircraft and repatriated to Ireland on 18th April.
- A rotation of 11 personnel currently deployed in Kosovo with the NATO led KFOR operation was conducted on 22nd April using the Air Corps Casa aircraft.
- In the case of MINUSMA, the UN Mission in Mali, the Defence Forces contingent is embedded in the German contingent in this Mission and are rotated with that contingent using German military air assets. Defence Forces personnel due to deploy to MINUSMA are currently in quarantine in Germany and will rotate on their due date. The returning personnel will be flown to Germany and will then be repatriated to Ireland.
- In the case of UNIFIL, the rotation of the main contingent is due later next month. As our largest mission, this involves the rotation of a significant number of personnel and is thus more complex, given quarantine and operational requirements. Unfortunately it is not simply a matter of landing a plane in Beirut Airport. UNIFIL is an active security operation in a volatile conflict zone and the extraction and rotation of personnel requires approvals and permissions from the UN and from the Host State, not least in terms of their health status and that of the local population in a time of a global pandemic health restrictions. In accordance with the direction of the UN Secretary General, the UNIFIL rotation will require the approval of the UN in New York on the recommendation of the Force Commander. Planning is ongoing in the mission headquarters in Lebanon in relation to the operation of the mission, including contingent rotations.

As indicated above, there is ongoing active engagement within the UNIFIL mission, with UN Force Commander and at UN Headquarters in New York through Ireland's Permanent Mission to the UN to ensure that the Defence Forces rotation can take place as close as possible to the original planned dates.

Following consultation between the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the Department of Foreign Affairs, in accordance with the process laid down by the UN Secretary General, a submission has been made by the Defence Forces through the Senior Irish Officer to the UNIFIL Force Commander seeking an exemption. In tandem with this, the Department of Foreign Affairs through our Permanent Mission in New York has been in close contact with UN Headquarters at senior level in relation to the case being made for an exemption. These contacts are continuing. We understand that the Force Commander is in the process of submitting his report to the UN Headquarters and that that will form the basis for the decision by the UN on any and all rotations in the mission.

While we continue to actively pursue the matter, and there are ongoing contacts at the most senior level with the UN in New York, as of yet, there has been no decision by UN Headquarters on the rotation of the Defence Forces contingent or any other contingent in UNIFIL.

The Military authorities have confirmed that personnel deployed in UNIFIL have been fully briefed by their commanders on an ongoing basis in the mission area on the current situation and ongoing developments. As soon as some definitive information on rotation dates for the Defence Forces contingent in UNIFIL is available, personnel and their families will be duly advised by the military authorities through the normal communication channels.

ENDS



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

COVID-19 RELATED QUERY

Department of Defence Internal Reference Number: DCQ20

Name of TD making query: Mr. Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD

Query Received: To ask Minister for Defence what new arrangements are being made for front-line workers under their Department who require childcare provision to continue working and when will they be implemented.

Reply:

The Government recently announced the introduction of the following new arrangements for childcare for essential healthcare workers. In circumstances where one parent/guardian/partner is an essential healthcare worker, the other parent/guardian/partner will be supported by their public sector employer to remain at home to care for the child(ren) so as to ensure that the essential healthcare worker is able to go to work.

In the first instance, flexible working arrangements will be put in place for the other parent/guardian/partner such as working from home or working adjusted hours/ shifts. This will allow the employee to balance work and caring responsibilities while ensuring the “essential healthcare worker” is able to go to work. Though not anticipated, in the event that flexible arrangements do not allow the essential healthcare worker to attend work it will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

The Defence Forces, while not in the category of essential healthcare workers, continue to provide a broad range of capability responses in support of the Primary Response Agencies during the Covid-19 Pandemic. In this context I am advised by the Military Authorities that the organisation has implemented prudent and safe working conditions and work practices to ensure that capabilities are maintained in order to be in a position to respond to assigned tasks. Commanders at all levels are required, in as far as is practicable, to implement flexible work arrangements, while being cognisant of operational outputs, and sensitive to carer responsibilities. Instructions have been issued to that effect and work practices will continue to be kept under review in order to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of personnel, thereby ensuring that they are in a position to provide appropriate capability in support of the Primary Response Agencies.

In addition to these arrangements for the members of the Defence Forces, working arrangements and leave associated with COVID 19 for civil and public servants as provided by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, are implemented, as required, by my Department.

ENDS



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

COVID-19 RELATED QUERY

Department of Defence Internal Reference Number: DCQ21

Name of TD making query: Mr. Sean Sherlock, TD

Query Received: To ask the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if it is planned to extend the timeframe of the tour of duty deployed to Lebanon; and if so, the justification for same.

Reply:

Given the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis, and in order to mitigate its transmission and ensure the continued operation of all missions, the United Nations Secretary General, on 5 April, 2020, advised all troop contributors and mission commanders of his plans to suspend all rotations and leave for military personnel serving in UN missions until 30 June. The UN direction will impact over 100,000 UN uniformed personnel from over 120 countries serving world-wide.

The moratorium on upcoming rotations and leave is designed to ensure the continued operations of essential peacekeeping missions, to protect vulnerable populations in conflict zones and to maintain international peace and security. It is also designed to ensure the health and wellbeing of personnel deployed on UN operations by limiting movement of personnel into mission areas.

The UN Secretary General has advised that in certain limited and extenuating circumstances, it may be determined that units or uniformed personnel must be deployed or rotated, in order to continue to deliver on the mission mandate. In such circumstances and where a rotation is vital to maintain a critical operational capability, an exemption may be granted. Such an exemption will only be granted, however, where the requisite quarantine requirements for incoming and rotating contingents can also be guaranteed and in accordance with the requirements of the host state. Decisions on any exemption will be taken by the UN Headquarters in New York on a proposal from the Force Commander.

The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces have been examining the impact of the UN decision on Defence Forces personnel currently serving with UN missions. We are also examining the impact it may have on future deployments, so as to advise personnel and families accordingly. Personnel deployed overseas have been briefed by their commanders in the mission areas.

Force Commanders in UN missions are currently preparing their plans with a view to addressing the direction of the UN Secretary General. There is ongoing engagement within the missions and with UN

mission commanders where the Defence Forces are deployed to ensure that Defence Forces rotations can take place as close as possible to the original planned dates and in accordance with the direction of the UN Secretary General.

Insofar as is practicable, within current restrictions, we have been successful in rotating Defence Forces personnel on their due dates or as required.

- We have had a successful rotation of the Defence Forces contingent in UNDOF on 4/5 April, while observing all quarantine restrictions for the rotating contingents. Returning personnel self-isolated at home or, where that was not possible, were accommodated in military facilities.
- On foot of a significant reduction in training activities in the EU Training Mission in Mali, the EU decided to reduce the number of training personnel in the mission while maintaining essential advisory and support capabilities. As a result, seven Defence Forces personnel were withdrawn and flown on a Spanish military aircraft to Madrid where they were met by the Air Corps Casa aircraft and repatriated to Ireland on 18th April.
- A rotation of 11 personnel currently deployed in Kosovo with the NATO led KFOR operation was conducted on 22nd April using the Air Corps Casa aircraft.
- In the case of MINUSMA, the UN Mission in Mali, the Defence Forces contingent is embedded in the German contingent in this Mission and are rotated with that contingent using German military air assets. Defence Forces personnel due to deploy to MINUSMA are currently in quarantine in Germany and will rotate on their due date. The returning personnel will be flown to Germany and will then be repatriated to Ireland.
- In the case of UNIFIL, the rotation of the main contingent is due later next month. As our largest mission, this involves the rotation of a significant number of personnel and is thus more complex, given quarantine and operational requirements. Unfortunately it is not simply a matter of landing a plane in Beirut Airport. UNIFIL is an active security operation in a volatile conflict zone and the extraction and rotation of personnel requires approvals and permissions from the UN and from the Host State, not least in terms of their health status and that of the local population in a time of a global pandemic health restrictions. In accordance with the direction of the UN Secretary General, the UNIFIL rotation will require the approval of the UN in New York on the recommendation of the Force Commander. Planning is ongoing in the mission headquarters in Lebanon in relation to the operation of the mission, including contingent rotations.

As indicated above, there is ongoing active engagement within the UNIFIL mission, with UN Force Commander and at UN Headquarters in New York through Ireland's Permanent Mission to the UN to ensure that the Defence Forces rotation can take place as close as possible to the original planned dates.

Following consultation between the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the Department of Foreign Affairs, in accordance with the process laid down by the UN Secretary General, a submission has been made by the Defence Forces through the Senior Irish Officer to the UNIFIL Force Commander seeking an exemption. In tandem with this, the Department of Foreign Affairs through our Permanent Mission in New York has been in close contact with UN Headquarters at senior level in relation to the case being made for an exemption. These contacts are continuing. We understand that the Force Commander is in the process of submitting his report to the UN Headquarters and that that will form the basis for the decision by the UN on any and all rotations in the mission.

While we continue to actively pursue the matter, and there are ongoing contacts at the most senior level with the UN in New York, as of yet, there has been no decision by UN Headquarters on the rotation of the Defence Forces contingent or any other contingent in UNIFIL.

The Military authorities have confirmed that personnel deployed in UNIFIL have been fully briefed by their commanders on an ongoing basis in the mission area on the current situation and ongoing developments. As soon as some definitive information on rotation dates for the Defence Forces contingent in UNIFIL is available, personnel and their families will be duly advised by the military authorities through the normal communication channels.

ENDS



COVID-19 RELATED QUERY

Department of Defence Internal Reference Number: DCQ22

Name of TD making query: Mr. Richard Boyd Barrett, TD.

Query Received: To ask the minister for Defence how many members of the Irish defence forces are currently serving overseas, and of those how many are stranded due to the COVID-19 crisis, and when does he intends to repatriate them and if he will make a statement on the matter

Reply:

As of 3rd April 2020, Ireland is contributing 580 Defence Forces personnel to 10 different missions throughout the world and also to a range of international organisations and National representations.

Given the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis, and in order to mitigate its transmission and ensure the continued operation of all missions, the United Nations Secretary General, on 5 April, 2020, advised all troop contributors and mission commanders of his plans to suspend all rotations and leave for military personnel serving in UN missions until 30 June. The UN direction will impact over 100,000 UN uniformed personnel from over 120 countries serving world-wide.

The moratorium on upcoming rotations and leave is designed to ensure the continued operations of essential peacekeeping missions, to protect vulnerable populations in conflict zones and to maintain international peace and security. It is also designed to ensure the health and wellbeing of personnel deployed on UN operations by limiting movement of personnel into mission areas.

The UN Secretary General has advised that in certain limited and extenuating circumstances, it may be determined that units or uniformed personnel must be deployed or rotated, in order to continue to deliver on the mission mandate. In such circumstances and where a rotation is vital to maintain a critical operational capability, an exemption may be granted. Such an exemption will only be granted, however, where the requisite quarantine requirements for incoming and rotating contingents can also be guaranteed and in accordance with the requirements of the host state. Decisions on any exemption will be taken by the UN Headquarters in New York on a proposal from the Force Commander.

The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces have been examining the impact of the UN decision on Defence Forces personnel currently serving with UN missions. We are also examining the impact it may

have on future deployments, so as to advise personnel and families accordingly. Personnel deployed overseas have been briefed by their commanders in the mission areas.

Force Commanders in UN missions are currently preparing their plans with a view to addressing the direction of the UN Secretary General. There is ongoing engagement within the missions and with UN mission commanders where the Defence Forces are deployed to ensure that Defence Forces rotations can take place as close as possible to the original planned dates and in accordance with the direction of the UN Secretary General.

Throughout the month of April, and even within the current restrictions, we have been successful in rotating Defence Forces personnel on their due dates or as required.

- We have had a successful rotation of the Defence Forces contingent in UNDOF on 4/5 April, while observing all quarantine restrictions for the rotating contingents. Returning personnel self-isolated at home or, where that was not possible, were accommodated in military facilities.
- On foot of a significant reduction in training activities in the EU Training Mission in Mali, the EU decided to reduce the number of training personnel in the mission while maintaining essential advisory and support capabilities. As a result, seven Defence Forces personnel were withdrawn and flown on a Spanish military aircraft to Madrid where they were met by the Air Corps Casa aircraft and repatriated to Ireland on 18th April.
- A rotation of 11 personnel currently deployed in Kosovo with the NATO led KFOR operation was conducted on 22nd April using the Air Corps Casa aircraft.
- In the case of MINUSMA, the UN Mission in Mali, the Defence Forces contingent is embedded in the German contingent in this Mission and are rotated with that contingent using German military air assets. Defence Forces personnel due to deploy to MINUSMA are currently in quarantine in Germany and will rotate on their due date. The returning personnel will be flown to Germany and will then be repatriated to Ireland.
- In the case of UNIFIL, the rotation of the main contingent of approximately 300 personnel is due later next month. As our largest mission, this involves the rotation of a significant number of personnel and is thus more complex, given quarantine and operational requirements. Unfortunately it is not simply a matter of landing a plane in Beirut Airport. UNIFIL is an active security operation in a volatile conflict zone and the extraction and rotation of personnel requires approvals and permissions from the UN and from the Host State, not least in terms of their health status and that of the local population in a time of a global pandemic health restrictions. In accordance with the direction of the UN Secretary General, the UNIFIL rotation will require the approval of the UN in New York on the recommendation of the Force Commander. Planning is ongoing in the mission headquarters in Lebanon in relation to the operation of the mission, including contingent rotations.

As indicated above, there is ongoing active engagement within the UNIFIL mission, with UN Force Commander and at UN Headquarters in New York through Ireland's Permanent Mission to the UN to ensure that the Defence Forces rotation can take place as close as possible to the original planned dates.

Following consultation between the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the Department of Foreign Affairs, in accordance with the process laid down by the UN Secretary General, a submission has been made by the Defence Forces through the Senior Irish Officer to the UNIFIL Force Commander seeking an exemption. In tandem with this, the Department of Foreign Affairs through our Permanent Mission in New York has been in close contact with UN Headquarters at senior level in relation to the case being made for an exemption. These contacts are continuing. We understand that the Force

Commander is in the process of submitting his report to the UN Headquarters and that that will form the basis for the decision by the UN on any and all rotations in the mission.

While we continue to actively pursue the matter, and there are ongoing contacts at the most senior level with the UN in New York, as of yet, there has been no decision by UN Headquarters on the rotation of the Defence Forces contingent or any other contingent in UNIFIL.

The Military authorities have confirmed that personnel deployed in UNIFIL have been fully briefed by their commanders on an ongoing basis in the mission area on the current situation and ongoing developments. As soon as some definitive information on rotation dates for the Defence Forces contingent in UNIFIL is available, personnel and their families will be duly advised by the military authorities through the normal communication channels.

ENDS