

# **LIBERIA – A UN PARAMETER FOR SUCCESS?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay will address the success or otherwise of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). United Nations Peacekeeping has developed over the past sixty years into a complex, global undertaking; therefore assessing the impact and effectiveness of a Peacekeeping mission remains as difficult as it is important. The ending of the Cold War plunged the African continent into a number of Intrastate Wars, one of which was the Liberian conflict. The internecine Liberian war brought to the fore arguments about the legitimacy of interfering in the affairs of another state and allied to the changing nature of Peacekeeping. Liberia encapsulated fundamental challenges for the implementation of peace agreements in a divided society. That is why it represents such a valuable model for evaluating what represents success or failure in a Peacekeeping Operation (PKO).

This paper will briefly examine the background of the Liberian conflict and also the reasons as to why it developed into such a protracted and brutal affair. This will allow an analysis of what constitutes a successful UN mission and the claimed successes of UNMIL in implementing its mandate and achieving its objectives. This in turn will develop a framework as to how success can be measured.

A broad corpus of literature already exists in relation to why certain PKOs are deemed a success in comparison to others and these ‘parameters’ are scrutinized in relation to Liberia. In doing so, this study will explore the different elements of the UN peace building strategies which are crucial to the stabilization of war torn countries, thereby contextualizing how UNMIL performed within Liberia. This paper will argue that UNMIL, while acknowledging justifiable concerns and criticisms directed towards it, contributed significantly to the successful restoration of a secure and stable environment (SASE) in the country. UNMIL can generally be considered a UN success story. Attention can then be focused as to how intervention by international bodies such as the United Nations can contribute in terms of building peace and stability in other conflict zones.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The ending of the Cold War and the “withdrawal of support from Western developed states” plunged the African continent into a number of internal civil wars, one of which was the Liberian conflict (Coleman, 2007: 73). Equally as Ero and Temin (2004) have pointed out this region of Western Africa is arguably “one of the world’s most unstable regions”; and they qualify this by alluding to the fact that out of a total of “seventy two successful military coups occurring in Africa between the years 1960-1990...[some] thirty seven took place in West Africa (p. 93). The central core

question of this essay is has UNMIL been successful and in effect how to measure such claimed success or indeed lack of. Before answering this question it is essential to underline the fact that each individual UN Peacekeeping mission is unique and therefore various standards need to be assessed to consider the effectiveness or otherwise of PKOs. As Druckman and Diehl (2013) argue;

“the challenges of evaluating the effectiveness of peace operations are considerable. They include providing a clear definition of what is meant by success or failure, establishing standards that guide evaluation, developing indicators that correspond to the standards, assembling information to access the indicators, performing analysis that tracks changes in the indicators over time, and interpreting the trends to render judgments (p. 1).

Therefore, this essay seeks to assess the local impacts of UNMIL’s deployment and to garner an estimation of the success of mandated activities conducted under the tutelage of the UN. In the forthcoming it will be argued that the presence of United Nations Peacekeepers in Liberia has contributed significantly to the restoration of peace and security in the country. To achieve this, a brief historical background and outline of the evolution of the Liberian Civil war will foreground the reader into the causes of the conflict and how in turn this led to direct UN intervention. Encapsulated within this, the UNMIL mission will be put in context within the spectrum of the historical development of UN peacekeeping operations and how UNMIL in turn is nested within this evolution. Following this, the mission itself will be analyzed within the context of a number of parameters to gauge its success, including the establishment and deployment of UNMIL, its stated objectives; which in turn will guide the reader through the actual operations conducted by UNMIL. This will then inform an analysis of the success of the mission in achieving key goals, based on data collected by UN official bodies and a cross spectrum of critiques by various authors to go beyond the scope of the immediate resolution of the Liberian conflict.

Having signposted the reader as to the structure of the essay the following is designed to give an entry point into the background of the conflict prior to UN deployment, where an understanding of the history of Liberia is essential to explain its subsequent descent into anarchy.

### *Historical Background*

The modern Liberian state was founded by ‘American-Liberians’, descendants of former Slaves from America who settled in Liberia from 1821 onwards (Cook, 2003: 1). Liberia declared its independence in July 1847; subsequently ‘Americo’ Liberians in effect exercised both political and economic control. This era of Americo-Liberian domination witnessed little or no political reform whereby political power pivoted around a privileged few which reached its apex during the 1971-1980 presidency of William Torbert (Ero, 1995: 45), a period characterized by endemic corruption. In 1980 a military *coup d’etat* was initiated by Samuel Kenyan Doe, with the support of the majority of the population; while a new constitution was initiated, its ideals and associated reform were never implemented in any real or tangible way, in effect Doe merely replaced one elite with another in the guise of his own henchmen (Cook, 2003: 2). According to Bekoe (2008) the situation deteriorated further with the advent of Charles Taylor, who led a group called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), actively assisted by other regional powers. Beyond the brutality of the Doe regime Taylor’s ranks were in turn swelled by those who had suffered under the Doe regime. This in turn saw the country slide into a bloody civil war when in 1989 Taylor led his group into Liberia from Cote d’Ivoire.<sup>1</sup>

Cook (2003) describes the confused evolution of the conflict with armed militias morphing into sub-groups with increasing violence being perpetrated on innocent victims.<sup>2</sup> Indeed Cochrane (2008) has noted that “this different way of doing war has important implications for bringing such violence to an end”. He also noted how “...in these intra-state conflicts, decision making and political power are often more fractured than in the case in inter-state warfare, civilian populations are normally more involved...and humanitarian abuses are often more extreme” (p. 31).

In 1998 Koff Annan in a report entitled “Sources of Conflict in Africa” in effect presaged this type of interstate conflict developing in Africa that was now being witnessed in Liberia;

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<sup>1</sup> This group later split and the Independent National People’s Front Liberia (INPLF) under Prince Johnson. In 1990 Prince Johnson’s INPLF forces captured Doe in Monrovia, and after a perfunctory show trial executed him by firing squad.

<sup>2</sup> Other disparate groupings were in addition to Taylor’s NPFL; NPFL Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC); Lofa Defence Force (LDF); ULIMO-K; ULIMO-J; Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL); Liberian Peace Council (LPC). [www.unmil.org/1content.asp?ccat=history](http://www.unmil.org/1content.asp?ccat=history)

“...in which the main aim, to an alarming degree, is the destruction not of armies but of civilians and entire ethnic groups. Preventing such wars is no longer a question of defending states or protecting allies. It is a question of defending humanity itself” (Shawcross, 2000: 252).

It was these multi-faceted issues that were to subsequently inform the UNMIL mission when deployed. By the mid-1990s Taylor controlled the majority of the country with the exception of the capital Monrovia. It is also notable that perhaps no other 21<sup>st</sup> century Conflict made more use of Child Soldiers than the Liberian Civil War, their use by all sides was both prolific and endemic (Kelly, 11 July 2009). It was onto this confused and bloody stage that the UN began to make tentative efforts to try and bring a resolution to the conflict.

#### *First Step – UNOMIL*

Regionally peace attempts brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had little effect, despite later assistance from a nascent UN Observer Mission, UNOMIL.<sup>3</sup> The conflict was fuelled and exacerbated by all the parties to the conflict engaging in systematic exploitation of natural resources including diamonds, rubber and timber; consequently as Sisk (2009) has noted where he refers to ‘incessant ambition’ of rival militias and warlords to profit from war, meant that any hopes of a peaceful solution were greatly reduced (p. 116). Although a Peace Agreement was signed in 1995 with elections being held in 1997, but no peace was possible with the election of Charles Taylor, fighting continued until 2003 when Taylor was granted asylum in Nigeria and left the country.<sup>4</sup> The way was now clear for a multidimensional UN mission to enter the country. In the following the evolution and deployment of UNMIL will be examined and how the UN envisaged it to be a multidimensional integrated mission.

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<sup>3</sup> The UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) established by the SC on September 22, 1993, deployed some 368 UN Military Observers (UNMOs) and associated civilian personnel to monitor implementation of the abortive Cotonou Peace Agreement prior to 1994 elections (Adibe, 1997: 471).

<sup>4</sup> Taylor was subsequently handed over to the UN in 2006 and indicted on charges of crimes against Humanity: firstly in Sierra Leone and then at The Hague. He was found guilty in April 2012 of all eleven charges levied by the Special Court, including terror, murder and rape (The Economist, 21 May 2007).

### *The Spectrum of Peace Operations*

We have seen previously how the UNMIL mission was predicated by a bloody and violent intra-state war, prior to examining the UNMIL mission in detail this now allows an opportunity to examine how it is nested as part of the spectrum of the generational development of UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs).

The aftermath of the Cold War in terms of PKOs, one of which was UNMIL, had witnessed significant changes in the posture of UN deployments. Missions carried out during the era of the Cold war are classified by many UN academics as '*first generation*' and those post Cold war usually referred to as '*second generation*' (Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2012: 149). What were the fundamental differences between these two so-called 'generations' of Peacekeeping?

The traditional method of peacekeeping during the first generation of missions usually witnessed UN intervention with the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces acting as buffer zones between the conflict parties, such as the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon or the UNPROFOR mission in the Balkans (Coakley, 2008: 115). Cold War peacekeeping missions were predicated on three core pillars, consent, impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defence (Doyle and Sambanis, 2006: 348). Jett (1999) also emphasises that irrespective of the development and evolution of PKOs it remains the case that the mandate which is created by the UNSC is vitally important in both how it is framed and how strong its terms are in impinging on how successful a mission will be (p. 39)

Sesay (1996) also contends that another key factor that came to the fore following the end of the Cold War was the argument of the legitimacy of interfering in the affairs of another state, as the UN Charter prohibited states to violate another's sovereignty and also prohibited the use of force (p. 35). But equally he also refers to the changing nature of Peacekeeping in the aftermath of the Cold War as being one where intervention was possible, for example on humanitarian grounds, where conflict could pose 'international instability' and thirdly where a state had failed (p. 36). This reflects a profound, indeed arguably a paradigm shift in international law, whereby a growing sense of global responsibilities for atrocities is increasingly encroaching upon the formerly sanctified concept of state sovereignty, it is in this area

in particular in coming years which in effect promises part of a new doctrine, called the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Another related issue that emerged during this period as well as the hotly contested issue of R2P was not only how to measure but by what criteria UN missions can be deemed to have been a success or not. In the following a brief synopsis will be addressed on the debate in this sphere.

### *Measuring Success?*

Howard (2007) has noted how “measurements of success in Peacekeeping vary significantly” (p. 2007). To decide on the success of any given UN mission, it is important what parameters are used to judge the success, and accordingly to examine what constitutes a successful mission. While Diehl (2008) accepts that defining the success or otherwise of a UN mission is difficult, there is nonetheless agreement amongst academics as to a set of criteria, however he asserts that success can mean different things to different people. Equally a recurring theme within the literature is what exactly peacekeeping is for and who decides what peacekeeping is. This in turn impacts on whether it is enough to realise short or long term goals. Johansen (1994) notes that Diehl (1994) lists two criteria for judging if a peacekeeping mission is a success; if the operation limits ‘armed conflict’ and secondly if it promotes conflict resolution (Johansen, 1994: 307). It was these arguments and themes that were to inform the deployment and posture of the forthcoming UNMIL mission

### *Objectives of UNMIL – Integrated Mission Concept*

Prior TO UNMIL the UN had received much criticism for failures to successfully achieve their objectives, particular in light of failed peacekeeping missions in Rwanda, Somalia and Srebrenica. On foot of this the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping or the Brahimi Report is perhaps the most significant review of peace and security activities undertaken as a result of a number of failed UN peace operations. Brahimi was tasked in accessing the shortcomings of the existing system in situ for PKOs and to make frank, specific and realistic recommendations for

change. These recommendations focused not only on politics and strategy but also and perhaps even more so on operational and organizational areas of need.<sup>5</sup>

The UNMIL deployment embraced several key components of the Brahimi Report. Some of the recommendations made by the report that were taken on board included rapid deployment teams, pre-mandate commitment authority and an integrated mission task force (Bellamy and Williams, 2004: 1). These developments were accordingly built into the fabric of the UNMIL deployment (Tardy, 20-21 June 2004). At this juncture as UNMIL was poised to be deployed Liberia's brutal conflict had resulted in over 250,000 deaths and the displacement of one third of the population (James-Allen *et al.*, 2010: 3).

It has been seen how the fallout from Brahimi was the development of a more complex and planned approach to peacekeeping operations. Lessons learned would result in more efficient systems being employed during mission planning at both operational and strategic levels. UNMIL was the first major and most complex UN deployment since the Brahimi report. UNMIL United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1509 was adopted on 19 September 2003, and required the transfer of authority to UNMIL from ECOWAS to take immediate effect. The mission deployed on Liberian soil on 01 October 2003 and began operations immediately.<sup>6</sup> UNMIL was because of these developments in the peacekeeping sphere one of the first missions which was conceived to implement the Integrated Mission Concept which sought to increase coordination between military and civilian actors (Hull, 2008: 6).

As the primary aim of this essay is to assess the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia, in this section it is opportune to discuss the major objectives that UNMIL was

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<sup>5</sup> The Brahimi Report was commissioned by the UN Secretary General and carried out by a high level Panel. It constituted a thorough review of the UN peace and security activities, addressing a number of issues related to the need for more urgent policy development standards and support for realistic mandates, a capacity for information management and strategic analysis; improved mission guidance and leadership, rapid deployment standards and 'on-call' expertise. It also called for the enhancement of Headquarters capacity. It was presented to the GA in August 2000. However, as emphasised in the Report, without the willingness of member states to commit troops and financial support, the performance of the UN in PKOs would not improve.

<sup>6</sup> ECOMIL (ECOWAS Mission in Liberia) troops, serving in Liberia were 're-hatted' as blue helmeted UN troops. ECOMIL came from ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), the mission was designated UNMIL.

entrusted and expected to accomplish that in turn will serve as benchmarks for that assessment. These objectives emanated directly from UNMILs mandate and as we have seen the associated goals of which the Integrated Mission Concept was a key and defining pillar (Hull, 2008: 11), termed as the Integrated Mandate Implementation Plan (IMIP) in the Liberian context. It was the aim of UNMIL to create an environment free from further violence which would enable Liberia to get back on track in relation to its own political, economic and social development. It was not sufficient to prevent the fighting and then for UNMIL forces to depart the country, and that logically such operations are undertaken on the theory that military means alone cannot lead to a self sustaining peace unless accompanied by robust efforts to address the structural factors responsible for the outbreak of Civil war in the first instance; as well as the economic and political consequences of war that left societies vulnerable to further renewed conflict (An Agenda for Peace, 1995: 25).

The Brahimi Report remains perhaps one of the most significant reviews of UN “peace and security activities” undertaken as a result of a number of failed UN peace operations (Brahimi Report, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)). It also highlighted three principles seen as essential for future PKOs; conflict prevention and peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace building. The latter is defined as;

“Peace building is action undertaken at the end of a civil conflict to consolidate peace and prevent a recurring of fighting. A peace building mission involves the deployment of military and civilian personnel from several international agencies, with a mandate to conduct peace-building in a country that is just emerging from a civil war” (Paris, 2004; cited by Coakley, 2008: 116-117).

The UNMIL mission represented ‘Multidimensional Peacekeeping’ ie., “missions with extensive civilian functions, including economic reconstruction, institutional reform and election oversight” whose express purpose was to significantly improve the chances of peacebuilding success (Fortna, 2004: 270). The UNMIL IMIP identified eight core goals that were built into the fabric of the deployment,<sup>7</sup>; one can

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<sup>7</sup> Peace and Security; Disarmament and Demobilisation; Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Ex Combatants, Establishment of the Rule of Law, including judiciary and corrections; Establishment of safeguards for human rights; Restoration of state authority; Provision of factual information through public media campaigns; Coordination of UN agencies for Humanitarian Assistance (Aboagye and Bah, 2004: 6).

observe that both the mandates and implementation goals of UNMIL are more or less interrelated, interdependent and reinforcing where the success or achievement of one is reliant on another, particularly from the viewpoint of negating the possibility of igniting another Civil War and building a sustainable peace (Cleaver and Massey, 2006: 189). UNMIL was therefore the first UN attempt to establish an Integrated Mission (Multi Functional Mission with Civil-Military Relations) with the UN system in Liberia under single leadership of the SRSG and Hull (2008) argues that in the Liberian case the implementation of this concept has been a great success (p. 10), to the extent that the concept is now the structure of choice among UN missions (p. 50). De Coning (2007; cited in Hull (2008) believes that this success is based on the fact that UN Humanitarian Agencies felt integrated and better coordinated at field level (p. 50).

#### *Measuring the Parameters of Success*

The UN mandate for UNMIL was a multi-dimensional one, but it was also quite specific in key areas and objectives which facilitate an analysis of each of its main constituent parts to be measured. For the mission to achieve its mandate it set several goals in the areas of Peace and Security, the DDR process, Human Rights, the Rule of Law, Information and Humanitarian assistance. These areas were all interrelated, and if peace and security were to be achieved then all the other goals would have to be achieved to a broadly similar level of satisfaction.

#### DDDR

One of the key implied elements seen to building a sustainable peace was implementing a program of disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDDR) and several authors contend that this was critical to achieving a successful outcome for the mission (Paes, 2005: 253; Jennings, 2007: 205; Lamp and Trif, 2009: 25), similarly Krause (2010) posits that DDR was the key to an effective transition from war to peace.

The DDR program proved relatively successful. Nilsson and Kovacs (2006) describe the results as 'mixed' on the basis that while 100,000 fighters had been disarmed, the amount of weapons seized did not correlate to these numbers (p. 5),

equally Agoabye and Bah (2004) noted that relatively little heavy weaponry was handed in.

But while the DDR process was often fraught with difficulties, Paes (2005) noted for example how NGOs highlighted the fact that many civilians were buying weapons for cash in order to be able to get the pay-off from registering as an ex combatant (p. 257); equally Call (2011) has noted that while over 100,000 combatants were demobilized by UNMIL; however it was slow in achieving this and in trying to generate employment for ex combatants (p. 363). Yet under the command of “the very experienced and well respected, General Daniel Opande from Kenya” (Furley and May, 2006: 187), it remained the case that the three principal groups involved in the conflict GOL, LURD and MODEL were all effectively disarmed (Robinson, 2006: 1) thereby achieving what Casas and Guzman (2010) believe is the core function of DDR in contributing to achieving a lasting peace process where those involved directly in the conflict can break with the past. On a further positive note Pugel (2006) asserts that the empirical evidence of his survey suggests that “the DDR program in Liberia has indeed enabled a much better life for those ex-combatants who have completed their program of training when compared to those former fighters who chose not to register and to reintegrate on their own” (p. 5)

### *Peace and Security*

Krasno (2006) conducted a public survey that looked at the impact of UNMIL three years after the initial force deployment. This survey is of significance because it gathered opinion from a wide cross spectrum of Liberian society. On the fundamental issue of Peace and Security it was notable that some 91% of respondents to Krasno’s survey believed that the security situation had markedly improved. (Krasno, 2006, 5). But while the overall security situation had improved Baker (2010) noted that crime and effective policing were still a major cause of concern for the populace (p. 186).

Ford and Tienhaara (2010) posit that while a relative peace has been reestablished in a country that was so heavily traumatized by Civil War there is much to be done to give Liberia a stable economic base from which to solidify peace and security (p. 362). Liberian society is war weary, but issues of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy are all in themselves factors than can lead to potential future instability. Nyepon, (2010)

alludes to how this lack of education and poverty continues to be an evolving vicious cycle, Call (2011) concurs that it is both grievance and exclusionary behavior that remain the root causes of a possible reoccurring of the Civil War

#### Human Rights, Elections and the Rule of Law

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003 mandated the creation of a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission, however it was not effectively launched until 2006; its goals were to investigate human rights abuses and also economic crimes occurring between 1979 and 2003 (Bannor-Addae, 2008: 2). One of the defining issues as it pertained to UNMIL's mandate was to protect civilians, this issue of Human Rights Violations remains a major concern, where for example "...during 2013 there was an increase of 25% of reported cases of sexual violence from 2012" ([www.betterworldcampaign.org](http://www.betterworldcampaign.org)). There is evidence that there is much psychopathology among combatants and civilians and a recent study in Liberia found that 40% of the population had symptoms deemed to be consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Galea *et al.*, 2012: 1).

Sisk (2009) notes that 'post-war electoral process matters significantly for state building over the long term' (p. 196); in this regard UNMIL was successful in establishing a safe and secure environment whereby the 2005 election was made possible in an environment conducive to free and fair elections. Lamp and Trif (2009) also contend that UNMIL was able to bring the implementation of the rule of law progressively and that allied to this UNMIL has been effective in winning cooperation from major political figures, improving the overall security situation and the protection of civilians (p. 27) Mvukiyeche and Samii (2010) who undertook a quantitative impact evaluation of UNMIL observe that UNMIL had a remarkably small direct local impact on the de-escalation and security at the local level, nevertheless the same report suggests that UNMIL played a major role in helping to end the war (p. 2).

On the Rule of Law front a successful feature of the UNMIL deployment has been that the National Government of Liberia made up of civil society and former belligerents groups has been operating under the protection of UNMIL ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)). Kovacs and Nilsson (2005) have noted that for into the future

“the establishment of a legitimate state monopoly over the use of force in society is imperative in the aftermath of Civil Wars (p. 403). Brule (2012) also believes that in addition to its role in helping train and mentor the civilian police and national army, that “UNMIL has contributed to the re-establishment of the government and to the rebuilding of the country’s infrastructure [thereby] significantly improving humanitarian conditions [and] supervision of elections” (p. 241).

## **Conclusion**

It is not always easy to export the claimed successes of a particular mission to another conflict zone, as many conflicts often have their own unique characteristics where local factors play a highly significant role. UNMIL at this juncture in time appears to have been a success because of the dedication which it received from the UN allied to the mission been so heavily funded, both these factors combined were central to its success. The paradox remains that the success of UNMIL is not necessarily the success of Liberia. Until the police and army are autonomous and the justice system fully reformed and available to all Liberian citizens, the country will remain vulnerable to potential future anarchy.

What therefore are the lessons of UNMIL that may be translated to other ongoing conflicts particularly in the African sub-continent? The demand for peacekeeping will continue but while the international community continues under the aegis of the UN to expend huge resources on the management and consequences of particular conflicts; as Tardy (21-21 June 2004) has noted the underlying political issues cannot be ignored. UNMIL has demonstrated the need for an integrated approach to peace operations combining interrelated civilian and military activities. Where possible regional approaches to conflicts should be encouraged, but it is notable in the Liberian case that regional intervention was ineffective.

Arguably at the heart of this essay are successes and failures, we have seen how a number of scholars have given parameters as to what constitutes success for a UN mission; although Liberia remains fragile, with numerous challenges across a wide spectrum of issues; the case of UNMIL seen through this lens constitutes a relative parameter for success.

### Short Biographical Statement

Dr. Rory Finegan is a serving Officer in the Irish Defence Forces with 32 years experience that has included three separate United Nations overseas deployments in the Middle East. He has served in a number and diverse range of appointments at home, most notably as Chief Instructor at the United Nations Training School Ireland (UNTSI), where he was intimately involved in the development and delivery of Civil-Military (CIMIC) training and has been Course Director for five iterations of the International Human Rights Course conducted annually at UNTSI. He has lectured widely in IR and Peacekeeping/Conflict Resolution Studies and in 2014 was awarded a PhD by Dublin City University (DCU), which studied the impact of Targeted Killings (TKs) in Northern Ireland and an analysis of their effectiveness and implications for counter-terrorism policies. [rfinegan@hotmail.com](mailto:rfinegan@hotmail.com)

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