# **This House would reorganise the Irish Army entirely on Mattis and Hoffman hybrid war principles, prioritising unconventional over conventional capabilities**

## **Motion framing and definitions**

Chair and colleagues, good morning. If adversaries exploit blended threats while we cling to old models, we will lag and pay for it dearly. I rise to propose that this House would reorganise the Irish Army on Mattis and Hoffman hybrid war principles, prioritising unconventional over conventional capabilities. By reorganise, I mean refocusing doctrine, training, structures, and investment on hybrid conflict. By Mattis and Hoffman, I mean designing for opponents who mix conventional, irregular, criminal, and informational means, preferring ambiguity to open battle. By unconventional, I mean small, dispersed teams under mission command, supported by special operations, strong intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, cyber and information readiness, legal and diplomatic levers, and civil security interfaces. By conventional, I mean heavy forces optimised for sustained peer manoeuvre war. Entirely means hybrid risk drives posture and resources, while a modest conventional core remains as a backstop. My thesis is simple: Ireland must transform to counter grey zone pressure quickly, lawfully, and at scale, rooted in our warrior heritage.

## **Threat and concept frame**

The grey zone is a band where peaceful and warlike features coexist, where hybrid threats are the integrated means within it. This frame lets law, strategy, and operations work to one map without overclaiming novelty. Hoffman warned years ago that future contests would blend modes and cluster in cities and dense terrain (Hoffman 2009: 5–7). For Ireland, this means pressure on ports, energy links, data cables, health systems, airports, and public trust. Picture a simple vignette: foreign proxies and botnets disrupt port operations while false narratives sap confidence in supply chains and public safety, eroding stability hour by hour. Our Strategy Statement 2025–2028 places resilience and whole-of-government action at the centre. The White Paper Update 2019 affirms neutrality and international engagement. A hybrid-first Army fits both guides, a practical response to how pressure targets small states, leveraging our landscape of hedgerows, bogs, forests, and mountain ground for concealment and surprise.

## **Deterring invasion through attrition and armed disobedience**

Deterring invasion through attrition and armed disobedience is central. For a small state, deterrence is denial and cost, not mirror-matching mass. A hybrid-first Army signals to any would-be invader that Ireland cannot be subdued at speed or at tolerable cost. We assure an unacceptable bill in attrition and armed disobedience. Dispersed teams—drawn from regulars, reserves, and trained volunteers—would persist behind any line, acting as modern flying columns, echoing the War of Independence when small, mobile units outmanoeuvred larger forces. Our terrain—hedgerows, bogland, mountain passes, and tight urban spaces—offers camouflage and observation in depth. These teams would deny freedom of movement with constant harassment against logistics, communications, and critical nodes. Every village becomes a sensor, every lane a covered route. Drones, electronic warfare, and open-source intelligence fuse with local knowledge, ensuring an occupier never rests, never knows where safe space begins.

## **Armed disobedience operationalised and cultural-historical grounding**

Armed disobedience sustains that pressure beyond the first shock. It means organised refusal to cooperate and a standing pattern of lawful noncompliance where possible, active resistance where necessary, under national command. Pre-planned shelter networks, caches, protected communications, legal guidance, and civic preparation enable families and services to hold out while the State fights on. The message is clear: an invader faces a population that does not yield, a landscape that does not help, and a force that presents no single target. This is true to our history of opposing invasion and occupation—from ancient resistance led by figures like Cú Chulainn to centuries of defiance—and our proud warrior culture, from the Wild Geese in France to Irish brigades in the US and British Army, where agility and craft shone. Modernised with sensors, secure communications, protected mobility, and precision at small-unit level, this turns ground and community into a living system of denial, delivering credible deterrence: no quick seizure, no cheap victory, no stable occupation.

## **Necessity rooted in Irish history and modern grey-zone tactics**

Necessity is not only modern; it is rooted in who we are. We secured independence with unconventional methods when a conventional army was beyond reach. The flying columns demonstrated how small, mobile, intelligence-led units could impose cost, deny freedom of movement, and outpace a slower opponent, living off concealment, community networks, and tempo. Our landscape—hedgerows, bogland, mountain passes, forests, and the maze of small towns and boreens—favoured them and favours us still. In a hybrid fight, that terrain matters, now enhanced as lookouts carry drones, scouts carry tablets, and columns carry electronic warfare kits. Adversaries today change the status quo below war thresholds through proxy action, faits accomplis, salami tactics, and information and cyber operations, aiming for delay, doubt, and fatigue (Azad et al. 2022: 5–6, 16–21). A conventional-first Army is too slow. A hybrid-first Army brings agile teams to key nodes, supports attribution, and counters disinformation in time, steadying our narrative, working with Garda and regulators, and denying cheap wins early. This aligns with policy: the Strategy Statement emphasises risk management and civil-military integration; the White Paper supports NSAC coordination for hybrid threats. Reorganisation preserves the triple lock on kinetics while enabling fast, lawful action below that threshold.

**Design principles feasibility and guardrails**

Design principles are clear and Irish. We build light, mobile, urban-competent combined arms teams, pushing capability down. Pair infantry, engineers and sappers, electronic warfare, drones, and counter-drones at the lowest tactical level. Train mission command, red-teaming, open-source and classified fusion, and integration with civil authorities. Stand up an information and attribution group linking to government and partners for coherent detection, evidence, and messaging from the first hour. Grow reserve and territorial elements for infrastructure security and area defence in every county. Keep a selective conventional core for credibility and alliance tasks. Feasibility rests on law and oversight. Base tasks in Defence legislation, with NSAC governance and Attorney General gatekeeping. Use time-bound approvals, strict necessity and proportionality tests, bans on domestic targeting and deception, post-action reviews, and Oireachtas briefings when safe. This fits White Paper hallmarks—neutrality, governance cycles, and international ties. It optimises resources by effect per euro, investing in sensors, secure communications, protected mobility, engineering, and stockpiles over heavy platforms.

## **Addressing Principled Objections**

Objection: hybrid is a fad, outcomes context-bound (Libiseller 2023; Tuck 2017: 2–3). Answer: measure outputs—detection time, attribution confidence, urban mobility hours, drill frequency, time to restore services. If unmeasurable, don’t fund. Objection: lost conventional deterrence. Answer: retain a modest kinetic core, rely on alliances for peer war, lead in the grey zone. Objection: mission creep into covert info work. Answer: tie tasks to truth, foreign audiences, civil-lead domestically with legal review. Objection: strain on people. Answer: design rotations, reserve depth, family support, and training tempo.

## **Adversary Lens**

Adversaries privilege non-military means to paralyse early (Gerasimov 2016: 24). The counter is faster truth, attribution, hardened nodes, and cross-government action, raising costs and blocking faits accomplis, buying time for diplomacy and policing without breaching neutrality or the triple lock. This reflects our warrior tradition—from Cú Chulainn to the Wild Geese, Irish soldiers have shown agility and craft, resisting invasion with scarce resources and sharp wits. The flying columns were no accident; they fit our land and people, modernised lawfully today.

## **Close**

Three steps: First, issue a force design directive making hybrid readiness the main effort—urban teams with drones, engineers, electronic warfare, and info support, with a lean conventional backstop. Second, restructure training and reserves for whole-of-society tasks—quarterly drills with Garda, energy, health, ports, and local government, publishing metrics. Third, reprioritise spending to sensors, communications, mobility, engineering, and European networks.

Ireland’s open island, with critical nodes across towns, ports, and seas, faces hybrid threats. Our terrain offers concealment; our history teaches small, smart forces beat larger systems. A hybrid-first Army protects trust, denies wins, and aligns with our warrior past. A conventional-first model lags. Vote yes.

## **3-Line Summary for the Chair**

Proposing as an Irish Defence Forces officer, I advocate reorganising the Army on Mattis and Hoffman hybrid principles, prioritising unconventional capability.

The speech defines terms, shows necessity with historical roots, lays out feasible design, and answers objections.

Urges Yes vote to deter invasion through cost and align with our warrior heritage.

# **This House would not reorganise the Irish Army entirely on Mattis and Hoffman hybrid war principles, prioritising unconventional over conventional capabilities**

## **Motion framing and definitions**

Chair and colleagues good morning. If we abandon our conventional strengths to chase hybrid trends we risk weakening Ireland’s defence at a critical time. I rise to oppose the motion that this House would reorganise the Irish Army entirely on Mattis and Hoffman hybrid war principles prioritising unconventional over conventional capabilities. By reorganise the proposition implies dismantling our current doctrine training and structure to focus almost solely on hybrid conflict. Mattis and Hoffman principles ask us to adapt to blended threats that combine conventional irregular criminal and informational means. Unconventional points to small dispersed teams with cyber and information tools while conventional refers to established heavy forces and combined arms. Entirely suggests a near total shift that leaves only a token conventional core. My thesis is clear. Ireland should reject this overreach in order to preserve deterrence uphold neutrality and protect our hard won balance of capability and tradition.

**Grey zone frame and policy alignment critique**

The grey zone as Sari and Regan describe is a band where peaceful and warlike features coexist with hybrid threats as the integrated means used within it Sari and Regan 2024 10 to 12. The frame is useful for mapping pressure below war yet it lacks operational precision for force design. Hoffman’s warning that blended modes will cluster in cities is a general observation not a prescription for a small island force Hoffman 2009 5 to 7. Ireland’s risk set spans ports energy links and data cables but also sea approaches and rural nodes. The proposition’s vignette of botnets and false narratives is real yet it overlooks the power of overt response through law enforcement regulators and open attribution. Our Strategy Statement 2025 to 2028 centres resilience and whole of government action. The White Paper Update 2019 affirms neutrality and international engagement. Both documents point to balanced capability not a hybrid only pivot.

**Terrain and history limits on concealment and flying columns**

The motion leans hard on terrain and history. Hedgerows and bogs do aid concealment and our record of flying columns during the War of Independence is a source of pride. Yet modern surveillance reduces those advantages. Drones thermal sensors wide area motion imagery and electronic detection can find and fix small units that radiate signals or move in patterns. A concept that rests on dispersion alone risks becoming a concept of defeat in detail. Flying columns succeeded against a specific opponent unprepared for sustained guerrilla action inside a hostile information environment. An advanced adversary with persistent ISR and precision fires is not that opponent.

**Deterrence critique attrition and armed disobedience risks**

Deterrence through attrition and armed disobedience also deserves caution. The proposition imagines modern flying columns persisting behind any line. It assumes shelter networks caches protected communications and social endurance at scale. In practice such an approach strains resources and morale and it gambles national credibility on long duration resistance. A small state cannot afford to make invasion the scenario it plans to survive rather than deter. Credible deterrence needs visible conventional power as a backbone. If we strip that out we signal vulnerability rather than resilience and we invite coercion tests below and above the threshold.

**Necessity unproven and history misread**

Necessity is unproven and history is misread. Azad and colleagues list hybrid tools such as proxy action faits accomplis and salami tactics with cases from Crimea to the South China Sea Azad et al 2022 5 to 6 and 16 to 21. Those cases show strategy and opportunity not a universal template that demands wholesale reorganisation. Starling and colleagues do stress first mover advantage but rapid denial and attribution are often best led by Garda and the national security community with military support Starling et al 2022 4. A conventional first Army with integrated hybrid competencies supplies the deterrent backbone and the surge capacity for aid to the civil power. The Strategy Statement emphasises risk management and civil military links. The White Paper supports NSAC coordination. None of this mandates an Army built almost entirely for unconventional tasks. The motion would dilute rather than reinforce the triple lock’s kinetic safeguard.

**Design and feasibility concerns**

Design and feasibility concerns are real. The proposed light teams that combine infantry engineers drones and electronic warfare sound agile but they impose a heavy training and logistics burden and they require persistent rehearsal with many civil actors. Territorial defence built on reserves and volunteers is valuable yet finite. The motion assumes capacity we do not currently possess without a clear plan to build and sustain it. Safeguards such as Defence legislation NSAC oversight and Attorney General review are important but time bound approvals and ex post facto reporting can falter when hybrid ambiguity clouds attribution and when political appetite for risk varies day to day. Optimising by effect per euro is sensible yet it often underestimates the true costs of retraining reequipping and doctrine replacement. Hoffmann and colleagues are right that coalitions and lawfare matter Hoffmann et al 2024 1 to 4. They are most effective however when backed by balanced forces that partners trust to handle both hybrid pressure and limited high end tasks. Heavy platforms and conventional enablers are costly but they deter peer power and they anchor alliance credibility.

**Additional risks fashion, context, metrics, sovereignty, mission creep, people strain**

There are further risks that should give the House pause. Libiseller argues that hybrid warfare behaves like an academic fashion where usage spikes track policy cycles Libiseller 2023. Tuck shows that Crimea’s speed and Donbas’s cost reflect context not a portable playbook Tuck 2017 2 to 3. If we hinge Army design on a concept that is still contested we build on sand. Metrics such as detection time or attribution confidence are useful yet untested at national scale. If they fail the force still needs the conventional capacity we have hollowed out. Losing conventional deterrence shifts our reliance onto alliances in a way that narrows sovereignty. Mission creep from information support to covert influence would erode neutrality. Legal reviews help but they cannot erase the reputational damage of a single misstep. People strain is not theoretical. A hybrid heavy posture increases tasking in the information and urban domains while aid to the civil power persists. Rotations and reserves alone will not offset burnout.

**Adversary lens rebuttal and role of conventional deterrence**

Proponents will counter with the adversary lens. Gerasimov argues that non military means can outweigh force at the political level Gerasimov 2016 24. That is a reason to harden civil systems not a reason to hollow out conventional deterrence. Faster truth and attribution should be led by Garda by the national security apparatus and by government communicators with Army support when needed. Our warrior heritage blends conventional and unconventional. Cú Chulainn and the Wild Geese symbolise courage and expeditionary skill. Irish service with allies has often been in conventional formations where discipline mass and manoeuvre mattered. Balance is the tradition not one sidedness.

**Balanced alternative path and recommendations**

There is a better path. First reinforce a statutory commitment to balanced capability in line with the Strategy Statement on resilience. Set clear readiness targets for both conventional and hybrid tasks and fund the baseline of artillery air defence protected mobility engineers and logistics alongside cyber and information units. Second enhance training for integrated response. Use NSAC led drills that combine Garda regulators defence civil defence and critical infrastructure operators. Exercise early attribution public communication and legal countermeasures with military support at the right threshold. Third invest in European cyber and resilience networks and attribution coalitions while preserving neutrality. Share evidence early and lawfully. Support partners through transparency and capacity rather than through a risky force design leap.

**Conclusion and call to vote no**

Ireland is an open island with critical nodes across towns ports and seas. We do face hybrid risks. We also face storms terrorism organised crime and the remote but real chance of interstate coercion. Our history including the flying columns teaches agility and resolve yet it also teaches prudence. A balanced Army that integrates unconventional competencies without discarding conventional deterrence is the prudent choice. It protects trust supports law and sustains strategic flexibility. A hybrid only or hybrid first design under this motion would leave gaps that an adversary could exploit and it would narrow rather than widen our options.

For these reasons the House should vote no.

## **3-Line Summary for the Chair**

Oppose the motion because a hybrid first Army would erode conventional deterrence, narrow neutrality, and rest on contested ideas.  
Argue for a balanced force that integrates hybrid skills while retaining visible conventional power to deter coercion and invasion.  
Offer a safer plan built on NSAC led integrated drills, overt attribution and EU resilience networks, not a risky force design leap.