Cable Sabotage in the Celtic Sea

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On November 16, a Russian vessel was escorted out of Irish waters. Concerns were raised over possible intentional sabotage of subsea cables. These underwater infrastructures keep intact Ireland's security, but also the digital functioning of other European nations. But Ireland's naval capabilities do not conform to NATO standards. Therefore, this blog post will argue that Ireland should increase defense spending for its maritime services.

Ireland's background in international security

The 'Emerald Isle' plays an important role in international peacekeeping. While not a member of NATO, Ireland does cooperate with NATO's 'Partnership for Peace' program. The Irish government articulates that Ireland is

a non-member of any military alliance, a status that has persisted since the Second World War. However, Ireland has been participating in UN peacekeeping since 1955. Ireland's contemporary role in international security is characterized by 'empowering global justice', and stabilizing fragile societies via UN peace efforts.

Gateway to Europe

Ireland has an appealing location for foreign investment, as it is positioned between the United Kingdom and the United States. But that position is at risk. It presents itself as a 'Gateway to Europe', in the context of its transatlantic subsea cable network and Ireland's attractiveness for foreign investment by American companies. But if Ireland wants to remain an attractive investment destination, it must recognize underwater cables as national critical infrastructure. If a disruption were to occur in these cable networks due to any form of altercation, Ireland would face economic and physical damage as well as reputational ramifications. Sabotage would lead to system failures in financial exchanges, and internet connectivity for Ireland and the wider European continent. Underwater cables are increasingly relied upon by the oil, energy, and financial industries. So, putting submarine infrastructure in jeopardy makes Ireland an unappealing destination for those industries, cooling down Ireland's economic growth.

Wake-up call?

Ireland's maritime technology is below par in comparison to its European counterparts, and the Irish navy demands modernization. At present, The Irish Naval Service faces issues such as sailor shortages, maintenance issues, and antiquated on-board infrastructure that is unfit to guarantee subsea cable security. Technological shortcomings include mediocre air as well as underwater mechanisms to detect submarines or submersibles. In contrast to Ireland, other European countries stepped up maritime efforts after the 2022 Nord Stream pipeline incident, especially in the Baltic region. Nord Stream saw a leakage of natural gas pipelines, illustrating Russian involvement in European waters. Following this, Moscow's alleged cable tampering in the Irish Sea calls for Ireland to finally pursue naval strengthening. Investing in smart technological solutions like uncrewed vessels is pivotal, given Ireland's low maritime capacity. This investment assists Ireland in getting back on level terms with its European counterparts regarding maritime security. Looking forward, adequate maritime security deters suspicious actors such as Russia and China, the latter being suspect of another cable sabotage incident near Sweden in November 2024.

Snap Elections

On November 29, 2024, national elections in Ireland resulted in a shared victory for centrist parties Fine Gael, and Fianna Fáil. These will likely form

a coalition similar to the previous government. Ireland's new government should not falter on its maritime security spending. A lack of investment in Irish maritime security jeopardizes subsea infrastructure by adversaries. This directly affects the security of the data flows, internet connectivity, and financial transactions in Ireland, along with the rest of Europe.

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