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Army offers weapons training to Ukraine

Department of Defence insists military skills training does not affect neutrality

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Irish troops are to provide weapons training to the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF), a significant departure from the Government's public position that Ireland is providing only non-lethal support.

As well as providing troops to train Ukrainian forces in non-lethal areas such as mine clearance, combat medicine and engineering, Irish personnel are also earmarked to pro-

vide instruction in basic weapons skills and military tactics. The Irish Times has learned.

Weapons training was not included in public announcements by the Government of the Defence Forces participation in the EU training mission. It contrasts with a statement by Tánaiste and Minister for Defence Micheál Martin earlier this year that the training would be in "non-lethal" areas.

There has been no reference to weapons training in any Gov-

ernment statements in the Dáil during debates on the matter. Ministers have emphasised the humanitarian nature of the training being provided.

To date, the Government's public position has been to provide the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) with non-offensive military support and material in line with Ireland's military neutrality and the programme for Government.

However, last month Cabinet approved a memo which would allow the training of troops in basic military skills, which will include rifle training

The full list of areas where Irish instructors will provide training is: basic military skills, leadership training, drill in-

structor training, combat medicine, demining and explosive disposal. Ukrainian troops will also be trained on the use of demining equipment donated by the Defence Forces, which is understood to include two armoured demining vehicles.

A Department of Defence (DOD) spokeswoman confirmed yesterday that training is being offered in these seven areas and said they present "no conflict" with Irish military neutrality.

The Department also denied any attempt to mislead the public on the nature of the training. It said the list of training areas announced earlier this year, which did not include any mention of weapons training, "was

always intended to be indicative rather than exhaustive".

The spokeswoman said Cabinet initially decided in February to provide training in demining and combat medicine. The later decision to include additional modules such as basic military skills are consistent with the memo brought to Government in February and represented only a "modest step-up", she said.

The Defence Forces training is taking place under the umbrella of the EU Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (Eumam), a EU Common Security and Defence Policy mission which co-ordinates military training provided to Ukraine by member states.