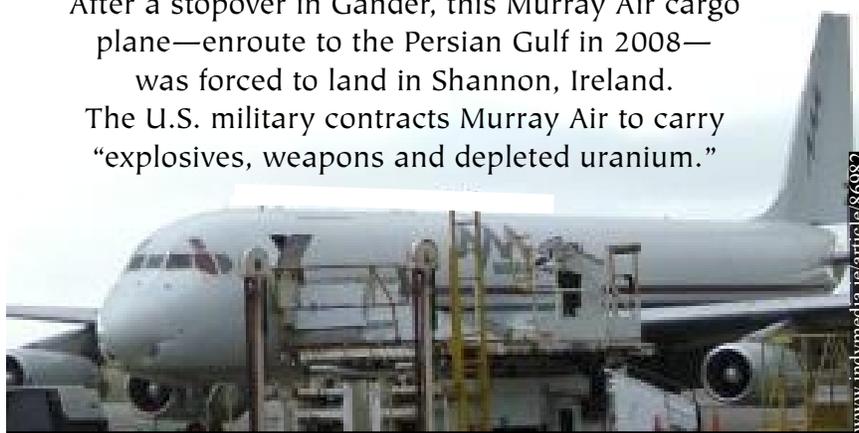


# The Shannon Connection: Learning from our Irish Colleagues

By Richard Sanders, coordinator,  
Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade

On March 28, 2008, an American cargo plane contracted by the U.S. military to supply the war in Iraq, made an emergency landing at Shannon's civilian airport in Ireland. The cargo plane had stopped at the Gander International Airport in Newfoundland before its Atlantic crossing. It was enroute to Qatar in the Persian Gulf from the McChord Air Force Base, the home of "Combat Airlift." Upon leaving Shannon, the DC8 transport had an engine failure that local witnesses described as a "streak of flame trailing from the plane."<sup>1</sup>

After a stopover in Gander, this Murray Air cargo plane—enroute to the Persian Gulf in 2008—was forced to land in Shannon, Ireland. The U.S. military contracts Murray Air to carry "explosives, weapons and depleted uranium."



Tracey Belle, spokesperson for Murray Air Cargo, the U.S.-military charter company operating the plane,

said they were licensed to transport "explosives, weapons and depleted uranium through Shannon Airport."<sup>2</sup>

This revelation added fuel to the fire of local citizen's concerns that their airport was being used as a stopover for U.S. flights ferrying troops, weapons and other military equipment to aid and abet the Iraq war. Like the Canadian government, Ireland claims that it has stayed uninvolved in this latest U.S.-led war.

However, like Newfoundland's Gander, St. John's and Stephenville airports, Shannon has also been open for business servicing U.S. military flights bound for the Iraq war since it began in March 2003. Similarly, all of these airports are civilian facilities, not military bases. Because so many U.S. military flights going through Ireland also stop in Newfoundland, Canadians have a lot to learn from what is known about U.S. use of the Shannon airport.

Shannonwatch, a dedicated group of Irish peace and human rights activists, has closely monitored U.S. military traffic through Shannon airport. For instance, they have gathered data showing that "at least 970 U.S.-military-contracted flights and a further 360 U.S. Air Force/Navy planes landed at Shannon in 2009."<sup>3</sup>

John Lannon, a Shannonwatch researcher, has revealed that since March 2003 "[o]ver one and a half million U.S. troops plus regular cargo shipments to Iraq and Afghanistan have gone through Shannon Airport."<sup>4</sup>

Lannon notes that Irish Transport Minister Noel Dempsey said that "1,276 civilian flights were granted

## Newfoundland Airports used by CIA Front Companies in the "War on Terror"

During the past decade's so-called "War on Terror," CIA aircraft linked to America's illegal kidnapping program, known as "extraordinary rendition," have used Newfoundland airports countless times.

Since 2001, airports in Gander, Goose Bay, St. John's and Stephenville welcomed at least 21 CIA-linked aircraft including:

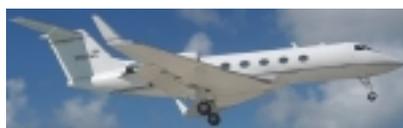
- 6 Gulfstream business jets (II-V)
- 4 Lockheed C-130 "Hercules"
- 4 CASA CN-235-300s
- 3 Bombardier Learjets (LJ35/36)
- 2 Beechcrafts (B200C & B300C)
- 1 de Havilland Canada "Dash 8"
- 1 Boeing 737-300 jet airliner

The CIA's operating and shell companies for these planes include:

- Aero Contractors<sup>1</sup>
- Aviation Specialties<sup>2</sup>
- Crowell Aviation Technologies<sup>1</sup>
- Crystal Jet Aviation<sup>1</sup>
- Devon Holding and Leasing<sup>2</sup>
- Path Corporation<sup>1</sup>
- Pegasus Technologies<sup>2</sup>
- Phoenix Air Group<sup>1</sup>
- Premier Aircraft Management<sup>2</sup>
- Premier Exec. Transport Services<sup>2</sup>
- Presidential Aviation<sup>2</sup>
- Rapid Air Transport<sup>2</sup>
- Stevens Express Leasing<sup>2</sup>
- Tepper Aviation<sup>1</sup>
- Vision Airlines<sup>2</sup>
- VPC Planes<sup>2</sup>

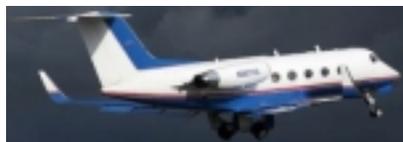
1=Operating company; 2=Shell company

Each aircraft has a unique story. Here is a taste of two of these stories:



### Gulfstream III (Tail # N829MG)

Carrying Maher Arar to Torture This plane "rendered" Canadian Maher Arar from the U.S. to Jordan where he was taken to Syria for torture. Thirteen months later, in October 2003, he was released. This aircraft made over 100 trips to Guantanamo Bay before 2006, and stopped in Gander and Stephenville several times between 2002 and 2005.



### Gulfstream II (Tail # N987SA)

Crashed with 3.2 tons of Cocaine While managed by Air Rutter International, this aircraft flew between the U.S. and Guantanamo, likely carrying CIA and Pentagon interrogators. After purchase by a Florida company in 2007, it crashed in Mexico enroute to the U.S. from Colombia. Police found 3.2 tons of cocaine in the aircraft wreckage.

For details/sources on CIA flights in Newfoundland see COAT's website: <http://coat.ncf.ca/CIAflights.html>



Evergreen and Kalitta Air at the Gander airport

2009 Annual Report, Gander Airport

www.ganderairport.com/cargo.htm

Shannonwatch says Murray Air, Evergreen and Kalitta Air “routinely ship munitions for the U.S. Air Force.” Amnesty says Evergreen and Kalitta are known for “covert intelligence and military operations.”

permits to carry weapons and munitions of war through Ireland in 2009. In response to a parliamentary question... [Dempsey] said the vast majority of these were from American civil airlines, chartered by the U.S. military, and involved flights to or from the U.S., and that almost all landed at Shannon.”<sup>5</sup>

Shannonwatch has exposed many details about the specific civilian airlines contracting their services to move U.S. troops and equipment for the war in Iraq. They have also uncovered much evidence proving that Shannon has been used by cargo companies contracted by the CIA for so-called “extraordinary rendition” flights to shuttle kidnap victims to secret prisons where they have been tortured.

Newfoundland airports are similarly complicit. The Gander International Airport, for instance, lists six charter companies that it describes as “frequent visitors to Gander.” The Gander website kindly provides web links to these six companies on a web page called “Cargo Opportunities at Gander International Airport”<sup>6</sup>:

- Atlas Air
- Evergreen Aviation
- Gemini Air Cargo
- Kalitta Air
- Murray Air
- Vega Air

Of these six companies, Shannonwatch<sup>7</sup> and Amnesty International<sup>8</sup> identify five as either U.S. military contractors used to move troops and munitions to warzones, or for CIA “rendition” flights to shuttle kidnap victims to U.S. detention/torture centres.

Shannonwatch research reveals that Murray, Evergreen and Kalitta “routinely ship munitions for the U.S. Air Force.”<sup>9</sup> Amnesty describes

Evergreen and Kalitta as firms “known for their connections to covert intelligence and military operations.”<sup>10</sup>

Atlas Air is similarly described by Shannonwatch as a “well-known carrier of war munitions,”<sup>11</sup> while Gemini is listed as a company providing “Aircraft Linked to CIA Extraordinary Rendition Flights.”<sup>12</sup>

While Canadian peace researchers can benefit from their Irish colleague’s investigations into transatlantic refuelling stops by U.S. military and intelligence agencies, Canadian anti-war activists can also learn from their Irish colleagues as well. Shannon airport has been the frequent site of protests, blockades and other non-violent acts of civil resistance against the Iraq war. In 2003, five members of the Catholic Worker movement used household hammers to disable a U.S. warplane that had stopped at Shannon. In 2006, they were found not guilty by a unanimous verdict from the 12 jurors. In response, the five activists issued a statement which read in part:

“The jury is the conscience of the community chosen randomly from Irish society. The conscience of the community has spoken. The govern-

In 2003, five Irish peace activists disabled a U.S. Navy warplane at Shannon airport that was enroute to the Iraq war.



In 2006, a jury found them not guilty.

ment has no popular mandate in providing the civilian Shannon airport to service the U.S. war machine in its illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq....

“The decision of this jury should be a message to London, Washington DC and [Ireland’s Parliament] that Ireland wants no part in waging war on the people of Iraq. Refuelling of U.S. warplanes at Shannon Airport should cease immediately.”<sup>13</sup>

## References

1. U.S. Military Exposed at Shannon Airport, April 2, 2008. [www.indymedia.ie/article/86982](http://www.indymedia.ie/article/86982)
2. Ibid.
3. John Lannon, “Shannon Airport – nothing covert about its war activities?,” Village Magazine, April 23, 2010. [www.villagemagazine.ie/index.php/2010/04/shannon-airport-%E2%80%93-nothing-covert-about-its-war-activities/](http://www.villagemagazine.ie/index.php/2010/04/shannon-airport-%E2%80%93-nothing-covert-about-its-war-activities/)
4. Ibid.
5. 2009 - Another Year of Foreign Military Might at Shannon Airport, Feb. 10, 2010. [www.shannonwatch.org/ReviewOf2009.htm](http://www.shannonwatch.org/ReviewOf2009.htm)
6. Cargo Opportunities at Gander International Airport [www.ganderairport.com/cargo.htm](http://www.ganderairport.com/cargo.htm)
7. Shannonwatch website [www.shannonwatch.org](http://www.shannonwatch.org)
8. USA: Below the radar: Secret flights to torture and ‘disappearance’ [www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/051/2006/en/3edf2253-d447-11dd-8743-d305\\_bea2b2c7/amr510512006en.html](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/051/2006/en/3edf2253-d447-11dd-8743-d305_bea2b2c7/amr510512006en.html)
9. John Lannon, Op. cit.
10. USA: Below the radar, Op. cit.
11. Did Israeli bombs passing through Shannon Airport? [www.shannonwatch.org/Kalitta\\_Air.htm](http://www.shannonwatch.org/Kalitta_Air.htm)
12. “Aircraft Linked to CIA Extraordinary Rendition Flights” [www.shannonwatch.org/Rendition\\_planes\\_110209.htm](http://www.shannonwatch.org/Rendition_planes_110209.htm)
13. Not Guilty. The Pitstop Ploughshares All Acquitted on All Charges [www.indymedia.ie/article/77460](http://www.indymedia.ie/article/77460)