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Monday, August 25, 2025

www.irishexaminer.com

No. 63,499

€2.60 (£1.70 in N. Ireland)

# Hostile state threat 'ever present'

■ Garda warning comes as 'Agent Cobalt' controversy deepens

**Cormac O'Keeffe**  
Security Correspondent

The threat to Ireland from hostile states seeking information — including on policies and political information of the State — “is ever present”, the garda security service has warned.

The *Garda Annual Security Services Plan 2025* says Ireland is facing an “increasingly diverse range” of threats—from terrorism, violent extremism, and subversion, as well as espionage and sabotage.

The plan is the first stand-alone garda document on the internal security service, with only brief statements included in annual garda policing plans up to now.

The warning on hostile states targeting State policies and political information comes as the so-called ‘Agent Cobalt’ controversy deepened over the weekend.

The *Sunday Times* stood by its report last October which stated that Irish military and garda security services were monitoring a politician in the Oireachtas who had been “recruited by Russian intelligence as an agent of influence”.

The security plan, drawn up by the Garda Security & Intelligence Service, said this about the threat to Ireland from hostile state actors: “The threat from these actors, intent on obtaining information on intellectual property, as well as policies and political information of the State, is ever present.”

Yesterday, *The Sunday Times* said that, according to security sources, the alleged value of Agent Cobalt was not to access classified material but to “influence narratives, delay policymaking processes, and sow confusion” in political and security structures.

The *Sunday Times* article follows reports in *The Journal* on Tuesday, which stated there was “no Agent Cobalt” and a garda investigation had “exonerated” him. It suggested the politician was “sent confirmation” of this in writing.

This prompted an unusual move by Garda Headquarters, which issued a formal statement on Tuesday saying that there was an

“ongoing active criminal investigation” into this matter.

On Friday, *The Journal* quoted details from what it said was a document that was drawn up following meetings between the Garda Special Detective Unit (SDU) and legal representatives of the politician in question.

It said the document “unequivocally states that the politician has no case to answer”.

The *Irish Examiner* understands that the purported “memorandum” was drafted by legal representatives using minutes taken at a meeting and that it names who was present, including allegedly from the SDU.

The authenticity and accuracy of the document, and whether or not the SDU agreed to its contents, are issues that are either not clear or disputed, with developments in this area possible.

Security sources told the *Irish Examiner* last week that no letter was issued by gardai clearing the politician and that no garda investigation would tell a suspect they were formally in the clear. They declined to comment on minutes of a meeting taken by third parties.

Separately, the security services plan said Ireland faces other threats. Referring to terrorist attacks in Europe, it said: “The proliferation of destructive ideologies poses a direct threat to the values of democratic society, corrupts vulnerable citizens, threatens lives, and endangers the freedoms and norms that we have become accustomed to in a secure society. Ireland is not immune to such a threat.”

The plan said the security challenge posed by self-radicalised “lone actors” as well as connected groupings or individuals displaying extremist and terrorist ideologies “present a potential threat to the security of the State and our people”.

The plan said gardai continue to maintain “vigilance” in respect of violent political extremism and related activity.

“Security & Intelligence is cognisant that there is a rise in violent political extremism in Ireland and across Europe,” it said, adding that it works with foreign security services on this matter.

## Green machine



Ireland's Eve Higgins makes a break against Japan at the Rugby World Cup at Franklin's Gardens, Northampton, yesterday. SEE: Sport, Pages 2-3

Picture: Ben Brady

## Munster rent inflation soars as supply falls 9%

**Liz Dunphy**

Munster saw the sharpest rent inflation in Ireland across the second quarter of 2025 as supply fell by 9% from the previous year, with just 300 properties to rent across the province.

Limerick City again saw the highest market rent increases, up 14.9%, with average monthly rents reaching €2,422, according to the latest rental report by Daft.ie. Limerick City has consistently seen high inflation in recent years.

Waterford City saw the second-highest rate of rent hikes, up 12.5% to €1,818.

Average market rents in Cork City rose 11.8% — the third highest percentage rise — to €2,241 per month.

Availability of rental properties had dropped with fewer than 300 homes available to rent in Munster on August 1, down 9% on the same date a year previously and down over two-thirds on the 2015-2019 average.

Overall, market rents rose by an average of 1.6% in the second quarter of 2025, the Daft.ie report found.

This 18th consecutive quarter of rising rents saw average open-market rent nationwide reach €2,055 per month between April and

June. This was up from a low of €765 in 2011 and 51% higher than before the outbreak of covid.

Galway City also saw significant rent inflation, up 8.5% to €2,295.

Dublin remained the most expensive for average monthly rents at €2,583, up 6.5%. Rents in Dublin had been rising at a slower pace than elsewhere, reflecting the impact of both covid-19 in reshaping location preferences and significant new purpose-built supply coming on stream, the report noted.

However, with the volume of new supply slowing considerably, inflation in the

capital — at 6.5% — is now close to the average seen in the rest of the country (7.3%).

There were almost 2,300 homes available to rent nationwide on August 1. This is down 15% on the same date a year ago and the fourth consecutive quarter of falling availability.

Outside the five major cities, rents rose by an average of 6.2% over the last year.

Commenting on the report, its author, Ronan Lyons, professor in economics at Trinity College Dublin, said: “The average open-market rent nationwide — at a little over €2,000 a month — is twice the rent

seen at the Celtic Tiger peak and 50% higher than the level of rents that prevailed just before the covid-19 pandemic hit. As has consistently been the case over the past 15 years, the substantial increases in rents are being driven by extreme scarcity of rental housing, relative to underlying need.

“Since the last report, the Government has moved to relax some of the strictest aspects of Ireland's rent controls,” said Prof Lyons.

“While this is likely to help boost investment in new rental supply, those changes will not take effect until next year.”

## Government accused of urban road safety U-turn

**Tadhg McNally**  
Political Reporter

The Government has been accused of a U-turn on plans to introduce across-the-board 30 km/h speed limits in urban areas.

The transport department has confirmed the onus will be on local councils to cut speed limits, rather than coming from Government.

Legislation passed last year contained provisions for sweeping changes to urban speed limits, but the department has since

confirmed these will not be enacted “at this time”.

It would have seen any 50 km/h speed limit reduced to 30 km/h, but instead will be left to the discretion of local authorities through a mechanism known as special speed limit bylaws.

Green Party Cork city councillor Oliver Moran accused Government of caving on a commitment made by the previous coalition.

“The legislated approach was that the default urban speed limit was to be 30 km/h,” he said. “Local author-

ities could then look at individual roads in an area and make special speed limits for roads they wanted to remain 50 km/h. That's been flipped on its head.”

Mr Moran argues that there is effectively no change, as local authorities have always had powers to reduce speeds on roads.

Roads minister Sean Canney defended the change, rejecting assertions that the Government had U-turned.

“There's been no rollback and I will be making sure that we are doing everything in our power to reduce the speed limits. I think people understand it as well,” Mr Canney said.

Cork City Labour councillor Peter Horgan highlighted concerns about driver behaviour, while calling for speed limits to be lowered.

“Driver behaviour has grown more angry and erratic since the pandemic and we must utilise all available tools to mitigate dangerous speeds of cars in our urban communities with a pedestrian safety first approach,” Mr Horgan said.



Local authorities will be responsible for lower speed limits in urban areas rather than central government.

### ‘Harvey robbed of childhood’

More than 1,000 marched through Dublin to call for justice for Harvey Morrison Sherratt, aged nine, who died after dealing with long delays for scoliosis surgery. “It robbed him of his childhood and robbed us of the opportunity to make precious family memories with him,” said his mother, Gillian.

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### Nuclear plant ‘hit by drones’

Russia has accused Ukraine of launching drone attacks that sparked a fire at a nuclear power plant in the Kursk region overnight, as Ukraine celebrated 34 years since its independence. However, while the attack damaged a transformer, radiation levels remained within normal ranges.

World: 6

### Entertainment growth lags

The entertainment and media industry in Ireland is expected to rise to €7.5bn in value by 2029, but growth will lag global counterparts. One sector expert said competition and rising costs were behind the slow growth and urged businesses to “think of the connected ecosystems they operate in”.

Business: 15

## Pat Ryan: Bust-up stories are garbage

**John Fogarty**  
GAA correspondent

Pat Ryan, the former Cork hurling manager, has labelled wildfire speculation of a half-time Cork dressing room bust up in the All-Ireland final as “absolutely total garbage”.

The Sarsfields club man stepped down as Cork manager despite being offered a new three-year term from Cork GAA after a meeting last Friday.

In an interview in today's *Irish Examiner*, he scoffed at the “disgusting” stories that spread rapidly in the wake of their second-half collapse against Tipperary at Croke Park last month.

“The disgusting point is that they were totally made-up stories, and then individual names were attached to it. Absolutely, under no circumstances did anything like that ever happen in my time with three years involved with Cork.

“I've had absolutely no run-in or argument with any players. I've had plenty of good discussions with our leadership group. Plenty of honest chats. [But] all those things were absolutely total garbage. Who goes in and has a big bust-up with a six-point lead?”

Ryan also confirmed that the decision not to have a Cork homecoming if they lost the final had been taken well in advance of the decider and not, as has been speculated, the morning after the loss.

“It was agreed between the county board and myself, not the players, that if we win, of course, you'll have a homecoming. If not, why would you? Why would you subject the public to coming down to do it? But that decision was made weeks and weeks prior [to the final].”

Newtownshandrum's Ben O'Connor, Cork's All-Ireland U20 winning manager from 2023, is favoured to replace Ryan.

Monday Sport: 9-11

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### News

Despite wildfires from east to west, Irish trips to Mediterranean countries continue to soar. What will it take to end our love affair with the sun holiday?

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### Opinion

Weight loss reality TV shows are sold to us as health-related and benign, promising to ‘transform’ lives, but the truth is they are just an excuse to gawp.

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