

HON RON MARK, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Defence Deployments: Iraq and Afghanistan

March 2019

This publication provides documents supporting Cabinet's August 2018 in-principle decisions to extend the New Zealand Defence Force deployment to:

- Iraq and the region to 30 June 2019
- the Afghan National Army Officer Academy in Afghanistan to 30 September 2019.

These extensions were subject to Cabinet consideration of relevant deployment considerations in September 2018.

Cabinet also:

- noted that Cabinet will be provided with further advice on possible options for New Zealand's future contributions to the Coalition mission in Iraq before the end of April 2019
- agreed to undertake a strategic reassessment of New Zealand's contribution to Afghanistan to support the government's medium term approach.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- August 2018 Cabinet minute entitled *Defence Deployments: Iraq and Afghanistan* [ERS-18-MIN-0015]
- Cabinet paper entitled *Defence Deployments: Iraq and Afghanistan* [ERS-18-SUB-0015].

This pack has been released on the Ministry of Defence website, available at:

www.defence.govt.nz/publications.

It has been necessary to withhold certain information in accordance with the following provisions of the Official Information Act 1982. Where information is withheld, the relevant sections of the Act are indicated in the body of the document. Where information has been withheld in accordance with section 9(2) of the Act, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Information is withheld where making it available would be likely to prejudice:

- the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand [section 6(a)]
- the entrusting of information to the Government of New Zealand on the basis of confidence by the Government of any other country [section 6(b)(i)].

Information is also withheld in order to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials [section 9(2)(f)(iv)].



Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Defence Deployments: Iraq and Afghanistan

Portfolios Foreign Affairs / Defence

On 14 August 2018, the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee:

Background

- 1 **noted** that Cabinet is due to make decisions in September 2018 on New Zealand's current defence deployments to the following operations:
 - 1.1 Afghanistan;
 - 1.2 Iraq;
 - 1.3 Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt;
 - 1.4 the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in Israel, Lebanon and Syria; and
 - 1.5 the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS);
- 2 **noted** that the nature of the deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan remain fit for purpose in the short term, but that it is timely to undertake a fundamental reassessment of New Zealand's contributions to both missions in the first half of 2019;

Iraq

- 3 **agreed in principle**, subject to paragraph 4 below, to extend the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) deployment to Iraq and the region to 30 June 2019;
- 4 **agreed** that the above in-principle decision be finalised once Cabinet has considered the relevant deployment considerations in September 2018;
- 5 **agreed** that this in-principle decision be conveyed now to Australia and other Coalition partners as necessary, including the intention to consider alternative options for the nature of any New Zealand contributions to Iraq from July 2019, including a wind down of the current training programme and the intention to make public announcements of New Zealand's decision in September 2018;
- 6 **noted** that Cabinet will be provided with further advice on possible options for New Zealand's future contributions to the Coalition mission in Iraq before the end of April 2019;

Afghanistan

- 7 **agreed in principle**, subject to paragraph 8 below, to extend NZDF's deployment to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy in Afghanistan to 30 September 2019;
- 8 **agreed** that the above in-principle decision be finalised once Cabinet has considered the relevant deployment considerations in September 2018;
- 9 **agreed** to undertake a strategic reassessment of New Zealand's contribution to Afghanistan to support the government's medium term approach;
- 10 **agreed** that the intention to conduct a strategic reassessment be communicated publicly, [REDACTED]
s6(a)
- 11 **agreed** that this in-principle decision be conveyed now to NATO partners, including the intention to undertake a fundamental reassessment of any further New Zealand contributions to Afghanistan from September 2019, and that this intention be publicly communicated in September 2018;
- 12 **noted** that Cabinet will be provided with further advice by June 2019 on possible alternative contributions to Afghanistan [REDACTED]
s9(2)(f)(iv)

s6(a)

Janine Harvey
Committee Secretary

Present:

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Rt Hon Winston Peters
Hon Kelvin Davis
Hon Grant Robertson
Hon Andrew Little
Hon David Parker
Hon Stuart Nash
Hon Ron Mark

Officials present from:

Office of the Prime Minister
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Ministry of Defence

Hard-copy distribution:

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister of Defence

Chair
Cabinet

DEFENCE DEPLOYMENTS: IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Proposal

1. This paper seeks agreement on an 'in principle' approach to forthcoming decisions on New Zealand's Afghanistan and Iraq deployments, to inform the finalisation of specific Cabinet papers on each.
2. Cabinet will, on 17 September, be asked to make final decisions on New Zealand's defence deployments to the following operations: Afghanistan, Iraq, Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt; the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in Israel, Lebanon and Syria; and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).
3. An in principle agreement now, followed by final agreement on 17 September will give direction to officials in foreshadowing the Government's intentions vis-à-vis Iraq and Afghanistan with key partners, ahead of public announcements.

Background and Comment

Principles underpinning deployment decisions

4. The Government has wide discretion in making decisions to deploy troops to peace support missions, especially outside New Zealand's immediate region. Cabinet deliberations require the weighing up of national security, foreign, economic, legal and defence policy issues, as well as operational considerations, within the wider context of our national values and reputation, and the independence of our foreign policy. This can lead to difficult judgements about the extent to which, and how New Zealand should become involved in peace support missions (be they UN-led or coalitions of like-minded).
5. There are, therefore, a set of principles (many of which are articulated in the *Strategic Defence Policy Statement 2018*) which Ministers can apply when considering advice on peace support deployments. These include: whether there is a clear, legitimate and compelling case for New Zealand involvement (which goes to issues of national and collective security, the values for which New Zealand stands and our support for international rules and norms); the legal basis for our involvement and the consistency of any proposed actions with international law; the risks to the safety and security of New Zealand personnel; and the implications for New Zealand's ability still to deploy to our immediate region should an emergency arise.
6. Cabinet will consider further advice on each of the deployments set out in paragraph 2 in September, including how they measure up to these principles. s6(a)

s6(a)

The Government's objectives are best achieved by engaging with our partners ahead of the final decision in September.

Iraq

7. The mandate for the NZDF's deployment of up to 143 troops to Iraq and the region, primarily deployed to the Australia-New Zealand joint Building Partner Capacity mission (BPC) in Taji, expires in November 2018. s6(b)(i)

8. The deployment remains relevant and consistent with the principles outlined in paragraph 5 over the short term. Despite significant successes by the Iraqi Government and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (the Coalition) since 2015, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group remains an insurgent threat to Iraq, s6(a)

The Iraqi security forces continue to require international assistance to build their capability to contain the ISIS threat within Iraq, and the underlying social and political drivers for ISIS's emergence in Iraq remain.

9. Accordingly the 75 members of the Coalition intend to continue their efforts to eliminate the threat posed by ISIS, including through ongoing support to Iraq into 2019 and beyond. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

10. We propose therefore that Cabinet extends the mandate for NZDF's deployment to Iraq to 30 June 2019, to match the conclusion of the current programme of training for Iraq troops. By that point, we expect the nature of support required by the Coalition and by the Iraqi Government and its security forces to have changed, s9(2)(f)(iv)

11. This provides an opportunity for New Zealand to evolve the nature of its own contribution to meet these changing needs in alignment with our values. s6(b)(i)

we expect New Zealand could (i) move to a 'train the trainers' model of security capacity building, (ii) reduce the number of NZDF troops deployed, and s9(2)(f)(iv)

12. The Government recognises the joint nature of the deployments and the need to keep coalition partners informed of our decision making. s6(a)

s6(b)(i)

We will also need to work with Coalition partners to determine the precise nature of any continued New Zealand presence in Iraq, to ensure that we were making a positive difference of a kind consonant with New Zealand's values and interests.

13. It is therefore proposed that:

13.1 Cabinet agree in principle to extend the Iraqi deployment mandate to 30 June 2019;

13.2 authorise officials to engage with Australia and other Coalition partners [REDACTED]
s6(a)

13.3 Finalise the decision at Cabinet meeting on 17 September with a paper setting out detailed deployment considerations (strategic analysis, ongoing legal basis, financial, safety and security of personnel etc.);

13.4 Following finalising the decision on 17 September, publicly foreshadow New Zealand's intention to re-configure any post-June 2019 contribution in an announcement after 17 September; and

13.5 Finalise the future approach set out in paragraph 11 by February 2019 - once officials have identified detailed options as to how best New Zealand could contribute within the Coalition's broader strategy.

Afghanistan

14. On 11 June 2018 Cabinet considered the Afghanistan deployment. Cabinet extended the mandate to align it with other regional deployment decisions. This allowed for a more strategic consideration of the Afghanistan deployment alongside a range of other deployments. [REDACTED]
s6(a)

[REDACTED] This paper creates an intermediate step of undertaking a strategic reassessment of New Zealand's contribution to Afghanistan. The paper also provides for communicating the Government's intention to undertake a strategic reassessment to the public and coalition partners.

15. To ensure that Afghanistan cannot, once again, be used as a safe haven from which to inspire, plan or launch global terrorism, the international community remains committed to support the government of Afghanistan and its security forces against the Taliban insurgency and other international terrorist groups. This commitment was confirmed at the recent NATO Leaders Summit in Brussels, with a wide spectrum of coalition members confirming a long-term intention to remain in support of the NATO-led mission (known as Resolute Support).

16. This mission seeks to (i) continue to develop the capability and capacity of the Afghan security forces so they can protect the Afghan population and pressure the Taliban on the battlefield [REDACTED]
s6(a)

17. New Zealand's current substantive contribution to Resolute Support is the deployment of 11 NZDF personnel to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy to train the

future Afghan military leaders.¹ We have been undertaking this role since 2013 and the current mandate is due to expire on 30 September 2018. More broadly NZDF personnel have served in Afghanistan through successive military deployments since 2001.

18. This paper proposes undertaking a strategic reassessment of New Zealand's contribution to Afghanistan. This recognises the changing environment in Afghanistan and the region, and ensures the Government's medium term approach remains responsive to conditions on the ground in Afghanistan. [REDACTED] s6(a)

19. The reassessment would not contemplate any increase to the size of New Zealand's current deployment but would include advice on how New Zealand could possibly contribute to the NATO-led mission through a different type of deployment in the medium term and/or various other (civilian) forms of contribution. [REDACTED] s9(2)(f)(iv)

20. We propose that Cabinet:

20.1 Agree in principle to extend the mandate for NZDF's deployment to the Officer Academy out to 30 September 2019;

20.2 Authorise officials to engage now with partners about our intention also to announce publicly the strategic reassessment of New Zealand's contribution in Afghanistan;

20.3 Finalise the detailed deployment considerations (ongoing legal basis, safety and security of personnel etc.) at Cabinet for its meeting of 17 September 2018;

20.4 Following the finalisation of the deployment extension, publicly announce the deployment extension and the strategic reassessment; and

20.5 Request that the strategic reassessment be provided to Cabinet by June 2019.

[REDACTED] s6(a)

¹ New Zealand also has two NZDF personnel deployed in headquarters roles. The mandate for these roles is due to expire in June 2019.

[REDACTED] s6(a)

Consultation

22. This paper was prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Defence and the New Zealand Defence Force. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet was informed.

Financial, Human Rights, Legislative, Gender and Disability Implications

23. There are no financial, human rights, legislative, gender or disability implications associated with this paper.

Publicity

24. It is recommended that the Prime Minister announce decisions on Iraq and Afghanistan deployments, once Cabinet has considered further detailed advice on each deployment and confirmed the in principle decisions below.

Recommendations

25. We recommend that Cabinet:

- a. **Note** that Cabinet is due to make decisions in September on New Zealand's current defence deployments to the following operations:
 - i) Afghanistan;
 - ii) Iraq;
 - iii) Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt;
 - iv) the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in Israel, Lebanon and Syria; and
 - v) the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS);
- b. **Note** that the nature of the deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan remain fit for purpose in the short term, but it is timely to undertake a fundamental reassessment of New Zealand's contributions to both missions in the first half of 2019;
- c. **Agree** in principle to extend NZDF's deployment to Iraq and the region to 30 June 2019;
- d. **Agree** that this decision be finalised once Cabinet has considered the relevant deployment considerations in September 2018;
- e. **Agree** that this in principle decision be conveyed now to Australia and other Coalition partners as necessary, including the intention to consider alternative options for the nature of any New Zealand's contributions to

Iraq

Iraq from July 2019, including a wind down of the current training programme and the intention to make public announcements of New Zealand's decision in September 2018;

- f. **Note** that Cabinet will be provided with further advice on possible options for New Zealand's future contributions to the Coalition mission in Iraq by February 2019;

Afghanistan

- g. **Agree** in principle to extend NZDF's deployment to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy in Afghanistan to 30 September 2019;
- h. **Agree** that this decision be finalised once Cabinet has considered the relevant deployment considerations in September 2018;
- i. **Agree** to undertake a strategic reassessment of New Zealand's contribution to Afghanistan to support the Government's medium term approach;
- j. **Agree** that the intention to conduct a strategic reassessment be communicated publicly, s6(a)
[Redacted]
- k. **Agree** that this in principle decision be conveyed now to NATO partners, including the intention to undertake a fundamental reassessment of any further New Zealand contributions to Afghanistan from September 2019, and that this intention will be publicly communicated in September 2018; and
- l. **Note** that Cabinet will be provided with further advice by June 2019 on possible alternative contributions to Afghanistan s9(2)(f)(iv)
[Redacted]

s6(a)

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hon Ron Mark
Minister of Defence

Released under the Official Information Act 1982