

HON ANDREW LITTLE, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

New Zealand Defence Force Operational Commitment to the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

September 2023

This publication provides documents on Cabinet's 21 March 2022 decision to withdraw New Zealand Defence Force personnel from Operation Inherent Resolve by 30 June 2023.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- New Zealand Defence Force Operational Commitment to the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) minute of decision [CAB-22-MIN-0084]
- New Zealand Defence Force Operational Commitment to the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Cabinet paper [CAB-22-SUB-0084]

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 pursuant to section 9 of the Act, it is not deemed that the public interest outweighs the need to protect 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 effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by and between or to Ministers of the Crown and officials [section 9(2)(g)(i)]



Cabinet

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.

New Zealand Defence Force Operational Commitment to the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

Portfolios Foreign Affairs / Defence

On 21 March 2022, following reference from the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee, Cabinet:

- 1 **noted** that the current mandate for the New Zealand Defence Force's commitment to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (the Coalition) expires on 30 June 2022 [CAB-20-MIN-0097];
- 2 **noted** New Zealand's support of the Coalition's broad efforts to defeat ISIS including through activities outside of Operation Inherent Resolve;
- 3 **agreed** that the New Zealand Defence Force continue to fill the Divestment Officer and Readiness Assessment Officer roles within Operation Inherent Resolve, until 30 June 2023;
- 4 **agreed** to withdraw all New Zealand Defence Force personnel by 30 June 2023;
- 5 **noted** that the estimated cost of the contribution to Operation Inherent Resolve in paragraph 3 is NZ\$0.455 million;
- 6 **noted** that this decision is estimated to increase the value of the veterans' support entitlements liability by a maximum of \$0.158 million, and that this cost can be met from within the existing unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force Non-Departmental Other Expenses appropriation: Service Cost—Veterans' Entitlements;
- 7 **noted** that agreeing to the above:
 - 7.1 is in line with New Zealand's countering violent extremism strategy, other lines of effort against ISIS and New Zealand's leadership of the Christchurch Call;
 - 7.2 supports a collective security effort, s9(2)(g)(i)
 - 7.3 builds defence relationships and personnel experience;
- 8 **noted** that the risks associated with the above decisions have been assessed, and that the benefits of a continued contribution through to 30 June 2023 are considered to outweigh the risks;

- 9 **noted** that all costs are able to be met from within the existing unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA;
- 10 **noted** that the Non-Departmental Other Expenses appropriation: Service Cost – Veterans' Entitlements appropriation for the 21/22 financial year is now fully allocated;
- 11 **noted** that the unmitigated overall threat assessment for Iraq **S6(a)**, and the unmitigated overall threat assessment for Kuwait **S6(a)**;

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

Released by the Minister of Defence

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs
Office of the Minister of Defence

Chair, External Relations and Security Cabinet Committee

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE OPERATIONAL COMMITMENT TO THE GLOBAL COALITION TO DEFEAT THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA (ISIS)

Proposal

- 1 To seek Cabinet agreement to extend and refocus the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) operational commitment to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (D-ISIS).

Relation to Government Priorities

- 2 New Zealand's military support to the D-ISIS campaign supports the Government's priorities by:
 - Contributing to our National Security Objective: '*Strengthening the international order to promote security*', and to our Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy: '*understanding the threat and working with our international partners to prevent violent extremism of all kinds*'. This in turn supports the Government's priority to '*lay the foundations for a better future*'.
 - Contributing to collective security efforts and the international rules-based system, which in turn supports the Government's priority to '*lay the foundations for a better future*'.
 - Supporting the Minister of Defence's *People* priority which ensures that New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel have the skills and experience they need to deliver government directed requirements safely and effectively, both at home and abroad.
 - The modest personnel commitment will not affect the NZDF's ability to prioritise the Pacific as envisaged in the *Defence Assessment 2021* and the Minister of Defence's *Pacific* priority. The Assessment also acknowledges that contributions further afield contribute to our security partnerships, the strength of the international rules-based system, multilateralism and operational effectiveness.¹ It also recommends that the NZDF and the Ministry of Defence conduct wider engagement outside of New Zealand's immediate neighbourhood where activities align with New Zealand interests and values.²

¹ Considered by Cabinet in November 2021 (ERS-21-MIN-0039).

² '*Priorities for the Defence Portfolio*' (ERS-21-MIN-0040) and '*Defence Assessment 2021*' (ERS-21-MIN-0039) were considered by Cabinet in November 2021.

Executive Summary

- 3 The mandate for the NZDF's operational commitment to D-ISIS expires on 30 June 2022. The deployment is at an important juncture as Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the military pillar of D-ISIS, enters a new phase in the campaign: reducing and reconfiguring as it moves from a combat phase to a mandate to train and assist Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).
- 4 While the Coalition has significantly degraded ISIS' military capability, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
[REDACTED]
- 5 While there are other violent extremist groups, ISIS has broader impact through its global affiliates and its continued online radicalisation capability and influence. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 6 This paper proposes a reduced, refocused NZDF contribution of five personnel (two existing and three new positions) to OIR, and, should Ministers agree, an additional new contribution of two personnel to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Mission Iraq (NMI). Positions would be mandated through to 30 June 2024. The paper invites Cabinet to authorise Ministers with Powers to Act (the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence) to approve new appointments, should suitable positions be secured.
- 7 A continued military contribution to the Coalition would demonstrate New Zealand's longstanding and principled commitment to collective security and provide operational capability building and ongoing relationship opportunities. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 8 [REDACTED] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
[REDACTED] In addition to NMI's engagement, other international organisations (such as the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations Development Programme, among others) are focused on addressing these long-term issues in Iraq, alongside the military support provided by OIR.
- 9 Officials assess that the benefits of a continued D-ISIS contribution (Option 1 or 2) outweigh the risks.

Background

What is the Global Coalition and what has it achieved?

10 D-ISIS was established in September 2014. Its membership stands at 84 countries from a range of regions—including our own—some [redacted S6(a)] contribute to the Coalition's military operation, OIR. In addition to the military campaign, the Coalition acts against ISIS' financing and economic infrastructure, working to prevent foreign terrorist fighters from moving across borders, supporting the stabilisation of liberated areas and countering the group's propaganda.

11 The Coalition has made considerable progress in its objectives, including successfully working with the ISF, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and other local militia groups to territorially defeat ISIS and reduce it to an insurgency. OIR has therefore reduced in size and reconfigured, moving from a combat phase to one focusing on advising, assisting and enabling the ISF.³ Iraq, as host nation for OIR, has the lead on all security operations.

12 [redacted S6(a)]

13 [redacted S6(a)] in January 2022 ISIS launched an attack on Hasakah prison in northeast Syria containing ISIS adherents [redacted S6(a)]. The attack is the most significant since ISIS lost its final stronghold inside Syria (Baghouz) in March 2019. While the SDF counter-attack, supported by Coalition air support and armoured vehicles, was eventually successful, it was not straightforward; the fight lasted around a week and freed several hundred detainees, although many appear to have died in combat or were recaptured.

NATO Mission in Iraq

14 OIR is not the only avenue for supporting Iraq to counter ISIS. NMI was established in 2018 as a civilian-military non-combat advisory, training and capacity building initiative. It focuses on supporting institutional and strategic change within key government, security and military education institutions in Iraq to help address the long-term drivers of violent extremism. All NATO members contribute to NMI and three NATO partners—Australia, Finland and Sweden—contribute militarily. [redacted]

[redacted s6(a), s6(b)(i), s9(2)(g)(i)]

³ Advising focuses on the effective employment of the ISF; assisting is the transfer of military resources to the ISF; and enabling provides effects-based capabilities—such as intelligence and surveillance platforms and air support (including strikes) [redacted S6(a)].

New Zealand's role to date: effective and appreciated

- 15 New Zealand's contribution to countering ISIS has been effective and appreciated by D-ISIS partners. We have supported OIR since 2015 with the deployment of up to 143 NZDF personnel at any one time to Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar. The major focus of our effort has been on building the capacity of Iraqi forces, through the Building Partner Capacity (BPC) training mission at Camp Taji, alongside the Australian Defence Force.
- 16 With the end of the BPC mission in 2020, Cabinet authorised a nine-person deployment until 30 June 2022: four personnel in OIR in Iraq and Kuwait; S6(a) in the United States (US) Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) in Qatar; S6(a) . S6(a) (see Annex A for New Zealand's current roles and position descriptions).⁴
- 17 The original objectives of New Zealand's deployment in 2015—to build ISF capability and to degrade ISIS—have now been substantively achieved.⁵
- 18 We have also supported the Coalition's other lines of effort. We have provided stabilisation funding and development assistance to Iraq from the New Zealand Aid Programme, participated in Coalition working groups on foreign terrorist fighters and financing, and contributed to the Coalition's effort to disrupt ISIS' social media campaigns and to develop counter-narratives.

The benefits of a future New Zealand contribution

- 19 As a supporter of collective security, New Zealand contributes to international security efforts where they align with our interests and values. Although ISIS S6(a) maintains the capacity to inspire globally: the ISIS inspired terror attack in Auckland in 2021 being one such example of the group's reach. S6(a) As a complex, multi-faceted problem, it is best addressed in partnership, as represented by the 84 members of the Coalition.⁹

⁴ S6(a)

⁵ As articulated in the 2015 Cabinet paper "International Response to the Threat of ISIL: Possible New Zealand Contribution".

⁶ S6(a)

⁷ S6(a)

⁸ S6(a)

⁹ S6(a)

20 Maintaining a contribution to the Coalition would support the pillars of mōhio and mahi tahi in New Zealand's Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy: understanding the threat and working with our international partners to prevent violent extremism of all kinds. It would also complement our ongoing contributions to the Coalition's other lines of work as well as our leadership of the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online. The modest nature of this deployment is in line with the Defence Assessment 2021's focus on the Pacific, but not to the exclusion of targeted contributions further afield.

21 [Redacted] s6(a)
[Redacted]
[Redacted] This would provide experiences, personal and professional development, which can only be gained working in these modern military environments. This enhances NZDF personnel's capability and resilience for other peace and security operations, domestically and in the Pacific.

22 Beyond continuing a contribution to OIR, New Zealand could consider participating in NMI. [Redacted] S6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted] This would be our only operational relationship with NATO following the conclusion of the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan in March 2021.

23 [Redacted] s6(a), s6(b)(i)
[Redacted] s6(a)
[Redacted]
[Redacted] s9(2)(g)(i)
[Redacted]. It would signal New Zealand's commitment to cooperation in support of the international rules-based system, and provide operational capability benefits to the NZDF through the maintenance of working relationships.

However the situation is complex and defeating ISIS [Redacted] S6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

24 While ISIS has been degraded, a number of long-term drivers for violent extremism remain in Iraq and Syria [Redacted] S6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

25 [Redacted] S6(a), s6(b)(i)
[Redacted] In addition to NMI's engagement, other international organisations (such as the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations Development Programme, among others) are focused on addressing these long term issues in Iraq, alongside the military support provided by OIR.

¹⁰ New Zealand's partnership status has traditionally been underpinned by its previous 25 years of continuous contributions to NATO operations. [Redacted] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

26 [Redacted] s6(a)
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

27 OIR and NMI are in Iraq at the invitation of the Government. The presence of foreign troops has been the topic of discussions in parliament and in election campaigns, and a constant agenda item in US-Iraq Strategic Dialogues over the past couple of years. The process of forming a coalition government since Iraq's parliamentary election in October 2021 is ongoing. [Redacted] S6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
[Redacted]

28 [Redacted] S6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
[Redacted] Reporting by the New York Times on deficiencies in the US targeting system overall have led to the US Secretary of Defence commissioning a review by the Rand Corporation to make independent recommendations to improve it [Redacted] s6(a)
[Redacted]

Key partners

29 Due to progress to date, the US withdrew the last of its combat troops from Iraq in December 2021, and will maintain a non-combat military presence of approximately 2,500 personnel. Citing a diversifying ISIS threat, the United Kingdom is [Redacted] s6(b)(i), s9(2)(g)(i) committed to OIR and NMI and will maintain [Redacted] S6(a), s6(b)(i) military personnel in Iraq. [Redacted] S6(a), s6(b)(i)
[Redacted]

30 Other partners have reduced their military commitments. [Redacted] S6(a), s6(b)(i) [Redacted] the Australian Defence Force has reduced its commitment to five senior OIR positions and two personnel to NMI. In January, Germany announced the conclusion of its military operations in Syria but extended its 500-strong deployment to Iraq for nine months. No partner has informed New Zealand that they intend to withdraw forces completely from OIR or NMI.

Options

31 The existing nine-person deployment mandate to OIR finishes in June 2022. Five of the seven roles remaining are affected either by the reconfiguration of OIR in its new phase, or by restrictions on role fulfilment [Redacted] S6(a)
[Redacted]
[Redacted] Therefore, maintaining New Zealand's current contribution is not recommended. We have identified alternative options below.

Option 1: OIR

- 32 In line with the valuable role played by OIR, but also its reduction in size in its new phase, we recommend a decrease of New Zealand's deployment to five, keeping two existing roles—Divestment Officer and Readiness Assessment Officer—and authorising NZDF to bid for up to three more: one Gender Adviser role and two Staff Officer roles.¹¹ We recommend Cabinet authorise Ministers with Powers to Act (Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence) to approve roles once secured through bidding processes. These roles would be mandated until 30 June 2024. NZDF would withdraw remaining current roles by 30 June 2022.

Option 2: OIR plus NMI s9(2)(g)(i)

- 33 In addition to the proposed OIR deployment of five personnel based in Baghdad and Kuwait, we recommend that NZDF be authorised to bid for up to two Staff Officer roles in NMI based in Baghdad, with authority to approve roles once secured through the bidding process delegated to Ministers with Powers to Act (Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence).
- 34 This provides support for a challenging but worthy initiative to S6(a), s9(2)(g)(i) [REDACTED] enhance Iraq's resilience to ISIS and violent extremism more broadly. It also supports the development of New Zealand's relationship with NATO and, as with Option 1, opportunities for the development of NZDF personnel.

Option 3: Withdraw

- 35 We do not recommend withdrawal. The Coalition is still required, New Zealand's interests are still engaged, and other partners are staying the course. However, OIR's progression to a new operational phase and substantial achievement of New Zealand's original objectives presents a natural point for New Zealand to withdraw should Cabinet so decide. Option 3 would see New Zealand avoid the risks associated with a continued New Zealand contribution, as listed below.

¹¹ Note Option 1 and Option 2 would see the NZDF withdraw from the Operational Law Adviser role and the J5/7 Plans/Training Officer in OIR, and its remaining roles in the CAOC and CPIE in Qatar by 30 June 2022.

Objectives for a continued contribution (Option 1 or Option 2):

- 36 As New Zealand has substantively achieved its original deployment objectives, if Cabinet were to select Option 1 or Option 2 it is also recommended that Cabinet agree to the following revised deployment objectives:
- New Zealand continues to contribute towards addressing ISIS extremism at its source through its contribution to Coalition efforts that support the ISF in militarily degrading and suppressing ISIS.
 - New Zealand continues to contribute towards the maintenance of its reputation internationally and with key partners for a values based, burden sharing approach to global problems.
- 37 And, if Option 2 (with the NMI element) is approved:
- New Zealand helps to address some of the long-term causes of violent extremism within Iraq through a contribution to NMI, which provides support to key Iraqi Government, security and military institutions.
 - New Zealand enhances its operational military capability through gaining operational experience and working with NATO.

Next Steps, Communications and Proactive Release

- 38 Should Cabinet agree to Option 1 or Option 2, officials would inform partners of relevant role changes by 30 June 2022. The NZDF would then bid for new positions in OIR and (if agreed) new positions in NMI. Following the bidding processes, officials would notify Ministers with Powers to Act of the outcome and seek approval for the specific positions secured.
- 39 Should Cabinet select Option 3 (withdraw), officials would inform partners and NZDF personnel would be withdrawn by 30 June 2022. The Minister of Defence would be updated on the withdrawal process.
- 40 A communications plan would be provided to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence following Cabinet's decision. Should Option 3 be selected, then officials recommend that the decision be announced promptly in the interest of transparency. This paper will be proactively released in due course.

Financial Implications

- 41 No additional funding is required for any options. Options 1 and 2 could be funded from Crown Revenue within the existing unallocated baseline for 'Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.' The estimated increase to the veterans' support entitlement obligation is \$1.987M over the term of the deployment and can be funded within the existing 'Vote Defence Force appropriation Service Cost – Veterans' Entitlements.'

Estimated Direct Costs	NZ \$million			
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Option 1: OIR	-	1.342	1.343	2.685
Option 2: OIR plus NMI	0.028	2.008	2.009	4.045
Option 3: Withdraw	0	0	0	0
Unallocated Appropriation¹²	4.85	21.1	26.789	

¹² These figures do not include the proposed expenditure in the New Zealand Defence Force commitments to Peace Support Operations in the Middle East and Africa S6(a), s6(b)(i) which are being considered alongside this one.

Legal Considerations

42 The legal basis for New Zealand's military presence in Iraq rests on the invitation and consent of the Government of Iraq. Should this be revoked, the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence would be informed and NZDF personnel would be withdrawn. s6(a)

For prospective new roles, a review will be undertaken to ensure these positions are within the approved mandate.

43 S6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

44 S6(a)

Consultation

45 This paper was jointly prepared by the Ministry of Defence, the New Zealand Defence Force and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (National Security Group and Policy Advisory Group), the New Zealand Intelligence Community, the Treasury and the National Assessments Bureau were consulted.

Recommendations [updated following discussion with ERS Ministers]

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence recommend that the Committee:

1 **agree** to one of the following three options:

Option 1: Continue with a reduced contribution to Operation Inherent Resolve for two years s9(2)(g)(i)

1.1 **agree** to reduce New Zealand's military contribution to Operation Inherent Resolve by approving the following proposed commitments to 30 June 2024:

1.1.1 **agree** that the New Zealand Defence Force continue to fill the Divestment Officer and Readiness Assessment Officer roles;

1.1.2 **note** the estimated cost of the proposed contribution to Operation Inherent Resolve under Option 1 is NZ\$0.911M; and

1.1.3 **note** this option is estimated to increase the value of the veterans' support entitlements liability by a maximum of \$0.316M and this cost can be met from within the existing unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force Non-Departmental Other Expenses appropriation: Service Cost—Veterans' Entitlements.

Option 2: Continue with a reduced contribution to Operation Inherent Resolve for one year

s6(a)

1.2 **agree** to reduce New Zealand's military contribution to Operation Inherent Resolve by approving the following proposed commitments to 30 June 2023:

1.2.1 **agree** that the New Zealand Defence Force continue to fill the Divestment Officer and Readiness Assessment Officer roles;

1.2.2 **note** the estimated cost of the proposed contribution to Operation Inherent Resolve under Option 2 is NZ\$0.455M; and

1.2.3 **note** this option is estimated to increase the value of the veterans' support entitlements liability by a maximum of \$0.158M and this cost can be met from within the existing unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force Non-Departmental Other Expenses appropriation: Service Cost—Veterans' Entitlements.

For Option 1 or Option 2

1.3 **note** that agreeing to Option 1 or 2 would: be in line with New Zealand's countering violent extremism strategy, other lines of effort against ISIS and our leadership of the Christchurch Call; support a collective security effort, s9(2)(g)(i); and build defence relationships and personnel experience;

1.4 **note** that the risks associated with Options 1 and 2 have been assessed and that the benefits of a continued contribution outweigh the risks;

1.5 **note** all costs are able to be met from within the existing unallocated baseline for 'Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA';

1.6 **note** the Non-Departmental Other Expenses appropriation: Service Cost—Veterans' Entitlements appropriation for the 21/22 financial year is now fully allocated so any future qualifying operational deployments will require Cabinet funding approval; and

1.7 **note** that the unmitigated overall threat assessment for Iraq S6(a) the unmitigated overall threat assessment for Kuwait is S6(a).

Option 3: Withdraw

1.8 **agree** to withdraw all seven remaining New Zealand Defence Force personnel by 30 June 2022 with no new financial implications:

1.8.1 **note** that, should Ministers elect to withdraw, officials would notify partners, New Zealand Defence Force personnel would be withdrawn before 30 June 2022 and relevant Ministers would be updated on the process; and

1.8.2 **note** Operation Inherent Resolve's progression to a new operational phase and substantial achievement of New Zealand's original objectives presents a natural point for New Zealand to withdraw.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Nanaia Mahuta
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hon Peeni Henare
Minister of Defence

Annex:

A: Current New Zealand D-ISIS Roles and Position Descriptions.

Released by the Minister of Defence

Annex A: Current New Zealand D-ISIS roles and position descriptions

Position (agreed in 2020)	Current position	Approval of position change	Current position description
CJ37 Chief Operations Training	The OIR CJ33 Night Chief of Operations was withdrawn in September 2021 S6(a)	CAB-20-MIN-0325 in July 2020 S6(a)	S6(a)
G73 Training Warrant Officer	Force Readiness Assessment Officer	CAB-20-MIN-0325 in July 2020 refers however Cabinet approval was not required as roles were deemed substantively similar	
CJ4 ISF Sustainment Development Team Coordination Officer	Military Advisory Group Divestment Officer	CAB-20-MIN-0325 in July 2020	
Operational Law Adviser	No change	N/A	
s6(a)			

Released by the Minister of Defence