

Hon Judith Collins KC MP, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

MANDATE REVIEW OF THE NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CONTRIBUTION TO MILITARY ACTION AGAINST HOUSHI TARGETS

June 2024

This publication provides documents on Cabinet's June 2024 decision to extend the mandate of the NZDF deployment to the United States-led coalition conducting strikes on Houthi military targets by six months.

This paper is available here: <https://www.defence.govt.nz/publications/mandate-review-of-the-new-zealand-defence-force-contribution-to-military-action-against-houthi-targets/>

The pack comprises:

- the redacted Cabinet minute of decision: *Mandate Review of the New Zealand Defence Force Contribution to Military Action Against Houthi Targets* [FPS-24-MIN-0016]
- the redacted Cabinet paper: *Mandate Review of the New Zealand Defence Force Contribution to Military Action Against Houthi Targets* [FPS-24-SUB-0016].

Certain information is withheld, where the making available of the information 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 a basis of confidence by the Government of any other country or any agency of such a Government [section 6(b)(i)]

In addition, certain information has been withheld in order to:

- maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any department or organisation in the course of their duty [section 9(2)(g)(i)]
- maintain legal professional privilege [section 9(2)(h)].

Where information is withheld pursuant to section 9(2), it is not considered that the public interest in this information outweighs the need to protect it.

Information about making an Official Information Act request to the Ministry of Defence is available from [this page](#).



Cabinet Foreign Policy and National 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.

Mandate Review of the New Zealand Defence Force Contribution to Military Action Against Houthi Targets

Portfolios Foreign Affairs / Defence

On 25 June 2024, the Cabinet Foreign Policy and National Security Committee:

1 **noted** that on 23 January 2024, Cabinet:

1.1 noted the deterioration of the security situation in the Red Sea due to Houthi attacks on international commercial shipping, and the significance of the Red Sea for New Zealand's trade;

1.2 agreed to [REDACTED] s6(a) a six-month deployment of up to six New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel to the United States-led coalition conducting strikes on Houthi military targets;

[CAB-24-MIN-0007]

2 [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(i)

3 **noted** that without the coalition strikes, it is likely that there would have been a significantly higher frequency and scale of Houthi attacks, which could have [REDACTED] s6(a) further reduced commercial shipping traffic;

4 **noted** that the operational threat assessment [REDACTED] s6(a)

5 [REDACTED] s9(2)(h)

6 **noted** the strategic objectives previously agreed to by Cabinet [CAB-24-MIN-0007], as outlined in paragraph 17 of the paper under FPS-24-SUB-0016;

7 **agreed** to extend the current [REDACTED] s6(a) mandate by six months until 31 January 2025, then withdraw;

8 [REDACTED] s6(a)

- 9 **noted** that the total estimated cost is \$0.715 million in Financial Year 2024/25;
- 10 **noted** that the cost in Financial Year 2024/25 can be funded within the current unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand’s Security, Stability and Interests MCA;
- 11 **noted** that officials will message partners as soon as possible and make preparations ahead of a withdrawal by the conclusion of this mandate;
- 12 **noted** the financial implications as outlined in the paper under FPS-24-SUB-0016.

Janine Harvey
Committee Secretary

Present:

Rt Hon Christopher Luxon
Rt Hon Winston Peters (Chair)
Hon David Seymour
Hon Nicola Willis
Hon Judith Collins
Hon Todd McClay

Officials present from:

Office of the Prime Minister
Office of the Chair
Officials Committee for FPS

Released by the Minister of Defence

Chair, Foreign Policy and National Security Committee

MANDATE REVIEW OF THE NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CONTRIBUTION TO MILITARY ACTION AGAINST HOUTHİ TARGETS

Proposal

1. To provide Cabinet with options to extend by six-months or withdraw the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel currently supporting coalition strikes against Houthi military targets ahead of the mandate expiry on 31 July 2024.

Relation to Government Priorities

2. The deployment under consideration aligns with Cabinet's intent to apply renewed attentiveness to traditional like-minded partnerships [Cabinet paper 'Resetting New Zealand's Foreign Policy' (CAB-24-MIN-0033 refers)].

3. This Cabinet paper also supports the *Defence Policy and Strategy Statement 2023* (DPSS) and *National Security Strategy 2023-2028* (NSS) objectives, supporting partnerships and demonstrating New Zealand's commitment to contributing globally to collective security efforts.

Executive Summary

4. On 23 January 2024, Cabinet authorised the deployment of up to six NZDF personnel to the US-led coalition conducting strikes on Houthi military targets for six months until no later than 31 July 2024 [CAB-24-MIN-0007 refers]. This paper provides Cabinet with options to either: extend the NZDF's contribution, known as [redacted] s6(a), by an additional six months before withdrawing by 31 January 2025 (recommended); or withdraw the NZDF's contribution following its mandate expiration on 31 July 2024.

5. Although this was initially only a six-month commitment, officials have identified there would be value to New Zealand in extending [redacted] s6(a) by an additional six months. With freedom of navigation and international trade still under threat, Option 1 (to extend and then withdraw) would offer the opportunity to further support coalition efforts

[redacted] s6(a), s6(b)(i) | s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
Option 1's firm withdrawal by 31 January 2025 would enable [redacted] s6(a) (while emphasising that other NZDF efforts to support Middle East maritime security will continue, [redacted] s9(2)(g)(i) in 2025).

6. If Cabinet does not wish to extend the deployment, it could elect to withdraw from this operation at the expiry of the current mandate on 31 July 2024, which would be consistent with Government messaging at the outset of the deployment.¹ [redacted] s9(2)(g)(i)

¹ Prime Minister Luxon stated at the press conference on 24 January 2024 that "The extent of our commitment with the six personnel that we're sending is through to no later than 31 July this year".

7. Officials will advise key partners of Cabinet's decision. A press release will also be prepared for Ministers' consideration.

Context

s6(a) is valued by Coalition partners

8. On 23 January 2024, Cabinet agreed to a six-month deployment of up to six NZDF personnel to the US-led coalition conducting strikes on Houthi military targets [CAB-24-MIN-0007]. s6(a), as the NZDF contribution has since been named, s6(a)

9. NZDF personnel have contributed to counter-Houthi strikes; s6(a) and supported the induction and integration of other coalition partners' personnel. s6(a)

10. New Zealand's closest partners have welcomed our contribution to the coalition, noting that it reflects our commitment to addressing shared challenges to global security and is a practical demonstration of our commitment to defending the international rules-based system. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

11. The coalition has grown to eight members,³ s6(a) The coalition's membership and strikes continue to send an important message to the Houthi that their attacks will not be tolerated by the international community. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

12. s6(a) International shipping traffic through the Red Sea was reduced by 66% in April 2024 compared to the equivalent period last year s6(a) Without the coalition strikes, however, it is likely that there would have been a significantly higher frequency and scale of Houthi attacks which could have s6(a), s6(b)(i) further reduced commercial shipping traffic.

13. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

14. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i) s6(a)

² s6(a)

³ The US, UK, Netherlands, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Kingdom of Bahrain, and New Zealand.

s6(a)

Other international efforts responding to the Houthi attacks

15. The coalition conducting these strikes sits amid a collection of international coalitions which have either been established or reinvigorated in response to the Houthi attacks. The majority of these coalitions are focused on defensive efforts to protect commercial ships from attack as they transit the Red Sea, and to prevent the smuggling of weapons destined for Houthi use.

16. New Zealand currently contributes s6(a) NZDF s6(a) to the Combined Maritime Force's (CMF's) Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG), a defensive operation under the NZDF's Op PUKEKO mandate.

Proposed Strategic Objectives

17. Upon approving s6(a) in January, Cabinet agreed to three strategic objectives, which we recommend should continue to apply to the deployment if extended:

- 17.1. New Zealand contributes to coalition efforts to halt or reduce the frequency and scale of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, restoring the confidence and flow of commercial shipping;
- 17.2. New Zealand demonstrates its commitment to the international rules-based system, and collective responses to international security challenges, through the provision of a visible contribution to coalition efforts which seeks to counter threats to maritime security; and
- 17.3. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

18. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

Options

Option 1: Extend the mandate for six months then withdraw

19. This option would extend the current six personnel mandate for six months, before withdrawing by 31 January 2025. Cabinet would be provided with further advice on the deployment only if significant changes to context occur which merit a reconsideration of this firm end date.

20. All NZDF personnel would continue to perform headquarters roles across s6(a) , and contribute to coalition strikes on Houthi military targets for a further six months. s6(a)

s6(a) the contingent would have ready access to legal advice, either in person or through a reach-back capability. s6(a)

s6(a)

21. This option would enable New Zealand to continue to contribute to an ongoing challenge to collective security,

s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

s6(a)

22. The cost for Option 1 is \$0.715M in FY24/25. This cost is proposed to be funded within the existing baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.

Proposed Commitment	Personnel/Capability	Location	Duration	Cost
NZDF personnel contribution to counter-Houthi coalition strikes	Up to six NZDF personnel to contribute to coalition strikes on Houthi military targets s6(a)	s6(a)	Until 31 January 2025	Up to \$0.715M

Benefits of Option 1

Benefit	Analysis
Contribution to strategic challenges	Extending the deployment would further demonstrate New Zealand's resolve s6(a) and to respond to major strategic challenges, especially those which directly affect New Zealand's prosperity and security. s6(a), s6(b)(i) s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

s6(b)(i), s9(2)(g)(i)

s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

Risks of Option 1

Risk	Analysis
	<p style="text-align: center;">s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)</p>

Option 2: Withdraw at conclusion of current mandate

23. This option would see the NZDF withdraw the six personnel deployed under s6(a) by the end of the current mandate expiry on 31 July 2024, concluding our contribution to coalition strikes on Houthi targets. s9(2)(g)(i)

Benefits of Option 2

Benefit	Analysis
<p>Withdrawal of a defined contribution</p>	<p>A withdrawal would adhere to previous public messaging on the length of the deployment, s6(a), s6(b)(i)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)</p> <p>s6(a)</p> <p>Withdrawing from the coalition in line with our original commitment of six months s6(a)</p>

Risks of Option 2

Risk	Analysis
	<p style="text-align: center;">s6(a), s6(b)(i), s9(2)(g)(i)</p>

s6(a), s6(b)(i), s9(2)(g)(i)

s9(2)(g)(i)

s9(2)(g)(i)

Next Steps

24. Officials will advise key partners following Cabinet's decision and prepare a press release. Should Cabinet agree to Option 1, the NZDF would continue the deployment whilst making preparations to withdraw by 31 January 2025. Should Cabinet agree to Option 2, the NZDF would begin preparations to withdraw ahead of the current mandate expiry on 31 July 2024.

Threat Assessment

25. The threat levels for NZDF personnel deployed in the Area of Operations are:

s6(a)

Financial Implications

Option 1: Extend the mandate for six months then withdraw

26.

s6(a)

s6(a)

⁴ United Nations Command on the Korean Peninsula: Future Mandate Options for the New Zealand Defence Force's Contribution, CBC-24-MIN-0046; United Nations Security Council Sanctions Against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Future Mandate Options for the New Zealand Defence Force's Deployments, CBC-24-MIN-0049

28. The following table provides financial estimates for the activities Cabinet has been asked to consider for Option 1.

	\$ million	
	2024/25	2025/26
Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA Minister of Defence		
Deploy six personnel for six months from 1 August 2024 to 31 January 2025 plus surge capacity of one Staff Officer	0.715	-
Total	0.715	-

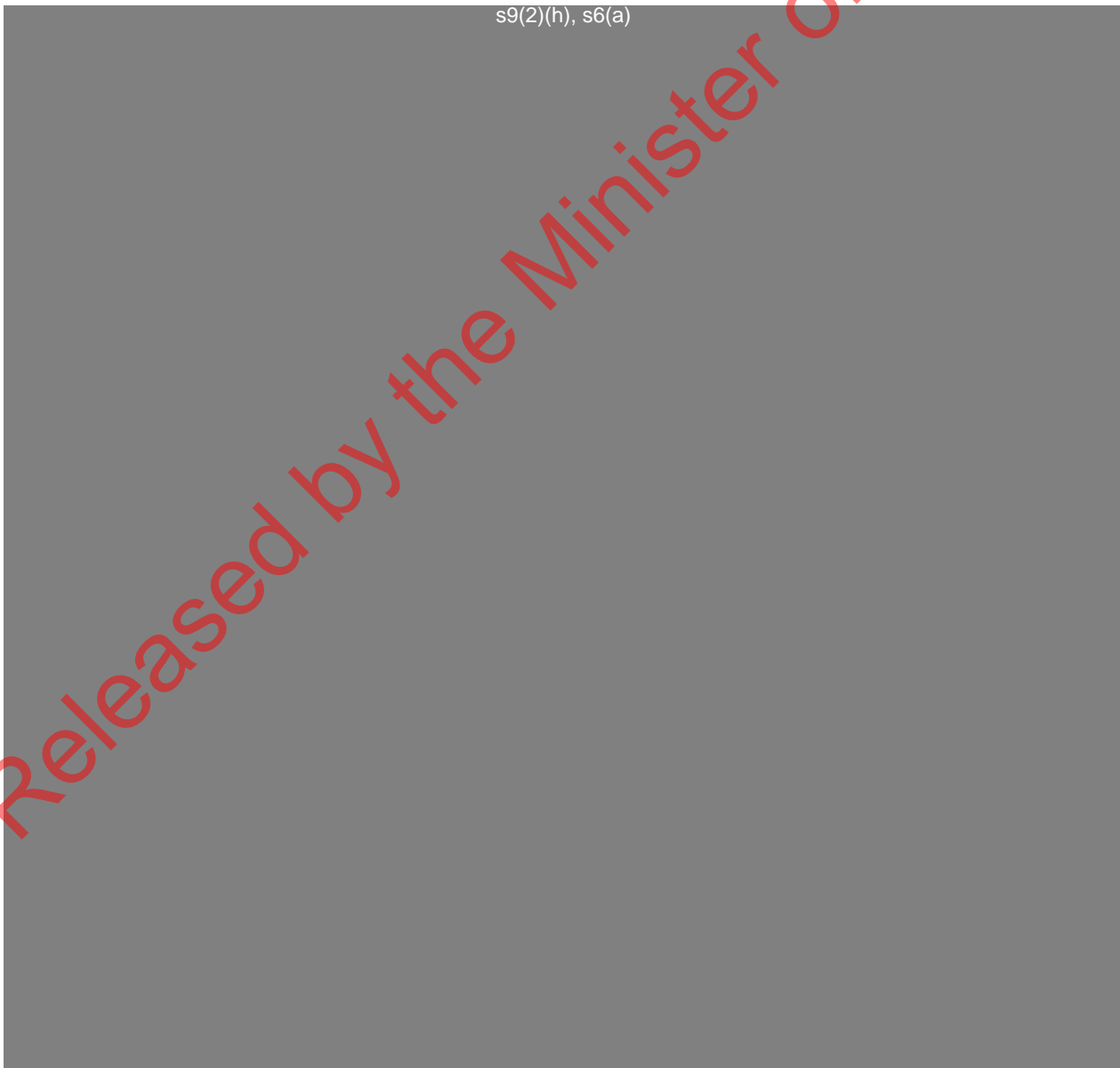
29. This deployment is not declared to be 'qualifying operational service' under the Veterans Support Act 2014. There is no impact on the veterans' support entitlement obligation.

Option 2: Withdraw at the conclusion of the current mandate

30. There are no financial implications associated with this option.

Legal Considerations

s9(2)(h), s6(a)



Consultation

41. This paper was jointly prepared by the Ministry of Defence, the NZDF, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, the Government Communications Security Bureau, and the Treasury were consulted.

Recommendations

42. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence recommended that the Committee:

1. **Note** that on 23 January 2024 Cabinet agreed to [redacted] s6(a), a six-month deployment of up to six NZDF personnel to the United States led coalition conducting strikes on Houthi military targets.

2. [redacted] s6(a), s6(b)(i)

3. **Note** that without the coalition strikes it is likely that there would have been a significantly higher frequency and scale of Houthi attacks which [redacted] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i) [redacted] and further reduced commercial shipping traffic.

4. **Note** the operational threat assessment [redacted] s6(a)
5. **Note** [redacted] s9(2)(h)
6. **Note** the strategic objectives previously agreed to by Cabinet, as outlined in paragraph 17.
7. **Agree** to one of the following options:

Option 1: Extend the mandate for six months then withdraw (Recommended)

- 7.1. **Agree** to extend the current [redacted] s6(a) mandate by six months until 31 January 2025, then withdraw.
- 7.1.1. [redacted] s6(a)
- 7.1.2. **Note** the total estimated cost is \$0.715 million in Financial Year 2024/25.
- 7.1.3. **Note** the cost in Financial Year 2024/25 can be funded within the current unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.
- 7.1.4. **Note** that officials will message partners as soon as possible and make preparations ahead of a withdrawal by the conclusion of this mandate.

OR

Option 2: Withdraw at the conclusion of the current mandate

- 7.2. **Agree** to withdraw the six personnel deployed under [redacted] s6(a) and close the operation by conclusion of the current mandate on 31 July 2024.
8. **Note** the financial constraints highlighted in paragraph 27.

Authorised for lodgement

Rt Hon Winston Peters
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon Judith Collins KC
MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Annex:

- A. New Zealand Defence Force Output 5 Financial Forecast

Annex A: New Zealand Defence Force Output 5 Financial Forecast

Vote Defence Force:	FY24/25 \$M	FY25/26 \$M	FY26/27 \$M	FY27/28 \$M
<i>Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.</i>				
s6(a)				

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Annex A: New Zealand Defence Force Output 5 Financial Forecast

Vote Defence Force:	FY24/25 \$M	FY25/26 \$M	FY26/27 \$M	FY27/28 \$M
Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.				

s6(a)

Released by the Minister of Defence