

HON RON MARK, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Update to Surge Deployment of the New Zealand Defence Force Electrical Works Team in the Multinational Force and Observers Mission

October 2020

This publication provides documents on Cabinet's August 2020 decision to approve an extension of the five-person NZDF Electrical Works Team surge deployment in the Multinational Force and Observers mission.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- the Cabinet minute of decision: *Multinational Force and Observers Mission: Update to Surge Deployment of the New Zealand Defence Force Electrical Works Team* [CAB-20-MIN-0410]
- the Cabinet paper: *Update to Surge Deployment of the New Zealand Defence Force Electrical Works Team in the Multinational Force and Observers Mission* [CAB-20-SUB-0410].

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.

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)]



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.

Multinational Force and Observers Mission: Update to Surge Deployment of the New Zealand Defence Force Electrical Works Team

Portfolio Defence

On 24 August 2020, Cabinet:

- 1 **noted** that on 19 November 2019, the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee:
 - 1.1 agreed to the surge deployment of up to two electricians into the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, for up to four weeks, commencing in 2019;
 - 1.2 noted that New Zealand may receive additional surge deployment requests to the MFO mission for the temporary deployment of additional personnel above Cabinet-mandated maximum numbers;
 - 1.3 authorised the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence (the Ministers with Power to Act) to approve any future surge deployments to the MFO mission of up to five personnel for up to 90 days;

[ERS-19-MIN-0043]
- 2 **noted** that in February 2020, the Ministers with Power to Act approved the surge deployment of a five-person Electrical Works Team to carry out remedial tasks at the MFO mission for up to 90 days;
- 3 **noted** that while the Electrical Works Team is due to complete their tasks within the 90 days as planned, the New Zealand Defence Force has:
 - 3.1 assessed that extracting the Team within the mandated timeframe via indirect commercial flights would incur some increased exposure to COVID-19;
 - 3.2 identified an opportunity for the Team to instead travel via a military flight;
- 4 **noted** that the Electrical Works Team are currently able to be extracted on an Australian Defence Force flight scheduled for 1 September 2020, which would exceed the mandated deployment duration by five days;
- 5 **approved** the extension of the surge deployment of the five-person Electrical Works Team by up to 14 days (to 10 September 2020);

- 6 **authorised** the Ministers with Power to Act to make any further changes to this surge deployment should further extraction delays take place.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

Released by the Minister of Defence

Office of the Minister of Defence

Chair, Cabinet

UPDATE TO SURGE DEPLOYMENT OF THE NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE ELECTRICAL WORKS TEAM IN THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE AND OBSERVERS MISSION

Proposal

1. To seek approval for the extension of the five-person New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Electrical Works Team surge deployment in the Multinational Force and Observers mission in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, for up to 14 days beyond the mandated 90-day duration, to mitigate COVID-19 health and safety risks to personnel associated with their return journey to New Zealand. Also to authorise Ministers with Power to Act (the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence) to approve any further changes to this surge deployment if required.

Background

2. In November 2019 Cabinet authorised Ministers with Power to Act (the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence) to approve surge deployments of up to five people for up to 90 days to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt [CAB-19-MIN-0612 refers].

3. In February 2020 Ministers with Power to Act approved a deployment of a five-person Electrical Works Team to the MFO to assist with remedial works on the mission's low voltage distribution system, and establish an ongoing maintenance programme for use by the MFO's onsite facilities team. The associated Cabinet Paper stated that the Minister of Defence would revert to Cabinet should a surge deployment exceed the agreed timeframe or personnel numbers.

4. Initially scheduled to deploy in March, COVID-19 restrictions delayed the departure of the team until May 2020, with a planned departure from the Sinai to New Zealand on 27 August (a 90-day duration). The Electrical Works Team is due to complete their tasks within the 90 days as planned. However, the NZDF has assessed that the lack of commercial flight options for the team's return journey to New Zealand would require a greater number of flights and transit countries, and this would incur some increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. The NZDF has the opportunity to instead travel via an Australian Defence Force (ADF) military flight, currently scheduled to depart Sharm el-Sheikh on 1 September [REDACTED] s6(a) which would mitigate some of this risk.

5. It is intended that NZDF personnel will be tested for COVID-19 before boarding in Sharm el-Sheikh, and that the aircraft will have undergone sanitisation prior to their departure. On returning to New Zealand [REDACTED] s6(a) the Electrical Works Team will undertake the mandatory managed isolation requirements.

Proposed extension

6. The proposed ADF flight departure on 1 September 2020 would mean that the Electrical Works Team would have deployed for a total of 95 days. Approval is therefore sought to exceed the mandated maximum duration of the surge deployment by up to 14 days (to 10 September 2020) to account for this adjustment to their scheduled return, and to build in additional time as a buffer should flight delays take place.

7. It is also proposed that the Ministers with Power to Act (the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence) be authorised to approve any further amendments to this surge deployment should further extraction delays, leading to a deployment duration in excess of 10 September 2020, arise as a result of COVID-19 implications.

8. The financial implications of the Electrical Works Team's additional time in theatre will be met by NZDF baseline funding.

Consultation

9. This paper has been prepared by the Ministry of Defence and the New Zealand Defence Force.

Recommendations

10. It is recommended that you:

- a. **Note** that in November 2019 Cabinet authorised the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence (Ministers with Power to Act) to approve surge deployments to the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, of up to five personnel for up to 90 days [CAB-19-MIN-0612 refers];
- b. **Note** the November 2019 Cabinet Paper stated that the Minister of Defence would revert to Cabinet should a surge deployment exceed the agreed timeframe or personnel numbers;
- c. **Note** that in February 2020 Ministers with Power to Act approved the surge deployment of a five-person Electrical Works Team to carry out remedial tasks at the Multinational Force and Observers mission for up to 90 days;
- d. **Note** that while the Electrical Works Team is due to complete their tasks within the 90 days as planned, the New Zealand Defence Force has assessed that extracting the team within the mandated timeframe via indirect commercial flights would incur some increased exposure to COVID-19, and have the opportunity to instead travel via a military flight;
- e. **Note** that the Electrical Works Team are currently able to be extracted on an Australian Defence Force flight scheduled for 1 September 2020, which would exceed the mandated deployment duration by five days;
- f. **Approve** the extension of the surge deployment of the five-person Electrical Works Team by up to 14 days (to 10 September 2020); and

- g. **Authorise** Ministers with Power to Act (the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence) to make any further changes to this surge deployment should further extraction delays take place.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Ron Mark
Minister of Defence

Released by the Minister of Defence