

HON PEENI HENARE, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Request For Support To Covid-19 Management In The Multinational Force And Observers Mission

October 2021

This publication provides the 9 April 2021 Ministerial submission on the request for support to COVID-19 management in the Multinational Force And Observers Mission in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- the Ministerial submission: *Request For Support To Covid-19 Management In The Multinational Force And Observers Mission*

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)]
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- 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)]



9 April 2021

Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister of Defence

URGENT REQUEST FOR SUPPORT TO COVID-19 MANAGEMENT IN THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE AND OBSERVERS MISSION

Purpose

1. To seek approval for the urgent deployment of a New Zealand Defence Force medical team to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission in Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, to manage the outbreak of COVID-19.

Context and Proposal

2. On 6 April 2021 the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) was advised of a COVID-19 outbreak in the MFO mission. As at 8 April 2021, ^{s6(b)(ii)} cases are active, including ^{s6(a)} NZDF personnel. Of the ^{s6(b)(ii)} people in the mission's South Camp, 125 are in isolation as close contacts or displaying mild symptoms. ^{s6(a), s6(b)(ii)}

3. The Force Commander, New Zealand's Major General Evan Williams, requested that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) urgently deploy personnel to stand up a mass testing facility. The ADF immediately deployed their six-person medical team ^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)}

4. ^{s6(a), s6(b)(ii)}

5. ^{s6(b)(i)}

6. Preliminary operational planning is currently underway, and the NZDF has identified that up to six personnel would be required in theatre for up to 30 days. It is likely that the team would comprise a doctor, a nurse, a science officer, an environmental health officer and two medics. This team could be readied to deploy in relief of the ADF as early as 13 April, pending Ministerial agreement.

7. While in theatre the medical team would seek to eliminate ongoing transmission and establish procedures with the MFO mission to prevent future outbreaks. This would include

tasks such as establishing an outbreak response team, developing an outbreak strategy, conducting testing, contact tracing and patient treatment.

8. The proposed deployment would not impact NZDF's ability to meet its domestic obligations, or those in support of the Pacific vaccination campaign.

Risk

9. The NZDF will implement appropriate infection prevention controls for the medical team. Where possible, this will include administration of the COVID vaccine.

10. The NZDF will continue to monitor the outbreak within the MFO mission and advise Ministers should the risk to deployed NZDF personnel change.

Next Steps

11. Should Ministers agree to the surge deployment, the NZDF would confirm availability with the ADF and the MFO mission. Regular updates are being received from theatre as to the status of the outbreak, and the progress made by the ADF team in testing and containment.

12. The NZDF will continue to work with the MFO mission to assess the outstanding requirements, including if outbreak containment is achieved and NZDF assistance is determined to be no longer required. Defence would advise Ministers of any significant changes to the proposed deployment.

Authority to approve

13. In 2012 Cabinet delegated authority to Ministers with Powers to Act (the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Minister of Foreign Affairs) to approve surge deployments for NZDF personnel to undertake specific tasking in theatre for up to 90 days [CAB Min (12) 10/2 refers].

14. [REDACTED] s9(2)(f)(iv)

Additional considerations

15. The unmitigated threat level to the MFO mission is [REDACTED] s6(a)

16. The estimated cost of the proposed deployment to the MFO mission is \$100,000. These costs can be funded from within the existing unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.

17. The following table sets out the expenditure and funding arrangements for this deployment:

	NZ \$million		
Vote Defence Force	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Six NZDF medical personnel to the MFO mission for up to 30 days	0.100	-	0.100
Additional Funding Required	-	-	-

18. The Minister for Veterans has declared deployments to this mission to be 'qualifying operational service' under the Act. This means that any NZDF personnel who serve on this deployment, who do not already have qualifying operational service, will attain 'veteran' status making them eligible for veterans' support entitlements. This deployment decision is estimated

to increase the veterans' support entitlement obligation by a maximum of \$331,000. The expense is able to be funded within the existing Vote Defence Force appropriate Service Cost – Veterans' Entitlements and no additional funding is required.

Recommendations

19. It is recommended that you:
- a. **Note** that on 6 April 2021 New Zealand was advised of an outbreak of COVID-19 in the Multinational Force and Observers mission [s6(a)] and the Force Commander had issued a request to the Australian Defence Force to stand up a testing facility;
 - b. **Note** that the Australian Defence Force immediately deployed medical personnel to the mission, [s6(b)(i)]
 - c. **Note** that Cabinet has delegated the authority to approve such activities to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence [CAB Min (12) 10/2 refers];
 - d. **Approve** the deployment of up to six personnel for up to 30 days from April 2021 to the Multinational Force and Observers mission to manage and monitor the COVID-19 outbreak;
 - e. **Note** that Defence would advise Ministers of any significant changes to the proposed deployment, including if outbreak containment is achieved and NZDF assistance is determined to be no longer required;
 - f. **Note** that the unmitigated threat level to Multinational Force and Observers mission is [s6(a)]
 - g. **Note** the estimated cost of the proposed deployment is \$100,000;
 - h. **Note** the total estimated costs for all options can be funded from within the existing unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA; and
 - i. **Note** this deployment decision is estimated to increase the value of the veterans' support entitlements liability by a maximum of \$331,000. This cost can be met from within the existing unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force Non-Departmental Other Expenses appropriation: Service Cost – Veterans' Entitlements.

KR SHORT
Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force
Date:

ANDREW BRIDGMAN
Secretary of Defence
Date: