

## **HON RON MARK, MINISTER OF DEFENCE**

### **Proposal to Renew the Mandate for New Zealand's Contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation**

October 2020

This publication provides documents on Cabinet's June 2020 decision to renew the mandate for New Zealand's contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation to September 2022.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- the 23 June 2020 Cabinet minute: *New Zealand's Contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation: Proposal to Renew Mandate* [ERS-20-MIN-0015]
- the redacted Cabinet paper: *Proposal to Renew the Mandate for New Zealand's Contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation* [ERS-20-SUB-0015].

This pack has been released on the Ministry of Defence website, available at: [www.defence.govt.nz/publications](http://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.

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# 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.*

### New Zealand's Contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation: Proposal to Renew Mandate

**Portfolios** Foreign Affairs / Defence

On 23 June 2020, the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee (ERS):

#### Background

- 1 **noted** that the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) deployment to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) contributes to the government's priority to create an international reputation New Zealand can be proud of and the maintenance of the international rules-based order;
- 2 **noted** [REDACTED] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i) and the need for an enduring United Nations presence will remain;
- 3 **noted** that:
  - 3.1 New Zealand has continuously contributed to the UNTSO since 1954;
  - 3.2 on 11 September 2018, ERS agreed to extend New Zealand's contribution of up to eight NZDF personnel to UNTSO for two years, to 30 September 2020 [ERS-18-MIN-0020];

#### Proposed mandate renewal

- 4 **agreed** to extend New Zealand's commitment of up to eight NZDF personnel to the UNTSO for two years, to 30 September 2022;
- 5 **agreed** that the NZDF may temporarily exceed the Cabinet-mandated personnel numbers for this deployment for the purposes of command reconnaissance, rotation, and extraction of forces from theatre [CAB-18-MIN-0346];
- 6 **noted** that the Chief of Defence Force will inform the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence in advance whenever Cabinet-mandated personnel numbers are exceeded;
- 7 **noted** that the unmitigated overall threat assessment to NZDF personnel deployed to the UNTSO is currently [REDACTED] s6(a) for personnel deployed to Lebanon and [REDACTED] s6(a) for personnel deployed to the Golan Heights and Syria;

- 8 **agreed** that, should this renewal be approved, officials will advise the United Nations and close partners through standard defence and diplomatic channels, and that a public announcement will be made in conjunction with concurrent Cabinet deployment decisions;

### Financial implications

- 9 **noted** that the total estimated cost of this deployment from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2022 is assessed as \$1.852 million;
- 10 **noted** that the estimated cost of \$1.852 million is able to be met within the existing baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.

Janine Harvey  
Committee Secretary

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**Present:**

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern  
Rt Hon Winston Peters (Chair)  
Hon Kelvin Davis  
Hon Grant Robertson  
Hon Andrew Little  
Hon David Parker  
Hon Ron Mark

**Officials present from:**

Office of the Prime Minister  
Officials Committee for OERS

**Hard-copy distribution:**

Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Minister of Defence

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Office of the Minister of Defence  
Chair, External Relations and Security Committee

## PROPOSAL TO RENEW THE MANDATE FOR NEW ZEALAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS TRUCE SUPERVISION ORGANISATION

### Proposal

1. To seek approval to renew New Zealand's contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) mission when the current mandate expires on 30 September 2020.

### Relation to government priorities

2. New Zealand's contribution to UNTSO supports the government's priority *to create an international reputation we can be proud of*. By deploying personnel to a United Nations (UN) mission, New Zealand contributes to the maintenance of the international rules-based order, which is fundamental to New Zealand's national security interests and foreign policy objectives. It is New Zealand's largest UN peacekeeping mission, and the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) most enduring deployment, having continuously operated there since 1954.

### Executive Summary

3. This paper seeks Cabinet's agreement to extend the NZDF deployment of eight personnel to UNTSO for two years from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2022.
4. UNTSO was established in 1948 to monitor the ceasefire between the newly created State of Israel and its Arab neighbours Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. New Zealand has contributed military observers to UNTSO since 1954. Despite Egypt and Jordan having subsequently signed peace treaties with Israel, an enduring UN presence is required in the Golan Heights and Lebanon.
5. Renewing this mandate would sustain New Zealand's modest but enduring contribution to managing one of the world's most intractable conflicts, and reinforce our international reputation as a champion of the international rules-based order and a responsible global actor. It would also reinforce relationships, progress foreign policy objectives and bring operational benefits to the NZDF. This deployment accounts for two thirds of our total contributions to UN peacekeeping missions (New Zealand has 12 mandated UN peacekeeping roles in total).<sup>1</sup>
6. The unmitigated overall threat level for NZDF personnel in Lebanon is assessed as s6(a) and for NZDF personnel in the Golan Heights and in Syria as s6(a)

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<sup>1</sup> Eight NZDF roles are mandated in UNTSO. The remaining four are mandated in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

7. COVID-19 has had an impact on the sustainment of approved NZDF deployments. Officials continue to monitor the effects of COVID-19 on missions in which NZDF personnel are deployed and will advise the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of any significant developments relating to COVID-19.
8. Costs associated with this deployment would be met within existing baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests.

**Problem definition: an ongoing United Nations peacekeeping presence is required to maintain stability between Israel and its neighbours**

9. UNTSO is the UN's longest-running peacekeeping operation, and remains one of its most important. The mission was created following the partition of Palestine in 1948 by United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 50 (1948), which called for a cessation of hostilities between the newly created State of Israel and its Arab neighbours – Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. UNSCR 50 established the positions of the UN Mediator and military observers to supervise the fragile truce. The subsequent 1949 Armistice Agreements between Israel and its neighbours required a UN presence, which has endured to the present day.
10. In addition to supervising the terms of the armistice and the ceasefire conditions from subsequent conflicts, the presence of UNTSO military observers prevents isolated, localised incidents from inadvertently escalating. As UNTSO military observers are based in several locations throughout the Middle East, they assist other UN peacekeeping operations in the region, such as the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), to fulfil their respective mandates.
11. UNTSO is made up of 153 unarmed military observers from 27 Troop Contributing Nations (TCNs).<sup>2</sup>
12. The Israeli Knesset is expected to vote on annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley and an area north of the Dead Sea on or after 1 July 2020. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

**The case for continuing New Zealand's contribution**

13. New Zealand's interests weigh strongly in favour of continuing our contribution to UNTSO. Our longstanding commitment to the mission advances New Zealand's national security interests, reinforces international partnerships, progresses foreign policy objectives and brings operational benefits to the NZDF.

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<sup>2</sup> UNTSO TCNs: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bhutan, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, Gambia, India, Ireland, Nepal, New Zealand, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States.

14. New Zealand's national security interests are advanced through actively contributing to peace and security in the Middle East. UNTSO is a neutral international presence, supporting peace in some of the most highly-contested areas within the Middle East region, where rivalries combine with contemporary threats that include violent extremism and civil war. The deployment to UNTSO demonstrates to countries in the region New Zealand's ongoing investment in Middle East security, supporting our broader interests and partnerships in the region. [REDACTED] s6(a)
15. As our largest UN peacekeeping deployment, the UNTSO deployment accounts for two thirds of our total contributions to UN peacekeeping missions. In this context, our contribution is a welcome demonstration of New Zealand's support for the international rules based order, and our willingness to contribute to those institutions and arrangements that reinforce global security.
16. The UNTSO mission works closely with the neighbouring UNDOF mission which is focused on the maintenance of the ceasefire between Israel and Syria. [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(i), s6(b)(ii)
17. New Zealand's continued participation in UNTSO also provides operational benefits to the NZDF. Commissioned Officers from all three services (Army, Navy and Air Force) routinely deploy to UNTSO, and at more junior ranks than in many other NZDF deployments. This builds experience operating in a UN peacekeeping environment. This experience is a prerequisite for NZDF personnel to become competitive for leadership positions in UN missions or international coalitions later in their careers.
18. Because UNTSO roles are generally not trade-specific, it significantly widens the pool of NZDF personnel eligible for deployment to the mission. This provides greater operational opportunities for junior female NZDF officers to deploy and enables New Zealand to meet its Women, Peace and Security Agenda targets for the deployment of female personnel on UN missions.

#### **New Zealand's current commitments**

19. New Zealand has continuously contributed NZDF personnel to UNTSO since 1954. The current mandate is for up to eight personnel [ERS-18-MIN-0020 refers]. (See Annex A for role descriptions for these personnel). New Zealand's personnel are deployed to the Golan Heights, Lebanon, and at UNTSO Headquarters in Israel (see map at Annex B indicating locations of NZDF personnel). Seven are Military Observers. The eighth is a Senior Staff Appointment which the NZDF periodically fills for 12-month rotational cycles with other TCNs. Pending Cabinet's extension of the UNTSO mandate, an NZDF Officer is scheduled to deploy into the Senior Staff Appointment role in July 2020 and again in July 2021.

Role	Description	Value
<b>Military Observers (Seven)</b> (October 2018 – September 2020)	Conduct patrols to observe, monitor and supervise the Agreements.	Visible presence of New Zealand in the area, and demonstration of a tangible contribution to the peace process.
<b>Senior Staff Appointment – Chief of Observer Group Golan-Tiberias</b> (July 2020 onwards)	Responsible for operational and administrative Command and Control of Observer Group Golan-Tiberias.	An influential position, which provides insight into UNTSO & UNDOF Headquarters operational plans. When filled, a Senior Staff Appointment increases New Zealand's visibility amongst UNTSO TCNs and the mission's leadership.

**Proposed Commitment**

20. It is recommended that Cabinet agree to maintain New Zealand's current mandate for up to eight personnel for two years out to September 2022.

**Implications should Cabinet not approve the proposal**

21. [Redacted] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)  
 [Redacted]  
 [Redacted] There are 12 NZDF personnel mandated for deployment to UN peacekeeping missions globally. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)  
 [Redacted]  
 [Redacted]  
 [Redacted]

22. Should Cabinet decide not to renew New Zealand's contribution to UNTSO, then it is convention to provide six months' notice to the United Nations. This would involve extending the deployment mandate out to December 2020.

**Threat level**

23. New Zealand Defence Intelligence assess the unmitigated overall threat level for NZDF personnel in Lebanon is [Redacted] s6(a), with force protection provided by the UNIFIL. For NZDF personnel deployed to the Golan Heights and Syria, the unmitigated overall threat level is assessed as [Redacted] s6(a). Force protection in the Areas of Limitation is provided by the respective host nations (Israel and Syria), and by the UNDOF in the Area of Separation. See map at Annex B for a visual depiction of these areas.

24. The unmitigated overall threat assessment for NZDF personnel deployed to UNTSO varies according to location. [Redacted] s6(a)  
 [Redacted]  
 [Redacted]  
 [Redacted]  
 [Redacted]  
 [Redacted]

25. [Redacted] s6(a), s6(b)(ii)  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]

26. NZDF continually monitors the operational threat level in UNTSO, [Redacted] s6(a)  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted] the Chief of Defence Force, would take appropriate measures to ensure the security of NZDF personnel. The Minister of Defence and Minister of Foreign Affairs would be notified of any significant developments.

**The impact of COVID-19**

27. COVID-19 has affected all UN peacekeeping missions, limiting rotations and restricting in theatre movement. [Redacted] s6(b)(ii)  
[Redacted] The UN response is focused on protecting, containing and mitigating transmission, securing supply chains, supporting national authorities, while continuing to implement mandates. The UN is experienced in operating in environments where communicable disease is present; Ebola virus and Zika virus being the two most recent examples.

28. NZDF personnel have continued to perform their respective roles with minimal impact. [Redacted] s6(b)(ii)  
The UN has provided clear guidance to all UNMOs on the necessary precautions to employ when operating at their specified sites, and UN Headquarters continue to monitor developments across the region as it pertains to UN personnel.

29. Officials continue to monitor the effects of COVID-19 on missions in which NZDF personnel are deployed, including peacekeeping contributions, and will advise the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of any significant developments or changes to scheduling.

**Legal considerations**

*International legal basis for UNTSO*

30. UNTSO is mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 50 (1948), which provided for a group of military observers to assist a UN Mediator to supervise the truce following the partition of Palestine. Resolution 73 (1949) subsequently provided for the Chief of Staff of UNTSO to supervise the Armistice Agreements in the region and requested continued service by UNTSO personnel to observe and maintain the cease-fire.

## Status of Forces

31. NZDF personnel deployed with UNTSO hold the status of an Expert on Mission as provided for in the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, 1946. This includes privileges and immunities as are necessary for the independent exercise of their functions during the period of their missions including immunity from personal arrest, as well as immunity from legal process of every kind for acts undertaken in the performance of their mission.

## Rotations

32. In 2012, Cabinet agreed to the inclusion in all NZDF deployment papers of a provision that allows NZDF to temporarily exceed Cabinet-mandated personnel numbers for the purposes of command reconnaissance, rotation, and extraction of forces in and out of theatre [CAB Min (12) 10/2 refers]. In July 2018, Cabinet noted the 2012 decision and agreed that this convention should continue [CAB 18-MIN-0346 refers]. The Chief of Defence Force would inform the Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister in advance whenever a rotation, extraction or command reconnaissance is planned above the mandated numbers for specific contributions.

## Ability to service New Zealand's standing commitments or deploy in an emergency

33. These proposed deployments can be undertaken without impacting the ability of the NZDF to meet standing obligations within the Pacific, or emergency responses.

## Financial implications

34. The estimated cost of the deployment is \$1.852M.
35. The expenditure to be funded from Crown Revenue is \$1.852M and the estimated cost is able to be met from the existing funding for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.
36. The following table sets out the estimated expenditure and funding position for the proposed deployment from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2022.

Vote Defence Force	NZ \$million					
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Estimated cost of proposed deployment	-	0.808	0.926	0.118	-	1.852
Total funded from existing appropriation: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests	-	0.808	0.926	0.118	-	1.852
Additional Funding Required	-	-	-	-	-	-

## Consultation

37. This paper has been prepared jointly 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 (NAB, NSG and PAG), s6(a), and the Treasury were consulted.

## Communications

38. Should Cabinet approve the renewal of New Zealand's deployment to UNTSO, it is recommended that Cabinet's decision regarding this deployment be announced alongside concurrent Cabinet deployment decisions to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and that a two week period be allowed to advise key partners through defence and diplomatic channels. The Ministry of Defence and NZDF websites would also be updated to reflect these deployments.
39. Should Cabinet decide not to renew New Zealand's contribution to UNTSO, it is recommended that this decision not be made public until the UN and key partners have been advised and any issues regarding the timing of withdrawal have been worked through. Officials would keep the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and Foreign Minister informed of developments in this regard.

## Proactive release

40. A redacted version of this Cabinet paper will be proactively released following the public announcement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

41. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence recommend that the Committee:
  1. **Note** that the New Zealand Defence Force deployment to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation contributes to the Government's priority to *create an international reputation we can be proud of* and the maintenance of the international rules-based order.
  2. **Note** [redacted] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i) [redacted] and the need for an enduring UN presence will remain.
  3. **Note** that New Zealand has continuously contributed to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation since 1954, and that the current mandate for New Zealand's contribution of up to eight New Zealand Defence Force personnel expires on 30 September 2020 [ERS-18-MIN-0020 refers].
  4. **Agree** to extend New Zealand's commitment of up to eight New Zealand Defence Force personnel to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation for two years out to 30 September 2022.
  5. **Agree** that the New Zealand Defence Force may temporarily exceed the Cabinet-mandated personnel numbers for this deployment for the purposes of command reconnaissance, rotation, and extraction of forces from theatre.

6. **Note** that the Chief of Defence Force will inform the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in advance whenever Cabinet-mandated personnel numbers are exceeded for the reasons set out in paragraph 32 of the paper.
7. **Note** that the unmitigated overall threat assessment to New Zealand Defence Force personnel deployed to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation is currently s6(a) for personnel deployed to Lebanon and s6(a) for personnel deployed to the Golan Heights and Syria.
8. **Agree** that, should this renewal be approved, officials will advise the UN and close partners through standard defence and diplomatic channels, and a public announcement will be made in conjunction with concurrent Cabinet deployment decisions.
9. **Note** that the total estimated cost of this deployment from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2022 is assessed as \$1.852M.
10. **Note** that the estimated cost of \$1.852M is able to be met within the existing baseline for Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.

Authorised for lodgement

Rt Hon Winston Peters  
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hon Ron Mark  
Minister of Defence

## Annex A: UNTSO Position Descriptions

### Senior Staff Appointment: Chief of Observer Group Golan-Tiberias (COGG-T)

Rank: Lieutenant Colonel (Equivalent)

#### Duties

- Maintain operational and administrative control and command of Observer Group Golan – Tiberias (OGG-T).
- Conduct observation, inspections, patrols and special investigations to detect and report activities that are, or could lead to, a violation of the Agreement on Disengagement in the Area of Separation (AOS) and in the A-Side of Area of Limitation (AOL).
- Execute special and non-routine operational tasks as directed by the Chief Observer Group Golan (COGG), and be prepared to assume his/her duties in their absence.
- Action all routine operational reporting through COGG as per UNTSO and OGG Standard Operating Procedures.
- Keep OGG HQ informed of military developments in and near the AOS and AOL A-Side.
- Assist COGG in maintaining an UNDOF Joint Operations Centre 24/7 co-located with the UNDOF HQ.
- Maintain liaison and good relations with appropriate Israeli officials in and near the AOL with respect to future operations.
- Maintain a training program to enable OGG-T UNMOs to accomplish assigned tasks and execute collective training activities in coordination with OGG HQ.
- Review and update the OGG-T Evacuation and Relocation plan.
- Maintain a visible UNTSO presence in North Eastern Israel and Israeli-occupied territory in Golan and foster good relations with the populace in and near the AOS and AOL.
- Coordinate and host visits by UNTSO personnel and UNTSO sponsored visitors to the AOL and A-Side of the AOS.
- Supervise all activities of the OGG-T Recreation and Welfare Committee to ensure compliance with applicable governing regulations and directives.

### Military Observer (UNMO)

Rank: Captain/Major (Equivalent)

#### Duties

- Patrol on foot, by vehicle and/or helicopters to gather information by day and night in any terrain.
- Observe, monitor and supervise agreements.
- Provide effective, accurate and timely verbal and written reports using appropriate communications means.
- Negotiate and mediate in difficult or tense situations, through translators if necessary.
- Conduct other tasks as directed by the Force Commander/Chief of Staff/Head of Mission UNTSO or by those with the appropriate delegated authority.

Released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and  
the Minister of Defence