

HON PAUL GOLDSMITH, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Mandate Renewal for New Zealand's Contributions to the United Nations Command on the Korean Peninsula

October 2026

This publication provides the Cabinet paper and associated minute of decision for Cabinet's May 2026 decision to approve the deployment of personnel to the United Nations Command on the Korean peninsula. This is part of Operation MONITOR.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- Cabinet paper *Mandate Renewal for New Zealand's Contributions to the United Nations Command on the Korean Peninsula* [FPS-26-SUB-0011]
- Cabinet minute *Mandate Renewal for New Zealand's Contributions to the United Nations Command on the Korean Peninsula* [FPS-26-MIN-0011].

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 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 Renewal for New Zealand's Contributions to the United Nations Command on the Korean Peninsula

Portfolios **Foreign Affairs/ Defence**

On 19 May 2026, the Cabinet Foreign Policy and National Security Committee:

- 1 **noted** that, under the Operation MONITOR mandate, New Zealand currently deploys:
 - 1.1 six personnel to the United Nations Command (UNC);
 - 1.2 six personnel to the UNC Military Armistice Commission;
 - 1.3 three rotational deployments to the UNC Honor Guard;
 - 1.4 two rotational deployments of an Army platoon; and
 - 1.5 one public affairs officer to the Korean Peninsula;
- 2 **noted** that the mandate for the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF's) support to the UNC will expire on 30 September 2026;
- 3 **noted** that the overall operational threat to NZDF personnel deployed to the Republic of Korea is assessed by NZDF as s6(a)
- 4 **agreed** that the strategic objectives for New Zealand's contribution to the UNC are as defined in paragraph 19 of the paper under FPS-26-SUB-0011;
- 5 **approved** the deployment of six personnel to the UNC, and six personnel to the UNC Military Armistice Commission;
- 6 **approved** up to two rotational deployments of the Army platoon to support the UNC for up to 90 days, with options to provide fewer rotations as other Indo-Pacific Army deployment opportunities arise;
- 7 **approved** the establishment of a UNC-Rear position in Yokota Air Base, Japan;
- 8 **authorised** the Chief of Defence Force to approve the surge deployment of up to six personnel for up to 90 days at one time;

- 9 **approved** the extension of the Operation MONITOR mandate, including all roles and surge deployments, from 1 October 2026 until 30 September 2028;
- 10 **noted** that the total estimated cost of the deployment is \$9.846 million, with \$2.973 million costed for the 2026/27 financial year, \$5.064 million costed for the 2027/28 financial year, and \$1.809 million costed for the 2028/29 financial year;
- 11 **noted** that the above decisions can be fully funded from unallocated funding available within the Vote Defence Force *Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests* Multi-Category Appropriation.

Jenny Vickers
Committee Secretary

Present:

Rt Hon Christopher Luxon
Hon David Seymour
Rt Hon Winston Peters (Chair)
Hon Mark Mitchell
Hon Todd McClay
Hon Chris Penk
Hon Nicola Grigg

Officials present from:

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

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Office of the Minister of Defence

Chair, Foreign Policy and National Security Committee

MANDATE RENEWAL FOR NEW ZEALAND'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMAND ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Proposal

1. This paper seeks approval to extend for two years the New Zealand Defence Force's contribution to the United Nations Command (UNC) on the Korean Peninsula.

Relation to government priorities

2. New Zealand's commitment to the UNC and United Nations Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC) supports collective efforts to uphold the international rules-based order, promotes peace and stability, and strengthens relationships with other UNC members.

Executive summary

3. This paper recommends that New Zealand extend, with modifications, the deployment for two years (Option One). These modifications will not alter the number of personnel the NZDF can deploy to the UNC as per the existing mandate, however will shift their roles. The rebalance will consist of:

- 3.1. Maintaining six personnel to the UNC Headquarters and six personnel to the UNCMAC as an ongoing commitment;
- 3.2. Maintaining up-to two rotational deployments of up-to 90 days of an Army platoon (up-to 38 personnel) to support the UNC;
- 3.3. Establishing one position at the UNC-Rear in Yokota Air Base, Japan as an ongoing commitment; and
- 3.4. Establishing surge provisions of up-to six personnel for up-to 90 days to support the existing NZDF rotational deployment, or the UNC mission, as requested by the UNC.

4. Agreeing to these recommendations will contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula which, in turn, demonstrates our commitment to the international rules-based order, and security in the Indo-Pacific. Extending our commitment to the UNC and UNCMAC will support maintaining New Zealand's reputation as a s6(a) partner for peacekeeping operations in the Indo-Pacific. The importance of New Zealand's relationship with the ROK, including through our ongoing commitment to Operation MONITOR, s6(a)

5. These recommendations also provide a means to develop and regenerate the NZDF's operational experience in peace missions, experience which can also be applied

in other contexts. Additionally, this supports the NZDF's, especially the New Zealand Army's, retention and regeneration goals.

6. The 2024-2026 Operation MONITOR mandate also included three rotations to support the UNC Honor Guard. Officials have recommended against proactively renewing these rotations [REDACTED] s6(a)

7. The recommended option can be funded within the existing unallocated baseline for *Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA*, and no additional funding is required.

8. In addition to Option One (recommended), an alternative option is presented in this Cabinet Paper: to withdraw all personnel from the UNC by 30 November 2026. This option is not recommended. Officials also considered a third option to sustain the current mandate in its current form; however this has not been proposed to Ministers due to only slight variances from Option One.

Background

9. Since the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement in 1953, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has continued to threaten the ROK and Indo-Pacific stability. The DPRK continues to pursue an aggressive outward posture, through developing more sophisticated nuclear capabilities, missiles, and delivery systems. Its nuclear and ballistic missiles (some of which are assessed as capable of reaching New Zealand) pose a risk to New Zealand and the broader international community's security and economic interests. There continues to be a risk of nuclear proliferation. The situation on the Korean Peninsula therefore remains a key global security concern.

10. [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED] in support of the rules and norms relied on for Indo-Pacific stability, it is in New Zealand's interests to contribute to collective efforts that support the armistice between the DPRK and the ROK, and the management of the DPRK's destabilising behaviour. The UNC is an important vehicle to promote and foster inter-Korean stability.

United Nations Command

11. The UNC is a US-led multinational force established in 1950 to restore peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. The UNC falls under the command of a US General, who also commands US Forces Korea and the US-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC). Today, the UNC supports the maintenance of Korean Peninsula stability through:

- 11.1. Conducting multinational operations and exercises to enhance readiness to defend the ROK from DPRK attack [REDACTED] s6(a)
- 11.2. Communicating strategic messaging to the DPRK; and
- 11.3. Coordinating a member state response during a time of warfare.

12. The UNC also includes UNCMAC, responsible for the administration of the terms of the Armistice Agreement. It does that through:

- 12.1. Ensuring compliance with the terms and provisions of the ceasefire;
- 12.2. Managing the separation of the opposing military forces on both sides of the Demilitarised Zone between the ROK and the DPRK;
- 12.3. Investigating any violations and settling disputes, acting as an intermediary in negotiations between opposing forces; and
- 12.4. Providing educational services for UNC military personnel.

13. New Zealand has been contributing to the UNC since its establishment. The NZDF is the second largest contributor to the UNC, only after the US. Additionally, this is the NZDF's largest ongoing land deployment in the Indo-Pacific. s6(a)

14. Operation MONITOR is primarily focused on collective security efforts to maintain the armistice, and peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. The NZDF contributes roles to the UNC that cover intelligence, operations, legal, planning, and training. NZDF personnel deployed to support the UNC will largely be based out of the Camp Humphreys, south of Seoul, but occasionally operate elsewhere in the ROK.

ROK relationship s6(a)



Current mandate

18. The current Operation MONITOR mandate, in force from 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2026, consists of:

- 18.1. Six personnel deployed to the UNC Headquarters, and six personnel deployed to UNCMAC;
- 18.2. Three rotations of six personnel to the UNC Honor Guard;
- 18.3. Two rotations of an Army platoon to support the UNC; and
- 18.4. One public affairs officer.

Options analysis

Proposed strategic objectives

19. Officials propose the following strategic objectives for the NZDF's renewed commitment to the UNC:

- 19.1. To support the international rules-based order by making a valuable contribution to an effective peace and stability mission in the Indo-Pacific.
- 19.2.  s6(a)
- 19.3. To contribute to the development of NZDF personnel skills and experience, and personnel retention.

20. Possible options for achieving these objectives were assessed against five criteria: alignment with New Zealand's strategic priorities, partnerships, regional interests, operational considerations, and fiscal impact.

21. Agencies regularly review whether Operation MONITOR is achieving the strategic objectives set by Cabinet. The last review was completed in November 2025 and found that the operation is fully meeting its objectives. There is, however, opportunity to make some changes to the deployment, particularly to surge personnel to support the mission.

Option One: Rebalance New Zealand's contribution (Recommended)

22. Option One recommends that Cabinet rebalance New Zealand's commitment to the UNC from October 2026 until September 2028:

Proposed commitment	Personnel/capability	Change from 2024-2026 mandate
Maintain current personnel contribution	Six personnel at the UNC, and six personnel at the UNCMAC, as an ongoing commitment.	No change.

at the UNC and UNCMAC		
Maintain up-to two rotational platoon deployments	Up-to 38 personnel, including a platoon of 35 personnel, plus two logistical support officers, and one public affairs officer, for up-to 90 days.	No change.
Establish a UNC-Rear position in Yokota Air Base, Japan	One service member, as an ongoing commitment.	New role.
Establish surge provisions	Up-to six personnel for 90 days as requested or required by the UNC or NZDF platoon deployments, to be authorised by CDF.	New provisions.

23. Maintaining New Zealand's longstanding contribution to the UNC and UNCMAC ensures the NZDF contingent is appropriately sized to deliver against New Zealand's strategic objectives. These roles are high profile, well regarded, and showcase our enduring commitment to multilateral security efforts.

24. Establishing a UNC-Rear position for one NZDF person will ensure better coordination and communication with the UNC, improving support to NZDF deployments to the Korean Peninsula, particularly in the context of rising regional tensions. The UNC-Rear provides logistical support and contingency planning in the event of escalation or crisis on the Korean Peninsula. This includes non-combative evacuation operations from the ROK.

25. Establishing surge capacity of up-to six personnel provides the NZDF flexibility to respond to emerging needs of the UNC at short notice, including potential administrative impacts of the change in CFC command. The surge provisions will also be able to support any requests from the UNC, including participation in the UNC Honor Guard, as occurred in the previous mandate.

Benefits of renewing and rebalancing New Zealand's commitment

Benefits	Assessment
Contributes to collective security efforts that protect New Zealand's interests and values	Contributes to a well-established mission that helps to address key regional and global security concerns that impact regional, and New Zealand's own security, economy, and prosperity. Additionally, it signals New Zealand's continued commitment to Indo-Pacific deployments that support the international rules-based order.
Partner relationships and interoperability	Strengthens New Zealand's relationships with UNC partners, s6(a) by contributing to multinational coalition efforts that support Korean Peninsula stability.
Contributes to building NZDF operational skills	Enhances, in a meaningful way, the NZDF's overall trained state with the technical skills that can be applied to other operations, s6(a) This concurrently supports the NZDF's retention and regeneration goals.

Risks of renewing and rebalancing New Zealand's commitment

Risk	Assessment
s6(a)	

Option Two: Withdraw from the UNC (Not Recommended)

26. Option Two proposes a complete NZDF withdrawal from the UNC, with funds fully released on 30 November 2026, two months after the conclusion of the current mandate on 30 September 2026. The extension of funds is to ensure appropriate notice is provided to the UNC to identify replacements before an NZDF withdrawal.

Proposed commitment	Personnel/capability	Timeframe
Withdraw	Withdraw all NZDF personnel	30 November 2026

Benefits of withdrawing from the UNC

27. Officials assess there are no strategic or operational benefits for New Zealand associated with withdrawing, other than cost savings and increased personnel availability.

Risks of withdrawing from the UNC

Risk	Assessment
Relationships with partners	NZDF personnel will lose engagement opportunities with key partners who are troop contributing countries. NZDF could look for alternate bilateral opportunities in the future to mitigate this risk.
s6(a)	
NZDF capacity building	NZDF personnel would lose the operational experience gained from this deployment. Equivalent operational experience cannot currently be obtained from alternate deployments, so there is little viable mitigation.

28. A third option to sustain the current mandate in its existing form was also considered, however this has not been included in this paper due to only slight variances from Option One.

Comparative table – Options against assessment criteria

	Strategic priorities	Partnerships	Regional Interests	Operational considerations	Fiscal impact
1. Rebalance	s6(a)				
2. Withdraw					

Threat Assessment

29. New Zealand Defence Intelligence assesses the unmitigated threat to NZDF personnel deployed to the UNC as:

Country/area	Operational Threat
Republic of Korea	s6(a)

30. NZDF assesses the unmitigated health threat assessment to NZDF personnel deployed to the UNC as:

Country/area	Health Threat
Republic of Korea	s6(a)

Financial Implications

Option One: Rebalance New Zealand's commitment (Recommended)

31. The recommended option rebalances New Zealand's contribution with the deployment of six NZDF personnel to the UNC, six NZDF personnel to the UNCMAC, up to two rotational deployments of an Army platoon to support the UNC for up-to 90 days, the establishment of a UNC-Rear position in Yokota Air Base, Japan, and surge up-to six personnel for up-to 90 days at one time from 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2028. The estimated cost to rebalance New Zealand's Operation MONITOR commitment is \$9.846 million, with \$2.973 million in financial year 2026/27, \$5.064 million in financial year 2027/28, and \$1.809 million in financial year 2028/29. This can be fully funded from unallocated funding available within the *Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA*.

	NZD million			
Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability, and Interests MCA	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total

s6(a)

Option One: Rebalance New Zealand's commitment	\$2.973	\$5.064	\$1.809	\$9.846
Option Two: Withdraw from the UNC	\$0.532	-	-	\$0.532

32. This deployment is not expected to meet the threshold for Qualifying Operational Service under the Veterans' Support Act 2014, as Operation MONITOR is assessed as a s6(a) threat operation.

Option Two: Withdraw from the UNC (Not Recommended)

33. The option to withdraw NZDF contributions under Operation MONITOR by 30 November is estimated to cost \$0.532 million in financial year 2026/27. This option can be fully funded with the *Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA*.

Legal Considerations

34. **Legal basis for presence.** *The Meyer Agreement* of May 1952 provides the legal basis for UNC personnel to operate in the ROK. s6(a)

Members of the Armed Forces are at all times subject to the Armed Forces Discipline Act 1971.

s6(a)

36. **Health and Safety.** NZDF activities during this deployment are 'operational activities' for the purposes of section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA). Consequently, the HSWA does not apply to any member of the NZDF while carrying out their duties on this deployment. However, the Chief of Defence Force will ensure that the purposes of the HSWA are complied with to the maximum extent possible under Defence Force Order 9 – *Safety*.

37. **Civilian harm.** Involvement in any action leading to civilian harm is unlikely. NZDF personnel will be directed to report any observed incidents of civilian harm. They will be reported under Defence Force Order 35 – *Response to Civilian Harm*.

38. **Detainee handling.** An initial Detention Risk Assessment has been carried out under the Detention Policy Framework which finds that there is no reasonable likelihood that NZDF personnel will be required to participate in a Detention Operation on this mission. Accordingly, the Detention Policy Framework is not engaged and a further assessment under the Framework is not required. This assessment will be reviewed regularly during the mission to ensure that it remains valid.

39. **Human Rights Risk Assessment (HRRRA).** New Zealand is obligated under international law to not aid or assist (or be complicit in) an internationally wrongful act by another State, such as breaches of human rights. The legal standard for complicity is high. The NZDF has undertaken a HRRRA to assess the risk of becoming complicit in an

internationally wrongful act through its contribution to this mission. The HRRA was informed by the nature of the operations undertaken by the UNC and UNCMAC, its historical human rights record, and the specifics of the roles undertaken by NZDF personnel. The HRRA determined that there is a negligible likelihood of the NZDF knowingly contributing to an internationally wrongful act.

Consultation

40. This paper was jointly prepared by the Ministry of Defence, the NZDF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views of the Government Communications Security Bureau, the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, and Treasury have been reflected in the paper. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (National Security Group and Policy Advisory Group) was informed of the advice in this paper.

Next Steps – Communications and Proactive Release

41. Officials recommend that Cabinet's decision on the future of the NZDF's support to the UNC be announced before this mandate term concludes on 30 September 2026. If Cabinet elects to conclude New Zealand's commitment, partners will be advised in due course and all NZDF personnel will withdraw by 30 November 2026.

42. Defence's delivery against the strategic objectives approved by Cabinet will be monitored and assessed, through internal processes, throughout the lifecycle of the deployment. Ministers will be updated on the outcomes of these assessments periodically.

43. The Ministry of Defence will proactively release this paper in due course, subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

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

1. **Note** that New Zealand currently deploys six personnel to the United Nations Command, six personnel to the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission, three rotational deployments to the United Nations Command Honor Guard, two rotational deployments of an Army platoon, and one public affairs officer to the Korean Peninsula under the Operation MONITOR mandate;
2. **Note** that the mandate for the NZDF's support to the United Nations Command will expire on 30 September 2026;
3. **Note** that the overall operational threat to NZDF personnel deployed to the Republic of Korea is assessed by NZDF as s6(a);
4. **Agree** that the strategic objectives for New Zealand's contribution to the United Nations Command are as defined in paragraph 19 above;
5. **Agree** to:

EITHER

Option One: Rebalance New Zealand's contribution (Recommended)

6. **Approve** the deployment of six personnel to the United Nations Command, and six personnel to the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission;

7. **Approve** up-to two rotational deployments of the Army platoon to support the United Nations Command for up-to 90 days, with options to provide less rotations as other Indo-Pacific Army deployment opportunities arise;
8. **Approve** the establishment of a United Nations Command-Rear position in Yokota Air Base, Japan;
9. **Agree** to delegate authority to the Chief of Defence Force to approve the surge deployment of up-to six personnel for up-to 90 days at one time.
10. **Approve** the extension of the Operation MONITOR mandate, including all roles and surge deployments, from 1 October 2026 until 30 September 2028;
11. **Note** the total estimated cost of the deployment is \$9.846 million, with \$2.973 million costed for financial year 2026/27, \$5.064 million costed for financial year 2027/28, and \$1.809 million costed for financial year 2028/29.
12. **Note** this option can be fully funded from unallocated funding available within the *Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA*.

OR

Option Two: Withdraw (Not Recommended)

13. **Agree** to the conclusion of all rotational deployments by the end of the mandate, on 30 September 2026;
14. **Agree** to extend the mandate for New Zealand's 12 existing roles in the United Nations Command and the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission by two months from 1 October 2026 until 30 November 2026;
15. **Note** the total estimated cost to withdraw NZDF support from the United Nations Command by 30 November is \$0.532 million in financial year 2026/27.
16. **Note** this option can be fully funded from unallocated funding available within the *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 Christopher Penk

MINISTER OF DEFENCE

ANNEX A: FINANCIAL TABLES

Option One: Rebalance New Zealand's contributions (Recommended)

	\$ million			
Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Option One: Rebalance New Zealand's contributions	2.973	5.064	1.809	9.846

Option Two: Withdraw (Not Recommended)

	\$ million			
Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Option Two: Withdraw	0.532	-	-	0.532