

HON Chris Penk, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

MANDATE RENEWAL FOR NEW ZEALAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE AND OBSERVERS

May 2026

This publication provides documents on Cabinet's 10 March 2026 decision to renew the mandate for New Zealand's contribution to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO).

The pack comprises the following documents:

- the redacted Cabinet minute of decision: *Mandate Renewal for New Zealand's Contribution to the Multinational Force and Observers* [FPS-26-MIN-0007]
- the redacted Cabinet paper: *Mandate Renewal for New Zealand's Contribution to the Multinational Force and Observers* [FPS-26-SUB-0007]

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

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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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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 Contribution to the Multinational Force and Observers

Portfolio Foreign Affairs, Defence

On 10 March 2026, the Cabinet Foreign Policy and National Security Committee:

- 1 **noted** that the mandate for the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) support to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) will expire on 30 September 2026;
- 2 **noted** that [REDACTED] s6(a);
- 3 **noted** that NZDF personnel supporting the MFO are based in the Sinai, [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(ii);
- 4 **noted** that the operational and health threat levels for personnel deployed to Egypt are [REDACTED] s6(a);
- 5 **agreed** to the proposed strategic objectives for the deployment, as outlined in the paper under FPS-26-SUB-0007;
- 6 **approved** the deployment of up to 28 personnel to the MFO from 1 October 2026 until 30 September 2028;
- 7 [REDACTED] s6(a);
- 8 **noted** that the total estimated cost of the deployment is \$10.362 million with \$3.870 million in the 2026/27 financial year, \$5.188 million in the 2027/28 financial year, and \$1.304 million in the 2028/29 financial year;
- 9 **noted** that the deployment 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 Allowance";

10 **noted** that the deployment is estimated to increase the value of the Veterans' support entitlement by \$4.435 million, and that this can be funded within the existing unallocated baseline for Vote Defence Force Appropriation "Service Cost - Veteran's Entitlement".

Sam Moffett
Committee Secretary

Present:

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

Officials present from:

Office of the Prime Minister
Office of the Chair
Office of Hon Judith Collins KC
Officials Committee for FPS

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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 CONTRIBUTION TO THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE AND OBSERVERS

Proposal

1. This paper provides advice and seeks Cabinet decision on the future of the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) deployment to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) peace support mission in the Middle East.

Relation to Government Priorities

2. New Zealand's contribution to the MFO supports collective efforts to uphold the international rules-based order, promotes peace and stability and strengthens New Zealand's relationships with troop contributing countries. ^{s9(2)(g)(i)} security and stability challenges in the Middle East can have far-reaching impacts including on the security and prosperity of New Zealand. New Zealand's contribution is in line with defence policy, foreign policy, and national security priorities.

Executive Summary

3. This Cabinet paper recommends that New Zealand maintain and renew its current commitment of up to 28 personnel to the MFO, ^{s6(a)}

4. This recommendation reflects the strategic benefit New Zealand gains from making a long-term, tangible contribution to an effective peace support mission. These benefits include fostering New Zealand's international reputation as a credible supporter of the international rules-based order, strengthening our partnerships with troop contributing countries, and enhancing the NZDF's operational effectiveness.

5. Conflict in the Middle East poses risk to deployed personnel, requiring robust measures for force protection, ^{s6(a)}.

6. 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.

7. Two alternative options are presented in this Cabinet paper. The first is to reduce New Zealand's contribution to 20 personnel, while maintaining the ability of the CDF to surge up to 10 personnel at any one time for up to six months. The second is to withdraw all personnel from MFO by the end of the current mandate on 30 September 2026.

Background

8. The MFO is a peace support mission established in 1982 which supervises implementation of the 1979 Treaty of Peace between Egypt and Israel and employs best efforts to prevent any violation of its terms. The Treaty of Peace provisions outline four

security zones within the Sinai Peninsula and along the Israeli border (refer to annex A). The MFO was established by the three Treaty partners: Egypt, Israel and the United States (US), which remain the MFO's three main sponsors. The MFO's four mandated tasks are to 'observe', monitoring for treaty violations, 'verify', conducting surveying patrols, 'report', on treaty compliance, and 'facilitate', hosting and coordinating dialogue between the parties.

9. New Zealand's contribution to the MFO (known as Operation FARAD) commenced at the time of the MFO's establishment and is currently the NZDF's largest commitment to the Middle East. The NZDF has contributed 28 personnel to support the mission for over 20 years. Operation FARAD personnel are based in the Sinai [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(ii)

[REDACTED] The mandate for this contribution was last renewed in 2024 and extends through to 30 September 2026.

10. The NZDF makes an effective and highly regarded contribution to the MFO.

[REDACTED] s6(a)

[REDACTED] s9(2)(g)(i), s6(a)

11. It remains in New Zealand's strategic interests to contribute to this peace support mission. The NZDF's contribution demonstrates that New Zealand acknowledges the far-reaching impacts of instability in the Middle East, and that we are committed to collective security efforts in support of the international rules-based order. [REDACTED] s9(2)(g)(i)

12. Following Hamas' 7 October attacks and Israel's subsequent incursion into Gaza, the security environment along the Egypt-Israel border has intensified and tensions have increased between Israel and Egypt. [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(i), s6(b)(ii)

13. Since the announcement of the adoption of *UN Security Council Resolution 2803* on 17 November 2025, which authorises the establishment of an International Stabilisation Force (ISF) in Gaza, [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(i), s6(b)(ii)

[REDACTED] s6(a)

Options Analysis

Proposed Strategic Objectives

14. Officials propose the following strategic objectives for the NZDF's renewed commitment to the MFO:

- a. To maintain New Zealand's credibility as a supporter of the international rules-based order by making a tangible contribution to an integral peace support mission.

- b. To make an effective contribution to the preservation of Israel-Egypt relations through observing, verifying, and reporting breaches of the Treaty of Peace.
- c. To strengthen partnerships with close partners, [redacted] s6(a)
- d. To gain NZDF operational experience in an austere environment and enhanced skills necessary for responding to future crisis and conflict.

15. When assessing possible options for achieving proposed strategic objectives, options were assessed against five criteria: alignment with New Zealand's strategic priorities, partnerships, regional interests, operational considerations, and fiscal impact.

Option One: Maintain and renew New Zealand's commitment (recommended)

16. Option One recommends that Cabinet renew New Zealand's current commitment to MFO for a further two years.

Proposed commitment	Personnel/capability	Duration
Maintain current personnel contribution [redacted] s6(a)	Up to 28 personnel [redacted] s6(a)	October 2026 to September 2028

17. Maintaining New Zealand's longstanding contribution of 28 personnel ensures the NZDF contingent is appropriately sized to strongly deliver against New Zealand's strategic objectives. [redacted] s9(2)(g)(i)

18. [redacted] s6(a), s6(b)(ii)

Benefits of maintaining and renewing New Zealand's commitment to the MFO

Benefits	Assessment
Credibility as a supporter of the international rules-based order	The NZDF maintains its decades-long support to a mission which has proven to contribute to sustained peace, thereby demonstrating New Zealand's support for the international rules-based order and delivering on regional interests. [redacted] s9(2)(g)(i)
NZDF capacity building	This deployment offers NZDF personnel, from a range of ranks and trades, the opportunity to gain operational experience in a mission distinct from the UN construct. In particular, [redacted] s6(a)
	[redacted] s9(2)(g)(i)

Relationships with partners	Personnel work alongside 13 other troop contributing countries ¹ , including some of our most important partners – s9(2)(g)(i)
	s6(a)

Risks of maintaining and renewing New Zealand's commitment to the MFO.

Risk	Assessment
Pacific response	s6(a)
s6(a)	s6(a)

Option Two: Reduce New Zealand's commitment (not recommended)

19. Option Two proposes that the NZDF decrease the size of its contribution to the MFO by eight personnel.

Proposed commitment	Personnel/capability	Duration
Reduce NZDF's personnel contribution, s6(a)	Deploy up to 20 personnel. s6(a)	October 2026 to September 2028

20. Under this option, the mandate of Operation FARAD would be extended for a further two years and the size of its core contingent would decrease from 28 to 20 personnel. s6(a)

Deploying up to 20 personnel to the MFO would remain a tangible and credible contribution to the mission.

Benefits of reducing New Zealand's commitment to the MFO

Benefits	Assessment
Cost savings	Less funding is required for Option Two when compared to Option One. Costs are outlined later in this paper under the subheading "financial implications".
NZDF capacity building	As with Option One, those deployed would receive valuable professional skills and experience working within the UNTSO construct.
Relationships with partners	As with Option One, New Zealand personnel would be able to engage with the 13 other troop contributing countries.

¹ Albania, Australia, Canada, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Fiji, Italy, Japan, Norway, Serbia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Uruguay.

As with Option One, New Zealand would provide pre-deployment training to Fiji.

Risks of reducing New Zealand's commitment to the MFO

Risk	Assessment
Pacific response	s6(a)
s6(a)	s6(a)
s6(a), s6(b)(ii)	s6(a), s6(b)(ii) s9(2)(g)(i)
	s6(a)
Credibility as a supporter of the international rules-based order	While New Zealand sustains a tangible contribution to the MFO mission under this option, s9(2)(g)(i)
NZDF capacity building	This option would reduce the opportunities for personnel, s6(b)(ii), s6(a)

Option Three: Withdraw from the Multinational Force and Observers (not recommended)

21. Option Three proposes a complete NZDF withdrawal from MFO, with funds fully released upon expiration of the current mandate on 30 September 2026.

Proposed commitment	Personnel/capability	Duration
Withdraw	Withdraw all NZDF personnel	30 September 2026

Benefits of withdrawing from the MFO

22. Officials assess there are no strategic or operational benefits for New Zealand associated with withdrawing, other than cost savings.

Risks of withdrawing from the MFO

Risk	Assessment
Relationships with partners	NZDF personnel will lose touchpoints for engagement with key partners who are troop contributing countries. NZDF could look for alternate

	engagement or joint deployment opportunities in the future to mitigate this risk. s9(2)(g)(i)
Credibility as a supporter of the international rules-based order	Withdrawing from this mission will weaken New Zealand's messaging of its support to the international rules-based order in the context of the Middle East. s9(2)(g)(i)
NZDF capacity building	s6(a)
Inability to rejoin the MFO	Were the NZDF to withdraw, other partners may fill the gap in personnel left by New Zealand. s6(a) This could create challenges in re-joining the MFO later. s9(2)(g)(i)

Comparative table – Options against assessment criteria

	Strategic priorities	Partnerships	Regional Interests	Operational considerations	Fiscal impact
1. Maintain	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
2. Reduce	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green
3. Withdraw	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green

Threat Assessment

23. New Zealand Defence Intelligence assesses the unmitigated threat to NZDF personnel deployed to the MFO as:

Country/area	Operational Threat	Health Threat
s6(a)		

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s6(a)

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Financial Implications

Option 1: Maintain and renew New Zealand's commitment (recommended)

24. The recommended option to maintain and renew New Zealand's current commitment of up to 28 personnel to the MFO, [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED] at any one time for up to six months from 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2028 is estimated to cost \$10.362 million with \$3.870 million in financial year 2026/27, \$5.188 million in financial year 2027/28 and \$1.304 million in financial year 2028/29. 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*.

	NZD million			
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability, and Interests MCA				
Option One: Maintain up to 28 personnel [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED]	\$3.870	\$5.188	\$1.304	\$10.362
Total	\$3.870	\$5.188	\$1.304	\$10.362

25. This deployment is likely to be declared "qualifying operational service" under the Veterans' Support Act 2014 and if so the value of the Veterans' support entitlement of \$4.435 million will be fully funded from within the existing unallocated funding in *Vote Defence Force: Appropriation Service Cost – Veteran's Entitlement*.

Option 2: Reduce New Zealand's commitment (not recommended)

26. The option to reduce New Zealand's baseline contribution to up to 20 personnel [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED] at any one time for up to six months from 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2028 is estimated to cost \$8.547 million with \$3.192 million in financial year 2026/27, \$4.279 million in financial year 2027/28 and \$1.076 million in financial year 2028/29. 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*.

	NZD million			
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability, and Interests MCA				
Option Two: Reduce to up to 20 personnel [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED]	\$3.192	\$4.279	\$1.076	\$8.547
Total	\$3.192	\$4.279	\$1.076	\$8.547

27. This deployment is likely to be declared "qualifying operational service" under the Veterans' Support Act 2014 and if so the value of the Veterans' support entitlement of \$3.309 million will be fully funded from within the existing unallocated funding in *Vote Defence Force: Appropriation Service Cost – Veteran's Entitlement*.

Option 3: Withdraw and conclude New Zealand's commitment (Not recommended)

28. The option to withdraw all NZDF support from MFO by 30 September 2026 is estimated to cost \$0.322 million in financial year 2026/27. This option can fully be funded within the *Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA*.

Legal Considerations

29. **Legal framework for activities.** The legal framework for the activities and presence of the MFO mission is provided by the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and Protocol. While deployed, NZDF personnel are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction in respect of any criminal offences, and are not subject to the civil jurisdiction of Israel or Egypt for matters relating to official duties.

30. **Rules of engagement.** NZDF personnel deployed on Operation FARAD will be armed. NZDF personnel will operate under the Operation FARAD – NZDF Rules for the Active Use of Force⁴ and NZDF orders and policies for the use of force.

31. **Health and safety.** Operation FARAD is an operational activity for the purposes of s 7(4)(a)(ii) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, and as such the Act does not apply to any member of the NZDF while carrying out their duties.

Consultation

32. 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 (National Security Group and Policy Advisory Group), the Government Communications Security Bureau, the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, and the Treasury were consulted, and their views have been reflected in the paper.

Next Steps – Communications and Proactive Release

33. This paper will be proactively released in due course.

34. Officials recommend that Cabinet's decision on the future of the NZDF's support to the MFO 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 September 2026.

s9(2)(g)(i)

Recommendations

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

1. **Note** that the mandate for the New Zealand Defence Force's support to the Multinational Force and Observers will expire on 30 September 2026.

⁴ Approved by the Prime Minister on 14 February 2008.

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2. s6(a)
3. **Note** that NZDF personnel supporting the Multinational Force and Observers are based in the Sinai, s6(a), s6(b)(ii)
4. **Note** that the operational and health threat levels for personnel deployed to Egypt are s6(a)
5. **Agree** to the proposed strategic objectives for the deployment.

EITHER

Option One: Maintain (recommended)

6. **Approve** the deployment of up to 28 personnel to the Multinational Force and Observers from 1 October 2026 until 30 September 2028.
7. s6(a)
8. **Note** the total estimated cost of the deployment is \$10.362 million with \$3.870 million in financial year 2026/27, \$5.188 million in financial year 2027/28 and \$1.304 million in financial year 2028/29.
9. **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*.
10. **Note** this option is estimated to increase the value of the Veterans' support entitlement by \$4.435 million. This can be funded within the existing unallocated baseline for *Vote Defence Force Appropriation Service Cost – Veteran's Entitlement*.

OR

Option Two: Reduce (not recommended)

11. **Approve** the deployment of up to 20 personnel to the Multinational Force and Observers from 1 October until 30 September 2028.
12. s6(a)
13. **Note** the total estimated cost of the deployment is \$8.547 million with \$3.192 million in financial year 2026/27, \$4.279 million in financial year 2027/28 and \$1.076 million in financial Year 2028/29.
14. **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*.
15. **Note** this option is estimated to increase the value of the Veterans' support entitlement by \$3.309 million. This can be funded within the existing unallocated baseline for *Vote Defence Force Appropriation Service Cost – Veteran's Entitlement*.

OR

Option Three: Withdraw (not recommended)

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16. **Agree** to withdraw all NZDF support to the Multinational Force and Observers by 30 September 2026.
17. **Note** the total estimated cost to withdraw NZDF support from MFO by 30 September is \$0.322 million in financial year 2026/27.
18. **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 Judith Collins KC

MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Annexes:

- A. Multinational Force and Observers Area of Operations

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ANNEX A – Map of the MFO Area of Operations

s6(a), s6(b)(ii)



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