

HON Chris Penk, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

MANDATE RENEWAL FOR NEW ZEALAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS TRUCE SUPERVISION ORGANISATION

May 2026

This publication provides documents on Cabinet's 10 March 2026 decisions to renew the mandate for the New Zealand Defence Force's support to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO).

The pack comprises the following documents:

- the redacted Cabinet minute of decision: *Mandate Renewal for New Zealand's Contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation* [FPS-26-MIN-0006]
- the redacted Cabinet paper: *Mandate Renewal for New Zealand's Contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation* [FPS-26-SUB-0006]

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 United Nations Truce Supervision Organization

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 United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) will expire on 30 September 2026;
- 2 **noted** [REDACTED] s6(a)
- 3 **noted** that the operational and health threat levels for personnel deployed to Lebanon and Syria is s6(a);
- 4 **noted** that the operational threat for personnel deployed to Israel is s6(a), and the health threat level is s6(a);
- 5 **agreed** to the proposed strategic objectives for the deployment, as outlined in the paper under FPS-26-SUB-0006;
- 6 **approved** the deployment of up to eight personnel to the UNTSO from 1 October 2026 until 30 September 2028;
- 7 [REDACTED] s6(a)
- 8 **noted** that the total estimated cost of the deployment is \$3.068 million with \$1.146 million in the 2026/27 financial year, \$1.536 million in 2027/28 and \$0.386 million in 2028/29;
- 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 Appropriation";

10 **noted** that the deployment is estimated to increase the value of the Veterans' support entitlement by \$0.704 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 UNITED NATIONS TRUCE SUPERVISION ORGANIZATION

Proposal

1. This paper provides advice and seeks Cabinet's decision on the future of the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) deployment to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

Relation to Government Priorities

2. New Zealand's support for a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operation in the Middle East is a tangible commitment to working with our partners to promote collective security and uphold a strong and effective international rules-based order. [REDACTED]

s9(2)(g)(i), s6(a)

[REDACTED] New Zealand's contribution is in line with defence policy, foreign policy, and national security priorities.

Executive Summary

3. This paper recommends that Cabinet renew and maintain the NZDF's current deployment of up to eight personnel to UNTSO for a further two years to 30 September 2028. The paper also recommends Cabinet renew the [REDACTED] s6(a)

4. This recommendation ensures that New Zealand maintains a tangible contribution to a UN peacekeeping mission, [REDACTED] s9(2)(g)(i)

[REDACTED] UNTSO is a longstanding mission in a highly volatile region, to which the NZDF has made a highly-regarded contribution since its establishment. The NZDF also works alongside some of our key security partners, gaining skills and experience applicable to our near region.

5. 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. There are no significant risks associated with this option.

6. This paper also presents two alternative options for the future of our commitment to UNTSO: reduce the NZDF's commitment to up to five personnel with [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED] or withdraw personnel by 30 September 2026.

Background

7. Established in 1949, UNTSO is the UN's oldest peacekeeping mission. New Zealand's contribution to UNTSO (known as 'Operation SCORIA') commenced in 1954,

making it the NZDF's longest-standing deployment. UNTSO personnel are deployed across Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, to monitor regional ceasefires, supervise armistice agreements, prevent isolated incidents from escalating, and assist other UN peacekeeping missions in the region (see full map at Annex A)¹. The area of operations has seen heightened tensions in recent years; most recently as a result of Hamas' 7 October attacks and Israel's subsequent incursion into Gaza, strike exchanges between Israel and Lebanese Hezbollah, and the consequences of the fall of the Assad regime in Syria.

It is in New Zealand's strategic interests to support UN peacekeeping missions, and in particular UNTSO

8. The mandate for New Zealand's contribution to UNTSO was last renewed in 2024 and extends through to 30 September 2026. The NZDF's current commitment is eight personnel, comprising seven United Nations Military Observers and one leadership position.

9. New Zealand's contribution to the UNTSO peacekeeping mission is a tangible contribution to collective security efforts. [REDACTED] s9(2)(g)(i)

10. UNTSO is the only UN peacekeeping mission to which New Zealand contributes in the Middle East.² The security environment of the Middle East region impacts broader global stability, and also has flow on effects for New Zealand. A small but tangible operational footprint to UNTSO is in New Zealand's interest [REDACTED] s9(2)(g)(i)

[REDACTED] demonstrating New Zealand is an active player in an important region for upholding global security.

Options Analysis

Proposed strategic objectives

11. Officials propose the following strategic objectives for the NZDF's ongoing commitment to UNTSO:

- a. To maintain New Zealand's credibility as a supporter of the UN and the international rules-based order by making a tangible contribution to a UN peacekeeping mission.

1 [REDACTED] s6(a)
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- b. To make an effective contribution to the maintenance of peace and stability along Israel's borders through monitoring, verifying and reporting ceasefire and armistice agreements.
- c. To reinforce New Zealand's relationship with the UN and [redacted] s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)
- d. For the NZDF to gain experience operating in a challenging security environment and enhance skills necessary for responding to future crisis and conflict.

12. This paper provides Cabinet with three options for the future of the NZDF's contribution to UNTSO. Each option is assessed against five criteria: alignment with New Zealand's strategic priorities; partnerships; regional interests; operational considerations; and fiscal impacts.

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

13. The recommended option seeks Cabinet permission to renew the NZDF's current commitment of up to eight personnel for a further two years.

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

14. Maintaining New Zealand's contribution of eight person ensures the NZDF contingent is appropriately sized to deliver strongly against New Zealand's strategic objectives.

15. Through formal invitations on a rotational basis, [redacted] s6(a)

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

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

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Benefits of maintaining and renewing New Zealand's current contribution

Benefits	Analysis
Credibility as a supporter of the international rules-based order	Maintaining NZDFs decades-long support UNTSO strongly demonstrates New Zealand's support for UN as a preeminent multilateral body. Especially given volatility in the Middle East region, a sustained NZDF contribution sends a strong signal of tangible support to the promotion of the international rules-based order.
NZDF capacity building	[redacted] s9(2)(g)(i) A commitment of up to eight personnel provides those NZDF personnel deployed with valuable professional skills and experience working within the UN construct.

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Operational effectiveness	<p>Having eight personnel deployed allows the NZDF contingent to operate across the broad area of operations.</p> <p align="center">s9(2)(g)(i)</p>
Relationships with partners	<p>New Zealand engages with 29 troop contributing countries³, including some of New Zealand's most important partners – s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)</p> <p align="center">s9(2)(g)(i)</p>

Risks of maintaining and renewing New Zealand's current contribution

Risk	Analysis
s6(a)	s6(a)
UNIFIL withdrawal	<p>In August 2025, the UN Security Council voted to extend the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mandate for one final time to December 2026, before ordering a staged withdrawal. UNIFIL is an armed UN peacekeeping mission operating along the Israel-Lebanon border which provides force protection for UNTSO personnel based in the region.</p> <p>The UN has assured that UNIFIL's drawdown will be "orderly and safe" and over an extended period, s6(a)</p> <p align="center">s6(b)(ii), s9(2)(g)(i)</p> <p>. The NZDF will continue to assess the situation and will update Ministers on the implications of this withdrawal on personnel as appropriate.</p>
United Nations funding decisions	<p>The UN is currently undertaking contingency planning with a view to cutting each peacekeeping mission's budget by 15-25%. s6(b)(ii)</p> <p>but the NZDF is closely monitoring how UNTSO, and the NZDF's current composition within the mission might be impacted.</p> <p>Ministers will be kept abreast of any relevant developments as appropriate</p>

Option Two: Reduce and renew New Zealand's contribution (not recommended)

16. Option Two would see New Zealand reduce its contribution to up to five personnel, and maintains s6(a)

Proposed commitment	Personnel/capability	Duration
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³ Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bhutan, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, India, Ireland, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States of America, Zambia, Latvia, South Korea, and France.

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Reduce and renew current contribution	Up to five personnel s6(a)	October 2026 to September 2028
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17. Under Option Two, the NZDF would provide five United Nations Military Observers and would coordinate with UNTSO a phased, staged reduction. s9(2)(g)(i)

Benefits of reducing New Zealand's contribution

Benefits	Analysis
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 UN construct.
Relationships with partners	As with Option One, New Zealand would be able to engage with the 29 troop contributing countries, including some of our closest partners, albeit in a reduced capacity.

Risks of reducing New Zealand's contribution

Risk	Analysis
Pacific response	s6(a)
Credibility as a supporter of the international rules-based order	Option Two would downsize New Zealand's already small UN peacekeeping footprint (11 personnel total). s9(2)(g)(i)
United Nations relationship	Considering the total contribution of troops to UNTSO across all countries, a reduction of s6(a) NZDF personnel is relatively insignificant reduction. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i). Communicating early with UNTSO on any decision to reduce personnel contributions and coordinating with UNTSO for a phased staged reduction would mitigate United Nations relationship risks.
Operational impacts	Since positions within UNTSO are filled quickly, reducing the NZDF's footprint would have minimal impact on UNTSO's operations. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

Option Three: Withdraw all personnel (not recommended)

18. Option Three provides Cabinet the opportunity to conclude New Zealand’s military support to UNTSO and withdraw all personnel at the end of the current mandate.

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

Benefits of withdrawing New Zealand’s contribution to UNTSO

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

Risks of withdrawing New Zealand’s contribution to UNTSO

Risk	Analysis
Credibility as a supporter of the international rules-based order	All UN member states are expected to maintain a tangible peacekeeping footprint. As such, withdrawing all support for one of the two UN missions that New Zealand contributes to would likely negatively affect our reputation as a credible supporter of the international rules-based order.
Access and influence within the UN	<p>Withdrawing all support for UNTSO may impact New Zealand’s reputation as a consistent and reliable contributor to United Nations peacekeeping mission.</p> <p>s9(2)(g)(i)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>This risk could be mitigated to some extent by clearly communicating to the UN and partners the reasons for withdrawing and withdrawing in a way that has minimal impact on the mission’s operations.</p>
NZDF capacity building	<p>s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Due to high demand for UNTSO positions, amid the broader downsizing of other UN missions, it would also be difficult for the NZDF to regain entry into this mission, or any others, should the Government later choose to do so.</p>

Comparative table – Options against assessment criteria

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

Threat Assessment

20. New Zealand Defence Intelligence assesses the unmitigated threat to NZDF personnel deployed or operating in:

s6(a)

21. s6(a)
s6(a)
s6(a)
s6(a)
s9(2)(g)(i), s6(a)
s6(a)

Financial Implications

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

22. The recommended option to maintain and renew New Zealand's current commitment of up to eight personnel, s6(a) from 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2028 is estimated to cost \$3.068 million with \$1.146 million in financial year 2026/27, \$1.536 million in financial year 2027/28 and \$0.386 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 eight personnel s6(a)	\$1.146	\$1.536	\$0.386	\$3.068
Total	\$1.146	\$1.536	\$0.386	\$3.068

s6(a)
s6(a)
s6(a)
s6(a)
s6(a)
s6(a)
s6(a)

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23. 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 \$0.704 million will be fully funded from within the existing unallocated funding in *Vote Defence Force: Appropriation Service Cost – Veteran’s Entitlement*.

Option Two: Reduce and renew New Zealand’s commitment (not recommended)

24. The option to reduce New Zealand’s commitment to up to five personnel, s6(a) from 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2028 is estimated to cost \$2.520 million with \$0.941 million in financial year 2026/27, \$1.262 million in financial year 2027/28, and \$0.317 million 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*.

Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand’s Security, Stability, and Interests MCA	NZD million			
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Option One: Reduce to up to five personnel s6(a)	\$0.941	\$1.262	\$0.317	\$2.520
Total	\$0.941	\$1.262	\$0.317	\$2.520

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 \$0.563 million will be fully funded from within the existing unallocated funding in *Vote Defence Force: Appropriation Service Cost – Veteran’s Entitlement*.

Option Three: Withdraw New Zealand’s commitment (not recommended)

26. The option to withdraw all NZDF support from UNTSO 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

27. **Legal framework for activities.** The legal framework for the activities and actions of UNTSO is established by the UN Security Council Resolution 50 (1948) and Resolution 73 (1949). While on duty at UNTSO, NZDF personnel enjoy the status, privileges and immunities accorded to Experts on Mission. This includes immunity from detention and jurisdiction for acts done in the performance of the mission.

28. **Rules of engagement.** NZDF personnel are not armed on this mission, s6(a)

29. **Health and safety.** Operation SCORIA 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

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

Next Steps, Communications and Proactive Release

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

32. Officials recommend that Cabinet's decision on the future of the NZDF's support to UNTSO 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.

33. Officials will continue to monitor the evolving impacts of UNIFIL's withdrawal from UNTSO's area of operations. Ministers will be provided updates as appropriate.

34. [REDACTED] s9(2)(g)(i)
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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 United Nations Truce Supervision Organization will expire on 30 September 2026.
2. **Note** that it is in New Zealand's [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED].
3. **Note** that the operational and health threat levels for personnel deployed to Lebanon and Syria [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED].
4. **Note** that the operational threat for personnel deployed to Israel is [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED] and the health threat level [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED].
5. **Agree** to the proposed strategic objectives for the deployment.

EITHER:

Option One: Maintain (recommended)

6. **Approve** the deployment of up to eight personnel to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization from 1 October 2026 until 30 September 2028.
7. **Agree** to delegate authority to the [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED].
8. **Note** the total estimated cost of the deployment is \$3.068 million with \$1.146 million in Financial Year 2026/27, \$1.536 million in 2027/28 and \$0.386 million in 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*.

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10. **Note** this option is estimated to increase the value of the Veterans' support entitlement by \$0.704 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 five personnel to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization from 1 October until 30 September 2028.
12. **Agree** to delegate authority [REDACTED] s6(a)
[REDACTED]
13. **Note** the total estimated cost of the deployment is \$2.520 million with \$0.941 million in Financial Year 2026/27, \$1.262 million in Financial Year 2027/28 and \$0.317 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 \$0.563 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)

16. **Agree** to withdraw all NZDF support to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization by 30 September 2026.
17. **Note** the total estimated cost to withdraw NZDF support from UNTSO security by 30 September 2026 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. UNTSO Map of the Area of Operations

Annex A: UNTSO Map of the Area of Operations

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

