Hon Paul Goldsmith, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Mandate Renewal: NZDF Participation in Multinational Force – Operation Olympic Defender to Secure Space Capabilities and Services

October 2026

This paper seeks Cabinet's agreement to renew New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) participation in the United States (US)-led enduring military space domain operation, Multi-National Force - Operation OLYMPIC DEFENDER (MNF-OOD).

The pack comprises the following document:

- the Cabinet paper and associated minute of decision *Mandate Renewal: NZDF Participation in Multinational Force – Operation Olympic Defender to Secure Space Capabilities and Services* [FPS-26-MIN-0018 and FPS-26-SUB-0018]

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

It has been necessary to withhold certain information in accordance with the following provisions of the Official Information Act 1982. Where information is withheld, the relevant sections of the Act are indicated in the body of the document. Where information has been withheld in accordance with section 9(2) of the Act, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Information is withheld where making it available would be likely to prejudice:

- the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand [section 6(a)]

Further information is withheld to:

- maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials [section 9(2)(f)(iv)]
- maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any public service agency or organisation in the course of their duty [section 9(2)(g)(i)]
- maintain legal professional privilege [section 9(2)(h)].

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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.

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Mandate Renewal: NZDF Participation in Multinational Force - Operation Olympic Defender to Secure Space Capabilities and Services

Portfolio **Defence**

On 25 August 2026, the Cabinet Foreign Policy and National Security Committee:

1 **noted** that in August 2024 the Cabinet Foreign Policy and National Security Committee agreed to accept a United States invitation for New Zealand to join Multi-National Force – Operation OLYMPIC DEFENDER (MNF-OOD), an enduring US-led multinational space domain operation [FPS-24-MIN-0020];

2 **noted** that New Zealand's economic and military capabilities depend on space services, s6(a) [redacted]

3 **agreed** to continue the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF's) participation in MNF-OOD for 24 months to August 2028;

4 **agreed** that NZDF's participation includes space domain awareness activities, and participation in planning and exercises;

5 **noted** that the Ministry of Defence will seek direction from the Minister of Defence in response to substantial developments where participation in MNF-OOD may go beyond New Zealand's policy parameters, including any potential expansion beyond the current and potential activities mentioned in the paper under FPS-26-SUB-0018;

6 s9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

7 **agreed** that NZDF's continued participation in MNF-OOD will be guided by the following objectives:

7.1 support safe, sustainable behaviour in space and help protect space assets;

7.2 strengthen partnerships with key defence partners, particularly in the space domain;

7.3 build NZDF space operations expertise, s6(a) [redacted]

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8 **noted** that national caveats ensure NZDF's participation complies with New Zealand legislation and policy;

9 **noted** that the option to continue participation in MNF-OOD will be through the current NZDF liaison officer to US Space Command at no additional cost;

10 **directed** officials to inform relevant partners of Cabinet's decision s6(a) [redacted]

Sam Moffett
Committee Secretary

Present:
Rt Hon Christoper Luxon
Hon David Seymour
Rt Hon Winston Peters (Chair)
Hon Paul Goldsmith
Hon Todd McClay
Hon Nicola Grigg

Officials present from:
Office of the Prime Minister
Office of the Chair
Officials Committee for FPS

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Office of the Minister of Defence
Chair, Cabinet Foreign Policy and National Security Committee

MANDATE RENEWAL: NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE PARTICIPATION IN MULTINATIONAL FORCE – OPERATION OLYMPIC DEFENDER TO SECURE SPACE CAPABILITIES AND SERVICES

Proposal

1. To seek Cabinet's agreement to renew New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) participation in the United States (US)-led enduring military space domain operation, Multi-National Force – Operation OLYMPIC DEFENDER (MNF-OOD).

Relation to government priorities

2. Participation in MNF-OOD supports the objectives of the *National Security Strategy* (2023), which identified space security as one of twelve core national security issues. Participation aligns with the objectives of the *2025 Defence Capability Plan*, and the *New Zealand Space and Advanced Aviation Strategy 2024-2030*.

3. Participation in MNF-OOD aligns with Cabinet's intent to apply renewed focus to traditional like-minded partnerships.[1]

Executive summary

4. This Cabinet paper recommends that Cabinet renews New Zealand's participation in MNF-OOD for a further two years to August 2028.

5. The operation aims to keep space assets operational by preventing attack and interference, thereby assuring the provision of space-based services. to member militaries. These services include communications, satellite navigation, and intelligence collection. It does this through day-to-day space domain awareness (SDA) and the coordination of member nations' space capabilities. s6(a) [redacted]

6. Participation provides New Zealand with significant strategic benefits, including access to the defence space communities and capabilities of larger partners, and to space information that supports NZDF operations and national security. Participation demonstrates New Zealand's commitment to collective space security, the international rules-based system, and freedom of access to space.

7. National caveats ensure NZDF's participation complies with New Zealand legislation and policy. Other members will participate according to their own policy and legal settings.

8. This paper recommends maintaining New Zealand's existing commitment to MNF-OOD through the continued deployment of one officer embedded at US Space Command and the cooperation of NZDF's New Zealand Space Operations Centre (NZSpOC).

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[1] 'Resetting New Zealand's Foreign Policy' (CAB-24-MIN-0033)

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9. s6(a) [redacted]

10. Continued participation can be funded within existing baseline for Vote Defence Force Air Force Capabilities Prepared for Joint Operations and Other Tasks. There would be no cost saving from withdrawing from participation in MNF-OOD.

Background

11. In August 2024, Cabinet agreed to accept a US invitation to join Multi-National Force – Operation OLYMPIC DEFENDER [CAB-24-MIN-0312]. MNF-OOD is a US-led multinational enduring space operation with a mandate to secure space infrastructure by coordinating the space capabilities of member nations.

12. New Zealand's current commitment is one NZDF officer embedded at US Space Command in Colorado Springs and the cooperation of the NZSpOC. This is the minimum commitment required for participation.

13. Member nations retain command of their own personnel and determine their participation in activities through national policy, legal, and operational caveats. s9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

14. Cabinet authorisation is required for continued participation in MNF-OOD.

New Zealand's economy and military capability relies on space services

15. Space-based services are central to the economy and integral to the success of modern military operations. Satellites have three broad functions: communications; positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) (i.e. satellite navigation); and providing awareness (i.e. looking at activity in space and looking down at activity on Earth).

16. Space is increasingly congested, contested, and competitive. Strategic competition and its effects on state behaviour in space have increased. There is already activity in space that threatens or interferes with satellite systems.

17. New Zealand does not have significant sovereign satellites on orbit[2] s6(a) [redacted]

18. A degradation of space-based services would have critical impacts on military capabilities and the economy, affecting logistics, supply chains, communication networks, electricity distribution, emergency services, intelligence collection, and other areas.[4]

[2] The NZDF's Defence Science and Technology agency has two small research satellites in orbit. s6(a) [redacted]

[4] *The economic impact on the UK of a disruption to GNSS*, UK Space Agency and the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology.

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MNF-OOD is a comprehensive operation to secure critical space infrastructure

19. MNF-OOD is designed to provide the security in space required to support military activity in other domains and protect commercial space industry development. MNF-OOD seeks to assure the delivery of space-based services to member militaries s6(a) [redacted] It does this through day-to-day space domain awareness (SDA) and the coordination of member nation's space capabilities.

20. s6(a) [redacted]

21. MNF-OOD's current members are the Five Eyes nations plus France and Germany. New Zealand's participation in MNF-OOD involves:

    21.1. An NZDF officer embedded within US Space Command;

    21.2. Participation in space planning and exercises consistent with New Zealand policy and legal settings; and

    21.3. Support from NZDF space domain awareness capabilities, including a telescope designed for this purpose.

22. As part of NZDF's participation, personnel are involved in planning activities and exercises. This participation is guided by New Zealand's interests and strategic objectives, and participation is limited by national caveats that reflect New Zealand's policy and legal settings.

23. It is anticipated that as MNF-OOD develops, further opportunities to support the development and planning of wider space-related activities are likely to emerge within the MNF-OOD construct. Approval from the Minister of Defence will be sought to participate in the development and planning of these initiatives where there is benefit to New Zealand in participation, and where these opportunities have policy, political or reputational implications.

24. s9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

25. New Zealand's geographic location and space infrastructure provide opportunities to contribute further to multinational space activities as Defence Capability Plan investments are delivered. s6(a) [redacted]

s6(a) [redacted]

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s9(2)(g)(i)

Participating in MNF-OOD aligns with existing policy

27. Participation in MNF-OOD aligns with the *Strategic Defence Policy* 2025 (as set out in the *2025 Defence Capability* Plan) and supports the *National Security Strategy 2023*, and the *New Zealand Space and Advanced Aviation Strategy 2024-2030*.

Strategic objectives for participation in MNF-OOD

28. New Zealand's participation in MNF-OOD would be guided by the following objectives:

    28.1. Support the security, sustainability, and resilience of the space domain;

    28.2. Strengthen relationships with key defence partners; and

    28.3. Build space operations experience and expertise among NZDF personnel to support wider NZDF operations.

29. A 2025 review of New Zealand's participation found the operation was meeting these objectives.

This paper recommends Cabinet reauthorise New Zealand's participation in Multi-National Force – Operation OLYMPIC DEFENDER for 24 months

30. If Cabinet agrees, New Zealand will continue participating in MNF-OOD through one NZDF officer embedded at US Space Command, and continued support from NZDF space capabilities, including the NZSpOC. s9(2)(g)(i)

Benefits

31. Participation in the operation provides the following benefits:

    31.1. Providing closer integration with defence partners in the space domain, including injecting New Zealand voice to the operation's activities and evolution;

    31.2. Enhanced information sharing from partners on activities in space that support NZDF operations and wider national security;

    31.3. Signalling support for responsible behaviour in space; and

    31.4. Upskilling NZDF personnel on space operations.

s9(2)(g)(i)

32. s9(2)(g)(i)

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s9(2)(f)(iv)

s9(2)(g)(i)

s9(2)(g)(i)

Financial Implications

36. New Zealand's ongoing participation in MNF-OOD will be through the NZDF liaison officer position attached to Space Command. This position is estimated to cost $0.163 million in FY2026/27, $0.164 million in FY2027/28, and $0.077 million in FY 2028/29 and is funded within the existing baseline for Vote Defence Force: Air Force Capabilities Prepared for Joint Operations and Other Tasks.

37. Withdrawal would not result in savings, as the liaison officer position would remain in place and continue to incur the same costs.

Legal Considerations

s9(2)(h)

s6(a), s9(2)(h)

Consultation and Engagement

40. This paper has been consulted with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade; the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment; the Government Communications Security Bureau; the Treasury; and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (DPMC) National Security Group. DPMC's Policy Advisory Group has been informed.

s9(2)(g)(i)

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Next Steps, Communications, and Proactive Release

41. Officials will advise close partners of Cabinet's decision through standard defence and diplomatic channels. This paper will be considered for proactive release subject to any appropriate redactions.

Recommendations

I recommend the Committee:

1. **Note** that in 2024 Cabinet agreed to accept a US invitation for New Zealand to join Multi-National Force – Operation OLYMPIC DEFENDER [CAB-24-MIN-0312], an enduring US-led multinational space domain operation;
2. **Note** New Zealand's economic and military capabilities depend on space services, and s6(a)
3. **Agree** to continue NZDF's participation in MNF-OOD for 24 months to August 2028;
4. **Agree** NZDF's participation includes space domain awareness activities, and participation in planning and exercises;
5. **Note** Defence will seek direction from the Minister of Defence in response to substantial developments where participation in MNF-OOD may go beyond New Zealand's policy parameters, including any potential expansion beyond the current and potential activities mentioned in this paper;
6. s9(2)(f)(iv)
7. **Agree** NZDF's continued participation in MNF-OOD will be guided by the following objectives:
   - 7.1. Support safe, sustainable behaviour in space and help protect space assets;
   - 7.2. Strengthen partnerships with key defence partners, particularly in the space domain; and
   - 7.3. Build NZDF space operations expertise, s9(2)(f)(iv)
8. **Note** national caveats ensure NZDF's participation complies with New Zealand legislation and policy;
9. **Note** the option to continue participation in MNF-OOD will be through the current NZDF liaison officer to US Space Command at no additional cost; and
10. **Direct** officials to inform relevant partners of Cabinet's decision and update the caveats for New Zealand's participation as required.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Paul Goldsmith
Minister of Defence

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