HON PAUL GOLDSMITH, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

New Zealand Defence Force Application for the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander Position

November 2026

This publication provides the Cabinet paper and associated minute of decision for Cabinet's May 2026 decision to approve the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) application for the role of Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- the August 2026 Cabinet paper *New Zealand Defence Force Application for the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander Position* and associated minute of decisions [FPS-26-SUB-0019 and FPS-26-MIN-0019]

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.

In addition, the business case for this project is withheld in full in accordance with the following provisions of the Act. Recognising the public interest in information on the investment decision, the Cabinet paper provides a summary of the key information that formed the basis of Cabinet's decision to invest this funding.

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)]
- the entrusting of information to the Government of New Zealand on the basis of confidence by the Government of any other country [section 6(b)(i)]
- The entrusting of Information to the Government of New Zealand on the basis of confidence by and international organisation [section 6(b)(ii)].

Information is also withheld in order to:

- maintain the constitutional conventions for the timing 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 department or organisation in the course of their duty [section 9(2)(g)(i)]
- to maintain legal professional privilege [section 9(2)(h)].

© Crown Copyright, Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

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.

New Zealand Defence Force Application for the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander Position

Portfolio **Foreign Affairs / Defence**

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

1 **noted** that the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) has s6(a) a candidate for the role of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) Force Commander and that the NZDF has confirmed it will apply, subject to Cabinet approval;

2 **noted** that an NZDF candidate would be subject to the MFO's ongoing application process;

3 **noted** that the operational and health threat levels for personnel deployed to Egypt is s6(a)

4 **approved** the deployment of four NZDF personnel to fill the positions of Force Commander, Military Assistant, Aide de Camp and Personnel Protection Officer from late November 2026 – 30 September 2028;

5 **noted** that this decision provides the NZDF with a distinct mandate to support the MFO, outside of New Zealand's baseline contribution to the mission;

6 s6(a)

7 **noted** that the total estimated cost of the recommended option is $0.721 million, with $0.229 million in Financial Year 2026/27, $0.393 million in Financial Year 2027/28, and $0.099 million in Financial Year 2028/29;

8 **noted** that this decision 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;

Released by the Minister of Defence

9 **noted** that this decision is estimated to increase the value of the Veterans' support entitlement by $0.247 million, with $0.141 million in Financial Year 2026/27 and $0.106 million in Financial Year 2027/28, and that these costs can be funded from existing unallocated funding within the Vote Defence Force Appropriation Service Cost – Veterans' Entitlements.

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

Released by the Minister of Defence

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Office of the Minister of Defence

Chair, Foreign Policy and National Security Committee

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE APPLICATION FOR THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE AND OBSERVERS FORCE COMMANDER POSITION

Proposal

1. This paper seeks Cabinet's approval for the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) to take up the seconded position of Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) Force Commander in Egypt, subject to the outcome of the MFO's Force Commander application process.

Relation to Government priorities

2. While New Zealand's strategic focus remains on our immediate region, accepting the Force Commander role would position New Zealand to lead a multinational peace support mission. This high-profile contribution would demonstrate New Zealand's commitment to working with partners (s6(a) to support stability in the Middle East, and an effective international rules-based system. Filling the position is in line with government defence policy, foreign policy, and national security priorities.

Executive summary

3. This paper recommends that Cabinet approve the deployment of four NZDF personnel to Egypt, comprising a Force Commander and three supporting staff, from late November 2026 to 30 September 2028. If Cabinet agrees to the recommendation, the deployment would be subject to the successful outcome of MFO's ongoing Force Commander application process.

4. This high-profile leadership role would demonstrate New Zealand's ongoing commitment to peace and stability efforts in the Middle East and Africa and strengthen the NZDF's baseline contribution to the MFO[1]. The Force Commander role would offer the NZDF valuable leadership and operational experience; raise the profile of New Zealand's contribution to the MFO and to Middle East stability; s6(a) s6(a)

5. The recommended option is estimated to cost $0.721 million total and can be fully funded from unallocated funding available within the Vote Defence Force: Operations Contributing to New Zealand's Security, Stability and Interests MCA.

6. Should Cabinet agree to the recommended option, the NZDF will continue to engage in the recruitment process. If an NZDF nominee is successful, officials will provide advice to Ministers to support communications on the deployment.

[1] CAB-26-MIN-0007 refers.

Released by the Minister of Defence

8ihmjf6mef 2026-09-11 09:37:38

Background

New Zealand's broader MFO contribution

7. New Zealand's contribution to the MFO (Operation FARAD) commenced at the mission's inception in 1982. s6(a) In March 2026, Cabinet renewed the NZDF's mandate to deploy up to 28 personnel to the MFO for a further two years until 30 September 2028, s6(a) New Zealand provides supplementary contributions to the MFO on an ad-hoc basis, including taking up the Force Commander role[2] and providing financial contributions to support the MFO's operational costs.

The status of the NZDF's Force Commander application

8. s6(a) The NZDF has confirmed to the MFO it will apply with the caveat that acceptance would be subject to Cabinet approval. The NZDF's candidate remains subject to the MFO's application process, s6(b)(ii)

9. s6(b)(ii)

Force Commander role description and deployment settings

10. The Force Commander position is the most senior MFO military role. The Force Commander reports to the MFO's civilian Director General and commands approximately 2,000 staff, comprising military personnel from across the 14 troop contributing countries,[3] and civilian staff. The Force Commander plays an important role in implementing the MFO's mandate,[4] including through engagement with the Treaty Parties – Egypt, Israel and the US.

s6(a), s6(b)(i)

12. s6(b)(ii) the Force Commander would be accompanied by three other NZDF personnel – a Military Assistant, Aide de Camp, and Personnel

[2] New Zealand has held the MFO Force Commander position on three other occasions. Most recently between 2019-2024.

[3] Troop contributing countries include Albania, Australia, Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, Fiji, Italy, Japan, Norway, Serbia, United Kingdom, United States, and Uruguay.

[4] The MFO supervises implementation of the 1979 Treaty of Peace between Egypt and Israel and employs best efforts to prevent any violation of its terms. The MFOs 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.

Released by the Minister of Defence

8ihmjf6mef 2026-09-11 09:37:38

Protection Officer. All personnel would principally operate from Egypt and may conduct activities in s6(a) Italy (where the MFO Headquarters is located), and Israel (as one of the Treaty Partners). Refer to Annex A for a map of the area of operation.

Options analysis

13. This paper provides Cabinet with two options – to either accept or decline the Force Commander position. Four criteria are used to assess the two options: strategic value; capability impact; opportunity cost; and risk.

Comparative table – Options against assessment criteria

	Strategic value	Capability impact	Opportunity cost	Risk
1. Accept	s6(a)			
2. Decline				

Option one: Accept the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander position (recommended)

Proposed commitment	Duration
Four NZDF personnel	Late November 2026 – 30 September 2028

14. Through option one, Cabinet would provide the mandate for the NZDF to have four additional personnel deployed to the MFO, outside of the MFO contribution Cabinet agreed in March 2026. Filling the Force Commander position and supporting functions for the proposed duration would significantly enhance the degree to which New Zealand could achieve all four Cabinet agreed strategic objectives for Operation FARAD[5]. The NZDF is able to fill this role at a relatively low-cost, s6(a)

Benefits of accepting the Force Commander position

Benefits	Analysis
Credibility as a supporter of the international rules-based system	Filling the Force Commander role provides an opportunity for leadership in a successful, widely supported peace support mission during a time of heightened regional instability, complementing New Zealand's existing support to Middle East and Africa initiatives that promote peace.
Operational effectiveness	s6(a)

[5] The agreed strategic objectives for Operation FARAD are: 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; to make an effective contribution to the s6(a) observing, verifying, and reporting breaches of the Treaty of Peace; to strengthen partnerships with close partners, including s6(a) to gain NZDF operational experience in an austere environment and enhanced skills necessary for responding to future crisis and conflict.

8ihmjf6mef 2026-09-11 09:37:38

Released by the Minister of Defence

Relationships with partners	s9(g)(i) s9(g)(i) . It would also support New Zealand's relationship with other troop contributing countries, s6(a)
Operational experience	Holding the position would improve the NZDF's ability to direct complex, large scale multinational missions in challenging conditions, a rare opportunity s6(a)

Risks of accepting the Force Commander position

Risk	Analysis
s6(a)	s6(a)
Personnel safety – s6(a)	s6(a)
Future funding to the MFO	The MFO is primarily funded by the Treaty Partners. s6(b)(ii) Treaty Partners are expected to maintain their MFO funding, given the MFO's proven effectiveness.
s6(a)	s6(a)
s6(a)	s6(a)

Option two: Decline the Multinational Force and Observer Force Commander position (not recommended)

15. s6(a)

Benefits of declining the Force Commander position

16. Officials assess that there are no strategic or operational benefits associated with declining the Force Commander position, other than minor cost savings.

Released by the Minister of Defence

8ihmjf6mef 2026-09-11 09:37:38

Risks of declining the Force Commander position

Risk	Analysis
s6(a)	

Threat assessment

s6(a)

s6(a)

Released by the Minister of Defence

8ihmjf6mef 2026-09-11 09:37:38

Financial implications

Option one: Accept the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander position

20. s6(b)(ii) [redacted]

21. Option one is estimated to cost $0.721 million total, with $0.229 million in FY2026/27, $0.393 million in FY2027/28, and $0.099 million in FY2028/29. 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.

22. This deployment is likely to be declared "qualifying operational service" under the Veterans' Support Act. The estimated cost is $0.247 million total, with $0.141 million in FY2026/27 and $0.106 million in FY2027/28. These costs can be fully funded from existing unallocated funding within the Vote Defence Force Appropriation Service Cost – Veterans' Entitlements.

Option two: Decline the Multinational Force and Observer Force Commander position

23. There are no financial implications associated with declining the position.

Legal considerations

s9(2)(h) [redacted]

26. **Health and Safety.** The activity is an operational activity pursuant to 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.

Next steps, communications, and proactive release

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

28. Officials will work with the Office of the Minister of Defence on communicating this decision. Should Cabinet approve the Force Commander position, officials recommend that announcements be withheld until the MFO's selection process is complete.

29. Should Cabinet decline the Force Commander position, officials would advise the MFO of Cabinet's decision and the NZDF will withdraw from the appointment process.

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

---

s6([redacted]

8ihmjf6mef 2026-09-11 09:37:38

Released by the Minister of Defence

(National Security Group), the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, the Government Communications Security Bureau, the Treasury, and Veterans' Affairs, were consulted, and their views have been reflected in the paper. The DPMC Policy Advisory Group was informed.

Recommendations

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

1. **Note** that the New Zealand Defence Force has s6(a) a candidate for the role of the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander and that the New Zealand Defence Force has confirmed it will apply, subject to Cabinet approval.
2. **Note** that a New Zealand Defence Force candidate would be subject to the Multinational Force and Observers ongoing application process.
3. **Note** that the operational and health threat levels for personnel deployed to Egypt s6(a)

Agree to EITHER

Option one: Accept the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander position (recommend)

4. **Approve** the deployment of four New Zealand Defence Force personnel to fill the positions of Force Commander, Military Assistant, Aide de Camp and Personnel Protection Officer from late November 2026 – 30 September 2028.
5. **Note** that this option provides the New Zealand Defence Force with a distinct mandate to support the Multinational Force and Observers, outside of New Zealand's baseline contribution to the mission.[12]
6. s6(a)
7. **Note** the total estimated cost of the recommended option is $0.721 million, with $0.229 million in Financial Year 2026/27, $0.393 million in Financial Year 2027/28, and $0.099 million in Financial Year 2028/29.
8. **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.
9. **Note** this option is estimated to increase the value of the Veterans' support entitlement by $0.247 million, with $0.141 million in Financial Year 2026/27 and $0.106 million in Financial Year 2027/28. These costs can be funded from existing unallocated funding within the Vote Defence Force Appropriation Service Cost – Veterans' Entitlements.

OR

[12] CAB-26-MIN-0007 refers.

8ihmjf6mef 2026-09-11 09:37:38

Released by the Minister of Defence

Option two: Decline the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander position (not recommended)

10. **Agree** to discontinue the New Zealand Defence Force's application for a candidate to fill the position of the Multinational Force and Observers Force Commander.

11. **Note** that there are no costs associated with this decision.

Authorised for lodgement

Rt Hon Winston Peters	Hon Paul Goldsmith
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS	MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Annexes:

Annex A: Map of the Multinational Force and Observers area of operations

Released by the Minister of Defence

8ihmjf6mef 2026-09-11 09:37:38