

## **HON Judith Collins KC, MINISTER OF DEFENCE**

### **Update on the NZDF's Maritime Security Commitments in the Middle East**

October 2025

This Note to Minister advises the Minister of Defence that the deployment of a Mine Countermeasures Task Unit to the Middle East in support of Maritime security, as previously approved by Cabinet, is no longer viable.

The pack comprises the following document:

- Note to Minister *Update on the NZDF's Maritime Security Commitments in the Middle East*.

This pack has been released on the Ministry of Defence website, available at:

[www.defence.govt.nz/publications/update-on-the-nzdf-s-maritime-security-commitments-in-the-middle-east](http://www.defence.govt.nz/publications/update-on-the-nzdf-s-maritime-security-commitments-in-the-middle-east).

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)]
- the entrusting of information to the Government of New Zealand on a basis of confidence by the Government of any other country or any agency of such a Government [section 6(b)(i)]

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)]

21 July 2025

Minister of Defence

## UPDATE ON THE NZDF'S MARITIME SECURITY COMMITMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

### Purpose

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

2. To advise the Minister of Defence that [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(i) the deployment of a Mine Countermeasures Task Unit (MCM TU) to the Middle East in support of maritime security, as previously approved by Cabinet, is no longer viable.

### Background

3. New Zealand supports maritime security in the Middle East through the NZDF's Operation PŪKEKO. Within this mandate, the NZDF deploys up to 20 personnel to a number of multinational coalitions, primarily based out of US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) in Bahrain. One of these coalitions is the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), the largest maritime coalition in the world.

4. In 2024, Cabinet agreed to renew Operation PŪKEKO's mandate to June 2026, and enhance the NZDF's contribution by deploying a Command Team to the CMF from January to July 2025, and HMNZS *Te Kaha* to the region to conduct maritime security operations. Additionally, Cabinet agreed to deploy a MCM TU of up to 18 personnel to support US NAVCENT operations for up to six months between May 2025 and June 2026.

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

### **Cabinet approval to deploy a Mine Countermeasures Task Unit**

8. On the basis of Cabinet's approval in 2024, the MCM TU was scheduled to support US NAVCENT Task Force 52, which focuses on mine countermeasures across the full CMF area of operations.<sup>1</sup> Cabinet was advised that the MCM TU would monitor critical surface and subsurface sea lines, identify mine threats, and neutralise the threat through safe and controlled means as part of its deployment.

9. The MCM TU's deployment was announced by the Minister of Defence by press release on 24 May 2024, alongside all other elements of Operation PŪKEKO.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Developments since Cabinet mandate approved*

10. Following Cabinet approval of this deployment, the MCM TU intended to deploy with s6(a) Mine Clearing Diving capabilities, and base out of US NAVCENT facilities in Bahrain. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

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

12. A range of alternative options have since been considered to enable the MCM TU's deployment s6(a), s6(b)(i)

The NZDF has however been unable to guarantee a ship that would adequately support the MCM TU's activities.

s6(a)

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

Defence assesses the MCM TU would no longer be able to effectively conduct

<sup>1</sup> CMF's area of operations encompasses approx. 3.2 million square miles of international waters, including the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, and the Indian Ocean as far as Madagascar.

<sup>2</sup> 'Middle East, Africa deployments extended', Beehive.govt.nz, 24 May 2024.

de-mining operations across the full CMF area of operations. The NZDF therefore intends to cancel the MCM TU's planned deployment to the Middle East.

14. The strategic objectives of Operation PŪKEKO continue to be met through the other components of the operation, which are: to contribute to Middle East maritime security; demonstrate New Zealand's commitment to counter-piracy, terrorism and smuggling efforts; strengthen our relationships with likeminded partners; and enhance the NZDF's operational experience.

#### Risks

s6(a)

s6(a)

New Zealand's continued interests in Middle East regional security matters have been well-demonstrated by our command of CTF-150 and HMNZS *Te Kaha*'s recent deployment in support.

17. A key benefit of deploying the MCM TU was the opportunity for personnel to gain valuable experience in new capability and enhance interoperability with the US.

s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv)

#### Next steps

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

19. The NZDF will advise US NAVCENT of the decision to not deploy the MCM TU in due course.

s9(2)(f)(iv)

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

21. A redacted version of this paper will be proactively released and published on the Ministry of Defence's website.

#### Recommendations

22. It is recommended that you:

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

Yes/No

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

Yes/No

c. [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(i)

Yes/No

d. [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(i)

Yes/No

e. **Note** that [REDACTED] s6(a), s6(b)(i) the deployment of a Mine Countermeasures Task Unit to US Naval Central Command is no longer feasible and will be cancelled.

Yes/No

f. **Refer** this submission to the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs for information.



**T DAVIES**

Air Marshal

Chief of Defence Force

Date:



**RICHARD SCHMIDT**

Deputy Secretary, Policy and Planning

Date: 23/7/25

**HON JUDITH COLLINS KC**

Minister of Defence

Date: