



13 October 2023

Minister of Defence

## NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE SUPPORT TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE: ISRAEL

### Purpose

1. To advise you that the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) is providing support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), as they explore options to assist New Zealanders to depart Israel.

### Background

2. MFAT has been actively exploring options to assist New Zealanders to depart Israel following Hamas' attack on 7 October and subsequent fighting. MFAT is currently aware of 242 New Zealanders registered as being in Israel. MFAT has issued a SafeTravel advisory, advising New Zealanders to seek commercial flights.

3. Israel's Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv remains open. However, commercial options are being affected by the high degree of volatility due to the conflict. In light of this complexity, MFAT is putting in place plans to assist the departure of New Zealand nationals via commercial means. To support planning for assisted departures, MFAT is deploying a team of two consular personnel to Tel Aviv, Israel.

4. Likeminded partners are executing plans to assist the departure of their nationals from Israel, largely through the use of commercial aircraft at this stage.

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

5. New Zealand is working alongside partners to secure options for the departure of New Zealanders, and MFAT has requested NZDF support to assist with situational awareness, [redacted] s6(a) to support information flow as they undertake consular efforts.

### NZDF Liaison Officers

6. In response to MFAT's request, the Chief of Defence Force has authorised the deployment of an NZDF liaison officer [redacted] s6(a) and the deployment of a second NZDF liaison officer [redacted] s6(a). CDF has the authority to deploy liaison officers as part of support to other government agencies, and in support of mandated government activities [CAB-21-MIN-0439].

7. The liaison officer based in [redacted] s6(a)  
[redacted]

8. The liaison officer based in [redacted] s6(a) will provide [redacted] s6(a)  
[redacted] information to support MFAT's consular planning.

9. [redacted] s6(a)  
[redacted]

In addition, the liaison officers will have no role in managing consular or welfare issues for New Zealanders (as this is an MFAT function).

10. [redacted] s6(a)  
[redacted]

### Recommendations

11. It is recommended that you:
- a) **Note** that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been actively exploring options to assist New Zealanders to depart Israel, following Hamas's attack on 7 October. Noted ✓
  - b) **Note** that at the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the New Zealand Defence Force will deploy one liaison officer to [redacted] s6(a) Israel, and one liaison officer to [redacted] s6(a). Noted ✓
  - c) **Note** that the purpose of the New Zealand Defence Force liaison officers is to [redacted] s6(a) provide situational awareness and information to facilitate the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's consular efforts. Noted ✓
  - d) **Refer** a copy of this submission to the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yes / No

*KR Short*  
**KR SHORT**  
Air Marshal  
Chief of Defence Force  
Date: 13 Oct 23

*Andrew Bridgman*  
**ANDREW BRIDGMAN**  
Secretary of Defence  
Date: 24 Oct 2023

*Andrew Little*  
**Hon Andrew Little**  
Minister of Defence  
Date: 13/10/23



14 October 2023

Minister of Defence

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade

## **NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE DEPLOYMENT TO SUPPORT THE ASSISTED DEPARTURE OF NEW ZEALANDERS FROM ISRAEL AND MIDDLE EAST**

### **Purpose**

To seek approval to deploy a Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft [redacted] s6(a) [redacted] to the Middle East region [redacted] s6(a) [redacted], to assist the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade with consular efforts to facilitate the departure of New Zealanders and approved individuals from Israel or other locations in the Middle East region.

### **Background**

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has stood up an Emergency Crisis Centre to manage the consular response to the Israel/Gaza conflict.
2. As part of this work, MFAT is working with Etihad Airways to facilitate the departure of New Zealanders who want to leave Israel. One flight departed from Tel Aviv earlier today (Saturday) with ten New Zealanders on-board. A further 46 travellers are booked on Etihad's Saturday service and will arrive in Abu Dhabi at 4am on Sunday (NZT). Demand for a third flight on Sunday has so far been low but could surge if commercial departure options from Israel continue to decline or stop altogether. MFAT's advice to New Zealanders who want to leave Israel, is to do so now.
3. These departure flights terminate at Abu Dhabi. MFAT has been clear to travellers that they are responsible for making onward travel arrangements. But we expect to come under significant pressure by evacuees to provide further assistance, [redacted] s6(a) [redacted]
4. MFAT has requested support from the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), through the deployment of a Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft, to provide strategic airlift to support the consular response. NZDF is able to provide support to other government

agencies, and in support of mandated government activities such as consular efforts, subject to the approval of relevant Ministers [CAB-21-MIN-0439].

5. The situation in Israel remains fast evolving. It is hard to predict with certainty what task the Boeing 757-2K2 could most usefully undertake, or even if it will be required. However as it will take 2-3 days for the aircraft to reach the region, officials think it is prudent to seek Ministerial permission now with the best information to hand, and provide updates if and as the situation evolves.

**Rationale for deployment**

6. NZDF support is requested for the following reasons:

- a) To provide contingency options against the possibility that a significant number of New Zealanders become stranded in Abu Dhabi due to the unavailability of onward flights. Currently, the risk of this is assessed as medium. While capacity exists on Emirates, Qatar Airways and Singapore Airlines' routes, it is limited. Availability could also decline quickly as departures from Israel grow.
- b) To provide a potential contingency to evacuate New Zealanders from Tel Aviv whom are not able to depart Tel Aviv, either because one or both of the remaining assisted departure commercial flights on Etihad Airways are cancelled, or passengers miss those flights and are not able to secure flights on flights operated by close partners. There are significant concerns that Israeli airspace may be impacted on 15 October, which would affect the operation of our third assisted departure flight on Etihad.
- c) To contribute to the consular response of close partners, [redacted] s6(a)

**Proposed deployment**

7. It is proposed that Ministers approve the deployment of: a Boeing 757-2K2 [redacted] s6(a) to the Middle East/Europe region [redacted] s6(a) from the planned date of departure (currently 16 October) of the Boeing 757-2K2.

8. The NZDF Boeing 757-2K2 is currently scheduled to depart New Zealand not before 06:00 on Monday 16 October from Royal New Zealand Air Force Base Whenuapai, Auckland and arrive in the Middle East region on 18 October.

9. The NZDF plans to base operations [redacted] s6(a) utilising existing arrangements and resources [redacted] s6(a) Other bases in the region may however end up being more suitable. The NZDF 757 would then collect New Zealanders from their location or a location which is convenient for the New Zealanders to travel to.

10. [redacted] s6(a), s6(b)(i)

[redacted]

11. The aircraft would be available to undertake airlift activities in support of the consular response between locations in the Middle East region, [redacted] s6(a)

s6(a)

12

s6(a)

13. It is proposed that the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs be advised of any increase [redacted] s6(a) [redacted]. Approval from the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs would also be sought if the deployment is likely to exceed [redacted] s6(a) [redacted] duration, of if the security situation in the region changes in a manner that would affect the support that NZDF could provide to MFAT.

14. To support the operation and provide consular support to New Zealanders on the ground, a small MFAT team of up to four persons would be included as part of the deployment.

#### **Risks and considerations**

s6(a)

16. While at present the security situation in Israel remains acceptable, it is possible that the conflict in Israel/Gaza may escalate. In this context, it is possible that that security situation [redacted] s6(a) [redacted] would be prejudicial to the health and safety of deployed personnel. To mitigate this risk, NZDF will continue to assess the situation and will not deploy to any non-permissive location or if the risks to health and safety exceeds the approved risk level.

#### **Threat level**

s6(a)

18. However, the situation on the ground is still developing and remains uncertain. The overall security environment could deteriorate rapidly with little warning.

#### **Financial implications**

19. The estimated cost of the proposed deployment of the Boeing 757-2K2 is \$0.850M - \$1.02M. The cost can be funded from NZDF baselines.

## Legal Considerations

### *Legal Basis*

20. The deployment will at all times only enter the airspace and territory of other countries with the consent of those countries, and will at all times comply with international law. In particular, any flights into Israeli air space will only occur with prior permission of the Israeli government.

### *Rules of Engagement*

21. [REDACTED] s6(a)

22. [REDACTED] s6(a)

### *Law of Armed Conflict*

23. As this is an assisted departure of New Zealanders and other eligible persons only, the deployment will in no way be involved in the long-standing broader Israel-Palestine conflict, including current hostilities between Israel and Hamas. [REDACTED] s6(a)

### *Civilian Casualties*

24. As this is an [REDACTED] s6(a) assisted departure of New Zealanders, no civilian casualties are expected. The situation on the ground in Israel is dynamic. Where lawful military action results in civilian harm, the reporting requirements in Defence Force Order 35 are to be followed as soon as reasonably practicable. Due to the nature of the activity this may be on return to New Zealand.

### **Human Rights Risk Assessment**

25. A human rights risk assessment (HRRA) would not typically be required for a facilitated departure of this nature, and officials have not conducted one. Should the situation change, officials would conduct a HRRA to ensure any risk of Detainee Handling.

26. Although detainee handling is considered to be a remote possibility as a consequence of this deployment, officials will consider the risks associated. If risk and likelihood are assessed to be significant, officials would advise Ministers on approach.

### **Consultation**

27. This paper has been jointly prepared by the Ministry of Defence and the New Zealand Defence Force, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

### **Recommendations**

28. It is recommended that you:

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a) **Note** that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has requested the support of the New Zealand Defence Force, as part of its efforts to assist the departure of New Zealanders and other approved individuals from Israel, due to the promixity of the Israel/Gaza conflict.

**Noted**

b) **Note** that the New Zealand Defence Force is preparing to deploy a Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft, [redacted] s6(a), from 16 October.

**Noted**

c) **Note** that the purpose of the deployment is to provide strategic airlift capability to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in support of New Zealand's consular response to the Israel-Gaza conflict.

**Noted**

d) **Note** that the Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft is expected to be based [redacted] s6(a)

**Noted**

e) **Note** that the situation is fast evolving and that Ministers will be updated on any significant changes from parameters outlined in this paper,

**Noted**

f) **Note** that the Boeing 757-2K2 may, if required and provided the environment remains permissive, undertake flights to to and from Tel Aviv to assist the departure of New Zealanders and other eligible individuals stranded in Israel.

**Noted**

g) **Note** that the deployment is estimated to cost \$0.850M - \$1.02M, and can be funded from New Zealand Defence Force Baselines.

**Noted**

h) [redacted] s6(a)

**Noted**

i) **Approve** the deployment of a Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft, [redacted] s6(a) to the Middle East Region, [redacted] s6(a).

**Yes** No

j) **Note** that if the commercial efforts to support the departure are successful and NZDF support for the consular response are assessed as no longer required ahead of 0600 16 October, officials will inform Ministers.

Noted

k) **Refer** this submission to the Prime Minister for concurrence.

Yes / No

l) **Note** that the Prime Minister may wish to inform the Leader of the Opposition of this proposed deployment.

Noted



**ARN SHAW**  
Brigadier  
For Chief of Defence Force  
Date: 14/11/23



**ANDREW BRIDGMAN**  
Secretary of Defence  
Date: 14/10/23



**TAHA MCPHERSON**  
For Secretary of Foreign Affairs  
and Trade  
Date: 14/10/23



**HON ANDREW LITTLE**  
Minister of Defence  
Date: 14 October 2023

**HON NANAIA MAHUTA**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Date:





18 October 2023

Minister of Defence

Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs

**UPDATE: NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE DEPLOYMENT TO SUPPORT THE ASSISTED DEPARTURE OF NEW ZEALANDERS FROM ISRAEL AND MIDDLE EAST**

**Purpose**

To update you on the easing of demand for consular assistance stemming from the Israel-Gaza conflict, and to inform you that officials now assess that there is currently no consular requirement to deploy the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft.

The aircraft remains available for tasking under the permissions you granted on 14 October if the situation deteriorates. NZDF staff will remain integrated as part of the MFAT-led Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) that is managing the consular response to the Israel-Gaza conflict and preparing for future contingencies as the situation evolves.

**Government support assisted the departure of New Zealanders from Israel**

1. The current status of MFAT's consular response to the Israel/Gaza conflict is:
  - a) Assisted departure flights operated from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi over the weekend, with 55 individuals (including 40 New Zealanders) departing Israel on these services. We understand almost all travellers have now booked onwards travel from Abu Dhabi to New Zealand or other final locations. Of the capacity we had secured with Etihad, only 31% was used.
  - b) Many of the 232 New Zealanders still registered as being in Israel have now departed the country.
  - c) MFAT's present focus is on a much smaller group (approximately 20) that have not replied to SafeTravel messages or attempts to contact them. Some of these travellers may need assistance.
  - d) Commercial flights out of Israel continue to operate. Our advice to New Zealanders who want to depart Israel, is to do so now using those flights.

- e) The most challenging consular cases are in Gaza, where 11 New Zealanders (and 1 family member) remain. MFAT has sought approval from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs for them to depart Gaza via the currently closed Rafah crossing into Egypt. However, the situation at the crossing is complex and uncertain, and departure cannot be guaranteed. Note, however, 8 New Zealanders did manage to depart the West Bank via Jordan on 16 October.

**The need to deploy the NZDF Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft was kept under review**

2. On 14 October, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence approved the deployment of a NZDF Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft [redacted] s6(a) to the Middle East/Europe regions to assist the consular response to the current Israel-Gaza crisis and facilitate the departure of New Zealanders and approved individuals from Israel or other locations in the Middle East/Europe regions.

3. The 14 October submission noted that Ministers would be informed if the aircraft was not assessed as required to assist the consular response.

**Officials assess that there is currently no consular requirement to deploy**

4. Officials have kept the consular situation under constant review as they assessed whether the deployment should proceed.

5. Officials now assess that there is currently no consular requirement to deploy the NZDF Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft to the Eastern Mediterranean or the Middle East to assist departure of New Zealanders from the Middle East region. This is because:

- a) Most New Zealanders who arrived in Abu Dhabi on MFAT assisted departure flights on 14 and 15 October, have either already arranged onwards travel bookings from UAE or preferred the certainty of making their own onwards commercial travel bookings;
- b) At the present time, the demand for assisted departure flights out of Israel has stabilised at a diminished level, with commercial routes departing Tel Aviv continuing to remain open;
- c) Assisted departure flights by [redacted] s6(a) are operating with significant spare capacity, and may wind down in the coming days.

6. Any deployment would now take place only if the situation changed to the point where a consular need required the aircraft to play a role in evacuations.

**The situation will remain under close review**

7. The NZDF Boeing 757-2K2 will now continue with previously planned tasks, but remains available to assist with the evacuation of New Zealanders, if required, [redacted] s6(a) [redacted] dating from the 14 October submission. Ministers will be informed if a need to deploy the aircraft eventuates.

8. NZDF will continue to be integrated in MFAT's Emergency Coordination Centre that is managing the consular response to the Israel-Gaza conflict and preparing for future contingencies as the situation evolves.

9. Officials noted that while the situation in Israel is relatively stable, the situation remains fluid, and the security situation in both Israel/the Occupied Palestinian

Territories (OPT)<sup>1</sup> and potentially the broader region could change quickly [REDACTED]  
s6(a)

10. Should a widening of the Israel-Gaza conflict result in a need to assist with any international evacuation responses that might emerge, officials will engage with key partners to explore how New Zealand is best placed to contribute, with a view to providing early advice to Ministers on a potential New Zealand response, or contribution to a broader international response.

### Consultation

11. This paper has been jointly prepared by the Ministry of Defence, the New Zealand Defence Force, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

### Recommendations

12. It is recommended that you:

a) **Note** that on 14 October, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence approved the deployment of a NZDF Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED] to the Middle East Region to assist the consular response to the current Israel-Gaza crisis;

Noted

b) **Note** that the 14 October submission noted that Ministers would be informed if the aircraft was not required to assist the consular response;

Noted

c) **Note** that MFAT assisted 55 individuals (including 40 New Zealanders) to depart Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi over the weekend, and almost all travellers have booked onwards commercial travel from Abu Dhabi to New Zealand or other final locations;

Noted

d) **Note** that the demand for assisted departure flights out of Israel has stabilised at a diminished level with commercial routes departing Tel Aviv remaining open;

Noted

e) **Note** that officials assess that there is currently no consular requirement to deploy the NZDF Boeing 757-2K2 aircraft to the Eastern Mediterranean or Middle East to assist departure of New Zealanders from the Middle East region;

Noted

<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding Israel's military withdrawal in 2005, Israel still exerts a sufficient degree of control over Gaza to be considered an Occupying Power.

f) **Note** that the aircraft remains available to deploy under the permissions set out in the 14 October submission s6(a), if the situation deteriorates further and there is sufficient identified need;

**Noted**

g) **Note** that the regional security situation remains fluid, and the security situation in both Israel/the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and potentially the broader region, could change quickly;

**Noted**

h) **Note** that NZDF will continue to be integrated in MFAT's Emergency Coordination Centre that is managing the consular response to the Israel-Gaza conflict and preparing for future contingencies as the situation evolves;

**Noted**

i) **Note** that Ministers will be informed if a need to deploy the aircraft eventuates or provided with early advice if a need to assist with any international evacuation responses emerges;

**Noted**

j) **Refer** this submission to the Prime Minister for information;

**Yes** / No

k) **Recommend** that a copy of this submission is shared with the Leader of the Opposition, for his awareness.

**Yes** / No



**KR SHORT**  
Air Marshal  
Chief of Defence Force  
Date: 18 October 2023



**ANDREW BRIDGMAN**  
Secretary of Defence  
Date: 18 October 2023



**TAHA MacPHERSON**  
For Secretary of Foreign Affairs  
and Trade  
Date: 18 October 2023



**HON ANDREW LITTLE**  
Minister of Defence/Acting Minister  
of Foreign Affairs

Date: 18 October 2023

**RT HON CHRIS HIPKINS**  
Prime Minister  
Date:

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



21 October 2023

Minister of Defence  
Minister of Foreign Affairs

## NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE PERSONNEL DEPLOYMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE ISRAEL-GAZA

s6(a)

### Purpose

1. To update you on the deployment of New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel in support of the New Zealand Government consular response to the Israel-Gaza situation, and to seek your approval to pre-position [redacted] s6(a) [redacted] s6(a) [redacted] s6(a) for contingency planning, in case the situation deteriorates and further NZDF assistance to consular efforts is required.

### Middle East security and consular situation

2. The security situation in Israel and Gaza, and in parts of the wider region, remains tense. [redacted] s6(a) [redacted]. There are already signs of unrest in the wider Middle East region beyond Israel and Gaza; protests, movement of militias, strikes on munition shipments (Syria), and clearing of civilians from areas of possible threat are all occurring, while political and online rhetoric are strident. The implications of any potential Israeli ground operation in Gaza on wider regional stability remain unclear but are potentially significant.

3. For New Zealand, the consular situation is manageable at the present time, with most New Zealanders who wish to depart Israel and the Occupied West Bank having done so already. Commercial flights are also still operating from Tel Aviv and other regional airports, although could be disrupted at any time. A small number of New Zealand nationals remain in Gaza and the West Bank, where the ability of New Zealand (and other partners) to assist our nationals remains very limited.

4. New Zealand has raised the SafeTravel alert level to 'Level 4 – Do Not Travel' for Lebanon, where there are currently 14 New Zealanders registered on SafeTravel.

s6(a)

s6(a)

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

6. However, the significant uncertainties in the wider context (including where, when and how any escalation of violence or conflict from Israel/Gaza could spill over into the wider region), and the potential gravity of any further escalation, are such that it would be prudent to ensure we are well positioned to assist New Zealanders should an extraordinary consular response be necessary.

7. Given New Zealand's geographical distance from the Middle East region (which limits our ability to respond rapidly to any changes in the security environment), a prudent approach of ensuring New Zealand has suitable NZDF capability available to support a consular response would have the objective of:

- Ensuring that NZDF personnel who could assist with consular response should the situation worsen, are pre-positioned in a proximate location to unfolding events ( [redacted] s6(a) [redacted] ); and
- Ensuring that NZDF and consular personnel are well integrated into the contingency planning processes of other partners on the ground, to ensure opportunities to synchronise and leverage consular response efforts are identified early.

s6(a)

8. While the consular need in the region is manageable at the present time, the situation could deteriorate rapidly with implications for the broader Middle East region. While those registered on SafeTravel are low as noted, demand for consular assistance could increase significantly if conflict spreads. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has already deployed additional staff to Cairo, Ankara, Tel Aviv and Cyprus to assist with consular and other functions.

9. As a contingency, to give the Government options and to support the objectives set out in paragraph 7 above, the NZDF recommends the pre-positioning [redacted] s6(a)

s6(a)

s6(a)

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

s6(a)

12.

s6(a)

s6(a)

14.

s6(a)

s6(a)

s6(a)

*Reputational and relationship benefits*

16. New Zealand is heavily reliant on support by partners in a range of consular contexts, particularly in places where there is no New Zealand consular presence or in high threat situations

s6(a)

17.

s6(a)  
s6(a)

*Any other operational function would be subject to approval by Ministers*



18. The [redacted] s6(a) would have no mandate to undertake any operational activity beyond engaging in contingency civilian evacuation planning and information sharing activities [redacted] s6(a). Any decision to deploy the team [redacted] s6(a) would be subject to further approval by relevant Ministers.

19. The [redacted] s6(a) will also not be involved in any operational planning that may be being undertaken by partner militaries [redacted] s6(a) beyond contingency planning for military-assisted evacuations.

20. If the situation requires it, and if it is authorised by Ministers [redacted] s6(a) could assist more actively in consular efforts. [redacted] s6(a)

*Other Options considered*

21. [redacted] s6(a)

22. [redacted] s6(a)

*Risks*

[redacted] s6(a)

[redacted] s6(a)

24. [redacted] s6(a)

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

## Communications

25. Once direction is received by Ministers, officials will develop advice for Ministers on public communications (if any) relating to the pre-positioning [redacted] s6(a)

## Update on other elements of NZDF assistance

26. On 13 October officials advised that the Chief of Defence Force had authorised the deployment of one NZDF liaison officer to [redacted] s6(a) to perform liaison and communication in support of New Zealand's consular response, and one [redacted] s6(a) to support the [redacted] s6(a) liaison officer. [redacted] s6(a)

27. On 14 October, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence approved the deployment of an NZDF Boeing 757 – 2K2 to the Middle East/Europe regions, to support the New Zealand consular response. On 18 October, officials advised Ministers that due to the easing of demand for consular assistance, there was not presently a need to deploy the aircraft. However, the aircraft would remain available for tasking under the permissions granted on 14 October, if the situation deteriorates.

28. In response to the rapidly evolving situation the Chief of Defence Force has assessed that sending [redacted] s6(a) further NZDF personnel to the region was necessary to better support information flow and situational awareness. [redacted] s6(a)

## Threat levels

[redacted] s6(a)  
[redacted] The direct threat to NZDF personnel remains unchanged by recent events, however, the collateral threat has increased.

## Recommendations

30. It is recommended that you:

a) **Note** that the security situation in the Middle East as a result of the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in remains tense, but that the number of New Zealanders requiring consular assistance as a result of the security situation is currently low.

**Noted**

b) **Note** that the deployment of additional NZDF personnel would ensure that New Zealand is positioned to be able to assist New Zealand nationals if the situation changes rapidly.

**Noted**

c) **Note** that as a prudent contingency, the NZDF is preparing to pre-position [redacted s6(a)] [redacted s6(a)] to assist in consular contingency planning efforts alongside close partners.

**Noted**

d) **Approve** the pre-positioning [redacted s6(a)] [redacted s6(a)] [redacted s6(a)].

**Yes/ No**

e) **Note** the [redacted s6(a)] will not undertake any operational activity beyond engaging in liaison, contingency planning for consular responses and information sharing activities [redacted s6(a)] and that any further operational activity by the [redacted s6(a)] will be subject to approval by Ministers.

**Noted**

f) **Note** that on 13 October officials advised that the Chief of Defence Force had authorised the deployment of two NZDF personnel to support the New Zealand response to the Israel-Gaza situation.

**Noted**

g) **Note** that the Chief of Defence Force has subsequently authorised the deployment of the following additional NZDF personnel:

i) [redacted s6(a)]

ii) [redacted s6(a)]

**Noted**

h) **Note** that the Boeing 757 – 2K2 aircraft remains available to deploy under the permissions set out in the 14 October submission [redacted s6(a)], if the situation deteriorates further and there is sufficient identified need;

**Noted**

i) **Refer** a copy of this submission to the Prime Minister.

Yes /  No

j) **Note** that it may be appropriate to consult with the Leader of the Opposition prior to a final decision being made, on the basis that a decision should not be deferred until the next Government is formed.

Noted



pp

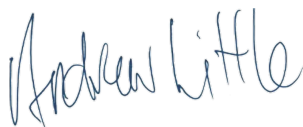
**KR SHORT**  
Air Marshal  
Chief of Defence Force  
Date: 21/10/23



**ANDREW BRIDGMAN**  
Secretary of Defence  
Date: 21/10/23



**CHRIS SEED**  
Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade  
Date: 21/10/23



**HON ANDREW LITTLE**  
Minister of Defence  
Date: 21 October 2023



**HON NANAIA MAHUTA**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Date: 21 October 2023

17 November 2023

Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Minister of Defence

## NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE PERSONNEL DEPLOYMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE ISRAEL-GAZA SITUATION: EXTENSION OF s6(a) TASK ELEMENT

### Purpose

1. To seek your approval to extend the timeframe and range of permitted activities for the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) s6(a) Task Element, to ensure it continues to be well placed to provide assistance to consular efforts in the Israel-Gaza crisis. With planning for possible consular operations completed for the moment, and MFAT s6(a), s6(b)(i) reducing their footprint in the region. This submission;

- informs you of the intent to maintain a s6(a) Liaison Element in s6(a) under extant Chief of Defence authorities, and
- seeks your approval to expand the permissions for the s6(a) Task Element (s6(a)) for 90 days, noting that the s6(a) will be held on standby in New Zealand.

### Background

2. On 21 October the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs approved the deployment of a s6(a) Task Element (s6(a)) for an initial period of 30 days (until 20 November) to:

- ensure that NZDF personnel, who could assist with consular responses should the situation worsen, were pre-positioned in a proximate location to unfolding events; and
- ensure that NZDF and consular personnel were well integrated into the contingency planning processes of countries on the ground, to ensure opportunities to be involved in partner operations were identified early.

3. The s6(a) comprises s6(a) personnel and also includes communications, logistics, medical and intelligence specialists.

4. In the 21 October submission Ministers noted that the s6(a) would not undertake any operational activity beyond engaging in liaison, consular response planning and information sharing activities in s6(a). Ministers also noted that the s6(a) would not be involved in any operational planning that might be undertaken by partner militaries in s6(a), beyond contingency planning for military-assisted evacuations.

5. The 21 October submission also noted that the situation might require the s6(a) to participate more actively in consular efforts, and that Ministerial approval would be sought in that instance. This submission seeks that approval, should it be needed in the future.

### Delivery of s6(a) deployment

6. The s6(a) deployment has met the objectives stated above. The s6(a) has participated in liaison, information sharing and the planning process in s6(a) for the evacuation of citizens from Lebanon with the s6(a), s6(b)(i) forces. MFAT has also been stationed in s6(a) and secured a commitment from s6(a) that New Zealanders requiring evacuation from Lebanon would be included in any future s6(a) operations out of that country.

7. The s6(a) deployment has worked alongside s6(a) partners and now has a clear understanding of these plans and other potential evacuation activities in the region. If the s6(a) is subsequently required by MFAT and if this submission is approved by Ministers, s6(a) personnel would now be able to rapidly redeploy and smoothly integrate into these plans. The s6(a) has also enabled the pre-positioning of s6(a) to shorten response times.

### Responsibly drawing down

8. Since the submission of 21 October, the consular situation in some parts of the region (e.g. Israel and the West Bank) has stabilised. However, the situation remains dire in Gaza where at least nine New Zealand Permanent Residents remain trapped. Concerns remain about the conflict spilling over to Lebanon potentially requiring evacuation of New Zealanders registered on Safe Travel (currently 13 but we would expect these numbers to spike should conflict spread). The possibility of wider regional spillover of the conflict remains of concern. s6(a)

In total, there are around 300 New Zealanders registered with MFAT in the immediate region.

9. The contingency planning in s6(a) is largely complete and s6(a), s6(b)(i) maintaining the ability to surge forward if required. It is proposed that New Zealand do the same, and that the s6(a) is withdrawn back to New Zealand (s6(a) personnel), with a s6(a) Liaison Element s6(a) of up to s6(a) personnel, depending on consular need, remaining. Specifically, the s6(a) will retain situation, and intelligence awareness, communications reachback, s6(a) (should the s6(a) need to surge back in), and monitor for developments that,

in conjunction with MFAT Consular staff, may trigger the re-deployment of the s6(a) MFAT is similarly scaling back its consular team in s6(a)

### Ongoing potential s6(a) role

10. As a contingency, however, it is recommended that the s6(a) permissions are extended for 90 days, beyond the current expiry of 20 November, to facilitate a quick deployment of the s6(a) back to the region if MFAT, as the lead of the consular response, requires quick upscaling of resources on the ground to contribute to an extraordinary consular response. The redeployment of the s6(a) back to the region would be by either civilian or military aircraft.

11. Greater clarity on the likely role for the s6(a) drawing on information gained from its involvement in contingency planning, and MFAT's ongoing assessment of the ways in which the s6(a) might most helpfully assist its consular effort, point towards the following expanded role for the s6(a):

- the ability to operate in the following nations: s6(a)
- deploying with and on partner military assets to participate in evacuation operations from affected locations where New Zealanders are involved;
- assisting in the movement of isolated approved individuals to departure points if needed and if environmental conditions permit (i.e. NZDF would not operate in areas where active combat<sup>2</sup> was taking place nor would the s6(a) carry weapons unless subsequent Ministerial approval was obtained for this); and the
- provision of immediate medical support to evacuees, if required.

12. Any decision for the s6(a) to undertake tasks beyond those specified above would be subject to further approval by relevant Ministers, including any decision to deploy into areas where there is active combat. It should be noted that the expanded role described above would still sit within the overall scope of the 21 October approval which limited the s6(a) role to information sharing, liaison and in particular, the provision of support to consular responses.

13. Should the extension for the New Zealand based s6(a) contingency not be approved:

- The s6(a) would have to re-establish a footprint in s6(a) prior to supporting a consular request, limiting the NZDF's ability to respond in an effective and timely way.
- s6(a) if the s6(a) is completely withdrawn, further inhibiting the NZDF's ability to provide timely support to a consular response.

s6(a)

<sup>2</sup> This specifically refers to areas where ground combat operations are occurring. This currently includes Southern Lebanon, Northern Israel and Gaza, and, for the purposes of this submission will include the West Bank. It excludes areas that are subject to a missile or rocket threats.

- The NZDF's connection to military information in [s6(a)] and partners' military intentions would be significantly degraded, reducing the effectiveness and timeliness of an NZDF response to a consular request.

## Update on other elements of NZDF assistance

### *Liaison Officers*

14. The NZDF currently has [s6(a)] liaison officers deployed to assist the consular response - [s6(a)] - carrying out roles in planning, information/intelligence sharing and communications. These are deployed under the Chief of Defence Force's authority in support of mandated government activities [CAB-21-MIN-0439]. The Chief of Defence Force's current intention is to reduce this number to [s6(a)] personnel, in line with the general downsizing of resources in the region. Together with the [s6(a)] Liaison Element discussed above, NZ personnel remaining in [s6(a)] would number around [s6(a)] to support ongoing planning and preparations for any possible consular operation.

### *Aircraft*

15. On 14 October, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence approved the deployment of an NZDF Boeing 757-2K2 to the Middle East/Europe regions to support the New Zealand consular response. On 18 October, officials advised Ministers that, due to the easing of demand for consular assistance, there was not presently a need to deploy the aircraft. This approval expired on 13 November.

16. It remains the case that a specific need for an NZDF aircraft has not been identified. The NZDF will retain an aircraft available for tasking, which may be a C-130 Hercules or Boeing 757-2K2 depending on the availability of aircraft at any given time and the specific nature of the tasking (the C-130 as a military aircraft can be used in more austere/high threat environments). Ministerial approval would be sought if tasking of an aircraft becomes necessary.

## Risks/Threat levels

17. The risks identified in the submission of 21 October remain extant, namely:

- [s6(a)]
- [s6(a)]



18. New Zealand Defence Intelligence assesses the unmitigated overall threat for NZDF personnel in the locations the s6(a) is most likely to be present as s6(a)

### Next Steps

19. The s6(a) will draw down from 20 November or withdraw completely (should this extension not be approved).

20. Should the extension to the s6(a) be approved, Ministers will be kept updated on any changes to the context and significant changes in the number of NZDF personnel in the region.

21. The Chief of Defence Force will continue to utilise NZDF liaison officers, as required, in support of MFAT led consular efforts, and the Minister of Defence will be kept updated on any significant changes to the number of deployed personnel as requested by MFAT.

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## Recommendations

22. It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** that on 21 October Ministers approved the pre-positioning of a [redacted] s6(a) Task Element in [redacted] s6(a) to assist in consular contingency planning efforts alongside close partners.

**Noted**

- b) **Note** that the [redacted] s6(a) Task Element has been successful in its contingency planning role and is now fully abreast of partner plans and New Zealand's potential interface with those.

**Noted**

- c) **Note** that MFAT and [redacted] s6(a), s6(b)(i) are downsizing their presence in [redacted] s6(a) as they have now largely completed their contingency planning, and that the [redacted] s6(a) Task Element will draw down and return to New Zealand but remain on an immediate notice to redeploy if requested.

**Noted**

- d) **Note** Chief of Defence Force intent to maintain a [redacted] s6(a) Liaison Element in [redacted] s6(a) of up to [redacted] s6(a) personnel, the precise number depending on consular need at a given time.

**Noted**

- e) **Note** that the number of New Zealanders requiring consular assistance as a result of the security situation is currently low but these cases are complex, the security situation in the Middle East remains tense, the overall situation remains highly uncertain and volatile, and MFAT is aware of around 300 other New Zealanders that are currently in the immediate region and who could be affected should the conflict escalate further.

**Noted**

- f) **Note** that the current approval for the [redacted] s6(a) Task Element expires on 20 November.

**Noted**

- g) **Approve** the extension of the [redacted] s6(a) Task Element of up to [redacted] s6(a) personnel by 90 days to facilitate rapid re-deployment to the region to contribute to an extraordinary consular response.

**Approved**

- h) **Note** that, if the proposed extension is approved, s6(a) members of the s6(a) will be withdrawn to New Zealand.

**Noted**

- i) **Approve** the following expansion of s6(a) Task Element activities to better assist MFAT with a potential consular response:

- (i) ability to move to the following locations: s6(a)  
s6(a)
- (ii) deploying with and on partner military assets to assist in evacuation of New Zealand nationals from affected locations;
- (iii) assisting in the movement of isolated approved individuals to departure points if needed provided that those locations are not a locus for active combat; and the
- (iv) provision of immediate medical support to evacuees, if required.

**Approved**

- j) **Note** that any further operational activity by the s6(a) Task Element beyond that stipulated above would be subject to subsequent approval by Ministers.

**Noted**

- k) **Note** that the Chief of Defence Force has currently authorised the deployment of s6(a) NZDF liaison personnel to assist the consular effort but his current intention is to reduce this to s6(a) personnel in line with the general drawdown of resources in the region.

**Noted**

- l) **Note** that the Chief of Defence Force's intention to reduce the number of NZDF liaison personnel would mean that, when combined with the s6(a) Liaison Element, s6(a)

**Noted**

- m) **Note** that NZDF aircraft remain available to deploy if a specific situation requiring military airlift arises and that Ministerial approval will be sought before the aircraft would be deployed.

**Noted**

n) **Refer** a copy of this submission to the Prime Minister.

**Yes / No**

o) **Note** that it may be appropriate to inform the Leader of the Opposition of this decision and that officials will discuss NZDF support for MFAT's consular effort with the incoming Minister of Defence at his/her earliest convenience.

**Noted**



**KR SHORT**  
Air Marshal  
Chief of Defence Force  
Date: 17 NOV 23



**ANDREW BRIDGMAN**  
Secretary of Defence  
Date: 17/11/23

P.P.



**TAHA MACPHERSON**  
For Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade  
Date:

**HON ANDREW LITTLE**  
Minister of Defence  
Date:

**HON GRANT ROBERTSON**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Date:

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