



# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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### **Report of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee: Period Ended 22 July 2022**

On 25 July 2022, Cabinet made the following decisions on the work of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee for the period ended 22 July 2022:

Out of scope

ERS-22-MIN-0027	<b>Options for New Zealand Non-Military Contributions in Support of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS</b> Portfolio: Foreign Affairs	CONFIRMED
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Out of scope

Rachel Hayward  
Acting Secretary of the Cabinet



# Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee

## Minute of Decision

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### Options for New Zealand Non-Military Contributions in Support of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS

**Portfolio** Foreign Affairs

On 19 July 2022, the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee:

1 **noted** that on 21 March 2022, Cabinet:

- 1.1 agreed that the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) continue to fill two roles within Operation Inherent Resolve of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (the Coalition) until 30 June 2023;
- 1.2 agreed that all NZDF personnel be withdrawn from the Coalition by 30 June 2023;
- 1.3 noted New Zealand's support of the Coalition's broad efforts to Defeat ISIS, including through activities outside of Operation Inherent Resolve;

[CAB-22-MIN-0084]

2 **noted** that while the Coalition has successfully worked with the Iraqi Government, the Syrian Democratic Forces and other partners to militarily defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria, ISIS continues to pose a threat in the region, as well as more broadly through its global affiliates and its continued online radicalisation capability and influence;

3 **noted** the following four non-military workstreams of the Coalition:

- 3.1 acting against ISIS' financing and economic infrastructure;
- 3.2 working to prevent foreign terrorist fighters from moving across borders;
- 3.3 supporting the stabilisation of liberated areas;
- 3.4 countering ISIS's propaganda;

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

6 **agreed** that in line with New Zealand's previous support, stabilisation funding for Iraq remains an appropriate mechanism and should be a focus for future New Zealand contributions;

- 7 **agreed** that countering ISIS propaganda also remains a priority for New Zealand, and that officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet should reinvigorate New Zealand's engagement with the Coalition's Communications Working Group;
- 8 **noted** that both of these activities can be met within MFAT baselines;
- 9 **noted** that, subject to expected appropriations, the expectation is that up to NZ\$4 million will be available for support to Iraq over the next three financial years from the Aotearoa New Zealand International Development Cooperation Programme.

Janine Harvey  
Committee Secretary

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**Present:**

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern (Chair)  
Hon Grant Robertson  
Hon Andrew Little  
Hon David Parker  
Hon Nanaia Mahuta  
Hon Stuart Nash  
Hon Peeni Henare  
Hon Michael Wood  
Hon Dr David Clark  
Hon Kieran McAnulty

**Officials present from:**

Office of the Prime Minister  
Officials Committee for ERS

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Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Chair, External Relations and Security Cabinet Committee

**OPTIONS FOR NEW ZEALAND NON-MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE GLOBAL COALITION TO DEFEAT ISIS.**

**Proposal**

- 1 To seek Cabinet agreement on future non-military contributions in support of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (D-ISIS).

**Relation to government priorities**

- 2 New Zealand's commitment to the D-ISIS Coalition supports the Government's priorities by:
  - Contributing to our National Security Objective: *'Strengthening the international order to promote security'*; and to our Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy: *'understanding the threat and working with our international partners to prevent violent extremism of all kinds'*. This in turn supports the Government's priority to *'lay the foundations for a better future'*.
  - Contributing to collective security efforts and the international rules-based system, which in turn supports the Government's priority to *'lay the foundations for a better future'*.
  - Ensuring New Zealand's strong community-based approach to de-radicalisation, including in the Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy, is reflected in our international engagement.

**Executive Summary**

- 3 The mission of the Global Coalition to Defeat Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is 'to tackle ISIS on all fronts, dismantling its networks and countering its global ambitions'. Beyond the military element of the Coalition - Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) - there are four other Workstreams: acting against ISIS' financing and economic infrastructure; working to prevent foreign terrorist fighters from moving across borders; supporting the stabilisation of liberated areas; and countering the group's propaganda.

- 4 On 21 March 2022, Cabinet considered our military commitment to OIR and decided to extend two positions to 30 June 2023, and to withdraw all New Zealand Defence Force personnel after that date. Cabinet also noted New Zealand's support of the Coalition's broad efforts to defeat ISIS, including through activities outside of OIR. This paper considers New Zealand's contributions to other Coalition Workstreams.

- 5 To date, New Zealand has contributed to both the stabilisation and the communications (countering propaganda) Workstreams. New Zealand has provided NZ\$39 million in international development cooperation funding to Iraq since 2003 with an initial focus on humanitarian support then, since the establishment of the Global Coalition in 2014, on stabilisation efforts in Iraq.
- 6 Our engagement in the Communications Working Group has focused on media analytics and monitoring; periodic representation and contributions at associated meetings of the Group; and more recently, engagement by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in the Working Group's Mainstream Media Action Group. We have used these opportunities at times to highlight our broader approach to violent extremism, beyond the ISIS focus.
- 7 Notwithstanding the modest size of our contributions to the Group, New Zealand's engagement and sharing of lessons learnt in this area has been noted and appreciated by partners. Our response to the Christchurch terrorist attack has enhanced our profile as a country with a unique perspective on Counter-Terrorism policy and communications. So too, has New Zealand's work alongside France, leading the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online.
- 8 We recommend further contributions to the stabilisation and communications Workstreams. While the Coalition has successfully worked with the Iraqi Government, the Syrian Democratic Forces and other partners to militarily defeat ISIS, ISIS continues to pose a threat in the region, as well as more broadly through its global affiliates and its continued online radicalisation capability and influence.
- 9 s6(a), s6(b)(i)

## Background

- 10 The Global Coalition to Defeat Islamic State in Iraq and Syria was formed in September 2014 and now has 85 members. The military element of the Coalition – OIR – has militarily defeated ISIS, which is now an insurgency, rather than a caliphate. But this success was, and is, materially dependent on the support provided by the other four Coalition Workstreams: acting against ISIS' financing and economic infrastructure; working to prevent foreign terrorist fighters from moving across borders; supporting the stabilisation of liberated areas; and countering the group's propaganda.
- 11 While down, ISIS is not out. s6(b)(i), s9(2)(g)(i)
- 12 Foreign Ministers of the Coalition met in Marrakech on 11 May to review progress and look ahead to future needs. The statement issued from the meeting covered the importance of civilian-led efforts, including 'prevention, stabilisation, countering terrorist financing, counter narratives and foreign terrorist fighter prosecution,

rehabilitation and reintegration, as increasingly necessary to achieve the lasting defeat of ISIS'. Ministers emphasised the need to enhance civilian-led counterterrorism capabilities in Iraq.

### ***ISIS's financing and economic infrastructure***

- 13 Having occupied large portions of territory in Iraq and Syria by 2014, ISIS had a basis not only for claiming to be a 'state', but also for its economic viability. OIR mounted airstrikes and other military actions directed against ISIS's sources of funding (oil wells, cottage-industry refineries and tanker convoys) and cash storage facilities, but a more comprehensive approach was needed. This led to the establishment of the Counter ISIS Finance Group in with a single goal: to determine how best to starve the self-styled caliphate of the funds it needed to achieve its objective of 'remaining and expanding'. The Finance Group had four key objectives: preventing ISIS's use of the international financial system; countering ISIS's extortion and exploitation of economic assets and resources; denying ISIS funding from abroad; and preventing ISIS from providing financial or material support to foreign affiliates in an effort to expand its global ambitions.
- 14 While ISIS is reduced to an insurgency, the ability to continue to withhold funds is a vital part of preventing its resurgence.

### ***Foreign Terrorist Fighters***

- 15 ISIS's persuasive use of propaganda led to an unprecedented flow of volunteers from around the world to join the terrorist group. This included not only men, but also women alone and families. By the end of 2015, approximately 40,000 individuals from over 120 countries had travelled to Iraq and Syria as fighters, creating a combined force with local Syrians and Iraqis assessed at around 100,000 fighters.
- 16 In the course of the conflict, many foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) were killed or imprisoned, with those remaining seeking to flee to constitute an insurgency in the region or return to their countries of origin. At the end of 2020, the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) held at least 10,000 ISIS prisoners across 14 detention centres. Other centres in Syria hold family of FTFs and displaced persons; one of the better known, Al Hawl camp, is estimated to hold 57,000, of which 94% is estimated to be women and children.
- 17 The question of what to do with those detained remains outstanding. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2396 (2017) urges UN Member States to strengthen measures on border control, criminal justice and information-sharing and counter-extremism. It also calls on Member States to take 'appropriate action' regarding suspected terrorists and their accompanying family members, including by considering prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration measures in compliance with domestic and international law. Practice by countries has differed. Some have repatriated FTFs and/or accompanying family members, with particular attention paid to unaccompanied minors. Others have called for prosecutions of FTFs in theatre.
- 18 In the meantime, the challenges posed by FTFs continues, as concerns about radicalisation of children and youth in the camps grow, along with the risk of FTFs being freed by ISIS into the region. The January 2022 ISIS attack on Hasakah

prison <sup>s6(a)</sup> has been the most significant since ISIS was militarily defeated in March 2019. While the SDF counter-attack, supported by Coalition air support and armoured vehicles, was eventually successful, it was not straightforward; the fight lasted around a week and freed several hundred detainees, although many appear to have died in combat or were recaptured.

- 19 A US State Department briefing on FTFs in June 2021 stated that the Coalition was working to ensure that 2,000 FTFs and 2,000 Iraqis in SDF custody were ultimately returned to their countries of origin and faced accountability. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) detentions are 'critical, but this should not be misunderstood to be the long-term solution. Repatriation, then prosecution or rehabilitation, as appropriate, is the only long-term solution for the non-Syrians.'
- 20 The 11 May D-ISIS ministerial statement stressed the need to ensure sustainable long-term solutions for ISIS fighters and family members in northeast Syria, including appropriate legal procedures to ensure those guilty of crimes were held accountable.

***Countering propaganda: communications***

- 21 From its inception, ISIS has run a sophisticated information campaign; its very name was chosen to represent its core message – it would be the Islamic State, with the legitimacy of a nation and the authority that accrued to one. ISIS narratives have followed three main themes: political, religious and social. The main efforts of the information strategy can be divided into four types of message: to unite, to frighten, to support, and to inform.
- 22 Various tools, including social media propaganda and, at its height, direct physical actions, and computer network operations have been used to access or target potential audiences, including attracting foreign fighters, covering ISIS's enemies, and promoting alarm in the region and beyond. ISIS's decentralised structure allowed its information campaign to continue, notwithstanding military setbacks. ISIS became a brand as much as a military movement, using its online propaganda to radicalise vulnerable individuals to conduct attacks in its name anywhere in the world, as we saw with tragic effect in Auckland on 3 September 2021. In Afghanistan, the lethal and confronting attacks by ISIS affiliate Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) moved it from an entity operating in only a few provinces to centre stage. The rise of terrorist groups with ISIS / Al Qaeda links and extremist ideology in Africa has been of particular concern, leading to the creation of an Africa Focus Group under the Global Coalition.
- 23 In short, while the Coalition has successfully worked with the Iraqi Government, the SDF and other partners to militarily defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria, ISIS continues to pose a threat in the region, as well as more broadly through its global affiliates and its continued online radicalisation capability and influence.

***Stabilisation funding***

- 24 The amount of funding sought to combat the effects of ISIS's occupation in Iraq is significant.<sup>s6(a), s6(b)(ii)</sup>

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

***Previous New Zealand non-military contributions to Iraq***

- 26 New Zealand has provided NZ\$39 million in international development cooperation funding to Iraq since 2002, with an initial focus on humanitarian support. Since 2014, with the establishment of the Global Coalition and New Zealand's membership of it, our contributions have focused on stabilisation, removal of explosive remnants of war and reintegration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq. Subject to appropriations, an indicative NZ\$4 million is expected to be available for further support to Iraq over the next three financial years.



- 27 Our engagement in the Communications Working Group (CWG) has focused on: contributions by MFAT and DPMC of media analytics and monitoring; periodic representation and contributions at associated meetings of the Group; and more recently, engagement by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in the Working Group's Mainstream Media Action Group. We have spoken to the CWG about our response to the 15 March terrorist attack and our broad response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry report.
- 28 Notwithstanding the modest size of our contributions to the CWG, New Zealand's engagement in this area has been noted and appreciated by partners. Our response to the Christchurch terrorist attack has enhanced our profile as a country with a unique perspective on Counter-Terrorism policy and communications. So too, has New Zealand's work alongside France, leading the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online.

***Potential future contributions to non-military Coalition priorities for Iraq***

- 29 Providing further contributions to the Coalition's non-military objectives would support the pillars of mōhio and mahi tahi in New Zealand's Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy: understanding the threat and working with our international partners to prevent violent extremism of all kinds. It would reaffirm a New Zealand commitment to the work of the Coalition and our close partners beyond the drawdown of New Zealand Defence Force personnel.
- 30 The conditions that have seen New Zealand support stabilisation funding and communications as Coalition priorities in the past still apply. Our international development cooperation programme aims to support sustainable development in developing countries to reduce poverty and contribute to a more secure, equitable and prosperous world, and the needs in Iraq remain significant.
- 31 On the communications front, our reputation from leadership of the Christchurch Call and our evolving work on how best to respond to extremism has brought with it expectations of greater international engagement across a range of related fora. The Global Coalition, with its wide and diverse membership and its practical approaches, is one of them.

32 s6(a)

There is also scope for New Zealand to increase engagement at a broader Working Group level, following our last in-person engagement with the CWG in 2019. As the Coalition resumes in-person meetings, New Zealand's presence would help bolster relationships with Coalition members and reaffirm our value as a credible, and expert contributor.

- 33 At this stage in the work of the Coalition, we would not recommend a contribution to the other two Workstreams; other Coalition members have greater expertise to offer and it is in stabilisation and communications lines of effort that New Zealand has a track record and, in the case of the CWG comparative advantage. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

### ***Next Steps, Communications and Proactive Release***

- 34 Publication of the decision on New Zealand's military contribution to the Global Coalition was deferred pending Cabinet consideration of our contribution to non-military elements of the Coalition. Following Cabinet's consideration of this paper, officials recommend a press release to cover the 21 March 2022 Cabinet decisions, and lines on support for non-military contributions, should Cabinet approve the recommendations in this paper.

### **Financial Implications**

- 35 No additional funding is required for the recommended contributions. Stabilisation funding has been earmarked in the Aotearoa New Zealand International Development Cooperation Programme, and increased engagement with the CWG could be managed within existing departmental budget baselines.

### **Human Rights**

- 36 There are no adverse Human Rights considerations for engagement with the CWG or provision of funding for stabilisation activities. Funded initiatives will be intended to improve local living conditions by laying the groundwork for reconstruction and recovery, and to safeguard communities against the resurgence of violence and extremism.

### **Consultation**

- 37 This paper was prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and consulted with the Ministry of Defence, the New Zealand Defence Force, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

### **Recommendations**

The Minister of Foreign Affairs recommends that the Committee:

- 1 **note** Cabinet's agreement on 21 March 2022 to extend two positions filled by New Zealand Defence Force personnel to Operation Inherent Resolve of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and to withdraw all New Zealand Defence Force personnel by 30 June 2023;
- 2 **note** Cabinet also noted New Zealand's support of the Coalition's broad efforts to Defeat ISIS, including through activities outside of Operation Inherent Resolve;
- 3 **note** that while the Coalition has successfully worked with the Iraqi Government, the Syrian Democratic Forces and other partners to militarily defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria, ISIS continues to pose a threat in the region, as well as more broadly through its global affiliates and its continued online radicalisation capability and influence;
- 4 **note** the four non-military Workstreams of the Coalition: acting against ISIS' financing and economic infrastructure; working to prevent foreign terrorist fighters from moving across borders; supporting the stabilisation of liberated areas; and countering ISIS's propaganda;
- 5 s6(a), s6(b)(ii)

- 6 s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- 7 **agree** that in line with our previous support, stabilisation funding for Iraq remains an appropriate mechanism and should be a focus for future New Zealand contributions;
- 8 **agree** that countering ISIS propaganda also remains a priority for New Zealand, and that experts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet should reinvigorate our engagement with the Coalition's Communications Working Group;
- 9 **note** that both of these activities can be met within MFAT baselines;
- 10 **note** that subject to expected appropriations, the expectation is that up to NZ\$4 million will be available for support to Iraq over the next three financial years from the Aotearoa New Zealand International Development Cooperation Programme.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Minister of Foreign Affairs