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US/ISRAEL/IRAN CONFLICT

MFAT DAILY UPDATE – Sunday 15 March (NOTE THIS REPORTS THE DAILY AOG SITREP)

KEY MESSAGES - UNCLASSIFIED

- The situation remains extremely concerning. We want it to end as quickly as possible and move to a negotiated solution. But we have to be prepared for all possibilities.
- We continue to be outraged by Iran's ongoing attacks on its neighbours, and its increasing use of asymmetric and economic warfare
- We are also worried about the increasing death toll and say again that international law, including international humanitarian law, must be upheld.
- [If asked – Strait of Hormuz mining/targeting ships] This is a worrying escalation. Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.
- [If asked – NZ participation in any freedom of navigation efforts and/or whether this would mean supporting US and Israel's military action.] Cabinet would need to look carefully at how any international coalition develops before making any decisions about a possible NZ contribution.
- [Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel's military action?] NZ is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.

Consular Messaging

- New Zealanders who can, should leave the region on commercial flights or by road now. That will be the fastest way to safely depart.
- Commercial flights are operating out of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Lebanon and Qatar.
- New Zealanders wanting to leave should not wait. The situation remains uncertain and the current conflict could escalate at any time, cutting off departure options without warning.
- [If asked – Bahrain bus departure] Our response teams postponed a planned bus departure from Bahrain to Saudi Arabia on 12 March due to Iran's ongoing retaliatory attacks on civilian infrastructure. We are continuing to review the security environment and will update those travelers as soon as we can.
- [If asked – C130J returns to NZ] As consular demand in the region has diminished with the increase in commercial flight availability, one of the two aircraft deployed is returning to New Zealand. The second aircraft and crew will remain in the region while the situation is assessed further.

END OF PUBLIC MESSAGES. RESTRICTED MATERIAL BEGINS ON THE NEXT PAGE.

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### KEY DEVELOPMENTS OVERNIGHT

- President Trump called on other countries via Truth Social this morning to deploy warships to the Strait of Hormuz to keep it open. China, France, Japan, South Korea and the UK were named.<sup>s6(a)</sup>
- President Trump claims the US has “totally obliterated” Iranian military targets on Kharg Island, where Iran processes 90% of its crude oil exports. Trump has warned Iran’s oil facilities on the island could be targeted next if Iran continues blocking the Strait. In response Iran renewed threats against American companies’ facilities in the region, or companies in which the US hold shares.
- Iran warned civilians to evacuate three UAE ports Saturday evening following allegations the UAE-hosted US launch points for strikes on Kharg Island, marking its first direct threat against non-US-affiliated targets.
- President Trump says Iran is seeking a deal to end the war, but the US is not prepared to agree until “very solid” terms are met, including Iran fully abandoning any nuclear ambitions. The US and Iran have declined proposals for ceasefire talks by other Middle Eastern countries, including Oman and Egypt.
- Iran is allowing a limited number of oil tankers to pass through the Strait of Hormuz on the condition cargo is traded in Chinese yuan rather than US dollars. The move represents a significant shift in energy trade dynamics and aligns with China's longstanding push to internationalise the yuan in oil markets.
- Major shipping lines are diverting ships away from the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. This follows threats from Iran’s proxy group the Houthi that commercial shipping linked to Israel or its allies could be targeted.
- s6(a)

s6(a)

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s6(a)

CONSULAR DEVELOPMENTS

- The consular operation to assist New Zealanders to depart Gulf states is nearing conclusion. As at 8:00am NZT on Sunday 15 March, the number of New Zealanders in the region registered on SafeTravel is 3,654 (the same number as yesterday). Current numbers are: UAE 2,193, Qatar 475, Saudi Arabia 447, Jordan 55, Kuwait 103, Bahrain 75, Iran 41, Iraq 33, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories 80, Lebanon 25, Egypt 94, and Oman 33.
- Commercial flight options for departure from the UAE and Qatar are readily available. New Zealanders continue to take up flight options, but flights are well below carrying capacity. Emirates is reducing services from the UAE to Auckland from daily to 3 times a week between March 17 and March 30. This is a temporary measure due to lower-than-normal passenger numbers.
- A final New Zealand Government assisted departure movement is being planned to help a small number of New Zealanders leave Bahrain on Monday evening NZT. Consular officials are in touch with the passengers wanting to take this overland bus service to Saudi Arabia. For security reasons, this will not be publicly announced until the operation has concluded.
- Once this movement is completed, a key transition point in the consular response will have been reached:
  - MFAT will have supported New Zealanders to leave Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain (in addition to regular updates to those in the UAE and elsewhere on commercial flight availability).

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- o New Zealanders who have required Government support to leave the Gulf region will have departed.
- o The focus of the consular operation will narrow to focus on: continued public messaging to New Zealanders registered in the Middle East; supporting a small number of complex individual cases (mostly in Iran); and continuing to prepare to help Kiwis in Iran once military strikes end.
- We continue to closely coordinate with our s6(a) Consular partners, s6(b)(i)
- Advice is being prepared for consideration on Monday afternoon NZT regarding the status of the second C130 that remains in the region (following the departure of the first aircraft on Friday).

### Assisted departures

- Bahrain – the planned assisted departure of New Zealanders from Bahrain on Thursday 12 March was postponed for security reasons. s6(b)(i) also paused their bus operations. There are currently 5 New Zealanders registered to depart but demand is soft. A review of security situation is ongoing with a decision on whether it is possible to proceed to be taken in the evening of Sunday 15 March.

### MARITIME SECURITY

- As noted above, President Trump tweeted today that many countries will be sending war ships, in conjunction with the USA, to keep the Hormuz Strait open and safe.
- At this point, NZ has not had a request from the US to contribute to such a maritime operation. However, creating the conditions to allow a return to commercial traffic through the Strait of Hormuz is an increasing area of focus. s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

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### NEW ZEALAND INC POSTS AND PERSONNEL OFFSHORE

- Abu Dhabi and Dubai: New Zealand Inc teams from MFAT, MPI, NZTE, and NZDF continue to shelter in place. The posts are closed to the public but remain operational. s6(d)
- Riyadh: Reopened in person on Monday 9 March. The post continues to review posture in line with the security situation. MFAT surge support, ERT team and s6(a) s6(d)
- s6(d)

### DEPLOYMENTS

- s6(a)
- The NZDF continues to closely monitor the situation and remains in direct communications with deployed personnel. Personnel are in locations with appropriate security measures and will remain unless operational requirements change. The Multi-National Force and Observers (Egypt) and UN Truce Supervision Organisation (Lebanon/Syria/Israel) missions remain operational with all other deployed missions in the region suspended due to current hostilities. Focus for the NZDF now is to resume mission outputs as soon as possible.

Note: This is incorrect. The correct information is the movements for all other deployed missions were suspended

### RECENT MEDIA INQUIRIES

The Post inquired about whether New Zealand would remove Russia oil sanctions. For context, the US is reported to be removing at least some of their sanctions on Russian oil in order to increase global oil supply. We responded with the following lines:

- [We acknowledge the US decision to grant a temporary waiver to allow India to import Russian fuel]
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs has been clear: our sanctions are in place to curtail oil revenues fueling Putin's illegal war against Ukraine.
- While we continue to monitor the situation, we're confident our current settings remain appropriate.

### Q&A

If asked about Trump Tweet to send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open:

- At this point, NZ has not been asked by the US to send military support to the area.
- If we received a request, this would be a matter for Cabinet. And I am not going to speculate right now.
- We would need to look carefully at how any international coalition develops before making any decisions about a possible NZ contribution. As I have said, this would be a matter for Cabinet.

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- A large proportion of NZ trade transits through or originates from the Middle East region, including around 75% of our oil imports. Recent trade negotiations and agreements mean NZ's security and economic interests are increasingly linked to the Middle East.

Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel's military action?

- NZ is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.

What has NZ done in the past?

- New Zealand has contributed to maritime security in the Middle East since the 1990s. This commitment remains directly linked to our economic, trade and geostrategic interests, and our longstanding support for international law, including freedom of navigation.
- One good example has been our contributions to the Combined Maritime Force which is responsible for coordinating multinational activities to counter smuggling, piracy and terrorism in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.

Would New Zealand consider providing support in other ways? For example, the types of defensive support to Gulf states that France or the UK are providing? Or the type of support that Australia is providing?

- We don't have the type of equipment that these states are providing (e.g. fighter jets, advanced air defence systems).
- We have in the past participated in international efforts to support freedom of navigation in the region (like the Red Sea). If a future request along those lines was made, and an international operation is stood up, we would consider it.

What do you think of US attack on Kharg island? Does this mean the US is going after Iran's oil?

- It is clear the US is trying to stop Iran's economic warfare.
- It is not for us to comment on the US' motivations. New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution.

Reports emerging that US didn't expect Iran to attack energy infrastructure/block Strait of Hormuz? Is the US at fault for these developments?

- Reiterate that New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution.
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

What does New Zealand think about reports Iran is mining the Strait of Hormuz?

- This is extremely worrying.
- There are clear international rules that say states cannot disrupt or pose dangers to civilian shipping in this way.
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

Do you support/condemn the US and Israeli military action in Iran?

- New Zealand's efforts are focused on the safety of our people in the region.

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

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

Does New Zealand consider the US and Israel's strikes on Iran legal?

- The US and Israel have already explained why they have done this. The US has asserted self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- The US and Israel acted based on their own assessment and information. New Zealand was not privy to that.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations.
- New Zealand will continue to advocate for the Iranian leadership to seek a negotiated solution.

What does New Zealand think about Israel's invasion of Lebanon?

- We're concerned by the escalation of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel.
- Hezbollah has threatened Israel for decades and New Zealand has designated Hezbollah as a terrorist entity.
- However, Israel's response right now is heavy-handed.
- We are particularly concerned that hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced.
- We are at serious risk of a vicious retaliatory cycle that will only raise the temperature further.
- We agree with the Lebanese Government that there need to be peace talks.
- Israel and Hezbollah reached a ceasefire agreement in 2024 and we need to get back to that.

Does New Zealand consider Israel's invasion of Lebanon to be legal/justified?

- Israel has already explained why it has done this.
- It is for Israel, not New Zealand, to make the case.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations. This includes respect for Lebanon's territorial integrity.

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

The Government says it wants to protect civilians. Why hasn't it condemned Israel's bombing of oil refineries, or the US's bombing of a girl's school?

- I understand the US is doing an investigation into the bombing of the girl's school and has committed to releasing the results. We will have to wait for that, but no matter what happened, it is certainly an absolute tragedy.
- Like the rest of the international community, we are very worried about the way this conflict is escalating. Civilian deaths are deeply concerning.

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- There are clear international rules that govern conflict. There is no question for New Zealand that international law and international humanitarian law have to be observed.
- Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected.

Will NZ pull staff out of ME Posts (e.g. UAE) like Australia and others are doing?

- New Zealand continues to monitor and assess the security situation in the region.
- New Zealand does not have an Embassy in Israel [if asked: or Jordan or Qatar].
- Our Embassy in the UAE is operational but not currently receiving in-person visitors.
- For security reasons we won't comment on staff movements.

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US/ISRAEL/IRAN CONFLICT

MFAT DAILY UPDATE – Monday 16 March (NOTE THIS SUPPLEMENTS THE DAILY AOG SITREP)

**KEY MESSAGES - UNCLASSIFIED**

- New Zealand wants to see this conflict end as soon as possible.
- We all agree on the threat posed by Iran. Its behaviour during this conflict and before, is unacceptable.
- The further this conflict goes on, the worse the impacts – on civilians in the region and on the global economy.
- We want to see de-escalation and a return to negotiation.
- [If asked – Strait of Hormuz mining/targeting ships] This is a worrying escalation. Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.
- [If asked – NZ participation in any freedom of navigation efforts and/or whether this would mean supporting US and Israel’s military action.] Cabinet would need to look carefully at how any international coalition develops before making any decisions about a possible NZ contribution.
- [Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel’s military action?] NZ is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.
- [If asked: whether New Zealand will remove Russia Sanctions] The Minister of Foreign Affairs has been clear: our sanctions are in place to curtail oil revenues fuelling Putin’s illegal war against Ukraine. While we continue to monitor the situation, we’re confident our current settings remain appropriate. The Ministry continues to monitor the situation closely, which includes engaging with partner countries on sanctions issues, assessing international developments, and our own settings. This is an ongoing process.

Consular Messaging

- New Zealanders who can, should leave the region on commercial flights or by road now. That will be the fastest way to safely depart.
- Commercial flights are operating out of UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, and most recently resumed from Qatar.
- The situation remains uncertain and the current conflict could escalate at any time, cutting off departure options without warning.
- [If asked – Bahrain bus departure] Our response teams did not proceed with a planned bus departure from Bahrain to Saudi Arabia as New Zealanders there declined assistance.
- [if asked – C130] returns to NZ] As consular demand in the region has diminished with the increase in commercial flight availability, one of the two aircraft deployed is returning to New Zealand, and timing for the return of the second aircraft and crew is being considered.

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### KEY DEVELOPMENTS OVERNIGHT

- Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has rejected President Trump's claim that Iran sought a ceasefire or even negotiations. Senior regime officials noted Iran would only accept a ceasefire if it received compensation and guarantees against repeated attacks via departure of US troops from the Persian Gulf.
- s6(a)
- There are initial indications Australia will not participate, with Transport Minister Catherine King today telling media "we won't be sending a ship to the Strait of Hormuz. We know how incredibly important that is, but that's not something we've been asked or that we're contributing to". There has been no comment yet on the issue from Ministers Wong or Marles.
- Today President Trump has warned that NATO could "have a very bad future" if US allies fail to assist in opening up the Strait. Trump said "we will remember", which countries join a coalition.
- Earlier President Trump indicated he might delay his Summit with China's Xi Jinping in an effort to pressure China to assist in unblocking the Strait.
- Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi said the Strait of Hormuz is open to all except the United States and its allies; noting Iran was open to countries wanting to talk safe passage. Iran has considered passage for a limited number of oil tankers on the condition that cargo was traded in Chinese yuan rather than US dollars. The move would represent a significant shift in energy trade dynamics and aligns with China's longstanding push to internationalise the yuan in oil markets.
- According to US media. Israel has warned the United States that its supply of ballistic missile interceptors is running "critically low" as the war enters its third week, Israeli defence systems entered the current conflict already depleted after last year's fighting with Iran. Israeli officials have denied these reports.
- The Chair of the US Federal Communications Commission has threatened to revoke broadcasters' licenses after US President Donald Trump criticised their coverage of the US-Israel war with Iran. This comes as the Trump Administration faces domestic pressure regarding the ongoing conflict, including over increasing fuel prices.

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#### MARITIME SECURITY

- There have not been any further developments on any ask for New Zealand to contribute to a maritime security operation. New Zealand has not been approached by the US to contribute to a maritime operation, s6(a)
- s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

#### CONSULAR DEVELOPMENTS

- The consular operation to assist New Zealanders to depart Gulf states is nearing conclusion. As at 8:00am NZT on Monday 16 March, the number of New Zealanders in the region registered on SafeTravel is 3,614 . Current numbers are: UAE 2,167, Qatar 478, Saudi Arabia 439, Jordan 55, Kuwait 97, Bahrain 78, Iran 41, Iraq 33, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories 74, Lebanon 25, Egypt 94, and Oman 33.
- Commercial flight options for departure from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are readily available. New Zealanders continue to take up flight options, but flights are well below carrying capacity. Emirates is reducing services from the UAE to Auckland from daily to 3 times a week between March 17 and March 30. This is a temporary measure due to lower-than-normal passenger numbers.

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- While flights from Bahrain remain suspended at present, Gulf Air is planning special departure flights ([www.gulfair.com/special-flights](http://www.gulfair.com/special-flights)) from Dammam in Saudi Arabia to destinations including London, Bangkok, and Mumbai. Gulf Air will provide bus transfers between Bahrain and Dammam.
- We continue to closely coordinate with our s6(a) Consular partners, who are winding down their operations in the region.
- Our overall assessment is that most New Zealanders who wish to leave Gulf states have now done so, although the ongoing uncertainty and potential for the security environment to deteriorate may prompt a further wave of requests for assistance. Consular assistance is now moving toward more complex cases, rather than New Zealanders requiring immediate assistance to depart.

### Assisted departures

- Bahrain – the planned assisted departure of New Zealanders from Bahrain on Monday 16 March was cancelled due to a lack of demand. The 5 New Zealanders registered to depart decided not to take up the assisted departure option.

### NEW ZEALAND INC POSTS AND PERSONNEL OFFSHORE

- There have been no changes in the status of the safety of our personnel since the previous update. Ramadan/Eid al-Fitr closures continue this week. Most government agencies, including Foreign Ministries, are closed during this holiday period.
- ABD and DUB: Staff continue to shelter in place in Abu Dhabi and Dubai (UAE). Both offices are closed to the public although staff in Abu Dhabi are able to go into the office for essential tasks.
- RIY: Our post in Riyadh is open and, like Abu Dhabi, is supplemented by surge staff. Post continue to review posture in line with the security situation and likeminded partners.
- CAI and ANK: Our posts continue to be unaffected by the kinetic action.

### DEPLOYMENTS

- s6(a)
- The NZDF continues to closely monitor the situation and remains in direct communications with deployed personnel. Personnel are in locations with appropriate security measures and will remain unless operational requirements change. The Multi-National Force and Observers (Egypt) and UN Truce Supervision Organisation (Lebanon/Syria/Israel) missions remain operational with all other deployed missions in the region suspended due to current hostilities. Focus for the NZDF now is to resume mission outputs as soon as possible.

Note: This is incorrect. The correct information is the movements for all other deployed missions were suspended

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### Q&A

#### Military

If asked about Trump Tweet to send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open:

- At this point, NZ has not been asked by the US to send military support to the area.
- If we received a request, this would be a matter for Cabinet. And I am not going to speculate right now.
- We would need to look carefully at how any international coalition develops before making any decisions about a possible NZ contribution. As I have said, this would be a matter for Cabinet.
- A proportion of NZ trade transits through or originates from the Middle East region. Recent trade negotiations and agreements mean NZ's security and economic interests are increasingly linked to the Middle East.

Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel's military action?

- NZ is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.

What has NZ done in the past?

- New Zealand has contributed to maritime security in the Middle East since the 1990s. This commitment remains directly linked to our economic, trade and geostrategic interests, and our longstanding support for international law, including freedom of navigation.
- One good example has been our contributions to the Combined Maritime Force which is responsible for coordinating multinational activities to counter smuggling, piracy and terrorism in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.

Would New Zealand consider providing support in other ways? For example, the types of defensive support to Gulf states that France or the UK are providing? Or the type of support that Australia is providing?

- We don't have the type of equipment that these states are providing (e.g. fighter jets, advanced air defence systems).
- We have in the past participated in international efforts to support freedom of navigation in the region (like the Red Sea). If a future request along those lines was made, and an international operation is stood up, we would consider it.

What do you think of US attack on Kharg island? Does this mean the US is going after Iran's oil?

- It is clear the US is trying to stop Iran's economic warfare.
- It is not for us to comment on the US' motivations. New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution .

Reports emerging that US didn't expect Iran to attack energy infrastructure/block Strait of Hormuz? Is the US at fault for these developments?

- Reiterate that New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution .
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

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What does New Zealand think about reports Iran is mining the Strait of Hormuz?

- This is extremely worrying.
- There are clear international rules that say states cannot disrupt or pose dangers to civilian shipping in this way.
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

Do you support/condemn the US and Israeli military action in Iran?

- New Zealand's efforts are focused on the safety of our people in the region.

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

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

Legal

Does New Zealand consider the US and Israel's strikes on Iran legal?

- The US and Israel have already explained why they have done this. The US has asserted self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- The US and Israel acted based on their own assessment and information. New Zealand was not privy to that.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations.
- New Zealand will continue to advocate for the Iranian leadership to seek a negotiated solution.

What does New Zealand think about Israel's invasion of Lebanon?

- We're concerned by the escalation of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel.
- Hezbollah has threatened Israel for decades and New Zealand has designated Hezbollah as a terrorist entity.
- However, Israel's response right now is heavy-handed.
- We are particularly concerned that hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced.
- We are at serious risk of a vicious retaliatory cycle that will only raise the temperature further.
- We agree with the Lebanese Government that there need to be peace talks.
- Israel and Hezbollah reached a ceasefire agreement in 2024 and we need to get back to that.

Does New Zealand consider Israel's invasion of Lebanon to be legal/justified?

- Israel has already explained why it has done this.
- It is for Israel, not New Zealand, to make the case.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations. This includes respect for Lebanon's territorial integrity.

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

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

The Government says it wants to protect civilians. Why hasn't it condemned Israel's bombing of oil refineries, or the US's bombing of a girl's school?

- I understand the US is doing an investigation into the bombing of the girl's school and has committed to releasing the results. We will have to wait for that, but no matter what happened, it is certainly an absolute tragedy.
- Like the rest of the international community, we are very worried about the way this conflict is escalating. Civilian deaths are deeply concerning.
- There are clear international rules that govern conflict. There is no question for New Zealand that international law and international humanitarian law have to be observed.
- Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected.

NZ Embassies in Middle East

Will NZ pull staff out of ME Posts (e.g. UAE) like Australia and others are doing?

- New Zealand continues to monitor and assess the security situation in the region.
- New Zealand does not have an Embassy in Israel [if asked: or Jordan or Qatar].
- Our Embassy in the UAE is operational but not currently receiving in-person visitors.
- For security reasons we won't comment on staff movements.

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**KEY MESSAGES - UNCLASSIFIED**

- New Zealand wants to see this conflict end as soon as possible.
- We all agree on the threat posed by Iran. Its behaviour during this conflict and before, is unacceptable.
- The further this conflict goes on, the worse the impacts – on civilians in the region and on the global economy.
- We want to see de-escalation and a return to negotiation.
- [If asked – Strait of Hormuz mining/targeting ships] This is a worrying escalation. Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.
- [If asked – NZ participation in any freedom of navigation efforts and/or whether this would mean supporting US and Israel’s military action.] Cabinet would need to look carefully at how any international coalition develops before making any decisions about a possible NZ contribution.
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- [If asked: whether New Zealand will remove Russia Sanctions] The Minister of Foreign Affairs has been clear: our sanctions are in place to curtail oil revenues fuelling Putin’s illegal war against Ukraine. While we continue to monitor the situation, we’re confident our current settings remain appropriate. The Ministry continues to monitor the situation closely, which includes engaging with partner countries on sanctions issues, assessing international developments, and our own settings. This is an ongoing process.

Consular Messaging

- New Zealanders who can, should leave the region on commercial flights or by road now. That will be the fastest way to safely depart.
- Commercial flights are operating out of UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, and most recently resumed from Qatar.
- The situation remains uncertain and the current conflict could escalate at any time, cutting off departure options without warning.
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### KEY DEVELOPMENTS OVERNIGHT

- President Trump had said Iran's military has been "literally obliterated" after more than 7,000 strikes. Iran continues to conduct retaliatory strikes, with an increasing focus on regional energy and economic infrastructure.
- President Trump also expressed surprise that Iran had attacked its Gulf neighbours, saying "nobody expected" Iran's leaders to fire missiles in retaliation for US-Israel strikes.
- An IRGC spokesperson said Iran's core military capabilities remain intact, disputing US claims of decisive degradation.
- Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has denied US media reports that Washington has re-established communication with Tehran through Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff.
- Iran continues to widen and intensify its regional retaliation, with fresh drone and missile activity overnight near energy and transport facilities in the UAE and intercepted attacks in Saudi Arabia
- Dubai International Airport was briefly shut after an Iranian drone strike ignited a fuel-tank fire, with UAE authorities also temporarily closing national airspace as an "exceptional precautionary measure". This was the third attack on the airport since the conflict began. Limited airport operations have since resumed, though regional flight disruptions persist.
- President Trump continues to pressure allies to join naval operations to secure freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, warning they face "a very bad future" if they fail to support efforts to keep the Strait open.
- European states are responding cautiously to President Trump's request. Germany has ruled out military participation, and the Dutch Prime Minister said the Netherlands would keep an "open mind" to any request, but it would be "very difficult to launch a successful mission there in the short term". Italian and Greek leaders have also indicated that they will not participate. France had earlier said it may participate once the situation stabilises.
- UK Prime Minister Starmer said "let me be clear: that won't be, and it's never been envisioned to be, a NATO mission". Starmer said the UK will not be drawn into the "wider war", but was giving consideration to using its mine hunting drones, already in the region.
- The Australian Transport Minister yesterday said Australia will not be participating. There has been no comment yet on the issue from Foreign Minister Wong or Defence Minister Marles.

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MARITIME SECURITY

- There have not been any further developments on any ask for New Zealand to contribute to a maritime security operation. New Zealand has not been approached by the US to contribute to a maritime operation, s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- s6(a), s6(b)(i)
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CONSULAR DEVELOPMENTS

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- While flights from Bahrain remain suspended at present, Gulf Air is planning special departure flights ([www.gulfair.com/special-flights](http://www.gulfair.com/special-flights)) from Dammam in Saudi Arabia to destinations including London, Bangkok, and Mumbai. Gulf Air will provide bus transfers between Bahrain and Dammam.
- We continue to closely coordinate with our s6(a) Consular partners, who are winding down their operations in the region.
- Our overall assessment is that most New Zealanders who wish to leave Gulf states have now done so, although the ongoing uncertainty and potential for the security environment to deteriorate may prompt a further wave of requests for assistance. Consular assistance is now moving toward more complex cases, rather than New Zealanders requiring immediate assistance to depart.

### Assisted departures

- Bahrain – the planned assisted departure of New Zealanders from Bahrain on Monday 16 March was cancelled due to a lack of demand. The 5 New Zealanders registered to depart decided not to take up the assisted departure option.

### NEW ZEALAND INC POSTS AND PERSONNEL OFFSHORE

- There have been no changes in the status of the safety of our personnel since the previous update. Ramadan/Eid al-Fitr closures continue this week. Most government agencies, including Foreign Ministries, are closed during this holiday period.
- ABD and DUB: Staff continue to shelter in place in Abu Dhabi and Dubai (UAE). Both offices are closed to the public although staff in Abu Dhabi are able to go into the office for essential tasks.
- RIY: Our post in Riyadh is open and, like Abu Dhabi, is supplemented by surge staff. Post continue to review posture in line with the security situation and likeminded partners.
- CAI and ANK: Our posts continue to be unaffected by the kinetic action.

### DEPLOYMENTS

- s6(a)
- The NZDF continues to closely monitor the situation and remains in direct communications with deployed personnel. Personnel are in locations with appropriate security measures and will remain unless operational requirements change. The Multi-National Force and Observers (Egypt) and UN Truce Supervision Organisation (Lebanon/Syria/Israel) missions remain operational with all other deployed missions in the region suspended due to current hostilities. Focus for the NZDF now is to resume mission outputs as soon as possible.

Note: This is incorrect. The correct information is the movements for all other deployed missions were suspended

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### Q&A

#### Military

If asked about Trump Tweet to send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open:

- At this point, NZ has not been asked by the US to send military support to the area.
- If we received a request, this would be a matter for Cabinet. And I am not going to speculate right now.
- We would need to look carefully at how any international coalition develops before making any decisions about a possible NZ contribution. As I have said, this would be a matter for Cabinet.
- A proportion of NZ trade transits through or originates from the Middle East region. Recent trade negotiations and agreements mean NZ's security and economic interests are increasingly linked to the Middle East.

Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel's military action?

- NZ is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.

What has NZ done in the past?

- New Zealand has contributed to maritime security in the Middle East since the 1990s. This commitment remains directly linked to our economic, trade and geostrategic interests, and our longstanding support for international law, including freedom of navigation.
- One good example has been our contributions to the Combined Maritime Force which is responsible for coordinating multinational activities to counter smuggling, piracy and terrorism in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.

Would New Zealand consider providing support in other ways? For example, the types of defensive support to Gulf states that France or the UK are providing? Or the type of support that Australia is providing?

- We don't have the type of equipment that these states are providing (e.g. fighter jets, advanced air defence systems).
- We have in the past participated in international efforts to support freedom of navigation in the region (like the Red Sea). If a future request along those lines was made, and an international operation is stood up, we would consider it.

What do you think of US attack on Kharg island? Does this mean the US is going after Iran's oil?

- It is clear the US is trying to stop Iran's economic warfare.
- It is not for us to comment on the US' motivations. New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution .

Reports emerging that US didn't expect Iran to attack energy infrastructure/block Strait of Hormuz? Is the US at fault for these developments?

- Reiterate that New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution .
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

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What does New Zealand think about reports Iran is mining the Strait of Hormuz?

- This is extremely worrying.
- There are clear international rules that say states cannot disrupt or pose dangers to civilian shipping in this way.
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

Do you support/condemn the US and Israeli military action in Iran?

- New Zealand's efforts are focused on the safety of our people in the region.

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

Legal

Does New Zealand consider the US and Israel's strikes on Iran legal?

- The US and Israel have already explained why they have done this. The US has asserted self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- The US and Israel acted based on their own assessment and information. New Zealand was not privy to that.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations.
- New Zealand will continue to advocate for the Iranian leadership to seek a negotiated solution.

What does New Zealand think about Israel's invasion of Lebanon?

- We're concerned by the escalation of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel.
- Hezbollah has threatened Israel for decades and New Zealand has designated Hezbollah as a terrorist entity.
- However, Israel's response right now is heavy-handed.
- We are particularly concerned that hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced.
- We are at serious risk of a vicious retaliatory cycle that will only raise the temperature further.
- We agree with the Lebanese Government that there need to be peace talks.
- Israel and Hezbollah reached a ceasefire agreement in 2024 and we need to get back to that.

Does New Zealand consider Israel's invasion of Lebanon to be legal/justified?

- Israel has already explained why it has done this.
- It is for Israel, not New Zealand, to make the case.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations. This includes respect for Lebanon's territorial integrity.

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

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

The Government says it wants to protect civilians. Why hasn't it condemned Israel's bombing of oil refineries, or the US's bombing of a girl's school?

- I understand the US is doing an investigation into the bombing of the girl's school and has committed to releasing the results. We will have to wait for that, but no matter what happened, it is certainly an absolute tragedy.
- Like the rest of the international community, we are very worried about the way this conflict is escalating. Civilian deaths are deeply concerning.
- There are clear international rules that govern conflict. There is no question for New Zealand that international law and international humanitarian law have to be observed.
- Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected.

NZ Embassies in Middle East

Will NZ pull staff out of ME Posts (e.g. UAE) like Australia and others are doing?

- New Zealand continues to monitor and assess the security situation in the region.
- New Zealand does not have an Embassy in Israel [if asked: or Jordan or Qatar].
- Our Embassy in the UAE is operational but not currently receiving in-person visitors.
- For security reasons we won't comment on staff movements.

Proactively Released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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## US/ISRAEL/IRAN CONFLICT

#4 MFAT DAILY UPDATE – Wednesday 18 March

**KEY MESSAGES - UNCLASSIFIED**

- We want this crisis to end as quickly as possible and move to a negotiated solution.
- We all agree on the threat posed by Iran. Its behavior during this conflict and before, is unacceptable.
- Iran's ongoing retaliatory attacks on its neighbours are dangerous and unacceptable.
- The further this conflict goes on, the worse the impacts – on civilians in the region and on the global economy.
- [If asked – Strait of Hormuz mining/targeting ships] This is a worrying escalation. Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.
- [If asked – NZ participation in any freedom of navigation efforts and/or whether this would mean supporting US and Israel's military action.] **At this point, NZ has not been asked by the US to send military support to the area. If we receive a request, this will be a matter for Cabinet. I am not going to speculate right now.**
- [Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel's military action?] New Zealand is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.
- [If asked: whether New Zealand will remove Russia Sanctions] New Zealand has been clear: our sanctions are in place to curtail oil revenues fuelling Putin's illegal war against Ukraine. While we continue to monitor the situation, we're confident our current settings remain appropriate. The Ministry continues to monitor the situation closely, which includes engaging with partner countries on sanctions issues, assessing international developments, and our own settings. This is an ongoing process.

## Impacts on the Pacific

- We are monitoring the impact of the conflict on the Pacific.
- We know that there are risks for the region – fuel imports are vitally important for Pacific Island countries and they are often at the end of long supply chains.
- [If raised: additional support?] New Zealand has not received any requests for assistance at this stage. Depending on how the situation develops, we will assess what support we can provide to our Pacific partners if needed.
- [If raised: consular response] We've been in contact with Pacific partners to see if we can help Pacific nationals get home. We've provided support in a small number of cases

## Consular Messaging

- The situation remains uncertain and the current conflict could escalate at any time, cutting off departure options without warning. New Zealanders who can, should leave the region on commercial flights or by road now. That will be the fastest way to safely depart.
- The Ministry continues to support New Zealanders in the region seeking assistance, though our assisted departures have now wound down following the resumption of commercial flights.
- [If raised: C130J returns to NZ] **The second NZDF aircraft is on its way back to New Zealand. The aircraft is no longer needed as commercial flight options are widely available in the region.**
- [If raised] **No New Zealanders returned with either C130 as commercial flights are available.**

END OF PUBLIC MESSAGES. RESTRICTED MATERIAL BEGINS ON THE NEXT PAGE

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### KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- Iran has confirmed that Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, was killed in an Israeli airstrike.
- A projectile hit an area near Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant. Iran has informed the IAEA that there was no damage to the plant or injuries to staff.
- EU Member States have refused President Trump's call for their countries to help secure the Strait of Hormuz. Many were fiercely critical of this demand, with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, Kaja Kallas, saying "this is not Europe's war".
- The war is continuing to spill over into Iraq with both Iranian rocket and drone attacks on US diplomatic and military sites increasing, as well as US strikes on Iran aligned armed groups.
- The UN World Food Programme estimates an additional 45 million people are projected to face acute hunger if the US-Israeli war on Iran continues until June. China has announced it will provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Iran, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq to help alleviate the humanitarian plight faced by the local populations.
- US Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Joe Kent, announced his resignation this morning, stating he "cannot in good conscience support the ongoing war in Iran. Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation... We started this war due to pressure from Israel".
- s6(a)
- s6(a), s6(b)(i)

s6(a)

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s6(a)

MARITIME SECURITY

- New Zealand has not been approached by the US to contribute to a maritime operation, s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- s6(a)
- s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

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### CONSULAR DEVELOPMENTS

- The consular operation to assist New Zealanders to depart Gulf states is nearing conclusion. As at **15:45pm NZT on Wednesday 18 March**, the number of New Zealanders in the region registered on SafeTravel is 3,615 . Current numbers are: UAE 2,167, Qatar 472, Saudi Arabia **440**, Jordan **54**, Kuwait 97, Bahrain 81, Iran 41, Iraq 32, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories 76, Lebanon **27**, Egypt 96 and Oman 32.
- Commercial flight options for departure from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are readily available. New Zealanders continue to take up flight options, but flights are well below carrying capacity. Emirates is reducing services from the UAE to Auckland from daily, to 3 times a week, between March 17 and March 30. This is a temporary measure due to lower-than-normal passenger numbers.
- While flights from Bahrain remain suspended at present, Gulf Air is planning special departure flights ([www.gulfair.com/special-flights](http://www.gulfair.com/special-flights)) from Dammam in Saudi Arabia to destinations including London, Bangkok, and Mumbai. Gulf Air will provide bus transfers between Bahrain and Dammam.
- We continue to closely coordinate with our <sup>s6(a)</sup> Consular partners, who are winding down their operations in the region.
- Our overall assessment is that most New Zealanders who wish to leave Gulf states have now done so, although the ongoing uncertainty and potential for the security environment to deteriorate may prompt a further wave of requests for assistance. Consular assistance is now moving toward more complex cases, rather than New Zealanders requiring immediate assistance to depart.

### Assisted departures

- Bahrain – the planned assisted departure of New Zealanders from Bahrain on **Monday 16 March** was cancelled due to a lack of demand. The 5 New Zealanders registered to depart decided not to take up the assisted departure option.

### NEW ZEALAND INC POSTS AND PERSONNEL OFFSHORE

- There have been no changes in the status of the safety of our personnel since the previous sit rep.
- <sup>s6(d)</sup>
- ABD and DUB: Staff continue to shelter in place in Abu Dhabi and Dubai (UAE). Both offices are closed to the public although staff in Abu Dhabi are able to go into the office for essential tasks.

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- RIY: Our post in Riyadh is open and, like Abu Dhabi, is supplemented by surge staff. Post continue to review posture in line with the security situation and likeminded partners.
- CAI and ANK: Our posts continue to be unaffected by the kinetic action.

### DEPLOYMENTS

- s6(a)
- The NZDF continues to closely monitor the situation and remains in direct communications with deployed personnel. Personnel are in locations with appropriate security measures and will remain unless operational requirements change. The Multi-National Force and Observers (Egypt) and UN Truce Supervision Organisation (Lebanon/Syria/Israel) missions remain operational with all other deployed missions in the region suspended due to current hostilities. Focus for the NZDF now is to resume mission outputs as soon as possible.

Note: This is incorrect. The correct information is the movements for all other deployed missions were suspended

### Q&A

#### Military

If asked about Trump Tweet to send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open:

- At this point, NZ has not been asked by the US to send military support to the area.
- If we received a request, this would be a matter for Cabinet. And I am not going to speculate right now.
- We would need to look carefully at how any international coalition develops before making any decisions about a possible NZ contribution. As I have said, this would be a matter for Cabinet.
- A proportion of NZ trade transits through or originates from the Middle East region. Recent trade negotiations and agreements mean NZ's security and economic interests are increasingly linked to the Middle East.

Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel's military action?

- NZ is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.

What has NZ done in the past?

- New Zealand has contributed to maritime security in the Middle East since the 1990s. This commitment remains directly linked to our economic, trade and geostrategic interests, and our longstanding support for international law, including freedom of navigation.
- One good example has been our contributions to the Combined Maritime Force which is responsible for coordinating multinational activities to counter smuggling, piracy and terrorism in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.

Would New Zealand consider providing support in other ways? For example, the types of defensive support to Gulf states that France or the UK are providing? Or the type of support that Australia is providing?

- We don't have the type of equipment that these states are providing (e.g. fighter jets, advanced air defence systems).

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- We have in the past participated in international efforts to support freedom of navigation in the region (like the Red Sea). If a future request along those lines was made, and an international operation is stood up, we would consider it.

What do you think of US attack on Kharg island? Does this mean the US is going after Iran's oil?

- It is clear the US is trying to stop Iran's economic warfare.
- It is not for us to comment on the US' motivations. New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution .

Reports emerging that US didn't expect Iran to attack energy infrastructure/block Strait of Hormuz? Is the US at fault for these developments?

- Reiterate that New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution .
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

What does New Zealand think about reports Iran is mining the Strait of Hormuz?

- This is extremely worrying.
- There are clear international rules that say states cannot disrupt or pose dangers to civilian shipping in this way.
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

Do you support/condemn the US and Israeli military action in Iran?

- New Zealand's efforts are focused on the safety of our people in the region.

[If pressed]:

- There is no doubt that Iran has defied the expectations of the international community for decades. Its behaviour needs to be addressed and contained. That is why the US and Israel have taken action.
- We have concerns about the way the conflict is unfolding. Civilians are being directly affected.
- New Zealand expects that all parties must comply with international law, including international humanitarian law. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected.

Legal

Does New Zealand consider the US and Israel's strikes on Iran legal?

- The US and Israel have already explained why they have done this. The US has asserted self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- The US and Israel acted based on their own assessment and information. New Zealand was not privy to that.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations.
- New Zealand will continue to advocate for the Iranian leadership to seek a negotiated solution.

What does New Zealand think about Israel's invasion of Lebanon?

- We're concerned by the escalation of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel.
- Hezbollah has threatened Israel for decades and New Zealand has designated Hezbollah as a terrorist entity.
- However, Israel's response right now is heavy-handed.
- We are particularly concerned that hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced.

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- We are at serious risk of a vicious retaliatory cycle that will only raise the temperature further.
- We agree with the Lebanese Government that there need to be peace talks.
- Israel and Hezbollah reached a ceasefire agreement in 2024 and we need to get back to that.

Does New Zealand consider Israel's invasion of Lebanon to be legal/justified?

- Israel has already explained why it has done this.
- It is for Israel, not New Zealand, to make the case.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations. This includes respect for Lebanon's territorial integrity.

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

The Government says it wants to protect civilians. Why hasn't it condemned Israel's bombing of oil refineries, or the US's bombing of a girl's school?

- I understand the US is doing an investigation into the bombing of the girl's school and has committed to releasing the results. We will have to wait for that, but no matter what happened, it is certainly an absolute tragedy.
- Like the rest of the international community, we are very worried about the way this conflict escalating. Civilian deaths are deeply concerning.
- There are clear international rules that govern conflict. There is no question for New Zealand that international law and international humanitarian law have to be observed.
- Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected.

NZ Embassies in Middle East

Will NZ pull staff out of ME Posts (e.g. UAE) like Australia and others are doing?

- New Zealand continues to monitor and assess the security situation in the region.
- New Zealand does not have an Embassy in Israel [if asked: or Jordan or Qatar].
- Our Embassy in the UAE is operational but not currently receiving in-person visitors.
- For security reasons we won't comment on staff movements.

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## US/ISRAEL/IRAN CONFLICT

#5 MFAT DAILY UPDATE – Thursday 19 March

## KEY MESSAGES - UNCLASSIFIED

- We want this crisis to end as quickly as possible and move to a negotiated solution.
- We are concerned about the increasing death toll and emphasize that international law, including international humanitarian law, must be upheld.
- Iran's ongoing retaliatory attacks on its neighbours are dangerous and unacceptable.
- **The attacks on gas fields by Israel and Iran take the region further into destructive conflict. These attacks against infrastructure need to stop.**
- [If asked – Strait of Hormuz mining/targeting ships] **New Zealand remains concerned about the situation.** Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.
- [If asked – NZ participation in any freedom of navigation efforts] New Zealand has not been asked to send military support to the area. If we received a request, this would be a matter for Cabinet. I am not going to speculate right now.
- [Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel's military action?] New Zealand is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.
- [If asked: whether New Zealand will remove Russia Sanctions] New Zealand has been clear: our sanctions are in place to curtail oil revenues fuelling Putin's illegal war against Ukraine. While we continue to monitor the situation, we're confident our current settings remain appropriate.

## Impacts on the Pacific

- We are monitoring the impact of the conflict on the Pacific.
- We know that there are risks for the region – fuel imports are vitally important for Pacific Island countries, and they are often at the end of long supply chains.
- [If raised: additional support?] Depending on how the situation develops, we will assess what support we can provide to our Pacific partners if needed.
- s6(b)(i)

- [If raised: consular response] We've been in contact with Pacific partners to see if we can help Pacific nationals get home. We've provided support in a small number of cases

## Consular Messaging

- New Zealanders who can, should leave the region on commercial flights or by road now. That will be the fastest way to safely depart.
- The situation remains uncertain and the current conflict could escalate at any time, cutting off departure options without warning. New Zealanders who can, should leave the region on commercial flights or by road now. That will be the fastest way to safely depart.
- Commercial flights are operating out of UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, and Qatar.
- [If raised: C130J Hercules returns to NZ] **One of the two NZDF aircraft deployed as a contingency has returned to New Zealand and the second is enroute back to NZ. They have not been required as commercial flights remain widely available. Consular surge teams remain deployed.**

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END OF PUBLIC MESSAGES. RESTRICTED MATERIAL BEGINS ON THE NEXT PAGE

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- Overnight, Israel attacked Iran's South Pars gas field facilities. Iran retaliated by attacking gas fields in Qatar and Saudi Arabia publicly warning that they would respond to any attacks on several oil and gas facilities by attacking such facilities in the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.
- President Trump via Truth Social has distanced the US from the Israeli attack on South Pars but warned that should Iran continue its retaliatory attacks on Qatar that the US will "blow up the entirety of the South Pars gas field at an amount of strength and power that Iran has never seen before".
- Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal warned Tehran that Gulf patience was not "unlimited" following Iran's retaliatory attacks on Saudi oil refineries. Qatar also confirmed "extensive damage" to facilities in its Ras Laffan industrial city and subsequently declared all Iranian military and security personnel persona non grata.
- The UAE has condemned Iran's "terrorist attacks" on its Habshan gas facility and Bab oil field. Oman continues to maintain its traditional de-escalatory, mediating posture.
- Israel has killed three high profile Iranian officials including Senior Security Chief Ali Larjani, Basij Force Commander Gholamreza Soleimani and Senior Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib. Iran has responded with renewed attacks on Tel Aviv.
- Israeli strikes on Lebanon are no longer confined to Southern Lebanon or southern areas of Beirut – traditionally controlled by Hezbollah. Over a million people (19 percent of the population) are now internally displaced with rising humanitarian needs.

s6(a)

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s6(a)

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

MARITIME SECURITY

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

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- New Zealand has not been approached to contribute to a maritime operation, s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- s6(a)
- s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

### CONSULAR DEVELOPMENTS

- The consular operation to assist New Zealanders to depart Gulf states is nearing conclusion. As at **07.37am NZT on Thursday 19 March**, the number of New Zealanders in the region registered on SafeTravel is **3,608**. Current numbers are: UAE **2,165**, Qatar **473**, Saudi Arabia **439**, Jordan 54, Kuwait 97, Bahrain 81, Iran 41, Iraq 32, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories **75**, Lebanon **25**, Egypt **94**, and Oman 32.
- Commercial flight options for departure from the UAE and Qatar are readily available. New Zealanders continue to take up flight options, but flights are well below carrying capacity. Emirates is reducing services from the UAE to Auckland from daily, to 3 times a week, between March 17 and March 30. This is a temporary measure due to lower-than-normal passenger numbers.
- While flights from Bahrain remain suspended at present, Gulf Air is planning special departure flights ([www.gulfair.com/special-flights](http://www.gulfair.com/special-flights)) from Dammam in Saudi Arabia to destinations including London, Bangkok, and Mumbai. Gulf Air will provide bus transfers between Bahrain and Dammam.
- We continue to closely coordinate with our s6(a) Consular partners, who are winding down their operations in the region.
- Our overall assessment is that most New Zealanders who wish to leave Gulf states have now done so, although the ongoing uncertainty and potential for the security environment to deteriorate may prompt a further wave of requests for assistance. Consular assistance is now moving toward more complex cases, rather than New Zealanders requiring immediate assistance to depart.

Assisted departures

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- Bahrain – the planned assisted departure of New Zealanders from Bahrain on Monday 16 March was cancelled due to a lack of demand. The 5 New Zealanders registered to depart decided not to take up the assisted departure option.

### NEW ZEALAND INC POSTS AND PERSONNEL OFFSHORE

- There have been no changes in the status of the safety of our personnel since the previous update.
- s6(d)
- ABD and Dubai: s6(d)  
Both offices are closed to the public although staff in Abu Dhabi are able to go into the office for essential tasks.
- RIY: Staff were required to shelter in place at the post overnight due to incoming attack notifications and loud bangs that were heard. Current information indicates that the projectiles were intercepted and landed outside of city limits. Post remains open to the public and, like Abu Dhabi, is supplemented by surge staff. Post continues to review posture in line with the security situation and likeminded partners.
- CAI and ANK: Our posts continue to be unaffected by the kinetic action.

### DEPLOYMENTS

- s6(a)
- The NZDF continues to closely monitor the situation and remains in direct communications with deployed personnel. Personnel are in locations with appropriate security measures and will remain unless operational requirements change. The Multi-National Force and Observers (Egypt) and UN Truce Supervision Organisation (Lebanon/Syria/Israel) missions remain operational with all other deployed missions in the region suspended due to current hostilities. Focus for the NZDF now is to resume mission outputs as soon as possible.

Note: This is incorrect. The correct information is the movements for all other deployed missions were suspended

### Q&A

#### Military

If asked about Trump Tweet to send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open:

- At this point, NZ has not been asked by the US to send military support to the area.
- If we received a request, this would be a matter for Cabinet. And I am not going to speculate right now.

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- We would need to look carefully at how any international coalition develops before making any decisions about a possible NZ contribution. As I have said, this would be a matter for Cabinet.
- A proportion of NZ trade transits through or originates from the Middle East region. Recent trade negotiations and agreements mean NZ's security and economic interests are increasingly linked to the Middle East.

Would this mean we would be supporting US and Israel's military action?

- NZ is not taking part in the conflict and does not intend to.

What has NZ done in the past?

- New Zealand has contributed to maritime security in the Middle East since the 1990s. This commitment remains directly linked to our economic, trade and geostrategic interests, and our longstanding support for international law, including freedom of navigation.
- **Although different**, one good example has been our contributions to the Combined Maritime Force which is responsible for coordinating multinational activities to counter smuggling, piracy and terrorism in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.

Would New Zealand consider providing support in other ways? For example, the types of defensive support to Gulf states that France or the UK are providing? Or the type of support that Australia is providing?

- We don't have the type of equipment that these states are providing (e.g. fighter jets, advanced air defence systems).
- We have in the past participated in international efforts to support freedom of navigation in the region (like the Red Sea). If a future request along those lines was made, and an international operation is stood up, we would consider it.

What do you think of US attack on Kharg island? Does this mean the US is going after Iran's oil?

- It is clear the US is trying to stop Iran's economic warfare.
- It is not for us to comment on the US' motivations. New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution.

Reports emerging that US didn't expect Iran to attack energy infrastructure/block Strait of Hormuz? Is the US at fault for these developments?

- Reiterate that New Zealand wants to see this crisis end quickly and for there to be a negotiated solution .
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

What does New Zealand think about reports Iran is mining the Strait of Hormuz?

- This is extremely worrying.
- There are clear international rules that say states cannot disrupt or pose dangers to civilian shipping in this way.
- Freedom of navigation needs to be restored to the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible.

Do you support/condemn the US and Israeli military action in Iran?

- New Zealand's efforts are focused on the safety of our people in the region.

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

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

Legal

Does New Zealand consider the US and Israel's strikes on Iran legal?

- The US and Israel have already explained why they have done this. The US has asserted self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- The US and Israel acted based on their own assessment and information. New Zealand was not privy to that.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations.
- New Zealand will continue to advocate for the Iranian leadership to seek a negotiated solution.

What does New Zealand think about Israel's invasion of Lebanon?

- We're concerned by the escalation of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel.
- Hezbollah has threatened Israel for decades and New Zealand has designated Hezbollah as a terrorist entity.
- However, Israel's response right now is heavy-handed.
- We are particularly concerned that hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced.
- We are at serious risk of a vicious retaliatory cycle that will only raise the temperature further.
- We agree with the Lebanese Government that there need to be peace talks.
- Israel and Hezbollah reached a ceasefire agreement in 2024 and we need to get back to that.

Does New Zealand consider Israel's invasion of Lebanon to be legal/justified?

- Israel has already explained why it has done this.
- It is for Israel, not New Zealand, to make the case.
- We have been clear that all parties must adhere to their international legal obligations. This includes respect for Lebanon's territorial integrity.

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

The Government says it wants to protect civilians. Why hasn't it condemned Israel's bombing of oil refineries, or the US's bombing of a girl's school?

- I understand the US is doing an investigation into the bombing of the girl's school and has committed to releasing the results. We will have to wait for that, but no matter what happened, it is certainly an absolute tragedy.
- Like the rest of the international community, we are very worried about the way this conflict escalating. Civilian deaths are deeply concerning.

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- There are clear international rules that govern conflict. There is no question for New Zealand that international law and international humanitarian law have to be observed.
- Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected.

NZ Embassies in Middle East

Will NZ pull staff out of ME Posts (e.g. UAE) like Australia and others are doing?

- New Zealand continues to monitor and assess the security situation in the region.
- New Zealand does not have an Embassy in Israel [if asked: or Jordan or Qatar].
- Our Embassy in the UAE is operational but not currently receiving in-person visitors.
- For security reasons we won't comment on staff movements.

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