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10 JUNE 2019

New Zealand to withdraw from Iraq in June 2020



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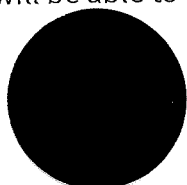
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New Zealand will conclude its non-combat Building Partner Capacity (BPC) mission at Taji Military Complex in Iraq in June 2020, when full responsibility for basic training will be handed over to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Minister of Foreign Affairs Winston Peters and Minister of Defence Ron Mark announced today.

New Zealand currently deploys up to 95 personnel to the BPC at Taji. Following recent Cabinet decisions this will reduce to a maximum of 75 from July 2019 and 45 from January 2020, before the mission's completion by June 2020.

New Zealand and Australia have been jointly delivering training to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) at Taji since 2015, when New Zealand first deployed to Iraq as part of the multinational Defeat-ISIS Coalition. Over 44,000 ISF personnel have been trained at Taji since 2015.

"Four years ago New Zealand made a commitment to the Iraqi Government and to the Coalition to train the ISF at Taji and lift their capability to defeat and prevent the resurgence of ISIS. Over the next 12 months, New Zealand will be able to wind down and conclude that commitment," Jacinda Ardern said.



"The New Zealand and Australian troops at Taji have worked hard, not only to provide training, but also to ensure that the ISF are well placed to take over this commitment at Taji in the near future. The goal of any training mission is to ensure that it becomes a sustainable programme."

"Significant progress has been made in this area, which will allow the mission to reduce in numbers and conclude within the next year, having successfully achieved what we went in to do. This is an encouraging evolution and a success not only for us but also for the ISF personnel who have trained hard to gain the skills to become a modern military force," said Ron Mark.

Alongside the deployment to Taji, the New Zealand Defence Force will continue in a reduced number of support roles within the Defeat-ISIS Coalition in the region. Cabinet will consider these positions again by next June.

New Zealand will however increase its stabilisation funding contribution to Iraq to approximately NZ\$3 million per annum for the next three years (from NZ\$2.4m in 2018-19) to help affected communities recover and rebuild following the conflict with ISIS.

Stabilisation funding will come from within MFAT's overseas aid and development fund, and will contribute to what has been estimated to be a US\$87 billion rebuild of Iraq.

"Despite its territorial defeat in Iraq in December 2017 and Syria in March 2019, it is clear that ISIS remains a threat and Iraq requires ongoing international support as it moves towards recovery and stabilisation," said Winston Peters.

"As large numbers of Iraqi people return home and begin to rebuild their lives and communities, New Zealand's targeted funding support can make a meaningful contribution towards this."



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