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New Zealand troops perform a haka in Timor-Leste (Photo: Brook Sabin/3 News)

By Brook Sabin

The New Zealand Defence Force is pulling out of its longest operation since the Vietnam War.

Timor-Leste, formerly known as East Timor, has been the scene of murder, riots and violence for more than a decade, but the decision has been made for New Zealand to leave.

The New Zealand troops first landed in the area 13 years ago. The soldiers arrived in the midst of mass violence, as pro- and anti-Indonesian factions clashed.

After pulling out in 2005, a fragile and ill-equipped government had little hope of quelling riots which broke out a year later and the NZDF was once again called upon, and has been there ever since.

The latest contingent of soldiers arrived six months ago and were shocked to see how the area had changed. Many personnel had been there during 2006, patrolling and heavily armed. One told 3 News he feared for his life each time they went out, not knowing who was dangerous and where the next bullet would fly from.

Dr Dan Murphy has been based in Timor since 1998 and has seen a lot. He had to remove deeply embedded bullets with his hands during the worst of the violence. Dr Murphy says the chance of success for the new Government is 50/50, but doubts the local Police and military have the capability to deal with any serious outbreak in violence.

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