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Valerie Morse  
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Dear Ms Morse

I refer to your request of 10 May 2020, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), for the following:

1. *Please provide any advice, risk assessments, planning or information held by NZDF about the implications of Covid-19 in relation to RIMPAC 2020 or any offshore/overseas training exercises.*

The below is an extract from a dot-point brief prepared for the Vice Chief of the Defence Force, dated 13 February 2020, which captures recommendations from Headquarters Joint Forces New Zealand (HQ JFNZ) on cancelling overseas engagement/training exercises due to the potential impact of COVID-19. Where indicated, some operational detail, and advice provided by a Defence Attaché, is withheld in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA.

### ***Cancellation of overseas engagement/training activities***

- *NZDF have a number of exercises and planning engagement scheduled to occur within the next three months that are within the identified hotzone. The major exercises are:*
  - **FPDA** [Five Powers Defence Arrangement] **Combined Working Group.** (HQ JFNZ) 22 – 24 Feb, 5 x personnel, Malaysia.
    - \* **HQ JFNZ Recommendation.** Review, 20 Feb.
  - **Combined Command Post Training (CCPT).** (HQ JFNZ) Consisting of six personnel deploying to South Korea over the period 23 Feb – 22 Mar 20.
    - \* **DA** [Defence Attaché] **Korea Comment:** No knowledge of any Nation withdrawing from this exercise: [ s. 6(a) ]
    - \* **HQ JFNZ Recommendation.** Review, 20 Feb.
  - **Tempest Express.** (HQ JFNZ) Consisting of two personnel deploying to Mongolia as part of a Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT) over the period 02 – 13 Mar 20.

- \* *HQ JFNZ Recommendation. Note currently there is no identified Covid-19 in Mongolia. Review situation on 20 Feb 20 or subject to wider NZDF direction.*
- **Bersama Shield.** (HQ JFNZ) consisting of approximately 40 personnel deploying to Malaysia over the period 16 Mar – 03 Apr 20.
  - \* **HQ JFNZ Recommendation.** Review situation on 20 Feb 20.
- **Jasco Black.** ( [ s. 6(a) ] ) Consisting of eight personnel deploying to South Korea over the period 01 – 29 Apr 20.
  - \* **HQ JFNZ Recommendation.** Monitor.
- **Exercise Lion Anvil.** ( [ s. 6(a) ] ) 8 x personnel deploying to Singapore for [ s. 6(a) ] integration and Interoperability Training OTP [Over The Period] 02 – 13 Mar 20.
  - \* **HQ JFNZ Recommendation.** Monitor.
- **HQIADS Land Planning Conference.** (HQ JFNZ) 2 x personnel deploying to Penang, Malaysia to attend the Bersama Lima series planning group OTP 05 – 11 Apr 20.
  - \* **HQ JFNZ Recommendation.** Monitor.
- **Combined Command Post Training (CCPT) 20-2 MPC.** (HQ JFNZ) 1 x planner to South Korea OTP 20 – 24 Apr 20 to assist in KTO [Korean Theatre of Operations] war game planning.
  - \* **HQ JFNZ Recommendation.** Monitor.
- **Ex Garuda Canti Dharma II TTT** [Train The Trainer]. (HQ JFNZ) 2 x trainers deploying to Sentul, Indonesia OPT 22 Mar – 09 Apr 20 to plan and coordinate training for USINDOPACOM [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command] sponsored GPOI FTE [Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative Field Training Exercise] in Jul – Aug 20.
  - \* **HQ JFNZ Recommendation.** Monitor.<sup>1</sup>

HQ JFNZ formed a Working Group to consider measures to protect New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel and capabilities, both operationally and domestically, in the event the threat of COVID-19 escalated. On 24 February 2020, the Working Group met and noted the following: travel assessments for CCPT (to cancel and return to New Zealand) and JASCO BLACK (watch). The related HQ JFNZ risk assessments are enclosed (enclosures one and two). Within the enclosures, OLOC stands for Operational Level of Capability; DLOC stands for Directed Level of Capability.

On 27 February 2020, the Working Group met and noted: JASCO BLACK (now cancelled), BERSAMA SHIELD (to be addressed at the next meeting), RIMPAC (go ahead) and CYBER FLAG (go ahead)<sup>2</sup>. Related risk assessments are enclosed (enclosures three, four, five and six).

<sup>1</sup> Exercise Garuda Canti Dharma II has since been cancelled.

<sup>2</sup> Exercise Cyber Flag has since been transitioned to a virtual activity.

On 5 March 2020, the Working Group met again and noted: no changes to previous assessments and the decision for BERSAMA SHIELD was deferred.<sup>3</sup>

On 12 March 2020, the Working Group noted: Exercise TROPIC TUNIX was to be reviewed 21 days out from its start date, and that the reconnaissance for the exercise was to go ahead; the decision for BERSAMA SHIELD was deferred to the Commander Joint Forces; JOINT WARRIOR was to go ahead;<sup>4</sup> the decision on TROPIC TWILIGHT was to be deferred to a future meeting, and the possibility of running the SUMAN WARRIOR Main Planning Conference {MPC} off base was raised, to be considered further at a later date. Participation in the Canadian Exchange programme (CANEX) was recommended to be deferred to the Air Component Commander for his decision.

On 19 March 2020, the Working Group noted that TROPIC TWILIGHT would be postponed, likely until September<sup>5</sup>, and that the SUMAN WARRIOR MPC<sup>6</sup> would be postponed until June. With the cancellation of many of the exercises the Working Group did not reconvene in April.

With respect to RIMPAC specifically, the exercise has been substantially modified to reduce the risk from COVID-19 (refer to the response to you of 22 May 2020). As the global COVID-19 situation remains dynamic, the NZDF continues to monitor the situation and will conduct a final, formal, risk assessment process on RIMPAC closer to the exercise deployment.

2. *Please provide any advice, assessments or information held by NZDF about the implications on NZ's relationship with China of participation in RIMPAC 2020.*

No information within the scope of your request has been identified. This part of your request is declined in accordance with section 18(g) of the OIA as the information requested is not held by the NZDF, nor are there grounds to believe the information is held by another department, Minister, or organisation.

You have the right, under section 28(3) of the OIA, to ask an Ombudsman to review this response to your request.

Yours sincerely



**AJ WOODS**

Air Commodore

Chief of Staff HQNZDF

**Enclosures:**

1. Risk Assessment – Combined Command Post Training (CCPT), Republic of Korea
2. Risk Assessment – JASCO BLACK, Republic of Korea
3. Risk Assessment – JASCO BLACK, Republic of Korea
4. Risk Assessment – BERSAMA SHIELD (BS), Singapore/Malaysia
5. Risk Assessment – RIMPAC Final Planning Conference (FPC), Hawaii
6. Risk Assessment – CYBER FLAG, Continental United States (CONUS)

<sup>3</sup> Exercise BERSAMA SHIELD has since been cancelled.

<sup>4</sup> Exercise JOINT WARRIOR has since been cancelled.

<sup>5</sup> TROPIC TWILIGHT has since been cancelled.

<sup>6</sup> Exercise SUMAN WARRIOR has since been cancelled.