



TE OPE KĀTUA O AOTEAROA  
**DEFENCE FORCE**



# TE MAIA HEI TOA

**The role of New Zealand Special Forces  
in modern warfare and national security**



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The cover title *Te Maia Hei Toa* is the name of the carving in the foyer of the 1NZSAS HQ in Papakura Military Camp and it represents the SAS motto of "Who Dares Wins".

New Zealand Special Forces (NZSF) collectively refers to the soldiers, sailors, aviators, civilians and officers within Special Operations Command New Zealand. This includes the New Zealand Special Air Service, Explosive Ordnance Disposal operators, Commando operators, and the various trades from across the NZDF who are part of the team that enables special operations capability.

The manaia *Hiranga Rerenga* is a kaitiaki (protector), which special forces operators designed to represent and unify the diversity of New Zealand Special Forces (NZSF) within Ngāti Tūmatuenga. This kaitiaki embraces the sword Excalibur, which represents the symbiosis between higher New Zealand Defence Force operational command, control, and oversight, and its tactical forces. The fingers supporting the blade denote the organic enablers sustaining NZSF. The emblem's colours derive from NZSF's traditional beginnings in North African desert operations during World War II, campaigns in the South East Asian jungles between 1955 and 1971, and niche expertise in special reconnaissance.

# New Zealand Special Forces

## Introduction

**New Zealand Special Forces (NZSF) is a critical part of the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) combat capability, New Zealand's national security community and strategic crisis management arrangements. We're an adaptable force with more than 65 years of operational service at home, regionally, and around the world. NZSF is also a learning organisation, who's relentless pursuit of excellence is driven by the need to improve and the discipline to do so efficiently. Recent operational experience from Bougainville, Timor Leste, Afghanistan and beyond have informed who we are and how we work.**

***Te Maia Hei Toa* describes the role and purpose of New Zealand Special Forces and illustrates how it continues to evolve to maintain its relevancy, operational edge, and the trust of New Zealanders.**

We are committed to act according to our values, and in a way that New Zealanders can be proud of. We are proud of our professionalism and the significant organisational improvements we have made over the last decade. However, we are also clear-eyed that relentless commitment is essential for enduring improvement, and to uphold the expectations of our country.

**Ensuring the lessons the NZDF has learned are passed onto the next generation.**

The Operation Burnham Inquiry and subsequent Expert Review Group (ERG) report recommendations identified areas where the NZDF and NZSF need to be better. These lessons are being implemented throughout the NZDF, including NZSF, so that it continues to mature as an organisation, in a number of ways.

**Our structure and processes have changed.**

In 2015, the NZDF established its special operations component function within Headquarters Joint Forces New Zealand. This structural change complements the strategic Special Operations Command in New Zealand Defence Force Headquarters (HQNZDF) and it directly involves

Commander Joint Forces New Zealand through the standardised NZDF operational planning and approval processes in line with the wider organisation.

**Closer alignment with policy processes for the full life cycle of operations.**

The NZDF and Ministry of Defence (MoD) are now increasingly providing integrated support throughout operations. The new operations life cycle codifies a framework ensuring early involvement of policy and strategic military planning and advice, continuous monitoring, and deliberate reviews. We are also working to ensure relevant security-cleared policy advisors are fully briefed on the full spectrum of special forces operations. This is complemented by a Strategic Risk Assessment Board for highly classified activities. All these measures support increased transparency at appropriately cleared levels in everything we do.

**Pathways for high potential special forces personnel.**

Our career management approach expands how we prepare high potential personnel for senior command. This includes secondment opportunities to other agencies, postings to the NZDF Strategic Commitments and Engagements Branch, and regional diplomatic postings.

### **The Defence Policy and Strategy Statement (DPSS) 2023.**

DPSS sets out New Zealand's updated strategic defence policy approach, in which Defence will act early to promote and protect New Zealand's security interests. This more proactive and purposeful approach emphasises deliberate Defence actions to shape our strategic environment and prevent threats to New Zealand's interests, with a particular emphasis on activities in and for the Pacific. This supports New Zealand's first **National Security Strategy (NSS) *Tō Tāto Korowai Manaaki 2023*** which emphasises and prioritises acting early to prevent national security threats and build New Zealand's resilience.

### **The refreshed strategy and policy points to the strategic significance of NZSF in the future of New Zealand.**

New Zealand is facing a more challenging and more complex strategic environment than ever before. There are increasing security threats and the effectiveness and stability of the post-war liberal rules-based international system are being undermined. Within this evolving landscape, it is important NZSF knows its roles, its capability needs, and areas for focused improvement. We must learn from our past while innovating and evolving to meet the future.

### **New Zealand requires a specialist force of full-spectrum operators.**

This has meant we have often had to deliver instantly while preparing and developing for the next challenge. But

our high readiness and world class standards ensure we are capable of conducting strategic tasks with agility, innovation, and precision to deliver unique solutions, and provide options so that Defence can act early and deliberately.

### **We will remain focused on our core tasks.**

NZSF focus on the core tasks, or roles, of special reconnaissance, direct action, and influencing outcomes. A high level of readiness to conduct these missions in combat environments provides the NZDF and the New Zealand Government with multiple special operations military response options across the operational spectrum to protect New Zealand and advance our national security objectives. We achieve these tasks while working with a wide range of security sector partners, ensuring that respective roles and tasks are clearly understood and ensuring international partners understand the New Zealand policy context within which we operate.

### **Our people are our capability.**

Special operations can be, and often are, conducted by individuals or small teams. Our value is in our highly trained, experienced, and mature people. I am proud of the women and men who make up NZSF. I know they are as committed as I am to maintaining our capabilities and when tasked by the New Zealand Government, implement our skills in the service of New Zealand and conduct

ourselves in a way consistent with our values.

*Te Maia Hei Toa* communicates to agencies, components, partners, and allies that NZSF will continue to be a highly valued military partner which understands its role and works with others to achieve New Zealand Government intent with civilian oversight.

### **Colonel S.D Bolton, DSD**

**Commander  
Special Operations Command  
New Zealand**

# New Zealand Special Forces' Vision

## VISION:

**A trusted, nationally-integrated, and globally connected full-spectrum special operations force that is orientated and prepared to support New Zealand's national interests.**

*Waiho i te tooto, kaua i te toiroa*

Let us keep close together, not far apart

### Nationally Integrated

We have relationships, trust, and credibility across Headquarters Joint Forces New Zealand, the wider NZDF, and the National Security Community. These enable lawful, timely, transparent, and effective employment of special operations military response options. National integration provides stakeholders with a shared understanding of NZSF capabilities and their possible contribution to New Zealand's foreign and domestic security interests. This contribution is underpinned by national-level policies, processes, authorities, oversight, and governance. We are a key contributor to the NZDF vision of a combat-focused integrated Defence Force.

### Globally Connected

We have relationships, capability, and connections across the global special forces network that enable seamless integration with coalition special operations so we can effectively contribute to them. This is achieved through regular operations, engagements, and activities, from the strategic to the tactical level, which expands our country's reach and capability.

### Full Spectrum Special Operations

We generate and maintain capabilities for conducting NZSF core tasks: special reconnaissance, direct action, support and influence. These are performed discreetly or overtly and in operating environments ranging from cooperation through to conflict. Our options must include graduated responses that provide unique solutions for the New Zealand Government. These range from routine support of agencies through to special operations involving technologically advanced military forces operating in a rapidly evolving information environment.

### Orientated and Prepared

Special operations preparedness for high-tempo conflict cannot be surged at short notice. Preparedness is an integral part of our mind-set, force generation, training standards, capability development, and command and control. When we are asked to respond, we provide assurance to Government because we are trained and equipped to world class standards; and because we deliver unique solutions to strategic problems through our agility, innovation, and precision. Our people provide the best possible military advice on special forces response options and do so with a deep understanding of New Zealand's policy commitments. Last but not least, our people are values orientated and they represent New Zealanders and the NZDF.



# Our Role, Purpose and Mission

**NZSF broaden the range of military options available to the New Zealand Government in support of national security objectives and strategic crisis management**

## WHY WE EXIST

### *To Serve New Zealand*

New Zealand Special Forces exist within a policy framework set by Government that directs what we are capable of achieving, how we are resourced, and why we are needed.

NZSF is employed to contribute to New Zealand's **national resilience**, **contribute to regional security**, and support the **rules based international system**.

We provide the Government with a **unique capability** that adds significant military value alongside other NZDF capabilities to all-of-Government responses.

## WHO WE SUPPORT

### *Partners, Allies and Friends*

Special operations is a nationally integrated defence capability. **We are committed to team work** at all levels across Government, with the joint force, and our international partners.

We deliver **tailored capabilities** within complex mission environments.

We can only support others because we are part of a joint force. Our success depends **on Navy, Army, and Air Force capabilities**. This is critical to achieving the joint effect whereby the four components become greater than the sum of our parts.

## OUR ROLE

### *Support National Security Priorities*

We are tasked with delivering special operations effects through the military tasks of inform, defeat and enable:

- We **inform** strategic and operational intelligence priorities as requested by Defence and other security agencies.
- We **defeat** threats to ensure the safety of New Zealanders, national interests, and partners, allies, and friends.
- We **enable** Government agency partners, and by working through and with other security forces to respond to asymmetric threats.

## OUR TASKS

### *Intelligence, Actions, and Support*

We are resourced with people, relationships, and capability to meet our outputs:

- **Special Reconnaissance:** unique and discreet methods of gaining information in sensitive or high risk environments.
- **Direct Action:** precise methods to destroy, degrade or neutralise threats.
- **Support and Influence:** support and enable security partners to meet their own challenges.

## OUR PURPOSE

New Zealand Special Forces provide options for Government that are outside the capability of conventional military forces and other Government agencies. Special operations are inherently focused on significant national or military objectives and are often discreet, mitigated high risk, and unorthodox in nature.

## OUR MISSION

NZSF is a trusted force conducting nationally integrated special operations at home and abroad in support of New Zealand's national interests.

## OUR VALUES

Tū Kaha | Courage

Tū Tika | Commitment

Tū Tira | Comradeship

Tū Māia | Integrity

## OUR TENETS

The unrelenting pursuit of excellence

Humour and humility

Brooks no sense of class

The highest standards of discipline



# NZSF Policy Alignment

## 2023 Defence Policy and Strategy Statement

NZSF core tasks are aligned with the three strategic pillars of the DPSS

### Understand

NZSF conduct reconnaissance tasks to inform decision-making at the highest levels of Government, or for military decision-making in a deployed operational context. Special reconnaissance occurs from jungle through to urban environments, creating understanding from the most simple physical requirements through to complex and sensitive technical considerations.

### Partner

NZSF conduct support tasks to enable partners to achieve their desired outcomes, which is as much about domestic support to other Government agencies as it is with working alongside international partners in a collaborative, understanding and respectful manner.

### Act

NZSF conduct direct action tasks to defeat and influence outcomes, which are often discreet without the use of force. These tasks are predominantly about taking action and extend from securing critical infrastructure to more standard military tasks during combat operations.



## NZSF role in delivering New Zealand's defence policy objectives

NZSF provide options highly valued by domestic agencies and international partners

### Promote and Protect New Zealand's defence interests in our Region, particularly in the Pacific.

Being in and of the Pacific, NZSF has a long history of working alongside our Pacific partners to meet security challenges in a manner that supports collective regional security interests. From Malaya in 1955, to supporting Papua New Guinea with APEC in 2018, NZSF act purposefully and deliberately to collaboratively enhance our region's security.

### Contribute globally to collective security efforts that promote and protect New Zealand's interests and values.

NZSF provides forces that are highly valued by international partners, far beyond the size of the contribution. Maintaining interoperability with our partners is fundamental to ensuring our reputation for individual excellence continues.

### Respond to events in New Zealand, in our region, globally where required.

NZSF response options provide a range of capabilities at the highest levels of readiness, with a proven track record of delivering, regionally and globally. From disaster relief to conflict, NZSF high readiness forces are trained and prepared to respond.

# Special Operations Today

## WHAT WE DELIVER:

High readiness forces trained and equipped to world class standards with the agility, innovation, and precision to deliver unique solutions to Government.

*I orea te tuatara ka patu ki waho.*

A problem is solved by continuing to find solutions.

## Headquarters Special Operations Command



Generates special forces, special operations capability, advises on and commands special operations.

## Explosive Ordnance Disposal

Supporting Partners at Home and Abroad



Domestic and expeditionary Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) response and a national chemical, biological, radiological, and explosive render-safe capability.

## Full Spectrum Special Operations

Global and Regional Employment



A force capable of conducting coalition operations across the spectrum of conflict to achieve strategic effects.

## Supporting partners at Home



Specialist capabilities made available to the Civil Authority at immediate notice for counter terrorism and other complex responses.

## Agile Regional Response



High readiness capabilities that can quickly react to regional crises independently or in support of the joint force and partners.

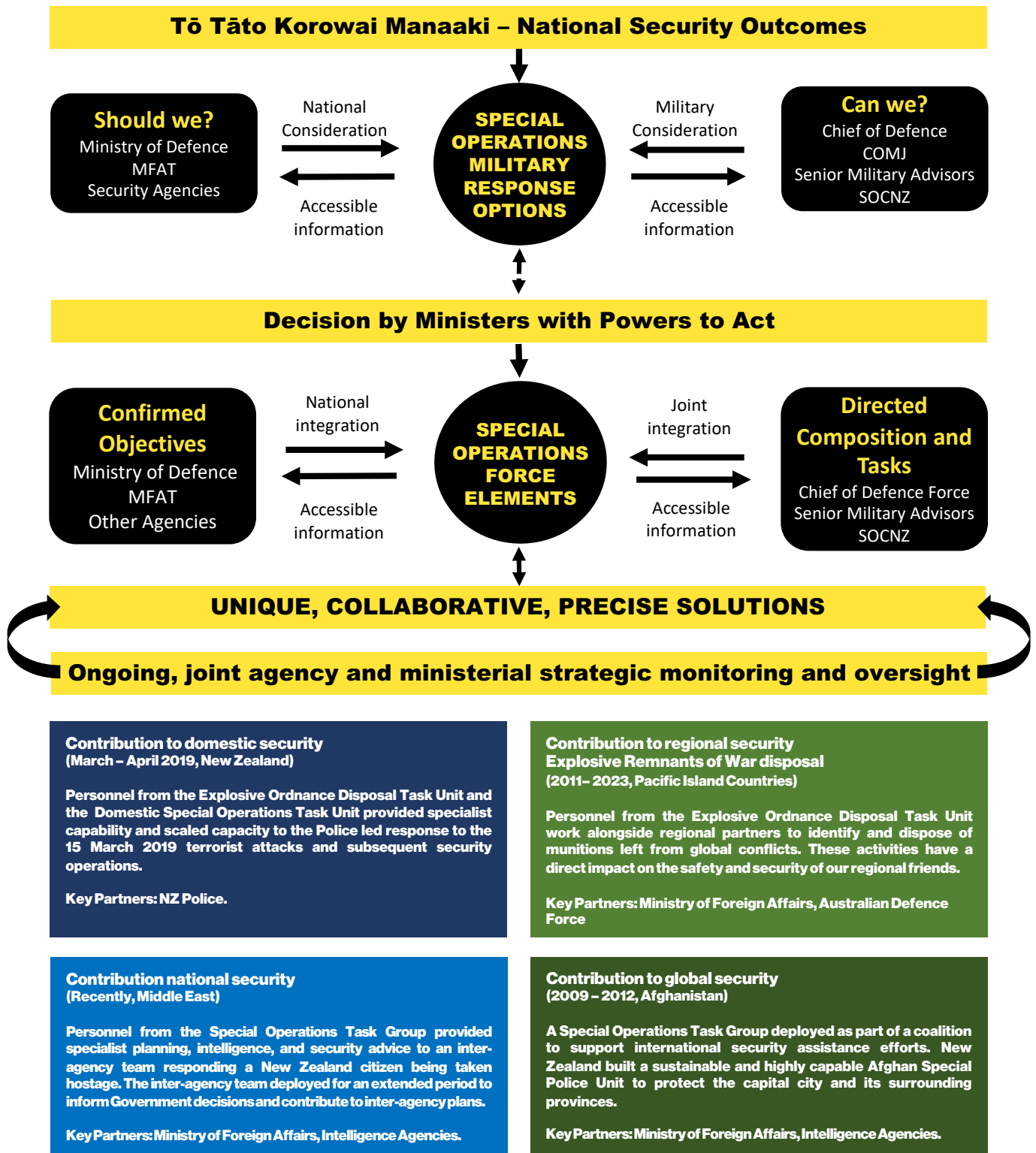




# Special Operations Employment

The employment of NZSF is guided by the NSS and DPSS, both for proactive operations to shape New Zealand’s strategic environment and for responses to particular events. We act when directed by the New Zealand Government, at the command of the Chief of the Defence Force, and integrated with the Ministry of Defence with civilian and ministerial oversight through the full life cycle of operations.

## THEORY INTO PRACTICE



# OPERATION WHAKAARI WHITE ISLAND

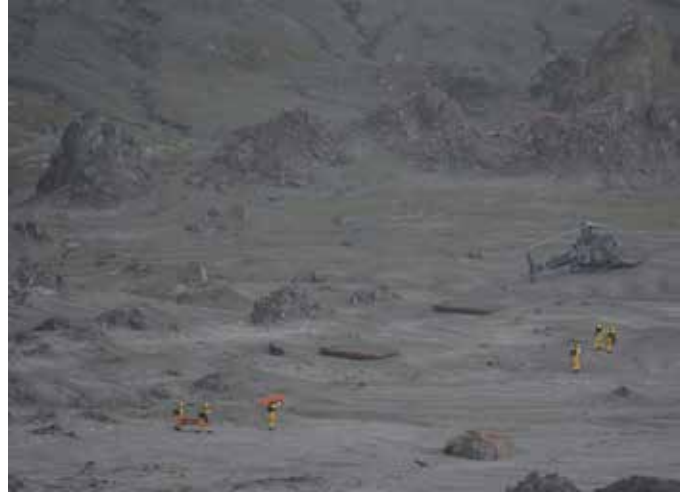
## Recovery Operation

### Whakatane, New Zealand, December 2019

- Supported National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and NZ Police
- Part of a Joint Task Force which included assets from across the NZDF

NZSF personnel were tasked to recover the deceased from Whakaari White Island following the 9 December 2019 eruption. NZSF worked as part of a wider NZDF team supporting NEMA and NZ Police.

The environmental conditions were toxic and hazardous, which meant the specialist skills and equipment NZSF maintains at high readiness were required to support the recovery. Specialist operators responded to a rapidly developing situation with agility, innovation, and precision.



## OPERATION TIMELINE

09 December – Whakaari White Island Eruption.

12 December – NZDF notified of support request from NZ Police.

13 December – NZSF deploy to Whakaari White Island.

0754 – NZSF team deploy and begin recovery operations.

0853 – Search of emergency shelter completed.

1050 – Recovery of deceased remains completed.

1110 – Operations on Island completed.

# OPERATION HADAF

## Hostage Rescue Operation

### British Council Office, Kabul, 19 August 2011

- **Response to a complex attack on the British Council Office building at no notice**
- **Partnered with the Crisis Response Unit, NZSF was able to rescue multiple British and foreign nationals**

NZSF partnered with Afghanistan's Ministry of the Interior and the Crisis Response Unit (CRU) from 2009 to 2012, enabling the Afghanistan rule of law by working to develop their sovereign capability to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks within Kabul and the surrounding provinces.

On the 19th of August 2011, a group of five Taliban insurgents conducted a complex attack on the British Council Building within central Kabul. Well organised and well armed, they initiated their attack using a suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device to enter the compound and take control of the building.

In response, the CRU was tasked to resolve the situation, with NZSF support. CRU/NZSF made entry into the compound using explosives, secured three British citizens. When fighting the terrorists a suicide bomber detonated and the building caught fire.

The CRU requested NZSF assistance to secure the remaining trapped civilians as the building burnt. NZSF coordinated the civilians escape through the roof using a fire truck, Apache helicopter, US drone and cell phones. With all civilians rescued and insurgents killed, the CRU and NZSF handed over to local police.

During the operation one NZSF operator and one CRU operator were killed, and nine CRU were wounded while saving those within. The operation highlighted the precision, and determination required to successfully resolve hostage situations, and the agility required to conduct advise and assist operations with foreign partners.



## OPERATION TIMELINE

- 0700 – CRU deploy to British Council building.
- 0855 – CRU snipers in position and begin clearing compound.
- 0945 – NZSF elements move forward to incident site and take command of coalition response elements.
- 1217 – CRU, with NZ SF advice, make entry and secure British and Nepalese civilians.
- 1232 – NZSF coordinated escape from the roof of civilians trapped there.
- 1258 – Larger NZSF group makes entry into compound, the CRU/NZSF inside can extract remaining civilians.
- 1500 – Situation handed over to Afghanistan National Police.

# OPERATION KŌKAKO

## Evacuation Operation from Kabul, Afghanistan, August 2021

- Supported Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) objectives
- Part of a Joint Task Force which included assets from across the NZDF
- 397 New Zealanders safely evacuated

In August 2021, NZSF supported MFAT and MBIE in the New Zealand Government's priority to evacuate NZ citizens and permanent residents from Afghanistan.

As the security situation in Afghanistan rapidly deteriorated, the NZDF was tasked to support a multi-agency response to withdraw any eligible New Zealanders, and those who supported New Zealand during its operations in Afghanistan.

The increased risk profile in the country and the rapid nature of the task meant NZSF was employed in support of the wider NZDF to assist MFAT as the lead agency.

NZSF helped to evacuate 397 individuals. Special operations military response options provided to Government ensured national security objectives were achieved.



### OPERATION TIMELINE

15 August – Fall of Kabul.

17 August – NZ Government decides to deploy NZDF to conduct evacuation.

18 August – NZSF Advanced Party deploys.

20 August – NZSF and NZDF commence evacuation operations in Afghanistan.

24 August – Large scale suicide bombing at Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA).

25 August – Evacuation operations from HKIA completed. NZSF and NZDF withdraw from Afghanistan.



# OPERATION APEC ASSIST

## Support to Papua New Guinea Joint Security Task Force, 2018

- Supported NZ Police, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and NZ Defence
- Support to Papua New Guinea (PNG) Joint Security Task Force (JSTF), comprising multinational Foreign Affairs, Police, Intelligence, and Customs agencies
- Enabled PNG SF to underwrite security, and therefore ability to host world leaders

NZSF, alongside Australian Special Forces, have a long standing partnership with Papua New Guinea Special Forces (PNGSF) that involves training and mentoring, and providing headquarters planning support to raise a credible special forces capability for the Government of Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Throughout 2018, PNG hosted the Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC), a major milestone for the PNG Government. Elements from NZ Police, MFAT and NZSF were deployed in small teams throughout 2017-18 to provide continuing support to events and prepare for the world leaders visit.

Whilst mentoring the PNGSF, NZSF was also called to support NZ Police protection to New Zealand officials, to support NZ Inc planning, and to provide inter agency advisors in the PNG Joint Security Task Force (APEC JSTF).

A permanent presence, and deep people to people relationships, allowed NZSF to identify impactful roles that reinforced NZ policy objectives, and to provide consistent on the ground information to inform NZ decision makers.

As the event drew closer, it became clear PNG Police needed additional support or international partners would need to be called in. PNGSF was supported with additional NZSF capabilities (marksmen, drones and military working dogs) and advisors. This NZSF support enabled PNG-lead security for APEC.



### OPERATION TIMELINE

- 2008 – Inception of Training Programme with Papua New Guinea Defence Force, and Australia SF.
- 2015 – Creation of a deliberate trilateral capability development plan with AUS/NZL/PNG.
- 2017 – Start of APEC Planning, MFAT request for NZSF to deploy permanently to PNG.
- 2018 – (Jan) Full scale APEC meetings begin , enduring NZSF training and planning presence.
- 2018 – (Sep) Deployment of a SF Task Unit to advise and assist PNGSF, and PNG Security Forces.
- 2018 – (Oct-Nov) Hosting of APEC world leaders, enable PNGSF to step up as primary response force.
- 2019 onwards – Continued AUS/NZL/PNG partnering, development of sovereign PNGSF capability.

# Special Operations Tomorrow

**Full spectrum special operations provide varied options to deal with complexity through the military tasks:**

- **Support and Influence to Enable**
- **Special Reconnaissance to Inform**
- **Direct Action to Defeat**

New Zealand is facing a more challenging and more complex strategic environment than ever before.

NZSF is a critical part of the NZDF's ability to act early and deliberately shape our security environment.

Through our core tasks, NZSF will contribute to a secure, sovereign, and resilient New Zealand.

Future NZSF operations may range across a spectrum from cooperation to conflict.

NZSF remains an agile organization capable of operating in various environments, including partnered operations in the remote Pacific region and highly complex and technical domestic and global operations.

NZSF will evolve as required to meet these challenges and stands ready to respond as needed.

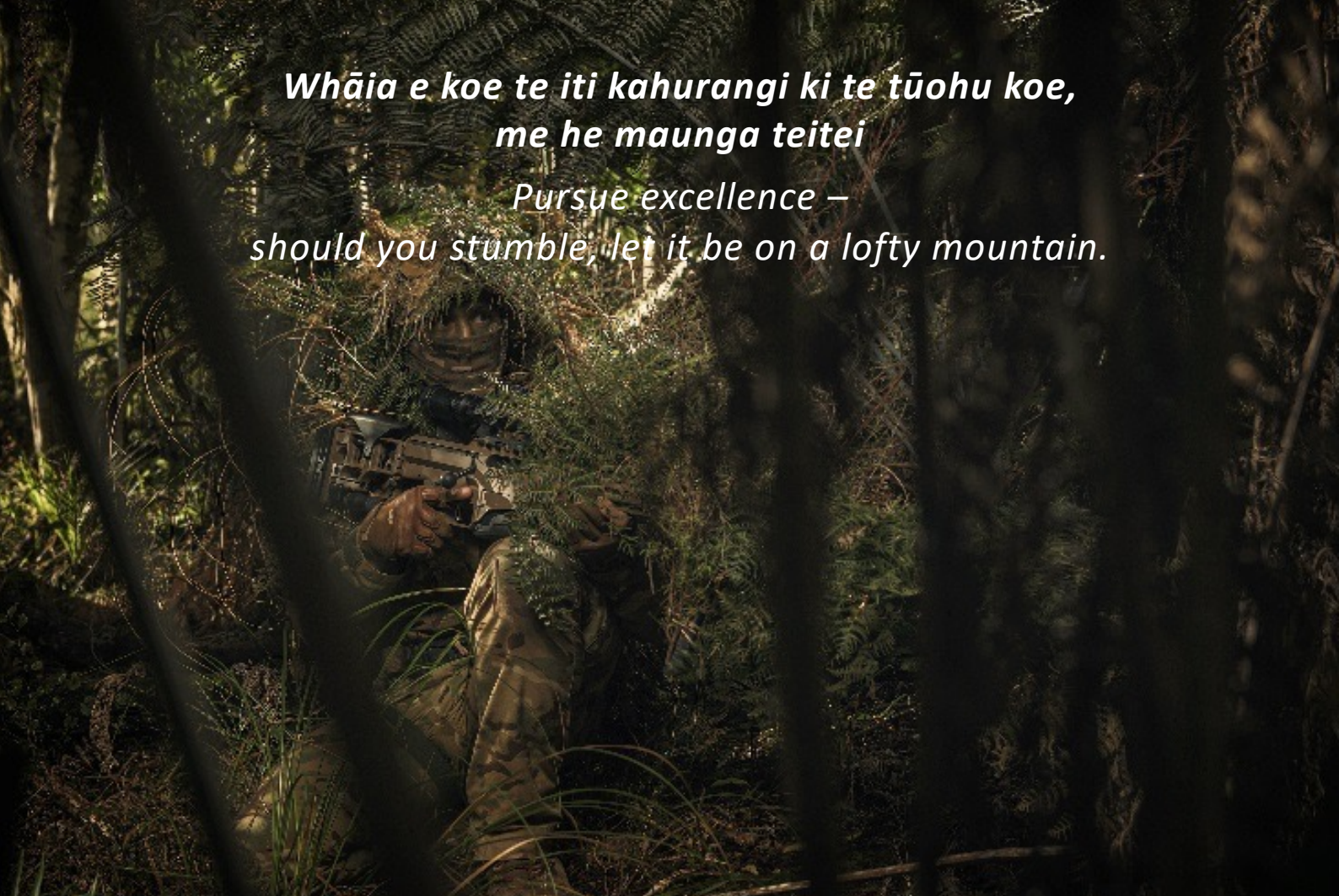


*A New Zealand Special Forces female engagement team member operates amongst local populace at an undisclosed location to inform Government decision making.*



*Always a little further: it may be.  
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow.  
Across that angry or glimmering sea.*

James Elroy Flecker



*Whāia e koe te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe,  
me he maunga teitei  
Pursue excellence –  
should you stumble, let it be on a lofty mountain.*



**HEI MANA MŌ AOTEAROA  
A FORCE FOR NEW ZEALAND**