



Headquarters  
New Zealand Defence Force  
Defence House  
Private Bag 39997  
Wellington Mail Centre  
Lower Hutt 5045  
New Zealand

OIA-2026-5698

15<sup>th</sup> April 2026

Anthony George  
Chair  
ESG Moscow Association

Dear Anthony George

I refer to your email of 4 March 2026, requesting under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) *copies of the following documents, in whatever format they may be stored by the departments specified. This will cover the period between 31 Jul and 03 Oct 25 and include.*

- *Evidence of receipt of the Appeal referred from MINDEF for CDF's action*
- *Evidence of NZDF documents related (directly or indirectly) to and with the review process, including manuscript drafts and notes, Memo, email, verbal advice, or other form of documented and recording device material discussing and recording details*
- *The documented format in which the review was conducted and with whom*
- *Evidence of communications in any format or type with Agencies outside the NZDF, and with the Office of MINDEF*
- *Evidence of all records of verbal conversations between the Office of CDF, his staff, and staff in the Office of MINDEF or other Agencies involved*
- *Evidence of documents specifying what staff or Agency appointments were consulted that have firsthand knowledge of the Moscow deployment*
- *Evidence of all other documents of a Restricted or Classified nature researched, including archived ESG Moscow files, DPMC Memoranda and Cabinet Minutes authorising the deployment*
- *Evidence of consultation with people or Agencies related to the merits of the Appeal that was independent of the Office of CDF and the NZDF*
- *Evidence that the information arising from the review and leading to the decision not to award recognition to ESG Veterans have not been post-dated or created because of this OIA request*
- *Should it be the case no documented evidence of the review process exists, the reasons why the Appeal process was not consulted on, recorded, or documented*

The nature of the review referred to in Brigadier Motley's letter involved Office of the Chief of Defence Force staff reviewing all relevant documents. A copy of the subsequent associated Minute is enclosed. Where indicated, signatures are withheld in accordance with section 9(2)(k) of the OIA to avoid the malicious or inappropriate use of staff information, such as phishing, scams or unsolicited advertising.

You have the right, under section 28(3) of the OIA, to ask an Ombudsman to review this response to your request. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that responses to official information requests are proactively released where possible. This response to your request will be published shortly on the NZDF website, with your personal information removed.

Yours sincerely

**GA Motley**  
Brigadier  
Chief of Staff HQNZDF

**Enclosure:**

1. New Zealand Defence Force Minute 22 September 2025

## Headquarters New Zealand Defence Force

### Chief of Staff MINUTE 13/2025

22 Sep 25

CDF (through Cos)

For information:

VCDF

CPO

DLS

DHCP

s.9(2)(k)

### MEDALLIC RECOGNITION FOR MOSCOW VETERANS

#### Reference

- A. HCP Minute, dated 23 Aug 2023
- B. Veterans' Affairs submission to CDF, dated 24 Jan 2018.
- C. NTM 2024-068, dated 31 Mar 2024
- D. Minister of Defence Letter to Anthony (Tony) George, dated 3 Jul 25

#### Purpose

1. To provide CDF advice regarding a request for medallic recognition. It was prepared in response to correspondence received by the Minister of Defence.

#### Background

2. Between August 1978 and July 1992, a total of 163 NZ Army personnel were seconded to MFAT to undertake construction and security duties at the NZ Embassy in Moscow. The environment they worked in was often challenging; surveillance by the Soviets was an expected part of the job and the working conditions were often unpleasant.
3. The secondment was not afforded operational conditions of service under the legislation and orders that prevailed at the time.<sup>1</sup> Moscow veterans have, however, argued that their service meets the threshold to be considered operational service within the framework that now applies to NZDF deployments.<sup>2</sup>
4. The personnel who served in Moscow are represented by the Embassy Security Guards Moscow Veterans group (known as ESG). Since the early 2000s, the RNZRSA and the ESG have actively campaigned for recognition of Moscow service, specifically Veteran Support Act (VSA) status and medallic recognition.

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<sup>1</sup> The only distinction in law was between wartime and peacetime service, for the purposes of the War Pensions Act.

<sup>2</sup> This encompasses the 2002 regulations for the Operational and General Service Medals, the relevant portions of DFO 3 and the Veterans Support Act of 2014, among others.

5. In 2007, CDF Mateparae considered a submission requesting medallic recognition for Moscow veterans. He agreed with the contention that the service was undertaken in an environment that “exceed[ed] the normal requirements of peacetime service”<sup>3</sup> (See Ref. A). Nonetheless, he declined to support the request. Similarly, CDF Keating agreed that it was beyond peacetime service but not eligible for award of a medal.
6. In 2018, Minister of Defence Mark approved Qualifying Operational Service (QOS) under the VSA for Moscow Veterans. Veterans Affairs’ (VA) submission to CDF recommended the secondments be treated as a deployment and the threat was assessed by VA at medium (Ref. B).
7. Since then, ESG has continued their efforts to have Moscow service afforded medallic recognition. The original request was for the NZ Special Service Medal<sup>4</sup>, then the Operational Service Medal (OSM), and in the most recent correspondence the General Service Medal (GSM) with a Moscow Clasp has been mooted.
8. In 2023, DHCP recommended that CDF Short support the award of the OSM to Moscow Veterans (Ref. A). He declined this recommendation and wrote to the Minister of Defence (Ref. C) to explain his decision.
9. In reply to 2024 ESG correspondence the Minister of Defence made clear that medallic recognition was not supported (Ref. D). Subsequent correspondence from ESG to the Minister has questioned aspects of the advice provided to CDF Short. ESG leadership has recently contacted HCP, seeking a meeting to discuss their case.

#### Issue

10. The core of the arguments made by Moscow Veterans is that their service was dangerous and demanding and that they should therefore be afforded entitlements and recognition. To properly assess these claims requires comparison with legal provisions, as well as with other operations and activities to ensure consistency of application.
11. The argument regarding eligibility for coverage under the VSA, which implies that Moscow Veterans were exposed to a significant risk of harm, has been made and accepted at the Ministerial level. This decision bolsters ESG’s contention that the Moscow secondments<sup>5</sup> are operational service for other purposes, beyond VSA eligibility.
12. In general, retrospectively applying present-day norms regarding operational conditions of service has been problematic, particularly where the deployment pre-dates current legislation, regulations and orders. In the normal course of events, medallic recognition and QOS determinations would follow from NZDF designating any given deployment as operational service. The system for setting conditions of service at the time of the secondments did not require these considerations.

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<sup>3</sup> One of the criteria in DFO 3’s definition of operational service.

<sup>4</sup> The deployments that are currently eligible for award of this medal are Nuclear testing, Erebus and Asian Tsunami.

<sup>5</sup> MFAT uses the terms secondment to describe the service of NZDF personnel in Moscow, which NZDF has mostly mirrored (occasionally using Tour of Duty instead). ESG rejects the term secondment, preferring to describe the service as an operation.

13. Determining operational conditions of service from the current system of laws, regulations and orders is hampered by imprecise use of terms and uncertain decision pathways. Nonetheless, the factors that require consideration are reasonably clear.

## Analysis

### Mandate

14. The starting point for full operational conditions of service (which includes tax-free allowances, medallic recognition and VSA QOS) is almost always a cabinet mandate. Government direction is an explicit prerequisite for tax-free allowances under the Income Tax Act, for example.

15. The ESG argues that there was a mandate for their secondment, but there does not appear to have been Cabinet consideration of the matter.<sup>6</sup> The secondments were akin to an agency-level arrangement between the Ministry of Defence and MFAT, rather than an independently mandated operation. MFAT eventually filled the security guard posts without assistance from Defence.

### Medallic Recognition

16. Cabinet direction is also the normal starting point for instituting a campaign medal (under the regulations for the GSM), which also confers eligibility for the OSM. Regulations for the OSM allow for its award even if personnel are not eligible for the GSM, but that relies on the deployment being considered operational service, which is defined in DFO 3:<sup>7</sup>

*“Service which exceeds the normal requirements of peacetime service, **and** which involves a credible military threat from enemy military forces, insurgents or other hostile forces.”*

17. The phrase ‘peacetime service’ is not well defined, but DFO 3 contains a list of examples in the non-warlike category. The kind of duties performed in the Moscow Embassy are not covered by these examples.

18. The second clause in the definition is more material than the first when considering medallic recognition. NZDF’s policy has been that eligibility for the GSM or OSM is only appropriate when there are identifiable actors with hostile intent towards deployed personnel that would then translate into a credible military threat.

### Threat Environment

19. The retrospective application of this policy then largely hinges on whether we treat Soviet security agencies as presenting a credible military threat because of their hostile intent. It is clear from the testimony of those deployed that a degree of hostility was evident in the day-to-day actions of Soviet security agencies. But whether it would be fair to conclude that in doing so the Soviets intended to present a military threat is questionable.

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<sup>6</sup> Correspondence between the Secretary of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister regarding Army engineers being used for the Embassy rebuild did occur.

<sup>7</sup> The regulations do not specify this is the definition to use, but in the absence of suitable definitions in other legislation or regulations, this is the default.

20. As a more general point, it is problematic to equate pervasive surveillance with a credible military threat. This would set an untenably low threshold that would render many routine NZDF activities liable to be considered operational service. Modern ISR capabilities exceed what was available to the USSR and the potential for modern-day hostile actors to efficiently monitor and affect NZDF activity has grown commensurately.

#### **Threat Assessments and Perceptions**

21. Differences in perception of the threat environment arise in almost all NZDF deployments. Personnel on operations are understandably attuned to countering threats and managing risk; but a greater personal stake in the outcome does not necessarily translate into a more objective assessment of the threat. Accordingly, the NZDF assesses threat at headquarters-level, weighing perceptions held by deployed personnel against evidence, both classified and unclassified. To uncritically accept the views of those deployed would be to allow them to amend key aspects of their own conditions of service.

22. MFAT have maintained a consistent position that they do not support medallic recognition for Moscow Embassy service. They are of the view that being watched closely by the host government was an expected aspect of service in the embassy (as it is in many embassies) and that there was not a genuine risk of harm. Their views do not constrain NZDF decisions, but the reasoning they are applying (keeping threat in perspective and maintaining defensible relativity among postings) is relevant to our own consideration.

23. The NZDF does not have a contemporaneous threat assessment for Moscow between 1978 and 1992. Deploying personnel were given briefs that depicted it as a high security threat environment. But those briefs did not necessarily reflect a considered organisational view of the military threat. The counter-intelligence threat is a factor but not the primary determinant of the final assessed threat level.

24. Threats (and the assessments and perceptions that result) are not static. The long duration of some operational missions can result in situations where threats diminish but medals are still issued. This can lead to a perceived inequity in the types of mission that deserve recognition. However, this only underscores the importance of the initial decision. To relax the use of principles and precedent in the initial decision would risk an escalating spiral of claims for recognition.

#### **Conclusion**

25. The Moscow Veterans have been consistent in their desire for recognition of their service. Three previous CDFs have considered the case for medallic recognition and all three have declined to support it. However, by agreeing that service exceeded the requirements of peacetime, CDFs Mateparae and Keating sent a mixed message. Ministerial approval of VSA eligibility further raised expectations that medallic recognition might be forthcoming.

26. Ultimately, past decisions do not constrain present-day decision making. The issue is whether medallic recognition for Moscow Veterans is defensible in terms of the provisions in legislation, orders and regulations, while also maintaining consistency of application. While the environment NZDF personnel experienced in Moscow was out of the ordinary, critical thresholds for designation as operational service were not met.

27. If we were to take a more expansive view of operational service in this instance, the implication would be that other deployments should be reconsidered. While this option is never completely foreclosed, it must be used with utmost discretion. Continually revisiting prior decisions on matters of such wide impact and interest is deleterious to discipline and order in the force.

28. ESG's most recent correspondence to the Minister was received on 8 Aug 25 (Annex B). DHCP has been in contact with ESG, explaining that a further review of the case was being undertaken to support a Minister of Defence reply. A draft letter from the Minister of Defence to ESG reiterating the position that medallic recognition is not supported is enclosed.

### Recommendations

29. It is recommended that you

s.9(2)(k)

- a. **Note** that a review of service in the NZ Embassy Moscow by 163 NZ Army personnel between 1978 and 1992 has found that the award of the General or Operational Service Medals is not justified.
- b. **Approve** the enclosed draft letter being provided to the Minister of Defence in order to reply to ESG correspondence.

s.9(2)(k)

*Signed out by me  
under my signature  
block.*

**JHR SELLWOOD**  
CAPT, RNZN  
DCoS, HQNZDF

### Annex(es)

- A. Minister of Defence Letter to Anthony (Tony) George, dated 3 Jul 25.
- B. Email from Tony George, Chair ESG Moscow Veterans Association to Minister of Defence, dated 8 Aug 25.

### Enclosure(s)

1. Draft letter form Minister of Defence to Tony George.