

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2015

PM: OK, good afternoon. Cabinet today considered options for contributing to the international coalition against ISIL. As you know, New Zealand has already provided humanitarian assistance and our diplomatic efforts in this area will continue to be extremely important. Following on from Cabinet's consideration of other options, I intend to discuss the issue with my caucus tomorrow and communicate with our partners, including Iraq and Australia, overnight. You can expect an announcement on the final decision tomorrow when I make a ministerial statement to Parliament.

I'm pleased to announce that Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, will make his first official visit to New Zealand later this week. Prime Minister Abbott will be in Auckland on Friday, and Saturday we will hold our annual leaders' meeting and discuss a range of political, economic, social, and security issues, including advancing the single economic market, our engagement in regional trade initiatives, and cooperation on global defence and security issues. We'll also participate in the 10th annual Australia New Zealand Leadership Forum. In addition, we will mark significant events in our relationship, including a centenary of the First World War and the formation of the Anzacs, and the co-hosting of the Cricket World Cup. I'm looking forward to welcoming the Prime Minister to New Zealand with his wife, Margie.

Today I announced the First World War commemorative events planned for Anzac week in Wellington. This year has a special significance as New Zealanders mark the centenary of the Gallipoli landings during the First World War. Events begin with the Pukeahu National War Memorial Park that's officially opened on Saturday, 18 April, but some areas of the park will be open to the public from as early as next month. The National War Memorial Park includes the Halls of Memories, Carillon, an Australian memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. The park sits on top of the new Arras traffic tunnel, which is lined with symbolic poppies, and named after the French town where the New Zealand tunnelling company dug huge networks of tunnels in the First World War. Anzac week celebrations will include a spectacular light and sound and street parade, and it will culminate with a very special Anzac Day ceremony on the 25th of April.

With regards to the cricket, the tournament is proving a huge success. More than 825,000 tickets to tournament matches have already been sold in Australia and New Zealand. Organisers are expecting the match between Australia and New Zealand in Auckland this weekend will be sold out. An estimated 60,000 people turned up for the opening ceremony in Christchurch, and more than 3,200 have taken advantage of the trans-Tasman visa arrangements making travel between Australia and New Zealand during the tournament easier. Host cities are seeing the benefits, with reports of accommodation being full, lots of visitors on the streets, and, combined with the outstanding performances of the Black Caps so far, there's been a brilliant atmosphere on match days. More than 1 billion people are expected to watch the tournament on television and the 30,000 expected visitors are forecast to spend almost \$50 million during their stay here in New Zealand, and that tournament's been great for our country.

As mentioned earlier, it's the Government's intention to move a ministerial statement tomorrow afternoon. In terms of legislation, we intend to make progress on a number bills, including the Parole Amendment Bill, and the Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf Amendment Bill. Also note that Wednesday is a members' day.

Just in terms of my own activities, this week I'll be in Wellington today and tomorrow and Wednesday. I'll be in Auckland on Thursday. As announced on Friday, I'll be welcoming Prime Minister Abbott at the airport before the official welcome at Government House. And

on Saturday all of this continues with bilateral talks. I'll almost certainly be in Christchurch for the golf on Sunday.

Media: Would it be fair to say, Prime Minister, the deployment has been decided on?

PM: Well, a decision's been made by Cabinet, and now what we want to do is communicate that decision to our caucus, but also to our international partners.

Media: Prime Minister, if that decision is for a group of non-combat trainers to go to Iraq, do you agree that that means New Zealand is at war?

PM: No. I wouldn't agree with that. On the basis that New Zealand was sending trainers, you know, we're obviously sending them to an environment which we'd accept is a dangerous environment. We'd certainly accept that they would be there to train Iraq forces to stand up against the threat from ISIL. But it's quite different from sending New Zealand combat forces as, for instance, you know, one could argue Helen Clark did when she sent the SAS in a combat role to Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Media: So in your mind New Zealand has not joined a war?

PM: No, I wouldn't say that. No. That's right—I wouldn't say that.

Media: Is that because they're non-combat troops training other—

PM: Well, because—look, in the past New Zealand's made its significant contributions in the areas of training or other activities, which I don't think you would see as war. I mean, Helen Clark sent engineers to Iraq, for instance. That wasn't seen as New Zealand engaging in the war. We have trainers already at the moment in Afghanistan with the British forces over there. I don't think people see that as an act of combat war. So it's quite a different situation to send people who are on the front line, who are fighting the enemy, versus potentially being in a situation where we are training others that might be in that role.

Media: So do you disagree with the Iraqi Foreign Minister, who said, when he was here, it was the Third World War?

PM: Well, he's obviously having to live through the nightmare of ISIL, and I have huge sympathy for what his country's going through, and for them, they're in a very, very difficult position. But from New Zealand's point of view, if tomorrow, as part of the ministerial statement, we announce that we're sending people to train Iraqi forces, we are just doing that: training Iraqi forces to stand up to ISIL, to combat ISIL. But it's not New Zealand at war with ISIL; it would be New Zealand providing services to assist others.

Media: Do you think you have public support with you, as you send these troops in?

PM: Yeah, look, I think, on balance, yes. It's always a difficult thing for people to assess, but, you know, if you look at the public polls, broadly they've been by a slim majority in favour as opposed to the counter view. I think, also, for New Zealanders, they would just, I think, adopt the view that we would, which is to say that ISIL have demonstrated through its actions over the course of the last year or so just how barbaric they are, and I think New Zealanders would expect us to do something to try and stand up to them. Now, there'll be a range of views of what that something should look like, but on balance we don't have the air combat capability, for instance, that other countries do. We're certainly not on our own if we make this call—62 other countries are involved in some way.

Media: What about parliamentary support? Is it embarrassing that you couldn't pass a vote in support of this idea?

PM: Well, firstly, we don't know that, but anyway it's not the convention to have a vote, actually. The responsibility and authority for sending forces rests with the executive. And, in fact, actually, if you look at history, there's been a range of different things. Yes, in 2001 Helen Clark, when she sent the SAS, had a vote, probably because she knew the National Party was voting for it, but nevertheless had a vote. That's true, but there's lots of other examples you can point to where there hasn't been a vote. There have been ministerial

statements, for instance. We don't have the convention that there'll be a parliamentary vote on these matters, and so, in the end, there'll be certainly a debate tomorrow. There'll be a ministerial statement, and we'll be encouraging other leaders to engage in that, but this is not a matter when—you know, if the basic argument is that New Zealand will be contributing training people, then I don't think that's a matter for a parliamentary vote.

Media: But if this was to escalate in any way and you were required to rethink what our deployment was, would you give a guarantee that you would only do so once you got a vote from Parliament?

PM: Well, I'm happy to give people a guarantee that says I'm not sending people off to actively be involved in combat. The decision that is to be made is one that we'll send training people. The mandate would be very clear for that, and there'll be no capability to step outside that.

Media: I wonder if that's the case on the ground, because over the weekend Canada's top general conceded that the previous assurances he'd given that Canada's forces would play a non-combat training role had proved to be unfounded. Why should we accept your assurances that there's a clear, bright line between training and combat?

PM: Well, for a start off I can't speak, you know, authoritatively about Canada, but they had their SAS forces in Iraq, so they have a different level of capability there. Secondly, the way that these deployments work is that there's an operational mandate, and that mandate is agreed between the defence forces and between the Government that give authority for that. So, in fact, to step outside the mandate would require the executive to change the authority. So I'm quite confident that, you know, while they would theoretically have the capacity to defend themselves, that's quite different from a combat role.

Media: So there'd be an absolute guarantee that no New Zealand troops would go out with the Iraqi troops that they're training on an operation—

PM: Correct.

Media: —to provide that training support?

PM: That's right. There's no—there would be no—there's no discussion or possibility that we would be going on an accompany function. Training, yes, potentially, as you'll see tomorrow, but not necessarily—but not accompanying.

Media: That would suggest not in any air-strike assist capability. You wouldn't be training the Iraqis to locate targets to enhance the capacity of air strikes?

PM: Well, I'm not going to go through all of the details of what we may and may not do, partly because, you know, that can be extrapolated in lots of different ways in terms of functions that people might have from intelligence gathering and others, but what I can say is we're not going to be involved in combat. That's an absolute assurance.

Media: But does that mean not being involved in combat? Will you give a similar undertaking that Kiwi troops will not be involved in intelligence gathering?

PM: Not at this point. We'll have some, you know, may have further to say about what the capability of what they are doing, but in terms of actual combat themselves, fighting people, we're not doing that.

Media: So Kiwi troops could go beyond the wire for intelligence gathering—

PM: Well, you'll just have to wait and see tomorrow. "Beyond the wire" is, you know, a very technical term, but, yeah, you'll have to wait and see tomorrow.

Media: Yeah, but they could go out into the field for intelligence gathering, and you wouldn't necessarily classify that as combat?

PM: I wouldn't expect that to be the way you might define that, but you'll have to wait and see tomorrow.

Media: What is your definition of “behind the wire”? Because you’re the one who first raised it.

PM: Yeah, so in terms of a training capability, training capability would take place in a particular area—a particular secure location. That is what I consider to be behind the wire. So, without getting into too many of the technical details, you know, in the event that they had to defend themselves, if that was the situation, then theoretically they could do that at the real margin. But in principle, in a hypothetical situation, if there was some fire fight down the road and the Iraqis were being overpowered, they couldn’t go and assist that.

Media: However, if they were being attacked themselves, presumably they could return fire?

PM: Correct. They can defend themselves.

Media: Could they not, though, go and give intelligence to form an air strike?

PM: Well, you’ll have to wait and see tomorrow in terms of the sort of announcements and statements that we make. But, you know, intelligence gathering has been things that we have—has been a function that we’ve done in the past in lots of locations. And we’ve certainly done that in places like Afghanistan, and that’s been well and truly—well and truly documented.

Media: What do you understand intelligence gathering to be if it’s not air strike assist? What does it actually consist of?

PM: Oh, look, it could be air strike assist. It could be for a variety of different reasons—

Media: It could be?

PM: Yep, intelligence gathering.

Media: So, if a troop, or some troops, go out—

PM: I think you’re probably thinking about the wrong person, and you would be way better to wait until tomorrow because you’re creating a whole lot of hypothetical examples that I think you don’t quite understand. So if you just wait until tomorrow, you’ll be able to see the announcement and it’ll be quite clear for you.

Media: Will the announcement tomorrow be the final deployment for New Zealand troops to Iraq, or is there potential that it could be augmented a bit further down the track?

PM: No, my expectation is what we announce tomorrow is what we’ll be doing.

Media: So, just to clarify that you don’t consider intelligence gathering for air strikes being part of the war?

PM: No, I don’t. No.

Media: So they could do intelligence gathering? Troops could do intelligence gathering?

PM: Like I say, you’d better wait until tomorrow.

Media: Have you set a time frame for the length of this deployment?

PM: Again, you’ll have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: Because my understanding of intelligence gathering is that it includes, like, troops out in the field saying: “There’s an IS target over there.”

PM: Yep.

Media: So is that non-combat in your eyes?

PM: Just wait—wait until you see tomorrow.

Media: Because that situation is precisely how the Canadians have been involved in fought four fire fights since January. It’s in that—

PM: Well, they have, but then that may be what the Canadians are doing, but it's not what the New Zealanders are doing. We're not going—

Media: But they are doing exactly the same thing, by what you are describing.

PM: No, if you go back and have a look at New Zealand—and, as I say, we're better to have a full and open discussion tomorrow. But if you look at what we did in places like Afghanistan, we had intelligence people that gathered intelligence, and that intelligence may have been used by other forces. I'm not saying that's the case. It's not necessarily troops that have gathered that intelligence. You guys are a bit off-beam, I think, but we'll just see how that goes.

Media: Do you have in your own mind a sense of how many casualties you would tolerate before rethinking a deployment?

PM: Well, obviously we are conscious of the potential risks, but we are also conscious of the fact that it's important that New Zealand, I think, stands up to a group of people which are threatening New Zealanders. And, you know, with all of these things, you can't go into them with your eyes closed; you have to take advice and you have to assess them. All I can say to you is on the basis that if we were to send forces to train Iraqis, we will be doing everything we possibly can to keep our people as safe as we possibly can. Certainly I think it's a safer environment if they're in a contained, secure environment as opposed to being out in a combat role.

Media: So do you think it's safer than it was in Afghanistan, where we lost 10 young military personnel?

PM: Arguably, yes. I mean, in so much that you're subjected to IED attacks at the side of the road and it's a far more uncontrolled environment. But, of course, there are always risks of green-on-blue attacks. You can't rule those out. But we've been training people, as I've said, in Afghanistan for quite a period of time and we haven't had any problems there.

Media: How significant is that risk of green-on-blue attacks?

PM: I can't put, you know, an accurate assessment on it, other than to say that it's a risk, and it's one that you'd have to do everything you could to mitigate against. And on the basis that we made the decision to go and train people, one of the reasons we'd have our own force protection—in other words our own soldiers protecting our own trainers—is because we believe, in our view, that is the safest form of, and highest level of, protection we could afford our soldiers.

Media: For you personally, sending troops into a dangerous situation like this, does this weigh on your mind? Has it kept you awake at night? Are you, you know, aware of the significant consequences?

PM: Yeah, well, look, I'm the person who has sent our SAS off to Afghanistan on a number of occasions, and we have lost people as a result of those executive orders. I've sent, on numerous rotations, our people back to Bamian, and again we've lost people. And obviously I feel that very closely. I've been to funerals and I've spoken to the families, and I've seen the pain that that has on those families, and I acknowledge that fully.

But equally I'm responsible for the safety of New Zealanders, and I happen to know that there are 35 to 40 people on a watch list locally. I happen to know there's a watch list of other people that we are unsure about, but gathering information. I happen to know that there are credible risks if New Zealanders potentially travel in the region from returning foreign fighters, and I happen to know that there are New Zealanders who could be in those locations at risk. And so, in the end it's all about weighing up that, and I think, as I said earlier, there are some risks, potentially, if you send people, but I think you can't take the view that says there is just no risk to New Zealanders if we do nothing. There's not. That risk actually increases; it doesn't decrease.

Media: Could GCSB or SIS agents go to Iraq to identify, or help identify, targets for air strikes?

PM: Have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: You've already spoken about the potential co-training role with Australia. Would that necessarily mean that our troops would have to be located at the same air base that the Australians are currently at?

PM: Well, it's highly likely if we do send people, we'd likely train alongside others. But in the end other countries can make their own calls for different things that they might do. If we were to—

Media: But an ANZUS deployment would necessitate, presumably—seeing as there's more of them than there is of us—that we would go where they are. And where they are, as you know, in Anbar province, has been very recently under attack from IS forces.

PM: Again, I think it's really important to understand that the Government is considering what we believe is the right course of action for New Zealanders and New Zealand forces. We're not dancing to somebody else's tune. It might be that it's beneficial, we think, to work alongside somebody else, another country, but they may have a whole lot of different assumptions that they're making about what they might want to do, about their own forces and the roles that they might play, and you're seeing that with Australia already. They've already got 600 people in Iraq; they're likely to grow those numbers significantly over time. Any contribution they make in Iraq is likely to be of quite a different nature to the one that we might make. There may be some crossover, but there may be quite a lot of differences.

Media: So when you say another country, this would suggest that Australia is on the same footing as our other coalition allies when it comes to co-training.

PM: Well, it depends. There are dozens of countries that are involved in training.

Media: Yeah, I'm asking whether Australia is first among equals.

PM: In what way?

Media: As a co-training partner for New Zealand.

PM: Well, it's a highly respected co-training partner.

Media: That's not what I'm asking. I'm asking whether it is our first choice—our first cab off the rank.

PM: Oh—that, you have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: Do you still think that going to Iraq is “the price of the club”, as you put it?

PM: Well, the club, as I would define it, is those 60-odd countries that are involved in supporting the conflict against ISIL. And, actually, if you look at my direct comments, that's exactly what I said. You go and have a look at them. That's exactly what I said. You guys interpreted it as the “Five Eyes”, but in fact I listed out a series of countries and others.

Media: Well, your Foreign Minister said it was the human race.

PM: Sorry?

Media: Your Foreign Minister interpreted it as the human race. Was he wrong?

PM: Well, I don't know. I haven't seen his comments.

Media: Prime Minister, has a status of forces agreement been secured with the Iraqi Government, or will you be looking at another method of protecting the troops?

PM: You'd have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: Will the troops be relying on diplomatic passports?

PM: You'll have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: What proportion of the troops are likely to be in that force protection role?

PM: You'd have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: But likely a high—you have kind of indicated in the past that it'd likely be a high percentage.

PM: Well, you'd have to wait.

Media: When you say they won't go in a combat role but they'll be able to defend themselves, if the decision is to send them, without getting too theoretical, if there's ISIS forces, you know, lobbing RPGs into the area behind the wire where our forces are, will they be they mandated to go outside? Could they be mandated to go outside and fight?

PM: Well, you always want to make sure that there is flexibility to ensure that they could protect themselves but not involve themselves in a conflict. There's quite a bit of difference, I think—

Media: But you may be protecting—sorry to interrupt. But you may be protecting yourself more effectively by going outside the wire and preventing—

PM: You could do, and so you would never have a mandate that said you'd get to this point and you could not move a single inch beyond that, but there's, I think, quite a lot of difference between, you know, what New Zealanders would understand, and certainly what I would understand, in forces that you send into a combat conflict role, and the capacity of people to defend themselves. So the police have the capacity to defend themselves, and in fact they do that. From time to time they're attacked and they defend themselves. That's quite a different scenario from saying there's a fire fight happening down the road, and our guys believe they're being overwhelmed and so they go and help them.

Media: Is the risk of insider attacks the chief reason behind taking force protection—having force protection?

PM: Well, as I said earlier, my assessment would be, if that's the call we make, that's the highest level of protection, and I would want to ensure our forces had the highest level of protection.

Media: And it's about insider attacks? It's about guarding against insider attacks?

PM: Well, it's just about, you know, in the end, you could do lots of roles which, you know, New Zealand replicate there and do itself because it's confident that that would be the best way of doing that. That's historically the way we've done things. If you go and have a look at Bamian, I mean, some of it probably wasn't possible to replicate on the ground, some of it was, but as a general rule we've, you know, typically looked after ourselves, provided logistics for ourselves, provided force protection for ourselves, because we believe that's the best way.

Media: And given that risk of insider attacks, would you expect our troops to have access or have loaded weapons within arm's reach at all times?

PM: Well, again, we'll cover that off tomorrow.

Media: On Donghua Liu, last year you said you couldn't remember where the dinner took place that you had with him. It's now emerged that that was at his home.

PM: I don't think that's actually right. I think that statement came from my office, but I'd have to check it.

Media: But do you remember that dinner now at his home?

PM: Well, I did at the time. As I said, it was a fundraising dinner.

Media: But your office said that—

PM: No, it wasn't—my office was asked whether we went to a fundraising dinner or what activities we'd had, and they pretty clearly spelt out we went to a fundraising dinner. We don't say where we go to dinner.

Media: Are you misleading by omission, though?

PM: No. I mean, look, at the end of the day, we're never going to start getting into a process of saying where we had dinner, you know, basically what I ate. You know, in the end I think it's quite appropriate that you ask us if we go to fundraising dinners, and it's quite appropriate that we're clear with you that we do, but that level of specificity, we're never getting into.

Media: In general, do you go to many fundraising dinners at private homes?

PM: Sometimes, yeah.

Media: When did you know that Jami-Lee Ross had received a donation from him?

PM: Well, I only knew that he was returning it, so I can't tell you I knew at the time, but I knew it was a Cabinet club dinner, so I figured—

Media: When you were at [*Inaudible*] was that donation discussed?

PM: No. I never involve myself in donations. I go to events, but I'm not involved in donations. They're handled by the party.

Media: Just to be clear, last year your office denied that the dinner was a Cabinet club dinner. Emphatically, they said no.

PM: Right.

Media: Are you saying it was a Cabinet club dinner?

PM: Well, that's only what I read in the paper on the weekend. People have their own definitions of it.

Media: So can I be clear: was it a Cabinet club meeting?

PM: I don't know. You'd have to ask to Jami-Lee Ross then. He organised it.

Media: But didn't you just say it was a Cabinet club dinner?

PM: Well, like I say.

Media: How do you define a Cabinet club dinner?

PM: Well, that's right, how do you?

Media: Well, we don't go to them.

PM: OK. Well, I mean, look, it can be a variety of different ways. They can be someone who's in a Cabinet club and someone who's not.

Media: But it was a fundraising dinner?

PM: Yep. As my office said, it was a fundraising dinner.

Media: Do you know why the donation wasn't declared?

PM: I don't think it has to be at that point. I mean, I don't know. You'd have to ask Jami-Lee Ross. It was a local—

Media: There was a delay on the receipt of the donation and it being returned.

PM: Don't know. I don't handle that. You'd have to ask him.

Media: So you seem to be contradicting your office, who emphatically said it was not a Cabinet club dinner.

PM: Well, probably it wasn't then. I don't know. I don't know—I don't know the details. All I can tell you is it was a fundraising dinner. I was asked whether it was a fundraising

dinner—well, my office was asked, and they said it was, and that's it. We're not going to start going into saying that, you know, it's at a particular place or we eat a certain thing. We're quite happy to tell you what's a fundraising dinner and what's not, but that's it.

Media: But just moments ago you said it was a Cabinet club dinner.

PM: Well, only because that's what I read in the paper. If you're telling me it wasn't, it wasn't.

Media: But you were there.

PM: Well, because they don't have a big banner on them. You just go to a dinner. I mean, you're being a bit pedantic and a bit silly about it. I mean, I don't know those things. I go to lots and lots of dinners, I go to lots of fundraisers, and they're well and truly declared. I don't involve myself in donations. I go to things. That was a particular fundraising dinner. We were asked that question and we made it quite clear there's nothing terribly special about it.

Media: Do you know if someone in the National Party advised Jami-Lee to give the donation back?

PM: No. I'm not aware of that.

Media: Just on ACT's claims for a referendum on the super age, would you support that at all?

PM: No.

Media: Have they spoken to you about that?

PM: No. I mean, I saw it in the paper, but—

Media: So that was the first you heard of it?

PM: Sorry?

Media: That was the first you heard of it?

PM: Yeah.

Media: And absolutely no plans?

PM: Well, the National Party's position's clear, actually, on super. I think we believe that the age should stay at 65, and the rules around it, 66 percent entitlement, should stay there.

Media: Did Tony Abbott ever talk to you informally about an Australian force entering Iraq?

PM: There's been so many discussions about—you mean, about what Australian forces are doing there?

Media: Yeah, well, there was a report at the weekend in the *Australian* saying he had raised the notion informally of 3,500 Australian—

PM: Oh, I've—he never raised that with me, no. I was just aware that his SAS is going there. That's it.

Media: Have you seen his national security statement from today?

PM: Look, I've just had someone sort of paraphrase it for me, but I haven't read it.

Media: He seems quite a lot more alarmed about the threat in Australia. Do you think that's reflected here in New Zealand?

PM: Well, the advice I get is that the number of people of potential interest to the Government, or to the authorities, probably more precisely, as a result of ISIL is rising.

Media: Has it risen since November—the speech you gave?

PM: Yes, that's the advice I've had.

Media: By how much?

PM: We'll come back to you and tell you exactly, but the last time I was briefed by SIS they said it was rising.

Media: Have you been advised that Boko Haram have said they're going to target Westfield shopping malls?

PM: Again, I've just seen—that's internationally, isn't it, in the USA? I've just seen the media reports. I haven't had any formal advice.

Media: Nothing about New Zealand?

PM: No.

Media: How concerned are you about the fruit fly find?

PM: Well, obviously, we're concerned because, you know, it presents a risk to the horticultural sector, and it's a very important sector in New Zealand. I mean, I do think that if you look at what's happening, you're obviously seeing the fruit fly—it's more prevalent in Australia. It's moving—it's moved to quite a number of states. It's a bigger risk to New Zealand. I think what isn't correct is the arguments that we're not doing enough. I mean, we have added 125 extra people, we've doubled the number of X-ray machines, we're spending \$7 million more on biosecurity. So there's a lot of different actions that we have been taking, but what is clear is it's a bigger threat, because there's simply more of them.

Media: So you don't think it's a fault with our customs?

PM: I don't, no. I mean, in fact, actually, there was quite a bit of work done on—you'll remember the arguments around screening, and whether there should be 100 percent screening through the green lane, and, in fact, the profiling work has proven to be the right thing to do. So people are far more likely to declare when they go through the green zone, and, in fact, you know, the work that we're doing there gives us—and the fact that we're profiling gives us—the ability to target where we think there's much greater risk. What is true is there are four ways that you can get fruit into New Zealand; only one of them actually is through our airports. There's many other ways. We don't actually know how this affected fruit's got in here, but we do know that it's—we've got very big borders, and there's quite a lot of threat from a growing problem in Australia.

Media: Are you confident that MPI has the resources it needs to be able to eradicate it?

PM: Yes. I mean, they've got four stages or levels they can go to. They're at level 2 at the moment. I think they're working hard to try and eradicate them. There's been an example of a different fruit fly, I think it was, but back in 1996, and they were successful. They had 40, in the end, of those particular flies, I think, that they got. So they're going to work hard to eradicate it, and they've got, I think, 7,500 traps. So they've got a lot of people and a lot of energy going into trying to eradicate it.

Media: And will the Government step in at all to assure our export markets that our fruit are safe?

PM: We've already contacted all of our export markets, and at this stage there's been a pretty muted response internationally.

Media: Would our force protection be akin to the guardian angels role that NATO held in Afghanistan?

PM: I don't know what you're talking about there.

Media: Right, so, guardian angels within armed forces that were just protecting joint operations or gathering [*Inaudible*].

PM: Wouldn't want to offer a view on it; haven't heard of it.

Media: But you'd expect our force protection at the very least to be armed in Iraq?

PM: You'd have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: Do you think it would be a positive step if NATO got more involved in training in Iraq?

PM: Well, what the Iraqi Foreign Minister said to us when we had our meeting was that their No. 1 issue was security. So I know there's been all sorts of different reports, but when we met with him he said the No. 1 thing that could be done to help Iraq would be to build up their security capability.

Media: In your meetings with Tony Abbott this weekend will you talk about the potential for the currencies to go to parity?

PM: I might rib him about it, but I don't think we'll be making any predictions it'd be happening. I've seen lots of predictions of parity parties in the past. I never quite attended one yet. Look, I mean, in the end one of the big advantages New Zealand had in 2009-2010 when I first became Prime Minister was that our exchange rate was very competitive with Australia, so there'd be a lot of exporters that would be a little unhappy with the current level of the exchange rate. But I think it probably reflects the relative economic performances of the two economies at the moment.

Media: Are you concerned at all about Australia's *[Inaudible]*?

PM: Well, I think "concerned" might be the wrong word. I mean, it's a big market in Australia, but it's a large part of our exports and a large part of our economy. So I would say New Zealand does well when Australia does well, so we want Australia to do well.

Media: Do you know, with a status of forces agreement, would it have been essential for the Iraqi Parliament to ratify such an agreement?

PM: I don't know.

Media: Because in the past you've spoken about how the Government of Mr al-Albadi is now more inclusive than previous regimes. Do you still hold that view, given that the Sunni bloc of MPs seem to be boycotting the Parliament at present?

PM: Well, that's certainly the advice we've had. That's certainly the view of others that, you know, we work alongside and talk to about these matters. They are much more confident about the Prime Minister and the steps that he is taking and his Government is taking. And—

Media: It seems to be wishful thinking, when the bloc that you're trying to include are boycotting the process that you're trying to foster.

PM: Well, I think it's—I mean, look, in the end there will always be different interpretations and different things happening there. But on a relative basis, compared to Maliki, the general feeling is that they're in a much stronger position, with a more inclusive Prime Minister now. That's the advice I get.

Media: If you do deploy tomorrow, do you—would it be in any way linked to the Washington Declaration or the "Five Eyes" alliance?

PM: No. I mean, it'd be a decision made by New Zealand, independently.

Media: *[Inaudible]* on the weekend talked about a 25,000 Iraqi push towards Mosul, involving five brigades and a crash training programme for those forces. Are our forces likely to be engaged in that particular operation?

PM: In terms of the—

Media: Training.

PM: The training of them—

Media: They've said there's a need for a crash training programme for the April-May offensive.

PM: I simply don't know. I mean, if we were to make the decision to send people, it would take some time to get there, so it doesn't sound like it would fit within that time frame.

Media: What's the expected time of arrival of our troops in—

PM: You'll have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: Are you still set on putting a time limit on the deployment?

PM: You'll have to wait till tomorrow.

Media: Have any of our major trading partners expressed reservations about New Zealand joining a deployment?

PM: No, not that I can recall. OK.

conclusion of press conference