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Dear Sunday Star Times Editor,

I write with regard to Ms Alison Mau's piece of 17 February 2019.

Ms Mau wrongly asserts that the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Building Partner Capacity training mission at Camp Taji in Iraq is "top secret", and shows a photograph of NZDF troops enjoying Waitangi Day there to aid her incorrect claim.

Ms Mau must have missed the announcement by the last Government of the Building Partner Capacity mission in 2015, the debate in Parliament about the deployment, the large number of press releases the NZDF has issued on the matter, and the carriage of Stuff's political editor, along with other media outlets, to Camp Taji.

The only caveat on coverage was about identifying NZDF personnel deployed as part of that operation. That caveat, made in early 2015, came after analysis of the threat posed to both our people, and their families at home, from ISIS. That threat has since receded and the caveat was lifted last year.

A measure taken to protect the safety of our people and their families does not make the entire deployment "top secret". Had Alison Mau asked, the NZDF would have told her about the caveat, its reason for being, and the reason it was subsequently reviewed and amended.

On the Operation Burnham inquiry; this was convened under the Inquiries Act and it is up to the Inquiry how it operates. There is information that is classified, but that is what one would expect. The inquiry has decided how to handle classified material – not the NZDF.

That does not mean the operation hasn't been described in some detail publicly – it has back in March 2017 by the then Chief of Defence Force, Lieutenant General Keating, and a large amount of information since then on our website. I am not referring to the book Hit & Run -- which bears no resemblance to the operation that was carried out.

While I acknowledge this was an opinion piece, the lack of factual reporting, the one-sided commentary, and grab-bag of issues has left 14,000 men and women of the Defence Force wondering where the fairness, accuracy and balance was.

**K. R. SHORT**  
Air Marshal  
Chief of Defence Force

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