1. What is Talisman Sabre?

Talisman Sabre is the largest exercise that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) conducts with all four services of the United States armed forces. It covers training in land, air and maritime warfare, including amphibious operations.

The biennial exercise focuses on crisis action planning and humanitarian missions, enhancing participating nations’ capabilities to deal with regional contingencies and terrorism.

2. What is the nature of the New Zealand Defence Force’s (NZDF) participation in the exercise?

The NZDF has been invited to participate fully for the first time. During the exercise, NZDF personnel will be working as part of a large force led by the Australians and NZDF military assets will be integrated with those of the ADF and the US armed forces.

3. When and where will this year’s exercise be held?

Talisman Sabre 15 will be held from 5 – 21 July in multiple training areas in Australia and the US. Most activity will take place in the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area in Central Queensland and Fog Bay in Australia’s Northern Territory.

It will involve around 30,000 troops from the ADF, the US military, the NZDF and the Japan Self-Defense Force, 21 ships including the US Navy aircraft carrier USS George Washington, more than 200 aircraft and three submarines.

4. What assets and how many personnel is the NZDF deploying for the exercise?

The NZDF is deploying the following:

- 2 ships – HMNZS TE KAHA and HMNZS ENDEAVOUR
- 4 aircraft – 2 NH90s, 1 Seasprite and 1 C-130
- 22 Light Armoured Vehicles, 11 Pinzgauers, 10 Unimogs, 1 Combat Tractor (a highly mobile excavator) and 1 Gap Crossing System (an aluminium bridge used to support combat crossing operations)
- Around 620 personnel, including 250 NZ Army personnel who will be embedded within the ADF’s 7 Brigade.

5. What are the goals of the exercise?

Talisman Sabre seeks to improve Australian-US readiness to plan and execute contingency responses, from combat missions to humanitarian assistance efforts. It also aims to strengthen the two countries’ ability to work together effectively during crises and provide humanitarian assistance when called upon to do so.

The exercise includes amphibious landings, parachuting, land force manoeuvres, urban operations, air operations, maritime operations and the coordinated firing of live ammunition and explosive ordnance from small arms, artillery, naval vessels and aircraft.

6. What are the benefits of this training for the New Zealand Defence Force?

The NZDF can use learnings from the exercise to inform its continuing efforts to develop the Joint Task Force (JTF), which is targeted to be fully operational by the end of 2015. The JTF joins the operational and support elements of the three Services into an integrated and coherent task force which can deploy, operate and sustain combat forces away from New Zealand.

Exercises such as Talisman Sabre offer relevant and effective training to further hone our people’s warfighting capabilities and their ability to respond to a wide variety of contingencies.

It is also an opportunity to train with key partners – Australia and the US – so we can further enhance our ability to operate alongside them in a combined and joint setting.

7. What other forces will participate or attend as observers of the exercise?

Members of the Japanese Self-Defense Force will participate for the first time as embedded personnel within US military units.

Twenty other countries have been invited to attend the International Observer programme.

8. How many times has the exercise been held?

Talisman Sabre has been held five times since 2005. This year’s exercise is the sixth iteration.