



Share



Save



Jacinda Ardern was visiting Antarctica to see research on global warming

RICK RYCROFT/AP

Italian air force rescues Jacinda Ardern stranded in Antarctica

Embarrassment for New Zealand after double trouble with ageing aircraft

[Demand more content](#)

[Bernara Lagan](#), Sydney

Monday October 31 2022, 3.15pm GMT, The Times

Share



Save



Italy's air force has had to rescue New Zealand's prime minister from Antarctica after her nation's ageing aircraft let her down for the second time in a week.

An Italian air force C-130 Hercules flew Jacinda Ardern to New Zealand on Saturday after her 50-year-old aircraft broke down on the ice. The glitch was doubly embarrassing for the Royal New Zealand Air Force. It was forced to abort its attempt last week to fly the prime minister to Antarctica for her first official visit.

Pilots feared that the New Zealand Hercules was incapable of landing in Antarctica's deteriorating weather and chose to turn back midway through the eight-hour flight. [Ardern](#) then accepted a lift on board an American C-17 jet transport — a larger, more capable aircraft.

Jacinda Ardern was given a lift home in a C-130 Hercules after glitches with New Zealand's aircraft

Share



Save



Jacinda Ardern was given a lift home in a C-130 Hercules after glitches with New Zealand's aircraft

ANTOINE ANTONIOL/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

The debacle has focused attention on New Zealand's low defence spending, outraging some MPs who view the aged air force fleet as a national embarrassment.

“Instead of stealing gold in Mini Coopers, the latest version of *The Italian Job* [film] has the Italian government transporting New Zealand's prime minister in a Hercules,” James McDowall, the defence spokesman for the opposition ACT party,

said.

Share



Save



“New Zealand’s ancient planes are falling to bits . . . at the moment we’re lucky to be able to successfully get off the tarmac let alone defend ourselves.”

The World Bank reported that in 2020 New Zealand spent 1.56 per cent of its GDP on defence. This compares with more than 2 per cent of GDP spent by the UK and Australia.

Last year Air Marshal Kevin Short, chief of the New Zealand Defence Force, said the nation had only three capabilities that could survive in a “hot” contested environment; its two frigates, SAS troops and its 50 year-old P-3 Orion maritime surveillance aircraft. The nation has not had a jet fighter force for two decades, after the last combat squadron was mothballed by Helen Clark, the former Labour prime minister.

New Zealand’s remaining air force planes are so limited in performance that the prime minister and her fiancé, [Clarke Gayford](#), have taken to accepting lifts overseas on board other leaders’ aircraft. After the Queen’s funeral in September, Ardern

hitched a ride from London aboard the official aircraft of with Justin Trudeau, the Canadian prime minister, while Gavford had to rely on the Australian air force for a

Share



Save



SPONSORED

Lift home.

Delays because of faulty aircraft are nothing new for New Zealand's leaders, who have endured a long and embarrassing history of being stranded overseas.

After visiting President Biden of the US in June, Ardern had to fly home on a commercial aircraft after her 30 year-old New Zealand air force Boeing 757 broke down in Washington DC. In August another Hercules breakdown left Peeni Henare, the defence minister, and a 30-strong delegation stuck in the Solomon Islands.

In 2019, Ardern was left stranded in Australia by another breakdown. [Winston Peters](#), then the deputy prime minister, became stuck in the Pacific when his aircraft broke down.

The New Zealand air force will begin taking delivery of new Hercules transports from 2024 and late this year will receive the first of four new P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft to replace the ageing Orions.