



New Zealand
Security Intelligence
Service
Te Pā Whakamarumarū

Security Intelligence Report | SIR

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Terrorism: The impact of ISIL's decline in Syria and Iraq on its supporters in New Zealand

Summary

~~S // AUS CAN GBR NZL USA~~

1. (S//FVEY) There has been a small reduction in support for ISIL among New Zealand-based extremists since mid-2016, when ISIL's caliphate began its decline. Nonetheless, in the near term, a low level of domestic support for ISIL is likely to endure.
2. (S//FVEY) New Zealand-based Islamist extremists will likely continue to aspire to travel offshore to engage in militant jihad alongside ISIL, but counter-terrorism measures, effected both in New Zealand and internationally, mean they are unlikely to succeed in doing so.
3. (C) Should ISIL be defeated in Syria and Iraq, it is possible some New Zealand-based Islamist extremists will turn their interest to other conflict regions, or switch their support to other Islamist terrorist groups.
4. (C) ISIL's decline is unlikely to significantly impact on the present low threat of terrorist attack in New Zealand, despite ISIL propaganda now calling for its external supporters to conduct attacks in their home countries.
5. (S//NZE0) Activity by known New Zealand Islamist radicalisers has diminished since ISIL began to decline, although this is likely a consequence primarily of personal or domestic matters. Online communities of New Zealand-based extremists continue to provide avenues to support ISIL.

Report Detail

Context

6. (C) The caliphate in Syria and Iraq proclaimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in June 2014 has been in decline since mid-2016, when the Iraqi city of Fallujah was liberated from ISIL control. As of early 2017, anti-ISIL military forces, consisting of Iraqi and Syrian armed forces and their international backers, Kurdish forces, anti-ISIL Syrian opposition groups, and US-led Coalition Forces have significantly reduced ISIL's territory, troops, and finances.
7. (C) Mid-2016 also marked a turning point in ISIL's messaging to supporters. In a 2016 Ramadan message, now-deceased ISIL spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani encouraged supporters to conduct attacks in Western countries instead of travelling to the caliphate. Similar messages were broadcast by ISIL leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in November 2016, and by Adnani's successor, Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, in December 2016.
8. (C) The loss of ISIL's territorial caliphate will likely diminish ISIL's appeal among its supporters worldwide, many of whom were attracted by the prospect of life in an idealised Islamic state. Nonetheless, it is highly unlikely this will bring about the end of ISIL as a transnational terrorist organisation, or the end of potential security threats from its supporters, some of whom will likely seek retribution on the West.

Assessment

~~S // NZL~~

Support for ISIL in New Zealand

9. (S//NZEO) There has been a small reduction in support for ISIL among New Zealand-based extremists since mid-2016, when ISIL's caliphate began its decline. Recent reporting indicates pro-ISIL rhetoric among some New Zealand-based Islamist extremists has declined, s6(a) [REDACTED]. However, ISIL still carries the prestige of its past successes, and new ISIL supporters based in New Zealand continue to be identified by NZSIS despite ISIL's recent territorial losses in Syria and Iraq.
10. (S//NZEO) ISIL is not yet defeated in Syria and Iraq, and the impact of its rapid rise to prominence and earlier military victories likely remains a source of inspiration for ISIL supporters. s6(a) [REDACTED] This level of support is unlikely to endure in the long term, however, unless ISIL manages to regain its previous image of strength and success.
 - i. s6(a) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- ii. (S//NZE) Despite the group's decline, New Zealand-based Islamist extremists continue to express support for ISIL online, although such support has not to date resulted in significant real-world activities.

Radicalisation

- 11. (S//NZE) **ISIL's decline has possibly contributed to a decrease in radicalising activity by known New Zealand-based supporters.** ISIL's decline has possibly been among the factors contributing to their reduced support for the group and diminished radicalising activity; however, a new or increased focus on personal or domestic matters likely has been more significant in most cases. Nonetheless, there is a realistic possibility new radicalising influences could arise in New Zealand—especially within online networks of ISIL supporters—as ISIL's physical caliphate declines and the group is forced to rely more on its online networks to recruit new supporters and spread propaganda.

- i. s6(a) [REDACTED]

Travel aspirations

- 12. (S//NZE) **New Zealand's ISIL supporters will likely continue to aspire to travel offshore to engage in militant jihad alongside ISIL in the near term.** s6(a)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] While interest in such travel will likely continue in the near term while support for ISIL endures, passport cancellations, a lack of finances, and other personal factors make it unlikely that any of these individuals will succeed in reaching ISIL-held territories.

- i. s6(a) [REDACTED]

- 13. (S//NZE) It is unlikely ISIL's caliphate is the sole drawcard for these aspiring travellers.

s6(a) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] primary motivations likely remain militant jihad or martyrdom—activities they could still undertake in other regions, should ISIL be defeated in Syria and Iraq.

- 14. (S//NZE) There is a realistic possibility New Zealand's ISIL supporters will show interest in travelling to alternative conflict regions for martyrdom or militant jihad, should ISIL be convincingly defeated in Syria and Iraq. This interest may include theatres more accessible from New Zealand, such as those in Southeast Asia.

- i. s6(a) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- ii. s6(a) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Jihadist allegiances

15. (S//NZE) **There is a realistic possibility some New Zealand-based ISIL supporters will switch allegiance to other terrorist entities as ISIL loses power and prestige.**

s6(a). Summary: Prior to ISIL's emergence some New Zealand ISIL supports favoured other terrorist groups. [REDACTED] ISIL's early military successes, its physical caliphate, and its sophisticated propaganda output were likely key factors in drawing these supporters to ISIL; likewise, ISIL's decline will possibly encourage New Zealand extremists to support other Islamist terrorist groups, or Islamist causes in general.

Domestic terror threat

16. (S//NZE) **ISIL's decline is unlikely to have a significant impact on the threat of a terrorist attack in New Zealand.** s6(a) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Although it remains possible that ISIL's messaging and propaganda could contribute to a known or previously unknown New Zealand extremist undertaking a likely unsophisticated domestic attack, we assess such messaging would likely be one contributing factor among other triggers.

ENDS

NZSIS Contact: Intelligence Publications Manager s6(a) [REDACTED]

Distribution

Domestic

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