



DEPARTMENT OF THE  
PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET  
TE TARI O TE PIRIMIA ME TE KOMITI MATUA

National Security Systems Directorate

# Counter Terrorism Handbook

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# Introduction

## Background

1. The Government's response to national crises is outlined in the National Security System (NSS) Handbook. The NSS is New Zealand's all-hazard national strategic planning and crisis management system and it comprises three levels: a committee of key Ministers appointed by the Prime Minister; the Officials' Committee for Domestic and External Security Co-ordination (ODESC); and Watch Groups. During crises the NSS provides strategic direction and ensures a coordinated government response. The NSS facilitates effective decision-making based upon situational awareness, a shared understanding of how events may unfold and procedures to ensure that decisions are taken in a structured way, at an appropriate level.
2. A counter-terrorism response has the overall aim of securing a swift resolution that reduces the risk to the public and ensures as little disruption and distress as possible. Under New Zealand law an act of terrorism is a crime, and as such is subject to criminal investigation and the judicial process. NZ Police therefore has the primary responsibility for the operational response to a domestic terrorist incident.
3. In some circumstances, the Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management (MCDEM) and regional-level Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Groups are likely to be requested to coordinate the response to manage the consequences of a domestic terrorist incident.
4. The frontline response (operational, and management of consequences) to an incident is typically managed locally or regionally, and supported at the national level. However, the complexity of terrorism requires that the Government be directly involved to harness all national resources to respond to an incident, which may have wide-ranging implications. The response is guided by strategic objectives.
5. The strategic objectives for an initial central government response are to:
  - a. **Ensure public safety, protect human life and alleviate suffering;**
  - b. **Preserve sovereignty, and minimise impacts on society, the economy, and the environment;**
  - c. **Ensure responsiveness to community needs;**
  - d. **Support the continuity of everyday activity, and the early restoration of disrupted services;**
  - e. **Uphold the rule of law, democratic institutions and national values.**

## Purpose

6. In addressing terrorism, New Zealand takes a risk management approach known as the '4 Rs'. The '4 Rs' approach, as outlined in the 2019 national Counter-Terrorism Strategy, encompasses end-to-end risk management around four elements: risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery. This Handbook is focused on the initial 'response' element of a terrorism event and is intended to act as an aide memoire that provides guidance for Ministers and officials when actual or imminent attacks occur.
7. The Handbook aims to:

- a. Identify credible terrorist attack scenarios within the current terrorism threat environment;
- b. Describe end-state objectives;
- c. Identify possible response options, and associated agency roles and responsibilities;
- d. Outline the actions taken by agencies in advance of the key Ministers and ODESC meeting;
- e. Provide Ministers and senior officials with an indicative meeting run sheet including key considerations;
- f. Provide background information concerning the enablers that contribute to an effective counter terrorism response.

## Scenarios

8. While recognising the uniqueness of terrorist incidents, and accordingly the need to maintain a flexible approach, observations from other countries' experience indicate that there are recurring themes and considerations that need to be addressed during a response. The Handbook is arranged with this in mind, while also drawing on New Zealand's current domestic terrorist threat assessment.
9. The Handbook does not contain an exhaustive list of all possible terrorist scenarios. Instead, it focuses on five scenarios that are indicative of the range and nature of credible terrorist events based on the current terrorism threat environment. The five credible scenarios are:
  - **Scenario 1: a change in New Zealand's domestic terrorist threat level;**
  - **Scenario 2: a short, isolated attack;**
  - **Scenario 3: a hostage-taking/siege incident;**
  - **Scenario 4: simultaneous attacks or complex cascading attack;**
  - **Scenario 5: a terrorist incident overseas that may impact New Zealanders or have consequences in New Zealand.**
10. A real terrorist incident may differ from these scenarios or may encompass aspects from a number of them. The guidance in this Handbook should be adapted according to the unique nature of the terrorist event.

## What Ministers can expect

11. The NSS is geared to assisting Ministers to make well-informed decisions and provide a degree of order and structure in challenging conditions. In this case a terrorist incident.
12. When an incident occurs, a committee of key Ministers would be convened in special session, as part of its role to "Coordinate and direct national responses to major crises or circumstances affecting national security either domestically or internationally". Ministers can expect to be briefed by the Chair of ODESC, the Commissioner of Police as well as supporting agencies' chief executives. In advance of the briefing, and time permitting, Ministers will receive a summary of what has happened. At the initial meeting, Ministers will be:
  - a. informed of what decisions are required of them and asked to provide direction to officials;
  - b. updated on what has occurred;

- c. informed of the impact;
- d. briefed on what the response is;
- e. briefed on what the public is being told.

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