



THREAT ASSESSMENT

Restricted: New Zealand terrorism threat environment following the Christchurch attack

Issued: 16 April 2019

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DMS6-14-377

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This assessment is based on information drawn from a variety of domestic and international resources and open source data. Threat definitions can be found on the last page.

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Summary

1. (R) For a more detailed report at a higher classification, please contact CTAG.
2. (R) The full impact of the 15 March Christchurch attack on New Zealand's terrorism threat environment will not be known for some time, due to the unprecedented nature of the attack.
3. (R) Individuals and small groups directed, inspired, or encouraged by Sunni Islamist extremist groups remain the principal extremist threat in the West, and ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) continues to be the predominant global terrorist actor. Since the 15 March Christchurch attack, CTAG has not sighted information indicating Islamist extremists in New Zealand are mobilising to violence.
4. (R) CTAG notes right-wing extremism in New Zealand is generally fragmented and disorganised. White nationalist groups ^{s6(a)} [REDACTED] have received little support. However, the extreme right wing has a significant presence online. We assess the capability, namely firearms, used in the Christchurch attack indicates the significant degree of capability easily available in New Zealand. We assess it remains possible other right-wing extremists have a similar level of capability.
5. (R) There is a realistic possibility that lone actors inspired by various ideologies, could become radicalised and mobilise to violence, without coming to the attention of intelligence or law enforcement agencies for extremist related reasons.

Introduction

6. (R) There has been a shift in New Zealand's terrorism threat environment following the 15 March Christchurch attack. The attack is the first successful terrorist attack in New Zealand, and could act as precedent for both right-wing and Islamist extremists in New Zealand. However, it will take time to fully understand any long term impacts on New Zealand's terrorism threat environment.

7. (R) This assessment is intended to provide an understanding of the short-to-medium term terrorism threat environment in New Zealand, in the context of the Christchurch attack and the global threat environment. This includes an assessment of how Islamist, right-wing, and other extremist ideologies may manifest in New Zealand.

Islamist extremism

Overview

8. (R) Individuals and small groups directed, inspired, or encouraged by Sunni Islamist extremist groups remain the principal source of terrorist threat in the West, and despite its battlefield losses ISIL continues to be the predominant global terrorist actor.
9. (R) Sunni Islamist extremism is a revolutionary political ideology, the goal of which is to remove existing social and political systems, and impose a single system based on a literalist interpretation of the Qur'an. A principle of Sunni Islamist extremist ideology is that violence is not only a legitimate, but mandatory, tool in this revolutionary struggle. Sunni Islamist extremists often regard various non-literalist Muslims as *takfir* (apostates).

Targets

10. (R) Islamist extremist terrorist attacks generally occur against indiscriminate targets in the West. Lone actors often attack symbolic targets, such as military or police personnel. However, target selection can be influenced by many factors and may not fit into wider trends.
11. (R) Other targets have been chosen because they were perceived to have insulted Islam. In 2015, 12 people were killed in attacks targeting satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. The magazine had previously published cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad.
12. (R) Places of mass gathering, including public events and transport hubs, are attractive targets for terrorists. Both ISIL and AQ (al-Qa'ida) have a demonstrated preference for such targets. Such places are appealing for lone actors as low sophistication attacks have the potential to cause mass casualties. s6(a)

Modus Operandi

13. (R) Low sophistication attacks continue to be the most likely methodology chosen by Islamist extremists, involving rudimentary weapons such as bladed weapons and vehicles. These are within the capability of most individuals, and minimal planning is required. Firearms are also considered a low sophistication methodology, although the acquisition of firearms or ammunition may present a barrier in some countries.
14. (R) Islamist extremist groups are innovative and continue to assess s6(a) for vulnerabilities. IEDs remain the method of choice for groups s6(a) internationally, due to their versatility and potential impact. s6(a)

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15. (R) Propaganda, including instructional guides and analysis of attacks, demonstrates the ease in which terrorist capability can be acquired. Issues of AQAP's (al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula) *Inspire* magazine often provided guidance on targeting and methodology. ISIL's propaganda effort to encourage extremists to conduct attacks in their home countries rather than travel to the conflict zone, coupled with the proven success and impact of low sophistication attacks, has lowered the barriers for conducting an attack.
16. (R) Islamist extremist groups are innovative and continue to assess ^{s6(a)} [REDACTED] for vulnerabilities. IEDs remain the method of choice for groups ^{s6(a)} [REDACTED] internationally, due to their versatility and potential impact. ^{s6(a)} [REDACTED]

New Zealand context

17. (R) CTAG is aware of a small number of Islamist extremists in New Zealand who are of security concern and who have the capability to commit an unsophisticated terrorist attack.
18. (R) There have been numerous calls of encouragement over many years from ISIL, AQ, and their supporters to conduct attacks targeting the West. Since the Christchurch attack, calls of encouragement have moved to specifically mentioning New Zealand. CTAG has however not sighted information indicating Islamist extremists in New Zealand are mobilising to violence.
19. (R) Following the Christchurch attack, a pro-ISIL social media entity released a propaganda image threatening civil aviation, possibly between Australia and New Zealand. CTAG has not sighted any credible reporting indicating such attack planning is underway and judge that targeting aviation requires a high level of capability and a significant amount of lead time to achieve.

Right-wing extremism

Overview

20. (R) There is no agreed definition of right-wing extremism. Right-wing extremism is an umbrella term to encompass a broad set of ideologies that include, but are not limited to: white supremacy, anti-Semitism, National Socialism, anti-immigration, anti-Islam, anti-left-wing, and ethnic-nationalism. Adherents can also espouse the view that they have a patriotic duty to preserve Western culture and values from perceived threats. It is important to note that this definition reflects ideology, and does not assume violence.

Targets

21. (R) Individuals who adhere to a violent extreme right-wing ideology typically conduct targeted attacks against specific populations they perceive as in opposition to their ideology. This includes immigrants, particularly the Muslim and Jewish communities, homosexuals, or left-leaning politicians, journalists or other public figures. However, we do note that the choice of target can also be influenced by personal grievance.

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22. (R) It is unlikely that an individual with an extreme right-wing ideology would conduct an indiscriminate mass casualty attack against crowded places, due to their intended targets generally being confined to a specific group of people.

Modus Operandi

23. (R) Extreme right-wing actors generally conduct well-considered and planned attacks, potentially with significant lead time (up to months or years ahead of the attack). Right-wing extremists do not typically consider suicide attacks, as they view survival and any publicity from subsequent legal proceedings as an opportunity to further disseminate their extremist ideology. All extreme right-wing terrorist attacks since 2011 have been conducted by lone actors or small, self-directed cells; CTAG is not aware of any attacks conducted by groups.

New Zealand context

24. (R) Prior to the Christchurch attack, CTAG had no indication groups or individuals supportive of extreme right-wing ideologies in New Zealand had the intent to conduct a terrorist attack.
25. (R) CTAG notes right-wing extremism in New Zealand is generally fragmented and disorganised. White nationalist groups ^{s6(a)} [REDACTED] have received little support. However, the extreme right wing has a significant presence online.
26. (R) We note the significant capability, namely firearms, used in the Christchurch attack. We assess it remains possible other right-wing extremists have a similar level of capability.

Other types of extremism

Ethno-nationalist and separatist extremism

27. (R) Attacks carried out by ethno-nationalist and separatist extremist groups and individuals predominantly occur within those countries that are related to their cause. For example, dissident Irish republican groups carry out attacks in the United Kingdom, ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna) carried out attacks in Spain and France, and Sikh extremists carried out attacks in India. However, there are exceptions to this; for example, Sikh extremists were responsible for the downing of Air India Flight 182 off the coast of Canada in 1985.
28. (R) While these groups do sometimes target civilians, they have predominantly targeted representatives of the state such as government buildings and security forces (both police and military). Ethno-nationalist groups principally use IEDs of various sophistication and firearms to conduct attacks.

Left-wing extremism

29. (R) Recent left-wing extremist attacks in the West are mostly anarchist-linked attacks conducted in Spain, Italy and Greece. These attacks generally target representatives of government such as politicians, government departments and security forces, the media and perceived symbols of the capitalist state. Often these attacks are conducted using low-sophistication IEDs and firearms. They rarely target members of the public or cause fatalities.

New Zealand context

30. (R) While we assess it is almost certain there are a small number of groups and individuals in New Zealand who are supportive of left-wing extremist causes, we also assess that the vast majority of these do not support or advocate the use of violence. However, it is likely they could use provocative and disruptive protest tactics to advance their cause [please see violent protest below].

Violent protest

New Zealand context

31. (R) Historically, New Zealand's right-wing extremist groups have conducted small scale protest activity, which has been met with little to no support from the general population and is often met by peaceful counter protest. CTAG assesses it is almost certain that right-wing extremist protest activity in the future will be met by counter protest activity. While there have been instances of provocative and disruptive tactics used by protesters in New Zealand, due to our understanding of left-wing activists in New Zealand we assess it is unlikely that pre-planned violence will be part of this protest activity.
32. (R) There is a realistic possibility that isolated incidents of violence could occur between opposing protest groups, particularly in the short-to-medium term, due to heightened tensions following the Christchurch attack.
33. (R) CTAG assesses it is highly likely that in the next 12 months right-wing extremist groups and individuals in New Zealand will restrict their public activities in an effort to minimise attention from the public, media and authorities. For example, 'White World Wide Pride Day' was due to be publically marked by a white-supremacist group in Christchurch on 24 March 2019; however, Police reporting indicates the group changed their plans and held a small gathering at a private residence.
34. (R) As a result, CTAG assesses it is unlikely there will be an increase in pre-planned violent protest activity in New Zealand.

Hoaxes

35. (R) The number of hoax threats typically increases immediately following terrorism-related activity. In the days following the Christchurch attack, NZ Police received a high number of calls. These threats reinforce the disproportionate public anxiety and diversion of law enforcement and security resources. The effect of this is amplified when made in a heightened security environment where there is low risk tolerance. Such threats are often fuelled by extensive media coverage of a terrorist attack.
36. (R) CTAG assesses that New Zealand-based extremists and international terrorist groups with a genuine intent and capability to conduct an attack are unlikely to publicise specific details of their plans prior to carrying them out.

Conclusion

37. (R) There has been a shift in New Zealand's terrorism threat environment following the 15 March Christchurch attack. The attack is the first successful terrorist attack in

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New Zealand, and could act as precedent for both right-wing and Islamist extremists in New Zealand.

38. (R) International experience indicates that while there are general trends in target selection, both right-wing and Islamist extremists can be influenced by several factors, including personal grievances, and therefore radicalisation pathways may vary widely between individuals.
39. (R) Although we can draw on trends from other Western nations, New Zealand's terrorism threat environment will be influenced by a number of factors, including the media coverage of the attack, and the Government and public response. We judge there will be unique elements to New Zealand's terrorism threat environment.
40. (R) It will take time to fully understand any long term impacts on New Zealand's terrorism threat environment. We assess however, the impact of the Christchurch attacks will be wide-ranging, significant and enduring.

s6(a): author information

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CONFIDENCE STATEMENT

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(R) This Threat Assessment draws on intelligence from a range of sources on whose reliability we comment in the main text where appropriate.

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Threat Level	Definition	Qualitative Statement
Negligible	Terrorist attack, violent protest activity or violent criminal behaviour is assessed as very unlikely	Remote / Highly unlikely
Very Low	Terrorist attack, violent protest activity or violent criminal behaviour is assessed as unlikely	Improbable / Unlikely
Low	Terrorist attack, violent protest activity or violent criminal behaviour is assessed as possible, but is not expected	Realistic possibility
Medium	Terrorist attack, violent protest activity or violent criminal behaviour is assessed as feasible and could well occur	Probable / Likely
High	Terrorist attack, violent protest activity or violent criminal behaviour is assessed as very likely	Very probable / Highly likely
Extreme	Terrorist attack, violent protest activity or violent criminal behaviour is expected imminently	Almost certain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless otherwise stated, all threat levels in CTAG's Threat Assessments reflect the country-specific threat level • Numbers of New Zealanders in overseas countries are provided by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade based on a voluntary registration system. The numbers do not include non-registered New Zealanders • Please advise CTAG of events or developments that relate to our threat warning function 		

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