



THREAT ASSESSMENT

TA 128 Impact of COVID-19 on the New Zealand Threat Environment

Issued: 8 April 2020

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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.

Summary

1. (R) While the confirmed presence of COVID-19 in New Zealand and the associated Government response have both heavily impacted New Zealand society (collectively referred to as the 'COVID-19 emergency'), the threat from terrorism in New Zealand overall remains unchanged at **MEDIUM**; *a terrorist attack is assessed as feasible and could well occur.*
2. (R) s6(a)
[REDACTED] we assess with high confidence that the COVID-19 emergency has likely temporarily altered the nature of the domestic terrorism threat environment with regards to opportunity and capability.
3. (R) Although specific long-term impacts remain unclear, we assess there is a realistic possibility some impacts on the terrorism threat environment, such as accelerated online radicalisation and emergence of COVID-19 emergency-associated grievances or conspiracy theories, will have a detrimental effect on the threat environment in the medium to long-term.
4. (R) CTAG continues to monitor the New Zealand terrorism threat environment and a change in the New Zealand terrorism threat level could occur at short notice.

Domestic terrorism threat environment

5. (R) The threat from terrorism is assessed to remain unchanged at **MEDIUM**; *a terrorist attack is assessed as feasible and could well occur.* CTAG continues to monitor the New Zealand terrorism threat environment and a change in the New Zealand terrorism threat level could occur at short notice.
6. (R) s6(a)
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The COVID-19 emergency has also been used as justification to spread extremist ideologies or other conspiracy theories, s6(a)
[REDACTED] We note that international terrorist groups continue to reference the COVID-19 emergency in their propaganda messaging; the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), for example, has urged followers in the West to mount new attacks to take advantage of the distraction of security forces.

7. (R) CTAG assesses terrorist groups highly unlikely have the capability to weaponise a virus. Some groups, however, may possibly attempt to conduct attacks using COVID-19-infected individuals in the hopes of spreading the virus through unsophisticated methods such as "targeted coughing". s6(a)

Domestic Outlook and Emerging Threats

8. (R) We assess with high confidence that elements of the COVID-19 emergency have likely temporarily impacted on the immediate manifestation of terrorism threats with regards to opportunity and capability. We further assess implications for the threat environment of some of these impacts will probably materialise in the medium to long-term.
9. (R) CTAG assesses a reduction in public gatherings and personal travel has limited the opportunity for some domestic extremists to target particular groups or individuals. However, such limitations are unlikely to stop an individual or group with intent to engage in an attack from targeting locations that continue as places of mass gathering such as hospitals, supermarkets and essential service hubs, as well as critical infrastructure.
10. (R) We assess the Government's closure of non-essential businesses, and restrictions on individual movements and online purchasing under the COVID-19 emergency lockdown, has almost certainly hindered acquisition of capability to conduct an act of violence in the short-term. However, individuals or groups may already be in possession of such items, or have alternative avenues to acquire them during the lockdown. The COVID emergency also provides increased opportunity to research, plan and engage in other capability development, which may accelerate the timing of an individual or group's intent to engage in a terrorist act once their desired target is more accessible.
11. (R) CTAG assesses individuals susceptible to, or already on the pathway towards, radicalisation, who are spending more time online during self-isolation, are probably at increased risk of exposure to extremist content and furthering their radicalisation. Any increased or accelerated online radicalisation of more individuals may later manifest as a greater volume of individuals and groups with intent to engage in acts of ideologically motivated violence. We assess there is a realistic possibility an increase in the number and diversity of radicalised individuals will have a detrimental impact on New Zealand's threat environment in the long-term.
12. (R) CTAG assesses there is a potential for new issue motivated groups, including individuals prone to violence within or on the fringes of these groups, to emerge in response to the COVID-19 emergency and any government and commercial activities they consider inappropriate. This is highly likely to include related conspiracy theories, such as that linking the recent launch of the 5G cellular network to the emergence and spread of the virus. If the COVID-19 emergency becomes protracted, we assess there is a realistic possibility emerging violent extremist groups or individuals will have a long-term detrimental impact on the New Zealand threat environment.

Overseas interests threat environment

13. (R) CTAG currently has no indication of a specific, credible threat directed at New Zealand interests abroad as a result of the COVID-19 emergency.

14. (R) We assess however, overseas attacks with a COVID-19 nexus – including those motivated by extremist conspiracy theories – have the potential to collaterally affect New Zealand interests offshore.

s6(a)



Intelligence cut off date: 8 April 2020

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.

(R) CTAG has high confidence in our assessments regarding the short-term impacts of COVID-19 on opportunity and capability to conduct terrorist attacks in New Zealand. We have moderate confidence in our assessments regarding the long term implications of COVID-19 on the domestic threat environment.

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s6(a)



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CTAG THREAT DEFINITIONS

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

- 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