

The following is summarised information from a Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG) Threat Assessment. Where possible, excerpts of the original document have been used. Some details are withheld under section 6(a) of the Official Information Act 1982 as release would prejudice national security.

Threat Assessment: Threats to New Zealand's COVID-19 mitigation programmes

Report Date: 12 November 2021

Report No: 21-167-TA

Summary of Threats to New Zealand's COVID-19 mitigation programmes

- CTAG continues to assess that movements opposed to New Zealand's COVID-19 mitigation programmes are not inherently violent extremist in nature. We also continue to assess the majority of those opposed to COVID-19 mitigation programmes in New Zealand are currently highly unlikely to have the intent to conduct an act of extremist violence.
- Recent months have seen a significant increase in anti-government rhetoric, including some that is explicitly violent. At present, this appears to be primarily motivated by the COVID-19 mitigation programmes, including the ongoing lockdown in Auckland and vaccine mandates.

Online threatening rhetoric

- We assess the majority of those currently espousing violent extremist rhetoric in New Zealand are highly unlikely to have the intent to conduct violence. We judge, however, that the volume and nature of the rhetoric is creating an environment that normalises and justifies violent rhetoric as a legitimate response to public policy. CTAG assesses this, combined with individuals' personal grievances, increases the likelihood that individuals will be radicalised and inspired to mobilise to violence.
- The sheer volume of online rhetoric and 'normalisation' of violent and threatening language in relation to the anti-COVID-19 mitigation programme space increases the possibility that genuine threats could be overlooked.

Violent Extremism Influence

- CTAG assesses that alongside politically-motivated violent extremists (PMVE), it is highly likely that there are individuals or small online groups of faith-motivated violent extremists (FMVE) and white identity-motivated violent extremists (W-IMVE) who are opposed to the COVID-19 mitigation programmes. However, we assess these make up a very small proportion of those opposed to New Zealand's COVID-19 programmes.
- CTAG notes that the vast majority of those opposed to mitigation programmes are driven by a diverse set of ideological frameworks and personal grievances, and are overwhelmingly peaceful.

Violent Protest

- We continue to assess protests in New Zealand are usually non-violent, conducted legally, and that most protestors do not support the use of violence or destructive tactics.
- We judge that while the vast majority of those opposed to COVID-19 mitigation programmes are highly unlikely to have the intent to conduct an act of extremist violence, there is a realistic possibility that one or more individuals in New Zealand have intent and almost certainly the capability to conduct an act of violent protest in relation to the COVID-19 mitigation programmes.

Terrorism

- We judge that while the vast majority of those opposed to COVID-19 mitigation programmes are highly unlikely to have the intent to conduct an act of extremist violence, there is a realistic possibility that one or more individuals in New Zealand have the intent and almost certainly the basic capability to conduct an act of terrorism in relation to the COVID-19 mitigation programmes.
- We assess the most likely scenario for a terrorist attack in New Zealand remains a lone actor attack, using a basic capability.
- CTAG continues to assess the terrorism threat level for New Zealand as **MEDIUM**; *terrorist attack is assessed as feasible and could well occur.*

Threat Outlook

- CTAG anticipates a continuing increase in online violent extremist rhetoric as COVID-19 mitigation programmes develop, both globally and nationally.
- We assess the anonymity offered by online platforms provides a sense of security for individuals to make threats online (genuine or otherwise) without fear of identification or repercussion. Likewise, the sheer volume of online rhetoric and 'normalisation' of violent and threatening language in relation to the anti-COVID-19 mitigation programme space increases the possibility that genuine threats could be overlooked. CTAG judges these factors will continue to challenge the ability of intelligence and law enforcement agencies to identify legitimate attack plots and distinguish them from hoax or non-credible threats.
- CTAG continues to monitor the threat environment, in coordination with New Zealand agencies, and will advise stakeholders of any significant change.