

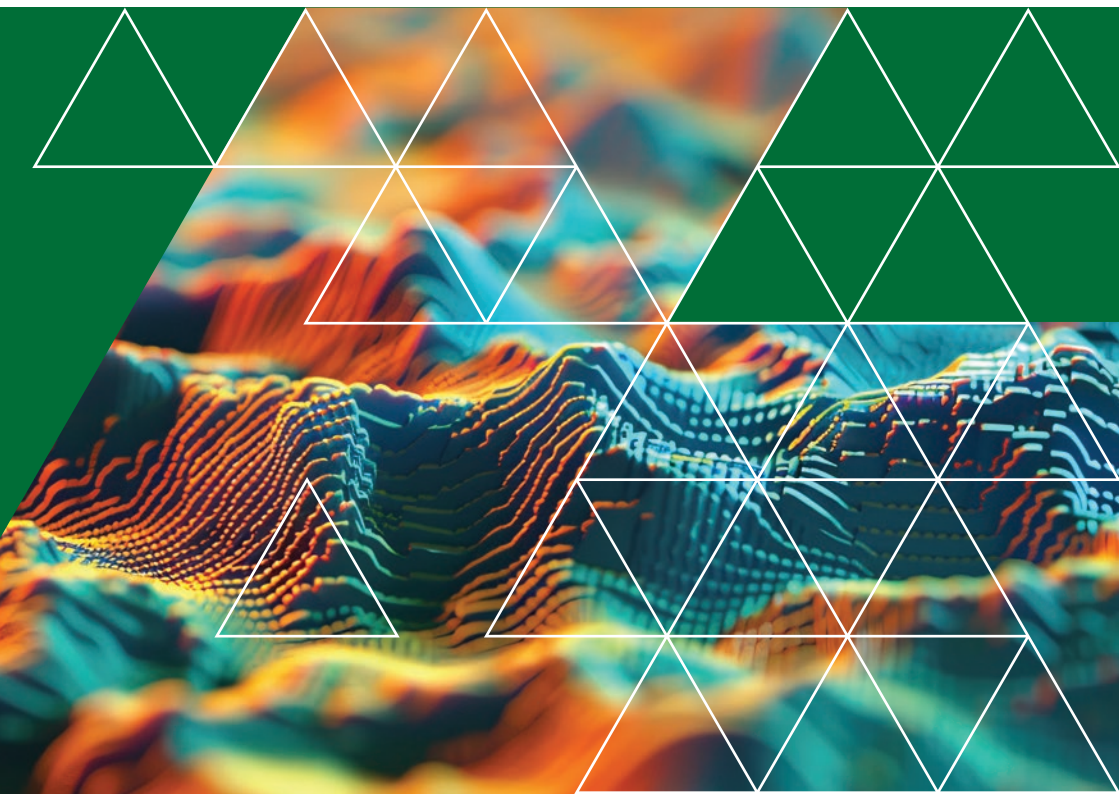
# New Zealand's Security Threat Environment

2024

An assessment by the New Zealand  
Security Intelligence Service



**Te Pā Whakamarumarū**  
New Zealand Security  
Intelligence Service





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4 SCENE SETTING



# Foreword

**Tēnā koutou. Knowing more about the national security threats we face allows us all to be better prepared to manage the risks.**

The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) is a firm believer that our national security is something we need to talk about so I'm pleased to introduce you to the 2024 report on *New Zealand's Security Threat Environment*.

Over the past year I have frequently described our first unclassified assessment as being a game changer. Never before have we had a single document to present to New Zealanders, whether they be community groups or in corporate boardrooms, and be able to demonstrate the kinds of trends, behaviours and activities we find most concerning.

This report contains intelligence you can use with a focus on foreign interference, espionage and violent extremism. It can support sound decision-making or even facilitate the asking of pertinent questions such as "what might this threat look like in our community" or "what does this mean for our business or organisation?" There are more case studies this year to help show these threats are real.

This assessment is not a Government policy document. It is the NZSIS's independent assessment of the threats facing our country and our region based on our own intelligence collection and analysis.

At the NZSIS, we strive to be much more than just a bearer of bad or confronting news. A significant part of our mandate is providing best practice protective security advice. This year's report carries a range of practical advice to show how risks can be managed. Often, the simplest protective measures can have the biggest impact.

One of the most important steps anyone can take is to report threats when you see them. If you see something that doesn't feel right, I urge you to trust your instincts and let us know. Security is not something we can completely solve or perfect. It requires constant attention and for everyone to play a part. I would like to see an annual tradition established in organisations and communities around the country where this report is used as a starting point for a healthy conversation on keeping each other safe and secure.

Ngā mihi nui



**Andrew Hampton**  
Director-General of Security

# Executive Summary

New Zealand is a safe and secure country for most of the people who live here. Even so, threats to our national security cannot be ignored.

Our open democracy allows us to enjoy rights and privileges that give us greater control over our lives than in many other parts of the world.

There is, however, a need for greater recognition that our safety and security cannot be taken for granted. Recent tragic events have reminded us that our national security can suddenly appear fragile.

The sense of fragility is felt unevenly across New Zealand's communities. Some encounter national security threats more often and more deeply than others. There are some groups and individuals who may be subject to threats such as foreign interference or violent extremism because of who they are. Some might not know they are being targeted and many more who will never experience being threatened. Wherever you might sit on that spectrum, the threats described in this report are deserving of everyone's attention.

The level of foreign interference activity in New Zealand remains an ongoing concern. It is limiting the ability of some New Zealanders to access the freedoms

and protections our democracy offers. Persistent foreign interference has the potential to harm our ability to act in our own best interests as an independent nation. The NZSIS will continue to call it out.

Equally concerning is the number of young people we see drawn into violent extremist themes and then becoming part of our investigative focus. This is set against a backdrop of a deteriorating violent extremist environment around the world.

Levels of Identity-Motivated Violent Extremism remain consistent and we are again seeing more engagement in Faith-Motivated violent extremist narratives. The conflict in Gaza is being used by terrorist organisations to drive online radicalisation and recruitment. These are global trends but similar signs are beginning to appear in our environment.

Another concerning global trend is the crossover between foreign interference and violent extremism. Some states are using criminal gangs or groups usually associated with violent extremism to carry out societal interference against expat communities.

Scanning for emerging threats and trends is an important function of the NZSIS but the focus of this report is to provide an update on the state of the threat environment in New Zealand as we see it currently.

## Updating the threat environment

This report is the second edition of what is an annual publication. Our assessments have been updated on how we see the nature of foreign interference, espionage and violent extremism in New Zealand. Included this year is key protective security advice that can help make yourselves harder targets for those who wish to cause harm.

The foreign interference section highlights the threat to New Zealand communities, academia, the media, businesses and government institutions. Case studies are used to illustrate some of the behaviours and activities from a small number of state actors commonly associated with those threats. It is hoped these portraits, most of which are anonymised, will help to reinforce the unfortunate truth that foreign interference happens here.

There is a greater focus on espionage in this year's report, including the various ways states target New Zealand

or New Zealanders both at home and abroad. A section on Insider Threat has also been introduced to raise awareness of how individuals in positions of trust may pose a risk to their public or private organisations.

The violent extremism and terrorism chapter details the range of motivations behind those who believe violence is the way to advance their cause or to address a grievance. A terrorist attack in New Zealand remains a realistic possibility. If someone conducts an attack in New Zealand, we assess it will mostly likely be an individual who has self-radicalised, taken steps to avoid detection and acted alone. The chapter looks at potential motivations along with behaviours and activities that could help identify such people before they cause any harm.

It used to be that the threats of foreign interference, espionage and violent extremism were quite distinct from each other in the world of security intelligence. Increasingly, we are finding these lines are blurring and common environmental factors are affecting those threats but in different ways. Our analytic approach reflects a growing cross-threat perspective we have been developing.

## Our place in the world

New Zealand's threat environment is influenced by the fact that we live in a highly globalised world.

Being part of the global village and marketplace has many benefits for New Zealanders, but it comes with some risks. Where once we relied on our ocean borders for security, we can no longer do this in a world where violent ideological content can be accessed freely online, or our intellectual property can be secretly transferred overseas.

In the past five years, relationships between states have become less stable and less predictable than that of the previous two decades. The prolonged Russian invasion of Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza are two vivid examples of events that are having ongoing global implications.

Conflict and acts of physical violence overseas can be unsettling for communities around the world with connections to those regions. The ripple effects can reach all the way to New Zealand.

Communities with connections to regions in conflict or to places where their family and friends are subject to violent targeting or subversion are feeling vulnerable and threatened. Emotions can be compounded by the volume of hate spread online. Suddenly the world's tensions can feel closer to home.



## Strategic competition

New Zealand and our Pacific neighbours find ourselves in an environment in which much larger states seek to advance competing visions for regional and global order.

We have entered a new era of strategic competition. It is shaping how we engage in the world, and presents troubling implications for the threats we face at home.

Several factors shape competition in our region of the south Pacific and wider Indo-Pacific. While some states seek to expand or shore up their influence, others try to adopt a more assertive approach.

There are ideological differences across the Indo-Pacific region. We see differing notions of nationalism, various levels of commitment to liberal rights, and an increase in authoritarian tendencies. The effect is increasing pressure on the rules-based international order that New Zealand relies upon.

Strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific has for the past decade or so been largely framed as being between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and New Zealand and its traditional security partners. However recently, the contest in the region is becoming one where there are several centres of power and influence.

These centres of power comprise a range of countries including those with which New Zealand is growing its relationships, whether India or in Southeast Asia.

Our history, our relationships, our people, and our location mean that New Zealand is increasingly exposed to security risks.

## **Role of the NZSIS**

The NZSIS exists to protect Aotearoa New Zealand as a free, open and democratic society for future generations.

We are New Zealand's lead agency for security intelligence. That means we detect, deter and disrupt threats to New Zealand's national security.

Our specific focus areas are to protect New Zealand from foreign interference, espionage, violent extremism and terrorism. The NZSIS also has a foreign intelligence mandate to help further New Zealand's interests and those of our region.

The other major function of the NZSIS is to enhance the ability of New Zealand government agencies and other organisations to protect their people, information and assets from national security threats.

In order to be effective, much of our activity needs to be undertaken in secret and invokes the use of intrusive powers that if not properly authorised would be illegal. Therefore, there is robust oversight and controls over everything we do.

The NZSIS makes its greatest impact when we partner with other domestic agencies, such as our sister agency the Government Communications Security Bureau and with the New Zealand Police. Partners outside the world of intelligence and security are equally crucial to achieving better national security outcomes. That involves working with communities, iwi Māori, local government, academia and the private sector.

The NZSIS is not an enforcement agency. It cannot arrest anyone. Our job is to ensure the right intelligence and protective security advice reaches the right people at the right time to make a difference.

## Staying ahead of the threat

The purpose of security intelligence agencies like the NZSIS is to try to stay ahead of threats.

A lot of time is spent at the NZSIS analysing how trends may develop and what classified intelligence decision-makers will need to know. Publishing an unclassified assessment such as this offers a broader range of New Zealanders a similar level of insight with which to manage their own risks.

The threats outlined in this assessment require our attention. National security threats, by their nature, are an attempt to undermine New Zealand's democracy, our institutions, our rule of law, our human rights, our prosperity and our way of life. How we collectively respond will be crucial for maintaining these foundations of our society.



## Key assessments

Our analysts have identified five key assessments, which typify the threat environment in New Zealand and can contribute to a broad level understanding of the risks the country needs to manage.

At a high level, the NZSIS assesses:

- New Zealand's unique place and role in the Indo-Pacific can make us vulnerable to the activities of other states striving for influence and position throughout the region;
- A small number of foreign states conduct interference and espionage in and against New Zealand and New Zealanders. These states seek to disrupt the rights of New Zealanders, including their right to freedom of expression;
- There are consequences for New Zealand's national security from intentional or unintentional harm caused by people in positions of trust in public or private organisations. The harm could come through acts of espionage, unauthorised disclosure of information, the loss or degradation of a resource or capability, or in extreme cases acts of terrorism;
- The most likely terrorist attack scenario in New Zealand is a lone actor, acting with little to no intelligence forewarning; and
- There are a small number of people who subscribe to a range of known violent extremist ideologies. Increasingly, we also see individuals whom we assess to support violence from a mixed, unstable, or unclear ideological outlook.

# Glossary of Key Terms

**INTELLIGENCE** is information that has been deliberately organised to give someone an advantage when making decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Intelligence may be derived from secret or open sources, but is usually classified to protect the advantage it confers.

**SECURITY INTELLIGENCE** is intelligence that helps government agencies identify, understand, and mitigate security threats.

**FOREIGN INTERFERENCE** is an act by a foreign state, often acting through a proxy, which is intended to influence, disrupt or subvert New Zealand's national interests by deceptive, corruptive or coercive means. Normal diplomatic activity, lobbying and other genuine, overt efforts to gain influence are not considered interference.

**ESPIONAGE** refers to various intelligence activities involving the clandestine collection of information, materials or capability for the purpose of gaining an advantage over a rival.

**STRATEGIC COMPETITION** is where states seek to advance competing visions for regional and global order.

**VIOLENT EXTREMISM** is the use or justification of violence to achieve radical political, social, or religious change. Violent extremists often target groups they see as threatening their success or survival, or undermining their worldview.

**TERRORISM.** Under New Zealand law, a **terrorist act** is defined as an ideologically, politically, or religiously-motivated act intended to intimidate a population, or to unduly compel a government to do or abstain from doing any act. A terrorist act could include acts causing death or serious bodily injury, but isn't necessarily limited to this.

**MISINFORMATION** is information that is unintentionally false or misleading, usually spread out of ignorance.

**DISINFORMATION** is information that is intentionally false or misleading, spread with the intent to cause harm or achieve a broader aim.

**PROTECTIVE SECURITY** is a series of risk management measures designed to help organisations and communities protect their people, information and assets.

# Who Poses a Threat?

The NZSIS is focused on threats to New Zealand's national security. These include threats from foreign interference, espionage, violent extremism and terrorism.

## Foreign interference actors

Threats can be posed by agents of foreign states who are directed by foreign governments to undertake espionage or interference activities against New Zealand. In general, states that engage in foreign interference are autocratic, repressive, and highly nationalistic.

NZSIS is very clear that those responsible for the foreign interference threat are the offending states themselves, and the agents who act on their behalf. The vast majority of people in New Zealand who have ethnic connections to those states are not a threat. Unfortunately, ethnic minority communities are often the first to be targeted by coercive foreign state activity.

This report does not single out any ethnic community as a threat to our country, and to do so would be a misinterpretation of the analysis.

## Violent extremist actors

Very few people in New Zealand support the use of violence to achieve political, religious, or social change. Those who do can potentially cause great harm to the safety of our communities. Two tragic incidents of terrorism in the last five years have demonstrated that harm, although over the course of New Zealand's history acts of violent extremism have been rare.

Violent extremism and terrorism are justifiably emotive terms but sometimes can be loosely defined. The NZSIS must conform to strict legal definitions in order to justify its investigations. We do not investigate peaceful and non-violent dissent within our communities.

Undoubtedly, there are large volumes of what we call 'awful but lawful' comments made inside New Zealand's information environment. Our counter-terrorism efforts can only be directed at the activities of anyone who intends to use, or encourage others, towards violence in support of extremist beliefs.

# 02.

## **New Zealand's Security Threat Environment**

Our assessment is separated into four sections

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# Foreign Interference

Acts of foreign interference violate the rights and freedoms of New Zealanders. They are designed to circumvent or undermine democratic processes and government decision making. The people conducting these activities are not necessarily spies of a foreign state but will often be people co-opted, paid or convinced to act on a state's behalf.

The types of people or entities a state may seek to co-opt include those with political influence, local businesses, community contacts, academia, or media organisations.

Sometimes those being given roles do not realise that the activities they are being asked to perform are for the benefit of a foreign state and may constitute foreign interference.

These assessments can only be made when there is a credible link to a foreign state and the activities are deceptive, corruptive, or coercive.

The following section describes activities seen in New Zealand targeting communities, academia, media and government institutions where that credible link to a state has been identified.

## Foreign Interference in New Zealand

**A small number of illiberal foreign states engage in foreign interference against New Zealand as a tool for advancing their interests abroad. In the context of strategic competition, they are seeking to change New Zealand's values and interests to better align with their own.**

The People's Republic of China (PRC) remains a complex intelligence concern in New Zealand, but there are other states that undertake malicious activity here as well.

States who conduct foreign interference try to move the political or cultural needle in favour of their interests while obscuring their involvement in the activity. This can make it difficult to draw conclusive links between the interference activity and the foreign state.

The result can be a severe infringement on the rights and freedoms of New Zealand communities. It can be particularly threatening for New Zealand's ethnic minority communities who some

states claim as their own. Foreign intelligence officers and their agents may target community members, their families or their businesses to suppress their right to freedom of expression or association.

Due to its often covert and subtle methods, foreign interference can be hard to detect and concerning behaviour and activities are often not reported.

New Zealand is not alone in facing the threat of foreign interference. It is a challenge countries face globally, including in our region, as illiberal states try to take advantage of others' size or openness.

## Front organisations

The PRC carries out foreign interference activities against New Zealand's diverse Chinese communities.

The NZSIS has seen attempts to use complex and deceptive front organisations to connect with groups in New Zealand and replace authentic and diverse community views with those approved by the PRC.

These front organisations will often appear to be community-based, claiming to represent an issue or a group of people but their true affiliation, direction and funding sources are hidden.

Community members may join these front organisations for legitimate personal reasons or to meet community expectations, and may not know they are taking part in activities considered foreign interference. Some people who join will be vetted for their ability to perform foreign interference tasks.

## Targeting Communities

Everyone in New Zealand has a right to freedom of expression, including the right to advocate, dissent, and protest. Some states seek to disrupt this right or punish those advocates in some way.

Any action taken by a foreign state to limit people or groups in New Zealand legitimately exercising their democratic rights is considered foreign interference. It is an attack on the ability of New Zealanders to participate in our society and our democracy.

Examples of foreign interference against New Zealand communities includes, but is not limited to, the following activities on behalf of a foreign state:

- withdrawing, withholding or threatening to withhold visas, passports or other official

documentation in response to the exercising of democratic rights in New Zealand;

- threatening or intimidating New Zealanders, or the family of New Zealanders living overseas;
- forced or coerced repatriation;
- attempting to cancel events in New Zealand; and
- attempts to exclude certain groups or communities from representation in New Zealand politics, including by intimidation.

### CASE STUDY

Russia views its diaspora communities as a global network of ‘compatriots’ whose role is to promote its language, culture, and worldview. It seeks to deter and suppress the dissenting views of individuals within these communities.

Globally, this has included a range of transnational repression activity, from assassinations to administrative punishments such as refusing passport applications. Domestically, Russia frequently arrests and charges individuals who speak out against government actions, particularly in regards to those who criticise the war in Ukraine.

The Russian Government views its laws as applying outside its borders and likely monitors the public statements and social media accounts of people overseas who are perceived as Russian and are seen to speak out, including in New Zealand. Russia’s interference with the Russian community in New Zealand likely includes primarily monitoring and attempting to shape this community’s online behaviours.

## Targeting the Private Sector

New Zealand's private sector, particularly companies focused on technology and innovation, are vulnerable to being used by foreign states to advance their military or intelligence goals without realising it.

Some foreign states may try to steal intellectual property outright, or covertly purchase it without disclosing its real end user. The New Zealand private sector should also be alert to foreign state actors using front companies or other deceptive approaches to gain access to tools or technologies that have a plausible military or intelligence use.

Purchasing technology from New Zealand companies using deceptive means may be seen as a way for foreign states to evade international sanctions or domestic export controls. Big data applications, space-related technologies, and advanced manufacturing processes have all reached a stage where the line between ordinary commercial and military or intelligence use can become blurry.

### CASE STUDY

In recent years, New Zealand organisations have been approached by a small number of entities seeking to develop space infrastructure in our territory.

These entities often claim the infrastructure will be used for civilian research purposes, but it was subsequently found in each case that what was proposed could have assisted foreign military activity that could have harmed New Zealand's interests. The full capabilities, and some of the affiliations of these entities, were deliberately hidden.

If these projects had gone ahead, we would have inadvertently allowed another country to install equipment in New Zealand with a plausible military or intelligence function. To have done so would have risked New Zealand's sovereignty. By hiding their affiliations, the foreign entities undermined New Zealand's ability to make informed decisions based on our national security and national interest.

## Targeting Academic Institutions

Free and open learning environments are crucial for the health of academic life, however, some states seek to shape the narratives and even the information that is being shared in these spaces.

Foreign interference in New Zealand academia can include when states or state-affiliated individuals:

- attempt to cancel academic events on 'sensitive' topics;
- monitor university lectures on 'sensitive' topics;
- influence the direction of research;
- harass students and lecturers; and
- monitor and secretly influence student groups.

These activities can lead to self-censorship or the exclusion of diverse voices within academic spaces.

### CASE STUDY

The NZSIS is aware of several diplomats representing a foreign state who maintain relationships with a number of New Zealand student groups associated with that state's diaspora population. The diplomats have used this access to influence group memberships in an effort to ensure that those elected to leadership positions are politically loyal to the foreign state. They have chosen to obscure their relationship with the student groups to avoid accusations of interference in academic society.

Conducting themselves in this way is an example of foreign interference. They are seeking to control how these groups and their members view the state and aim to identify dissidents.



## Targeting Media

Foreign language media outlets that cater to specific communities are being used by a small number of illiberal states to attempt to influence New Zealand's information environment.

These outlets can be manipulated by these illiberal states through a variety of ways to ensure certain narratives feature in their coverage while other storylines are suppressed. The result is media outlets in New Zealand replicating the official lines or viewpoints of foreign state media.

Some illiberal states also use political and societal pressure to suppress other forms of media or journalism from featuring in mainstream discourse. An example is coercively pressuring for films or speaker events on sensitive issues to be cancelled. This ultimately negatively impacts media freedom and impartiality which is vital for the health of New Zealand's democracy.

### CASE STUDY

A New Zealand-based Chinese language news outlet is almost certainly responsive to PRC direction and repeats approved talking points in New Zealand. Its publisher has attended PRC-organised media forums and signed content sharing agreements with organisations that also conform to the narrative. The news outlet routinely republishes material from sources that are directly or indirectly controlled by the PRC. While this type of state-influenced outlet is the norm in some countries, it runs contrary to widely-accepted journalistic norms in New Zealand.



## Targeting Government Institutions

There are a small number of states that seek to interfere in New Zealand government institutions to try to influence decisions and outcomes.

Normal diplomatic activities are not considered foreign interference. An official representative of a foreign state providing feedback to a New Zealand official on a policy issue is completely above board. It becomes foreign interference when the state's activities are deceptive, coercive or corruptive. An example would be deceptively using a local co-optee to advance that position as if it were the view of a New Zealand-based community.

Another example is 'long-term influence building'. Relationship building is an important and normally legitimate diplomatic activity, however, this can become foreign interference when foreign states seek to use the relationship to influence a New Zealand official to undertake or cease an activity in a way that may be seen as a conflict of interest or even bribery. This may happen through the giving of personal gifts, donations, travel opportunities, or business deals in exchange for self-censorship on an issue important to the foreign state.





## Central Government

Foreign interference targeting central government is often focused on gaining access to public servants and politicians, building influence, and trying to limit the ability of certain communities to have the same reach.

The goal of this activity is to persuade politicians or officials to self-censor or to encourage political positions in line with the interests of the foreign state through deceptive, coercive or corruptive means. Co-optees or third parties are often used to conceal the foreign state's involvement.

This is a kind of foreign interference that aims to undermine New Zealand's ability to make independent domestic and foreign policy decisions.

## Local government

New Zealand's local governments are seen as a prime target for 'influence building'. They are attractive due to their extensive authority over valuable strategic resources and critical national infrastructure as well as their ability to exert influence at a central government level.

Local governments also attract interest since they own controlling stakes in all of New Zealand's ports and exercise control over the use of public spaces, such as for organised protests or events.

It is important to note that not all engagement with foreign governments is harmful but it is important for local government officials to recognise the risks.

## Signs of Foreign Interference

### Deception

Often an interference actor will claim their advocacy is for personal reasons when further digging might reveal they are being paid, encouraged or coerced by representatives of a foreign state.

If someone is hiding their state affiliation, funding, or tasking, then it is probably foreign interference. The true objectives or intentions behind their activity will be concealed from those they are trying to influence.

### CASE STUDY

NZSIS knows of an instance where a foreign state manufactured a business opportunity in order to build long-term influence with a politically connected New Zealander. The state concealed its role – and the role of specific foreign interference entities – in the creation of this opportunity and in the wider influence-building process. The NZSIS assesses these actions were part of the state’s long-term aim to covertly influence New Zealand’s political environment.

### Coercion

It is highly coercive when state-backed activity suppresses the freedoms of individuals in New Zealand. This might include interference in someone’s freedom of expression, or their ability to freely participate in New Zealand’s society or political environment.

Often the foreign interference activity either directly or indirectly threatens a person or group because of their affiliation to an ethnicity, religion, or political advocacy group.

### CASE STUDY

A small number of foreign states collect information on specific communities in New Zealand. Often these states will use community members to monitor people the foreign state views as dissidents in New Zealand and gather personal details about them. This information can be used to conduct retaliatory action such as cancelling visas or targeting family members still living in the foreign country. In 2023, a foreign state denied the visa application of a New Zealand person trying to visit family in the country due to their association with a community group the foreign state did not like.

## Corruption

When state-backed actors try to gain leverage over people to get political or other favours, that is a clear case of corruption. Another example is suppressing a group's participation in an event in exchange for financial or other forms of public support.

### CASE STUDY

In 2023, a foreign state used a New Zealand contact to pressure a local council by offering to help fund a community event if they agreed to restrict the participation of a particular religious group. The foreign state wanted it known that the group is banned in their country and carries out activities 'against the will' of the state's diaspora.

### Protective Security Advice

If you are concerned approaches by a third party could be potential foreign interference, there are a range of steps you can take to manage risk:



- **Be vigilant.** Is their interest in you suspicious, ongoing, unusual or persistent compared to your regular interactions? If their behaviour is deceptive, corruptive or coercive, it should be reported to the NZSIS.
- **Check their identity and connections to foreign governments.** Research unknown individuals online to check their organisation exists.
- **Take a trusted colleague with you when meeting someone new.** Having someone else around can make it harder for you to be compromised.
- **Consider how appropriate it is to accept any offer or gifts you may receive.** Conduct due diligence to consider whether it puts you in a compromising position.
- **You can be particularly vulnerable when travelling overseas.** There are a range of protective measures that can help you manage your risk.

Learn more at [www.protectivesecurity.govt.nz/foreign-interference-protection](http://www.protectivesecurity.govt.nz/foreign-interference-protection)



# Espionage

**The term 'espionage' covers a range of activities related to the covert collection of information or materials. The NZSIS seeks to detect state-backed efforts to secretly gather information about New Zealand and New Zealanders for the benefit of that state.**

Espionage has been around since ancient times but has gained renewed prominence in this environment of heightened strategic competition.

The NZSIS knows there are foreign intelligence officers in New Zealand under the guise of legitimate activity, and that a small number of foreign states conduct espionage against New Zealand and New Zealanders.

There are various ways states might use espionage to gain an advantage. Each of the following forms of espionage happens in New Zealand or to New Zealanders, either at home or abroad:

- Seeking covert insights into foreign policy intentions and vulnerabilities.
- Seeking to acquire information on trade or security relationships in order to give their state an edge in negotiations or their own security relationships and prioritisation.
- They may seek to steal proprietary technology or intellectual property to improve their own industries or capabilities.

- Targeting public and private commercial entities, as well as public and private research institutions, for the purpose of commercial or military advantage.
- Using espionage techniques to enable foreign interference activity such as monitoring and repressing the international diaspora of people with familial or cultural links to that state.

By its nature, espionage is complex and highly secretive. It no longer needs to be carried out in person, often it will happen through cyber or other means from distance, but having someone physically present still provides advantages.

Foreign intelligence officers are very adept at operating online. Social media, and other online databases, allow foreign intelligence agencies to identify possible recruits. End-to-end encryption allows foreign intelligence officers to securely manage recruits from overseas.

Espionage will not always involve the stealing of technology or intellectual property. Sometimes, the foreign state is after special knowledge or access in order to advance their interests. This will include knowledge of critical skills or methodologies, as well as inside access to Government or commercial systems carrying sensitive information.

← John Smith



**John Smith (He/Him) • 3:29 PM**  
People Operations, Talent & HR

**Technical expert opportunity**

Hi John,

Hope the week is treating you well?

We're looking for international experts to integrate new learning models into our fleets.

**Would you be free to chat?**



## Protective Security Advice



It pays to be wary of offers or approaches online that appear too good to be true. Advertised roles may be specifically targeted towards those with experience or exposure to commercially sensitive information or technology with the lure of significant benefit packages. Foreign states will keep adapting their approaches to appear as legitimate as possible.

Here are four simple steps to protect yourself against malicious actors:

- Recognise a suspicious profile
- Realise the potential threat
- Report your concerns
- Remove them from your network.

Learn more about networking safely at [protectivesecurity.govt.nz/tbyl](https://protectivesecurity.govt.nz/tbyl)  
Check out [ownyouronline.govt.nz](https://ownyouronline.govt.nz) for tips to stay safe on social media.

## CASE STUDY

The intelligence arm of the People's Republic of China is well-known for using professional social networking sites to identify unwitting candidates, including New Zealanders. Bogus consultancy jobs are offered or similar roles that can be co-opted for reporting privileged information.

Often this begins as an innocuous request for an article or a report on a benign topic and slowly progresses into more sensitive questions. By the time the unwitting candidate becomes aware that they are engaging with an illegitimate actor they have often already shared information they otherwise would not have.

## CASE STUDY

NZSIS is aware of units within a foreign intelligence service that focus on targeting New Zealand. One of these units in particular has persistently attempted to gain intelligence about New Zealand or New Zealanders. It has attempted to secretly recruit New Zealanders to provide them intelligence to support their geopolitical ambitions.

In the past two years, NZSIS has identified people affiliated with this unit coming or attempting to come to New Zealand, most likely to collect New Zealand political, foreign policy and government information and identify potential intelligence sources. To disrupt the activities of the unit and those who do its bidding, NZSIS delivered a message to one of its affiliates to pass on to the foreign intelligence service. It warned that NZSIS is aware of their activities, they must stop, and that we will continue to monitor and disrupt this type of activity through multiple means.

# Insider Threat

**New Zealand public and private sector organisations are vulnerable to the threats described in this report when individuals within these organisations use their access to information, places, or systems to intentionally or unintentionally cause harm. Sometimes the harm can have damaging consequences for our national security.**

Damage could come through acts of espionage, unauthorised disclosure of information, the loss or degradation of a resource or capability, or in extreme cases - an act of terrorism.

The NZSIS has a specific responsibility to lead on countering insider threats and to support personnel security functions across government to identify and mitigate risks.

There have been a number of occasions where the NZSIS has worked with government agencies to prevent, mitigate, and respond to actual or potential insider threats.

Motivations to undertake insider threat acts are complex, varied, and usually influenced by a combination of pressures and vulnerabilities. These can include disgruntlement, grievance, ambition, financial motivation, complacency, or naivety.

In some cases, foreign state actors build relationships with insiders to take advantage of their position, or manipulate them into undertaking an insider threat act.

## Protective Security Advice

Developing a strong security culture is crucial for groups and organisations to effectively manage their protective security.

Healthy security cultures are workplaces where potential breaches or concerns are routinely reported.

Organisations are advised to take a collaborative approach to raising awareness of the common signs and to have a holistic plan for dealing with an insider threat.

Learn more at [www.protectivesecurity.govt.nz/it-happens-here](http://www.protectivesecurity.govt.nz/it-happens-here)







## CASE STUDY

Earlier this year, the NZSIS investigated an individual working for the New Zealand government who had unknowingly signed an agreement to do contract work on behalf of a foreign state.

The employee was lured by a targeted job advert on a professional networking site, which matched their skillset. The NZSIS worked with their employer to raise awareness of this conflict of interest and the security concerns it raised.

The NZSIS has observed other examples of foreign state actors using social media sites to connect and offer opportunities that appear lucrative, and are specifically tailored to attract government insiders who have access to privileged information they want, or who provide advice to decision-makers and could be influenced.

Research shows that during difficult economic times, insiders can be more susceptible to these types of tactics. Agreeing to work which appears legitimate, might inadvertently be causing significant harm to New Zealand.

**RADICALISED  
EXTREMIST  
THREAT  
US VS THEM  
HOSTILITY  
IDEOLOGY**



# Violent Extremism and Terrorism

At the time of writing, New Zealand's terrorism threat level has been at LOW since November 2022. That means an attack is a realistic possibility.

The NZSIS maintains its assessment that the most likely form of violent extremist attack would be an individual who has self-radicalised, taken steps to avoid detection and acted alone.

Radicalisation can be a rapid process and depends on the nature of the person involved. History has taught us that a relatively mild threat environment can suddenly be upended at any time.

There is enough vile rhetoric online, including from accounts linked to New Zealanders, and enough sharing of violent extremist propaganda, to suggest a toxic mix of grievance and ideological motivation is present.

Inflammatory and violent language online can target anyone, although most appears directed towards those from already marginalised minority

communities, or those affected by globally significant conflicts or events, such as the Israel-Gaza conflict. While distressing, the vast majority of those who express these views do not have the intent and capability to follow through.

Communities for violent extremists may only be loosely connected online networks of people who are unlikely to know each other's real names and will never meet each other in person. That makes for a challenging job of trying to identify those behind the most concerning rhetoric and trying to understand the credibility of their intent. Significant progress has been made in this area of intelligence analysis, mostly through stronger collaboration with domestic and international partner agencies.

## TREND

### Foreign nationalist rhetoric

The NZSIS is aware some communities are concerned that nationalist movements in foreign states are directing discriminatory rhetoric towards minorities in New Zealand to highlight ethnic or religious differences. While this leads to some communities feeling unsafe, it falls outside of the NZSIS' remit unless there is a specific call for support of violence to achieve an ideological goal.

When there are indications that an individual or group supports violence to advance a nationalist ideology, the NZSIS is able to investigate and work with appropriate partners to mitigate the threat to New Zealanders and our national security.



## What is violent extremism and terrorism?

Due to the extraordinary powers the NZSIS may be authorised to exercise, it needs to operate with strict boundaries on what constitutes violent extremism and terrorism.

The glossary in this report defines those terms, but in a nutshell, violent extremism is the justification of violence to achieve radical change, whilst terrorism is the act of violence that expresses those extremist beliefs.

These definitions can sometimes be more loosely applied outside of the NZSIS, but inside the organisation, it is necessary for us to apply a higher bar to justify a national security investigation.

For example, the NZSIS can never investigate someone for exercising their right to freedom of expression and to espouse what may be fringe or radical ideas. If the same person was justifying the use of violence to advance those ideas, it would tip over the threshold for us to open a national security investigation.

The NZSIS's role will never be to police ideas, thoughts, or misinformation. Our democratic society entitles people to hold whatever views they like. We become concerned when extremists start taking steps toward committing violence.

## Motivations for Violent Extremism

The NZSIS continues to investigate a small number of adherents to a range of violent extremist ideologies. Currently, the most common motivations are associated with Identity-Motivated Violent Extremism, and Faith-Motivated Violent Extremism, but there remains some Politically-Motivated Violent Extremists, and an increasing trend of individuals we assess to support violence from a mixed, unstable, or unclear ideological outlook.

## Identity-Motivated Violent Extremism (IMVE)

Identity-motivated violent extremism (IMVE) continues to be a prominent ideology within New Zealand's violent extremist environment. It is attracting a concerning number of young people who are becoming motivated by violent extremism through what they see in IMVE spaces online.

The NZSIS uses the term IMVE to refer to violent extremists who seek to advance their own identity through violence or seek to denigrate the perceived identity of others. White identity-motivated violent extremism (W-IMVE) remains the dominant IMVE ideology in New Zealand. Terrorist attack-related material and propaganda, including the Christchurch terrorist's manifesto and livestream footage, continue to be shared among IMVE adherents in New Zealand and abroad.

Other IMVE adherents in New Zealand express a range of views, which include anti-Semitism, anti-Rainbow communities, and various anti-Māori, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigration outlooks.

The narratives these people are drawn to appear mostly grounded in global issues and various conspiracy theories. Sometimes local New Zealand social, political and economic issues are used as justification for their ideologies, but these are not the main focus.

### CASE STUDY

The 'Terrorgram Collective' is an IMVE network with a radicalising influence. Users mostly operate on the online secure messaging platform Telegram. Publications are produced for the site that explicitly call for violence or for a 'race war'. Globally, there has been at least one terrorist attack linked to Terrorgram and people have been arrested for their involvement in producing objectionable content.

There are New Zealand individuals who are, or have been, members of Terrorgram-affiliated channels. It is possible there are New Zealanders on the fringes of Terrorgram who may be radicalised. There are Terrorgram publications which have been classified as objectionable in New Zealand. Possession and distribution of these publications carries a potential prison sentence of up to 14 years.

## Faith-Motivated Violent Extremism (FMVE)

A small number of Faith-Motivated Violent Extremism (FMVE) cases are beginning to re-emerge in New Zealand, in line with trends we see globally.

The NZSIS uses FMVE to refer to violent extremists motivated by any interpretation of faith. Support for faith-based violent ideologies in New Zealand is largely from those who consume online propaganda and promote supportive views. There may also be New Zealanders financially supporting FMVE abroad, either knowingly or inadvertently.

A small number of New Zealand-based people continue to express support for FMVE groups offshore, the most prominent of which is the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), although this support is limited. Even though the Gaza conflict is being used to drive radicalisation and recruitment online, these narratives currently appear less relevant to a New Zealand audience and there is no real focus on calling for people to travel to fight.

### CASE STUDY

The NZSIS received information from a partner agency indicating a New Zealand-based account was sharing ISIL-related FMVE material on social media, expressing views in support of an FMVE ideology, and engaging in online forums with individuals overseas.

Investigators quickly assessed the credibility and identified the individual to determine the level of risk they posed. NZSIS intelligence was able to inform domestic partners who worked to mitigate the potential risk of the individual radicalising others.

## Politically-Motivated Violent Extremism (PMVE)

There continues to be a small number of individuals who adhere to Politically Motivated Violent Extremist (PMVE) ideologies in New Zealand.

The most common PMVE narratives now focus on anti-authority themes, driven by conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation – in some cases produced by foreign states, although not targeted specifically at New Zealand.

Even though PMVE adherents in New Zealand are typically united in their opposition to the existing political system, and the Government of the day, their motives and views are often highly personalised and lack an overarching ideological driver or central figure.

New Zealand-based PMVE adherents have moved past their opposition to COVID-19 mandates and now focus on other domestic political issues where they seek to exploit polarising issues to further spread their beliefs.

### CASE STUDY

An individual came to the attention of the NZSIS who indicated they wanted to attack key infrastructure in support of their PMVE ideology. The individual's ideology evolved over the course of our investigation from being primarily motivated by COVID-19 mitigation measures towards more general anti-authority themes. They drew upon a wide variety of conspiracy theories.

Over time it became clear that they were more interested in gaining the respect of similarly minded people than actually following through on their violent rhetoric. The individual had not undertaken any real-world acts of preparation.

The NZSIS lawfully shared information with the New Zealand Police to assist with their mitigation strategy and determined soon after that it had no further role to play.



## Mixed, Unstable, and Unclear Ideologies

We continue to see more people in New Zealand expressing support for mixed, unstable or unclear ideologies. An example of this is when a person follows multiple violent extremist narratives at the same time, which can be contradictory or complementary. Others are when someone shifts between distinct ideologies or when a person shows a desire to commit a violent extremist act but does not have a clearly defined motivation or allegiance.

A person fitting this category might include someone sharing propaganda from offshore FMVE groups, while also expressing support for violent white identity or misogynist rhetoric.

Often the primary attraction is the desire for violence and this kind of violent extremist will seek out whatever rhetoric helps them to justify that desire.

A common factor in these cases is that they tend to have a wide variety of online violent extremist material at their disposal. How they make sense of their personal ideologies tends to evolve over time, so our assessments need to be made on the basis of the unique circumstances and mindset of the individual.

### CASE STUDY

The NZSIS received information from a partner agency about a New Zealand-based individual posting their support online for ideologically motivated violence against particular non-white minority groups. Their posts suggested they may have acquired a weapon.

Even though the individual expressed support for White Identity Motivated Violent Extremism (W-IMVE), other statements covered a broad spectrum of grievances and targets, not all of which were aligned with a W-IMVE ideology.

Once NZSIS began investigating it became apparent that the individual did not have a weapon as previously stated and they were unlikely to have genuine intent to conduct an attack. Instead, it appeared their posts were designed to gain attention and notoriety.

The mixed and unstable nature of their rhetoric, along with a range of vulnerabilities, including their young age and mental ill health, contributed to challenges for the NZSIS in assessing the threat and risk posed by this individual. Our work in close collaboration with domestic partners ensured that support was given to the individual and steps put in place to mitigate any risk posed.

# Kia mataara ki ngā tohu Know the signs

## A guide for identifying signs of violent extremism

**Our 'Know the Signs' guidance, launched in 2022, remains the most useful way for New Zealanders to help us to detect early indications of violent extremism.**

The resource draws on the expertise and experience of NZSIS's intelligence professionals to identify the most common behaviours and activities observed during their work to counter violent extremism in New Zealand.

Violent extremists can come from a wide range of backgrounds so the indicators in the guide are deliberately ideology-neutral in recognition of that fact.



The guide includes indicators relating to:

- **Security Awareness** – behaviours or activities which may indicate someone is attempting to conceal their violent extremist activities;
- **Unusual changes in behaviour** – displaying noticeable changes in everyday behaviour, which may indicate a plan to conduct an attack;
- **Mindset and ideology** – behaviours or activities that may indicate someone is developing or promoting a violent extremist ideology;
- **Association and relationships** – behaviours or activities that may indicate someone is developing relationships with known terrorist groups and extremists;
- **Research and planning** – behaviours or activities that may indicate someone is researching or planning to engage in terrorist or violent extremist activity;
- **Gathering knowledge, skills and resources** – behaviours or activities that may indicate someone is gathering the knowledge, skills or resources to engage in terrorist or violent extremist activity;
- **Preparation** – behaviours or activities that may indicate someone is in the final stages of preparing to conduct a terrorist or violent extremist act.



**Ta Piri Whakamarama**  
New Zealand Security  
Intelligence Centre

### Kia mataara ki ngā tohu Know the signs

A guide for identifying signs  
of violent extremism

Since its launch, *'Know the Signs'* has been distributed to education institutions, local government, businesses, and community groups. The NZSIS has started to receive more reports from the public where elements in the guide have been referenced.

It's available digitally at [nzsis.govt.nz/know-the-signs](https://nzsis.govt.nz/know-the-signs)

Physical copies may be made available upon request by contacting [community.engagement@nzsis.govt.nz](mailto:community.engagement@nzsis.govt.nz)

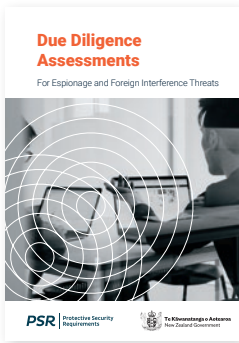
# Resources

## Protective Security Requirements website

The Protective Security Requirements is New Zealand's best practice security policy framework. The website outlines the Government's expectations for how its agencies should manage security governance as well as personnel, physical and information security.



There are a range of self-service resources available for any organisation wanting to improve its security arrangements. Find the framework at [protectivesecurity.govt.nz](https://protectivesecurity.govt.nz)



## Due Diligence

This guide is produced by NZSIS's Protective Security Requirements team to help organisations identify and mitigate the risks associated with foreign interference when working with others.



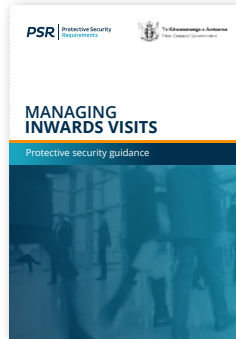
## Trusted Research

Trusted Research aims to help New Zealand's research and innovation sector get the most out of international scientific collaboration while protecting their intellectual property, sensitive research and personal information.



## Espionage and Foreign Interference Threats

Security advice for members of the New Zealand Parliament and Locally Elected Representatives.



## Managing Inwards Visits

This advice helps organisations assess possible security risks around visiting delegations from overseas.



## Security travel advice for Government officials

This advice is designed to support travelling officials protect themselves overseas but can apply to any organisation looking to protect their people, information and assets while out of the country.



## Kia mataara ki ngā tohu – Know the signs

'Know the Signs' identifies around 50 behaviours or activities associated with counter-terrorism investigations in New Zealand.

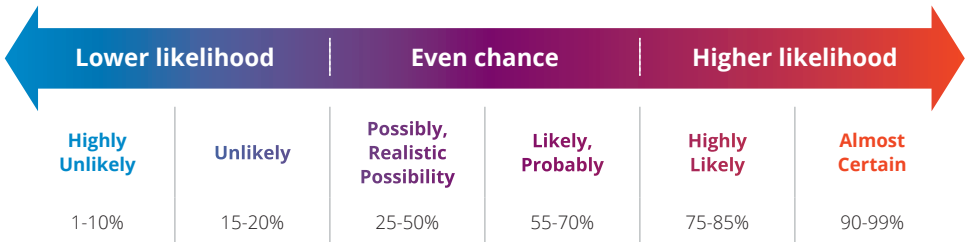
# Methodology

**This report is based on information gathered from a variety of sources including New Zealand Government information, academic research and media reporting.**

Our assessments were developed over a number of analytical sessions involving New Zealand Intelligence Community analysts and external subject matter experts.

Overall, we have medium confidence in our assessments which are based on a large body of credible and reliable sources, and our historic understanding of the New Zealand threat environment. We acknowledge that intelligence gaps remain and alternative explanations are possible.

Probabilistic language has been used through this report. It is common practice in intelligence assessment to use probabilistic language to denote the likelihood of an assessment being true. NZSIS's probabilistic language scale is as follows:



## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support, knowledge and feedback provided to us by our colleagues in government and external subject matter experts, which makes for a much more robust assessment than would have otherwise been possible.

# Reporting a National Security Concern

You can help us at NZSIS to keep New Zealand safe by telling us if you notice concerning behaviour or activity. Your information could help us protect New Zealand from threats such as foreign interference, espionage and terrorism.



## IN AN EMERGENCY: CALL 111 IMMEDIATELY

If your information is less time critical, you can tell us using our online form at [nzs.govt.nz](https://nzs.govt.nz) or inform Police either at [105.police.govt.nz](https://105.police.govt.nz) or through their non-emergency number 105. Whichever channel you choose, we will make sure your information reaches the right place.

## We all have a role to keep New Zealand safe

You may be the person best placed to notice a threat to our communities, our economy, or our country.

Every year we receive hundreds of reports from New Zealanders who share information about potential threats to our national security. Even the smallest piece of information can be vital in helping us detect and prevent foreign interference or terrorist attacks.

Trust your instincts. If something doesn't look or feel right, it's better to let us know. You can tell us in confidence by using our online form.

## How we'll use your information

Once we receive your information, we'll review it in context with other available information. We'll work out if we need to investigate further and if any risks need to be managed.



**Te Pā Whakamarumarū**  
New Zealand Security  
Intelligence Service