



8 July 2026

Ref: OIA-2025/26-0731

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request relating to Parliament protesting funding

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request, which was received by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) on 19 May 2026. You requested:

I am seeking all documents relating to the protest held in Parliament Grounds in February and March 2022, specifically any reports or other documents (including communications) that relate to the funding or organisation of the protest.

On 20 May 2026 you were advised that your request was partially transferred to Police for any information they may hold in scope of your original request. Police will respond to you directly.

On 26 May 2026 you refined your request to DPMC to be for the following:

- I am seeking all documents relating to the protest held in Parliament Grounds in February and March 2022. Formal documents include reports, briefings, memoranda, aides-memoire and also documents from entities such as The Disinformation Project if they were held with DPMC.*
- Specifically, any reports or other documents (including communications) that relate to the funding or organisation of the protest.*

The time frame for responding to your request was extended under section 15A of the Act by 10 working days because consultations were needed before a decision could be made on the request. Following this extension, I am now in a position to respond.

Information being released

I have decided to release copies of the documents listed below, subject to information being withheld as noted.

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
1	17 February 2022	Parliament Protest ODESC Agenda Parliament Protest ODESC #1 Minutes 17 February 2022 1000hrs	Release, with some information withheld under sections 6(a), 9(2)(g)(ii), 9(2)(k)
2	17 February 2022	ODESC briefing: Parliament Protest ODESC #1	Release
3	25 February 2022	Aide-Memoire: Prime Minister's National Security Briefing on 2 March 2022	Release [Some information not in scope and consultation ongoing]

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
4	23 March 2022	Security and Intelligence Board Meeting Papers [Pages 7-64 and 77-109 removed as not in scope of request]	Release, with some information withheld under sections 6(a), 9(2)(a) [Some information not in scope]
5	23 March 2022	Minutes of Security and Intelligence Board Meeting	Release, with some information withheld under sections 6(a), 9(2)(g)(i) [Some information not in scope]
6	25 March 2022	Comparisons between the Canadian Freedom Convoy and New Zealand Protest Convoy, and Longer-Term Implications	Release

The relevant grounds under which information has been withheld are:

- s6(a), to protect the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand
- s9(2)(a), to protect personal privacy
- s9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion
- s9(2)(g)(ii), to prevent improper pressure or harassment; and
- s9(2)(k), to prevent disclosure or use for improper gain or advantage.

In relation to Item [3] paragraphs 17-20 and Attachment B titled 'Letter from Hon James Shaw MP', to date consultation with former MP Shaw has not been able to be completed therefore, at this stage this information is not being released to you. Once consultation with Mr Shaw is completed a second reply will be sent to you with the decision regarding paragraphs 17-20 and Attachment B.

As per section 16(1)(e) of the Act, the following excerpt is being provided from the briefing titled 'Fortnightly Report National Security Group', dated 3 March 2022:

National Security System Governance, Coordination and Responses Update
National Security System activation: [Not in scope] Parliament protest
The National Security System remains activated in response to [Not in scope] and the protest at Parliament.

The remainder of the document is not in scope of your request.

In addition, please find attached as Appendix A extracts from the briefing titled 'Policy Levers for Addressing Mis/Disinformation', dated 9 March 2022.

The remaining information in this document is withheld in full under the following sections of the Act:

- s6(a), as disclosure would be likely to prejudice the security, defence or international relations of New Zealand
- s9(2)(ba)(i), to protect information which is subject to an obligation of confidence and its release would be likely to prejudice the future supply of similar information

- s9(2)(f)(iv), to maintain the confidentiality of advice tendered by or to Ministers and officials; and
- s9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion.

Nothing else has been identified as relevant to your request.

In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Act. No public interest has been identified that would be sufficient to outweigh the reasons for withholding that information.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response will be published on the DPMC website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JW', is positioned above the printed name and title.

Jeremy Clarke-Watson
Deputy Chief Executive
National Security and Resilience Group



ODESC

Officials' Committee for Domestic
and External Security Coordination

Parliament Protest ODESC Agenda

Date	17 February 2022	Time	1000hrs
Location	Rms 1.24-1.26, Defence House		
Invitees	DIA Department of Corrections DPMC GCSB MBIE	MFAT MoD MoJ MoH MoT Parliamentary Service	NZCS NZDF NZSIS Police PSC
Classification	RESTRICTED UNCLASSIFIED		

Purpose: To ensure agencies have a consistent understanding of the situation, ensure risks and implications are identified and appropriately managed, and to consider any communications issues.

Item	Topic	Lead
1.	Introduction	Chair
2.	Situation update Lead agency update	Police
3.	Key issues, risks, implications	Police
4.	Support and resourcing	Chair
5.	Advice to Ministers	Chair
6.	Communications and messaging	Chair
7.	Next meetings	Chair



ODESC

Officials' Committee for Domestic
and External Security Coordination

Parliament Protest ODESC #1 Minutes 17 February 2022 1000hrs Rms 1.24-1.26 Defence House

Attendees

Agency	Attendee	
DPMC	Tony Lynch (Chair) Marika Hughes	Catherine Delore s9(2)(g)(ii) Tania Warburton
Department of Corrections	Jeremy Lightfoot	
DIA	Paul James	
GCSB	Andrew Hampton	
MBIE	Oliver Valins	Carolyn Tremain (from 10:30am)
MFAT	Audrey Sonerson	
MoD	Bronwyn Evans Kent	
MoJ	Andrew Kibblewhite	
MoH	Ashley Bloomfield	
MoT	Bronwyn Turley	
NZCS	Christine Stevenson	
NZDF	Tony Davies	Darryn Webb
NZSIS	Rebecca K	
NZ Police	Andrew Coster	Jane Archibald
Parliamentary Service	Rafael Gonzalez-Montero	
Public Service Commission	Helene Quilter	

Introduction

1. The National Security System has been activated, at the request of New Zealand Police (the lead agency), regarding the ongoing protest activity at Parliament (known as the Freedom Convoy protest). The purpose of this ODESC was to ensure agencies have a consistent understanding of the situation; and to discuss risks and implications related to response options.

2. The Chair of ODESC welcomed attendees, thanked them for convening quickly, and noted that this issue had escalated straight to ODESC, rather than via a Watch Group.

Situation

3. The Police Commissioner provided an overview of the current situation. The Freedom Convoy arrived at Parliament on 8 February and became unlawful quickly with vehicles blocking key thoroughfares as well as structures erected on Parliament grounds. Police deployed more resources in response, and this was met with passive resistance. Police made 120 arrests before resources (staff and infrastructure) reached capacity. These resourcing constraints, limited number of Police cells and vehicles, remain.
4. The Police Commissioner noted the challenge of finding an appropriate intervention that would be successful and balance the risk of a significant escalation of unlawful behaviour causing harm. Some of the significant constraints the Police are facing in seeking to minimise disruption, clear blocked roads, etc include:
 - The sophisticated tactics the protesters are using when confronted with Police action – there is “a readiness to obstruct Police activity” at play. For example, protesters sitting in vehicles to resist towing which is a practice observed at other protests internationally.
 - The wider support base (financial, logistical and physical), not only enabling protesters to remain onsite, but providing surge capacity through calls on social media (growing numbers from 300 plus into a much larger crowd at short notice). When the crowd swells, it could quickly overwhelm Police capacity to manage.
 - The limited ability to detain people for lengthy periods given that they tend to be arrested for more minor offences with limited grounds to oppose bail (meaning they return to the community/back to the protest within a short timeframe).
5. The Police Commissioner noted that they are engaging with some of the protest leaders, although there is not one coherent voice. The protesters are mainly united by anti-mandate sentiment, and are looking for engagement from Government, although it is unclear what conditions they would accept as a pre-requisite for dispersal (other than an end to the mandates).
6. Protests are also occurring in Auckland, Picton, Christchurch, and Dunedin. Connection is occurring via social media, and there is concern that enforcement activity at one of these locations would trigger a response at another.
7. The Chief Executive, Parliamentary Service, noted the significant damage that has been done to the Parliamentary complex, and the flow-on effects the protest is having related to the safety and security of MPs, both in Wellington and at their constituency offices. Parliament is still sitting and the option of Parliament sitting virtually was raised; however Police are concerned this could escalate behaviour at the protests rather than make a positive difference.

Response options

8. Police would like to reach an outcome without significant harm to people. The Police Commissioner outlined the four options under consideration:

- *Maintaining the status quo.* This involves police being present, relationship building, and engaging in dialogue with protest influencers.
 - *Minor escalation.* Police would strengthen their response and chip away through minor disruption such as supply chain, but engagement-first would also occur.
 - *Cordon and contain.* Establish border control in order to cease the flow of occupiers in and out of the area, including disrupting movement of additional vehicles. This may require emergency powers to be activated and **ODESC advised Police to seek legal advice regarding this.**
 - *Large-scale intervention.* High-level Police deployment focusing on physically restraining, arresting occupation participants, and clearing vehicles.
9. ODESC suggested a fifth option being de-escalation by finding a pathway to compromise.
10. ODESC noted the risks identified for each option, ranging from the potential for gradual deterioration of crowd behaviour and the potential for counter-protest associated with the status quo option, to the potential for significant escalation and risk of extreme action associated with a large-scale intervention. As noted above, events at one protest site could trigger escalation at another. Additionally, due to the dynamic nature of this event, options and resources need to be kept available however Police are not requesting other agency's resources at this stage.
11. To further inform planning, at ODESC's direction, **DPMC will convene inter-agency work** with Police and other relevant agencies to identify wider strategic considerations, and risks associated with the options identified, using a range of scenarios. Work will also be undertaken to understand legal thresholds and pathways regarding accessing emergency powers and additional resources.
12. Chief Executives from Corrections and Customs (previous Deputy Chief Executive at Corrections) shared their experiences from responding to prison riots and associated protests. They agreed that the response options outlined by the Police Commissioner appear to be the "right" ones, and also discussed the effectiveness of engaging local community, and iwi/Maori leadership in the discussions regarding pathways to an effective resolution.
13. ODESC agreed that positive engagement with the protesters is key to maintaining stability while the protest continues, but that there may be a limited window in which this engagement can occur to result in effective de-escalation, given the lack of coherent voice which may fracture quickly.
14. ODESC also briefly discussed what other countries are doing to manage similar protest situations, such as Canada's use of emergency powers. Police are in regular contact with their international counterparts, and the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) will reach out via their posts to seek any additional advice on what effective measures are being utilised.**

s6(a)

17. In response to questioning, the Director General of Health did not raise concerns for any significant public health issues connected to the protest, apart from the escalation leading to a mass casualty event.
18. The Chief Executive of the Department of Internal Affairs mentioned local government have reported a rise in vandalism of an anti-authority nature as well as other disruptive activity. They also reflected on the 2011 Occupy Protests, and the difficulty in moving protesters once they have established at a location.
19. Police advised **they would establish an information flow to keep ODESC agencies informed.**

Key risks and implications

20. ODESC canvassed several risks and implications arising from the continued protest activity:
- Loss of public trust and confidence for perceived inaction in ending the disruption; and limited resources to maintain enforcement in relation to protests in other parts of New Zealand should the protests expand or new ones emerge.
 - The risk of escalation of current protest activity to target critical infrastructure, including critical transport routes, as has been observed in other jurisdictions.
 - While the Wellington protesters have shown some willingness to “clean up” (both in respect of their aggressive behaviour and physically at the location) in reaction to public sentiment, it is a volatile situation. If it continues, protesters could become more disruptive again, with little notice.
 - There are also risks associated with an extended duration including from fire or other emergencies on site, with limited abilities for emergency services to respond because of blocked access.
 - The Chief Executive of the Ministry of Justice asked ODESC to specifically note the significant impact the protest activity is having on the judicial system, with trials needing

s6(a)

to be cancelled because of the lack of safe access to the courts. This could be perceived as a breakdown of law and order.

- The impact on surrounding business owners was noted as a significant factor. **MBIE is considering options for possible relief for those impacted**, although there is no neat solution.

Communications

21. Police and DPMC's Strategic Communications Teams would **develop consistent media lines**. These will be distributed to ODESC agencies' communications teams for their information.

Next meeting

22. A further ODESC meeting will be held next week if the protest remains unchanged, and would come together earlier should Police as lead agency request another meeting. Consideration will also be given to convening if:

- There is major escalation in protest activity and/or behaviour.
- There are further copycat protests in New Zealand.

Action items

Para	Action	Lead
8	Police to seek legal advice regarding thresholds for declaring a State of Emergency.	Police
11	DPMC will convene inter-agency work with Police and other relevant agencies to identify wider strategic considerations, and risks associated with the options identified, using a range of scenarios	DPMC
s6(a)		
17	Police to establish an information flow to ODESC agencies.	Police
18	MBIE to consider options for activating support for affected businesses.	MBIE
19	Police and DPMC's Strategic Communications Teams to develop consistent media lines.	Police Communications and DPMC Communications

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ODESC

*Officials' Committee for Domestic
and External Security Coordination*

To	Prime Minister
From	Tony Lynch, Chair of ODESC
Prepared by	Marika Hughes, Director, National Security Systems Directorate
CC	Relevant Ministers
Date	17 February 2022
Subject	Parliament Protest ODESC #1

Key points

- The National Security System has been activated in support of Police's lead agency role in the response to the ongoing protest at Parliament.
- ODESC agreed that the range of options under consideration by Police represent the spectrum of possible responses, and has commissioned work to enable a better understanding of risks and to further inform planning at a system level.
- It is anticipated that another ODESC meeting will be held in the week beginning 21 February 2022, but chief executives will meet sooner if the situation requires.

Background

1. The first National Security System ODESC meeting was held today (17 February 2022) at the request of the lead agency (Police) to ensure agencies have a consistent understanding of the situation; and to discuss risks and implications related to response options. Chief Executives and senior delegates from 16 agencies attended.¹
2. ODESC attendees appreciated the update provided by the Police Commissioner and reflected on the complexities of the challenging situation. They were able to share expertise from across the system, acknowledging the purpose of the meeting was not to dictate or determine the operational courses of action for Police to undertake.

Situation update

3. The Police Commissioner provided an overview of the current situation, based on a briefing provided to the Minister of Police on 16 February 2022. He noted the challenge of finding an appropriate intervention that would both be successful and balance the risk of

¹ Department of Internal Affairs, Department of Corrections, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Chair), Government Communications Security Bureau, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Transport, Parliamentary Service, New Zealand Customs Service, New Zealand Defence Force, New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, New Zealand Police and Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission. Crown Law will attend future meetings.

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a significant escalation of unlawful behaviour causing harm. Some of the significant constraints the Police are facing in seeking to minimise disruption, clear blocked roads, etc include:

- The sophisticated tactics the protesters are using when confronted with Police action – there is “a readiness to obstruct Police activity” at play.
 - The wider support base (financial, logistical and physical), not only enabling protesters to remain onsite, but providing surge capacity through calls on social media (growing numbers from 300 plus into a much larger crowd at short notice. When the crowd swells, it can quickly exceed Police capacity to manage.
 - The limited ability to detain people for lengthy periods given that they are only arrestable for bailable offences (meaning they return to the community/back to the protest within a short timeframe).
4. The Police Commissioner noted that they are engaging with some of the protest leaders, although there is not one coherent voice. The protesters are mainly united by anti-mandate sentiment, and are looking for engagement from Government, although it is unclear what conditions they would accept as a pre-requisite for dispersal (other than an end to the mandates).
 5. The Chief Executive, Parliamentary Service, noted the significant damage that has been done to the Parliamentary complex, and the flow-on effects the protest is having related to the safety and security of MPs, both in Wellington and at their constituency offices.

Key risks and implications

6. ODESC canvassed several risks and implications arising from the continued protest activity:
 - Loss of public trust and confidence for perceived inaction in ending the disruption; and limited resources to maintain enforcement in relation to protests in other parts of New Zealand should the protests expand or new ones emerge.
 - The risk of escalation of current protest activity to target critical infrastructure, including critical transport routes, as has been observed in other jurisdictions.
 - While the Wellington protesters have been showing some willingness to clean up (both their aggressive behaviour and physically at the location) in reaction to public sentiment, it is a volatile situation. As it continues, protesters could become more disruptive again, with little notice.
 - There are also risks associated with an extended duration including from fire or other emergencies on site, with limited abilities for emergency services to respond because of blocked access.
 - The Chief Executive, Ministry of Justice, asked ODESC to specifically note the significant impact the protest activity is having on the judicial system, with trials needing to be cancelled because of the lack of safe access to the courts. This could be perceived as a breakdown of civil society.
 - The impact on surrounding business owners was noted as a significant factor. MBIE is considering options for possible relief for those impacted, although there is no neat solution.

Response options

7. The Police Commissioner outlined the four options under consideration:
 - Maintaining the status quo;
 - Minor escalation;
 - Cordon and contain; and
 - Large-scale intervention.
8. ODESC noted the risks identified for each option, ranging from the potential for gradual deterioration of crowd behaviour and the potential for counter-protest associated with the status quo option, to the potential for large-scale escalation and risk of extreme action associated with a large-scale intervention.
9. To further inform planning, DPMC will convene inter-agency work with Police and other relevant agencies to identify wider strategic considerations, and risks associated with the options identified, using a range of scenarios. Work will also be undertaken to understand legal thresholds and pathways regarding accessing emergency powers and additional resources.

Discussion

10. Chief Executives from Corrections and Customs (previous Deputy Chief Executive at Corrections) shared their experiences from responding to prison riots and associated protests. They agreed that the response options outlined by the Police Commissioner appear to be the “right” ones, and also discussed the effectiveness of engaging the local community, and iwi/Maori leadership in the discussions regarding pathways to an effective resolution.
11. ODESC agreed that positive engagement with the protesters is the key to maintaining stability while the protest continues, but that there may be a limited window in which this engagement can occur to result in effective de-escalation, given the lack of coherent voice which may fracture quickly.
12. ODESC also briefly discussed what other countries are doing to manage similar protest situations, such as Canada’s use of emergency powers. Police are in regular contact with their international counterparts, and the Ministry of Foreign and Trade (MFAT) will reach out via their posts to seek any additional advice on what effective measures are being utilised.

Next Steps

13. A further ODESC meeting will be held next week if the protest remains unchanged, and would come together sooner should the Police Commissioner request a meeting. Consideration will also be given to convening if:
 - There is major escalation in protest activity and/or behaviour.
 - There are further copycat protests in New Zealand.
14. We will keep you apprised of any further significant risks or complications if they arise.

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Aide-Memoire

PRIME MINISTER'S NATIONAL SECURITY BRIEFING ON 2 MARCH 2022

To:	Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern Minister for National Security and Intelligence		
From:	Tony Lynch. Deputy Chief Executive National Security Group	Date:	25/02/2022
Briefing Number:	DPMC-2021/22-1510	Security Level:	RESTRICTED UNCLASSIFIED

Purpose

1. This note provides background material for your National Security and Intelligence meeting with officials from the National Security Group on 2 March 2022, 3.00-3.45pm in your office.
2. There are three items on the agenda:
 - a. Update on ODESC activations [Not in Scope] and Parliament Protests);

[Not in Scope]

- c. All other business, including a short update on the 15 March 2022 ISC meeting.

Item one: ODESC activations

3. The national security system is activated in response to [Not in Scope] and the Parliament Protests. We will provide an update on the latest developments in both during the meeting.

[Not in Scope]

[Not in Scope]



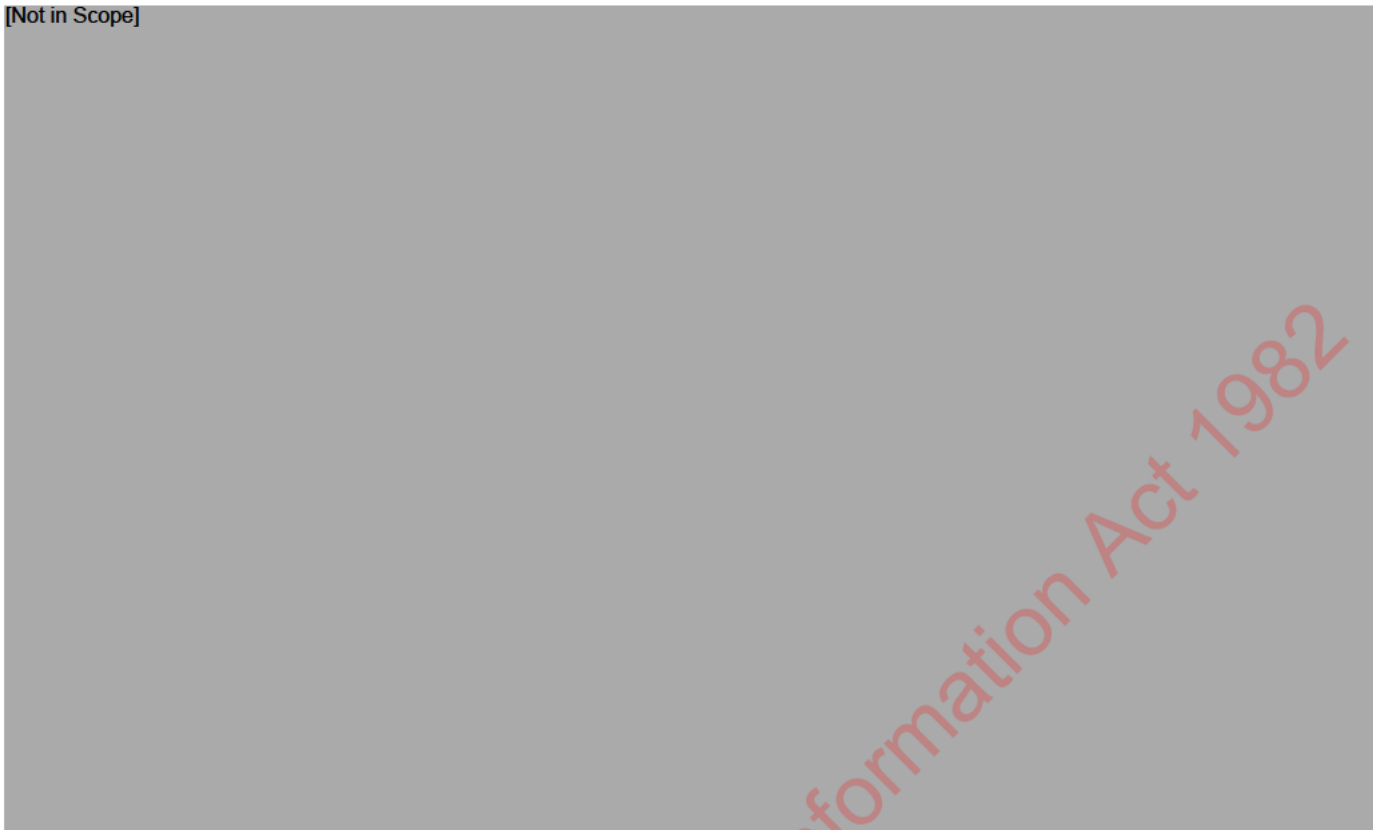
Parliament Protest

7. As you know, ODESC met on 17 February 2022 at the request of New Zealand Police (the lead agency), regarding the ongoing protest activity at Parliament. The NSG continues to monitor the ongoing Parliament and related protest activity across New Zealand to identify system risks and opportunities for further co-ordination across agencies. We continue to support Police as the lead agency; this has included assisting them to convene an inter-agency group, which is meeting every 48 hours. This group aims to enable co-ordinated situational awareness for agencies, and to consider the wider system risks relating to the ongoing protest activity across New Zealand
8. In response to your request at the last NSI meeting for more information on the funding sources of mis/disinformation campaigns, the National Assessments Bureau (NAB) and the Ministry of Health's Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART) are working with Police's Financial Intelligence Unit to provide a report. To effectively determine funding sources will require use of production orders to obtain relevant information and then forensic accounting measures. This is not something that DPMC or Health are able to undertake (this sits with Police).

[Not in Scope]



[Not in Scope]



Item three: All other business

Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) meeting, 15 March 2022

[Not in Scope]



Consultation ongoing

**AIDE-MEMOIRE: PRIME MINISTER'S NATIONAL SECURITY BRIEFING ON 2
MARCH 2022**

DPMC-2021/22-1510

Consultation ongoing

Tony Lynch
**Deputy Chief Executive
 National Security Group**

...../...../2022

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
**Minister for National Security and
 Intelligence**

...../...../2022

Attachments:	
Attachment A:	Attachment A [Not in Scope]
Attachment B:	Attachment B – Letter from Hon James Shaw MP

**AIDE-MEMOIRE: PRIME MINISTER'S NATIONAL SECURITY BRIEFING ON 2
 MARCH 2022**

DPMC-2021/22-1510

Attachment A

[Not in Scope]

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Attachment B

Letter from Hon James Shaw MP

CONSULTATION NOT YET COMPLETED, ATTACHMENT
NOT PROVIDED CURRENTLY

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



Security and Intelligence Board

Meeting Papers

23 March 2022

1030 – 1300 hours

Virtual via MS Teams

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List of Meeting Papers

Item	Documentation
1.	Agenda
[Not in Scope]	
5.	March Protests Reflections and Insights • Not available yet. To be sent out prior to meeting.
[Not in Scope]	

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Security & Intelligence Board Meeting

Agenda

Date 23 March 2022
Time 1030-1300 hrs
Venue Virtual via Microsoft Teams

[Not in Scope]



[Not in Scope]

5. RESTRICTED UNCLASSIFIED **March Protests Reflections and Insights** (25 minutes)

NZ Police

Item purpose: The purpose of this paper is for SIB to consider the national security issues raised by the recent protest activity at Parliament and associated violence at its conclusion, and to consider a system response to the ongoing national security implications.

[Not in Scope]

Cover Sheet for SIB Item 5

Meeting Date	23 March 2022
Sponsoring Agency	New Zealand Police
Item Title	Recent Protest Activity: insights and implications for New Zealand's national security

Purpose

1. This paper seeks SIB discussion on national security system issues raised by the recent protest activity at Parliament. It is provided to encourage SIB discussion on the insights and learnings from the protest activity, the underlying drivers of anti-mandate and anti-authoritarian sentiment, and the ongoing national security implications, including whether a system response may be needed.

Recommendations

2. It is **recommended** that SIB:
 - a. **reflect** on the recent protest activity at Parliament and associated violence at its conclusion and consider whether the anti-mandate movement is reflective of the anti-authority movement in New Zealand
 - b. **reflect** on the efficacy of the immediate system response during the occupation of Parliament
 - c. **discuss** whether the protest activity and underlying threads of alienation, vulnerability, social deprivation, anti-authorism represents a threat to New Zealand's social cohesion, social resilience, democratic institutions, and national infrastructure beyond the end of the Parliament occupation
 - d. **discuss** whether a system response is required to manage the ongoing national security implications, and if so, what this might include to:
 - i. increase knowledge and awareness of social factors and issues driving vulnerability to anti-authority, anti-Government and ultra-nationalist sentiment
 - ii. strengthen resilience to protect our democratic system, s6(a) and our communities' way of life
 - iii. provide community reassurance, Government-supported counter narratives, a strengthened fourth estate and explore disinformation assessment and response activities across Government similar to the Disinformation Assessment and Response Team in the Ministry of Health

- iv. identify whether offshore influence and anti-authority movements impact on domestic activity and if so, the extent of the impact and how this can be detected and mitigated early
- v. consider whether the protest raises any particular legislative and regulatory gaps and whether current reform packages are appropriately scoped and prioritised to address these
- e. **agree** that SIB will retain oversight of this issue, including consideration of findings from post-occupation agency and system debriefs.

Comment

- 3. This paper asks SIB to consider national security issues and implications raised by the recent protests on Parliament grounds and the associated violence. It seeks to encourage SIB discussion on and consideration of:
 - knowledge and awareness of social factors and issues that may drive vulnerability to anti-authority, anti-Government and ultra-nationalist sentiment, and the scale of this impact
 - how New Zealand can strengthen resilience to protect our democratic system, s6(a) and make it responsive and receptive to particular grievance and sentiment
 - what could be done to provide community reassurance, and Government-supported counter narratives, a strengthened fourth estate and explore disinformation assessment and response activities across Government similar to the Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART) in the Ministry of Health
 - whether offshore influence and anti-authority movements impact on domestic activity and if so, the extent of the impact and how this can be detected and mitigated early
 - whether the protest raises any particular legislative and regulatory gaps and whether current reform packages are appropriately scoped and prioritised to address these.

Papers accompanying this cover sheet

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Item 5B | Some System Reflections for SIB: drivers, enablers and possible implications |
| Item 5C | Gauging impact and a possible national security system response |

Contacts

Andrew Coster, Police Commissioner

Primary contact: Tim Blackmore, Tim.Blackmore@police.govt.nz, s9(2)(a)

23 March 2022

Members
Security & Intelligence Board

SIB Discussion Paper:

Recent Protest Activity: insights and implications for New Zealand's national security

Purpose

1. This paper seeks SIB discussion on national security system issues raised by the recent protest activity at Parliament. It is provided to encourage discussion on the insights and learnings from the protest activity, the underlying drivers of anti-mandate and anti-authoritarian sentiment, and the ongoing national security implications, including whether a systems response may be needed.

Observations arising from the occupation event - New Zealand's national security landscape has been changing, with a shift towards more extremist beliefs

The occupation and enabling factors

2. The occupation of Parliament grounds and the violence at its conclusion is a significant moment for Aotearoa New Zealand. It was the largest and most significant protest since 1981, although not at the same scale or sustained intensity. In Police's view, the 2022 Parliament protest had its foundations in disaffection and alienation at a societal and political level and was primarily domestic in nature. However, the protest activity was promoted, encouraged and directed through social media channels. In addition, some aspects of the anti-mandate movement are examples of activity that is reflected by and tailored to wider international trends of misinformation and extremism, fuelled by individual experiences and public health responses to the global COVID-19 pandemic.
3. The scale of extremist and vitriolic content online, and its intensification through conspiracy theories, s6(a), has exploited and increased pre-existing domestic disaffection and alienation within New Zealand. The anti-authority, anti-government, and strong individualistic narratives have a significant effect on people already pre-disposed to such narratives and has clearly raised compelling issues that have rallied individuals and groups across New Zealand, including those who are feeling socially alienated and disaffected.
4. The nature and composition of the protesters changed over the 23-day period of Parliament's occupation. Police observes that the proportion of anti-mandate protesters were a minority of those present by the end of the protest, with many more anti-authority individuals joining throughout the occupation. Consequently, Police's detailed response plan was agile, from de-escalation and negotiation responses to increasingly strong law enforcement action when protesters failed to respond to softer tactics. Police's experience

over the course of the occupation was that any central or local Government, or Police action, gave the protesters a cause to rally around, with a high risk of further escalation. For example, protestor escalation following an intention to tow illegally parked vehicles. Police also observed that the escalation in protester activity and the increase in anti-authority actors attending the occupation demonstrated the level of social disenfranchisement of those present, with many not having anything to lose by being involved.

5. Political and social activism through protest action is not a national security concern and the right to protest in a democratic society must be protected. However, what is concerning is the increase in the volume and nature of harmful anti-authority rhetoric which could contribute to an environment that encourages or increases the risk of civil disorder and violence occurring as a response to legitimate public policy.

Domestic causes and effects reflect international experience

6. Parts of New Zealand society have suffered genuine hardship during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Hardship has been felt most strongly in the restrictions on New Zealanders' fundamental freedoms for public health and societal wellbeing. Individual and societal disaffection and political alienation is often seeded in hardship and harsh lived experiences.
7. Opposition to vaccine mandates came from people significantly disadvantaged as a result of this policy. However, it also provided an opportunity for other disaffected sectors of society to advance their grievances and ideologies. The views expressed during the occupation were not heterogenous, but they were bound by a crisis narrative that drove intense emotions, including anger, which morphed into or was a pretext for violence for some. s6(a)

8. In overseas jurisdictions, mis and disinformation, conspiracy theories, and extremist narratives combined with themes of radical individualism, have resulted in social polarisation and splintering of social realities. Our domestic anti-mandate movement manifests in anti-Government, anti-authority (including anti-law enforcement), and anti-media sentiment. While the protest was influenced by action overseas and there was an international aspect, the protest had strong domestic support, including via domestic crowd funding.
9. The protest highlights a more general disenfranchisement with Government from a range of anti-authority actors who oppose the government for several reasons, ranging from reasonable criticisms of specific policy to conspiracy theories with no legitimate basis. A more recent development is the number of anti-authority actors and groups who find common cause in opposing almost all aspects of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ We have seen this public sentiment with a number of protests occurring over late 2021 and into 2022, as well as an increase in anti-authority action,

¹ NIC-IR-220211 New Zealand Police Intelligence Report *Anti-Authority Rhetoric and Actors*

including action focused on the Prime Minister, s6(a), and anti-COVID response action.

10. The coverage of vaccine mandates by mainstream media, often without in-depth editorial reflection or objective coverage, can have the effect of energising a movement, perpetuated through online echo chambers that foster an extremist view. With the nature and volume of mis and disinformation being spread, there has been an increase in threatening rhetoric and a shift towards extreme beliefs and the normalisation of calls, particularly in the online domain, for civil disorder and violence as a legitimate response to public policy.
11. A sense of shared threat and the need for action can act as a powerful unifying force, bringing together previously disparate individuals and causes, and fuelling shared in-group and projected out-group identities. s6(a)

[REDACTED]

Discussion Points

Is a coordinated and sustained national security system response required?

12. There is a complex set of issues that has led to the s6(a) and civil disorder risks, and violence experienced in the anti-mandate protest. This complexity may warrant consideration of multiple factors and responses, including:
 - a national security system response and integrated work across the 4Rs, with consideration of the efficacy of the immediate system response during the protest
 - a re-emphasis on social inclusion and social cohesion
 - a consideration of deeper knowledge and intelligence on the factors underlying the anti-authoritarian elements of the protest, and
 - consideration of whether our laws, regulations, and current policy reform programmes, are fit for purpose.
13. These are the same areas identified for consideration by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019.

What are the implications for social cohesion and social inclusion arising out of the protests?

14. The narratives and grievances are highly visible to the public due to social media, the 24-hour continuous news cycle, and the presence of alternative media outlets. As well, numerous individuals actively shared, to large online audiences, their participation in, and perception of, the protest and related matters. As a system, one approach to rebuilding social cohesion and social inclusion may be to take deliberate efforts to engage and

understand the concerns of protestors as a way of counteracting divisive responses. Along with this, a primary focus could be to correct disinformation and focus society on what unifies us rather than what divides us. Education and awareness across all levels of society is needed, with a strong emphasis on social responsibility and acceptable behaviour. A focus beyond inclusion of ethnic minority groups will be required.

15. The social cohesion challenge is not limited to attempts to re-engage those who feel that their interests and those of society have diverged to a point of crisis; it is also to provide assurance to the rest of society that efforts to manage the risks of this situation, and address its causes, are appropriate and likely to be successful. If this assurance cannot be provided, the public demand for firm action can be expected to grow.
16. The Government response to recommendation 12 of the Royal Commission, to develop and promote an accessible reporting system for the public to report easily and safely concerning behaviours or incidents to a single contact point, is one part of a broader solution. However, other efforts to prevent threatening behaviour and maintain civil discourse on public interest issues are required.

What is required to strengthen resilience and counter false narratives?

17. One area that could be considered is the strengthening of the fourth estate, including free, frank, objective, transparent, and well-evidenced journalism and media reporting to foster a mainstream media environment that people can trust and have confidence in. A trusted mainstream media environment mitigates and removes the need for people turning toward non-traditional media sources, where there is significant mis/dis-information and extremism. Without a strong fourth estate, it is likely that we will continue to see people move further into harmful echo chambers. Government is supporting a pluralistic media to maintain editorial content through media reforms, and preserving plurality, transparency in sponsorships, and editorial inquiry is a key aspect of this reform. There is also the activity supported through the Ministry of Health to provide counter-narratives that address the realities of COVID-19 and the real protections that public health orders provide. More could be done with the Disinformation Assessment and Response Team.
18. It is likely that a response will require the involvement of agencies outside of SIB, particularly to address social, education, health and wellbeing issues, and to promote fact-based social narratives. While the Ministry of Social Development is leading a workstream on social cohesion as a response to Ko tō tātou kāinga tēnei, the report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019, the scope of this work may require re-examining to ensure that its scope covers the range of issues highlighted by this recent protest activity. Another focus area could be on individual resiliency to mis and disinformation, including the need for individual mental health responses, which if able to be accessed, could mitigate future risk.

Do we need increased knowledge and vigilance, and if so, what would that look like?

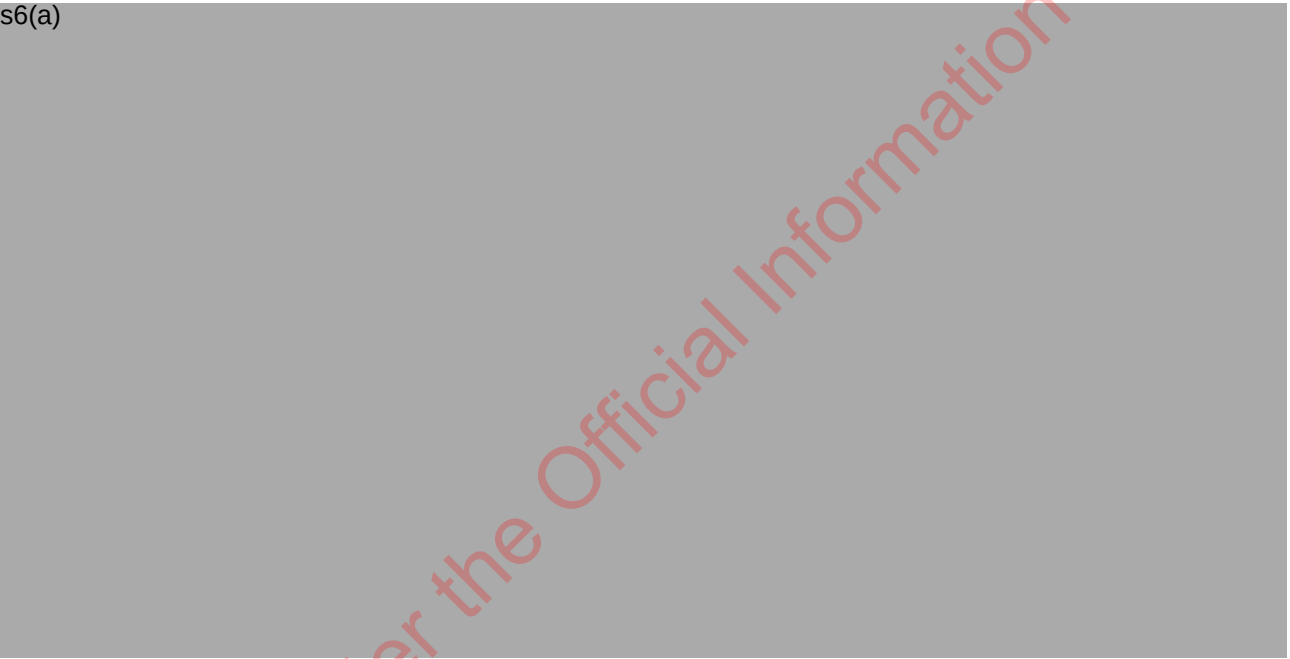
19. While no direct or credible threat of planned violence has been identified post-occupation, the risk that individuals may be mobilised to engage in acts of extremist violence may have increased. This is due to the strengthening of relationships that occurred at a personal level amongst some protestors, where these relationships had previously been

sustained online. The shared experience of attending the protest may have created stronger bonds between individuals of concern within the protest cohort.

20. Properly detecting, assessing, and preventing such behaviour, which is always challenging, is even more difficult in an environment where it can intersect with political and religious expression, legitimate protest, and ever-shifting forms of ideological framing. In recent months, anti-authority sentiment has increasingly had physical manifestations such as confrontation and intimidation, as well as property and infrastructure damage. Since October 2021, Police has, through daily scanning, collected approximately 100 samples of threatening rhetoric aimed at the Prime Minister or her Government.² The violence at the conclusion of the protest is the latest physical manifestation of this threatening rhetoric, highlighting the potential for escalation.

Are we collecting the right intelligence to respond to and mitigate the threats and risks?

s6(a)



22. Consideration could also be given to whether there is a mandate and/or legal mechanism to enable us to move safely to investigate and make decisions around national security risks stemming from the margins of protest, without impacting or having a chilling effect on legitimate protest.

Has the protest identified any gaps in legislative and regulatory settings that need to be scoped and prioritised?

23. The Royal Commission noted the critical importance of having fit for purpose legislation and policies to enable regulators and law enforcement agencies to act early to prevent serious harm. Many of our policy agencies are progressing legislative and regulatory reform programmes that can strengthen our national security settings. There is an opportunity for SIB to consider whether there are any gaps in this reform package arising

² NIC-IR-220211 New Zealand Police Intelligence Report *Anti-Authority Rhetoric and Actors*

out of recent experiences, and whether these reform programmes have the right scope and prioritisation.

24. This may require SIB to have targeted discussions with the responsible policy agencies across issues such as:

s6(a)

Conclusion

26. This paper asks SIB members to consider the national security and societal issues raised by the recent protest activity at Parliament and associated violence at its conclusion, and to consider a system response to the ongoing national security implications.

Recommendations

27. SIB is asked to:

- a. **reflect** on the recent protest activity at Parliament and associated violence at its conclusion and consider whether the anti-mandate movement is reflective of the anti-authority movement in New Zealand
- b. **reflect** on the efficacy of the immediate system response during the occupation of Parliament
- c. **discuss** whether the protest activity and underlying threads of alienation, vulnerability, social deprivation, anti-authorism represents a threat to New Zealand's

social cohesion, social resilience, democratic institutions, and national infrastructure beyond the end of the Parliament occupation

- d. **discuss** whether a system response is required to manage the ongoing national security implications, and if so, what this might include to:
- i. increase knowledge and awareness of social factors and issues driving vulnerability to anti-authority, anti-Government and ultra-nationalist sentiment
 - ii. strengthen resilience to protect our democratic system, s6(a) and our communities' way of life
 - iii. provide community reassurance, Government-supported counter narratives, a strengthened fourth estate and explore disinformation assessment and response activities across Government similar to the Disinformation Assessment and Response Team in the Ministry of Health
 - iv. identify whether offshore influence and anti-authority movements impact on domestic activity and if so, the extent of the impact and how this can be detected and mitigated early
 - v. consider whether the protest raises any particular legislative and regulatory gaps and whether current reform packages are appropriately scoped and prioritised to address these
- e. **agree** that SIB will retain oversight of this issue, including consideration of findings from post-occupation agency and system debriefs.

Andrew Coster
Police Commissioner

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ODESC

 Officials' Committee for Domestic
and External Security Coordination

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MINUTES OF SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE BOARD MEETING

23 March 2022

Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Present

Tony Lynch (Chair)	Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet (DPMC)
Marika Hughes (Director NSSD)	DPMC
s6(a) (Secretary)	DPMC
Andrew Hampton	Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB)
Carolyn Tremain	Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE)
Mike Yardley	Ministry of Defence
Cecile Hillyer	Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade (MFAT)
Christine Stevenson	New Zealand Customs Service (NZCS)
Kevin Short	New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF)
Andrew Coster	New Zealand Police (NZP)
Rebecca Kitteridge	New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS)

Apologies

Brook Barrington	DPMC
Chris Seed	MFAT
Andrew Bridgman	MoD

In attendance

s6(a)

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Item 1: Agenda & Introductory Remarks

1. The Chair welcomed Cecile Hillyer and Mike Yardley to the meeting who were standing in for Chris Seed and Andrew Bridgman respectively. The Chair noted the last SIB meeting was in December, with the February meeting being cancelled due to the significant events impacting the system requiring Chief Executives' attention. These included the Omicron outbreak and the National Security System activations for the Ukraine/Russia conflict and the Parliament protest.

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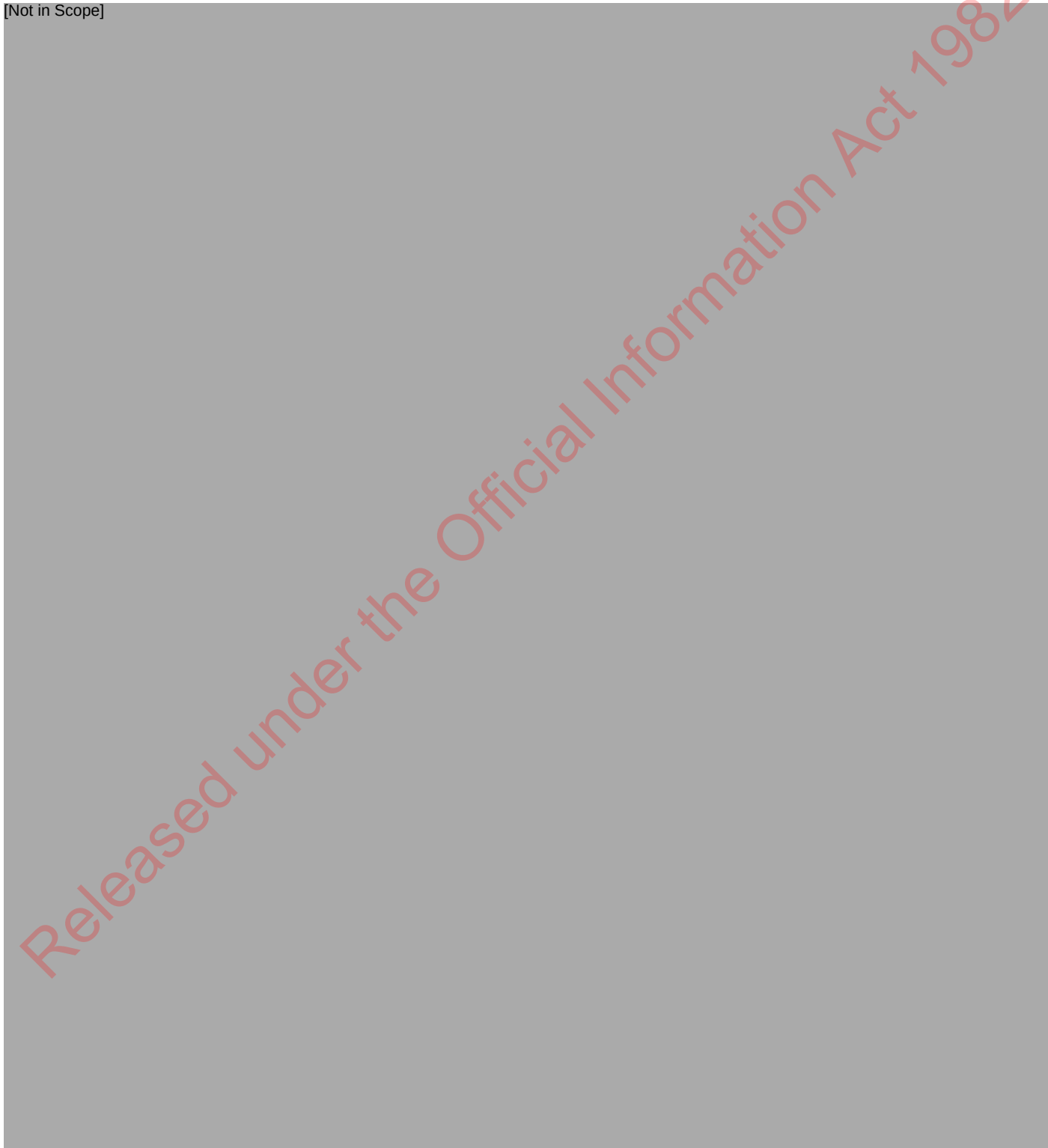
Item 5: March Protests Reflections and Insights

20. The Police Commissioner provided his reflections following the March protests at Parliament and across the country, emphasising the need to learn from the events and understand the underlying causes. The Commissioner noted the growing anti-Government and anti-authority sentiment that had been building over time, driven by a variety of factors including the health controls, culminating in the Parliament protest. The Commissioner questioned if there was anything that the national security system could have done differently to avoid the situation, noting the challenges faced by the system over the past two years.
21. A lack of social cohesion was raised as a key contributor to the protests, with the Commissioner reflecting the March 15 terrorist attacks on the Christchurch masjidain had potentially limited the view of what were considered minority communities, highlighting the need to consider a wider view on marginalised and disaffected groups. Mis and dis information has been raised by various groups and media as the cause of the protests, however the Commissioner opined that mis and dis information should be seen as an aggravator, raising the question about what can actually be done about it.

s9(2)(g)(i)



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TITLE	Comparisons between the Canadian Freedom Convoy and New Zealand Protest Convoy, and Longer-Term Implications
Date	25 March 2022
Produced by	Insights and Reporting Team, COVID-19 Group, DPMC

Thank you to the following teams that assisted with this report: The Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART), National Immunisation Programme, at the Ministry of Health; the National Assessments Bureau; the Combined Threat Assessment Group; the New Zealand Police; the Department of Internal Affairs; and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Introduction

1. The Insights and Reporting Team in DPMC's COVID-19 Group have analysed the drivers of the recent Wellington Convoy Protest and its parallels with the Freedom Convoy Protest in Canada.¹ This report will look at drivers of the protest, funding of the protest, the responses so far, and finally what this all means for social cohesion.
2. The main conclusions from the analysis below are that long-term social issues, such as inequality, feelings of disenfranchisement, and mistrust of the government, have been exacerbated by COVID-19, which analysts have perceived to have led to an erosion in social cohesion. This has created space for mis/disinformation to further spread, and extreme ideologies to become more mainstream. This was evidenced by the recent protests in Wellington and reflected in similar protests in Canada, which are thought to be a symptom of this decline in social cohesion.

Freedom Convoy Canada Overview

3. The protest in Canada, dubbed the 'Freedom Convoy' began as a protest against vaccine mandates for truck drivers crossing the United States-Canada border, which came into force in January 2022. The mandate required unvaccinated Canadian truck drivers returning from cross border journeys to quarantine upon returning home. The convoy initially consisted of truck drivers and conservative groups and headed east towards the capital Ottawa, before becoming an ongoing occupation of the city centre. Similar protests occurred elsewhere in Canada, including the Ambassador Bridge, which handles 27% of trade between the United States and Canada.¹ The scale of the disruption in Ottawa, which included constant blaring of horns eventually led to the city's mayor declaring a state of emergency. Despite being associated with truck drivers, the Canadian Trucking Alliance estimates that 85-90% of cross-border truckers are vaccinated. The Alliance did not support the convoy and suggested that many protestors in Ottawa had no connection to the industry.^{2 3 4} After around three weeks of the Ottawa occupation, a period of time similar to the duration of the Wellington Convoy Protest, Prime Minister Trudeau invoked never before used emergency measures which gave police powers to arrest and disperse participants.⁵

Wellington Convoy Protest Overview

4. The recent protests in Wellington had a number of similarities to the Freedom Convoy protests in Canada. As in Canada, the protests in Wellington were initially directed against vaccine mandates but quickly transformed into a less defined protest under the theme of "Freedom". The protest was also similar in its methods, with an initial convoy of protestors beginning an occupation of the city centre in order to cause disruption. The protests in Wellington also ended in a similar fashion with New Zealand Police removing demonstrators after around three weeks.^{6 7}

¹ All of the information and analysis related to the Canadian Freedom Convoy was taken from open-source material and the Canadian government were not involved.



Comparisons Between the New Zealand and Canadian Situations

5. There are commonalities between the recent protests in Canada, and New Zealand. Analysis of the drivers of the protest, funding, responses so far, and longer-term impacts for social cohesion in both Canada, and New Zealand, are set out below.

Drivers of the Protest: In Canada, and New Zealand, it appears that COVID-19 restrictions such as vaccine mandates have led to frustration and discontent for some. This has allowed mis/disinformation to further spread, and more extreme ideologies to become more mainstream.⁸

6. Although the Freedom Convoy began as a protest about a specific aspect of Canada's public health response to COVID-19, the protest quickly expanded beyond this, becoming a focal point for protest against the Trudeau government and for far-right extremists.^{9 10} As with other protest movements associated with COVID-19 public health measures, protestors appeared to espouse conspiracy theories driven by mis/disinformation. One group connected to the Canada Freedom Convoy protest was the group Canada Unity, founded by a far-right activist and QAnon conspiracy theorist, which acted as an early organiser of the protest. News spread through a web of Facebook groups and Telegram Channels, before being amplified through more mainstream right-wing commentators.^{11 12} A spokesperson for Facebook's parent company Meta, also reported that so called 'content farms' were producing memes in support of the protests in Bangladesh and Vietnam.^{13 14 15}
7. The protests in Wellington had parallels with the protests in Canada, with protestors expressing feelings of disenfranchisement and frustration. A recent report by New Zealand Police noted that frustration with lockdowns, pressure to get vaccinated, and fatigue were leading to growing discontent and to an erosion of social cohesion.¹⁶ Representatives of the Human Rights Commission also reported that during consultation with protestors, many at the Wellington protest claimed to have lost jobs or suffered side-effects of vaccination.¹⁷ The chair of Taranaki Whānui also commented that there were many Māori protestors, which he attributed to a long history of grievances against the Crown and deep-rooted mistrust of government.¹⁸ In contrast the Canadian Freedom Convoy Protest did not appear to have significant numbers of indigenous peoples. The Canadian protest was, however, condemned by First Nations leaders, which mirrors the responses from Iwi leaders during the protest in New Zealand.¹⁹
8. Other researchers commenting directly on the Wellington protest also indicated that economic and ethnic inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to the anger among some at the protest, whilst also possibly making them more susceptible to mis/disinformation.²⁰ A number of protestors in Wellington were reportedly observed repeating conspiracy theories found online, including theories that the vaccine is unsafe, contains metals and is even linked to HIV.²¹ Many of the theories online are spread through Telegram, via groups such as Voices for Freedom and Counterspin Media.²² Groups such as Counterspin media also use their platform to sow mistrust of mainstream media outlets and other parts of society with calls for journalists, politicians, academics and the police to be arrested for supposed crimes against humanity.²³ Research from Te Pūnaha Matatini reported in 2021, noted that mis/disinformation was being used as a tool to bring New Zealanders who were vaccine hesitant to a more vaccine resistant position, before encouraging them to embrace right wing ideologies.^{24 25} The report noted the sharp increase in popularity and intensity of mis/disinformation since the August COVID-19 outbreak, and that much of the content originates in Australia and the United States.²⁶
9. The protest also appears to have become a rallying point for more extreme groups.^{27 28} The Police report mentioned above also noted that conditions created by discontent have allowed divisive narratives and extreme ideologies to spread.²⁹ This was borne out during the protests as evidenced by the drawing of swastikas, equating the New Zealand government with Nazi and fascist regimes, and violent slogans on buildings and statues near parliament.³⁰ Messaging related to the conspiracy theory group QAnon was also observed at the Wellington protest.³¹ This rhetoric was also echoed in some of the reports to the media from protestors themselves. In a recent article, one protestor mentioned that the violence on the



final day of the protest was not carried out by protestors at the site to demonstrate against mandates, but was being carried out by groups of extremists. It is still too early to conclude who was behind the violence and what their exact motivations were.³²

Funding: In both Canada and New Zealand, reporting in the media suggests that funding came from numerous small donations. Media reports also suggest larger donations were made by individuals in Canada, and to a smaller extent in New Zealand. Investigations remain underway regarding the funding of the Wellington Convoy protest.

10. A large portion of funding for the Canadian Freedom Convoy came through crowd funding websites including GoFundMe and later GiveSendGo.³³ The GiveSendGo page quickly raised CAD9 million (NZD10.4 million) from around 100,000 donors. The largest donation was \$215,000, whilst an American software billionaire donated \$90,000.³⁴
11. The means of funding the protests in Wellington has drawn some parallels with the protests in Canada. Media reporting suggests that funding for the Wellington Convoy protest came mostly from small donations, with only a few reports of larger donations from some businesses within New Zealand.^{35 36} There have been suggestions in the media that some of the money used to fund the protest originated offshore, although this has not yet been substantiated. Police are looking into funding streams as part of their investigation. Concerns were also voiced by groups including the National Māori Authority, who have suggested that some groups linked to the protests have been taking advantage of disaffected and vulnerable people as a source of donations. Funds were reportedly used to pay for parking fines, food, and equipment.^{37 38 39}

Responses So Far: In both Canada, and New Zealand, steps were taken to end the protest. In the longer-term, government, and non-government, organisations have been looking at ways to address some of the causes.

12. In Canada, steps were taken during the Freedom Convoy occupation to remove the protestors, such as the introduction of emergency powers. Another tactic used by the government as well as by private companies was to prevent finances from reaching the convoy protestors. GoFundMe seized donations after police reports of violence, and after crowdfunding activities migrated to GiveSendGo. Canada has funded long term initiatives to combat mis/disinformation, whilst work is ongoing at the University of Ottawa to better understand the issue.^{40 41 42 43 44 45}
13. The response to the immediate issue of the occupation in Wellington, bore some resemblance to the response in Ottawa, but also differed significantly in scale. Initially police patrolling the Wellington protest followed a tactic of de-escalation, similar to that initially used in Canada, to prevent major unrest from breaking out. Unlike in Canada, no temporary laws were invoked to bring the protest to an end, but, as in Canada, intervention from the police was required to finally disperse the occupation.⁴⁶ Although there were no reports of funding for the Wellington protest being blocked, the police are looking into funding streams as part of their investigation into the protest.⁴⁷ The government, and others such as the Disinformation Project led by Te Pūnaha Matatini, the Brainbox Institute, and Toha Toha are looking at ways to better understand, and combat mis/disinformation. Government agencies such as the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Ministry of Health have also been working to understand COVID-19 related mis/disinformation with groups such as the Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART), set up for this reason. DART has been tasked by the Ministry of Health to outline actions that can be implemented to combat health related mis/disinformation including referral to other agencies or legal actions against groups which create and distribute mis/disinformation.^{48 49 50}



Implications for Long Term Social Cohesion: Experts and commentators see the protests in Canada, New Zealand, and elsewhere as a symptom of a decline in social cohesion linked to COVID-19 and wider long-term issues of inequality. This has created space for mis/disinformation to further spread, and more extreme ideologies to become mainstream.

14. In a recent interview with news broadcaster Al Jazeera, a member of the Disinformation Project at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia Canada, pointed to the long-term issues of social cohesion which will continue after the Freedom Convoy. Their analysis identified that online conspiracy theorists had been recruited by right wing organisations to spread their ideology within protest related groups. People within the groups feel ignored and marginalised in part due to the lack of any attempt to engage with them. The feeling of alienation felt by some protestors was then amplified by mainstream, but still fringe, political organisations, such as right-wing parties, who are attempting to build upon the notoriety of the protest for future elections. The project spokesperson commented that regardless of whether mandates remain or go, the feeling of disenfranchisement will remain and that there may be an increase in the popularity of nationalism and populism.⁵¹ This aligns with the New Zealand Police analysis that the decline of social cohesion linked to COVID-19 has made some people more susceptible to mis/disinformation and more extreme ideologies, and also more likely to participate in protest activity.⁵²
15. Experts in this field have mentioned similar drivers in the New Zealand protests. A prominent psychologist in a recent article in the Guardian newspaper, pointed to the fact that many of the protestors were people who have experienced marginalisation, which has potentially increased due to public health measures. This has made some protestors inclined to look for a sense of physical community that protests can provide, whilst also bringing them into contact with others looking to spread more extreme messaging. As well as groups pushing extreme views to people who feel marginalised, recent reports have also noted the presence of “influencers” on social media, using language such as “choice” and “freedom” as a means of building trust with people and distancing them from their other networks. Some of these influencers use this trust as a means of selling products, such as herbal remedies, whilst simultaneously breaking down trust in traditional sources of information such as the mainstream media and medical professionals,^{53 54} further undermining social cohesion.



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Extracts from Briefing: Policy Levers for Addressing Mis/Disinformation, dated 9 March 2022

Executive Summary

1. Mis/disinformation is not a new problem. It has been around in various forms throughout history. But the arrival of mass social media has enabled mis/disinformation to be scaled at a global level for the first time, delivering an asymmetric tool for manipulation of large groups of people across borders and geographical distances, with limited traceability and at very low cost.
2. New Zealand, like many of our likeminded partners, has been impacted by networks that disseminate harmful mis/disinformation. This has affected for example the public health response to COVID-19. It has also manifested in more sinister ways, leading to radicalisation of at-risk individuals, threats and intimidation of people in our communities, and as a vehicle to undermine trust in democracy, media, and the institutions of government.
3. *Withheld in full*
4. There are no easy solutions. Our approach will need to be comprehensive and long-term to build resilience within society to manage future mis/disinformation topics. New Zealand is not alone in recognising the nature of the problem and grappling with appropriate ways to address it.

Paragraphs 5-10 withheld in full

Mis/disinformation leads to a range of harms...

11. Mis/disinformation has emerged as a complex security issue around the world. The development of online tools and social media environments that enable mass participation has enabled the spread and promulgation of mis/disinformation, with implications that governments and democratic societies have been relatively slow to recognise.
12. There are potentially harmful effects from the spread of mis/disinformation. At the most acute end of the spectrum these harms include threats to public safety, incitement of criminal or violent extremist activity, breakdown of social cohesion, and efforts to undermine democratic institutions. Mis/disinformation can play a role in recruitment and radicalisation strategies of violent extremist groups. It can also be a tool of corporate or State influence or driven by ideologically motivated groups. Unwitting accomplices are often involved in the dissemination of misinformation online. Distinguishing innocent participants from the nodes of deliberate and coordinated inauthentic behaviour can be difficult.
13. The impacts in New Zealand have become significant, exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While a full analysis is yet to be carried out, mis/disinformation appears to have played a significant role in the February 2022 occupation of Parliament grounds and associated violence and intimidation towards lawmakers, the media, academics, authorities, officials, and the general public. Researchers, civil society groups, tangata whenua, and the internet community have for some time expressed concern about the impacts.

14. *Withheld in full*

15. Money also plays an important role, because of the potential to monetise mis/disinformation content as a revenue source (for extremist groups and grifters alike) and as a means of financing the production, dissemination, and promotion of mis/disinformation. The economics of mis/disinformation are largely obscure, although it appears those who profit from and finance mis/disinformation frequently operate at a safe distance from those most impacted by it.
16. Mis/disinformation networks can also be driven by a range of other factors, including charismatic online personalities, development of a sense of community or shared knowledge, relatively complex psychological phenomena (including e.g. “rabbit-holing” – the descent into belief in bizarre, improbable or conspiratorial theories; or “brigading” – where groups engage in coordinated attacks on others), and genuinely held ideological beliefs (some moderate, others less so).
17. Addressing these problems is particularly challenging, whether for governments or communities. This problem set, like the online networks that drive it, is new enough that tried and tested solutions are yet to emerge. Mis/disinformation typically fits within definitions of protected or political speech. Most mis/disinformation is legal – making it difficult to address using traditional law enforcement and intelligence tools before the harms become apparent. Regulatory tools have proved particularly difficult to develop. It can be challenging to trace the financial flows, or to keep up with the shifting patterns of mis/disinformation and their impact.

18. *Withheld in part*

In the lead up to the ‘convoy’ occupation there were clear signs of mis/disinformation networks looking to incite harm and disorder, hidden in plain sight among what seemed like more typical forms of political protest. Whilst that ambiguity made it more difficult for agencies to focus in on the threat, many community groups and academics were actively calling them out.

Paras 19-21 withheld in full.

22. *Withheld in part*

As we witnessed at the convoy occupations, even with longstanding efforts to get ahead of COVID-19 disinformation, existing inequality, social disengagement and mental health issues can create vulnerabilities that are easily exploited by malign actors.

Remainder of briefing (paras 23 -43) withheld in full.