



NATIONAL SECURITY SITUATION UPDATE: RAMADAN 2018



To	Assistant Commissioners, District Commanders
Approved by	Assistant Commissioner Mike Pannett
Prepared by	National Intelligence Centre (NIC) Security Intelligence and Threats Group (SITG)
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Introduction

1. This is a national security situation update for senior staff, intended to enhance awareness of potential national security issues.

Summary

2. The Muslim holy month of Ramadan commenced on 15 May and will end on 15 June 2018, although the exact date may vary from region to region. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, a.k.a. ISIS or Daesh) terrorist group issued calls for attacks during Ramadan in 2015, 2016, and 2017, and may yet do so in 2018. These calls have led to increased terrorist attacks from supporters across the globe.
3. Ramadan in 2018 follows the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Israel and the movement of the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem on 14 May, further inflaming tensions in the Middle East.
4. Internationally Ramadan is also a period of increased risk to the Muslim community, due to either the backlash following any terrorist events, the increased profile of the Muslim community during this period, or a combination of the two.
5. There is no specific intelligence indicating an attack is being planned in New Zealand at this time, and the national threat level remains LOW – an attack is possible but not expected.
6. Effective prevention, planning, readiness, and engagement will reduce the likelihood and potential impact of incidents and enable Police to respond effectively should an incident occur.

Background

7. The Muslim holy month of Ramadan has started and concludes with the celebration of Eid al-Fitr on 15 June 2018. Ramadan commemorates the revelation of the Qu'ran to the Prophet Muhammad. During this period, Muslims will fast during the hours of daylight, breaking their fast in the evening with a meal (iftar), often taken communally. Ramadan will see increased attendance at Mosques to participate in iftar meals and for services, such as those related to Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Power) on 10-11 June. Ramadan can also be expected to increase the visibility and media coverage of the Muslim community, mosques, and specific events during this time.
8. As a period of spiritual reflection and atonement, Ramadan is considered to be a time where bad behaviour is particularly frowned upon, and good deeds are even more valuable than in other months. However, in recent years ISIS propaganda has called for attacks during Ramadan, naming it the "month of martyrdom" and for supporters to "maximize the benefit you receive on the day of judgement."

9. While Police are not aware of a specific call by ISIL or other terrorist groups for attacks in Ramadan in 2018, propaganda calling for attacks was issued by ISIL in 2015, 2016, and 2017, and may be forthcoming or not yet have been identified in 2018.
10. In recent years this propaganda led to a surge in terrorist attacks. In 2016, Ramadan saw 17 attacks carried out by ISIL supporters, roughly the same number that had occurred in the previous 12 months. Attacks occurred across the Middle East, Asia, and the West, including the attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, USA; the attack on Ataturk Airport in Turkey; and the killing of a Police officer and his wife in France. In 2017 attacks during Ramadan by ISIL supporters included the London Bridge attack in the UK, an attack on Parliament in Iran, and the Brighton Siege in Australia.
11. Ramadan in 2018 immediately follows other events that inflame tensions in the Middle East. The day before Ramadan, 14 May, is the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel, called by Palestinians the Nakba (catastrophe). The United States Embassy in Israel officially moved to Jerusalem on 14 May, a move widely perceived as endorsing the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and undermining the existing peace process.¹ This has already led to mass demonstrations and violence.
12. Internationally, Ramadan is also a time of increased risk for the Muslim community, due to either the backlash following terrorist events, the increased profile of the Muslim community during this period, or a combination of the two. In addition to vandalism, verbal altercations, and online harassment, this has also led to violence. During Ramadan in 2017, verbal harassment of Muslims escalated into a stabbing incident where two men were killed in Portland, USA, and a vehicle ramming attack on worshippers exiting the Finsbury Park Mosque in London, UK.

NZ Context

13. The national terrorist threat level in New Zealand is currently assessed as LOW - an attack is possible, but is not expected. There is no intelligence as to any specific threat.
14. However, this intelligence could be incomplete or the situation could change at short notice. Internationally, attacks have taken place with little warning.
15. The Muslim community in New Zealand has experienced sporadic incidents of vandalism and abuse. While not frequent, incidents do create widespread concern among the community when they do occur, as well as attention from the media.

Considerations

16. New Zealand continues to be low threat environment relative to other peer nations. However, Police need to remain aware of potential threats and risks, particularly given that an incident could occur with little or no warning.
17. Effective prevention, planning, readiness, and engagement will reduce the likelihood and potential impact of incidents and enable Police to respond effectively should an incident occur.
18. Districts and operational groups are asked to consider the following enduring principles:

Prevention

- Take potential threats, for example vehicular attacks, into account as part of operational planning around public spaces and events.

¹ 128 nations, including New Zealand, voted for a United Nations resolution condemning the move in December 2017 (9 nations were opposed).

Readiness

- Staff should be appropriately briefed on potential threat scenarios, and, where appropriate, national security POIs in their area.
- Staff deployed to potential risk locations and operations should have access to appropriate tactical options.

Engagement

- Effective engagement with communities is essential to ensuring that trust and confidence is maintained, information is shared, and communities can passively and actively support preventative Police action where necessary.
 - Engagement with partners, such as private security firms, event planners and site operators also provides an opportunity to ensure that they are appropriately aware of potential threat scenarios.
19. In the absence of specific threat intelligence, these steps and others will enhance security and provide reassurance.

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