

Counter-espionage

An example of current NZSIS work practices



DEPARTMENT of the
PRIME MINISTER and CABINET
Te Tari o Te Pirimia me Te Komiti Matua

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CASE STUDY NO. 3

What is espionage?

Espionage is the attempt to obtain secret or confidential information by covert means. Espionage often targets sensitive political and military information and is increasingly directed at economic and commercial information as well. Espionage has been traditionally associated with countries stealing one another's secrets.

Foreign intelligence organisations conduct espionage against New Zealand using a range of techniques, from traditional human-based intelligence operations through to highly sophisticated cyber espionage operations. Intelligence officers are sent from foreign countries to pursue objectives which are harmful to the wellbeing of New Zealand and New Zealanders. Foreign intelligence organisations also target New Zealand interests elsewhere in the world.

Countering threats from espionage and interference remains a main focus of the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS).

NZSIS and counter-espionage

Counter-espionage involves domestic efforts by NZSIS to identify and suppress foreign intelligence efforts targeting the New Zealand Government and New Zealand-based organisations.

Because foreign intelligence organisations also target New Zealand's interests elsewhere in the world, NZSIS also conducts counter-espionage operations globally.

Case studies

Thwarting foreign agents

NZSIS discovered foreign intelligence agents in New Zealand, conducting what was assessed to be highly damaging espionage activities. These agents used assumed identities to conceal their real affiliation with their host government in the hope of avoiding detection.

Through careful investigation, NZSIS was able to work out their true identities and, in the course of detaining the agents, collected valuable intelligence and provided assessment on their activities. This helped identify future espionage activities and reduce the risks of them accessing valuable information.

Defensive support

Undeclared foreign intelligence agents working in New Zealand were known to have an enduring interest in a prominent New Zealand organisation, which has been the subject of both human and cyber espionage. NZSIS provided a defensive briefing to the New Zealand organisation and discussed with them the espionage threat posed by foreign agents, allowing the organisation to better secure itself from the threat.

Protective security

NZSIS provides protective security advice to Ministers and government officials travelling on business to parts of the world known to be high risk for counter-intelligence activities.

NZSIS has identified instances of Ministers and officials being targeted by hostile foreign agents while overseas. These agents were particularly focused on covertly exploiting electronic devices and information. Through its expertise in this field, NZSIS was able to support these Ministers and officials in securing themselves from these efforts.