

Counter Terrorism: Global Perspectives

Presentation by Perry Head
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Mr Chairman, Conference Sponsors, Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this 20th Annual Security in Government Conference, here in Canberra.

As the final speaker at this three day event I hope I can both summarise some of the key issues already presented and perhaps leave you with one or two new observations.

I have been asked to speak today on “Global Perspectives.” As the head of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Counter Terrorism Branch, I will focus on the threat of **terrorism** and how we respond to it, but with the recognition that terrorism itself represents just one threat - albeit of critical and immediate priority – in what will undoubtedly remain a dynamic international security environment.

I note in particular that we have already been privileged to hear a comprehensive analysis of Australia’s Strategic Outlook by Peter Varghese, the Director-General of the Office of National Assessments. We have heard also from several other expert speakers how many emerging issues, including the rise of non-state actors and asymmetric conflict where insecurity has itself been globalised, demographic challenges, globalisation including the mobility of people, finances information and goods, climate change, energy security and so forth are likely to impact more forcefully on our strategic environment over the coming decades.

As Mr Varghese observed, “in a complex and interdependent world, the new issues do not replace the old — they join them on a more crowded horizon.” And within this environment, as Duncan Lewis stated on Wednesday, the only thing certain is uncertainty.

But there would be no disagreement that in assessing and responding to these challenges, that we **can** assert with certainty that terrorism, particularly in its current and most pervasive manifestation of Islamist extremism, will remain a

focus of attention for years to come. Indeed we see the fight against terrorism as one that could last a generation, such are the characteristics of this global threat.

Mr Chairman,

I do not propose today to do go over the same ground of previous speakers in describing the threat posed by al-Qaeda, and related global extremists. Suffice to say that despite the concerted attention of the military and security forces across the globe, particularly since the September 11 attacks, al-Qaeda continues to operate, significantly from locations in Pakistan and in concert with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and inspires the various al-Qaeda franchises now linking militant groups and networks across the Middle East and North and East Africa.

And as described by the Director-General of ASIO, al-Qaeda has been unique in its willingness and ability to reach out well beyond traditional constituencies to a global audience of sympathisers and urban activists, drawing on its extremist narrative, and using to great effect new communications technologies which make communication easier and detection more complex.

Many studies, including one undertaken by the New York Police Department released earlier this year contain sobering conclusions about the vulnerability of alienated youth, and are directly relevant to our own circumstances. The ubiquitous use of the internet for both operational planning and in the spread of radical ideology is a common thread of such assessments, and one on which Australian and regional agencies are increasingly focused. I could not hope to better describe such factors than the presentation given to us today by Federal Agent Zuccato.

Terrorism is truly an international issue – at any moment it may manifest itself on the other side of the street, or the other side of the globe- but its reverberations are felt by all. Domestically, we could not begin to effectively implement the policies of **prevention, preparedness, response and recovery** unless we also consolidate cooperation with our intentional partners and maintain a continuous scan of the international environment. Terrorism has necessitated a myriad of interventions, agency-to-agency collaboration and capacity building assistance, both domestically and abroad. Such activities are resources intensive, and at time intrusive and confronting. And yet we still face an uncertain world, where **what we don't know** remains central to our endeavour.

Terrorism is not a theoretical or abstract concept – it is cold-blooded murder. Once radicalised, hard-core terrorists are rarely if at all deterred by an appeal to values to which they do not subscribe, or by physical impediments we place in

their way. And as an active participant in a mobile and globalised society, Australia and Australians are exposed to this reality. The events of 9/11, the shocking circumstances of the Bali and Marriott bombings and the attack on our Embassy in Jakarta, are just some examples of this exposure.

And what has been loosely described as “home-grown terrorism,” as evidenced in such horrific events as the 2005 London tube and bus bombings, further reminds us of the folly of complacency or naïve isolationism. I commend to you the address made by the British High Commissioner, H.E. Helen Liddell at the Conference Breakfast last week, which in great detail outlines the extent of British responses to these tragic developments. In researching for this conference, I again read through some of the accounts of the survivors of these events, which served to graphically bring into focus the immediacy and importance of our collective endeavor within the counter terrorism sphere, of which this conference is part.

I should observe that the much of the date about Islamist extremism is itself a stigmatising and unwelcome development for Muslim communities globally, which overwhelmingly reject the nihilist arguments of extremists. Loose debate can serve to fuel alienation and mistrust, and present new and difficult social challenges. Our Attorney General focused on such issues this morning. We must navigate our way responsibly within these troubled waters. That is one reason that Australia recognises that measures to build social cohesion and community harmony, and to empower those who may feel disaffected or marginalised, are an important part of the broader strategy to combat terrorism, both in Australia and within our region. We are for example, therefore supporting numerous exchanges between communities within the region and Australia.

So in recognising Australian interests as being inextricably part of this broad international environment, I wish to dwell for a moment on terrorism within the immediate neighbourhood of South East Asia. It is this region where as you might expect the interests of Australia and Australians are readily identified - and for which Australian agencies therefore have identified a priority interest. Within our region, an initial challenge for us has been to come to a common understanding and common prioritisation of the issue.

We must therefore assess and assist meaningfully the counter-terrorism requirements of our partner countries. We must monitor the local environment and act to protect the safety of Australians residents, mindful too of the physical security of our diplomatic and other facilities. We must be cognisant of the special interests of Australian businesses and their staff. Importantly, we must be willing and capable of responding in times of crisis.

We have just heard from General M'bai in respect of the challenges Indonesia faces and of the progress Indonesian authorities have made in addressing terrorist threats. Indeed, by all assessments Indonesia has made remarkable progress in its counter terrorism efforts and, on request, Australia has been a willing partner in much of this endeavour.

For Australia, building and enhancing close cooperation with Indonesia and our other regional partners is clearly of the highest priority. And to do this we have allocated new resources and built and sustained partnerships and contacts, the depth of which might not have been contemplated only a few short years ago. Ironically, the scourge of terrorism has served to strengthen this sense of partnership.

And such cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral in nature, has yielded significant results. In Indonesia, as we have just heard, terror networks have been disrupted and the capacities of Jemah Islamiah have been seriously degraded, as evidenced by the arrest of key JI leaders, the disruption of a planning and the seizure of explosives and weapons. And encouragingly, any public support or sympathy for terrorist ideals appears in significant, perhaps permanent retreat.

Similarly, good progress has been made by the Philippines authorities, with the assistance of its international partners, in addressing the terrorist threats there, including in both operational and broader contexts. Earlier this year Australia welcomed the passage by the Philippine Congress of the new ground-breaking anti-terror law, the Human Security Act 2007, which strengthens greatly the legal regime for investigating, prosecuting and bringing to justice terrorists and their supporters.

At the same time, we recognise that within the region, locking-in progress on counter-terrorism can be inextricably linked to progress in settling long-standing issues which involve complex questions impinging on national sovereignty. Associate Professor Kingsbury provided the context of several such conflicts across the region. Any optimism in terms of counter-terrorism successes in the Philippines, for example, must therefore be maintained against a realistic assessment of the peace processes in Mindanao, and of other threats.

Our counter terrorism agenda is by necessity broadly-based and multi-faceted, and the most effective endeavour encapsulates a whole-of-government response. At the outset of this Conference, the Secretary of the Attorney General's Department Robert Cornall identified a key lesson from actions since the attack of on the World Trade Center has been that modern terrorism requires a broader

and more diverse response than the immediate reaction, which was essentially to find and punish the perpetrators. Put simply, eliminating the bad guys cannot be fully achieved unless the environment which spawns their actions is understood and addressed.

Within the South East Asian region, upwards of 20 Australian agencies undertake programs or collaboration that contribute substantively to an effective counter terrorism agenda. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has played an important role in the coordination of such international counter-terrorism assistance, both in Canberra and through our diplomatic missions, as part of the broader Governmental coordination processes outlined by Duncan Lewis earlier in this conference.

Such cooperation is helping to expand already extensive collaboration with regional counterparts in key counter-terrorism areas such as law enforcement, policy governance, defence, border and transport security, financial monitoring, intelligence, legal affairs, counter-radicalisation and other efforts to counter extremism. Each of these components contributes to the effectiveness of the overall counter-terrorism profile. And many of Australia's development cooperation activities, including major initiatives in the education sector in Indonesia and Philippines, make important contributions to the totality of this work.

Australia is also working collectively at the regional level, where we are engaged on a comprehensive range of measures to build regional counter-terrorism capacity. As we have heard, the joint Australia-Indonesia Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC) has conducted more than 100 courses and trained over 3000 law enforcement and legal officers from the region. And Australia and Indonesia have also shown leadership in steering a process of sub-regional Ministerial engagement, which has identified concrete areas of collective regional action against terrorism, and which will complement further collaboration amongst respective national agencies charged with these important functions.

Both regionally and globally, Australia is also addressing the emerging threat posed by CBRN, (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism) including by becoming an initial partner country in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. We held the first Global Initiative outreach activity in the form of a regional GI seminar in Sydney this year.

Earlier this year staff from my branch were in Guam participating in a regional "dirty bomb" radiological exercise, as part of a US-led international CBRN exercise. Australia has initiated a range of programs designed to address the threat of bioterrorism within the region, including by providing biosecurity and

biosafety training at Australian facilities. While we assess the immediate threat of CBRN within our region to be modest, taking into account the known capacities and interests of identified terrorist groups, this is precisely the sort of over-the-horizon issue for which prevention is a prerequisite strategy.

One key lesson we have learned in the region is that it is important to recognise the individual characteristics and capacities of each country with which we cooperate. By some margin, the most exacting counter-terrorism work is therefore undertaken at the bilateral level. But it has been important to supplement this work within a meaningful regional and international framework. By working to common agendas, whether at the bilateral, regional or international level, we have indeed achieved much.

So to summarise our brief stock-take of global perspectives, we see al-Qaeda as threatening, and at times emboldened on the international stage. Within our immediate region, we have seen good progress in addressing terrorism, but much more work remains. The formal links to al-Qaeda may be marginal. But globally and regionally, Australia is engaged, often at high cost in terms of human and physical resources. And the threat of home-grown terrorism disturbs us all.

As you will often hear, there is no room for complacency. We view the threat of terrorism as one that may last a generation or more. To take an analogy from business, we must have a balanced scorecard and simultaneously focus on short, medium and long-term objectives if we are to address this threat successfully. And we know that rogue elements have the will to again strike with little warning, should an opportunity arise.

We have heard already of the four drivers or principles which govern our overall counter-terrorism engagement. As we come to the end of this conference it is prudent to review these;

Within **Prevention**, we aim to deter and disrupt terrorist activity while also addressing the ideological factors that influence the radicalisation of individuals and drive recruitment by terrorist groups;

Preparedness, seeks to protect people, assets infrastructure and institutions from terrorist activity and planning, and to establish and train how to respond and recover from a terrorist incident.

Response, includes a capacity to respond decisively and promptly to a terrorist incident, should one occur, and to manage its consequences, including bringing offenders to justice, and fourthly;

Recovery, involves assisting as appropriate with a return to normal life, including by support for economic, physical and environmental well-being.

In this context I note some personal observations concerning challenges in maintaining our CT agenda and level of engagement within the region:

These are:

- the long-term and resource intensive nature of the exercise creates policy fatigue – extremists define their mission as a long-term agenda and are comfortable to engage in a slow battle of attrition;
- emerging issues and social priorities, which other speakers have identified, therefore compete for valuable and scarce resources;
- relationships need constant reinforcement as individuals and governments change, and priorities rise and fall;
- political developments which shape the terrorist environment are often beyond our immediate influence, and local disputes can be exploited to inflame tensions;
- many of our objectives, including those involving counter-radicalisation, are long term and broad-brush in nature, implemented within a dynamic environment, and difficult to evaluate;
- the internet and the new electronic media increasingly present as effective and anonymous tools for extremists to use and manipulate;
- and finally, what we don't know is what worries us most.

Nevertheless, we have established a solid agenda of counter-terrorism cooperation with our regional partners, and I would assert that this has, and will continue to materially enhance our own security in Australia, and the security of Australians abroad.

As we wind up, I thought I would leave you with this personal observation on the nature of the terrorist threat. The following is a description of events in London during the Blitz in 1940:

This was the beginning of the Blitz - a period of intense bombing of London and other cities that continued until the following May. For the next consecutive 57 days, London was bombed either during the day or night. Fires consumed many portions of the city. Residents sought shelter wherever they could find it - many fleeing to the Underground stations that sheltered as many as 177,000 people

during the night. Londoners and the world were introduced to a new weapon of terror and destruction in the arsenal of twentieth century warfare.

And here, a report on the Tube bombings in 2005:

For hundreds of thousands of people commuting into London, the morning of July 7, 2005 began just like any other. But at the peak of the rush hour, bombs were detonated in three crowded subway trains and aboard a London bus. At least 52 people died, along with four bombers, and 700 were injured. A week later, millions stood in silence to honor the victims of the deadliest attack in Britain since World War II. A week after that, the transport system was hit again - with attempted explosions on three more Tube trains and another bus.

Perhaps nothing better encapsulates the reality of terrorism, than the transformation of the London tube system from a sanctuary to a target. As noted by earlier speakers, networked extremists can now operate simultaneously across defined theatres of war, regions of relative peace and stability, and the domestic settings of stable, economically developed countries.

And it is the innocent who pay the highest price. We should never forget that what our counter-terrorism efforts attempt to achieve, above all else, is a recognition and affirmation of human respect and dignity.

Thank you.