



**Australian Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Seminar Series**

**Australia's Response to Terrorism**

**Delivered by**

**The Hon. Senator Robert Hill  
Minister for Defence**

**Parliament House, Canberra  
25 May 2004**

**The seminar series is proudly supported by**



**SAAB**

## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Menzies Research Centre, ADI Limited, SAAB Systems or IBM. The Menzies Research Centre, ADI Limited, Saab Systems and IBM disclaim any liability for any statement made in this publication.

The use of the materials or any information, in whole or in part, contained on this publication is your sole responsibility. The Menzies Research Centre Ltd, ADI Limited, SAAB Systems and IBM disclaim any liability for any damages whatsoever including without limitation direct, indirect, incidental and/or consequential damages resulting from your use of materials and/or the information provided in this publication.

## **Introduction**

Earlier this month an Algerian salafist, Abu Ibrahim Mustafa, released a video on the Internet in which he preached:

The war in Palestine, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Algeria, in Chechnya, and in the Philippines is one war. This is a war between the camp of Islam and the camp of the Cross, to which the Americans, the Zionists, Jews, their apostate allies, and others belong.

Previous lectures in this series have made clear that the terrorist threat is now a core national security issue. Whilst the ADF must continue to provide conventional defence and deterrence it must also help protect Australians against the real and contemporary threat of terrorist attack. This requires new doctrine and new capabilities.

There is no doubt that western military forces are finding the threat of asymmetric attack a great challenge. Defeat is no longer measured in the routing of armed forces. Sometimes, the mere appearance of defeat is enough. Osama bin Laden has cited the American withdrawal from Beirut in the wake of the 1983 suicide bombing of the Marine Barracks and their disengagement from Somalia after the 1993 Mogadishu firefight in which 18 soldiers died as examples of asymmetric victories against a superpower.

Now after Madrid, we have to deal with the perception that Governments can be defeated by bombing civilians. It does not matter if it is accurate or not – only that someone believes it.

## **History of terrorism**

The starting point in countering a threat is always to better understand it.

Despite a long history of terror, nothing has prepared the world for the ‘latest wave’, which we now must confront. Having emerged since the Iranian revolution, and the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan, this latest wave adopted the religious roots of the

first terrorists from centuries ago. Described by Professor Rapoport as the ‘religious wave’, this new terrorism is different from previous manifestations.

The new Islamic terrorism is most commonly associated with Al Qaeda, and personified by its leader Osama bin Laden. Al Qaeda is an organisation which, in seeking to create a single Islamic nation as the home of all Muslims, and by accepting recruits from across the globe, has a purpose and recruitment pattern unique in the history of terrorism.

Today’s terrorists have followed the trend of globalisation: they have developed “virtual” alliances: they have a global agenda and are willing to pursue their aims anywhere.

Tragically, that includes Australia.

While some organisations may focus on a country or region – Jemaah Islamiyah in South East Asia or Lashkar e Toiba in South Asia for example – they also belong to a worldwide network of terrorist organisations determined to bring about a global transformation. These linkages are extensive. The recent bombing in Madrid seems to have been carried out principally by Moroccans, some of whom, when cornered by Spanish police, reportedly phoned Britain’s suspected Al Qaeda chief Abu Qatada and then made calls to a JI operative in Indonesia. They then blew themselves up.

Academics might discuss the typologies, or the appropriate nomenclature for the terrorism which confronts us today and debate exactly when and how it emerged. But there is no question that the world changed on September 11, 2001, and from that date the war against global terrorism really began. For Australians the transformation of our world became complete one year, one month, and one day later when eighty-eight Australians were murdered in Bali.

### **Australia and terrorism**

In the past Australia was afforded some degree of protection by our geographic isolation, and while plainly our geography has not changed, the world has changed around us. So we face the reality that Australia’s great strategic constant – the ‘air-sea gap’ – no longer provides us with the isolation or protection it once did. No longer can we stand aside

from the threat of terrorism which has long plagued the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and others. Nor can we hope that we will be overlooked as a middle power in favour of targets with a more visible presence on the global stage. Furthermore, because we are under threat due to the values we hold, there can be no opportunity for disengagement. After the new Spanish Prime Minister confirmed the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, the terrorists attempted another major attack in Madrid. There can be no opting out.

We are a target but not because of government policy, or past action, no matter what the terrorists might claim. We are a target today because of who we are and what we stand for. The terrorists will try to target us at home if they can, or, if they can not, they will target our people and our interests overseas as we saw tragically in Bali on 12 October 2002. We might be specifically identified or more likely attacked as part of the broader enemy of a specific brand of Islam.

### **Today's terrorists**

Today's terrorists are not only global, but they also seek to achieve their ends by the most heinous of means. Today's terrorists not only act indiscriminately, killing equally Christian and Muslims, as well as Hindus, Jews and Buddhists, but they also seek to inflict casualties in massive numbers in the perverted belief that this will help them to advance their cause.

In pursuing their goals they adopt asymmetric approaches to warfare as they are unable to match our conventional forces. In doing so they also abandon any pretext of abiding by the laws of armed conflict, they hide in civilian areas, use civilians as shields, and do not identify their soldiers. They target combatants and non-combatants alike.

In the words of the Chinese airforce Colonels Wang and Qiao in their famous publication, the terrorists are embracing the concept of 'unrestricted warfare' – they know no bounds to their actions, and they are prepared to employ 'unlimited means'.

Indeed beyond this, Al Qaeda and their acolytes actively exploit the fact that in our response to their crimes we abide by the rule of law, we are overwhelmingly humane, we

endeavour to avoid civilian casualties, and we will limit our actions and follow the laws of armed conflict. When we fail to meet these standards we expect to be punished. The terrorists, by contrast, believe our very humanity is a weakness.

When planning attacks we have also seen that these groups are adept at exploiting our laws, liberties, pluralism and openness to hide their work, and in New York and Madrid we have seen that they will use the infrastructure upon which we have built prosperous societies, as a weapon against us. The very elements of our societies which they abhor, they are willing to embrace as weapons in seeking to carry out their crimes.

The terrorists have clearly demonstrated that they know no bounds in the pursuit of their aims. Not only do they know no bounds, but they redefine horror with each act –they seek to commit murder on an ever-increasing scale.

In order to achieve their aims they have shown their capacity to fashion brutal weapons of their own invention; using civilian aircraft as missiles on September 11, using fertilisers and other common chemicals to create devastating explosives, and attempting to conceal weapons in the shoes and clothing of bombers.

As destructive as these methods have proven, their ever-increasing ambition has pushed the terrorists to openly seek the world's most powerful weapons of mass destruction. Osama bin Laden, for one, has described it as a "duty" for al Qaeda to obtain nuclear weapons. We know that terrorist groups have sought out chemical and biological weapons.

### **Weapons of Mass Destruction**

Australia has a long and proud history of supporting international efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. These efforts have included a leading role in the key global non-proliferation regimes, including the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty, the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the Australia Group which aim to prevent the spread of weapons and materials associated with weapons of mass destruction.

Australia is determined to continue to work with its friends and allies in the region and beyond to reinvigorate international anti-proliferation regimes and export controls on prohibited and dual use items. But traditional counter-proliferation regimes have met with limited success, particularly against determined groups who work outside international norms and institutions.

And the threat posed by a terrorist group with access to WMD is too disastrous to contemplate. Such a threat requires a more activist and proactive approach. It requires action above and beyond the measures which have been relied upon in the past.

To that end, Australia is cooperating with like-minded countries on non-proliferation enforcement under the Proliferation Security Initiative, which aims to impede illicit WMD-related trade, including through the interdiction of weapons of mass destruction in transit. The initiative continues to grow with over 80 countries invited to attend the plenary meeting in Krakow next week. Australia hosted the first PSI exercise in 2003 and has continued to play a part in air, maritime and land based interdiction exercises. There will be six interception exercises in the next 12 months with the focus in our region continuing to be maritime interdiction.

There is little doubt that the seizure of centrifuge parts by American and British authorities acting with German assistance in an Italian port helped convince Libya to abandon its WMD program. It illustrates the importance of this sort of cooperation and engagement.

### **Engaging the threat**

When the threat can be directly engaged and thus defeated or reduced, it is in Australia's national interest to do so. Unlike Labor, we will not pull up the drawbridge and pretend that the only way to protect ourselves is to be a small target. We have learnt that we cannot run away from terrorists. They must be defeated or they will come to us.

Al Qaeda presented as a legitimate target in Afghanistan from where it commanded global operations, conducted terrorist training and stored weapons. Australia's efforts as

one of the coalition in that conflict severely damaged Al Qaeda and its capacity to export terrorism.

The removal of the Taliban Government also demonstrated that those who foster and give refuge to terrorists, or in other words are complicit in their crimes, will pay a high price.

In the same way Australia's efforts in helping the Iraqi people achieve sovereignty and freedom, despite the efforts of violent extremists determined to deny them basic human rights, demonstrates our commitment to values which must prevail if the war against terror is to be won. Conversely, to withdraw would be to give those who do not share these values a great victory. It would reward the tactic of violence against non combatants and encourage the use of these tactics elsewhere.

In these various operations the ADF has performed superbly, militarily and with humanity.

### **Strengthening Australia's military capabilities**

Beyond a conventional military capability the threat to Australia from terrorism has required much more. We have committed over \$2 billion to counter-terrorism, and we have implemented over 100 measures since September 11, 2001. In my portfolio alone, we have committed more than \$1.3 billion to the Australian Defence Force to fight the war against terrorism. The money has been spent not only on helping with the international effort to remove the threat of al Qaeda and their supporters from Afghanistan, but also to strengthen our defences at home.

A comprehensive list of measures would be impractical here, but we have focussed on developing better laws, stronger terrorism fighting agencies, and improved intelligence and international cooperation.

By contrast, Labor suggests that bigger bureaucracy and a siege mentality will protect us – new Departments and a reversion to reliance on the “air-sea” gap. Mr Latham argues that Australia should focus on defending the Australian mainland and not develop what he calls an ‘expeditionary’ force that can deploy rapidly over large distances and which

can operate closely with our most likely coalition partners. But even to defend Australia requires such expeditionary capability and our alliances provide a massive force multiplier.

He also argues against ‘pre-emptive strike’. But if more decisive action had been taken against Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, the attacks on New York and Washington might have been avoided. Self-defence has always been a legitimate response to imminent attack. Defence against terrorism does not allow the same lead times as defence against conventional forces.

Whatever threats we face in the coming years we will do ourselves no good by adopting an isolationist mentality. Mr Latham might want to take this into account before he next suggests that we fall back on the strategic orthodoxy of the Cold War.

We are instead, as I said, taking a new, multi-dimension approach. We have introduced better laws so we are more able to prosecute terrorists and those who would support them. These laws have defined, or increased penalties, for a range of offences including undertaking a terrorist act, being a member of a terrorist organisation, or providing support to a terrorist organisation. We have listed more than a dozen terrorist organisations and will not hesitate to list more should the need arise. We have made it harder for terrorists to finance their activities and to move illicit funds – restricting the lifeblood of their operations.

We have made our terrorism fighting agencies stronger by improving their ability to stop terrorists before they act and to respond if they carry out their crimes.

### **ADF counter-terrorism capabilities**

Critically, the ADF is now more able to defend against, and respond to, terrorism. The establishment of the Special Operations Command as the lead and primary response arm of the ADF to counter terrorism is a major development in Defence's contribution to domestic security and to the global war on terrorism. Placing all of the lead elements of the ADF's counter-terrorism capability under a single command provides a coordinated and synchronised response to the terrorist threat.

The ADF has also raised a second Tactical Assault Group based in Sydney at 4 RAR (Commando) which provides for a more rapid response to incidents on the East Coast of Australia. Previously our only Tactical Assault Group was based in Western Australia, which limited its rapid response capability to events in Eastern Australia. The second Tactical Assault Group also provides for redundancy as the Tactical Assault Groups are available to conduct simultaneous operations should that be necessary.

The government has also formed the Incident Response Regiment within the ADF, and it too has been placed under the Special Operations Command, providing the ADF with the full range of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive response capabilities in coordination with response functions of the Tactical Assault Groups.

We have also invested heavily in intelligence collection and analysis and instigated greater cooperation with our international partners to defeat terrorism and to create a world in which we will no longer be threatened. We have concluded an agreement with nine key regional partners to facilitate practical cooperation in counter-terrorism activity. Such agreements have facilitated the Bali bombings investigation and the recent announcement that the Indonesia Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation would be established with a focus on regional counter-terrorism cooperation.

From an ADF perspective our Special Forces are working with others in the region, both in providing training, and in joint exercises, to contribute to strengthening regional counter terrorism capabilities.

## **Conclusion**

The threats are serious and they demand an effective response. We face the reality that Australia is no longer isolated by geography, nor overlooked in favour of major power targets. Indeed, in Australian history the threat from terrorism has never been greater. But we have responded to the gravity of these threats, and despite – or because of them, we are now better prepared to confront and deal with terrorism than at any time in our history.

We must maintain our confidence and resolve, we must be prepared to make the effort both at home and abroad, we must stand by our friends and allies and we must accept that the struggle will be a long one.

That being said, our values, our strategies and our tactics are sound. Our personnel are superb. If we do not draw back from the task of prosecuting this conflict, we will prevail. We have no option but to defeat those who would attack us.