

## HOME-GROWN TERRORISM IN AUSTRALIA: THE WAY FORWARD

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's panel discussion.

Responding to the threat of domestic terrorism is a critical and ongoing issue for Australia.

Our response presents many challenges for government – at both federal and state levels – and the Australian community more broadly.

Since 11 September 2001, Australia has developed new national counter-terrorism coordination and response arrangements; we have strengthened our laws to address acts in preparation of a terrorist event; and over \$10 billion in additional funding has been committed to ensure we are well resourced to meet terrorist threats.

Preventing terrorist acts, and dissuading those who might seek to commit them, is a complex proposition.

Notwithstanding the successes of our security agencies, even the best resourced security forces cannot prevent all acts of terrorism.

In the end, tools of state – particularly in a free and open society – simply cannot preclude the covert actions of all parties committed to conducting terrorist attacks.

However, there are measures that governments can take – in addition to strengthening our security regime – to reduce the threat of home-grown terrorism.

Mitigation of terrorist attacks involves a combination of an appropriate security response with effective social policy that enhances social cohesion and lessens the appeal of radical ideology.

I will address three themes: the UK response, and how we might learn from it; what government is doing to respond to radicalisation; and the challenges that government alone cannot overcome.

I should note that terrorism is not a new phenomenon, nor does it have any particular association with Islam.

Terrorist tactics have been used by many groups in the past, and will undoubtedly be used by diverse groups in the future.

For the purpose of today's forum I will focus on countering the appeal of radical Islamist terrorism.

The 7 July 2005 bombings of the London transit system highlighted the potential threat to Western countries from Islamist terrorists within their own communities.

Australia is not immune from this threat.

Although I appreciate that there has been much debate in the community about the manner in which some Australian terrorism cases have been handled, the fact remains that there have been a number of instances where Australian prosecutors have identified sufficient grounds to pursue terrorism-related charges against Australian citizens or residents.

There is much debate about what constitutes an effective counter-radicalisation strategy.

In the same way that individuals have different motivations for accepting radical messages, there is no one solution to counter radicalisation.

As a result, an effective response needs to encompass a range of traditional security and law enforcement approaches – such as community policing and liaison – with broader activities aimed at enhancing social cohesion, addressing the politics of identity and alienation and strengthening communities.

Ensuring an appropriate balance between protecting our society from terrorist attack while ensuring the protection of the rights and freedoms that we believe in will remain a vital imperative for government and the Australian people into the future.

There is a growing body of research on the process of radicalisation and the manner in which governments and communities might respond.

It is an area with which governments internationally continue to grapple.

A number of countries, including Australia, have taken steps to address home-grown extremism, each targeted to their own communities and within the context of their social norms and political systems.

For example, the UK is implementing a range of measures aimed at improving the manner in which they build community resilience to extremism and counter the threat of domestic terrorism.

Their strategy has evolved in response to continuing dialogue with Muslim communities in the UK.

The UK counter-radicalisation strategy has several key themes: to challenge extremist propaganda and support alternative voices; to disrupt promoters of violent extremism; to increase the capacity of their communities to resist or reject extremism; and to address areas of concern expressed by extremist ideologues through emphasising shared values across communities.

The UK is engaging the education sector, and attempting to engage young people through sporting and youth groups to build social cohesion and improve cross-cultural awareness.

As a result, various arms of government not traditionally associated with security are now key partners in effecting their counter-radicalisation response, and thereby a broader counter-terrorism strategy.

They also have a strong focus on countering radical ideology and trying to positively influence those at risk.

The Australian response has a number of similarities with the UK model – particularly in terms of building social cohesion.

However, understandably there are also some differences between our approaches. There are clear differences between our systems of government and the respective historical, cultural and socio-demographic profiles of our respective Muslim communities.

One of the key elements of any effective policy delivery is recognition of local circumstance and cultural diversity.

Co-operative federalism remains an integral part of the way in which Australia shapes and implements its counter-terrorism response.

The National Counter-Terrorism Committee – a body of senior officials that reports to the Council of Australian Governments – provides a forum for all jurisdictions to discuss and plan a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism.

The NCTC also provides the means through which meaningful dialogue on the approaches of various jurisdictions can inform the policies of other states or territories.

The main focus of the NCTC has been on counter-terrorism arrangements, capabilities and information sharing.

Much work has also been done on countering radicalisation in Australia.

At the request of the Council of Australian Governments, *A National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security* was developed between 2005 and 2006.

The National Action Plan was informed by a number of community consultation processes, including input from the Muslim Community Reference Group.

To date, \$35m has been committed to this initiative.

The purpose of the National Action Plan is to reinforce social cohesion, promote harmony and support national security by addressing extremism and the promotion of violence and intolerance.

Federal, state and territory agencies are working in partnership, but the approach adopted by individual jurisdictions will vary to suit local demographic, social, cultural, religious and economic circumstance.

The major focus areas of the National Action Plan are education, employment, integrating communities and enhancing national security.

Many broader policy initiatives are aimed at promoting equality and encouraging participation, whether economic or at the community level.

Although much of this work is not targeted directly towards countering radicalisation, it assists in engendering a greater sense of national identity and community and has positive externalities in respect of counter-radicalisation.

Although specific programmes may change as part of continuing policy development, I believe we can have confidence that the intent of the response will remain.

The challenge for government is considerable and an effective response must be measured and tailored to the needs of Australian society.

Terrorist propagandists will continue to expound their messages, subvert traditional information services and encourage individuals to develop a sense of shared identity or grievance.

Government's ability to enter the debate within the radical Islamist movement is limited, and is likely to remain so.

In a sense, we are outside the discourse and our attempts to engage on ideological grounds will be constricted by a presupposition that our actions are self-serving. As a result, we need to encourage greater understanding and respect for cultural and religious differences, while promoting the values that we share, and strive to build an inclusive nation which offers hope and opportunity.

Australian communities and families have a key role to play in providing leadership, a sense of belonging and a counter to radical ideologues – from wherever they emerge.

This is occurring already but we need to find ways to encourage and foster its continuation.

As with many other social issues, the families and friends of those at risk of radicalisation are often best placed to identify changes in behaviour or political views, and to provide guidance or alternative views.

Such interactions can be key determinants of an individual's world view and are an area in which government can play no role.

This is a long term policy issue and our response will be incremental in nature.

We need to get this right.

Further research and continued engagement with the community will help us to shape our policies and ensure that our resources are targeted appropriately.