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This is a transcript of a Public Lecture held by Australia's Ambassador for Counter-Terrorism, The Honourable William (Bill) Paterson on 24 May 2012. The lecture, hosted by the Griffith University node of CEPS, was held in conjunction with the launch of Pakistan's Stability Paradox: Domestic, Regional and International Dimensions (London: Routledge, 2011) edited by Dr Ashutosh Misra, CEPS Research Fellow, and Dr Michael E. Clarke, ARC Linkage Fellow.

## The Changing Landscape of Terrorism

William (Bill) Paterson PSM, Australian Ambassador for Counter-Terrorism

### Transnational Terrorism ten years on: defeated or diffused? What has worked and what lies ahead?

Commentary over the last week or two on the threat from Al Qaeda - which marks a year since the death of Usama bin Laden in Abbotabad - has focussed on whether we continue to face a resource intensive struggle against a resilient transnational jihadist movement or whether it is time to move on.

It is argued that there are bigger strategic challenges looming; budgets are tight, the problem is residual and containable, the jihadists have been degraded and no longer present a significant threat of mass casualty attacks, and that risks are overstated by self-serving security communities.

But there have been a range of indicators - including violent incidents, plots, fundraising, recruitment and radicalisation over a widening geographic area, as well as strategic uncertainties - that all point to a resilient transnational terrorist threat, one which will continue to present substantial security policy challenges over an extended period.

Certainly, the transnational terrorism of the last decade needs to be kept in perspective, for it has not, and does not, represent an existential or a territorial threat to most countries. However, it does have the potential to:

- expose vulnerability and can have a disproportionate impact - that is one of its objectives - which presents unique challenges for the security policymaker; and
- bring about disproportionate responses by way of legislation, regulation, police and military action - indeed, this is often one of its aims.

But it is best considered as one of a number of evolving but enduring security challenges or contingencies with which we must deal, and for which we must plan, for terrorism will surely endure. While terrorism may be taking new and challenging paths, it is an old technique, a tactic (not an objective in itself nor a strategy) that has long used by politically-motivated, but weak, groups through history to deliver an asymmetric impact that maximises fear, uncertainty and disruption.

### The 9/11 Decade

The massive and spectacularly successful terrorist attack on the United States on 9/11 had an enormous global impact on the following decade. Most of all, it had a deeply traumatic and

transformative effect on the United States. In much of the western world, strategic priorities were re-ordered and military doctrines re-written. Security budgets were re-shaped and greatly enlarged. Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded. Intelligence, police and military forces were given new missions and capabilities. Counter-terrorist legislation was introduced or its reach significantly expanded. Costly protective security measures impinged on all our lives, from airports to malls, with checkpoints, barriers, bollards and CCTVs. UN resolutions were passed, new bodies established and new cooperative relationships within and between governments developed. Jobs such as my own were created.

Did the scale of the threat warrant such massive changes? The US has spent an estimated \$3.4 trillion on Iraq and Afghanistan, and a further \$1 trillion on homeland security. Was this expenditure commensurate with the level of risk? And what has been achieved?

Today I want to address how effectively we have responded over the decade and how, in turn, this has changed the nature of the problem and, more particularly, how best to address it in the decade ahead.

## A new paradigm or evolving security challenge?

The terrorist threat has not been eliminated. It is changing in its shape and geographic spread, its security consciousness, modes of operation, adaptation, innovation and participation. These capabilities and characteristics are presenting significant new challenges in identifying and locating terrorist groups and individuals.

Modern terrorism has been empowered by cheap and accessible technology and mobility arising from globalisation – although terrorists have fortunately so far been unable to acquire, or to master or use effective CBRN weapons.

While not the only application of terrorist tactics of concern to security planners, jihadist terrorism remains the principal focus due to its transnational aspirations and capacity to attract and recruit adherents in both western and Muslim countries. Nevertheless, it is confined to a very small extremist fringe within Islam, and has singularly failed to become a mass movement. Its inability to catalyse the *ummah* has been a major failure. Its violence

has disproportionately affected Muslims, who have borne the majority of casualties.

## The challenge for Australia

For Australia, Al Qaeda-led, associated or inspired transnational terrorism will remain an enduring and evolving security threat, including 111 Australian civilians who lost their lives in nine major international terrorist attacks from 9/11 on, and where many more have suffered injury and loss. The first Bali bombing of October 2002, in which 88 Australians lost their lives, also had a massive national impact, as did the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, which was badly damaged by a terrorist attack in 2004. These shocks were compounded by their proximity to Australia, in a newly democratic, largely tolerant and moderate Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country.

Separately, Australia has been regularly listed as a legitimate target by Usama bin Laden and Al Qaeda's new leader and principal ideologue, Ayman al Zawahiri, by JI's Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, and in Anwar al Aulqi's *Inspire* magazine. Australia has served as part of western-led coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq and is a strong friend of Israel, putting us at the heart of jihadist demonology.

Attack planning, fundraising and radicalisation have all occurred in Australia. In addition, a small number of Australians have fought and trained with extremist organisations overseas, while 38 mainly Australian-born nationals have so far been prosecuted, and 22 convicted, for plotting at least four major attacks within Australia itself over the decade.

So transnational terrorism is, and is likely to remain for some time, a major security issue for Australia.

How do we see the current terrorist landscape?

## Terrorism now: diffuse, dispersed and adaptable

Al Qaeda's core leadership – the inspirational vanguard and organisational heart of the movement – has been decimated by a decade of relentless targeting of its key operatives. Few key figures remain, and recruitment of experienced and trusted successors has suffered.

Since the dramatic and debilitating elimination of Usama bin Laden on 2 May, AQ has lost several key operational commanders in drone strikes. Harun Fazul, a key AQ-linked al Shabaab leader, was killed in Mogadishu a year ago, while Bali bomber associate, Umar Patek, a key Indonesian terrorist, is on trial in Indonesia after being detained in Pakistan over a year ago. Anwar al Aulqi and Samir Khan, two key AQAP operatives were killed in a drone strike in Yemen last October, and other mid-level operatives have progressively been eliminated in a ramped-up campaign of drone strikes in the FATA of Pakistan and in Yemen.

So, AQ's ability to plan and implement further mass casualty attacks – its cohesion and capability – is markedly diminished. Its safe haven in Pakistan's border areas is under heavy pressure and its internal cohesion at risk. It is preoccupied with survival; its ability to train, travel and communicate is limited; its fundraising and recruitment has been squeezed; its new leader lacks charisma or deep loyalty; and the exploitation of material seized in Abbotabad has increased its vulnerability.

But it would be premature to declare it is in its death throes. Al Qaeda's leadership has been resilient, committed and durable, and could regenerate should conditions permit it to do so. It continues to pose a threat.

And its narrative and iconic status has - and will - continue to give inspiration, focus and allegiance to a loose, geographically diverse and largely independent range of jihadist movements, cells and individuals. New recruits continue to join. Indeed, the scale and spread of the jihadist challenge has arguably grown over the decade despite our significant counter-terrorism successes.

The decentralisation and diffusion of AQ-linked or inspired extremists, together with their greater security awareness and ability skilfully to utilise readily available technologies, and to probe points of vulnerability in our societies, means that we in fact face a more difficult CT landscape – harder to detect, and harder to pre-empt.

As part of this shifting landscape we are seeing the development of a new generation of 'self-radicalised' extremists, dispersed, often unaffiliated and large invisible to intelligence



The Hon. Bill Paterson delivering his public lecture

or law enforcement agencies, often energised and empowered over the internet. Attacks mounted by them may increasingly be small-scale and opportunistic, with little preparation, training or lead-times. Failed attacks may be considered successful due to their disruptive effects, demonstration of vulnerability, and generation of fear and uncertainty.

So the spectrum of possible modes and scale of attack has widened, from extensively planned mass casualty attacks (harder now to undertake as more likely to be detected) to 'micro-terrorism,' being simple, local actions on the part of very small cells or individuals acting alone.

The threat can often be linked to failing or deeply troubled states, to poverty, marginalisation and social dislocation, to separatist insurgencies and local agendas, and sometimes, even, to state actors (such as Iranian support for Lebanese *Hezbollah*) – but the new paradigm for the West is that it can also arise internally in developed and democratic societies. It will be with us for a generation, or perhaps longer, and there may be no point at which victory can be declared.

## The centre of gravity shifts from Af-Pak to AQ's offspring in Middle East and North Africa

Al Qaeda has four formal affiliates which now carry much of the banner for the organisation, operating with a large degree of independence

and spreading the challenge for security professionals. These affiliated groups are:

- AQAP - a union of Yemeni and Saudi extremists which is able to operate increasingly freely in some tribal areas of Yemen, capitalising on Yemen's political instability. It has demonstrated the capability to target both the Yemeni and Saudi governments, and the west, and seeks to develop innovative methods of attack;
- AQI - which, though having been greatly reduced by US pressure and tactics and Iraqi exhaustion with its excessive violence, can still deliver carnage on a grand scale, largely in support of Sunni sectarian interests in Shia majority Iraq. The US withdrawal and instability in Iraq may be giving AQI renewed impetus;
- AQIM - which operates loosely across remote areas of southern Algeria, the Sahel, Mali, Niger and Mauritania, largely extorting funding through kidnapping (KFR), but it may be moving deeper into local communities and appears to have obtained some additional weapons from the unrest in Libya. It also appears to be working with the Nigerian jihadist group, Boko Haram, which has recently mounted a series of high profile attacks in Nigeria; and
- Al Shabaab in Somalia – which has recently concluded a merger with AQ. Al Shabaab is in close geographic proximity to, and has some contact with, AQAP in Yemen, and presents a growing security challenge to Kenya and Uganda. It is currently coming under significant military pressure from the African Union force, AMISOM, in a growing effort to underpin a return to stable and constitutional government in Somalia. Foreign fighters in al Shabaab represent a threat to the west.

With the AQ core diminished and its focal leader gone, the leaders of affiliate groups will increasingly become the force behind the global jihadist agenda, although their followers mostly have more parochial and

local concerns, rather than global objectives.

Beyond the affiliates and associates, there are wide and geographically-dispersed militant groups and cells which share much of Al Qaeda's ideology and objectives, but which operate without much, if any, direction from or linkages to AQ. These include:

- the now-fractured Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Indonesia;
- Indonesia's successor umbrella extremist group, Jemaah Anshorut Tawhid (JAT);
- Negara Islam Indonesia (NII), a group – like JI - with historical roots in Darul Islam;
- a range of small but persistent extremist groups and cells across the Indonesian archipelago;
- the Abu Sayyaf Group and MILF in the southern Philippines;
- a broad spectrum of active militant and extremist groups in Pakistan; and
- elements in Afghanistan, Lebanon and the radical Palestinian movement.

The range of militant and extremist groups in Pakistan - some of which have enjoyed official backing as assets in Pakistan's geopolitical manoeuvring *vis a vis* India and Afghanistan - now potentially threaten stability in Pakistan itself. Some are no longer fully under Pakistani control and have developed global jihadist ambitions (such as Lashkar e Taiba), while some (such as the Pakistani Taliban) target the Pakistani state itself.

And, as I've outlined above, there are the radicalised individuals, 'homegrown' (who may develop some links to established cells or groups) or 'lone wolves,' operating by themselves and simply inspired or motivated by the AQ narrative. Unburdened by organisational constraints and planning imperatives, their unpredictability and isolation presents intelligence and law enforcement challenges. They are of particular concern to western societies. The United States saw 43 cases of homegrown terrorism in 2010 alone, and has indicted over 200 individuals on terrorism charges since 9/11.

## The impact of the Arab uprisings

The uprisings in the Arab world have added uncertainties about the shape of future governments in the Middle East,



The Hon. Bill Paterson and Dr Ashutosh Misra at the Public Lecture/Book Launch

the participation of Islamists in new governments, their level of commitment to counter-terrorism, and the space which may be available to, or the tolerance toward, extremist groups.

Concerns have been expressed that the uprisings could open opportunities for extremist Muslim movements to capture the political process. Prolonged instability may be allowing some extremist groups, particularly in Libya and Yemen, to recruit, capture weapons and expand their areas of safe haven. And as the period of uncertainty and instability lengthens, opportunities for extremists may grow.

But political Islam – or the evident growth in Muslim religiosity - does not equate with or necessarily lend support to jihadist terrorism, a frequent misconception in western public discourse. The uprisings in the Middle East today reflect a generational shift and have been driven, initially at least, by issues of governance and political participation, about corruption and equity, and opposition to repressive authoritarian governments.

They originated in secular movements amongst youth, and were not driven initially by religious issues or extremist manipulation. Their democratic agendas in fact ran directly counter to al Qaeda's totalitarian narrative and calls for violence to overthrow apostate governments. The uprisings caught Al Qaeda, its affiliates and associates, by surprise and they have so far largely been unable to

capitalise on these events. Indeed, the largely indifferent Arab response to bin Laden's death suggested his message has lost relevance amongst most Muslims.

Unresponsive and corrupt governments have fuelled political Islam and given oxygen to extremists. The passing of such governments (assuming more representative and accountable ones follow) removes a key AQ claim for support. But if the transitions result in increased sectarianism, of violent divides within Islam itself, much of the promise inherent in the uprisings will be lost, and new opportunities will potentially be created for extremists.

The outcomes of this current turmoil are far from clear, but there is no inevitability in growing space for Islamist extremism and violence. Opinion polling shows support for AQ's brand of extremism has slumped in Muslim majority counties over the last few years, and bin Laden's passing may further accelerate this trend. Bin Laden himself saw carnage of Muslims as being deeply counterproductive.

### Drawdown in Afghanistan

In addition to the Arab uprisings is a further strategic uncertainty: will the ISAF drawdown in Afghanistan enable the re-building of a terrorist safe haven in Afghanistan? While specific US CT capabilities will be retained, there are clearly some risks to the west's core objective, to ensure Afghanistan does not

again become a launch pad for transnational terrorist groups.

### The challenge of the internet

Extremist use of the internet and on-line publishing expands the reach of fringe extremist groups. Of particular concern was publication by the Yemeni-American extremist preacher, Anwar al-Aulaqi and the Pakistani-American Samir Khan, of a sophisticated English-language on-line magazine, 'Inspire.' It encouraged individuals in the English-speaking world to undertake acts of violence, providing an accessible Islamic justification for doing so, and practical information on bomb-making and other individual means of undertaking an attack.

The sophistication of this on-line magazine and its faultless English made the jihadist message potentially available to a massively larger audience. The recent elimination of these terrorist publishers appears to have set back, but not eliminated, the production of *Inspire*. Two editions have recently been published online – one instructing on the use of fire as a terrorist weapon, a tactic with obvious relevance for Australia.

More broadly, the internet's extremist web communities can serve as a social network for the socially isolated or disaffected individual, providing a virtual peer group of the like-minded, and a justification for violent action. The internet can be used for recruitment and propaganda, as a source of data and knowledge transfer, a fundraiser, a medium to transfer funds, and for operational planning and communication. The technology is accessible, low cost, immediate, portable, unregulated and global. Social networking via chat rooms, forums, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter provide additional opportunities for terrorist communication, proselytisation and association. In addition, the proliferation of jihadist websites continues – they number in the thousands - and there are difficulties and issues in disruption or manipulation, particularly in liberal societies.

Self-radicalised individuals, often having radicalised over the internet, are appearing as perpetrators of 'lone wolf' attacks, where the individual involved may have no formal or even informal association with Al Qaeda or its offshoots.

## Diaspora communities

The other developing factor – not new but perhaps more evident – are the linkages some members of diaspora communities in the west have retained or developed with extremist causes or groups in their countries of origin. There is no single pattern in this phenomenon, involving different generations and, for different reasons, in different countries of settlement. However, there may be some common threads evident in levels of socio-economic disadvantage, alienation, unemployment or discrimination, making the Al Qaeda narrative of injustice and western discrimination against Islam an attractive rationale and its call to act a compelling one for those who may feel angry and powerless.

## Southeast Asia and Indonesia

Southeast Asia has, perhaps, demonstrated the greatest success in responding to the jihadist terrorist threat over the last decade. Indonesia in particular has faced down a persistent violent extremist challenge from Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and its related organisations and splinter groups, who have mounted a series of high-profile mass casualty and more limited attacks within Indonesia.

Since the first Bali bombing in October 2002, which claimed 202 lives (including 88 Australians) the Indonesian National Police have pursued JI with determination, its associated groups and key individuals, dismembering what was a highly structured organisation with a core cadre of Afghan-trained veterans with international links to Al Qaeda and others. JI has been fractured and greatly diminished, but the exposure of a major terrorist training camp in Aceh two years ago, the killing by police of members of a cell preparing attack plans in Bali in March, and continued planning by small numbers of extremists, points to an enduring extremist challenge.

These incidents fit an emerging pattern of attacks by smaller splinter groups, with shorter planning cycles, a mix of old cadre and a newer generation, and focussed on principally targeting Indonesian police and government officials. There is some evidence of a convergence between members of some Islamic vigilante groups and extremists.

Since 2002, Indonesia has arrested around 700 people on terrorism-related offences, and secured around 475 convictions. This public process has built understanding within Indonesia of the nature and scale of the threat it faced. Indonesia has, with its partners, built a sophisticated police CT capability and demonstrated a long-term commitment to dealing with the drivers of radicalisation but, as recent events have shown, there are still weaknesses in Indonesia's social framework which can permit extremism to fester.

The Philippines and Thailand, which both face separatist insurgencies in their Muslim-majority southern provinces, need to address the grievances which have given rise to discontent. These are mostly local in nature, and require locally-developed processes of resolution. Thailand and Malaysia still present as attractive facilitation hubs for terrorist groups, including the Iranian-sponsored Lebanese Hezbollah.

Cross-regional cooperation, through ASEAN and other mechanisms, including the new Global Counter Terrorist Forum, is developing steadily and contributing to what has, overall, been a committed response to a shared regional security threat.

## CT is extensive and collaborative

Contemporary terrorism is transnational, and hence counter-terrorism requires a collaborative transnational response. Cooperation between governments and between relevant government agencies is critical. Counter-terrorism is intelligence-led, but requires the involvement of many arms of government, and close coordination between them, to be effective.

Terrorism is, in the end, a potent form of criminality where intelligence, military support, law enforcement, border security, the application of due legal process, counter-radicalisation, social and community integration, socio-economic development, education and the rehabilitation of convicted terrorists all form part of a coherent policy response.

The breadth of action necessary to comprehensively address terrorism has required the breaking down of institutional inequities and rivalries and instilling, through sometimes difficult processes of cultural

change, habits of cooperation and information sharing.

The development of analytic and operational fusion centres has been one outcome. For Australia, a federal state, establishment of a National Counter Terrorism Committee to develop a national CT plan and to build, and share, capacity has been another.

## The next decade: dealing with terrorism as a long-term issue

Ten years after 9/11, governments are increasingly turning to longer-term strategies, in their own societies, and in terms of support for neighbours and vulnerable countries more widely, to ameliorate the conditions which may give rise to terrorism.

Necessarily, these strategies are going to have to be implemented in climates of budget stringency. The substantial resources which were made available to develop CT capabilities in the wake of 9/11 and Bali will simply not be available to most governments.

Australia is a leader in CT capacity building and support, particularly in the development of intelligence and law enforcement capabilities, working with our partners in South East Asia and beyond. We also attach priority to assisting regional countries with so-called counter-radicalisation programs, which aim to counter the conditions which give rise to extremism. But these conditions, and the motivations of individuals, are so variable and often so local, that common pathways toward extremist violence remain unclear, and hence appropriate strategies to pre-empt individual engagement or to rehabilitate convicted terrorists are still largely experimental.

Multi-disciplinary approaches are likely to be essential. Particularly in developing nations, development assistance programs which address socio-economic disadvantage and exclusion are likely to have long-term positive effects.

No single approach, nor any single arm of government, or single government, can effectively deal with the issues raised by transnational terrorism. It requires wide collaboration at the local, national and international levels, and will require a sustained commitment over an extended period.

### About the Lecturer

Mr Paterson is currently a member of the CEPS International Advisory Board (IAB). He was Australia's Ambassador to Thailand from 2004-2008. He has extensive experience in international strategic and security policy, politico-military affairs, intelligence and regional issues as a senior government official, including as head of DFAT's Anti-Terrorism Task Force immediately after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

In 2002-03 he was head of the Australian Government's Iraq Task Force. He has also served as head of the International Security Division and the South-East Asia Division in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra.

Mr Paterson served as Chief of Staff and Principal Adviser to the Foreign Minister (2000) and as Assistant Secretary for Asia, APEC and Trade policy in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (1998-99). Overseas, Mr Paterson has served in Dhaka, Baghdad, Vienna, Washington, Tokyo and Bangkok.

Mr Paterson has a Bachelor of Arts degree with honours from the University of Melbourne. He was awarded the Public Service Medal in 2004 and the Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal in 2005. He is married with three children.

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