



**Australian Security in the 21st Century
Seminar Series**

**TERRORISM:
Meeting the Ideological Challenge**

Delivered by

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Minister for Foreign Affairs**

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‘Terrorism: Meeting the Ideological Challenge’

by

**The Hon Alexander Downer MP,
Minister for Foreign Affairs**

**Menzies Research Centre,
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Introduction

On the evening of 12 October 2002, Frank Morgan was in Bali. He was one of a number of Federal Agents from the Australian Federal Police who were enjoying some time off from their peacekeeping duties in East Timor.

He was resting in his hotel when the three explosions occurred just after 11.00pm.

In the hours that followed, Mr Morgan gave support and comfort to injured Australians - including helping an AFP colleague through an operation without anaesthetic.

He later said that he knew how to operate in a crisis. He did.

He had also been a member of Prime Minister Howard's security team in Washington on 11 September 2001.

Few Australians have shared a coincidence like this. But thousands of Australians have been personally touched by acts of terrorism in New York, Washington, Bali, London and elsewhere.

Five years after the September 11 attacks and four years after the first Bali Bombings, the threat from extremist groups remains an important security challenge and one with global dimensions.

Jemaah Islamiyah leaders remain at large in Southeast Asia.

In Europe, home-grown terrorists have struck and killed in their own communities.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban seeks to overthrow the Government of President Karzai and once again wrench that country back to a medieval past.

And Al Qaeda tries to foment civil war in Iraq and plots to strike America and her allies.

This will be a long struggle.

Osama bin Laden says al Qaeda will be patient and steadfast and fight until "the one whose time has come dies first".

We too must be steadfast and patient. We must also be clear-eyed about the ideology that inspires and motivates al Qaeda and its imitators.

The challenge is not just to keep Australians safe from terrorist attack, it is also to understand the appeal of and defeat an ideology that is more political than it is religious.

It is an ideology which challenges the values and ideals that are universal - freedom of speech, religious freedom and freedom from fear and intimidation.

Progress in the Counter-Terrorism

The Government has made fighting terrorism the highest of national security priorities and we have had some significant successes.

In Southeast Asia, Jemaah Islamiyah is a reduced force, with many operatives arrested or finding it harder to operate.

Internationally, Al Qaeda's operations have been disrupted and many of their leaders and followers arrested or killed.

The leadership is less able to exert direct control over their networks and cells.

International cooperation against terrorism in Southeast Asia has deepened and is delivering real benefits.

In Indonesia, for example, a regional training centre jointly established by Australia and Indonesia is helping South-East Asian law enforcement agencies develop the capabilities they need to destroy terrorist networks.

It has now conducted more than 50 courses for over 1200 officers.

The Bali regional ministerial process successfully brought 25 countries together to strengthen legal and law enforcement cooperation.

This work has led to more effective investigations and prosecutions of terrorism-related crime.

And new initiatives, such as interfaith dialogues, are promoting tolerance and mutual understanding.

In Indonesia, where the lives of 92 Australians were taken in the attacks of 2002 and 2005, authorities have a strong record of successful convictions of terrorism - with over 160 individuals sentenced to prison.

With our support and assistance, Indonesia has disrupted the ability of terrorist networks to plan and carry out operations in our region.

These are important achievements. But I cannot say that the threat from international terrorism has passed or that it will do so soon.

The terrorists are adapting their tactics in response to our efforts.

Their cells are becoming smaller, more autonomous and more difficult to detect.

Despite their war on modernity, they increasingly rely on digital communications, the media and the internet for recruitment, operations and to spread their message.

And the attacks have kept coming. In the five years since 9/11, brutal terrorist attacks have killed thousands of innocent people in many countries.

More than 100 Australians are among the dead. Many more Muslims have been the victims of countless attacks by terrorists who claim, perversely, to act in the name of Islam.

We know the terrorists will keep trying and we know that international terrorists have sought to develop or acquire weapons of mass destruction.

They are not bound by civilised restraint and extremist groups like al Qaeda would not hesitate to use such weapons.

Osama Bin Laden advocated their use long before 9/11.

Radical Saudi sheikh Nassir Al-Fahd has argued that there is religious justification for their use, issuing a fatwa stating 'it is our obligation to fight [the infidels] with chemical and biological weapons.'

The United States 9/11 Commission Report found that al Qaeda was developing an "ambitious" biological weapons program in Afghanistan in 2001 and was making "advances in its ability to produce anthrax".

In our own region, a rudimentary chemical and biological manual was discovered in a Jemaah Islamiyah safe-house in the Philippines in 2003.

The leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, recently put out a call for nuclear scientists and explosives experts to join his terrorist group, sweetening his offer with the promise that, I quote "the large American bases [in Iraq] are good places to test your unconventional weapons, whether biological or dirty".

The scale of the damage and carnage the terrorists seek to inflict is limited only by the weapons they can command.

Australia is working internationally to keep WMD out of the hands of terrorists.

For example, we are an active member of the Proliferation Security Initiative, which is aimed at disrupting illicit transfers of WMD. We also provide training and advice throughout the region on controlling sensitive materials and technologies.

An important new example of international cooperation is the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, announced by President Bush and President Putin on 15 July.

Australia has joined this Initiative, whose members will meet in Morocco at the end of the month to agree principles and develop a work plan.

Iraq and Afghanistan

Iraq and Afghanistan are front-lines in the battle against violent extremism.

I acknowledge that views in Australia and elsewhere will differ over military action against the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

However, today the choice is clear. It is between supporting progress and order on the one hand, and anarchy and sectarian conflict on the other.

The US National Intelligence report is worth mentioning at this point. Its findings were not greatly surprising or controversial, despite the way they were reported based on the highly selective leaks.

It is to be expected that terrorists and their sympathisers will opportunistically cite the war in Iraq to justify their murder of innocent people across the globe, many of them Muslims.

But if it wasn't Iraq, it would be something else.

The September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre and the 2002 Bali bombings took place before the war in Iraq.

Government policy will not be dictated by terrorists and so we will stay the course in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Withdrawing from Iraq is not a viable strategy against terrorism and it won't make Australia safer.

The experience of Canada highlights this point. Canadian troops are in Afghanistan but not in Iraq.

Despite this, in June Canadian authorities disrupted a home-grown terrorist plot in Ottawa, arresting 17 people for allegedly planning to detonate truck bombs and open fire on crowds of people.

International terrorists were targeting Americans and Australians well before Iraq.

The main factor driving terrorist groups such as Al Qaida and JI is not Iraq.

It is their long-held ideological view that the west represents a corrupting force and their ultra-conservative interpretation of Sharia Law, which they believe should govern the organisation of society and the Muslim nation

The extremists have chosen to make Iraq a battleground - Osama bin Laden has said that Iraq is "for you or for us to win".

We know what sort of place Iraq will be if it is won by the extremists. Pulling out of Iraq is the worst possible course of action, handing victory to the terrorists.

As the US intelligence assessment points out, if they perceive they have won, more terrorists will continue their jihad.

Preventing such an outcome in Iraq is not America's burden alone and supporting Afghanistan is not NATO's burden alone.

The consequences of extremist victory would be felt everywhere and Australia should make its contribution to this global effort.

While most countries do all they can to stop terrorism, some sponsor terrorist groups to promote their own political agendas.

This is simply unacceptable. It is essential that all countries, including Iran and Syria, use their influence to stop terrorist activities in the region, including those directed at the state of Israel.

The Ideological Challenge

Ladies and gentlemen,

What we face in Afghanistan and in Iraq, what we face from groups like al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia, is an extremist ideology that allows for no ideas or belief systems other than its own.

It seeks to intimidate and eliminate those who refuse to submit. According to this mindset, the personal liberties and pluralism that characterises the western way of life, including the freedoms enjoyed by women, constitute a mortal threat to a "true" Islamic society.

In our own society, many people, including some Muslims, for example, do not agree with the Australian Government's policy on Iraq.

In our system, those people can and do speak freely about their views, they can write articles, organise and attend demonstrations and organise groups of like-minded people to try to convince others to oppose the policy.

At the end of the day, if they feel strongly enough, people can vote in national elections for candidates that better reflect their views on that issue.

There would be no such choices if the grim Taliban-style approach advocated by the extremists were to succeed. There would certainly be no democracy.

In the view of groups like al Qaeda and JI, democracy is a false religion because it renders humans sovereign over their own communities, while they believe only God can exercise this sovereignty.

And so, they seek to overthrow existing governments and replace them with Taliban-style regimes.

In the Middle-East, they would seek to deny the state of Israel its very existence.

These groups see it as legitimate to use violence and terror to achieve their aims, and have no qualms about murdering anyone they see as their enemies, including fellow Muslims.

It is imperative that we see this ideology clearly for what it is - a set of ideas as brutal and uncompromising as any totalitarian ideology that has preceded it.

It is an ideology that directly challenges the principles and values on which the modern world is founded - democracy, open markets and societies, tolerance and pluralism.

Because lies left unchallenged for long enough become facts, it's up to us to challenge the extremist view of the world and set out alternatives.

The alternatives to the dismal terrorist vision include a positive contribution to a stable and peaceful community of peoples and nations.

It is a vision of progress and development and of inter-ethnic harmony and tolerance.

It is an alternative lived daily by people of all religions, cultures and nationalities, including by the vast majority of Muslims who reject extremism.

We need to support this majority in its ideological battle with extremists, who are seeking to appropriate the Islamic faith to justify their violent acts

Ultimately it will be Muslims who reject violence and extremism who will win over the minority who might be susceptible to the jihadist cause.

They need to demonstrate that the extremists cannot meet the basic aspirations of the people they seek to govern.

No society on earth can hope to thrive - to provide security and prosperity for its people - on the basis of extremism.

We need to support the spread of democracy and good governance in Southeast Asia.

Indonesia is an example of what democracy can offer - improved access to justice, a stronger, more open economy, a place where all citizens have a voice and the choice of how, when and where to practice their faith.

President Yudhoyono's democratic government has also contributed to an end to the conflict in Aceh..

In the region, we support a dialogue between faiths that builds understanding and undercuts the extremists' aim of a clash of civilisations.

We should and can work towards an open dialogue where comments such as those of Pope Benedict can be debated and even protested without resort to violence and calls for retribution.

Of course, there will be differences of views and disagreements.

Society cannot move forward on any issue without debate. But it is how the debate is conducted that is the true test of any culture or civilisation.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

The terrorist attacks in Bali four years ago changed the way Australia sees the world.

They brought a new sense of vulnerability, and the realisation that the challenge of terrorism would have to be confronted far more resolutely and decisively than in the past.

Since then, we have suffered further attacks, but we have also made progress against Al Qaeda and JI and we have come to know the enemy better.

Our response has been to work cooperatively to improve security in the region. As the region becomes more secure, so does Australia.

We know the terrorists seek to drive a wedge between Australia and its Muslim communities and neighbours and we won't let this happen.

We - all of us - will have to answer to the next generation if we fail in this responsibility.

