

# Terrorism and National Security

by Jon Atkins

On 11 June 2015 the [ABC's RN Breakfast program](#) discussed the issues of 'radicalisation', terrorism and national security.

Interviewed on the program was Dr Rohan Gunaratna, described as Singapore's leading terrorism expert and head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research which is described as, "one of the largest counter-terrorism research and training centres in the world."

Dr Gunaratna was in Sydney to brief the region's ministers, ambassadors and officials at a major two-day international gathering at the Countering Violent Extremism Summit held on June 11-12.

Dr Gunaratna claims that between 120 to 130 young Australians have travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight there and that the government needs to dismantle the related support groups within Australia. According to Dr Gunaratna, "Australia has done a lot, especially by passing new laws, building operational security platforms to counter the threat".

Dr Gunaratna got one thing right – Australia certainly has "done a lot" with respect to anti-terror laws. Prof George Williams notes that since September 11 attacks in 2001, 64 anti-terrorism statutes have been enacted by the federal parliament. During the time of the Howard government, a new anti-terror law was passed every 6.7 weeks. But contrary to Dr Gunaratna's assessment, Prof Williams argues that Australia's strategy is counter-productive since an over-zealous legal approach generates a sense of grievance and alienation within the Muslim community thus contributing "to the problem by fuelling the radicalisation process".

An interesting statistic was mentioned in the program: 15% of Singapore's population is Muslim, while in Australia, that figure is just two per cent. Yet the number of young Australians joining militias, including ISIS, vastly outnumbers Singaporeans doing the same. Why?

Totally missing from Dr Gunaratna's assessment was any acknowledgment of the following probability: that a significant factor influencing the motivation of this small cohort of Australians and their local supporters involves resentment towards the US and its aggressive foreign policies in the Middle East and the Australian government's support for these policies.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, backed by allies such as Britain and Australia, was a crime against international law and had disastrous consequences – well over 1 million dead and many millions more internally displaced or seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. The sectarian conflicts ignited by that invasion have expanded and are now tearing the entire region apart.

That invasion created the conditions conducive to the rise of ISIS described by journalist Patrick Cockburn as "a very horrible, in many ways fascist organization, very sectarian, kills anybody who doesn't believe in their particular rigorous brand of Islam."

To quote the view of former CIA analyst, Graham Fuller on the rise of ISIS: "I think the United States is one of the key creators of this organization. The United States did not plan the formation of ISIS," he says, "but its destructive interventions in the Middle East and the War in Iraq were the basic causes of the birth of ISIS."

In addition, it is important to ask: Where did ISIS inherit its ideology from? Answer: from Saudi Arabia, the most prominent regional ally of the US.

Saudi Arabia is a missionary state. It uses proceeds from its massive oil resources to spread Wahhabism, an ultra-conservative version of the Sunni religion, to many countries via the

establishment of mosques and madrassas or religious schools. This puritanical and intolerant version of Islam condemns Shia and other Islamic sects as non-Muslim apostates and polytheists. The ideology disseminated by ISIS is an extremist off-shoot of Wahhabism.

In his recent book, *The Rise of Islamic State*, Patrick Cockburn refers to a 2009 cable authored by Hillary Clinton, (former US Secretary of State) and released by WikiLeaks. In this cable, written eight years after 9/11, Hillary Clinton complained that donors from Saudi Arabia were the key source of funds sent to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide. But despite this private admission, Cockburn notes that the US and its allies “continued to remain indifferent to Saudi preachers whose message, spread to millions by satellite TV, YouTube and Twitter, called for the killing of the Shia as heretics”.

The United States’ aggressive interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East and its support for repressive regimes, egged on by successive governments in Australia, has helped spread jihadism within the Middle East, in Afghanistan and to other parts of the world.

In this sense, it is the Australian government’s foreign policy, in lockstep with US foreign policy, that poses a real and growing danger to Australia’s national security. Our military involvement in Iraq is exacerbating these threats.

Only by ending our support for US aggression and standing up for the observance of international law, will Australia contribute to reducing the incidence of ‘radicalisation’ at home and the spread of jihadism abroad.

To this we can add Australia’s involvement in what some consider to be the world's greatest terrorist campaign, that is President Obama's global program of assassination of ‘terrorists’ by militarised drones. Australia is implicated in this terror program via top secret facilities such as Pine Gap. While official government circles deny its consequences, the resentment-generating impact of these drone strikes is blatantly obvious.

Significantly, on the occasion of its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Magna Carta offers arguments against the US drone program on the grounds of due process – a pillar of liberty that the US and Australian governments are choosing to trample upon today.

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