

The new landscape of law enforcement



When terrorism arrived at our backdoor in Bali it was a huge shock for many Australians, but for those working in intelligence and crime fighting, it was simply inevitable, according to Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty.

“We could never be in denial we weren’t going to be a target. You can’t live in a corner of the world and expect the rest of the world to ignore you,” Commissioner Keelty said.

“While we have predominantly a multicultural society in Australia - and that has worked well in our favour in terms of our diversity and openness to different cultures - I don’t think that was ever going to be a shield against terrorism.”

Australia’s role in the region has greatly increased since the Bali bombings, particularly in Indonesia, the Philippines and the Solomon Islands.

“The role of the AFP is to serve Australian interests in the region, but at the same time to be a good corporate citizen and assist where we can.

“One of the important things about the way we assist is that we at all times understand and respect the sovereignty of the host police force and understand that they are ultimately accountable.”

In a battle where the lines between intelligence and investigation are increasingly becoming blurred, good policing is the key.

“Terrorism is a crime. At its base it is a mass murder. The way to investigate terrorism is the way we investigate crimes,” Commissioner Keelty said.

There’s no question crime scenes like Bali are complex, but the principles of investigation remain the same.

“A lot of the direct evidence of terrorism comes out of those crime scenes. Once you start to track down that evidence you are starting to track down terrorists and as you chase them down you are getting more evidence about the existence of networks and that is very pure intelligence.

“The police bring to the table investigative skills - very objective and very thorough examination of all the material - and can actually provide the intelligence community very pure information from which they can build the big picture.”

This then has to be tackled on a strategic level, with regional leaders needing to decide where to focus their resources.

The extradition of suspected Bali mastermind Hambali to the United States has highlighted the importance of issues being addressed on a diplomatic and political level.

“It’s beyond the capacity of a law enforcement agency to deal with complex foreign policy,” Commissioner Keelty said.

“What we find ourselves dealing with is the results of activities of terrorists. There’s a lot more behind what’s driving these terrorists. This is about the Jihad ... the war to create Islamic states.”

The fight against terrorism will need to be a united one. In our region the AFP has built on relationships which existed before the Bali bombings.

“We have liaison officers posted in 27 countries around the world and the co-operation we’ve received through the investigation in Indonesia has demonstrated that those liaison posts and those relationships that we’ve taken a long time to build up do pay dividends in the longer term,” Commissioner Keelty said.

These relationships will need to hold firm if the battle against terrorism is to be won.

“The terrorists will only be beaten if we join together and are serious about the law enforcement and intelligence approach.”

Commissioner Keelty also believes we need to develop a greater understanding of terrorists themselves.



“Why do people choose to take this course of action as opposed to being part of the community and building up the community?” he said.

“That emphasises the urgency with which we need to tackle the propaganda problem.

“That someone believes they will achieve something out of killing themselves is almost incomprehensible to us, but we need to understand more about that.

“We need to understand the drivers behind this so we can re-educate those people and give them something brighter, another opportunity in life other than to kill themselves.

“Whilst ever there are people willing to take up the cause, we’ve got to give them an alternative.”

Commissioner Keelty is determined the battle will be won; the alternative is too bleak to contemplate.

“That would mean future generations of youth around the region wouldn’t have a region to enjoy,” he said.

“If something serious happens in travel, for example, it will shut travel down. If something serious happens in shopping centres it will shut shopping centres down.

“Communities won’t exist the way we’ve been able to exist in the past and we can’t allow that to happen.

“We’ve got to make sure that future generations actually get a better life. The legacy we need to leave them is the fact we’ve seen this problem and addressed it.

“This is why the fight against terrorism will be a generational fight. It will be long term.”