

Working with the community to combat terrorism

Counter terrorism efforts involve a multi-faceted response, and the AFP is working closely with the community and its partner agencies to reduce the threat.

Recently there has been a great deal of attention paid to police operations in which terrorism suspects have been arrested and charged. The number of officers, the length of the investigation, the use of specialist response groups and every other detail of such operations is examined in minute detail. Police also review these operations at every stage to ensure that improvements are made where necessary.

However these investigations are not the only work being done to counter terrorism. There are many law enforcement, government and non-government agencies and related organisations working hard in a range of ways to ensure that Australia remains free from terrorist attack.

Around the world police and partner agencies are focusing on early intervention strategies to counter violent extremism, including policy responses around social inclusion.

Strategies typically aim to undermine and counter extremist ideology; support mainstream voices within the community; disrupt the promotion of violent extremism; identify and support individuals vulnerable to extremist rhetoric; and increase the resilience of the community.

Within a policing framework, the AFP works with its partner agencies and on individual

programs to ensure the risk of a terrorist attack is minimised. But an essential element of any strategy it undertakes involves the community wherever possible.

"The AFP is committed to ongoing engagement with the community to build mutual understanding and trust and to work together to keep Australia safe," AFP Manager Counter Terrorism Domestic, Commander Scott Lee said.

"Community engagement is an essential element of the AFP countering violent extremism efforts, and involves close coordination with State and Territory law enforcement partners. The AFP has seen the benefits of the increased interaction with various communities in our counter terrorism efforts and is continuing to develop strategies with our national and international partners to identify and engage with individuals and communities at risk."

"Our policing experience has shown that working together with the community is an important way to minimise feelings of fear or marginalisation that may otherwise arise."

In addition to community liaison, the AFP also supports efforts to find out more about what motivates terrorists, the processes

of radicalisation, what happens to convicted terrorists in jail, and whether incarceration affects their extremist ideologies.

Globally there are a range of research programs being undertaken regarding effective counter-radicalisation initiatives and countering violent extremism. Several significant projects are underway in Australia, including the development of a lexicon of terrorism which examines the language being used.

One of the most significant studies the AFP is involved in is a joint project being run through Monash University with the support of Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria and the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. This study aims to adopt highly innovative research methods, with a strong reliance upon primary source material, to shed light on why people become radicalised to the point where they are willing to carry out a terrorist act.

"It is hoped that the results from this type of research will provide information to police about more effective ways to prevent terrorism," said Federal Agent James Cheshire, AFP Counter Terrorism Liaison Officer at the Victoria Police Counter Terrorism Coordination Unit.

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01: A prison cell 01: Building damage after a terrorist bombing in Jakarta

Supporting research efforts is only one part of the AFP's strategy to minimise the threat from terrorism. It is also investing heavily in reaching out to the community to ensure there is an understanding of the work that we do.

"Although we have been successful in combating terrorism in Australia, there is a critical need for the community to understand and support the work we are doing. The only way this can be achieved is if we work with them in partnership," Commander Lee said.

The AFP's community liaison program is one way in which this happens. Established in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombing, the Community Liaison Team (CLT) in Melbourne was set up to find ways to communicate more effectively with Victoria's diverse communities. In particular, the team aimed to build social resilience, and improve ties between police and the community.

Through events like the AFP-sponsored Iftar dinners, which celebrate the breaking of the fast during the month of Ramadan, to school visits and football matches with high-profile AFL teams, the AFP has been able to improve relationships and build new bridges into the community. The success of the Melbourne team

has led the AFP to establish a second Community Liaison Team in Sydney.

James Cheshire likens the role of the CLTs to the way in which police worked within their communities half a century ago.

"Forty or fifty years ago you'd see coppers engaging with kids in their community and teaching them boxing or some other activity," he said.

"So in that sense, the way in which we're reaching out to the community hasn't changed. We want to get to know the kids and their parents, play a bit of footy with them or take part in other events, without any expectation that this will help us in an investigative sense. What we do hope is that

we will begin to build up some trust, and hopefully that will play a role in stopping those at risk of radicalisation from taking steps that may see them involved in dangerous activities."

Promoting an understanding of the AFP, its role and the part it plays in the justice process is an important element of the work done by the CLTs.

In addition to its intelligence and investigative activities, the AFP is working hard with the community, its partner agencies and in support of research activities that will help to ensure Australia remains free from terrorist attack.



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