

Lessons learned from Bali

10 years on from the bombs that shook the popular tourist spot of Bali, the approach of the Australian Federal Police to countering terrorism has evolved with the ever-changing terrorism threat.

It is almost hard now to imagine a world before September 11. Such was the magnitude of the event, that the entire globe was focussed on those two giant buildings and the macabre replays of the aircraft that destroyed them. Maybe because it was so far away that the terrorist attacks seemed almost surreal.

But when the terrorist bombs exploded on the tourist resort island of Bali, the spectre of terror was different. Australians understood just how close and real the prospect of a terrorist attack was. The October 2002 Bali bombings would also prove to be a major turning point for the AFP.

National Manager Counter Terrorism Steve Lancaster says that major terrorism incidents including September 11 and the Bali bombings have changed the way governments around the world approach national security.

“No country in the world, no matter how well organised or well structured, could have easily managed an event like September 11. It was so far from left field that it was in the ‘what-if’ realm of possibility. You could probably make a movie out of it and people would still walk out of the theatre and say ‘that is unbelievable, it just couldn’t happen’ – but it did happen.”

The immediate response to September 11, at first, and then Bali, was like a culture shock. Assistant Commissioner Lancaster says there was simply no experience of terrorism on that scale. With the exception of the Northern Territory, there was no terrorism legislation or offences in Australia at that time. Similarly, there was no specialist investigation or intelligence capability for terrorism in the AFP or any other Australian agency.

But since September 11 and Bali the AFP, along with the rest of the world, has been on a path of learning,



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Assistant Commissioner
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AFP members work amid the wreckage in Bali

growth and constant evolution. Like the rest of the world, Assistant Commissioner Lancaster says “we felt vulnerable and taken aback by the intent and capability of the terrorists”.

The AFP responded along two distinct lines. The first priority was to deal with the incident. While specialist counter terrorist capabilities may not have been in place, a lot of the frameworks were.

An already strong relationship between the AFP and the Indonesian National Police facilitated a rapid response to the bombings. The lessons learned from Bali and subsequent experience at the international level built the foundations for future development. A dedicated focus on counter terrorism intelligence capability would eventually uncover home-grown terrorist plots in Australia.

The second response was to look forward. This included a two-fold aim to develop an expertise

to prevent attacks while building the response capability if there was an attack. There was also a rapid acceleration of activity in the legislation and policy areas.

New legislation made acts of terrorism a crime. But importantly, legislation was developed to enable law enforcement agencies to intervene early to prevent terrorist acts occurring. Now 10 years on, the AFP has been a key contributor in the evolution of whole-of-government counter-terrorism strategy.

Strategically, the AFP forms part of the inter-governmental framework responsible for the strategic level coordination of counter-terrorism policy and related security responses. This is achieved through the National Security Committee of Cabinet and the Secretaries Committee on National Security. The AFP also contributes to inter-jurisdictional coordination

Aerial photograph of Paddy's Bar shows the devastation of the Bali bombs.



Inset above: Fires blaze amid the wreckage of the Bali bombs.



Inset above: Scenes of wreckage of the Bali bombs.



A Police member sifts through debris from the bomb blast.

“Our challenge is to try to prevent terrorists from carrying out their acts. To do that, we need to think like them, to think about the unthinkable and the what-ifs, so we are in the position to prevent the next phase in the evolution of terrorism.”

arrangements through the National Counter Terrorism Committee.

Domestically, the AFP works collaboratively with state and territory police through the Joint Counter Terrorism Teams (JCTTs) in each jurisdiction. The JCTTs work closely with other domestic agencies, the broader intelligence community and international partners to identify and investigate terrorist activities in Australia.

The JCTTs also form part of the

investigative response in the event of a terrorist attack in collaboration with state and territory partners.

Assistant Commissioner Lancaster says law enforcement, together with national security agencies, in Australia have been successful in investigating and countering the terrorist threat in Australia. He points to the four disrupted planned terrorist attacks in Australia as evidence of that expertise.

Terrorist tactics globally have adapted in response to the growing expertise of law enforcement and security agencies. There is a very good chance that centrally controlled; complex attack planning has a high chance of being detected. Prosecution of this type of criminal

activity is greater because the evidence is much more observable and detectable.

In response, the trend has changed from large-scale, spectacular attacks, to smaller-scale attacks potentially perpetrated by ‘lone wolves’. Terrorists endeavour to target vulnerable and disaffected individuals to conduct attacks – this strategy is often employed by organised crime groups.

He says law enforcement must look at effective alternative disruption strategies to ensure public safety and appropriate outcomes for those who are extreme in their views. Traditional prosecution is always part of the law enforcement remit but it is not necessarily the ‘end game’.

“You have to go to the cause of the problem,” he says. “There are people out there who think about, or talk about committing terrorist acts. But there is a quantum leap from talking about terrorism to planning and organising a terrorist attack.”

Countering violent extremism

The launch of the AFP’s Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategy on 15 March this year was a major milestone in developing the AFP focus of prevention where possible. The AFP strategy complements the



whole-of-government CVE framework led by the Attorney General's Department since 2008.

The AFP strategy highlights the importance of a combined approach of law enforcement, community engagement and social policy initiatives to strengthen community ties, trust and social cohesion. It also highlights the importance of developing and implementing preventive measures to address the long-term causes of violent extremism – and this focus is now central to Australia's ongoing efforts in tackling terrorism.

Assistant Commissioner Lancaster says adopting this preventative strategy and working with other government agencies and the community to achieve that is one of our primary objectives. A fundamental aim of the CVE strategy is to engage those individuals and communities and, where possible, give them the support they need.

“When people reach the stage of planning a terrorist act there are invariably signs that they are becoming radicalised. Key in going forward in this paradigm of prevention is identifying the groups or individuals who are displaying the signs of extreme behaviours through their community.”

To that end, the CVE strategy complements the important community engagement work already in place. As part of the strategy, AFP community liaison

teams in Sydney and Melbourne undertake a range of activities to build relationships. Activities include sporting events such as the Unity Cup, multi-cultural and interfaith workshops and Ramadan Eid dinners.

“Before you can achieve a deeper level of engagement with the community, you have to develop relationships and trust. You need those relationships in place where people trust you and talk openly”.

The Future

Assistant Commissioner Lancaster says that looking forward, we, as a community need to maintain focus and avoid becoming complacent. He cites the 10th anniversary of September 11, which prompted a significant increase in calls to the National Security Hotline. This increase was due to security being in the forefront of the public mind.

Top: National Manager Counter Terrorism Steve Lancaster attends the launch of the AFP Countering Violent Extremism Strategy.

Above: An AFP member contributes to the disaster victim identification effort in Canberra.



“What keeps me awake at night is the online threat. That’s a real challenge,” Assistant Commissioner Lancaster says. “The Internet is one of the greatest risks we have got in relation to terrorism at the moment.”

“Someone can actually radicalise in the confines of their own bedroom. One of the challenges we face in law enforcement is detecting this type of activity. In these instances, the role of the community in identifying changes in behaviour of someone they know, be it a family member, friend or work colleague is a critical factor in preventing terrorism.”

Assistant Commissioner Lancaster says the challenge now for law enforcement is to maintain our counter terrorism efforts while anticipating how terrorists are evolving. He says that terrorist groups have already adapted to the internet and their methods of communicating their messages and propaganda are well established.

“Terrorists are now thinking about what they are going to do tomorrow. They are thinking about perpetrating the next September 11 or Bali bombing.

“Our challenge and our goal, is to prevent terrorist acts and we have carried that ‘baton’ of responsibility well. To ensure that we do not ‘drop the baton’ we need to think about the unthinkable and consider the ‘what-ifs’ so we are in the position to prevent the next phase in the evolution of terrorism.

“The only way we can achieve this is to keep working together in the National Security space and with the community.”



Above: AFP Forensic officers survey the bomb-affected area