

American Foreign Policy Council

AUSTRALIA

QUICK FACTS

Population: 22,992,654 (July 2016 est.)

Area: 7,741,220 sq km

Ethnic Groups: English 25.9%, Australian 25.4%, Irish 7.5%, Scottish 6.4%, Italian 3.3%, German 3.2%, Chinese 3.1%, Indian 1.4%, Greek 1.4%, Dutch 1.2%, other 15.8% (includes Australian aboriginal .5%), unspecified 5.4%

Religions: Protestant 30.1% (Anglican 17.1%, Uniting Church 5.0%, Presbyterian and Reformed 2.8%, Baptist, 1.6%, Lutheran 1.2%, Pentecostal 1.1%, other Protestant 1.3%), Catholic 25.3% (Roman Catholic 25.1%, other Catholic 0.2%), other Christian 2.9%, Orthodox 2.8%, Buddhist 2.5%, Muslim 2.2%, Hindu 1.3%, other 1.3%, none 22.3%, unspecified 9.3%

Government Type: parliamentary democracy (Federal Parliament) under a constitutional monarchy; a Commonwealth realm

GDP (official exchange rate): \$1.257 trillion (2015 est.)

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (January 2017)

OVERVIEW

The shallow presence and short history of Islamism in Australia is a function of the country's comparatively small Muslim population (just 1.7 percent of its total of 21.5 million, or approximately 366,000 people).¹ By global standards, the threat of Islamist violence in Australia is relatively low. While recent years have seen several Islamists convicted of terrorism-related offenses, none of these trials have provided evidence of any specific, well-developed terror plots that were nearing execution. Generally, Australia has not proven fertile ground for global terrorist organizations, despite some attempts by such groups to recruit and fundraise there. The overwhelming majority of those convicted under the country's anti-terrorism laws seem to have belonged to small, independent, self-starting groups with no clear connection to any well-established global terrorist organi-

zation. Similarly, the very few individuals to have been in contact with such organizations have long since left them, and have shown little, if any, intention of undertaking terrorist acts in Australia. Notably, however, the threat of terrorism associated with the Islamic State (ISIS) has spiked within the country in recent months.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

The Benbrika group

In November 2005, Australian federal and state intelligence and law enforcement agencies carried out the largest counterterrorism raids in the country's history as part of a long-running investigation known as Operation Pendennis. Seventeen people were arrested and charged across Sydney and Melbourne at that time, with another charged a week later and an additional three charged in late March 2006.² The senior figure in the affair was Abdul Nacer Benbrika, also known as Abu Bakr, an immigrant from Algeria who, at the time of his arrest, was variously reported as being 45 or 46. The rest of those charged were considerably younger, mostly between 18 and 28. All except one came from immigrant families, with the dominant ethnicity among them Lebanese. A majority of the Melbourne group was Australian-born, and one of the accused was an Anglo-Australian convert to Islam. Neither the Melbourne nor Sydney groups seem to have been highly educated or wealthy. Most were tradesmen or laborers, and only one participant had a graduate degree. Moreover, several had minor criminal records for fraud, theft and firearms charges.³

Members of the Melbourne cluster were all charged with being members of a terrorist organization involved in the fostering or preparation of a terrorist act (a legal designation under Australian law). Some were also charged with providing resources or making funds available to a terrorist organization, as well as possessing materiel connected to terrorism. Benbrika himself was also charged with intentionally directing the activities of a terrorist organization.⁴ The Sydney cluster faced more serious charges of conspiring to plan a terrorist attack.

The Melbourne trial commenced first, resulting in seven convictions, four acquittals, and one retrial. In February 2009, Benbrika was sentenced to 15 years in prison with a non-parole period of 12 years—considerably less than the maximum 25-year sentence available under the relevant legislation.⁵ It is possible this was due to the relatively embryonic nature of the group. The court found that the group had not reached the stage of plotting to blow up specific targets. By contrast, the Sydney cluster was more advanced, with considerable stockpiles of weapons and chemicals.⁶ In October 2009, following the longest-running criminal trial in Australian legal history, five of its members were convicted (in addition to four others who had pled guilty) and subsequently sentenced to prison terms ranging from 21 to 28 years.⁷

Links between the Benbrika group and global terrorist organizations seem to have been sparse. Of the Melbourne cluster, Anglo-Australian Shane Kent was the only one to have attended a training camp overseas in Afghanistan where he report-

edly pledged allegiance, and may have been introduced, to Osama bin Laden.⁸ Nevertheless, prosecutors dropped charges alleging Kent provided support to al-Qaeda.⁹ The Sydney cluster seems to have had some deeper international experience, with up to three of them having visited *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT) training camps in Pakistan.¹⁰ Benbrika himself, however, appears to have had no sustained contact with global terrorist organizations. The only encounter on the public record was in 1994, when the British-based al-Qaeda sheikh Abu Qatadah visited Australia as a guest of the Melbourne-based *Salafi imam* Mohamed Omran. News reports suggest Benbrika's radicalization can be traced to his exposure to Abu Qatadah's speeches during that tour.¹¹

Abu Qatadah's host, Mohamed Omran, is one of Australia's highest-profile *Wahhabi-Salafi imams*, the head of the Ahlus Sunnah Wa-I-Jamaah Association, and a central figure in any consideration of radical Islamism in Australia. In addition to his connections with Abu Qatadah, he has been named in Spanish court documents as an associate of al-Qaeda's Abu Dada (a charge which he has denied).¹² At the time of Abu Qatadah's speaking tour of Australia, and for several years thereafter, Benbrika was one of Omran's followers. Their relationship seems to have ended some years before Benbrika's arrest, when he left Omran's organization because he found it insufficiently radical.¹³ Benbrika's own followers in the Melbourne cluster appear to have continued attending Omran's center, but there is no doubt that Benbrika was their most important influence at this time.¹⁴

Ideologically, the Benbrika group clearly held to a *Wahhabi-Salafi* ideology. First, the group viewed the world as divided between "true" Muslims and everyone else. Second, it believed that Islam was under attack from the Western world, particularly the United States, but also Australia.¹⁵ Third, the group held that the perceived campaigns against Islam waged by the West in Afghanistan and Iraq compelled the group's members an obligation as devout Muslims to act in defense of Islam. That obligation took the form of an individual religious obligation to embark upon violence in Australia. Thus, the group's views of their militancy were larger defensive, rather than imperial; they saw themselves as acting in the defense of Islam, rather than proceeding from an explicit desire to Islamize Australia or the world.

Consistent with its independent, self-starting nature, the Benbrika group was informally and independently funded. Some members would contribute to a sanduq, or central fund, mainly through minor crimes such as car theft and credit card fraud.¹⁶ By all accounts, it received no external funding from well-established terrorist organizations.

Operation Neath

August 2009 saw the culmination of Australia's second-largest counter-terrorism operation, in which five men were ultimately arrested and charged with conspiring to plan a terrorist attack on Holsworthy Barracks, an Australian Army training base.¹⁷ The apparent plan was for members of the group to kill as many Australian soldiers as they could with automatic weapons before they themselves were killed.¹⁸ The matter is currently before the courts.

The five men, all Australian citizens from Melbourne, were ethnically Lebanese and Somali. Authorities believe they were part of a broader group of 18 men, also ethnically Lebanese and Somali.¹⁹ The group seems to have similar professional and educational backgrounds to the Benbrika group discussed above. None were believed to have graduate-level education, and most were either laborers or taxi drivers.²⁰ Likewise, there appears to have been an absence of a well-formulated overarching ideology; although the group was definitively *Wahhabi/Salafi* in orientation, its political narrative appears to have been reactive and defensive. Members regularly expressed anger at the presence of Australian troops in Muslim countries, possibly Iraq and Afghanistan, although they did not mention these places by name.²¹

Unlike the Benbrika group, however, there appears to be no clear religious authority figure in this case. All of those charged were young, and while the contours of the group will emerge more fully as evidence is presented in court, publicly available information suggests the group to be horizontal in structure.

The other key development in this case is the group's Somali connection—the first alleged involvement of Somali Australians in radical Islamist activity. Indeed, a 2007 investigation by the Australian Federal Police of extremism within the Australian Muslim Somali community found no evidence of any illegal activity.²² However, authorities believe that the group apprehended in Operation Neath possessed links with Somalia's *al-Shabaab*, an al-Qaeda affiliate banned in the United States, and which American authorities allege has been actively recruiting Somali-American Muslims.²³ News reports suggest several members of the group had attempted to travel to Somalia to train with al-Shabaab.²⁴ A spokesman for *al-Shabaab*, however, has denied the allegations, claiming it has “no involvement at all” with the group and no people based in Australia.²⁵

Operation Appleby

Operation Appleby appears to be the longest running anti-terror operation in Australia. Beginning in September 2014, the most prolific raid conducted involved 800 law enforcement agents in Brisbane and Sydney.²⁶ The raid was response to intelligence that suggested that Muhammad Ali Baryalei, a senior Australian member of the Islamic State, had ordered Australian Islamists to “kidnap and murder a randomly chosen non-Muslim member of the Public.”²⁷ The pre-emptive raids conducted resulted in 16 arrests, though only one, Omarjan Azari, was charged. As of late 2016, 15 people have been charged from the intelligence gathered within Operation Appleby, with the latest arrest occurring on May 26, 2016.²⁸

In April 2015, law enforcement authorities in Melbourne used the Preventative Detention Order (PDO) to hold a terror suspect without charge.²⁹ Although the PDO bill was introduced into legislation in 2005, this was the second time in Australian history it had been used. The first invocation of PDOs was in a September 2014.³⁰ Finally, the law was slated to expire in December 2015 but was extended in 2018.

Individuals connected to terrorism

While the above events are certainly the most important in the history of Islamist militancy in Australia, several other individual Islamists have been convicted of terrorism-related offenses. Some of these have been Australian citizens who have made connections with Islamist terrorist groups overseas. Others are foreign nationals who attempted unsuccessfully to infiltrate Australia. None are presently active members of radical Islamist organizations. They are:

- David Hicks, an Anglo-Australian convert to Islam who travelled to Albania and joined the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).³¹ Hicks undertook four weeks of training with the KLA and enlisted with NATO, but the conflict ended before he could do any fighting, and he was sent home under NATO orders.³² Upon returning to Australia he attempted to join the Australian Army, but was rejected.³³ In November 1999, he flew to Pakistan, where he spent three months in a *Lashkar e-Taiba* training camp. From there, he traveled on to Afghanistan where he spent eight months in 2001 in an al-Qaeda training camp.³⁴

Following the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, Hicks was sent to the front line to fight with the Taliban. He insists he saw no action, and never fired his weapon. Indeed, the front to which he was sent collapsed only hours after he arrived. Hicks was captured detained in the Guantànamo Bay detention facility for just under five-and-a-half years. In March 2007, Hicks was formally charged with providing material support for terrorism and tried before a Special Military Commission. He pleaded guilty and became the first person convicted by the Guantànamo Military Tribunal. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, all but nine months of which was suspended.³⁵

Hicks has since served his sentence and been released into the Australian community. Initially, he was placed under a control order that required him to report to a police station three times weekly. The control order expired in December 2008, however, and the Australian Federal Police did not seek to renew it—indicating Hicks was no longer considered a threat.³⁶ Moazzam Begg, a former Guantànamo Bay detainee who met Hicks in detention, has said that Hicks is no longer a Muslim, and ceased being one some time early in his detention.³⁷

- Joseph Thomas, who in early 2001 travelled to Afghanistan to join the Taliban's fight against the Northern Alliance. Thomas spent a week on the front line in Afghanistan after his training, but did not participate in any combat. Over the four months that followed, he was in contact with senior al-Qaeda figures such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, Mohammed Atef, and Saif el Adel, seeking help with income and accommodation. He claims he did not know who these people were at the time.³⁸ With the commencement of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, Thomas remained to fight American forces. At that time, he shared a guesthouse with 9/11 planner Ramzi bin al-Shibh, and was asked by al-Qaeda's

Abu Zubaida to “do some work.”³⁹ Thomas’ time with Abu Zubaida took him to Pakistan, where he met the alleged mastermind of the *USS Cole* bombing, Khalid bin Attash. Bin Attash asked Thomas to undertake an attack in Australia.⁴⁰ Thomas was given \$3,500 and a plane ticket to Australia for this purpose. However, he has maintained at all times that he had no intention of executing such an attack, and that the money he received was merely compensation for his time and maintenance, rather than for terrorism.⁴¹ Yet, before he could board his flight, Thomas was arrested by Pakistan’s ISI, and subsequently was tortured.

Around this time, the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Security and Intelligence Organization questioned Thomas, who provided a detailed statement. In June 2003, Pakistani authorities released Thomas and flew him to Australia, where he remained free for around 17 months until being arrested. Thomas was charged with receiving funds and resources from a terrorist organization that would assist in a terrorist attack, as well as with travelling on a falsified passport.⁴² Following a high-profile trial, Thomas was acquitted of the most serious offenses—largely because most of the evidence on which they were based was tainted by his torture at the hands of the ISI. At the end of the appeal process, Thomas was finally convicted on the falsified passport charge, as well as for receiving funds from a terrorist organization. He was sentenced to nine months’ in prison, and upon his release, was made subject to a control order that, among other restrictions, prohibits him from contacting certain figures involved in terrorism and imposes a curfew.⁴³

- Faheem Lodhi, an Australian citizen, immigrated to Australia from Pakistan in 1996. In June 2006, he was convicted of acting in preparation for a terrorist attack and sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment. Key elements of the prosecution’s case included that Lodhi had sought information about chemicals capable of making explosives, possessed a terrorism manual, and had maps of the electricity grid.⁴⁴ It is suspected that he was targeting the national electricity supply, as well as various Army barracks and training areas. During the trial, it emerged that Lodhi had trained with LeT in Pakistan, where he met al-Qaeda operative Willie Brigitte. Lodhi was also Brigitte’s main contact when Brigitte visited Australia.⁴⁵ Brigitte himself was deported from Australia for visa violations, before finally being convicted in a French court and sentenced to nine years in prison for planning a terrorist attack in Australia.⁴⁶
- Jack Roche, a British immigrant to Australia who converted to Islam in his late 30s. Soon after his conversion, Roche had contact with twin brothers Abdulrahman and Abdulrahim Ayub, who are suspected of being Australia’s representatives of the Indonesian terrorist group *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI). The Ayub twins sent Roche to Malaysia and JI leader Hambali. From there, Roche was sent to Pakistan, where he trained in explosives in an al-Qaeda camp and met Osama bin Laden.⁴⁷ Al-Qaeda subsequently asked Roche to

return to Australia to gather information about the Israeli embassy in Canberra, as well as on Joseph Gutnick, a wealthy Jewish-Australian businessman. In June 2000, Roche set to work, filming the outside of the embassy. However, he could not go through with the attack and went to the Australian Intelligence and Security Organization to tell them of these events. Yet, in Roche's words, "no one seemed to be particularly interested in what was going on."⁴⁸

It was only after the Bali bombings in October 2002 that Australian law enforcement and security agencies took a fresh look at domestic militancy, which resulted ultimately in Roche's arrest and conviction for the embassy plot.⁴⁹ He was sentenced to nine years in prison with a parole period of half that time, and was released in May 2007.⁵⁰

- Musa Cerantonio is an Australian preacher who used social media to both express his support for ISIL and propagate ISIL-related propaganda (Lambert, 2016, 12 January).⁵¹ He was first arrested in 2014 in the Philippines while allegedly attempting to travel to Syria (Wood, 2015, March).⁵² Upon his arrest, he was deported to Australia. Cerantonio is regarded as an influential advocate for ISIL (Oakes & Clark, 2016, 11 May).⁵³ While precise levels of his influence are unclear, Cerantonio is alleged to have associated with Singaporean ISIL sympathizer Zulfikar Shariff (Lim, 2016, 29 July).⁵⁴ In May 2016, he, along with five others, was arrested for attempting to sail to Indonesia, before travelling to ISIL controlled territory (Safi & Robertson, 2016, 11 May).⁵⁵
- Numan Haider was the perpetrator of the September 2014 Endeavour Hills attack, in which he stabbed two anti-terrorism officers from the Joint Counter-Terrorism Team (Oakes, 2014, 25 September).⁵⁶ He was killed during the attack. Haider was also alleged to have associated with Al-Furqan. Subsequent inquiries into the incident have revealed evidence suggesting Haider viewed ISIL propaganda on his mobile phone two days prior to the attack (Longbottom, 2016, 22 March).⁵⁷ He was also said to have attempted to find out Tony Abbott's schedule. Haider, who came from a "moderate" Muslim family, was said to have been radicalized "within months."⁵⁸
- Man Haron Monis was the perpetrator of the December 2014 hostage crisis at the Lindt Chocolate Café in Sydney. The 50-year-old Iranian held 17 people hostage for 16 hours in the café.⁵⁹ Monis was deemed to have been mentally and emotionally unstable prior to the attack. After police negotiations failed, he was killed when police stormed the building.⁶⁰
- Omar Succarieh was accused of both funding terrorists abroad and attempting to aid Agim Kruezi's (failed) migration to Syria.⁶¹ Arrested in 2014, he allegedly financed *Jabhat Al-Nusra*.⁶² Police believe he sent at least \$27,000 to them.
- Sevdet Besim was arrested for plotting the foiled 2015 Anzac Day attack.⁶³ Besim intended to "run over a police officer, cut off his head and go on a violent

rampage that would end in his own death.”⁶⁴ He claimed to have been inspired by his friend, Numan Haider. Besim plotted the attack online with a teenager living in the UK.

Non-violent Islamist groups

Given Australia’s status as a liberal democracy, Islamist groups can form freely and remain in existence provided they remain within the law. Accordingly, a number of Islamist organizations remain active in Australian society.

The most worrisome, from a security perspective, is Mohamed Omran’s Ahlus Sunnah wa-l-Jamaah Association. Nothing on the public record links the Association to violence directly, and its representatives have consistently denied their support for terrorism.⁶⁵ However, public concerns surround Omran because of his connections with the al-Qaeda figures discussed above, and as a result of his own statements in support of Osama bin Laden, whom he insists was not involved with the 9/11 attacks.⁶⁶ While the organization is said to be fundamentally apolitical, it has voiced support for violent jihadist resistance against both the occupation of Palestine, and the “Western” forces in the Afghan and Iraq wars.⁶⁷ In this context, the ASWJ is viewed as an organization that has occasionally strayed “from its civic-social mainstay into the realm of radical politics.”⁶⁸

The other prominent *Wahhabi-Salafi* organization of note is the Islamic Information and Services Network of Australasia, headed by Samir Mohtadi. This organization is more politically moderate than other *Wahhabi-Salafi* groups, and broke from Omran’s group many years before domestic terrorism became a public issue. Mohtadi testified during the trial of the Benbrika group, saying that he warned Benbrika he would notify the authorities if he intended to do “anything stupid,” and that Australia was a “peaceful country.”⁶⁹

A range of other *Wahhabi-Salafi* organizations with similar attitudes exist, most notably Sydney’s Global Islamic Youth Centre, led by Sheikh Feiz Mohamed, though it appears unconnected to Omran’s group. None of these groups publicly advocate the forceful Islamization of Australia. To the extent they are radical, they tend to articulate their activism in defensive terms, rather than offensive ones. Mohtadi’s group is focused on *dawah* (proselytization) rather than the forceful transformation of society.

The Al-Furqan Islamic Information Centre was a bookstore that “doubled” as a *musallah*, primarily for young Muslims, in South Melbourne.⁷¹ It was led by Harun Mehicevic after he decided to part ways with the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah (ASWJ) centre in 2011.⁷² Like ASWJ, Al-Furqan’s theological position is built upon Salafism. While it is unclear if Mehicevic advocated a politicized brand of *Salafism*, the organization was linked with at least six alleged and known Australian terrorists: Neil Prakash, Numan Haider, Adnan Karabegovic, Sevdet Besim, Harun Causevic, and Mohomod Unais Mohamed Ameen.⁷³

Prakash and Ameen have appeared in ISIL propaganda videos from ISIL controlled territories.⁷⁴ After being subject to multiple police raids since 2012, Mehicevic

made the decision to cease Al-Furqan's operations in 2015.⁷⁵ However, it has been alleged that Al-Furqan continues to operate covertly from a suburban leisure centre in Dandenong, Melbourne (Minear & Dowling, 2015, May 2).⁷⁶ Notably, Mahicevic himself has not been accused or charged for terrorist offences. Rather, it has been alleged that he was asked to assist the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) by leveraging on position to "spy" on ISIL.⁷⁷

The most overtly Islamist organization in Australia is undoubtedly *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. The group attracted a slew of media attention following the 2005 London bombings, when banning the group became a topic of public discussion in Australia, mirroring Britain's public calls for a ban on the group.⁷⁸ HuT treats the establishment of "the Khalifah system as explicit ideological aspiration."⁷⁹ Its methodology is based on non-violent resistance against secular democracy, and specifically relies on demonstrating the (in their view) intellectual, moral, and functional superiority the *Khalifah* system of governance vis-à-vis any other.⁸⁰ As such, HT appears to rely heavily on its online publishing arm, wherein critiques of Australian policies, particularly those on counter-terrorism, are commonplace (*Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia*, n.d.-c).⁸¹ However, while HuT is a major presence in many countries, its members in Australia are very small in number and confined mostly to Sydney.⁸²

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

As a nation with a British political inheritance, a very small Muslim population and a strong enduring alliance with the United States, Australia is not a welcoming environment for Islamist movements, particularly violent ones. Islamism has no discernible public or governmental support as an ideology. Anyone who calls publicly for the incorporation of some part of Islamic law (typically family law) into the Australian legal system faces swift denunciation, to say nothing of those who openly support more radical Islamist ideas.⁸³

Accordingly, none of the aforementioned Islamist organizations receive government patronage, and there is little if any evidence that their popularity and level of support in the Australian community extends significantly beyond their own memberships. Debate continues in Australia as to whether or not HuT, for instance, should be banned.⁸⁴

As the Muslim population of Australia continues to grow, both through population expansion and immigration, Muslim organizations can be expected to expand in size and number. Within a span of 20 years (between 1991 and 2011), the Muslim population increased from 125, 000 to 500,000. However, while an increase in the number of mosques is inevitable as a result, there is no evidence of a surge in mosque construction, and there is nothing in the public domain to suggest an impending rise

in terrorist activity beyond what has been seen since 2005. It is probably true that HuT's voice is gradually becoming louder (facilitated by media attention) but it remains closely monitored and of marginal influence.⁸⁵

Funding arrangements for Islamic organizations are more difficult to discern. The record to date suggests that would-be terrorist groups in Australia are not reliant on overseas funding for their plots, and indeed, as discussed above in relation to the Benbrika group, have attempted their own fundraising, often through fraudulent means.

More mainstream Islamic organizations have long been recipients of funding from both Australian and overseas governments. Among the most active has been the Saudi government, which is thought to have spent around AU\$120 million (roughly 91 million in U.S. dollars) in Australia since the 1970s.⁸⁶ It is reasonable to assume that this financial support played an important role in the emergence of *Wahhabi* Salafism in Australia over the decades that followed. In this regard, there have been periods of consternation in the Australian press over funding from the Saudi government, particularly of esteemed institutions such as Australian universities.⁸⁷ There is little to suggest, however, that funding flows from abroad have increased in the past decade, while the associated media coverage indicates that such funding arrangements would be heavily scrutinized once publicly known. The Australian government, too, has actively funded Islamic studies in Australian universities—most directly through the establishment of a National Centre of Excellence in Islamic Studies across three universities in three states at a cost of AU\$8 million (\$6 million U.S.).⁸⁸ The center was conceived as part of the government's social cohesion, harmony and security strategy, and aims at teaching Islam in an Australian context.⁸⁹

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

The Australian government responded to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent 2002 Bali bombings with a flurry of legislative activity. The suite of anti-terrorism laws introduced since that time have created new terrorism-related offenses and greatly expanded the powers of police and intelligence agencies.⁹⁰ These laws have certainly been controversial for their impact on civil liberties, and there has been much criticism of the legislative process that produced them,⁹¹ as well as the occasionally improper use of these powers and instances of improper conduct by police and intelligence agencies.⁹²

Australian authorities have also taken some steps towards a social approach to counterterrorism. In September 2005, the Howard government established a Muslim Community Reference Group to look into areas of social need in Muslim communities, including those elements thought to contribute to radicalization, such as education, employment and social cohesion.⁹³ Similarly, some police forces around the country, including the Australian Federal Police, have expanded their community engagement programs.⁹⁴ Led by the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the National

Disruption Group (NDG) was established in 2014 to execute the deradicalization of returning Australian foreign fighters.⁹⁵ Within the NDG, federal police collaborate with academics, religious leaders, and psychologists to conduct to facilitate the deradicalization process.⁹⁶

Not all of these measures have been well received among Australian Muslims. The introduction of anti-terrorism laws caused significant Muslim protest, and these measures have been regularly criticized by Muslim groups for contributing to further alienation and facilitating coercive and intimidating behavior from authorities.⁹⁷ While there is some evidence suggesting that the impact of harsh legislation and the negative tone of public discourse are having a radicalizing effect in Australia,⁹⁸ this is impossible to quantify. Similarly, the Muslim Community Reference Group has faced criticism for being a forum for lecturing to the Muslim community and encouraging Muslims to identify radicals for the government under the guise of community engagement, as well as for perpetuating the connection between Muslims and terrorism.⁹⁹ In February 2015, the state established a website to enable individuals to report any extremist propaganda they might chance upon online.¹⁰⁰ This initiative was also widely criticized within the Muslim community as a transgression of their rights.

In September 2014, the threat level of terrorism in Australia was raised from “medium” to “high,” indicating the imminent likelihood of a terrorist attack in Australia).¹⁰¹ This was the first time the threat level had been increased since 2002. The threat level assessment was based on a four-tier system, with “extreme” being the highest possible level. The threat level was maintained at “high” at least until September of 2015.¹⁰² In November 2015, the threat level assessment system changed from a four-tier to a five-tier one in response to the “changing domestic and international security landscape.”¹⁰³

Upon its introduction, the threat level assessment was indicated as “Probable,” indicating that Australian intelligence believes that terrorists have both the capability and intention to conduct an attack.¹⁰⁴ Australia’s National Security website indicates the threat level to still be “Probable.”¹⁰⁵ Both “high” (the 3rd highest in the four-tier system) and “Probable” (the 3rd highest in the five-tier system) indicate the same quantitative and qualitative threat levels (Keenan, 2015, 26 November).¹⁰⁶ Then Prime Minister Tony Abbott said this five-tier system (“Not Expected,” “Possible,” “Probable,” “Expected,” and “Certain”) would be easier for laypeople to comprehend.¹⁰⁷

Finally, as of April 1, 2016, the state intends to introduce a post-sentence preventative detention order bill to enable the state to prolong and maintain the detention of “high risk offenders” who are deemed to be beyond the help of rehabilitation.¹⁰⁸ It does not appear that this law has been introduced yet.

The threat from Islamism in Australia, especially the radical variant, while real and continuing, has grown significantly since 2013. To date, in spite of the occasional

overuse of force, attempts at law enforcement have been successful in monitoring and prosecuting the main threats stemming from Islamic radicalism. However, the large number of Australian citizens (close to 62 since 2015) that have joined ISIS indicates that the organization has established links in Australia. Most of these recruitments have taken place through social media which has resulted in Australia deploying various strategies to counter the ISIS threat in the cyber space.¹⁰⁹

ENDNOTES

- [1] Figures derived from "Australia," CIA World Factbook, November 9, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/as.html>.
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- [3] Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization In The West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York: New York City Police Department, 2007), 27-28
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- [11] "Suspect Linked To radical UK Cleric," Times of London, November 13, 2005, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article589625.ece>.
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- [13] "Terror Links To Radical Sheikhs," The Australian, November 10, 2005, 1.
- [14] Ibid.
- [15] "Long Sentences For Sydney Terror Plotters."

- [16] "Tip-Off Led To Intense 16-month Investigation," *The Age* (Melbourne), September 17, 2008, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/tipoff-led-to-intense-16month-investigation-20080916-4hxp.html>; Silber and Bhatt, *Radicalization In The West: The Homegrown Threat*, 52.
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- [18] Cameron Stewart, "Phone Call Sparked Operation Neath," *The Australian*, August 4, 2009, 1, 4.
- [19] *Ibid.*
- [20] *Ibid.*
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