

THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILING COUNTER TERRORISM STRATEGY

The Federal government's approach to counter terrorism is a mess, and in light of the recent proposal to strip people of their citizenship, is only getting worse.



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This is all despite the fact that almost universally, research points to the enormous influence that wider social, economic and political issues have on the process of radicalisation. Yet, the focus of the government's strategy seems to rest heavily on how best it can strip people of their rights in the name of "security".

This approach was carried into the recent Countering Violent Extremism summit held in Sydney. Just a quick skim of the topics alone gave enough of an indication of the intentions behind it, as well as of ongoing negative trends in the way the Attorney General's Department has consulted with the Muslim Community.

At its core, there is a denial of the need to consider alternative sources of radicalisation. John L. Esposito, a leading international academic on Islam, and a professor of International Affairs and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, states in an essay published on the root causes of radicalisation, "Drivers of radicalization include moral outrage, disaffection, peer pressure, the search for a new identity, and for a sense of meaning, purpose and belonging."

These root causes are all largely concerns that, in any other situation,

would result in increasing scrutiny of the role the government is playing in addressing the needs of its citizens. Instead, we see them focusing upon stripping them of citizenship.

The professor also references an MI5 report that states, "... far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practice their faith regularly. Many lack religious literacy and could... be regarded as religious novices."

This implies religious ideology largely does not actually account for the impetus for violent extremism. That is, the problem lies not with Islam, but with the environment Muslims are currently in.

Nonetheless, this incorrect understanding of the process of radicalisation continues to proliferate and hinder public discussion. The process is clearly neither linear nor as simple as has been previously insinuated, and is certainly not predicated on ideology and citizenship.

Disappointingly, the Attorney-General's Department continues to espouse such misnomers. Their discourse is outdated and their approach marked by a dismissal of research and recommendations from the Muslim Community.

A "discussion paper" they compiled to drive a recent community consultation was made up of a series of generalisations and basic facts about violent extremism. It still referred to radicalisation as though it was a result of Islamic ideology, still refused to acknowledge the impact of social issues on the process, still focused upon the endgame of a very broad process, and refusing to deal with the root causes.

This was reinforced by the safe choices the department, made with attendees.



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This, and other "consultations" are evidently just box-ticking exercises. Opportunities for these Departments to feel satisfied that they have "consulted" with the Muslim Community, without actually having done anything

constructive. With that in mind, it was noteworthy that on Budget Day last month, Fairfax revealed the 2015 Budget would include an extra \$450m more to "fight local jihadis".

With this new announcement, spending on national security and de-radicalisation programs will rise to over \$1 billion - a staggering figure considering the context within which it is being made. This is amongst cuts being made to parental leave schemes, hospitals, education, international aid and public transport, amounting to billions of dollars.

Thus, we can assume the Abbott government is taking this so-called threat seriously. It boggles the mind, then, that it would continue to exclude legitimate Muslim voices and widely accepted research from the discussions about how to tackle radicalisation. It exacerbates an environment of disaffection and disempowerment, and does nothing but isolate the very community that best understands these challenges.

By narrowing the definition of radicalisation to the point where social issues and valid concerns over government strategies and policies become irrelevant, the various arms of the Federal government, armed with over \$1 billion in funding, continues on its delusional path of diminishing returns.

More importantly, it continues to use taxpayer dollars on pointless programs that do little to address the genuine concerns of both the Muslim, and the wider Australian community, all without true consultation.