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Australia and the United States: Sharing Lessons in the Fight against Domestic Extremism

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Recent events in Paris, Ottawa, Sydney, and elsewhere have brought into renewed focus the threat posed to the United States and its partners by homegrown violent extremism. The challenge includes countering online radicalization, blocking financial support to the Islamic State, protecting against “lone wolf” attacks, and preventing citizens from joining the fighting in Syria and Iraq.

With President Barack Obama hosting a “Summit on Countering Violent Extremism” on February 18, it is clear Washington is eager to learn from what others are doing to counter the extremist threat. Australia’s approach should be of particular value to the United States leading up to and following the summit.

Australia has grown increasingly concerned with the potential threat to domestic security from citizens influenced by the sophisticated narrative peddled by terrorist groups like the Islamic State. The implications of that narrative became tragically clear with the siege by lone gunman Haron Monis in downtown Sydney in December, and before that during unprecedented counter-terrorism sweeps across Australian cities in September. The conflict in Syria and Iraq has had a catalyzing effect on a small, disaffected segment of Australia’s Muslim community.

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Prime Minister Tony Abbott's government in August announced a more than \$500 million counterterrorism strategy that includes new funds and staff to better counter radicalization and extremist threats. This plan includes community engagement programs, a new Australia Federal Police Community Diversion and Monitoring Team, and a multiagency national "disruption" group to target recruiters and foreign fighters. Much of this counterterrorism strategy has focused on bolstering the traditional role of intelligence and security forces, and some it has come under fire as being too far-reaching or heavy-handed.

But Australia's evolving strategies to counter violent extremism have also used the nation's sense of multicultural

Open Day at Sydney's Gallipoli Mosque in 2012. The Australian government's strategy to counter violent extremism relies heavily on the nation's sense of multicultural social cohesion and includes efforts to reach out to local communities. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/threthny/7961347534/>

social inclusion to work at the community level with local leaders on better awareness, education, and engagement. Multiculturalism plays a crucial role in providing an authentic counternarrative to combat the extremist propaganda that targets disaffected segments of the community, especially among youth.

Australia's community-level focus should be instructive for the United States and other partners, because it offers an opportunity to tackle localized causes of radicalization and violent extremism. For example, Australian police, researchers, and community organizations are tailoring counter-radicalization efforts differently in western Sydney than in southern Melbourne, recognizing the differences in those targeted communities. The government's Living Safe Together Program keeps communities at the center of its response and wisely gives a boost to local policing to increase and improve community outreach programs.

This approach reflects a realization that countering the long-term threat of extremism at home requires engaging on issues outside the national security arena, such as jobs, education, health, and civil rights. Australia's focus on this type of work and the building of grassroots community contact by the police, social services, educators, religious leaders, and

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others is essential to preventing violent extremism, especially among at-risk youth. With sometimes-mixed reactions, the government has worked hard to include community leaders as part of the design, implementation, and monitoring of programs. Australia's relatively small population and limited number of high-risk communities provide a range of in-depth case studies that should be of interest to the United States.

As U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry outlined during his January 23 speech at Davos, "If we're going to successfully combat violent extremism, we better understand all of the factors, because we can't change minds without knowing what's in them."

The issue of messaging and the changing of minds is among the most difficult challenges that the United States and others face, and in this regard Australia is no different. The scale, sophistication, and effectiveness of the Islamic State's social media and other messaging set it apart from those of previous extremist groups. The diffuse nature of the messaging makes it especially difficult for governments and communities to respond. Programs such as All Together Now in Australia point the way toward a better response, but more research and exchanging of best practices needs to happen to ensure an effective multichannel and multimedia strategy is used. Bringing community groups and leaders onboard is critical, given that governments struggle to be creative and strategic in the use of social media and other channels to spread a counternarrative.

The threat of fighters returning from the battlefields of Iraq and Syria has dominated much of the debate in both Australia and the United States. The security implications of these fighters' return are especially significant for Australia, which has an estimated 200-250 nationals participating directly in the conflict in Syria and Iraq. The initial reaction by Australia and others has been to cancel the passports of those involved. This is understandable but insufficient and raises the question of rehabilitation as another issue worthy of discussion at President Obama's upcoming summit. In this area, Australia and others can learn from the Hayat program in Germany and the pilot de-radicalization programs in Aarhus, Denmark, which provide counseling and support for returned fighters. This off-ramp to rehabilitation should be a crucial part of governments' approaches. If done successfully, rehabilitated returnees can provide a credible resource for helping turn away potential recruits.

Australia already works closely with the United States as part of the coalition combatting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. It is part of



Secretary of State John Kerry speaks about violent extremism during the recent World Economic Forum in Davos. Kerry highlighted the need to "understand all of the factors" behind extremism in order to effectively counter it. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/statephotos/16162625699/>

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the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network and a member of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum. Working with Australia to share lessons learned and better coordinate efforts to counter violent extremism at home is a natural extension of the already close relationship between the two countries, especially between their law enforcement, security, and intelligence agencies. ▲

The Month That Was

AUSTRALIA

Cabinet reshuffle causes submarine tender delay. Prime Minister Tony Abbott on December 21 appointed Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews to replace David Johnston as defense minister as part of a cabinet reshuffle amid the government's falling poll numbers. The government announced that roughly \$20 billion in defense acquisitions, including \$13.5 billion for new submarines, has been put on hold while Andrews settles into his new role. Immigration Minister Scott Morrison took over Andrews' social services portfolio, while Sussan Ley became immigration minister. Ley is the second woman appointed to Abbott's cabinet.

Falling commodity prices put pressure on Australian economy. The Australian dollar was trading at more than 1.25 to the U.S. dollar on January 22 for the first time since 2009. A drop in iron ore and energy prices as well as reduced Chinese demand has put pressure on the Australian economy and the federal budget. Australian mining companies have ceased operations at some smaller mines and have started writing down assets to reflect falling prices. The economy nevertheless created 37,400 new jobs in December as unemployment dropped to 6.1 percent.

Government backtracks on healthcare rebate cut. The Australian government on January 15 put on hold a planned cut to the Medicare rebate available for general practitioner consultations four days before it was scheduled to go into effect. The \$20 rebate cut would have saved the government \$790 million but drew stiff opposition from doctors and patients. The policy reversal has also highlighted tensions between Prime Minister Tony Abbott and senior ministers who had insisted that the proposed cut would be politically damaging.

Manus Island asylum seekers end two-week hunger strike. Asylum seekers at the Australian-run detention center on Papua New Guinea's (PNG) Manus Island ended a 13-day hunger strike on January 27 after reinforcement security guards were flown to the compound and made several arrests. The hunger strike, which was accompanied by protests during which asylum seekers blocked guards' access to parts of the detention center, started when authorities announced plans to transfer 50 asylum seekers who had been granted refugee status to a site on mainland PNG for language and skills training before being resettled throughout the country. Protesters worry the proposed site is not secure and fear they will be mistreated.



The Cobar copper mine in New South Wales. Falling commodity prices, including for copper, are putting pressure on the Australian economy and forcing the closure of small mining operations. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/suburbanbloke/3386565623/>



The aftermath of an intense wildfire that recently swept through 30,000 acres near Adelaide. Firefighters brought the blaze under control, but not before it destroyed 27 homes. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/winchwebsites/16062969348/>

Wildfire destroys homes near Adelaide. Firefighters on January 8 brought a major wildfire under control after it had swept through more than 30,000 acres and destroyed 27 homes near Adelaide in South Australia. Thousands were forced to leave their homes as high temperatures and strong winds fueled the fire, the largest in South Australia since 1983. More than 600 firefighters battled the blaze along its 150-mile perimeter. There were no deaths, but 132 people were injured.

Australia signs up for major counterterrorism summit in Washington. The Australian government has agreed to take part in a high-level summit in Washington on February 18 to share ideas about countering violent extremism. The agenda has not been set, and it remains unclear whether Prime Minister Tony Abbott will attend. Australia is a key member of the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The Abbott government has passed legislation bolstering its domestic security and intelligence gathering powers, and announced a \$10.6 million program to prevent young Australians from becoming involved in extremism.

Abbott visits Iraq. Prime Minister Tony Abbott made his first visit to Iraq on January 4 where he met with his Iraqi counterpart, Haider al-Abadi, and visited Australian forces engaged in the multinational fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Abbott reiterated Australia's commitment to help the Iraqi government fight ISIS and pledged \$4 million in additional humanitarian aid. Australia has already committed six F/A-18F Super Hornets to the air campaign against ISIS and 200 troops to advise and assist Iraqi forces. New defense minister Kevin Andrews accompanied Abbott on the trip.

NEW ZEALAND

Navy intercepts illegal fishing boats. The HMNZS *Wellington* on January 12 observed and collected evidence against three vessels illegally fishing for highly protected Antarctic toothfish in waters south of Australia. New Zealand naval personnel attempted to board the vessels but were not able to do so safely. The ships were flying false flags and the owners have not been identified. Interpol has issued a notice requesting that all countries provide information on the three vessels. The incident has provoked criticism that the *Wellington* acted too timidly—a charge the New Zealand Navy has vigorously denied.

Government to decide soon whether to join anti-ISIS coalition. Prime Minister John Key on January 20 said his government will soon decide whether to commit forces to the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Key noted that New Zealand must make some



The HMNZS Wellington (left) monitoring a fishing vessel poaching toothfish in the southern Pacific Ocean. Wellington personnel recently observed three vessels poaching in waters south of Australia but could not board the ships safely. <https://www.facebook.com/317342038008/photos/a.390631373008.207738.317342038008/1015358822213009/?type=3&permPage=1>

contribution as a member of the Five-Eyes grouping, which also includes Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. New Zealand defense force personnel are currently conducting reconnaissance in Iraq and the government will make its decision after they report back.

Drought conditions threaten New Zealand farmers. Primary Industries Minister Nathan Guy told farmers on January 21 that he is not yet ready to declare a state of drought despite the high temperatures and lower-than-usual rainfall that are affecting the Wairarapa region on the southern North Island and Canterbury region in the northeast of the South Island. An official declaration of drought would trigger extra government support and funding for farmers. Dry conditions are the latest in a tough year for New Zealand farmers, who are already under pressure from low dairy prices and reduced demand.

New Zealand takes seat on Security Council. The UN Security Council resumed business on January 2, marking the beginning of New Zealand's two-year term as a member. New Zealand's ambassador to the United Nations, Jim McLay, on January 15 outlined Wellington's planned approach to the Middle East peace process during the first open debate of the new term. McLay said a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is overdue and a two-state solution is the only feasible basis for peace. He also noted that U.S. leadership on the issue is indispensable.

PACIFIC ISLANDS

Tonga elects first commoner as prime minister. Tongan lawmakers on December 29 elected Samiuela 'Akilisi Pohiva as prime minister, making him the first head of government chosen from outside the nation's hereditary nobility. Pohiva, an outspoken democracy campaigner, defeated former deputy prime minister and presumed frontrunner **Samiu Vaipulu**. Pohiva's top challenge will be paying down Tonga's significant loans from China. He also pledged to make raising governance standards and combating nepotism a personal priority—one that was already set back by his decision to employ his son as a personal assistant.

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission fails to reach tuna agreement. The 25-nation Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission concluded its annual session on December 5 with participants unable to reach an agreement on conservation measures for threatened tuna stocks. Reports indicate that the highly sought-after bigeye tuna have been reduced to just 16 percent of their original spawning biomass. Efforts by Pacific Island countries to set strict catch limits were blocked by the large "distant water fishing nations" of the European Union, China,



The tail of a Fiji Airways plane. Direct flights have resumed between Fiji and the Solomon Islands, ending a months-long impasse. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/44460990@N04/12109617465/>

Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States that catch the majority of Pacific tuna. The disappointing result sparked criticism from environmental groups, which are now questioning the effectiveness of the commission.

Flights resume between Solomon Islands and Fiji. Flights between Fiji and the Solomon Islands are set to resume after officials on January 13 wrapped up several weeks of negotiations to resume direct service between the two nations. Flights were halted in July 2014 amid a dispute over the establishment of additional services. As the impasse dragged on, officials and commentators grew concerned that the dispute would negatively affect tourism, which depends heavily on regional flights between Pacific Island countries.

Samoa prime minister denies growing Chinese influence. Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi on January 9 responded to concerns in the local media that Chinese businesses are enjoying outsized influence in Samoa and denying locals equal opportunity. The government recently proposed a bill that would give citizenship to major investors, sparking concern that Chinese businesses will benefit disproportionately. The prime minister has praised China's role in the economy, especially its financial aid and effect on the business environment. China recently agreed to fund major upgrades at Samoa's Faleolo International Airport.

New Caledonia government collapses, fails to select replacement president. New Caledonia continues to be led by an interim government after two failed attempts to elect a new president. Disagreements over fiscal reforms led the Caledonia Together Party to break ranks with its two fellow anti-independence parties on December 16, triggering the collapse of the coalition government. The anti-independence parties have since refused to compromise to resolve the deadlock and pro-independence ministers have abstained from voting for a new president. The pro-independence Caledonian Union Party says it will present its own proposal to end the deadlock within two weeks. ▲

Looking Ahead

Asia Pacific workgroup planning meeting. The Society for International Development (SID) will host a meeting on February 26 to discuss the 2015 agenda of the SID-Washington Asia Pacific Workgroup. The brainstorming session will include remarks by Nathan Associates' Jack Andre and SIL-International's Bill Hampton. The event will take place from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at SID-Washington, 1101 15th St., NW, Third Floor. For more information or to RSVP, [click here](#).

Maritime Competition in a Mature Precision-Strike Regime. The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) will host a discussion on February 26 on its latest study, *Maritime Competition in a Mature Precision-Strike Regime*. The session will include remarks by CSBA president Andrew Krepinevich and Rep. James Langevin (D-RI), the ranking member of the House Armed Services Subcommittee for Intelligence, Emerging Threats and Capabilities. The event will be held on from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in Room 210 of the Cannon House Office Building, Independence and New Jersey Aves., SE. For more information or to RSVP, [click here](#).

Creating Shared Value. CSIS's Project on Prosperity and Development will host a conference on March 3 about the role of the private sector in addressing enduring socioeconomic challenges in the world's poorest countries through agricultural development. The event will take place from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Second Floor Conference Room at CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. For more information or to RSVP, [click here](#).

A Centenary of Australian War Art. The Embassy of Australia is currently hosting an exhibition commemorating the centenary of the establishment of the Australia New Zealand Army Corps during World War I. The exhibition, which will run until June 2, consists of 41 pieces of art from the Australian War Memorial. The works depicting Australian military experiences from World War I to Afghanistan are on display weekdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Embassy of Australia's Gallery, 1601 Massachusetts Ave, NW. For more information, contact Cultural.RelationsUS@dfat.gov.au. ▲

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