A safer Australia: Meeting the challenges of homeland security
by Anthony Bergin

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Last December Prime Minister Rudd released the first National Security Statement (NSS) and the summary and conclusions of the Report of the Review of Homeland and Border Security (Smith Review) conducted by former Defence Secretary Ric Smith. Smith's review was presented to the government on 27 June 2008.[1]

Homeland security is the term that's used to describe the actions that governments, businesses, individuals and other organisations take to manage ongoing threats to public safety, including natural disasters and terrorism.

Homeland security is thus nested within the overall national security jigsaw puzzle, but it is not the same as *national security.*

As defined in the NSS, for example, national security covers freedom from attack or the threat of attack; the maintenance of a state's territorial integrity and political sovereignty; the preservation of a nation's freedoms; and the maintenance of a state's fundamental capacity to advance economic prosperity for its citizens.[2]

This comprehensive definition differs from the former Howard government's much narrower approach: the term *national security* was more often than not used as a synonym for *counter-terrorism*.

Flowing from the findings of the NSS and the Smith Review, this *Policy Analysis* outlines eight critical challenges facing Australian homeland security decision makers. The recommendations are interdependent, so the suggested measures listed below aren't meant to imply any priority order. To implement these recommendations will require strong political leadership and broad partnerships across all tiers of Australian government, the private sector and the broader Australian community.

Build an all-hazards resilience approach for national preparedness

The NSS takes an all-hazards approach to security: it isn't just about bombs and bullets, but also includes natural hazards and cascading infrastructure failures. This is a welcome and novel approach at the federal level in Australia. As the Smith Review concluded, management across all hazards has received limited attention at senior levels within the Australian Government, even though natural disasters are frequent and are estimated to cost Australia on average over $1 billion a year.

While the NSS suggests that national preparedness across all-hazards is a critical part of overall national security, it doesn't confront the very sobering finding of the Smith Review that there's a 'fundamental gap' in our national planning arrangements to deal with catastrophic disasters.[3]

Smith's judgment supports the finding in a report released by ASPI last May that similarly concluded that our current approach to catastrophic disasters is generally inadequate to the task. That study found that we don't have whole-of-government plans to respond to a catastrophe; that it's not clear which Commonwealth agency or individual will be in charge for the Commonwealth; and that there appears to be no clear national guidelines to assess what capabilities the jurisdictions need to prepare for a catastrophic disaster.[4]

Given that major disruptive events have always been with us and will be into the future, we should be putting in place arrangements that will help to ensure that we can endure the very worst hazards.

To that end, Smith sensibly recommended that there's scope for greater national collaboration in emergency management. He recommended that the National Security Adviser, or his deputy, should chair the Australian Emergency Management Committee and that the work of that committee and the work of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee should be better integrated. The logical next step, however, would be to blend these functions in order to enhance the Australian Government's ability to develop integrated responses in an all-hazards framework to get the job done.

Smith found that the Commonwealth's role in research and capability development activities had been focused predominantly on counter-terrorism. He recommended that more could be done to support research into security risks beyond counter-terrorism. Again that's a sound proposal: it should be implemented by the new Defence, Intelligence and Research Coordination Division in the Prime Minister's department.

The NSS rightly points out that the community plays an important role in national security and that it's essential for government to engage with the Australian people on the threats we face and the 'role the wider community can play in responding to those threats'.

The Smith Review reached a similar finding; it judged that many current threats are cross-jurisdictional and that it's often the general community that is threatened. Smith found that the capabilities and capacities to take action for identifying, preparing for, responding to and recovering from incidents lie not just with governments, but also with the community.

All this is sound and sensible. Neither the federal or state governments nor the military[5] can be in all places at once to protect us against all threats: community resilience needs to be community-linked.

Indeed our homeland security policy should focus around the concept of *resilience* to provide a unifying mission for the many government bodies involved in protecting us from threats at home. And here resilience shouldn't just be understood as bouncing back; it's also about being *stronger* than before the crisis occurred. Resilience is a concept aligned with Australian values of independence and self-reliance.[6] An all-hazards approach to build resilience should become the predominant theme of our homeland security efforts.[7]

The NSS usefully points out that one of our great assets here is the strong tradition of volunteering in support of communities in times of emergency. Capacity building through volunteers provides a great potential approach to building community resilience. But we need greater efforts to attract and retain volunteers. How we reinvigorate and replace our ageing volunteer emergency workforce and get young people to step up is a key challenge. At the same time, more work needs to be undertaken on preparing people for what they will experience in a disaster and in the general area of first aid training for children and households.

Resilience 'lives' locally, so the importance of local government should not be overlooked. Australia has about 700 local government bodies. Their responsibilities go beyond the traditional functions of 'rates, roads and rubbish'. While the states have the primary responsibility for most emergencies, it's at the local level where responders will be first on the scene. High on the priority list for local bodies should be emergencies caused by more frequent and extreme weather events that are expected due to climate change. Local counter-disaster organisations will confront an increased frequency and volume of emergency response calls.

We should also be strengthening our healthcare preparedness and medical surge capacity. While the NSS notes the importance of community resilience for our overall national security, the specific role of our healthcare response systems isn't addressed. That's unfortunate: medical readiness for mass casualties, specialty life support systems, trauma and burn care needs urgent attention. National minimum standards for dealing with mass casualty disasters should be set. Our hospitals would then know what they are reasonably expected to be able to cope with. They could plan and resource appropriately. Setting standards would make clear the gap between what we are spending and what we need to spend.[8]

In addition to addressing health care priorities, we should also consider our preparedness to deal with a major agricultural disaster. In the last year two key reviews have drawn into question the adequacy of planning arrangements and training for handling significant biosecurity and cross border viral infection.[9] Health, agriculture, environmental and emergency management arrangements must be better integrated into a whole-of-government all-hazards approach.[10]

A key finding of the Smith Review was that we lack effective arrangements to deliver community warnings to provide clear and timely communication about emergent threats. A useful step was taken in October last year with the introduction of a more flexible counter-terrorism alert system to provide specific warnings for different types of industries and infrastructure in different regions.[11] However, further steps are needed to ensure that the public know in advance of a crisis how to prepare, respond and stay informed. Solutions such as telecommunications mass messaging and local radio need to be pursued vigorously.

The NSS states that the government is considering establishing a Crisis Coordination Centre to support government decision making. Such a centre should ensure that there are clear instructions to those in harms way and update the public with relevant information as the situation changes.

Develop a national counter-radicalisation strategy

The NSS correctly observes that undermining the influence of violent ideologies and preserving social cohesion is advanced through community engagement. It notes that just as *Neighbourhood Watch* programs promote security at a local level, all Australians can make a contribution to promoting security at a national level.

The Smith Review concluded that counter-terrorism was the most sensitive area of national security in terms of the impact it has on community relations. Smith therefore emphasised the importance for governments to work closely together in this area with the community, to be clear about their respective roles and the perceptions that government activities may generate.

A national counter-radicalisation strategy should now be developed that would enhance security whilst protecting civil liberties.[12] It should focus on the earliest stages of pre-radicalisation, when intervention strategies are at their most effective. Countering militant radicalisation on the web would be a key focus, devising strategies to challenge the recruitment process at the point of dissemination. An *Australian Muslim Communities National Security Forum* should be established to develop strategies for tackling extremism that may lead to acts of terrorism. It could play a crucial role in detecting those prone to pre-radicalisation via its direct access to the grass roots dynamics of local communities.

And we also need to invest in interdisciplinary research to plug gaps in our knowledge. We don't have a good picture of what is happening in some of our most vulnerable neighbourhoods. Centrally located knowledge, especially in developing suitable and appropriate counter-measures, would serve security agencies and our Muslim communities.[13]

Leverage federalism

The NSS points out that the states and territories are national security assets. State-based emergency response organisations protect the community at vulnerable times and 44,000 police officers in our eight police services respond to a spectrum of public safety and security challenges.

While the states have a primary role in responding to many of the threats we face, the Smith Review found that the jurisdictions viewed the Commonwealth's role in responding to all-hazards, apart from terrorism, with 'varying degrees of equivocation'. Frustration with 'the feds' is clearly very high.

Not surprisingly therefore, Smith recommended that there was scope for greater national collaboration in emergency management. He suggested that the new post of a National Security Adviser facilitate the Commonwealth's work with the jurisdictions here; it's clearly going to be important to leverage the collective knowledge and resources of all levels of government.

Federalism will guide the approach in responding to disasters of all kinds. As a first priority in this process there needs to be a real commitment by the Australian Government to ensure that the bulk of support provided by the Commonwealth for public preparedness, response and recovery efforts by the states and territories goes to those areas of greatest risk of major natural disaster or terrorist attack.

Develop a risk register

One of the most important outcomes of the NSS as it bears on homeland security is a commitment that the new National Security Adviser will work towards a coordinated budget process for national security, and advise on the best allocation of resources across portfolios to most effectively achieve the government's priorities. To achieve this objective the National Security Adviser will assist in the preparation of Australia's first national security budget.

This is eminently sensible and long overdue. It's damaging to Australia's overall security to divide one department's spending, such as Defence, from other Commonwealth funding of security measures. Securing Australia at home will involve tradeoffs within overall federal spending on security. As part of this process the Australian Government should develop a planning capability for national homeland security preparedness to guide resource allocation across the federal government and allocations to the states.

In developing Australia's national security budget one would expect that there would be an assessment of homeland security threats, an examination of the means to protect ourselves and what gaps exist, including budget allocations to federal agencies with resources directed to all-hazard planning and preparedness.

It's encouraging that NSS promises that the National Security Adviser will coordinate an evaluation of the performance against whole-of-government outcomes in light of the priorities set out in the NSS in order to inform resource allocation. This will be a critical exercise: it will ensure we don't over or under-invest in homeland security capabilities. The National Security Adviser will require a staff of dedicated analysts to undertake such evaluation exercises.

The NSS asserts explicitly that Australia must apply a *risk-based approach* to assessing, prioritising and resourcing our national security policy. A useful step here would be for the Australian Government to develop a national risk register (NRR), as has been undertaken by the UK government last year. The NRR is the first publicly available risk assessment from the British Government. It's meant to capture the range of emergency incidents that might have a major national impact.[14]

In the NRR incidents are categorised into accidents, such as industrial or transport; natural events, like floods and other natural hazards; and malicious attacks that includes terrorism. It examines cases in these categories and outlines appropriate responses, not just from government, but also from business, families, individuals and the wider community.

A similar Australian assessment would enable the public to evaluate relative risks realistically and allow governments and communities to deploy resources to the most likely threats. Of course a good risk framework is only useful if governments are willing to ultimately make the hard choices on security trade-offs.

Get down to business

The NSS notes that in some areas, up to 90% of our critical infrastructure is owned and operated by the private sector and that our economic wellbeing depends on our ability to protect national assets such as airports, ports, bridges, and water and power facilities from catastrophic failure. The NSS correctly judges that this requires working with the private sector to protect this infrastructure.

This partnership approach has been established over the past few years with mixed success. For example, a recent report on infrastructure protection by the Victorian Auditor-General found that forums for communicating with industry weren't fully operational and that three lead Victorian departments were not aware of which of their critical infrastructure was listed on the critical infrastructure register for their industry sectors. This inhibited their ability to work with owners/operators on recommended best practices.[15] All governments therefore need to refocus their cooperative efforts to build industry trust and successful public–private sector partnerships around ensuring the resilience of infrastructure essential for supporting our normal daily lives and that any dangerous facilities are protected against possible attack.

While the NSS recognises that the responsibility for infrastructure protection is shared between the government and the business community, there's no recognition that the nation's ageing critical infrastructure is itself a national vulnerability. Strengthening our infrastructure should be an important part of ensuring resilience and requires strong collaboration between governments and business.

Climate change is a very important consideration in terms of the impact that higher temperatures, rising sea levels and increased storm activities will have in developing the nation's roads, ports, railways and other vital infrastructure in future years.

Business will be pivotal in ensuring that safety and security measures are factored into the construction of new national infrastructure. There will certainly need to be more work done on how the costs are borne with respect to climate-proofing critical infrastructure, and how climate change should be factored in to funding infrastructure projects under the $20 billion *Building Australia* fund.

Business can often perform many disaster support roles more efficiently than government. It has the resources, technical expertise and planning capabilities. Our commercial supply chains can provide a wider range of goods and services on demand than governments can match. However, the role of business in Australian disaster response hasn't been fully thought through. Governments should incorporate private sector capabilities into their disaster response planning by developing public–private sector partnerships.[16]

We also need to better integrate our security industry into homeland security arrangements by providing a framework that would allow public and private sector customers access to a wider spectrum of advanced security capability and leverage leading edge security thinking from industry and the research community.

To allow the maximum number of customers' access to all those potentially providing relevant technologies and services, a 'national customer group' should be established that would bring together key Australian government agencies to develop and discuss broad capability requirements. They should interact with a security suppliers and professionals peak body. This would better integrate customers and sellers in our multi-billion dollar security market and enhance the ability of Australia to protect itself at all levels from all hazards.[17]

Re-focus efforts on protecting mass gatherings

Given the history of terrorist attacks on soft targets to produce mass casualties, the NSS is absolutely correct in pointing out the critical importance of protecting those people visiting our national icons and monuments and other places where large numbers of people gather. But the record here is very mixed. While there are examples of good practice in some states, there's really been a failure to get a nationally consistent approach to protecting mass gatherings.

This is surprising in many ways. Whereas critical infrastructure protection has been as much about building robustness from supply interruptions into sectors such as water, banking and telecommunications, mass gathering protection is fundamentally focused on counter-terrorism and public safety. We know that terrorists want to attack crowded places to produce mass casualties. And one trend in terrorist targeting is to increase the number of casualties for each attack.

As the vulnerability of mass gatherings is very high, the level of residual risk to places of mass gatherings such as sporting events and entertainment precincts is more often much higher than other infrastructure such as power stations, transport or water facilities. Despite the high level of residual risk to mass gatherings, issues such as aviation and maritime security have occupied authorities here much more since 9/11.[18] We have consistently under-invested in the area of mass gatherings protection and to date there's no real evidence that there has been a solid national effort to engage on these issues.

Compared to infrastructure protection, it's probably been the least amenable area to national leadership. Some jurisdictions have seen the problem simply as one of community policing and working with those responsible for occupational health & safety issues. Some states haven't welcomed Commonwealth involvement, so to date its been difficult for business to gain traction on these issues and get police and governments to really engage with venue owners and operators.

We need a nationally consistent approach when it comes to this issue, especially around best practice information sharing and pooling of knowledge between business and governments at all levels.

One useful model that could be adapted on an ongoing basis is the Business Liaison Centre that existed during the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting (AELM) in September 2007 in Sydney. The Business Liaison Centre, which held regular meetings with the AELM planning and operation groups, helped to make sure that the business sector in Sydney had effective access to frequent updates about APEC events and potential threats. This allowed them to minimise disruption to their operations while enhancing the security of the AELM by aligning the relevant Sydney business staff accreditation processes with those used by AELM.

Presently mass gatherings protection as an issue-area falls under the *Trusted Information Sharing Network for Critical Infrastructure Protection* (TISN) managed by the Attorney-General's department. That's not a good fit. The TISN is really about ensuring the continuity of supply of essential goods and services. Protecting mass gatherings is a different body of work; the partnership with business should be a key priority coordinated nationally by the Office of National Security in the Prime Minister's department.

Improve information sharing

Virtually every Commonwealth department has some responsibility for homeland security. However, Smith's review very wisely opted not to focus on drawing organisational boxes. Rather, Smith emphasised that those departments and agencies, which contribute to national security, be regarded as a community in order to enable the government to make strategic judgements across a wide range of hazards. He therefore placed the priority on the need for those departments and agencies concerned both at the national and jurisdictional levels to be well connected and networked, with organisational, technical and other barriers minimised.

In this context, the Smith Review found that there's a need for a closer relationship between the Australian Intelligence Community (AIC) agencies and the intelligence analysis units established within non-AIC agencies in response to newly emerging threats. Importantly, a key and disturbing finding of Smith's review was that overall there still exists legislative, technical and cultural barriers to information sharing within and between governments and the private sector.

Smith recommended that these barriers should be addressed by the National Security Adviser, supported by a new position of a National Security Chief Information Officer. These are worthwhile suggestions.

As a first priority, the new Chief Information Officer should spell out clearly a plan that outlines exactly what kind of homeland security information is expected from the states and private sector and what information they in turn can expect to receive.

Develop homeland security professional education

The NSS usefully points out that professional development is important to ensure that those working on national security have the relevant skills and a comprehensive knowledge of the national security enterprise.

Exactly the same principle applies with respect to those working on homeland security. Homeland security professionals should possess relevant skills and a sound understanding of the range of homeland security missions.

The government has tasked the National Security Adviser to establish an executive development program in national security, initially aimed at senior officials.

In developing the options for this professional program it will be important not to neglect those working on homeland security issues at federal, state, and local level and those in the private sector who own and operate critical infrastructure. It will be important to include participation of those groups tasked with responding to large interconnected infrastructure failures.

Key homeland security leaders can develop relationships to support homeland security as part of an overall national security professional program. Any professional development program for national security should include vital aspects of homeland security such as public health, emergency management, risk based analysis, business continuity, and infrastructure vulnerabilities.

Finally there's scope to develop stronger links between government and the universities on homeland security research and education programs.

Agencies with a strong interest in homeland security could exchange information with the peak body, Universities Australia, on research requirements and education issues. A national academic consortium to foster current interest in homeland security and to promote joint research, exchange information about academic programs and coordinate academic support for government agencies responsible for homeland security matters could also be established.

Endnotes

1   http://www.pm.gov.au/media/speech/2008/speech_0659.cfm
    The complete Smith Review has not been released.
2   A legal definition of national security is contained within the
    National Security Information (Criminal and Civil Proceedings) Act 2004.
    Under the Act, 'national security' is defined as 'Australia's defence, security, international relations or law enforcement interests'.
3   A major study on Australia's ability to respond and recover from catastrophic disasters was presented to the Augmented Australasian Police Ministers Council in April 2006. This report has not been released.
4   David Templeman and Anthony Bergin *Taking a punch: Building a more resilient Australia*, ASPI Strategic Insights, May 2008. A catastrophic event produces extensive casualties and loss of life, widespread damage, large numbers of displaced people, significant business failure, extreme relief and recovery costs that overwhelms our capacity to respond.
5   The Smith Review found that the Australian Defence Force and agencies of the Defence Department have built significant expertise and capability that can be used in emergency management and response and recommended that these contributions be sustained.
6   This was echoed in remarks by Prime Minister Rudd in his Australia Day address in Hobart on 22 January this year. He described Australia's convict history as 'harsh and bleak times', but pointed out that 'it says something about the resilience of Australians that we did it. We came through this; we built this great nation ….there is a strength, there is an individualism, there is a determination, there is a character about this country which is something of which we should be collectively proud.'
    http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2009/speech_0760.cfm
7   Templeman and Bergin, note four. To promote the concept of organisational resilience within the business community a group of corporate members of the Trusted Information Sharing Network for Critical Infrastructure Protection (TISN), managed by the Attorney-General's department has created the TISN Resilience Community of Interest.
8   Anthony Bergin and Raspal Khosa *Are we ready? Healthcare preparedness for catastrophic terrorism*, ASPI Special Report, April 2007.
9   On 12 June 2008 the government released the report *Equine influenza: The August 2007 outbreak in Australia,* by The Hon. Ian Callinan. On the 18 December 2008 the government released the independent Quarantine and Biosecurity Review Panel report, *One Biosecurity: a working partnership.* The panel was chaired by Mr Roger Beale.
10 See Carl Ungerer *An all-hazards approach to national security: Preparing for and responding to threats to Australian agriculture*, ASPI Policy Analysis, August 2008.
11 'New counter–terrorism alert system' *Media Release*, Robert McClelland Attorney-General, 30 September 2008. For comment see Anthony Bergin *Communicating risk: Revising Australia's counter-terrorism alert system*, ASPI Policy Analysis, October 2008.

[12] The Smith Review appeared rather diffident on this point. It simply noted that counter-radicalisation programs like those in the United Kingdom 'have their place'. Over the next three years the British Government will spend nearly $100 million to strengthen moderate Muslim community groups in their fight against extremist messages.

[13] Anthony Bergin 'Bringing brains to the terrorism struggle', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December 2008.

[14] http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/reports/national_risk_register.aspx

[15] *Preparedness to respond to terrorism incidents: Essential services and critical infrastructure*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 21 January 2009. It seemed to be the case that the reason why forums for communicating with industry weren't formed was because of the existence of forums under the Trusted Information Sharing Network under the federal Attorney-General's department.

[16] This point is developed in *All in a day's work: Business and Australian disaster management*, ASPI Special Report, December, 2008.

[17] See Anthony Bergin, John Azarias and Don Williams, *Advancing Australian homeland security: Leveraging the private sector,* ASPI Special Report, March 2008.

[18] This has in part been driven because of the need for Australia to conform to international standards, led by the United States.

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