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The Threat from Islamic Extremism – Can Governments Handle It?

By Des Moore

It is now widely recognised that, amongst those who are Muslims, a proportion accept the Islamic religion as an ideology that should be widely spread and, if necessary, by violent means. Importantly also, as one imam has put it “A Muslim has no nationality except his beliefs”. This is most obviously reflected in the violent actions taken and threatened at an international level by those connected to al-Qa’ida and its affiliates. But it is also reflected in destructive actions and attempts by individual Islamic extremists within various countries.

The propositions I put to you today are two. First, by contrast with the history of wars between countries, the biggest problem the world now faces is a new major threat to life, perhaps even survival, from groups or individuals who have extremist beliefs. Second, political and other leaders in western countries are falling well short of the response needed at the domestic level. Arguably, the world has moved into a new environment in which sections of Islam are seeking to overthrow western dominance by means that should produce a response at both international and domestic levels that extends to cultural as well as military levels.

Even at the domestic level, this is an enormous subject and it is possible to do no more than focus on particular aspects. I propose to discuss domestic terrorism in Australia but, because the problem and how it might be handled is international, I will also examine developments overseas and, as it is the principal target of Islamic extremists and the most important Christian country, the United States in particular.

The most important recent development in that country was the publication on 28 May by President Obama of a 51 page National Security Strategy which, although dealing with a wide range of security issues in the broadest sense, paid considerable attention to the threat from “homegrown terrorism” and how the Government intends to respond. Indeed, this is reportedly the first time so much attention has been given to the threat posed by the increasing number of US residents described as having been “radicalised” at home. It doubtless reflects a number of close escapes over the past year or so from potential extensive killings in the US.

Last year there was in fact a shooting of 13 by a US soldier of Muslim faith at a domestic military base. In February an Afghan who worked as an airport shuttle driver was caught before achieving his objective of undertaking a bombing in the New York subway system and, more recently, a Nigerian who had been trained by an al-Qa’ida group in Yemen only just failed to blow up a plane as it landed in the US. After that incident, and following subsequent discussions in London between NATO countries, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton commented that “increasingly, we are having to face—whether it’s the UK, the US or

Yemen—threats coming from beyond our borders that cannot be pinned on any place”. The attempt to blow up the plane also led to a major change in the publicly stated position of President Obama who, when he did eventually react, made a Bush-like statement that “we are at war with al-Qa’ida”. On 8 June it was reported that two US citizens who grew up in America were detained on charges of planning “the murder, kidnapping and maiming” of US citizens “at a place outside the US.”

An interesting development after the imprisonment of the Nigerian was that the authorities in Malaysia (which is a democracy having about 60 per cent Muslims) arrested ten terrorism suspects reportedly linked to him and also to an international terrorist group that included persons from Yemen, Syria, Nigeria and Jordan. This arrest, which was reported to be under the Internal Security Act allowing for indefinite detention without trial, demonstrates that the threat of extremism extends beyond predominantly Christian countries. Arguably, the Malaysian response to this threat may be tougher than in Western democracies.

An increased recognition of the risks in the US was also reflected in a February report in *The Age* that the US Director of Intelligence had indicated publicly that he is “highly certain” that al-Qa’ida or one of its associates will attempt a large-scale attack on American soil within the following six months.

Since 1990 there have reportedly been more than 20 terrorist plots or attacks in New York and the May 2010 strategy document itself refers to “several recent incidences of violent extremists in the United States who are committed to fighting here and abroad”. It describes this as underscoring “the threat to the United States and our interests posed by individuals radicalized at home”. While acknowledging that “we will not be able to deter or prevent every single threat”, it proposes increased action designed to identify and interdict threats, and to deny “hostile actors the ability to operate within our borders”.

This homegrown terrorism problem is not assessed as a separate security matter. Rather, the document states that “we are now moving beyond traditional distinctions between homeland and national security ... to a “determination to prevent terrorist attacks against the American people by fully coordinating the actions we take abroad with the actions and precautions that we take at home”. Particular attention is given to the threat from “the potential spread of nuclear weapons to extremists who may not be deterred from using them” and to the importance of action to “disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qa’ida and its affiliates” for both homeland and international security reasons.

The reference to extremists obtaining nuclear weapons follows the summit on Nuclear Security held by Obama on 13/14 April and attended by many international leaders. At that summit Obama stated that “the biggest single threat to US security – short term, medium term and long term – would be the possibility of a terrorist organisation obtaining a nuclear weapon”. The implications of this statement are profound but have been given remarkably little attention.

The implications can be highlighted by referring to comments made at a defence conference held by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in Canberra in 2007. There a US expert on nuclear proliferation, Robert L. Gallucci, pointed out that there is an increasing risk of a terrorist group obtaining and using a nuclear weapon without being detected. He was referring not only to one with the destructive power of the Hiroshima bomb but also to a more limited nuke sufficient to kill “only” 250,000 people. This is obviously relevant to Australia. It is worth quoting a relevant extract:

We have no defence against a nuclear weapon delivered by a terrorist group, because we could be sure that it will be delivered in an unconventional way. After we get finished worrying about all the containers, we can then start worrying about all the trucks, and then we can worry about the marinas and then we will rapidly conclude that we really cannot defend, as a strategist would say, by denial, or by preventing a nuclear weapon from being introduced into the United States, which leaves us only with deterrence. Deterrence, of course, creates the problem of knowing exactly who your attacker is, having an attacker who had some level of unacceptable damage, and anybody who presents to you the proposition that they value your death more than their life is not a realist.

After the publication of the US National Security Strategy last month, the adviser to President Obama on counter-terrorism, John Brennan, not only highlighted the concern about radicalised US residents but suggested that al-Qa'ida has adopted a new strategy of "seeking foot soldiers who might slip past our defences by defying the traditional profile of a terrorist". What Brennan seemed to have in mind is that the al-Qa'ida strategy now focuses on trying to persuade individual residents with sympathetic extremist inclinations to take damaging action locally either on their own or with a small group.

The increased attention by the US to the domestic terrorist threat sends an important warning signal to other countries as well as the American community. At the same time, however, an examination of the analysis and announced responses raises a serious question as to whether those planned are both sufficient and appropriate. It is of particular concern that the Obama administration seems reluctant to publicly equate terrorism with extremist Islamism. In his address Brennan made comments that suggest a deliberate policy of avoiding public criticism of Islam. For example, the Administration refuses to describe the enemy as "jihadists" or "Islamists" because, Brennan claims, jihad is a holy struggle and a legitimate tenet of Islam based on purifying one's community. This is simply nonsense – but worryingly so. Nor, Brennan postulates, is terrorism the enemy because "terrorism is but a tactic". Indeed, the strategy document itself argues that al-Qa'ida are simply killers with no religious authority and that "neither Islam nor any other religion condones the slaughter of innocents". These comments are not consistent with analyses of the interpretations by extremists of the religion.

My assessment is that a situation seems to have developed in the US in which, while the Obama administration supports the continuation of very extensive military activity to "dismantle and defeat" al-Qa'ida and its affiliates, it is refusing to recognise, at least publicly, that their activity is influenced by religious beliefs or texts. It is almost as if those threatening the US have underlying motives that are unmentionable. This is in turn reflected in the emphasis given by the Obama administration to the importance of diplomacy in dealing with countries which support and promote terrorist activity, such as Iran, and with international institutions.

That is also illustrated by the appointment by President Obama in January of Rashad Hussain as Special Envoy to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. Hussain is described as a Hafiz, that is, someone who has memorised the whole text of the Koran in Arabic. Hussain contributed to the drafting of President Obama's very worrying address to the Muslim world in June 2009 in Cairo entitled "A New Beginning". Somalian-born ex-Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali commented that in that speech Obama "denounced Islamic extremism but without once associating Islam with extremism". Her book *Infidel* vividly and courageously (particularly for a woman) illustrates the problem facing the USA (and hence the Western world) and her

article on the Cairo speech summed up the basic problem by pointing out, “It is not America that is at war with Islam. It is Islam that is at war with America.” Yet Obama said “America and Islam are not exclusive—they do not need to be in competition” and “America is not and never will be at war with Islam”. There are other concerns about Obama’s attitude towards Islam, including his policy on Guantanamo Bay prisoners. It is worth noting that it was about mid-2009 that Obama’s polling moved sharply downwards.

His appointment of a special envoy to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference has been welcomed by some as an attempt to establish a partnership with the Muslim world that might help change its views. But the OIC, the official spokesman of the Muslim world, opposes the recognition by the United Nations of a range of human rights and seeks to promulgate sharia as superior to any other declaration of rights as well as issuing fatwas requiring the application of sharia law. Hussain is on record as arguing that the USA should recognise “the benefit of strengthening the authoritative voices of mainstream Islam”. One can only suggest that it is one thing to establish closer contact with “mainstream” Islamic representatives but quite another to leave an implication that they have views and objectives that are acceptable, let alone need strengthening.

The approach adopted by Obama is far from being accepted in the US. A year or so ago Newt Gingrich, who is a former Speaker of the US House of Representatives and a possible Republican candidate in the next presidential election, expressed serious concern on CNN about the attitude adopted by the Obama Administration. Then, in early January Gingrich wrote to Republican Party supporters arguing that “in the Obama administration the rights of terrorists have been more important than protecting the lives of Americans. That must now change decisively.” It is worth mentioning one or two of Gingrich’s comments on CNN. They included the following.

I am really deeply worried. We have two grandchildren ... and I believe they are in greater danger of dying from enemy activities than we were in the Cold War. There are thousands of people across this planet who get up every morning actively seeking to destroy the United States. They are spreading their poison by sermons, by the internet, by a variety of recruiting devices.

... At what point do you have to say “enough”? When you’re lectured by the Saudis about being respectful when they do not allow any Jew or any Christian to practise their religion in Saudi Arabia, and we tolerate it. When do you draw a line?...

... We are simply not prepared today to be a serious country ... I wrote about terrorism and nuclear weapons in a book called Window of Opportunity in 1984, I gave speeches in the nineties on this ... We warned in March of 2001 about terrorist attacks in American cities...

I’ve been at this a long time. I am genuinely afraid that this political system will not react until we lose a city, and nobody in this country has thought about the threat to our civil liberties the morning after we decide it’s that dangerous and how rapidly we will impose ruthlessness on ourselves in that kind of a world.

I think those of you who care about civil liberties had better be thinking through how we win this war before the casualties get so great that the American people voluntarily give up a lot of those liberties.

Let us now consider very briefly the position in the UK. Given that country's experience with the London bombings and the many aggressive public statements by imams in the UK, the problems there with Islamist extremists have been more overt than in the USA. They well illustrate how serious the situation can become once the proportion of Muslims reaches even only 4 or 5 per cent. There now exists a de facto application of sharia law in some parts of the UK and not so long ago an imam expressed his "right" to conduct a street protest against British troops returning from Afghanistan (in Australia a forty-five-year-old Iranian-born immigrant was charged last year as a result of sending hate mail to the families of Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan).

In 2009 there were also considerable arrests in the UK and the Minister for Counter-Terrorism (who would have thought ten years ago there would ever be such a minister?) stated that there are now an estimated 2000 suspected *potential* terrorists in the UK. Two months ago the government also published a second paper on counter-terrorism (*Contest Two*) that adopted what appears to be some toughening in policy in that it included in the counter-terrorism strategy an emphasis on prevention. This is designed to stop the spread of Islamist ideology not by outlawing it but through education, counter-propaganda and disrupting the funding of Islamic extremist organisations. This is supported by a government think tank, Quilliam, which is staffed by reformed Muslim extremist and works to debunk radical propaganda and extremist views. It has recently identified problems with running British prisons where extremists encourage radicalisation.

However, as in the US there is a question as to whether sufficient attention is being given to the need to publicly address the sources of extremist Islamism and the implications for society. There is little doubt that the softly, softly approach is due in part to the voting power that is now exercised by the large Muslim population in the UK and in other countries, even including Australia.

Although the country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia, has arrested (with some killed) more than 500 alleged terrorists since the Bali bombings, prison sentences are often short and there have been repeat offences. The head of the main counter-terrorist agency recently stated that the "ideology is still spreading" and consideration is now being given to making advocacy of militancy an offence. There has also been a report that some Indonesian people smugglers have contacts with al-Qa'ida. France appears to have experienced little or no domestic terrorism, but reports suggest there is growing concern about the failure of the 6 million Muslims to assimilate. And although Turkey is nominally a secular country with democratic institutions, Islamic extremism is increasing and the present government seems to be making a deliberate attempt to encourage anti-Christian/Jewish attitudes. In Holland, the debate in the forthcoming elections reveals that a major issue is the increasing proportion of Muslims and the advocacy by outspoken Dutch politician Geert Wilders of stopping immigration from Muslim countries will, according to polls, lead to his party doubling their seats. A major problem facing concerned Dutch politicians is reflected in the fact that, in the four largest cities in Holland, "Mohammed" or a version of it has become the most popular name for a baby boy. Little wonder, perhaps, that the Dutch are pulling out of Afghanistan.

Turning to Australia, a recent article published in *The Australian* (29 May) by an expert analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Anthony Bergin, implies that the Rudd government is perhaps even more behind the ball game than the US and UK governments in responding to potential domestic terrorist threats. In an article headed "Deliver Us from Extremist Evil" Bergin comments as follows on the measures announced in the Budget

“It has been a long time coming, and represents only a modest beginning. The Rudd government’s third budget has committed \$9.7 million over four years for measures that will counter violent Islamist extremism and terrorism through programs aimed at shaping public attitudes, undermining terrorist propaganda and supporting and diverting those at risk away from violent extremism”.

The budget media release by the Attorney-General’s department, entitled “Countering Violent Extremism in our Community”, announces new measures focussing on, inter alia, “identifying and diverting people at risk of violent extremism”, “supporting rehabilitation and de-radicalisation programs” and improving responses to violent extremist messages”. However, no mention is made in the release of Islam or Muslims let alone Islamic extremism and one could be excused for wondering who is behind the threat of violent extremism. Indeed, while these new measures complement existing initiatives, the list suggests only minimal action, particularly as they include expenditure on *international* terrorist activities. The weak conclusion in the media release is that, apart from law enforcement, the emphasis is on strategies to “enhance social cohesion and resilience that lessen the appeal of extremist ideologies that fuel terrorism”.

Of course, there is more on-going counter-terrorist activity than these measures through intelligence and security agencies such as ASIO and the Australian Federal Police. ASIO’s annual report for 2009 provides a perspective on how it is attempting to deal with the problem – and its potential extent. That report indicated that 2009 had involved it in the most intense activity since 2005, with the identification of a new terrorist cell and the numbers convicted of terrorist offences since 2006 rising to twenty-one (which after convictions I will mention shortly will now be twenty-six). ASIO also stated its first priority as being to prevent a terrorist attack on Australia and warned that “terrorism continues to be a persistent threat to Australia and Australian interests ... the possibility of an attack in Australia remains” and is “expected to be a destabilising force for the foreseeable future”. ASIO described the defeat of al-Qa’ida in Pakistan and Afghanistan as vital, noted that overseas terrorist groups had threatened attacks on Australia, and pointed out that the Let group (which was responsible for the Mumbai deaths) included an Australian citizen (Lodhi) and a Frenchman (Brigitte) who had been sent to Australia to assist him, with both now convicted. It also noted that terrorism could involve chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

The growing extent of the problem identified by ASIO is reflected in the increase in its staffing of 13 per cent to 1700 in 2009 and the rise in spending of 19 per cent to \$362 million. ASIO issued 2738 reports or assessments for government (including 1092 threat assessments) and undertook about 60,000 visa security and 65,000 counter-terrorism checks.

Leaving aside the expansion of existing agencies, the Rudd government seems to have taken only very limited action additional to the Howard Government to address the domestic threat from Islamic terrorism. In his National Security Statement of December 2008 Prime Minister Rudd did say that Australia has been “explicitly and publicly mentioned as an ‘enemy’ by Islamist extremists” and that “terrorism is likely to endure as a serious ongoing threat”. But that was the only reference to Islamism in a fourteen-page address to Parliament and his undertaking then to release a counter-terrorism White Paper “next year” was not met until two months ago. Even then the limiting in that paper of the “tougher” (biometric) visa checks to only ten countries suggests a less than complete counter-terrorism policy.

The White Paper does acknowledge that there is a serious terrorist threat, outlines various protective measures being taken, and also identifies the main threat as coming from “extremists who follow a distorted and militant interpretation of Islam”. But it refers only

very briefly (in one paragraph) to why the Muslim religion has an inherently dangerous influence on its adherents and gives no consideration to what response might be made at the cultural level.

In preparing the White Paper, the Rudd government is reported to have sought advice from Professor Abdullah Saeed, who occupies at Melbourne University the Sultan of Oman Endowed Chair in Arab and Islamic Studies. By contrast, no such advice was sought from Dr Mark Durie, who has written widely on the reasons why we should be seriously concerned about the objectives of Islam and who has argued that Professor Saeed downplays major differences between Islamic and Christian cultures and also falsely claims that Islamist terrorism has no foothold among Australian Muslims. It is unclear whether Melbourne University's decision to employ Professor Saeed simply reflects the endower's views and generosity or is an acceptance of a view held in some parts of academia that Islamic life has attractive features that we should learn.

Of course, as with the Bible there are differences in the interpretation of the Koran, and about the extent to which sharia law should apply, with a good deal depending on the imams' interpretations. However, as Anglican Vicar, Dr Mark Durie makes clear in his recent book *The Third Choice*, a significant proportion of Muslims accept Islam as an ideology that should be established, if necessary by violence, in other countries under sharia law applying to a wide range of social behaviour, extinguishing all other religions and subordinating the role of women. For believers, religious beliefs come first and the laws of the state come second and are over-ruled when there is a conflict (by contrast, Jewish law accepts the authority of the state). In his review of Durie's book (Newsweek February 20, 2010), Dr Mervyn Bendle of James Cook University points out that the title of the book "comes from the fundamental Islamic principle that non-Muslims have three choices in a *Sharia*-dominated world: embrace Islam, be killed or enslaved, or live as subservient and tax-paying *dhimmis*". Dr Bendle also brings out the analysis by Durie of the attitudes adopted by many leading western politicians, academics and even Christian leaders, suggesting an alarming brushing aside of this principle and ready acceptance of the idea that the Muslim religion shares a common humanitarianism with Christianity.

In considering the Rudd Government's approach it is also relevant that in August 2009 the Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, released a Discussion Paper on National Security Legislation for public consultation and comment by end September of that year. Despite the claim that the paper contains proposed amendments "which implement the Government's comprehensive response" to four reviews of counter-terrorism and national security legislation dating back to July 2006, there has been no follow-up and (presumably) the paper remains open for public comment. I have not examined the paper but it is of concern that the Attorney-General originally stated that he seeks amendments to existing legislation "to achieve an appropriate balance" between protecting security and ensuring that the legislation "will be exercised in a just and accountable way". Such an amendment would likely increase the difficulty, already considerable, of securing convictions from the many judges who are reluctant or feel unable to make decisions that impinge on what they regard as human rights. Paul Sheehan's book *Girls Like You* provides a vivid and disturbing illustration of judicial recalcitrance.

In his statement McClelland made no reference to Islamic terrorism but he proposed one amendment that would create an offence of "inciting violence against an individual on the basis of race, religion, nationality, national origin or political opinion". This is a two-edged sword. It could allow action to be taken against radical Muslims, but my concern is that it

would increase the difficulty of making critical comments about the Muslim religion or even, possibly, about Islamic extremists. By contrast, although the Howard government was equally nervous about publicly commenting on extremist Islamism, it did implement many counter-terrorism measures, including the passage of twenty-five pieces of legislation dealing with terrorist acts, principally designed to create offences and procedures *before* a terrorist act is committed.

An illustration of the depth of extremism in Australia can be found in the seventy-seven-page judgment on February 15 by New South Wales Supreme Court Justice Anthony Whealy when sentencing five men to maximum prison terms of between seventeen and twenty-eight years for conspiring to prepare for a terrorist attack (*Regina v Elomar & Ors*). This should be compulsory reading for anyone concerned about Australian security. Justice Whealy opined that those convicted showed no remorse, would wear their prison terms as “a badge of honour” and there was no indication the leader would ever renounce his extremist views. These convictions were imposed even though there was no evidence that specific targets had been identified, no actual acts of terrorism had been committed and no weapons could be found. The prosecution claimed that the terror cell had a weapons stock equivalent to that used in November 2008 by the Mumbai terrorists when they killed 173 and wounded over 300. The police, however, have been unable to find the weapons obtained by the Australian terror cell.

It is encouraging that heavy sentencing such as this has occurred based only on evidence of conspiring; but it also confirms the highly dangerous threat to Australia’s domestic security. This threat was heightened by the response from the Muslim community. The sister of one of those convicted featured briefly on ABC television as she protested outside the court; the president of the Islamic Friendship Association of Australia, Keysar Trad, claimed to detest terrorism but argued the five had been victimised; and the well-known imam and critic of Australian mores, Sheikh Hilali, hosted a large meeting at the nation’s largest mosque in Lakemba where ten imams and twenty community leaders issued a statement describing the sentencing as a “travesty of justice” while a group of young men outside the mosque shouted that ASIO are “dogs”.

As far as I am aware there has since been no substantive comment on these convictions by any Australian political leader. My perspective is that, despite terrorist convictions now amounting to twenty-six, the thwarting of numerous terrorist attacks and the active pursuit of Islamist objectives by a significant section of the Muslim community, the response by political, religious and business leaders has fallen well short of what is needed—indeed in some respects it hardly exists. This is particularly true of the apparent inability of our leaders to proclaim the virtues of Western culture and the problems with Muslim culture.

Because the threat from Islamist extremism is worldwide, and Australia is involved in military and intelligence activity overseas in combating that threat, it is important that major Western societies defend and retain their Judeo-Christian culture and democratic systems of government. It is by no means clear that this is assured, and a continued deterioration overseas of overt support for our culture would have adverse effects for Australia.

It is ironic too that laws in Western countries often provide protection against the expression of views that can be portrayed as anti-Islamic. These laws have been used, for example, in Canada by anti-discrimination tribunals against two commentators there who expressed critical opinions about Muslims.

In Australia a complaint was lodged by an Omar Hassan with the Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Commission, and accepted by it, against Radio 4BC commentator Michael Smith, for making public statements that allegedly vilified, incited hatred and discriminated against Muslims. Hassan wrote a fifteen-page letter to 4BC that described Australia as a racist country and criticised various forms of behaviour, particularly by Australian women. Smith could be required by the Commission to attend a three-hour mediation session with Hassan.

This is not the first of such anti-discrimination measures taken in Australia. Under laws passed by the Victorian Labor government two Christian pastors were punished for warning their flock about the Koran's praise of jihad; and 2GB commentator Alan Jones was ordered last year by the New South Wales Administrative Tribunal to pay \$10,000 in damages and deliver an on-air apology to Muslim leader Keysar Trad for vilifying Muslim youth. During the recent debate over whether the burka should be allowed to be worn in public, the Victorian Premier John Brumby exhibited a worrying reaction by peremptorily dismissing any such suggestion.

At first glance the fact that public critics of Islam face constraints in Australia might be thought strange, given that the Muslim proportion of our population is small. The religious affiliations recorded in the 2006 census have about 2 per cent of the population, or less than 400,000, as Muslim and over 60 per cent as Christian, with about 30 per cent having no religion or not stated. However, most overseas polling shows that a substantial proportion of Muslims approve of violent action in support of Islam, including the 9/11 episode in the USA, the London train bombings and fighting against military forces of the USA and the West generally in the Middle East. If only 10 per cent of Australian Muslims come in that grouping, it would mean 40,000 activists of one kind or another.

What more can or should be done to reduce the risk of such activism here? One thing we should do is to make ourselves the toughest target possible for extremists in the hope of deterring potential terrorists. We should involve a tightening of our immigration policy and tougher penalties for terrorists. But increased penalties will not deter those who are prepared to be martyrs. There is also a need to effect a major increase in the promotion of our culture and an accompanying denigration of extremist interpretations of Islam. Governments, both federal and state, should effect a major upgrade in the priority given to counter-terrorist policy, and make this a bi-partisan effort. There should also be an attempt to persuade friendly overseas countries, particularly the US and the UK, to adopt a similar approach.

Measures might include the creation of a position of Minister for Counter-Terrorism, whose tasks would include promoting the virtues of our culture, criticising extremist interpretations of Islamic culture and the publicising of polling of attitudes adopted by Muslims generally. Legal changes might include outlawing the advocacy of terrorist activity, exempting criticisms of religious texts from anti-discrimination legislation, and generally making it easier for police and intelligence services to track, detain and prosecute possible terrorists. Human rights are important but we face a situation in which a group of people vows publicly to destroy the right to live of fellow citizens, including fellow citizens of the same faith. That demands a change in legal and judicial thinking.

A "tightening" of immigration policy should include a deliberate attempt to improve the quality of migrants, including their understanding and acceptance of western culture, and an indication that immigration policy will be concerned less about the total than the possible adverse composition and security implications; a requirement that would-be migrants sign a formal statement of acceptance of the separation of church and state, the equality of treatment

of men and women and the rejection of certain cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation (such a statement could include specific acceptance of deportation in the event the undertakings were not fulfilled); an upgrading of staff at overseas posts involved in interviews and intelligence assessments of migrant applicants and a greater involvement of such staff in interviews of refugees at UNHCR camps; the institution of a collection of data on the religion of immigrants (the only guide to that now is the dominant religion of the country from which the immigrant comes, which suggests that about 30 per cent of net arrivals come from countries where the main religion is Islam).

Some will argue that we should also do more to persuade Muslims who are here to integrate and to make them feel part of the community. But my perception is that this is unlikely to produce any significant results. When in 2007 he was spokesman for the Islamic Council of Victoria, Waleed Aly indicated that Muslims should not be pressured to assimilate: “life will make you integrate”, he claimed. A reading of Justice Whealy’s judgment can only confirm that there is a worrying number of extremist Islamists who are never going to integrate. A similar outcome is likely for moves to persuade Muslim leaders to speak openly against Islamists within their communities.

I believe the foregoing justifies the view that extremist Islamism, or what John Howard described at a recent function as “Islamic fascism”, is our greatest threat. We are living on a precipice and could quickly slide over the edge.

We Australians who are first and foremost Australians must do things for ourselves. For we have good reasons not to be able to expect sufficient of the Muslims who are here not only to integrate but also to persuade their religious compatriots to accept that they too should become true Australians rather than striving to force Australians to become like them.

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