



Community involvement in national security An essential but difficult task

Key points

- The most important element in further enhancing national security is engaging the community.
- Engaging the community in both preventing and preparing for an attack, and responding and recovering will deliver enormous benefits for national security.
- Engagement should not solely be directed at the Muslim community but include elements of the entire Australian community including individuals, religious groups, businesses, interest groups, industry and professional associations and academia.
- Engagement with the broad business sector is improving with activities such as the Business - Government Advisory Group on National Security.
- The new engagement model should be built on a foundation of consultation, and be supported by two way communication, trust, working from the same information base and adequate resources.
- The main challenges preventing community engagement will be sustaining the increased security posture of the community and crafting appropriate and targeted engagement strategies.
- There are numerous practical tools for community engagement and most of the government's experience with engagement is held by the 'soft' social policy areas of education, health and community services rather than the 'hard' areas of defence, intelligence and security.

National Security Practice Notes is a publication series that covers topical issues which are of critical importance to building national and domestic security capability. They are aimed at practitioners in the intelligence, security, law enforcement, emergency services and related national security areas.

In the letter to the heads of Australia's States and Territories inviting them to attend the Counter-Terrorism Summit later this month, the Prime Minister listed five potential agenda items. Probably the most important is the last one which was "enhancing community understanding of, and engagement in, the national counter-terrorism arrangements".

This does not mean that the other items - counter-terrorism legal frameworks, surface transport security, identity security and the prevention of any advocacy of terrorism - are not important. However, improvements in these areas will not deliver the same benefit as engaging the community in both preventing and preparing for an attack, and responding and recovering from one. Nor does community engagement mean working solely with the Muslim community.

What it required is varying levels of engagement with all elements of the community including individuals, families, religious groups, interest or lobby groups, business and professional associations and academia.

To date, the Australian Government's community engagement activities have been limited to:

- a broad-brush national security information campaign
- restricted membership government-business committees, and
- selective discussions with influential business, ethnic and community leaders.



National security information campaign

The national security information campaign started in 2002 and has had two phases. The first was the 'Let's Look Out For Australia' campaign, best known for its 'Be alert, not alarmed' slogan. It aimed to put the level of national security alert and terrorist issues into a rational perspective, to encourage people to be aware of the threat level, to understand that there was a necessity for everyone to be vigilant, and that

there was no need to change the routine of Australian's daily lives. The current phase is called the 'Help Protect Australia From Terrorism' campaign. Its aim is to remind Australians to remain vigilant and report possible signs of terrorism to the National Security Hotline.

Government-business committees

Restricted membership government-business committees include groups such as those under the Trusted Information Sharing Network (TISN), the Business - Government Advisory Group on National Security, and various departmental sub-committees. Of these, the TISN network is the most extensive. Its 13 groups mostly focus on critical infrastructure sectors, such as electricity and telecommunications, bringing together representatives from more than 130 organisations to work on medium to long-term planning issues to mitigate vulnerabilities in physical and information infrastructure.

Selective discussion

Selective discussion with influential business, ethnic and community leaders is the third element of current engagement with the community. The purpose of these meetings ranges from encouraging businesses to implement business continuity planning and security risk assessments to building trust between the Islamic leaders and government with the aim of encouraging them to report suspicious members of their community.

While these activities are important and have yielded valuable results, it is time to move to a much more sophisticated approach to engaging the community.

The purpose of such engagement is to create a culture of security responsibility that permeates throughout the community in much the same way as environmental responsibility does. Developing an ethos of personal and professional responsibility for security, in contrast to considering that it is always someone else's job, is the only way to ensure that an effective security environment is created at the least cost.

The Australian Homeland Security Research Centre undertakes independent, evidence-based analysis of domestic security issues.



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This does not mean everyone has to become obsessed with security, put up razor-wire topped fences and become perpetually suspicious of others. Rather it means being conscious of security risks whenever a decision is made. It means always bearing in mind the security and anti-crime principles of deter, detect, respond and recover, just as most people today try to apply the environmental principles of reduce, reuse and recycle wherever practical.

An essential precondition in creating this new security-conscious culture is to replace the government's current community engagement process, which can be characterised as a one-way communication process based on centralised command and control. Such an approach, which was appropriate in the immediate aftermath of an attack where the focus had to be on improving government-led emergency management planning, intelligence enhancements and counter-terrorism legislation, has led to an environment where the government tells the community what it wants and provides no simple way by which the community can contribute more to the security agenda.

A new community engagement approach

So what would the new form of community engagement look like?

Most probably, it would consist of empowering individuals and groups, be built on a foundation of consultation, and be supported by two way communication, trust, working from the same information base and adequate resources.

Empowerment

Effective engagement depends on empowering people with roles and responsibilities and the resources to actually undertake them. This requires tailoring initiatives based on the capabilities and enthusiasm of individual groups. Some groups will require little more than guidance while others will require considerable education and support.

For example, private security personnel would welcome enormously the opportunity to play a larger

role in boosting national security. This would not involve giving them more power but instead simply facilitating regular meetings between law enforcement agencies and security managers to update each other on local crime trends, suspicious behaviour and evolving security threats. Individual personnel may also be trained to provide a bridge between their organisation and emergency services and police in the event of an incident. Given that there are 8 private security officers for every one law enforcement officer, this sector could play a far more important role in domestic security than they do today.

Another group which has the ability to contribute much is CBD building superintendents.

Another group which has the ability to contribute much is CBD building superintendents. These people are the day-to-day managers of multi-tenanted buildings and are often the first point of contact for the security issues of their tenants. This group could be encouraged to meet regularly with police and colleagues in their precincts to work on issues such as area CCTV coverage, suggestions for area security improvements with city planners, and the development of protocols allowing rapid transmission of suspicious incidents to and from police.

Consultation

Consultation is central to building engagement between government and the community. It leads to vastly improved information on ways to meet security objectives, provides individuals with an opportunity to influence decisions on policies and programs, and importantly strengthens support for security measures. It will also deliver outcomes which will have a lasting impact as distinct from advertising which only has a short-term effect.

The form of consultation will invariably be top-down rather than bottom-up due to the sensitive nature of national security. This means that a formal, coordinated approach is essential and it must be



planned effectively from the start so as to engage all the relevant elements of the community in the form that is most appropriate to them.

Effective ways to do this have included creating advisory committees or taskforces of external representatives who are appointed by ministers and have direct access to them, and the engagement of third parties who would manage consultations with relevant groups and individuals, and provide independent reports to ministers.

Not only is effort required to bring both parties up to the same level of knowledge that is appropriate for the particular purpose in hand, but effort is also required to address the numerous widely held misconceptions about national security.

Examples of such consultative groups include the Community Consultation Team which produced the report Australian Perspective on Defence in 2000, the Advisory Council on the Government's National Illicit Drugs Strategy, and the Business - Government Advisory Group on National Security (see breakout). The former, led by the Hon Andrew Peacock, was unique in that it involved a serious and determined effort to find out what the Australia public thought about national security. Its consultation included holding 28 public meetings which were attended by over 2000 people, numerous meetings with State governments, local government organisations and public interest groups, and reviewing over 1000 submissions. The National Illicit Drugs Strategy Council was a radical departure from the traditional approach of developing illicit drugs policy as it involved the Advisory Council reporting to the Prime Minister, having access to the other ministers involved, and using employees from various agencies to assist the Council but not as direct members. The Council assisted in both policy development and

monitoring of implementation.

Two-way communication

A condition for effective engagement is two-way communication where information can be passed in both directions between government and other parties. This involves more than just sharing the control of a meeting or listing points in the minutes raised by the non-government party. It means listening seriously to and considering their views in the decision making process. In some instances, it may even involve bringing trusted stakeholders into the actual confidential policy development and decision making policy process.

Trust

Trust of the government is essential in engaging the community. In the national security space, trust can be rapidly lost if decisions are seen to be politically driven. Issues such as the Keelty affair earlier this year and the delinking of Iraq to Australia as a terrorist target have the potential to undermine trust. Consequently, decisions have to be seen as in the interest of the country as distinct from the government. One way of doing this is to

Business - Government Advisory Group on National Security

The Business - Government Advisory Group on National Security, which had its first meeting in December 2004, provides a mechanism by which industry and business leaders can engage directly with government on national security issues. It is made of senior private sector company CEOs and managing directors.

It provides a high-level forum to consider ways that government and industry can work together to advance counter-terrorism and critical infrastructure protection agendas. This group is chaired by the Attorney-General, with members being drawn from the ranks of senior business leaders and senior government officials. The chairs of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Critical Infrastructure Advisory Council are also members of the advisory group.

Not only will the group provide business with the opportunity to advise the Government of security matters of concern, it will also allow the Government to discuss proposed new security measures with business.



ensure that the government's spokespeople are seen by the public as trustworthy. The former head of ASIO and the Australian Federal Police Commissioner are such people.

Working from the same information base

Effective engagement will only occur when all parties work from the same information base. This means each party knows not only the roles and responsibilities of the others, but also understands their culture, drivers and priorities. This is not as simple as it may seem as every organisation and group, whether it is a government agency, community group or infrastructure organisation, has quite different agendas and ways of making decisions.

Not only is effort required to bring both parties up to the same level of knowledge that is appropriate for the particular purpose in hand, but effort is also

required to address the numerous widely held misconceptions about national security. Without doing this, these incorrect beliefs can undermine trust, motivation and empowerment. The main misconceptions relate to risk management and intelligence and these will be discussed in the next *National Security Practice Note*.

Adequate resourcing

Effective engagement requires resourcing. This means more than just providing air tickets to attend meetings. It means providing resources to develop education programs, facilitate the spread of information, test roles and responsibilities, and possibly contributing towards the capital cost of essential equipment and systems. If resourcing is not sufficient, then those involved in the engagement may feel that the government does not consider their contribution worthwhile.

The toolbox for engagement

There are numerous practical tools for community engagement which have been developed over many years in other areas of government. The most important is flexibility – flexibility to adapt and innovate for the particular situation.

The tools start with the least intrusive, such as education and persuasion, to more proactive, such as recommended practices and incentives, and end with very intrusive measures such as regulation and legislation.

Below is a list of the least intrusive measures.

1. Prepare a single National Security Strategy which defines the roles and responsibilities of all organisations and the community in national security. While there are several documents, such as *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade White Paper (2003)*; *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2003*; *National Critical Infrastructure Strategy (2004)* and *Protecting Australia Against Terrorism (2004)*, there is no all-encompassing document which explains the entire picture and especially, the roles of the community and its groups and how they can contribute besides reporting possible signs of terrorism.
2. Produce a regular scorecard of the nation's state of security. Such a scorecard is a powerful way of focussing attention on strategic issues while measuring performance. This approach is also useful in ensuring that important issues remain in focus and are not undermined by urgent issues, defined by the media or political imperatives. An example of an effective scorecard is the Australian State of the Environment Report which is jointly developed by governments, industry, landholders and community groups.
3. Allocate an Outpost Officer to selected and key associations to facilitate their members adoption of appropriate security posture. Outpost Officers are used by the Immigration and Education Departments to change the behaviour of key stakeholders, as well as being a key point of contact to answer questions and provide resources to the association's constituents. They also provide an on-the-ground feedback information source which is trusted by the Government agency, as well as providing a policy liaison function.
4. Deliver regular speeches and briefings from government officials to groups. This will play a part in maintaining engagement, enthusiasm and information currency of the groups. Such addresses are quite common in parts of the national security area, such as in the Critical Information Protection Branch, Emergency Management Australia and ASIO but they could be expanded significantly.



5. Create a position within each area with the specific role of engagement of stakeholders. For example, the Australian Research Council funded group, the Research Network for a Secure Australia (RNSA), has created an Outreach Manager with the specific role of bringing together counter-terrorism user groups, academics and industry to share information on capability requirements and technology possibilities.
6. Develop security information campaigns which incorporate a call for action aimed at specific groups. For example, the Queensland's government HOT¹ program is aimed at transport staff and the proposed "If you see something, say something" slogan is aimed at the public transport passenger, and both provide actionable information which will resonate more than generic slogans.
7. Develop an induction course on national security which both selected leaders of the community and members of national security agencies attend. The purpose would be to get an understanding of both the national security policies and programs but also the culture, drivers and decision making processes of the agencies and stakeholders. An elaborate version of such a course in the Defence areas has been run for many years under the title of the Defence and Industry Study Course. It features a program of seminars and visits to enhance mutual understanding between Defence and the community as well as creating networks that can be used in times of rapid mobilisation.
8. Request professional associations to integrate security into their members' approaches of practice and having regular meetings with senior office bearers. For example, asking the association of urban planners to encourage their members to incorporate security considerations into their approval processes (such as being more open to the removal of parking from immediately in front of a building), or considering the viability of introducing Security Impact Statements for new developments in much the same way as Environmental Impact Statements are now required.
9. Bring industry and community security experts into government so as to develop solutions which are practical and would be supported by the community and business. These people would not be contractors but volunteers. This approach was used successfully during wartime mobilisation to increase material production where government did not have the experience of practical planning, resourcing and operations. These were not paid bureaucrats but people who accepted this work on a nominal salary of a dollar a day (hence their name 'dollar-a-day men'). This approach has also been used post-September 11, 2001 in the United States. For example, the Department of Transport brought volunteers from American industry to help design an aviation security system. For instance, executives from Disney Corporation, Federal Express, and Marriott helped with issues like metrics, process mapping, and customer

This issue has already been a major factor in limiting engagement, particularly in the private sector. There is increasing concern among organisations which are already being engaged about how the national security decisions affecting them are being made and their cost implications. For example, telecommunications carriers are becoming concerned about discussions on shutting down mobile phone networks as a way to stop the detonation of remotely triggered explosive devices. [This issue has arisen again following the possible detonation of the London bombs by mobile phone calls.] Australia's telecommunication providers are concerned about who will pay for the cost of setting up such a shutdown process, as well as the loss of income and reputation when the networks are shut down, particularly if the emergency turns out to be a false alarm.

Challenges

There are numerous challenges in building this new form of engagement with the community. The two most important ones are ensuring that the increased security posture of the community is sustained and how to craft appropriate engagement approaches.

Sustaining the increased security posture of the community

A continual challenge to engagement is to make it sustainable. Typically, engagement lasts as long as individuals consider that the problem remains, that they can do something about it, and that it may happen to them.

The longer the time between terrorist attacks, whether actual or thwarted, that individuals can relate to, such as those in Bali and in London, the more



difficult it is to sustain engagement. This is not only a problem for the Australian community but also for intelligence and law enforcement agencies. For example, by mid 2002 after the capturing of many Al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan, the disrupting of their networks, and the exploitation of intelligence from the aborted attack on the US facilities in Singapore (of which the Australian High Commission was a secondary target), there was quiet confidence in the Australian intelligence community that the threat had been significantly reduced. Following the Bali attack in October 2002, this confidence was shattered as the intelligence community realised they had missed a paradigm shift in which monitored groups (such as Abu Sayaf and Laskar Jihad) had changed their targeting from domestic to international targets. The confidence was further shaken by the revelation that Jack Roche had targeted US and Israeli interests in Australia and ASIO knew nothing of it. A similar shattering of confidence has occurred recently in the UK with the intelligence agencies confident that they had destroyed all the local terrorist networks before to the July 2005 bombings. Given that terrorist attacks can be a long time apart and governments triumph their counter-terrorist successes, continual reinforcement is required to maintain awareness in the community that the threat remains real and imminent.

Countering the belief that “it won’t happen to me” will also be challenging. This belief stems partly from a misconception that the most likely targets will be high profile symbolic targets, such as the Opera House, or economic targets, like off-shore oil platforms, so if you are not near one of these targets, then you are not at risk. But as has become readily apparent, the targets of terrorist attacks are those which will cause mass casualties, and these could be shopping strips, city street malls, cinemas, or bus interchanges.

Crafting appropriate engagement approaches

Most sections of the national security community (with the notable exception of State police forces) have had little to do with engaging the community in the past. And the experience they do have is mostly

based on legalistic and frequently combative contracting arrangements and this approach is wholly unsuitable for community engagement.

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However other sections of government have the required experience, notably the health, education and community services agencies. In addition, there is also considerable expertise on community engagement outside government such as among State and local governments, and business and professional associations.

Consequently, there needs to be a transfer of skills, knowledge and experience from the soft policy areas to the hard policy areas of defence, law enforcement, legal and intelligence. The alternative is to build up the experience organically but due to the urgency of the problem, there is insufficient time for the luxury of learning by failure.

At the individual level, the engagement of others requires new interpersonal, communicating and consulting skills which are not based on the command and control culture. Again importing of new skills from other sections of government and the community may be preferable to large scale re-training.



Conclusion

Effective engagement of the community in national security will be what makes the most difference to both Australia's actual security and the population's sense of security. It will also be the hardest thing for the national security agencies to achieve as it is an area where government's directive power has little use. Consequently, it may be tempting for Governments to focus on other areas of counter-terrorism importance, such as developing new counter-terrorism legislation or providing more resources to the intelligence and law enforcement agencies, as this will deliver quick wins. However, community engagement is far more important and if done effectively, will have much greater impact over the longer term. To deliver effective and efficient engagement will require a much more sophisticated and targeted approach than has been seen to date, and will depend on bringing in new skills and approaches from other areas of government and the community.

Engagement is not just about government giving messages to the community. Rather it is about the public genuinely being part of policy making, decision making and implementation processes.

Footnotes

- 1 HOT is a mnemonic for Hidden, Obviously suspicious, and Typical not what is found. It is an aid for staff to work out if something or person deserves further security attention.

About the author

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