



A Speech by

The Minister for Foreign Affairs
The Hon Alexander Downer MP

To the

International Institute for Strategic Studies

“International Security – Making Progress in
Uncertain Times”

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Introduction

Thank you Dr Gary Samore, director of studies for the International Institute of Strategic Studies for the invitation to address you today.

The IISS is rightly highly regarded for its important contributions to the debate on international security and strategic issues.

I am of course particularly pleased to be addressing the IISS here in the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom is a major partner for Australia on foreign policy and security issues.

We both recognise that the threats posed by international terrorism, WMD proliferation and weak and failing states make these uncertain times.

We understand that security is not guaranteed by geography.

We also understand that ignoring such threats is a delusion, and inaction is negligence.

The reality of the world we live in – the reality of the 21st century post-September 11 – demands a different response from us all, whether we live in Europe or the Asia Pacific.

The fact is that if terrorists and proliferators can collaborate or abuse weak states to bring destruction and conduct crimes...

...then we – national governments, regional groupings and multilateral system with all our resources – must be able to cooperate to bring peace and security instead.

In the words of Winston Churchill: "It is no use saying 'we are doing our best'. You have got to succeed in doing what is necessary."

The reality is that Australia and the United Kingdom are prepared to take action – for us, practical outcomes that enhance our security are what matter most.

Today I would like to outline the actions we are taking - and why we are taking them – in the Middle East and closer to Australia, in South East Asia and in the South Pacific to protect and enhance global security.

We face immense challenges in our endeavour. Terrorists and their support networks exploit economic, political and social weakness. If we do not succeed, or if we simply walk away from the challenge and turn our backs on those who seek our support, the growth of international terror networks and failed states will haunt us for generations to come.

Iraq: The Path Ahead

Given its importance for the Middle East – a region which borders Europe - and for security more broadly, it is only fitting that I commence my remarks by talking about Iraq - why we acted and why we must get it right.

The coalition's purpose was to rid Iraq and the world of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction, following his serial flouting of UN Security Council resolutions, his persistent refusal to comply with the demands of the international community.

The recent finding by Polish troops in Iraq of undeclared warheads, further confirms that we were right to act. These should have been declared to the United Nations – and were not.

In achieving our aim, we have also helped the Iraqi people set a course for a better future.

The 28 June handover of power to Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and his government was a historic moment for Iraq and the world.

With the resumption of sovereignty, Iraqis have the opportunity to build a democratic and prosperous nation.

The Iraqi people are already exercising effective authority over Iraq's institutions.

All ministries have been transferred to Iraqi leadership over the last few months as administrative capacity has developed.

And the Coalition has made steady gains in the delivery of essential services to the Iraqi people – in a climate of sabotage.

The Australian Government is proud to have played its part in these efforts.

We remain committed to the noble and just cause of a free, democratic and prosperous Iraq.

Iraqis will now take the lead in shaping their country's future. But we should not fool ourselves that this will be easy.

Terrorists have placed Iraq at the forefront of their evil campaign against the West and mainstream Islam.

And former regime supporters continue to frustrate the ambitions of ordinary Iraqis to live in freedom.

They share the same methods: the violence and horror of indiscriminate terror attacks.

At the same time, Iraq's new leadership has a narrow window of opportunity to win the confidence and support of Iraqis.

It must ensure an inclusive political process, in which all Iraqis feel they have a stake and that their views are represented through debate rather than violence.

We trust that the forthcoming Iraqi national political conference will assist in this endeavour.

Iraqis will take the lead in creating their future.

But they can't do it alone.

International support remains vital to build the capacity of the Iraqi security forces.

Australia and the United Kingdom are each contributing to this task.

We both recognise that to cut and run from Iraq now would be the height of irresponsibility.

To cut and run would not just be a snub to the requests of the interim Government. It would deliver terrorists a victory with terrible consequences for us all. Not only would it turn Iraq into a terrorist haven. Those terrorists would be emboldened to strike out more and more.

The Australian Government recognises the need to stay the course. The peace, stability and prosperity of the Middle East are in all our interests.

The international effort, however, must broaden its commitment.

In this regard, United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1546, passed unanimously just over a month ago, is a most welcome break from the past. It marked the moment the international community bound together to fully endorse Iraq's political transition and mandated the multinational force to continue supporting Iraq's rehabilitation.

In doing so, it recognised it must put past differences aside to assist the Iraqis create – in the words of Iraqi President Ghazi Al Yawar – ‘a free and democratic Iraq, and...a country that is a source of peace and stability for the whole world.’

The resolution embodies the commitment of the international community to assist Iraq. It makes any unilateral decision to withdraw not only a withdrawal of support for Iraqis struggling to create their future...

...it shows too a reluctance to support the decision of the international community expressed in the resolution.

While resolutions are important in building the framework, what really counts is effort on the ground.

UN efforts will continue to be crucial, particularly its advice on the national political conference in July, drafting of a new constitution and helping Iraqis prepare for elections in 2005.

Other members of the international community must also now come forward to support the Iraqi Government with the practical assistance and resources the UN needs to fulfil its mandate to support Iraq's political transition and rehabilitation.

...and to build on the sound progress made by the Iraqis and the Coalition Provisional Authority prior to 28 June.

Challenges Beyond Iraq

Let me turn to the challenges beyond Iraq.

As we have learned only too well in the death and destruction of New York, Bali, Madrid, Riyadh and Istanbul, the networks supporting and enabling terrorist activity are not confined to the location in which a bomb or an assassination takes place.

These networks operate across borders, across regions; they take advantage of weak controls wherever they find them; their finances and logistics can not be interrupted and destroyed by one nation or one regional grouping operating in isolation.

In response, there has been increased momentum world-wide for cooperation on counter-terrorism – with a particular focus on law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

We have already seen results. Over 3400 Al Qaida operatives and associates have been detained or killed since September 11, eroding its leadership.

These outcomes have added to multilateral efforts to outlaw terrorist groups and combat terrorist financing.

But terrorist attacks in Spain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, demonstrate the resolve of Al Qaida and its kind to wage war – whatever the cost for innocent civilians - not only against the west but also against mainstream Islam.

And in the Asia Pacific region, Jemaah Islamiyah and other terrorist groups are not yet defeated. They continue to recruit, plan and execute attacks. For instance, it is estimated that over 300 people have died in southern Thailand this year as the result of ongoing terrorist activity.

There is no question we must remain steadfast in our practical cooperation...continuing to stop attacks and detain suspects.

But we must also increase our efforts to fight terrorism on the battle-ground of ideas.

This is of crucial importance to the war against terrorism

We must deny any legitimacy to terrorists seeking to exploit Islamic idealism.

We know the vast majority of Muslims world-wide have no interest in Taliban-style oppression being offered by Al Qaida, JI or their ilk.

We need to encourage mainstream Muslims to defend their own best interests – as some have been doing – by denouncing and countering terrorism in all its forms.

As part of our efforts to enhance international cooperation and understanding, my Indonesian counterpart, Hassan Wirajuda, and I last week agreed at the ASEAN Regional Forum in Jakarta to establish an inter-faith dialogue involving religious leaders from Australia, Indonesia and the wider region with the aim of developing networks among different religions and fostering a greater awareness of other belief systems in the region.

I also met key Islamic thinkers and political leaders in Jakarta to engage them on their concerns. I was impressed by their strong desire to understand the West better, and their willingness to assist others to understand moderate Islamic thinking.

Ladies and gentlemen

Australia will this month release a White Paper on Terrorism – as a contribution to the global efforts to fight terrorism on the battle ground of ideas...

...to clearly describe the nature of terrorist threats we face...

...and to outline what we see as the best means of addressing terrorist threats – at home, regionally and internationally.

The White Paper will point to some of the ways in which we have found success on the regional front...

...through our bilateral counter-terrorism arrangements, which underpin working-level cooperation and capacity-building with nine regional partners...

...and through the recent regional counter terrorism meeting I hosted with my Indonesian counterpart to bring high-level focus to the challenges.

A major outcome of that meeting was a joint announcement with Indonesia to establish the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation.

This centre builds on the excellent cooperation between Australia's and Indonesia's police forces in the aftermath of the Bali bombing. It will boost the capacity within the region to fight terrorism and other transnational crime.

The centre was officially opened last Saturday, and has already attracted strong international support.

While the centre represents a new regional initiative, existing regional architecture also offers a means to counter terrorism.

The Five Power Defence Arrangements, an alliance of 33 years between Australia, the UK, Singapore, Malaysia and New Zealand, is holding counter-terrorism related exercises for the first time...

...focusing initially on the crucial issue of maritime security...

...and with Indonesia as an official observer.

The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum has now become important for discussion and cooperation on security with an active Committee on Counter-Terrorism focused on core problems such as maritime and transport security.

And the work of the ASEAN Regional Forum's Intersessional Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime has laid a basis for cooperation in border, maritime and transport security.

From Australia's perspective, the ARF remains the most inclusive forum on security issues in the Asia-pacific....

...bringing together the major strategic players from the region, the Americas and Europe to discuss issues of mutual strategic concern.

Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction

With terrorists seeking to acquire WMD, the threat posed by WMD proliferation is now more acute than ever.

Keeping WMD out of the hands international terrorists is one of the main security challenges of our age.

But we are making some progress towards better, tighter control of WMD, their delivery systems, and their related materials and technology.

The unanimous adoption of UNSC resolution 1540 on 28 April is important for improved international cooperation to counter the WMD proliferation threat.

It demonstrates the important role of the Security Council in forging an international consensus to prevent terrorists and other non-state actors from acquiring WMD...

...with all states now required to implement effective domestic non-proliferation controls on WMD-related items.

Measures like the Proliferation Security Initiative are providing important practical support to the commitment embodied in the Security Council resolution, seeking to stop the flow of WMD materials and technology.

And interest in and application of the PSI approach continues to grow.

Recently Russia became the 15th PSI core participant and over 60 countries attended a global PSI meeting celebrating the first anniversary of the initiative.

Public and private diplomacy, pressure and persuasion are also playing a crucial role in current counter-proliferation efforts.

The revelations of the proliferation network run by Pakistan's AQ Khan and of Libya's past WMD procurement are proving valuable tools in efforts to stem the illicit trade in WMD technologies and materials.

With increased funding for its watchdog nuclear safeguards role – and solid support from the international community – the International Atomic Energy Agency is putting countries of concern increasingly under the spotlight.

Libya's historic decision to renounce WMD will bring it due rewards...

...and Iran is now feeling the pressure to fully address the strong concerns of the international community.

In the Asia Pacific region, the six party talks initiative – being hosted by China, with assistance from its neighbours, the United States and Russia – remains the only viable way forward to address North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Here Australia has also been playing a role, through our diplomatic relations with the North and in urging regional countries to maintain pressure.

Once Pyongyang has met the requirements of the international community for transparent and permanent dismantling of its nuclear programs, we want to see North Korea more fully integrated into the international community...

...with all the security and economic benefits that will bring for North Korea, its people and for the region.

Ladies and gentlemen

In the post September 11 world we have come to understand better the risks failed and failing states pose for regional and global security.

Afghanistan's hosting of the Al Qaida network was a stark lesson for us all on the dangers that can emerge from some failed states.

And unending civil war, poverty and weak governance in the 1990s also created an attractive environment for Al Qaida operations from Sudan and Somalia.

These events remind us that we must take a practical, activist approach to ensure potential incubators of future threats – weak states – are pulled back from the precipice and given a sustainable footing to face the future with confidence and security.

Countries active in the international arena have a responsibility to promote good governance and encourage the development of states capable of

dealing with transnational crimes and denying safe haven or safe passage to perpetrators.

There are of course also sound development reasons for doing so – with good governance and the rule of law giving business people and investors confidence to go about their work and advancing the interests of all the members of a community.

Australia has identified a need to address these in our own region.

We are working closely with Indonesia and the Philippines on a range of governance measures.

And we are also playing a leading role in efforts to address the risks posed by state and institutional weakness in the Pacific.

The most prominent example of this has been the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) – an ongoing initiative developed with regional partners to restore law and order and to bring sustainable governance reform to that country.

Australia is also keen to help Papua New Guinea to strengthen its governance. Last week in Port Moresby, I signed an Enhanced Cooperation Program with Papua New Guinea to allow for substantial Australian police, financial and legal assistance to reduce crime and improve governance.

Our work with the Solomon Islands, with Papua New Guinea, as well as a new agreement on assistance to Nauru, mark a specific and significant shift in our dealings with the South Pacific.

We are now prepared to get more directly involved, in cases where we believe this will have a positive impact.

Our experience in the Solomon Islands context reassures us that this strategy is soundly-based...

...and we will continue this approach in cooperation with international partners – from the region and Europe alike.

Conclusion

These continue to be uncertain times for us all.

But in the face of the continuing challenges of terrorism, WMD proliferation and weak and failing states, better cooperation by all states, at all levels, remains an essential goal.

After all, terrorists and proliferators will use any and all means available to them...

...they are prepared to be flexible, to adapt to new technologies and to cross many borders to achieve their violent and destructive objectives.

In response to this, we – the international community – must show greater deftness and more flexibility...

...recognising that threats do not respect borders.

We must use the most practical means to achieve results...

...and avoid getting stuck or delayed by processes which neither add value nor bring results.

The realities of the 21st century and the nature of our adversaries mean we must have this ambition...

...and bring to it a sharp resolve at all times.

It is in this spirit that Australia, a country located in the Asia Pacific but with interests and objectives that span the globe, will continue to play its role on international peace and security matters...

...through ever greater cooperation with friends and allies world-wide.
