‘The Rise of Terrorism’

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I’ve been asked to speak to you today about ‘the rise of terrorism’, which I’ve taken, for our purpose, to mean the rise of Islamist terrorism, which is usually what we mean when we talk about terrorism these days.

Before I go on I would like to get some definitions straight - I think this is important in order to have a precise discussion. The words ‘terrorist’ and ‘terrorism’ have become such a part of the lexicon that we tend to use them willy-nilly, without being precise about what we mean. When I use the word ‘terrorist’, I don’t mean a bad guy with a beard who kills innocent people for no reason.

The definition of terrorism, which is more or less agreed on by the experts, is this: (slide) - ‘deliberately and violently targeting civilians for political purposes’. I have taken it from British academic Louise Richardson, who wrote an excellent book, ‘What Terrorists Want’, which I can highly recommend.

The word ‘terrorism’ is not a pejorative. It’s a statement of fact about a modus operandi which has been deliberately chosen for maximum effect. For the purpose of the definition, it matters not whether we agree

with the terrorists' objectives. As we know terrorists have always claimed to be freedom fighters.

Another word that needs defining is 'Islamist'. (slide) People talk a lot about 'Islamic terrorism' or 'Muslim terrorists', which is problematic because it implies, a) that it's about religion, which it's not; and b) that there is something inherently Islamic about their act, which there's also not. I prefer to use the term 'Islamist', which means: 'someone who believes that Islam is not only a religion but also a political system, and that modern Muslims must return to the roots of their religion and unite politically.' This is important, because it reminds us that the terrorism wave that we're witnessing is not principally about religion; it's about politics.

Having set out these definitions, I'm not going to give you an academic or scholarly overview. I'm going to give you a journalist's view – a personal account, based on the past eight years I've spent covering Islamic extremism and terrorism, as a television reporter with the ABC's 4 Corners, a newspaper writer with The Australian and the author of two books on the subject.

My first book was 'In the Shadow of swords' (slide) which is about the origins and evolution of the Indonesian militant group Jemaah Islamiyah, JI, and its execution of the Bali bombings in October 2002, which killed 202 people including 88 Australians. It was that event that really put terrorism on the radar for Australia. Until then I think we felt somehow protected or immune from it, but not any longer.

My second book, published last year, was The Mother of Mohammed (slide), which is a very different book. It's classified under 'biography' in many bookshops, but I prefer to think of it as simply an amazing life story. It's the story of Rabiah Hutchinson, an Australian woman who

joined the global jihadist movement and ultimately became a member of the al Qaeda inner circle in Afghanistan in the leadup to September 11 2002. It's an extraordinary story, and I was drawn to it because I wanted to understand how an Australian woman – just like me in many respects – could become part of the international jihadist movement, of which terrorism is such a core feature.

The emergence of the global Islamist movement – led and inspired in recent years by this man, Osama bin Laden (slide), although it dates back to well before his time - has been the most far-reaching political phenomenon of this current generation. It has re-shaped the world order after World War 2 and the Cold War. It has forced us to re-think the role of nation states, which have been the key elements of the world's political geography since post-colonial times. It is very much a product of globalization. Osama bin Laden is the world's first global terrorist. He is arguably the world's first global leader, although what he's achieved through that is open to question.

Covering the rise of terrorism has been very much a personal journey for me, and I thought I would tell you a little bit about that journey. (slide) In 2002, I was a reporter with the ABC's 4 Corners program, a role in which I continued until the end of last year when I left the ABC to focus on writing.

In about the middle of that year we set out to do a story about a little known militant group which had emerged in recent months in Singapore and Indonesia. Remember this was in the year after the September 11 attacks on the US; terrorism was the big story – for a while the only story. The Singaporean authorities had uncovered a plot by a local terrorist cell, linked to al Qaeda, to bomb a series of Western targets in Singapore, including the Australian embassy there. The group was

identified as ‘Jemaah Islamiyah’ and its leader was an obscure Indonesian cleric, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir.

Initially I was sceptical of these reports coming out of Singapore. Singapore is in many ways a police state, although quite a benevolent one as police states go, and has been known to resort to many measures to quash political dissent, including – as many states do – labeling its opponents as ‘terrorists’. Another reason for skepticism was the group’s supposed name ‘Jemaah Islamiyah’, which simply means ‘Islamic community’. It seemed to tar all Muslims with the terrorism brush. Incidentally, this was also a reason why the Indonesian government and people were so slow to recognize the group’s existence and the threat it posed.

So in October 2002 we set out to do a story on this mysterious group ‘JI’. We were in Malaysia on our way to Indonesia, when I got a phone call from 4 Corners’ associate producer to say an explosion had gone off in Bali. At that stage the casualty toll was unknown and it was still thought it might have been a gas tank that exploded. I felt convinced JI was behind it, which of course turned out to be true, so we headed as soon as possible to Bali.

We arrived in Bali on the evening of October 13, the night after the bombing, and went straight to Kuta Beach, the location of the Sari Club and Paddy’s Bar. (slide) I remember very clearly tramping down the street late at night. We had to leave our car behind and carry our camera gear because the streets were closed off. It was deadly quiet except for the crunch of broken glass underfoot. There was smashed glass everywhere - huge panes and shards of it, broken windows for hundreds of metres around.

When we got to the site it was still deathly quiet. I had expected there would be a rescue operation underway, with sirens wailing, bulldozers moving the rubble, and ambulance crews removing people from underneath it. But there was no movement at all. The nightclubs – made mostly of thatch and corrugated iron – had been so flimsy they'd simply been flattened, making the task of removing the bodies easy.

All that was left was the smoking, blackened timber skeletons of the buildings. And a terrible stench.

After that we drove to the Sanglah Hospital, which by contrast, was in a state of mayhem. (slide) There were people everywhere – friends and family members searching for their missing loved ones. Notes and photographs of people who were missing had been plastered all over the walls, relatives pleading for information about them. There were bodies lined up along the corridors covered in white sheets. In one room there was a pile of severed limbs. In the wards, people with horrible burns were being wheeled out for transportation to the Denpasar airport where a fleet of Australian Hercules warplanes was ferrying them for treatment in Australian hospitals.

It was all very disturbing as you can imagine. But the most chilling thing of all was an event that I witnessed a few days later, when we flew to Solo in Central Java, hoping to interview Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, whose group JI was the main suspect in the bombings. (slide)

It was a Friday when we got to Solo, and Ba'asyir was due to deliver the Friday afternoon sermon in the local mosque, so we went along and filmed it. It was all in Indonesian and Arabic of course, but we could pick up the odd word – such as 'jihad', 'terroris' and 'kafr', which is Arabic for non-believer. Ba'asyir also spat out the occasional phrase in English, perhaps for the benefit of the journalists and camera crews

outside, such as ‘God bless Osama bin Laden’. It was clearly a tirade against the West, but it was only later when we had the sermon translated, that his words became clear.

Here’s what Ba’asyisr said:

‘God has divided humanity into two parts – namely the followers of God, and those who follow Satan. The party of God and the party of Satan. God’s group and Satan’s group. God’s group are those who follow Islam, those who are prepared to follow his laws and struggle for the implementation of sharia law… Meanwhile what is meant by Satan’s group are those people who oppose God’s law (and) throw obstacles in the path of the implementation of God’s law.’

Ba’asyir’s supporters in the congregation murmured their agreement as he continued:

‘We would rather die than follow that which you worship. We reject all of your beliefs, we reject all of your ideologies, we reject all of your teachings on social issues, economics or beliefs.’ And here’s the finale: ‘Between you and us there will forever be a ravine of hate, and we will be enemies until you follow God’s law.’ (slide)

‘Between you and us there will forever be a ravine of hate’.

It was really that line that set me on the journey I’ve been on for the past eight years; a journey to understand, and hopefully help others to understand, how the world has come to this. What is this ravine of hate? And how have we found ourselves on the other side of it?

I’m going to give you a potted account of the Bali bombings of 2002, because it was the most impactful terrorist event for Australians, an event all Australians can relate to, and also because they encapsulate the

rise of terrorism, where it came from and how it has re-shaped our world.

These are the Bali bombers, or at least three of them; three brothers - Muklas, Amrozi and Ali Imron. (slide)

Amrozi will be familar to you. (slide) He's the one that we in the media dubbed 'the smiling assassin' because he always wore this big cheesy grin. This shot was taken just seconds after he was convicted and sentenced to death in 2003, when his reaction was to turn around and gave big thumbs-up to the court. Amrozi, who's not very smart, was the gofer of the bombing cell. He said later that the feeling he had after the bombs went off was just like how you feel when you finally get the girl you've been chasing.

Amrozi's elder brother Muklas was the cell's spiritual leader. (slide) He looks quite mad in this shot but he was in fact a serious, scholarly young man, an Islamic teacher, though obviously a fanatic.

Amrozi's younger brother Ali Imron (slide) was not a fanatic; he was more or less just following his big brothers. Ali Imron played a crucial role. He drove the bomb-car laden with explosives to a spot around the corner from the Sari Club, and briefed the two suicide bombers who drove it to its final destination and flicked the switches on the bombs.

I was always fascinated by these brothers. What would cause three young men from one family to carry out such a terrible act, supposedly in the name of their religion? Their story is a good case study in microcosm of the evolution of Islamist terrorism.

The brothers come from a small village called Tenggulun (slide) in eastern Java: population about 2000 and three mosques. Most of the people are farmers and quite poor.

The brothers' family was relatively fortunate. This is their home, which I visited with a 4 Corners crew in 2003; it's quite comfortable by rural Indonesian standards. Their father, a man called Nur Hasyim, was the village leader for 30 years. He was a respected authority and a disciplinarian. There were thirteen children, seven boys.

The boys had a conservative Islamic upbringing. In an earlier talk I referred to it as a 'strict' Islamic upbringing, but I don't think that's quite correct. I think it's more precise to say that Islam was a way of life for them. They went to an Islamic school - everyone went to Islamic schools, pretty much, in rural Indonesia, because there were no other schools to go to – and they lived their lives by Islam.

Their great-grandfather had set up the first Islamic school in the village. We know from Muklas that he was a follower of the Wahhabi school of Islam, a particularly puritanical and austere teaching of Islam which originated in Saudi Arabia. According to Muklas he had made the haj pilgrimage to Mecca seven times, and each time brought back with him the latest teachings from Saudi Arabia. As a result, the brothers were brought up on this very literal and conservative Middle Eastern influenced brand of Islam, which is at odds with the more easygoing, pluralistic Islamic hybrid that has traditionally been the norm in Indonesia.

Another very important factor is that Nur Hasyim, the brothers' father, was a veteran of Indonesia's bloody war of independence against the Dutch in the 1940s, which ended with the creation of the Indonesian republic in 1949. (slide) This was profoundly important for Muklas and his brothers. Muklas later related the story of how his father had witnessed his own brother being shot dead by Dutch soldiers.

And Muklas said (slide): "It was these kinds of stories that inspired me and my younger brothers to be mujahideen".

That quote says a great deal about how Muklas and his cohorts – the men in JI, the Bali bombers – see the war that they believe they're fighting. It's a war for Islam. They see themselves not as terrorists but as 'mujahideen' - holy warriors - and they see this battle as just the latest bout in a campaign that's been going on for more than half a century.

The battle, as they see it, did not begin with the Bali bombings. It began back in the colonial era, when Indonesians were fighting for independence from the Dutch. For many of them it was a battle waged in the name of Islam.

When Indonesia *won* its independence, there was a large rump who believed the new republic should be an Islamic state. Remember that 90% of the population are Muslims. It's the largest Muslim population in the world. Islamic groups had fought for independence and in the first elections they won 40% of the vote. When Indonesia's founding president Sukarno rejected the idea of an Islamic state and instead chose to make Indonesia a secular democracy, the Islamists felt it was a travesty and a betrayal, and they never forgave it.

The immediate upshot of this was that one of the leading Islamists of the time – a charismatic former military commander named Kartosuwiryo - rebelled and established his own Islamic State of Indonesia.

Kartosuwiryo preached to his followers (slide): "We must eliminate all infidels and atheism until they are annihilated and the God-granted state is established in Indonesia, or (we must) die as martyrs in a holy war." This was in 1949. As you can see it was much the same language that Abu Bakar Ba'asyir would be using more than fifty years later.

Kartosuwiryo's Islamic state of Indonesia, as it was called, survived for 13 years. It had its own army, police force and elements of a civil administration. It covered much of West Java and later spread to other parts of Indonesia.

Kartosuwiryo called his territory – 'Dar Ul Islam' – the Abode of Islam. This comes from an ancient Islamic concept which sees the world divided in two: Dar Ul Islam, or 'the abode of Islam', where Islamic rule is established; and Dar Ul Harb, 'the abode of war', where Islam is still being fought for.

20,000 people were killed in this insurgency, which only ended when Kartosuwiryo was captured & executed in 1962, and his rebellion was crushed. The concept of 'Darul Islam' was crushed as well – or so the Indonesian authorities thought. In fact it was not – it survived and later flourished underground, and the dream of restoring the Islamic state lived on for generations of young Indonesians.

The brothers – Muklas, Amrozi & Ali Imron – would have grown up on the much-embellished folklore of the Islamic state of Indonesia, the tales of the bravado and martyrdom of Kartosuwiryo, who was rather like a 'Ned Kelly' figure for Indonesian Muslims, and the glories of fighting and dying for Islam.

The enemy changed over the years - from the Dutch to Sukarno, and later the dictator Suharto – but the battle was the same, a battle for Islam. Later, after Suharto, it became a battle against the Western forces who they believed had corrupted Indonesia and prevented it becoming an Islamic state.

I think these brothers were always destined to join that struggle. Amrozi told an interviewer: "My father wanted his children to be warriors". And becoming 'warriors', as they saw it, must have been a very empowering choice. For three boys in a remote, rural village – to see themselves as part of an historic and time-honored struggle; it had to be better than ploughing a paddy field for the rest of your life.

So in the case of the three brothers, the emergence of JI, and the Bali bombings, the history of Darul Islam and the struggle for an Islamic state in Indonesia is absolutely crucial.

I want to pause and say something briefly here about this notion of ‘an Islamic state’.

I think when we here in Australia and elsewhere in the West hear the words ‘Islamic state’ or ‘sharia law’, we immediately envisage women being stoned to death and thieves having their hands cut off. But there is much, much more to Islamic law than these draconian aspects of the *hudud* or criminal laws. And we need to understand it because we need to understand why the prospect of Islamic law has become such a beacon of hope for millions of Muslims around the world, including women.

It’s not because they all want to wear burqas or be prevented from going to school or work. It’s because for millions of Muslims the idea of an Islamic state represents a Utopian ideal of a perfect world, in which God’s law rules, and the fickle, unjust fiats of corrupt human leaders hold no sway. In such a world there would be perfect harmony, respect and equality. And there would be no need for draconian punishments because no-one would steal or commit adultery.

(If you want to delve further into this you should read some of the work of Sayid Qutb, an Egyptian intellectual and ideologue in the 1950s and ‘60s, whose writings underpinned the Islamist movement.)

Muslims hark back to the golden years of the Islamic civilization when the caliphate, as they call it, stretched for more than 7000 kilometres across Asia and Europe. It imported gold and slaves from Africa and exported inventions like Arabic numerals to the West. It was at the forefront of science, medicine and the arts.

Here’s a description from one Islamic history, somewhat gilded you might think:

‘In the Islamic lands, not only Muslims but also Christians and Jews enjoyed the good life. They dressed in fine clothing, had fine houses in splendid cities serviced by paved streets, running water and sewers, and dined on spice delicacies served on Chiense porcelains. Seated on luxurious carpets, these sophisticated city dwellers debated such subjects as the nature of God, the intricacies of Greek philosophy or the latest Indian mathematics. Muslims considered the Golden Age God’s reward to mankind for spreading his faith and his speech over the world.’

So it is this – a return to these glory days – that many Muslims envisage, and not the Taliban’s Afghanistan, when they wish for an Islamic state.

But back to the three brothers.

In 1979 Muklas was sent to an Islamic boarding school in Solo, Central Java (slide), which had been established by two clerics, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir and his mentor and colleague, Abdullah Sungkar.

1979 was a very important year in the history of the Islamist movement. (slide) It was the year of the Iranian revolution, when an Islamist government was swept to power on a wave of popular support, an event that galvanized Islamists all over the world. It was also the year of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when Muslim warriors from around the globe rallied to fight the Russians, in what’s become widely known as ‘the first jihad’. So it was a time when young Muslim men all over the world were coming forth to fight in the name of Islam against invasion, occupation and oppression. And they had a model of what could be achieved: the new Islamic state in Iran.

It was also an important time in Indonesia’s political history. President Suharto had been in power for twelve years of increasingly tyrannical rule. There were numerous crackdowns in which Muslim activists were arrested and jailed, essentially for their political beliefs. Amnesty International called them prisoners of conscience. Abu Bakar Ba’asyir and Abdullah Sunkar had been imprisoned for campaigning peacefully

for an Islamic state, having taken up the cause of Indonesia's martyred hero, Kartosuwiryo. They were known as courageous dissidents fighting a dictator.

So it was in this heady political atmosphere that young Muklas became a student at Ba'asyir's boarding school in 1979. It was not long after this that Ba'asyir and Sungkar formed JI and started sending young recruits to Afghanistan to train as 'mujahideen'. Muklas was among the first to volunteeer.

Afghanistan was perhaps the most crucial stop in Muklas's journey. (slide) Likewise for many thousands of young Muslim men around the world. Afghanistan was the crucible of the global jihadist movement.

Muklas was sent for three years of military training in a boot camp run by one of the Afghan warlords, Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf. A patron and financier of this camp was Osama bin Laden, who at the time was the little known 17th son of a Saudi construction tycoon, who was using his father's money to help finance the Afghan war against the Soviets. Later bin Laden would become an icon of the Islamist struggle. He was revered by the mujahideen because he had given up a life of great luxury to fight in the trenches in the name of Islam. Muklas said of bin Laden: 'he is a real leader, he is one human being that I very much adore in this life.'

In Afghanistan, Muklas found himself among like-minded Muslim fighters, or 'holy warriors' as they called themselves, from all over the world - the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, the Middle East, north Africa, the Balkans – who felt they were united in one mighty struggle.

This was bin Laden's great achievement - and I use the word great to mean 'historic' or 'world changing' – during the first Afghanistan conflict and in the years after it: to persuade Muklas and thousands of young men like him that their separate causes were all part of the same global holy struggle.

It’s important to remember that this was a revolution and they, in their own eyes, were revolutionaries.

And of course when the war ended with the defeat of the mighty Soviet army, this was proof to them that there was no struggle they couldn’t win. And so the rise of terrorism began (slide) leading to the attacks of September 11 2001 and the Bali bombings in 2002.

In the aftermath of Bali, Ali Imron was the only one of the bombers to express remorse. He said later: ‘After I became a fugitive I looked back at the history of the Prophet Muhammad and our Muslim predecessors, and I realised there was no such kind of jihad. It shouldn’t be a bloodbath, not like that. Those people at the Sari Club – they weren’t soldiers, prepared to go to war and therefore prepared to die… So I realised what I did was wrong.”

However his brothers Muklas and Amrozi had no such regrets. Muklas announced afterwards: ‘This is jihad, not drugs. We are not sorry at all. Until bombs stop dropping on Muslims around the world we will keep going, we will never stop.”

Amrozi, as he prepared to face his executioner, said: ‘Even when we are dead, our children and grandchildren will continue. There will be a million Amrozis to come.’ A million may be an exaggeration, but I think we can be certain there will be more Amrozis.

The case study I have outlined is by no means a comprehensive picture of the current terrorist phenomenon. It is more a snapshot of one example. If you want a list of factors that have contributed to the rise of terrorism, here’s a few:

- The colonial carve-up of the Middle East and other Muslim lands
- The failure of Arab nationalism in the Middle East

- Corruption and despotism of secular Arab regimes, many of them US and Western-backed
- Frustration at the poverty, unemployment and socio-economic disadvantage of many Muslims, which are easy to blame on the affluent West
- The erceived determination of non-Muslim countries to oppose Islamic governments, whether it be in Egypt, Algeria, Indonesia, Sudan, or elsewhere
- Presence of US forces on the Saudi Peninsula and the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Deep-seated desire in many Muslim communities for Islamic rule
- Success of the narrative of 'oppressed Muslims'
- The failure of political Islam to provide an alternative to the forms of governance rejected by the Islamists.

Again, this list is by no means comprehensive.

You'll notice that religion is not on my list. As I said before - and this is my view, not everyone will agree with it - it's not really about religion. Most of the people who have joined this movement have strong political grievances and objectives, some of them legitimate, relating to foreign occupation, denial of self-governance, oppression or human rights abuses.

So what is new about Amrozi and his brothers and the wave of terrorism we are currently witnessing? Terrorism itself is certainly not new. It's been around for centuries. The current wave is new in the sense that it is being waged in the name of Islam but that doesn't make it unique, as previous terrorists have also been motivated by religion.

One expert has called what we're seeing now 'a global terrorist movement'. The phrase is from Marc Sageman, a former CIA field officer who used to run the mujahideen out of Pakistan, and who now writes excellent books on terrorism, which I also recommend.

It's a deceptively simply phrase; on the face of it, it seems a statement of the obvious, and yet I think it encapsulates the phenomenon of modern-day terrorism very well;

1) It is global, and
2) It is not an organization or even a network, but a movement - a global movement.

It's also a very modern movement. In many ways the rise of terrorism was a reaction against globalization itself. Islamic militants were railing against many things: Western domination; US hegemony; the instability, uncertainty and change brought by internationalism; poverty and unemployment in transplanted Muslim communities; the intervention of the United Nations, NATO and other multi-lateral agencies in world affairs.

Yet even as they declared war on the agents of globalization, the terrorists seized upon the tools of globalization to do so, using computers, satellite phones and the internet to communicate, recruit and proselytize.

Particularly after the 2001 attacks on America, as the new global terrorism entered its second, post-September 11 phase, its leaders relied increasingly on the internet to allow the movement to survive and flourish. After US and allied forces moved in to oust the Taliban, destroy al Qaeda's training camps and infrastructure, decimate their ground forces and hunt down their leaders, the internet provided the crucial space where the terrorists were able to regroup. Since then the bulk of the movement's recruitment, networking indoctrination, and exchange of information on weapons, explosives and military expertise has occurred online.

Where once al Qaeda's headquarters was Kandahar, Afghanistan, now it is in cyberspace.

Cyberspace is also home and headquarters to a vast virtual *ummah* – an Arabic word for community or nation – of Muslims who are determined to carry on the struggle for Islamic rule.

For this vast community, national borders have virtually dissolved. To quote Giles Kepel, a French scholar of Islamic politics who was recently in Australia, their 'Islam-ness' has become a kind of national identity. I interviewed Kepel when he was in Sydney and he made the point that we in the West have failed to get a grasp of this *new* new world order that many Muslims perceive. We are still hung up on the idea that nation states rule the world, while many Muslims think of their own community as a global entity.

Before I conclude, a few final comments.. At this point in a presentation like this about the rise of terrorism, I'm often asked 'So what do we do about it?' I'm afraid that's one question I don't have an answer to. But I do have some thoughts on the subject. Principally, I believe we have to tackle the problem on two levels.

First, we have to deal with the terrorists themselves – as criminals. We need strong laws, strong intelligence agencies, strong counter-terrorism policing, and we need to be ever vigilant about the possibility – or even likelihood – of an attack at some stage on Australia. We of course have to balance all of this with the defence of our civil liberties, which is just important.

But no matter how many terrorists we lock up, a strong groundswell of support will continue among millions of ordinary Muslims for their objectives, which, are seen by many as just and legitimate. Put at their most simplistic, they are the right to self governance, which may include Islamic law, and the right to freedom from oppression and persecution. We need to examine and grapple with these issues on an entirely different level, to identify which of them are legitimate and which of them can be achieved. One example is the push for a Palestinian state,

which is one factor that motivates many terrorists to act as they do. This is an example of an objective that *is* legitimate and just, and the attainment of which may help undermine the grassroots support for the terrorists and their cause. This doesn't mean negotiating with terrorists; it means sensibly and with enlightened self-interest doing what we can to tackle the root causes of the terrorism itself.