

# Al-Qaeda still threat to West

The terrorist network has been weakened but not defeated, writes **Anthony Bergin**.

The United States has put in an enormous effort since September 11, 2001, into taking Osama bin Laden out of commission. His death is a fantastic public relations coup for the US. We're better off with bin Laden dead. The alternative of the Americans capturing him alive would have resulted in a complete media circus, with debate focused on where and whether to conduct a trial in a US civilian court. Bin Laden's attorney would have argued that due to adverse publicity his client couldn't get a fair trial in the US and moved a court motion to have his client's case struck out.

Killing bin Laden will remove someone who has inspired recruits to the jihadist cause. Without him dead, it was hard for Americans to close the whole chapter on the September 2001 terrorist attacks.

But we should not exaggerate the impact of eliminating bin Laden. Even without a pulse, he will continue to have symbolic influence, although he hasn't exercised real operational direction over al-Qaeda for some years. Bin Laden will continue to be invoked by Islamist extremists as a hero and a source of terrorist strategy and ideology. In death he could be a morale booster for his jihadist followers. Martyrdom features high on the list of Islamist virtues.

The war in Afghanistan will go on without any real change as the Taliban launches its much anticipated spring counter-offensive. While al-Qaeda provides inspiration and a degree of ideological backbone to the insurgency, the terrorist network does not play a significant role in day-to-day operations.

Over the short term, there will be a spike in militant violence as al-Qaeda affiliates react to news of bin Laden's demise. In particular, violence can be anticipated in



Still a symbolic influence on extremists ... Osama bin Laden memorabilia on sale in Quetta, Pakistan.

Photo: REUTERS

Pakistan as radical groups there learn of any assistance to the US in the mission targeting bin Laden. US facilities around the world will be on heightened alert.

Killing bin Laden brings a sense of psychological closure in the 10th anniversary year of the terrorist attacks in the US. But that doesn't mean that the world is safer from terrorism or that bin Laden's death will significantly enhance US citizens' own security.

America's counter-terrorism efforts have made it more difficult for members of jihadist terrorist organisations to enter the US and launch successful attacks.

The US, along with Western states including Australia, has been subject to home-grown Islamist extremist violence.

Over the past two years the US has witnessed a growing number of terrorist plots by its citizens or legal permanent residents. Home-grown terrorists who receive training and guidance from terrorist groups in Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, or Somalia

have the potential to cause large-scale damage on their return. European and US citizens have travelled to these conflict zones and training camps.

The war on terrorism will go on. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was responsible for the 2009 Christmas Day bombing in which an airline passenger tried to set off plastic explosives sewn to his underwear, and the foiled plot to blow up cargo planes last October. Al-Qaeda in Iraq was involved in the 2007 London and Glasgow bomb plots.

Al-Shabaab, a Somali militant group, has declared its allegiance to bin Laden. In 2009 a small group of Australians, mostly of Somali descent, sought the permission of al-Shabaab leaders for an Australian attack.

Bin Laden's death will not affect al-Qaeda or its affiliates in terms of their strategies or direction. Al-Qaeda has waning support among Muslim societies, largely because of its indiscriminate killing of

Muslims. The fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt has demonstrated that there's the possibility of peaceful political change brought about without terrorist jihadist violence.

Muslim-majority countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia will continue to suffer the bulk of terrorism attacks and casualties. But Islamist extremist violence, while a manageable risk in Western states, will remain a major concern to our national security policymakers.

Al-Qaeda will continue to encourage extremist subsidiaries to carry out attacks. While it may be very difficult for al-Qaeda to pull off a large-scale, spectacular attack in the West in the near future, even failed terrorist attacks arouse public attention and fear. That won't change because we no longer have to go after bin Laden.

■ *Anthony Bergin is the director of research programs at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.*

## Australia faces rising Asian risk

**Anoop Singh**

Australia is still benefiting from Asia's rapid economic growth, which reached 8.25 per cent last year. Asia's exports have benefited from the global investment cycle and strong final demand from emerging economies.

Robust domestic demand across Asia reflects still expansionary monetary and fiscal policies, and growth in both private investment and consumption.

Investment is being driven by the need in many Asian countries to overcome capacity constraints and to build infrastructure. Consumption, meanwhile, is being propelled by rising employment, wages, and productivity.

Despite the tragic earthquake and tsunami in Japan, the outlook for Asia is positive, which bodes well for Australia. Near-term prospects are favourable and the International Monetary Fund's latest *Economic Outlook* for the Asia-Pacific region forecasts growth in the region to average nearly 7 per cent in both 2011 and 2012.

Growth will be led by China and India, as their economies will probably expand by 9.5 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, in the next two years. Their demand for

### Fiscal and financial vulnerabilities cloud the outlook for advanced economies.

commodities is driving Australia's mining boom. Real gross domestic product growth in Australia is expected to pick up to 3 per cent and 3.5 per cent, respectively, in 2011 and 2012 on a calendar-year basis.

Although Australian households have become more cautious in their spending behaviour, consumption is still firm due to the strength of the labour market. The impact of the floods and cyclone Yasi on GDP is likely to be temporary and is estimated to have reduced GDP by between 0.5 and 1 per cent in the first quarter of this year.

Despite a favourable outlook, the risks for Australia, mainly external, are tilted to the downside. While the prospects for sustained global growth have strengthened in recent quarters as uncertainties over private domestic demand in advanced economies have lessened, a key risk is a faltering of emerging Asia's rapidly growing demand for commodities.

Almost 60 per cent of Australia's exports, dominated by commodities, are now headed to emerging Asia, up from 40 per cent 10 years ago. This increased the vulnerability to swings in commodity demand and prices.

Shocks from emerging Asia have overtaken those from the United States as the important external factor influencing Australia's business cycle.

New downside risks have arisen such as the potential for turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa to disrupt global growth and inflation, and the uncertain spillovers from the earthquake-related tragedy in Japan.

Meanwhile, fiscal and financial vulnerabilities cloud the outlook for advanced economies and could disrupt global financial markets, pushing up the cost of capital for Australian borrowers.

■ *Anoop Singh is director of the International Monetary Fund's Asia and Pacific department.*

# A less than noble climate of consensus

In the second of a series on research funding and innovation, **Garth Paltridge** questions why climate science is exclusively government sourced.

We hear that Julia Gillard is happy to have the CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology and the Australian Academy of Science on her side while making her arguments for a carbon tax. Well, of course she is.

She and her predecessor bought them. And bought them good. Over the past couple of years her Department of Climate Change (the DCC) gave them \$27 million in the form of research grants. That pays a fair swag of the salaries of the CSIRO and bureau climate scientists who make up the majority of all employed climate scientists in Australia.

University climate researchers, while relatively few in number, are vocal enough to be heard in many public forums. Gillard has bought them, too, with another \$5.5 million from the same source. That sort of money is handy in the university environment, since it is mostly on top of already assured salaries.

Moreover, it is fairly easy to get. Certainly it is much easier than normal university research funds, which come mainly from the Australian Research Council — this after a soul-destroying application and peer review procedure that wipes out 80 per cent of the applications and reduces the individual grant money to sub-optimal levels.

Gillard's climate money is very different. Among other things it can be put towards such niceties as business-class travel to the many international workshops and conferences that are part of the climate-change industry.

The bottom line is that virtually all climate research in Australia is funded from one source — namely, the government department that has the specific task of selling to the public the idea that something drastic and expensive has to be done to the structure of society in the name of mitigating climate change.

And if you think that government agencies shouldn't be in the game of social engineering, then you are way behind the times.

Over the past two years more than \$100 million was distributed by the DCC for exactly that purpose.

So there can be no doubt that climate-research grant recipients

know perfectly well that scepticism concerning the climate-change story does very little for their careers. One therefore wonders a bit about the much-vaunted consensus of the global warming establishment regarding climatic doom.

Surely there is no way a whole scientific discipline can be subverted, either consciously or subconsciously, by crass materialism? Well, maybe not in the long term. But if experience is any guide, the sorting out of a problem of vested scientific interest can take many decades.

At the moment, climate scientists are trapped in the coils of a disaster theory sold prematurely to the world at large. They are supporting the theory with long-term forecasts about an atmosphere-ocean system whose behaviour in many respects is inherently unpredictable.

On the one hand, public discussion of the uncertainties associated with the "main conclusions of the science" must be discouraged, and on the other there is a need for sufficient uncertainty to justify a continued flow of research funding. In short, they are in a right royal mess of political correctness.

The average climate scientist is extremely reluctant to go against the tide of official opinion set by the research activists of his field,

whatever might be his private thoughts on the matter. Loyalty to colleagues gets in the way, and perhaps also the seductive attraction of a "noble cause". With those sorts of justification, it is much easier for an idealistic scientist to be mindful of the fact that, when Gillard buys people, they have to stay bought if they want to continue in the game.

Surely there are independent scientific establishments whose advice can be trusted by both government and public? Well, yes, there are — most of the time. The Australian Academy of Science is a prime example. But one has to mumble a bit when talking about the independence of such bodies in the context of climate change. They generally don't have much in-house expertise on the subject, and when asked for advice, are obliged to put together committees of advisers from the relevant research establishments. It is not too difficult to imagine where the advisers come from. Moreover, it costs money to service a committee. Guess where that comes from.

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