

Summary of September Address

Guest Speaker: **Dr Julian Droogan**, Lecturer, Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, Macquarie University. Subject: **"The Tenth Anniversary of September 11. The Future of Al Qaeda and Global Terrorism."**

Introduced by David Greatorex, Julian, as part of his role at Macquarie, heads the research programs looking at emerging Asian security threats. His other research interests include religious radicalization, the history of religious terrorism, and political violence and South Asian religion, history and culture.

To paint the picture for the anniversary of this very public world-changing event Julian took us back to 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the "end of the cold war." The Soviet political, social and economic system had failed and Capitalism appeared to reign supreme. Freedom was now here to stay and the thinkers were now looking to see what the "new drivers" for the West would be. Some espoused the view that liberal democratic culture would spread with an expanding progress in world technology. There was no place in this new world for religious dogma, no place for religions. Enlightenment and modernization would be key to cultural progress. In the future there would be politics and government with no religion. Julian gave us the analogy of the "caravans in the old west" coming to the finishing line and forming their circle. Other states may need to catch up with the "caravans" but that was simply timing. This he purported was a very Christian approach in that the world had/was achieving salvation.

Julian then brought us back to reality with the situation that all this "salvation" was a mirage and that history does repeat itself. The event of September 11 brought it all back with a vengeance. A new period was ushered in with the repetition of the past and clearly religion was now back and involved. Fundamentalism was now a focus and occurring in all religions with a strong reactionary fervour. Religion was here to stay. Politics and religion now had a united approach and Julian showed us several slides of world leaders praying in many different places including areas of war. So what was now the major threat to the West? Julian's view, for the time, was that religious terrorism was the threat. There was a clash of civilizations in a new modern guise but based on religious fundamentals. Communication was now instantaneous with religions adapting to the various methods, taking a cosmopolitan approach and recognizing other faiths. There was now a more militant form of religious expression with a form of nationalism included, particularly moving into politics. Julian reminded us of the nationalistic approaches of India (Hindu) and Pakistan (Islam) in developing and exploding their nuclear weapons to express a respective position of strength.

Islam is seen as presenting violent/terrorist extremes and yet all religions have a violent history with the Christian religion as bad as Islam. For Julian Islam is a "schizophrenic" religion stemming from its historical base e.g. the Koran has both violent and classic segments in its writings. What does this historical background say for the future? When Mohamed commenced his teachings in the late 6th century his objective was to convert the population of Mecca. Within 10 years he had only managed to convert 70 families. Other opportunities to convert neighbouring tribes was more successful enabling Mohamed to take Mecca and then the Arabian Peninsula. He became an administrator and an Islamic explosion followed. Later a new power emerged presenting a different Islamic belief and the period of the "dark ages" begin. In generalist terms Christian religion involves a separation of state whereas Islam has the state as inseparable from religious involvement. Over time however some Muslim countries have created that separation from state whilst retaining the Islamic religion e.g. Turkey, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

What has developed in recent times leading up to and following "September 11" is a "very new" fundamentalism that looks to the past to solve modern problems. The militant wings of Islam have a very purified version of the Koran and take quotes from it to support their action that is not acceptable. Many of these quotes are only a vision that does not have a literal application. Islam is a monolithic religion based on jurisprudence principles and legal interpretation. Islam has a problem with modern day approaches in which often "the loudest is heard the most." The Security Agencies of the West have done a wonderful job in developing networks of intelligence, technological listening devices and scanning equipment to reduce the opportunity for terrorist acts. Additionally we are now seeing changes in progress in the Arab world with the various revolutions

that are presently underway (i.e. "Arab Spring"). Julian sees this as a good sign for also reduced terrorist attacks. Why are these changes occurring? From Julian's viewpoint the reasons are varied and many. There has been more of a civil liberties approach in these countries with the removal of oppression and the seeking of Western modernity. Capitalism, Communism or Islam is not included in these uprisings they are more a reform of the state not religion. There is not the same "jihad" involved.

For Julian, Al Qaeda, has been "defragged". It now has less than 200 operatives and very few senior people at leadership or planning levels. It has become an "idea" and operates more as a franchise than a well-coordinated, active organization. There are more local bases with no connection and in his view as a terrorist group not likely to attack the West.

For the next 10 Years Julian reflected on the possible political and religious conflicts that could arise. There is a new conflict between Sunni (Saudi Arabia) and Shiite (Iran) Muslims. Both have East and West support and the "cold war" could become very hot. Julian believes it will happen and it will have religious connotations. Questions from the members related to; (1) China's position in these world developments and (2) is an attack likely on the anniversary of September 11?

Ray Hyslop thanked Julian for his very detailed and informative presentation with lots of "pearls of wisdom" to reflect on but was happy to hear that Al Qaeda was no longer so powerful. September 11 was an event that has led to the question for us all: "Where were you when September 11 took place?" He also reminded us that there are extremists in all political, social and religious ideals and that this aspect can be more to the issue.