

Appendix A: Current security context

In September 2014, the Australian Government raised the national terrorism threat level for Australia to HIGH. While a significant elevation, there was no indication that a terrorist attack was imminent. On 26 November 2015, a new five level terrorism threat advisory system was introduced and the national terrorism threat level set at PROBABLE. This means that credible intelligence, assessed to represent a plausible scenario, indicates violent extremists in Australia have an intention and capability to conduct terrorist attacks in Australia. Recent low-capability terrorist attacks and disrupted plots in Australia and overseas reinforce the elevated threat and provide cogent examples of the enduring terrorist threat.

The principal threat to Australia comes from individuals and small groups who adhere to the violent extremist ideologies associated with groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), al-Qaida, and their affiliates. These groups have dedicated media organisations and are adept at utilising social media to inspire, encourage, and in some cases direct, attacks in the West, including in Australia.

The conflict in Syria and Iraq and the notion of ISIL's so-called caliphate continue to appeal to those susceptible to the extremist rhetoric of these groups. Individuals who are attracted to the jihadist narrative, including a cohort prevented from travelling, as well as a small number of Australians involved with violent extremist groups overseas, present long term security challenges.

Self-directed 'lone actors' attacks using firearms, homemade explosives, or basic weapons are increasing in the West and by their nature present a significant challenge for security and law enforcement agencies. Such attacks are often spontaneous and utilise easily acquired weaponry that requires no specific skill to use effectively. The lone actor threat is not confined to Islamist extremists.

While the symbolic appeal of an attack against a government or authority – such as the military, police, and security agencies – elevates the threat to these entities, members of the public and locations where large crowds congregate could also be attacked indiscriminately. Attacks against the general public in crowded places are designed to cause injury or death and are aimed at disrupting lives and causing fear – even a simple attack can meet this objective.