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This is the author-version of article published as:

Koschade, Stuart (2006) An Assessment of Terrorism Studies in Australia: Recommendations and Future Directions. In *Proceedings Research Network for a Secure Australia - Closed Counter-Terrorism Workshop*, Melbourne University.

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**AN ASSESSMENT OF TERRORISM STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA:
RECOMMENDATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS.**

Shortened Title: **AN ASSESSMENT OF TERRORISM STUDIES
IN AUSTRALIA.**

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AN ASSESSMENT OF TERRORISM STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA: RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS.

The field of ‘Terrorism Studies’ in Australia has developed in stark contrast to the field at large. Since the expansive period of growth within the field following the 2001 al-Qaeda attacks and the rise of 21st Century Islamic extremism, terrorism studies in Australia has undertaken significant growth and is now firmly established within academia and national research initiatives. This paper aims to essentially function as a health check for the field in Australia, discussing the development of the field of terrorism studies, the major foci of the field, its development, prevalence, and standing in Australia, its responses to the traditional criticisms of terrorism studies, where the field is situated today, and the directions for the future.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TERRORISM STUDIES

The field of terrorism studies developed with the emergence of international terrorism as a new mode of political violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The initial response to the academic examination of events such as the 1969 Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine’s (PFLP) hijacking of a Trans-World Airline flight to Tel Aviv came from the political science discipline and its examination of political violence. Among the most notable of these approaches came from Ted Robert Gurr in 1970 and his application of traditional political violence theory, particularly his application of relative deprivation theory.¹ Gurr and his colleagues attempted to understand exactly what terrorism is but their efforts were frequently undermined by non-academic counter-terrorism and intelligence professionals. The formal meta-theoretical approaches from political science began to falter when they came under increasing criticism within wider academia, and consequentially, were publicly

labelled inept. By the mid-1970s many academics largely abandoned the strict political science approach and widened the field's scope through the integration of sociological, communicative, and psychological theories aiming at explanatory research in relation to terrorism.²

Following the expansion of the frameworks and approaches, the field began to witness a relatively sharp increase in the amount of research and dissertations on terrorism. By the late 1970s, terrorism studies had developed into a dynamic interdisciplinary field, through the works of influential academics such as Paul Wilkinson,³ Lester Sobel,⁴ Yonah Alexander,⁵ Fredrick Hacker,⁶ Grant Wardlaw,⁷ and Walter Laqueur.⁸ This new interdisciplinary nature of the field offered approaches from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, international relations, criminology, psychiatry, anthropology, and law, thus creating a multidisciplinary sub-field based within political science.⁹

Subsequent to the development of the sub-field of terrorism studies in the 1970s, the 1980s saw a dramatic rise in the amount of research and literature on terrorism due to a further increase in the intensity and frequency of international terrorism.¹⁰ This period was described by Gordon as the 'take off' years within the field.¹¹ The period saw the two core journals of the field begin, with *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* in 1977, and *Terrorism and Political Violence* issuing its first volume in 1989. Gordon asserted that terrorism studies was and remained "a multidisciplinary field, with political science the core discipline to which the subject is attached".¹²

CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM STUDIES

The contemporary field of terrorism studies, while arguably still loosely based within political science, is a completely multidisciplinary field. The al-Qaeda attacks of 2001 and the rise of 21st Century Islamic extremism has entailed a dramatic increase in the frequency and intensity of terrorism, comparable to the situation in the 1980s through the operations of groups such as the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Red Brigades, and the Red Army Faction. Since 2001, the field has experienced another ‘take off’ period: there has been an exponential increase in literature, research, funding, and dissertations on terrorism.

To illustrate the expansive scope of the field, this section of the article will endeavour to outline the main foci of the field building on a study by Avishag Gordon, which examined the academic study of terrorism after 2001.¹³ To demonstrate the major foci of the field, contemporary terrorism research is examined through the two chief terrorism studies journals detailed previously. This endeavour does not intend to be an exhaustive and definitive map of the field, but rather a guide to the areas of focus and research within terrorism studies. Terrorism studies research can be divided into four major foci:

- i. The Phenomenon of Terrorism
- ii. Terrorists
- iii. Terrorist Tactics
- iv. Counter-Terrorism

There is research that lies outside these areas, however, their focus will usually be within the general categorisation of one of these foci. Each of these areas are

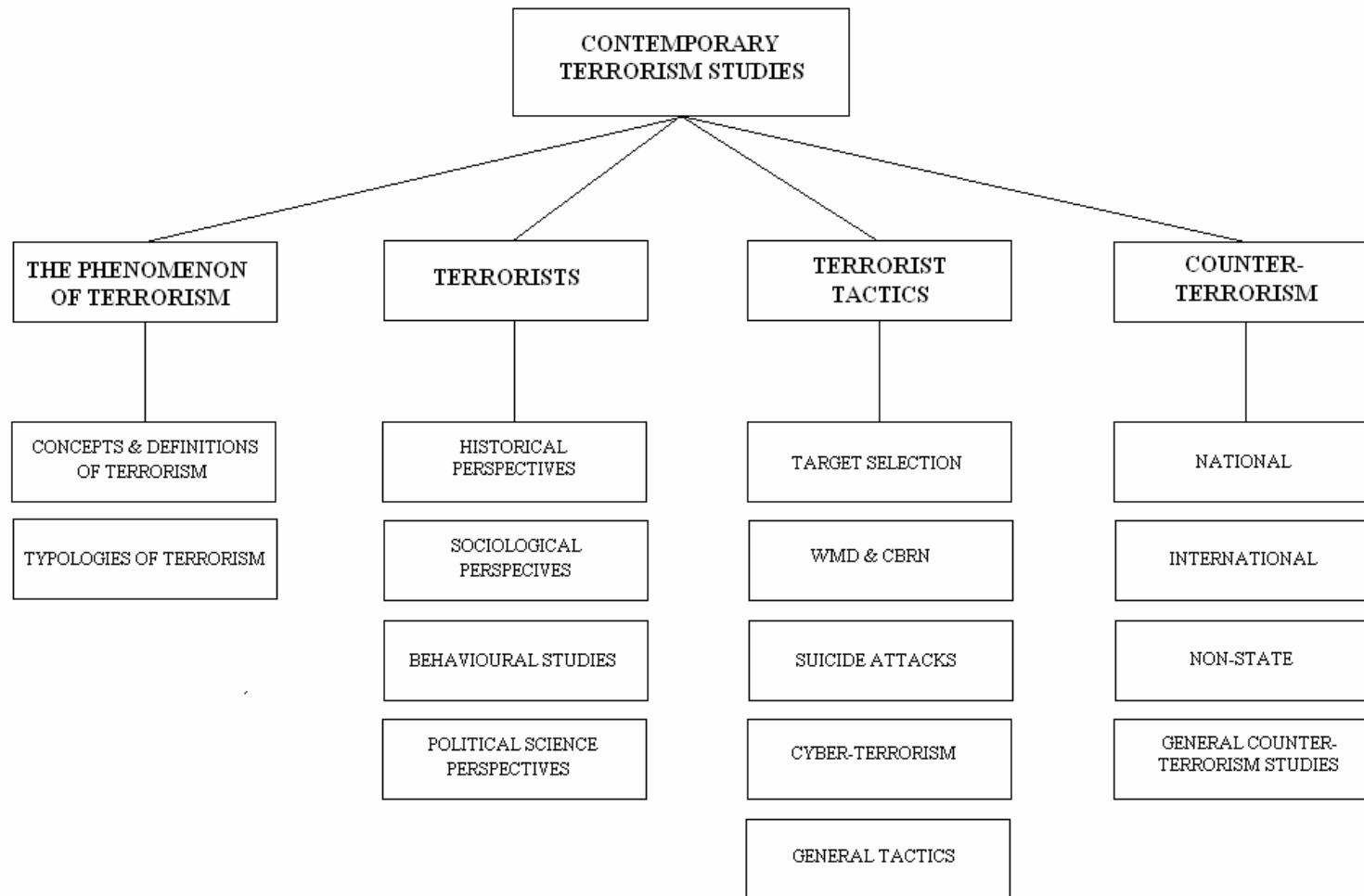
interdependent, however, each focus has been developed such that its separation and independent understanding is necessary for insight into the total framework of terrorism studies. Figure 1 clearly demonstrates the division of the field and the examples of sub-areas of research within each major focus.

TERRORISM RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA

The development of the field in Australia has been markedly slower than in other regions of the world, arguably due to the low frequency and intensity of terrorism experienced by Australia. The literature that did exist before 2001 was generated as a response to international terrorism, when conflicts from other areas of the world were played out on Australian shores. Very few of these studies would constitute academic research within the field of terrorism studies in Australia. A majority of the literature offered was in response to events such as the rise of Ustasha groups in the 1960s and the Hilton bombing in 1978. Of this literature, only six could be considered academic research within the field. This literature included:

- i. William Clifford's 'Terrorism: Australia's Quiet War' in 1981;¹⁴
- ii. Grant Wardlaw's 'Terrorism and Public Disorder: The Australian Context' in 1986;¹⁵
- iii. James Crown's *Australia: The Terrorist Connection* in 1986;¹⁶
- iv. Malcolm MacKenzie-Orr's 'Terror Australis' in 1991;¹⁷
- v. Therese Taylor's 'Australian Terrorism: Traditions of Violence and the Family Court Bombings' in 1992,¹⁸ and;
- vi. Jenny Hocking's *Beyond Terrorism: The Development of the Australian Security State* in 1993.¹⁹

FIGURE 1. CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM STUDIES



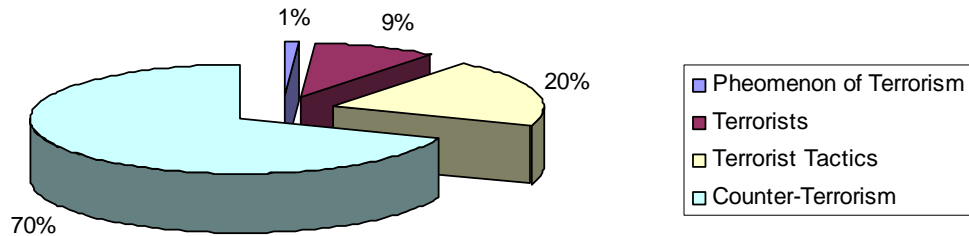
Following the events of 2001, the expansive increase in terrorism research has facilitated a momentous growth of terrorism studies in Australia, with important contributions to the field from Jenny Hocking,^{20 21} Clive Williams,^{22 23} Aldo Borgu,²⁴ and Christopher Michaelson²⁵ to name a select few. Since 2001 the field has developed rapidly within Australia, with most universities now offering intelligence and counter-terrorism courses or units. The field in Australia is supported by two principle organisations, the Research Network for a Secure Australia and the Australian Homeland Security Research Centre. Despite the significant growth in the field in Australia, its development pales in comparison with the developments of the field in the US. It is clear, however, that the field in Australia is increasing in its intensity and popularity, but at this stage it is important to understand how far the field has come, the directions required to ensure the continued expansion of the field, identifying the areas which are receiving adequate attention, and those that are not.

MAPPING AUSTRALIAN TERRORISM STUDIES

In order to gauge the development, standing, and directions of terrorism research in Australia, a review was undertaken of 85 current PhD and research projects listed in the Counter-Terrorism Research Network collated by the Victorian Police. This research was examined for its methodology and its classification within the foci of terrorism studies in an attempt to map the field in Australia. The disciplines within this sample included political science, law, international relations, engineering, biology, sociology, psychology, history, criminology, Information Technology (IT), business, and intelligence studies.

From the sample examined, it appears that the Australian research within the field of terrorism studies has an excessive and intensive focus on counter-terrorism research. Figure 2 shows the distribution of this research over the major foci of the field. Seventy percent of the research within the sample had a concentrated focus on counter-terrorism. The areas examined within this area included counter-terrorism legislation, interrogation practices, interagency cooperation, blast modelling, critical infrastructure protection, and assessments of the Australian Intelligence Community. While the counter-terrorism focus is an extremely important area within the field and has the most pertinent applications for government policy and counter-terrorism functions, the somewhat excessive concentration on a pure counter-terrorism focus points to serious deficiencies within the other areas of terrorism studies. In addition to the lack of attention given to the other foci of the field, this trend suggests a focus on reactionary measures to examine and counter terrorism, where as a more significant focus on understanding terrorism will in turn produce pre-emptive theories and solutions to countering terrorism.

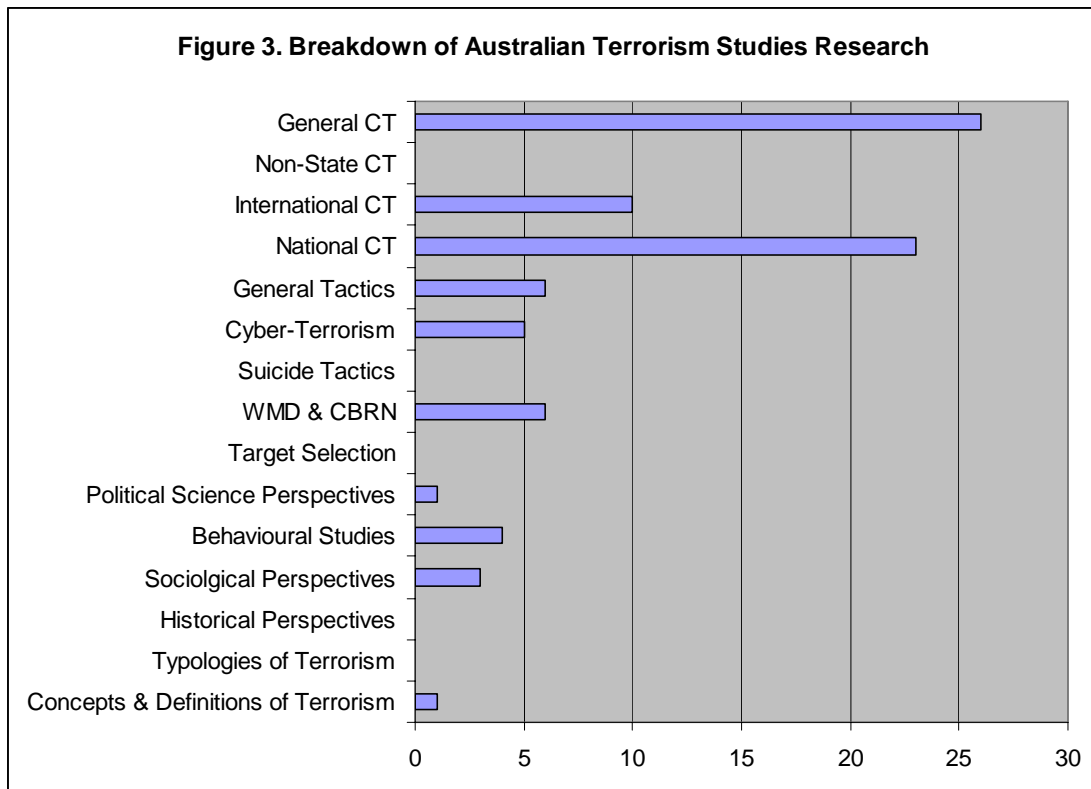
Figure 2. Australian Terrorism Research



The second concentration of research within the field was the terrorist tactics foci. While the amount of research dedicated to this category pales in comparison to counter-terrorism research, the terrorist tactics focus constituted twenty percent of the literature within the sample. The major areas of research within this focus included terrorists' intelligence practices, terrorist finances, cyber-terrorism, and use of the internet. While there was a reasonable amount of research devoted to this focus, there are areas within the focus that appear to not be being treated within the Australian field of terrorism studies. Figure 3 shows that while there are adequate levels of research examining cyber-terrorism, WMD & CBRN, and general tactics, there is no research examining the target selection employed by terrorists, and no research into the tactic of suicide bombing.

Other areas of research within the field that appear to be receiving little or no attention include studies examining the phenomenon of terrorism through evaluations

and assessments of concepts and definitions of terrorism, as well as typologies of terrorism. The second area that was receiving little attention was research examining terrorists and terrorist groups. This is an extremely important area of the field that facilitates the understanding and comprehension of terrorists and terrorist groups, paving the pathway for explanatory and potentially predictive research. Naturally, the ability of the field to provide a predictive capacity is simply a measure of the reliability and validity of the research and the consequential insights. The deficiencies in this area were compounded by next to no research attempting to employ political science approaches and frameworks for analysis to understand, document, explain, or predict terrorism. Additionally there was very little research from the historical, behavioural, and sociological perspectives. These are potentially areas that hold the most promise for an interdisciplinary framework for the study of terrorism. Figure 3 show more clearly the deficiencies within the field in Australia. It is also worthy to note that interestingly, there was no research employing a theological perspective. This approach is explicitly critical in understanding the phenomenon of 21st Century Islamic extremism, the distinction between Sunni and Shiite, the foundations and legitimacy of the phenomenon within Islam, and an understanding of Wahhabism and Salafism.



DILEMMAS WITHIN TERRORISM STUDIES

An essential element in an assessment of the field in Australia relies on an examination of the field in relation to the traditional criticisms of terrorism studies. In 1988, Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman raised significant issues and criticisms of the field of terrorism studies, its methodologies, and frameworks for analysis.²⁶ In 2001, Andrew Silke re-raised these criticisms in light of the fact that they had not yet been resolved.²⁷ Similar concerns were voiced by David Brannan, Philip Esler, and N. T. Anders Strindberg.²⁸ In addition to issues raised by Bruce Hoffman,²⁹ these criticisms fit into four major complaints:

1. Terrorism Studies' lack of objectivity;
2. Terrorism Studies is too abstracted from the phenomenon which it attempts to study;
3. Terrorism studies is not research based, with little generation of primary data, and;
4. Terrorism Studies lack of substantive analysis that aims at explanatory and predictive studies.

The first criticism of terrorism studies relates to the difficulty of examining the phenomenon with a high level of value neutrality which, while difficult post event, is a vital element within terrorism research. The second criticism supports the requirement of more research examining terrorists and terrorist groups through substantive forms of analysis. The third criticism is endemic and unavoidable within terrorism studies, as the inherent difficulty in generating data on terrorists and terrorist organisations will always provide methodological difficulties. This criticism can be overcome through a greater integration between the academic field of terrorism studies and the Australian government, specifically its intelligence and counter-terrorism arms. Short of any possible coordination in this sense, the field will almost constantly rely on secondary and tertiary resources. The fourth criticism is the most substantial criticism of the field due to the remaining three arguably constituting traditional academic complaints. A review of the sample of research in Australia indicates that the field has a focus on applications and recommendations to policy and counter-terrorism (which is vital and its dominance within the field is not being criticised), but it appears that there are too few studies that are employing analytical methodologies that attempt to understand, explain, and predict terrorism. It is these circumstances that again demonstrate the need for research directed in these areas.

This point is not to say that this type of research does not exist, only that there is a significant need for a greater concentration of research in these areas. The analytical methodologies employed within the sample included futures studies, community consensus building, network and social network analysis, theories of globalisation and democracy, political and social drivers that create a psychology of violence, graph data mining, and blast analysis. Many of these frameworks directly facilitate the understanding, explanation, and prediction of terrorism. Potential substantive analytical research methodologies are abundant and to provide examples, could include psychological or demographic profiling, social movement theory, behavioural models, sources of conflict theory, and statistical analysis name but a few.

Further dilemmas exist within the Australian context of the field. Principally these issues concern the adversarial nature of the different approaches to research within terrorism studies as well as between many institutions, the dominance of United States academics and institutions in the overall field, and the 'sessional' contributions

from researchers of different fields who lack commitment and dedication to terrorism studies. The adversarial nature between the major disciplines and approaches in addition to the 'in-group' and 'out-group' dynamics formed as a result of the various approaches within the field constitute an extreme dilemma. The advancing of the field is reliant on the successful maintenance of its interdisciplinary nature and not through competing for funds and prestige. The dominance of the US within the field, particularly in the latest era of terrorism studies is largely a result of the attacks of 2001 themselves. Before this period, due to the nature of international terrorism the field was arguably equally split between European and American academics. Since 2001, the War on Terror, the responses to September 2001, the inexplicable amount of funding for research and academia in the field, US institutions and academics have come to dominate the field.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to use the momentum and foundation that have been established in Australia since the second boom period of terrorism studies post 2001 to firmly establish the field within Australia. The first recommendation is that there is a critical need for an academic organisation that can coordinate research and funding for terrorism studies in Australia, similar to institutions such as the Criminology Research Council. Such an organisation would facilitate an interface between academia and government. This organisation would define the scope, assessments, and directions of research as well as attempt to contribute to policy making and counter-terrorism solutions. This organisation should aim for the general advancement of the field of terrorism studies and (said with full appreciation of the difficulty and complexity of the task) should attempt to employ a working definition or definitions of terrorism (and its various categories) for the context of terrorism research in Australia. This final recommendation is not vital to the strength or development of the field, but would greatly enhance the strength and foundation of the organisation. Organisations such as the Research Network for a Secure Australia, the Australian Homeland Security Research Centre, and the Centre for Policing, Intelligence, and Counter-Terrorism (PICT) already exist, but a more overarching, multi-disciplinary, and comprehensive organisation is required. Links with national research think-tanks such as the Australian Strategic Policy Institute would also create beneficial environments and relationships for the institutions and the field. Whether this is a joint venture

between these organisations or they facilitate the creation of a new organisation is indefinite, however the opportunity remains. A critical step in the right direction is the PICT's Journal of Policing, Intelligence, and Counter-Terrorism and should be supported by the terrorism studies community in Australia.

Regardless of the body or bodies that facilitate the study of terrorism within Australia, the field should

1. Aim to generate knowledge and understanding of terrorist groups and events in Australia;
2. Attempt to generate primary data where possible;
3. Aim to meet the criticisms of terrorism studies;
4. Provide substantive analysis to focus on explaining and predicting terrorism and terrorist events;
5. Aim to provide succinct and critical applications and recommendations for implementation within the AIC and counter-terrorism practices and policy;
6. Provide avenues for further research and models;

The goal of terrorism studies in Australia should be two fold: 1. To advance the field of terrorism studies; 2. To fulfil the role of assisting the Australian Government in counter-terrorism policy generation and applications. This article has examined the development of the field of terrorism studies, mapped a sample of the current research within the Australian context of the field, identified areas of research that are being neglected, attempted to respond to the criticisms of terrorism studies, and made specific recommendations for the advancement of the field in Australia, principal of these recommendations was the creation of an overarching multi-disciplinary institution to coordinate and support terrorism research in Australia.

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