

**Islamic and white supremacist terrorism in our region**

Since '9/11' 2001, terrorism has challenged governments, security forces and the community, in no small part due to the advent of Islamic State, the Internet and 'social media'.

Baghouz, Islamic State's last territorial stronghold, fell to United States-backed Syrian Democratic Forces on 23 March 2019. While this marked the end of Islamic State's caliphate in Iraq and Syria, its ability to inspire terrorism continues, not least in our region.

In Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday (21 April), bomb blasts across the country ripped through three Christian churches and five hotels – at least 257 people were killed and 500 injured. This well-co-ordinated series of attacks was carried out by two little-known Muslim organisations affiliated to Islamic State, in part as retaliation for the loss of the caliphate and possibly for the attack on mosques in Christchurch on 15 March (see below). If so, the latter would have been an afterthought, for the Sri Lankan attacks must have been long in the planning.

On Mindanao, where Moro Islamic separatists have been battling the Philippines government and its predecessors since 1899, previously warring groups united in 2017 at the instigation of Islamic State, which hoped to form a southeast Asian caliphate. These groups staged an uprising on 23 March 2017, seizing the 'Muslim capital', Marawi, and holding it against the Philippines armed forces until October. Australia, along with the United States, supported the Philippines with military advisers and ground-attack aircraft. While this attempt at establishing a caliphate failed, Moro discontent continues and Australian advisers are still working there under Operation Augury.

A Patani Muslim insurgency in southern Thailand has

been ongoing since 1948 at varying intensity, accompanied occasionally by terrorist acts further afield. Historically, an ethnic separatist insurgency with few links to other Muslim insurgencies, recently, it has been taken over by hard-line jihadis, but links, if any, to Islamic State are unknown.

Islamic State links to Muslim fundamentalists in Indonesia are better established, but the security forces seem to have matters in hand. This is an evolving situation, though, and the political mood has tilted towards Muslim supremacism, despite Pancasila<sup>1</sup>, as Indonesian expert, Ian Ingleby, indicates in the letter below.

Islamic terrorism is not our only challenge. White supremacist (neo-Nazi) terrorism, long in the shadows, emerged in Christchurch on 15 March 2019, when a 28-year-old Australian from Armidale, New South Wales, Brenton Harrison Tarrant, allegedly opened fire with an automatic rifle and a shotgun on congregations in two mosques (Al Noor Mosque; then the Linwood Islamic Centre) during Friday prayers. Fifty-one people were killed and 50 were wounded, two dying later.

Tarrant lived-streamed the first 15 minutes of his attack on Facebook Live. Indeed, despite the essential role of the Internet as a means of communication, we cannot be blind to its less attractive features. It has proven to be a powerful medium for the recruitment and radicalisation of disaffected people, a process difficult for the authorities to detect and to monitor. The Christchurch horror and previous instances where the Internet has been used to preach hatred and murder have created a *prima facie* case for more effective, timely detection and removal of this material from the Web and international prosecution of those who peddle it. That's going to be hard to do, but let's make a start, now.

**David Leece and Ian Pfennigwerth<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Pancasila is the five principles on which Indonesia and its unity have been built: belief in a Supreme Being; nationalism; humanitarianism; social justice; and consultative democracy. The first precept recognises six religions: Islam, Protestant Christianity, Roman Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

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