Future Focus: Future Threats to National Security

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Sparking the unthinkable:
When natural disasters are used as force multipliers

Thank you for the invitation to speak to you at this important conference. I would like to especially extend my personal appreciation to Mr Loh Kean Wah (NSCS) and Mr Barry Desker (RSIS) in inviting me to present at this prestigious conference.

Today, I will talk about a future risk to national security. A risk that has not been on the radar and it will only be a matter of time before terror organisations have the imagination to create the catastrophic threat which I call "Disaster Terrorism".

[Slide: Once upon a time]

Sometimes, the best way to understand a threat is not clinically or academically dissect it, but to be emotionally immersed in it. And with such an approach, I ask that you clear your minds and let your imagination drift away and let the story I am about to tell you, unfold in your dreamful mind.

[Fade/dim lights, except lectern]

[Slide: Bushfire]

Tuesday 29 January
Victoria, Australia

Following an intense heat wave, a total state fire ban is put in place in Victoria. As state resources are being staged, fires break out across the state and evacuations commence from threatened areas. Communities are still traumatised from the 2009 Victoria Bush Fires and heeding the lessons learned from the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the previous fires, authorities were quick to ensure early evacuation are implemented. Within two days, the fires had multiplied with over 140 active fires being fought by authorities.

On **Friday 1 February**, there were over 4,500 people displaced by the uncontrolled fires, 300 of these were sheltering in the Tom Flood Sports Centre in Bendigo. As the emergency services were stretched in responding to the massive fire, they were also at their most vulnerable – and this opportunity would become exploited by the Front for Liberation of Australian Muslim Extremists (FLAME).

[Slide: Explosion]

At 20:25 hours, just ten minutes before sunset an explosion ripped through the sport centre inflicting severe casualties including children, women and the elderly. The response from the emergency services was delayed due to their resources already being exceeded and deployed elsewhere, community responders and volunteers raced to the site, assuming a gas cooking cylinder has exploded. The building caught fire and an overwhelmed Mayor attempted to front the media saying that emergency services were on the scene.

[Slide: FLAME iPad message]

The Premier later that evening expressed his sorrow to those affected by the tragedy, stated the cause of explosion was not determined and that it would not be helpful to the families to speculate. Within an hour of the Premier's live television address, Ten News received an uploaded video from an Afghani Islamist extremist group claiming responsibility for the explosion at Bendigo. In the low resolution video, a dark complexion man sits with a backdrop of mountains, holding an iPad that has been used to translate Arabic into an English audio clip and displaying a message "As you incite violence in my holy land and burn the flesh of my families, I too shall invade your sanctuary and make your family burn like the eyes of Allah. If you seek shelter, you will burn. Now you will know what it feels like to have no shelter while burning without mercy". The man does not speak, the iPad provided the narrative for the hatred in his eyes.

The Federal Police also assume command of the incident, which leads to a massive and not so discrete leadership rift between Police and Fire Services coordinating the fire and now criminal response – contributing to a further loss in confidence by the public. As Police cordons are bolstered, fire crews become visibly frustrated at additional security measures around the fire ground with some saying the extra security is creating response delays and putting people at risk.

[Slide: Police Armored vehicle]

By **Saturday 2 February**, there is a significant decrease in evacuation compliance with families citing they were safer at home than taking a risk elsewhere while the Islamic terrorists were at large. Police call for out of state reinforcements as their resources become even more overloaded from the fire, criminal investigation and cordon duties – they were also be pushed into the media spotlight for a number of hate crimes against Muslims in the state and this coverage re-ignites debate on Australia's immigration policy. The FLAME *modus operandi* was to create fear to evacuate and encourage families to stay in their homes – while they operated covertly to spread fire through applying their knowledge of bush fire behaviour, a twenty dollar tennis racket and a few packets of barbeque (solid fuel) starters. They repeatedly said it was safe for people to evacuate and use shelters, but the images on TV of armed police at evacuation centres gave little confidence to the public that was the case.

[Slide: Tony Abbott]

Monday 4 February, Prime Minister Tony Abbott announces that the Bendigo Evacuation Centre explosion was deliberate and that the perpetrators would be pursued and punished, but he would not be drawn into whether the culprits had terrorist or Islamic ties despite the earlier video. The FLAME tactic of discouraging evacuation, whilst spreading the fires was proving highly effectively and emotive. Australian Defence Force assets then were deployed to assist with the security of the area and evacuation centres, along with supporting local hospitals and firefighting efforts. The increasing number of deaths became unpalatable to the Australian public and small protests were made in Canberra calling for ban on Muslim immigrants, these sentiments were echoed with a number of hate crimes against Australian Muslims and their places of worship.

[Slide: Army and Police]

Tuesday 5 February, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation received a Skype originated phone call. The short voice recording was played twice stating that FLAME would bring down any aircraft operating near the fires and that the terrorist group had experience in bringing down the aircraft of the "non-believers in Afghanistan". The recording was identified as originating outside of Australia by Federal Police and the threat was taken seriously with an immediate suspension of air operations. This lead to significant spread of fire and fuelled frustration and outbursts by the public, emergency services and anti-Muslim activists.

Friday 8 February there was a break through by accident. Late in the afternoon, Australian Defence Force soldiers routinely stopped a white four wheel drive with two persons in it dressed in rural firefighter uniforms requesting entry to the fire ground. When their identities were challenged via radio to the emergency coordination centre, they were found not to be legitimate. The armed soldiers called for local Police who arrested the two Australian nationals for impersonation – they would also find in their vehicle, a tennis racket with molten marks across its strings, several packets of fuel tablets and a topographical map of the area with several hand written markings.

[Slide: Insert pair of firefighters]

Over the coming days in absence of the two impersonators, the fire came under control and was eventually extinguished three weeks later. The fire eventually claimed 87 people across Victoria and an anxious public, still tender from the Black Saturday Bushfires demanded answers. The answers would naturally unfold over the coming months. FLAME was not an Islamic extremist group, it was a false flag. FLAME was uncovered to be the mastermind of brothers Timothy Huchinson and Grant Huchinson along with their friend Robert Narrows – all typical *Aussie* blokes. Timothy had returned from Afghanistan after serving with the Australian Army. He left the service angry and saddened that his younger brother Terry had been killed there by the Taliban. He exited the service with his platoon friend Narrows who equally shared a hatred for the Taliban and the loss of Terry. Grant remained in service and continued to fight in Afghanistan with the Australian Army. It would be through Grant a local Afghani was conscripted to make the video and post it to Ten News and YouTube at an internet cafe in Kabul and place the Skype call to ABC.

Timothy grew up as a patriotic Australian and before joining the Army had been a volunteer bush firefighter, where he learned all the ingredients that created the perfect fire storm.

The trio's campaign was simple, the Australian public was ignorant of the sacrifice that Australian soldiers had made overseas in places like Afghanistan – they needed to be reminded that their security was threatened too and the war was to be brought home to provoke a response of support and absolute commitment to exterminate Islamic fundamentalists.

Federal Police also uncovered a manual of how to use natural disasters as force multipliers, such as exploiting the vulnerabilities that communities only had during floods, storms, bushfires and earthquakes. Timothy's manual illustrated in detail in Chapter 2, how to "render the infidels impotent" during bushfires – the section had also been translated into Arabic, though there was evidence he had made Arabic copies on memory sticks and had thrown these into the foyers of Mosques and other Muslim meeting places in Victoria. The draft book called FLAME would become internationally known as the first *disaster terrorism manual* to be written.

Like the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma, it was thought that Arabs had executed the attacks at Bendigo – days later the American public would be eating *humble pie*, coming to the realization that the attack was carried out by one of their own, a war hero by the name of Timothy McVeigh. As the Australian public grew to accept the deaths of their countrymen were not by the hand of Arabs but by the Huchinson gang, the call for a Royal Commission of Inquiry commenced. Over the coming years, it would be revealed that Australian emergency management and the national security agencies were too divorced from one another, with both lacking the imagination that terrorism could interface with disasters and in doing so, create massive jurisdictional, operational and logistical complications – the *all hazards approach* that had been espoused, had not been applied in practical terms.

September – later that year

International intelligence agencies start to monitor copies of the FLAME manual surfacing around the world, including Canada, Spain, Indonesia, New Zealand and the United States – all of whom have significant bush fire risks. Hutchinson's goal to use natural hazard events as force multipliers becomes sustained through the distribution of the draft manual. From an unknown location and author, a second version is distributed over the internet in native Arabic and entitled "When the wills of Allah collide". The handbook explores the vulnerabilities of other natural hazards events, such as the detonation of flood banks under heavy loading quoting minimal explosive for maximum damage.

December –later that year

The Hutchinson Gang, including Grant who is discharged from the Army are tried and convicted on numerous terrorism and arson charges. Though they remain incarcerated, they had managed to create a new generation of terrorist – the disaster terrorist who would strike communities when they and the public safety agencies were at their most vulnerable.

As the FLAME manual continues to go viral in the terrorist cyber world, seasonal floods arrive in Queensland. As the SES responds to the increasing and major flooding in Ipswich, a flood bank fails catastrophically inundating the area. Hundreds of residents become stranded and seek rescue. The failure of the flood bank comes under the media spotlight with one reporter alleging the structure had been attacked by terrorists. Was the failure due to exceeding the design standard or was its cause a more sinister event, inspired by FLAME? Regardless, the public reaction was predictably one of fear, anxiety and anger. Whether FLAME inspired actors were responsible or not, FLAME had left a legacy of devastating methods through its viral electronic publication and globally pioneered the concept of using natural disasters as terrorist force multipliers.

[lights on]

[Slide: Disaster Terrorism title]

The use of "natural disasters as a force multiplier" has not been explored in open forums, yet it is natural disasters that yield more damage than any single terrorist instrument is capable of. What if the impacts of catastrophic natural disasters were amplified through terrorist actions, at a time when the state is most at its vulnerable and protective systems are at their most over whelmed.

[Slide: FLAME group photo]

How real is the concept of disaster terrorism? Is it too radical to conceive? Do we already have it on our radar?

The attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, created a global industry in homeland security despite more people dying in bath tub drownings' each year in the US than the total global death toll of terror attacks outside of active war zones according to Mueller and Stewart (2011). They go on to point out that people die in automotive accidents in the US each year due to short haul travelers reluctant to undergo time intensive and intrusive new air security measures – Mueller and Stewart in argued that the systems created to secure lives, in fact had killed more Americans than the acts of 9/11.

So what are natural disasters capable of? Let's compare the energy yield of a few scenarios:

[Slide: Mk54 SADM]

The Mark 54 Special Atomic Demolition Munition (SADM) 6 Kilo Ton[3].

[Slide: Little Boy/Hiroshima]

Little Boy Atomic Bomb dropped on Hiroshima 1945: 20 Kilo Ton[1.]

[Slide: B83]

B83 High Yield Strategic Thermonuclear Bomb. 1.2 Mega Ton[5].

[Slide: Bushfires]

2009 Victoria bush fires. Estimated energy yield 19.5 Mega Tons[6].

[Slide: Tsunami]

2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Estimated energy yield 299 Mega Tons[2].

[Slide: Hurricane Katrina]

Hurricane Katrina. Estimated energy yield 300 Mega Tons[1.]

So we can safely assume that natural hazards have more destructive potential than terrorist incidents. But what if what if terrorists where to use natural disasters to amplify the effects of a traditional terrorist instrument causing a force multiplier of impact on public safety? This concept is what I call Disaster Terrorism (DTER).

If we explore Schmid's (2011) revised academic consensus definition, derived from over 109 definitions of terrorism, the two key ingredients are doctrine and practice. Our story of the Huchinson gang and FLAME, contains these elements and is quite feasible, if not too simple and devastatingly so.

The social consequences of terrorism definitions arguably evolve around the effect that terrorism events typically use an intermediate target to influence the final target – such as targeting of innocent citizens or non-combatants to raise the profile of the terrorist group's ideals who in turn influence their political leadership, certainly in a democratic state.

A key social element of terrorism is the negative psychological impact on people. Heskin (cited in Horgan, 2005) identifies two limiting factors which determine the extent of peoples attitude toward terrorism; being one's individual subjective perception of the righteousness of the particular group in question (terrorist organisation) and the physical proximity to direct exposure to terrorism. This later factor is strongly coupled to the core ingredient of terrorism, the psychological arousal created from fear of terrorism, which habitually diminishes over time (Horgan, 2005, p. 4). Disaster terrorism, strikes communities when they are already in a significant state of hyper arousal.

[Slide: DTER]

There is unlikely to be a situation where a country is more vulnerable than in a major disaster. The existing services are overwhelmed, police and military units may be refocused as part of surge capacity, access to the disaster affected area may be restricted – but without national identification and challenging protocols it is likely that impersonating actors may have more free access to the affected area, climate change will create more disasters and therefore more opportunities to apply disaster terrorism will exist, critical infrastructure such as electricity, water, gas and fuel are likely to be under massive strain and highly vulnerable, and jurisdictional tensions between national security and emergency management are potentially created – all leading to an increase of vulnerability of the state from terrorist attack.

If you were a terrorist with only limited access to explosives, how would you create more "return on investment"? There would be no point exploding a flood levee when there is no flood, and even a vehicle based IED would cause minimal casualties in comparison to detonating a fully loaded flood levee upstream of a township already fragile and overwhelmed with flooding. During a disaster, services are already overwhelmed, the public are already in a state of anxiety and such an infliction would create even more uncertainty, put more lives at risk, create leadership tensions across agencies given the jurisdictional swing from natural disaster to a terror event, and ultimate create global publicity for the terror organisation.

Disaster Terrorism is now a concept, but how long could it take until a new doctrine emerges? We all know that Osama bin Laden subscribed to the written doctrine of *Military studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants,* and other documented doctrines such as *Prairie Fire* are all now well circulated on the internet. Is it possible that without even executing the doctrine, that a terror organization could sew the seed and produce a *FLAME* manual?

[Slide: Scenarios]

What if flood control systems were sabotaged? What if bio-terror agents were introduced to mass shelters? What if Tsunami evacuation routes or evacuation centers are targeted? What if the critical amount of potable water saved was contaminated or infected? What if websites with life critical advice were hacked and fatally false information was provided. What if the FLAME story came to life? Is disaster terrorism the next Black Swan? Remember disaster terrorism is not just having a terror event during a disaster, the terrorist act uses the disaster as a force multiplier – physically and psychologically.

What if?

Following the September 11 attacks, The US Army engaged a group of top Hollywood directors to create a range of terrorist scenarios to be considered (Nagai, 2002). They were engaged because the intelligence community lacked imagination and had insular perspectives as bureaucrats. Creativity and diversity of opinion are crucial to national and international security threat assessment if we are to maintain a step ahead of terror organizations. Good threat assessment demands a diversity of opinions, the best ideas will come from people you don't agree with.

[Slide: Future of DTER]

Why try to smuggle a 6 kiloton suitcase nuke into a target area, when Mother Nature provides opportunities to exploit and amplify the effects of natural disasters which already yield in the megatons? The worst modern terror attack in US history prior to September 11, was the attack carried out by Timothy McVeagh. According to Toolis (2010) he carried out his attack on a budget of less than $800, and took the lives of 168 people as well as injuring over 800 people. Disaster Terrorism capitalizes on the vulnerabilities of a disaster affected community, already overwhelmed and highly aroused. The same amount of explosive, could well fail a major flood levee or piece of critical infrastructure rendering the lives of the same, if not many more.

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management has been recently repositioned and is now part of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, which includes a major role in national security coordination. The move conceptually is an encouraging move and creates opportunities for better alignment between the emergency management and national security sectors. The weakness in New Zealand is that the majority of emergency management capability is maintained by local government and the systems for them to interact with the national security system are limited. A prime example is security vetting, although common to central government agencies who have a role in national security, local government emergency managers are not required to have a criminal background check let alone a national security clearance – creating an instant barrier to share information and given higher level clearances can take months to process – this will be an issue should disasters and terrorism converge. Not to mention, the information management and physical security systems at the local level are not compliant or compatible to national information security (INFOSEC) standards. Our traditional approach of secrecy, may well create vulnerabilities which terror organizations will exploit. As Peter Ho put it, the *need to know* doctrine is an idealistic curse that we should challenge.

Merging of the two roles is not the solution. Like moths to a flame, emergency managers could drift their focus to terrorism and suffer from mandate creep – leaving the real and more likely risk of natural disaster being treated as a lower priority as it did in the US with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security – FEMA became a forgotten agency within the bureaucracy. It will be important that we do not try to create an entirely new industry or bureaucracy with disaster terrorism – to combat it; we just need better dialogue and assured interoperability. There has been no open source discussion on the concept of disaster terrorism, but even if the security sector has been thinking about it – it certainly has not been communicated to the average emergency manager. We need to make sure that our national security systems can be applied to a natural disaster and should a disaster terrorism incident occur that they are flexible enough to accommodate the security dimension without wholesale changes to incident leadership in the public's eye – our response should be seamless and give confidence to communities.

[Slide: 1997 Terrorism Manual Cover]

I still remember taking my first course in terrorism response. The FEMA self-paced *Emergency Response to Terrorism* published in 1997 had a cover with two tall distinct buildings with a bull's eye on one. Only a few years later, that illustration was no longer fiction. The story of FLAME is also fiction, but the concept of disaster terrorism is very real, it too may no longer be fiction in a few years.

Finally, let us be prepared and start engaging to ensure emergency management and national security systems are effective, aligned and ready for such an eventuality. Disaster Terrorism may well be a future focus.

[Slide: Thank you]

Thank you.

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Biography

Steve Glassey is the Director of Public Safety Studies and Associate Director of the Centre for Risk, Resilience and Renewal at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

In his former role as General Manager, Emergency Management at the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) he was responsible for the strategic oversight of business continuity and national emergency social services (psychosocial, child protection, government helpline) and disaster financial assistance for New Zealand's largest government department.

His role at the Ministry as a senior public servant also required him to represent the Ministry on all relevant national security matters from mass illegal immigrant arrivals to biosecurity incidents. He was a founding member of the National Security Systems: Ensuring Public Safety Cluster and acted on behalf of the Chief Executive (MSD) on the Officials Domestic and External Security Committee (ODESC).

In previous roles, he has been a Disaster Management Officer for the United Nations in the Asia Region, Chief Executive of the Emergency Management Academy of New Zealand, an Emergency Management (Urban Search & Rescue) Advisor at the Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management, Paramedic Rescue Technician and Naval Communications Specialist (including Cryptography systems).

He has also been an instructor in humanitarian response security for RedR New Zealand, focusing on personal safety, operational security planning and defensive tactics. In 2013, he was deployed to Super Typhoon Haiyan (Philippines) to manage security planning and liaison with UNDSS for a major INGO humanitarian operation in the Western Visayas.

Steve holds a Masters in Emergency Management (Charles Sturt), a Postgraduate Certificate in Public Management (Victoria University) and a Graduate Certificate in Terrorism Safety & Security (Charles Sturt). He is a Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) with the International Association of Emergency Managers and was made New Zealand's first Fellow of the Emergency Planning Society in 2013.

He is currently working toward a doctoral degree, researching the lessons learned from declared states of emergency in New Zealand since 1960 and developing an evidenced based dynamic doctrine model.

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