



Submission No 3

Watching Brief on the War on Terrorism

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Ms Margot Kerley
Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Watching Brief on War on Terrorism

Dear Ms Kerley,

Thank you for your letter of 16 April 2003 in which you seek "an explanation of the current alert levels in place, and those that are proposed under the new counter terrorism plan, including the interior levels referred to."

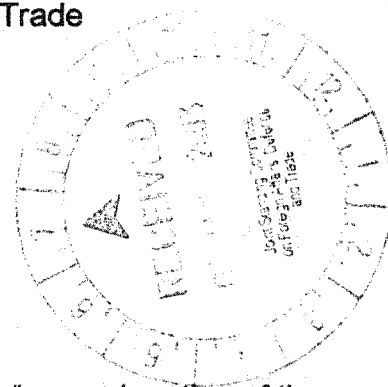
As I stated in my evidence to the Committee, "In terms of the levels of terrorist alert, under the current national anti terrorist plan that we are operating under, there are three levels."

Paragraph 1.57 of the National Anti Terrorist Plan (NATP)(Sixth Edition) November 1995 states,

The Commonwealth Government maintains three levels of counter-terrorism alert:

- a. Level 1 – Standard Level of Alert
- b. Level 2 – Special CT Risk, and
- c. Level 3 – Full CT Alert

A more comprehensive description of the Levels of Alert is included at Annex B of the Plan and I have reproduced it for your information. The interior levels referred to by Deputy Commissioner Brennan relate to additional descriptors added to the Level of Alert by the Commonwealth Government depending on the security environment. For example, as stated in my evidence, "At the moment, with the



three-level alert system, we are sitting on level 2, which is a special counter terrorism alert **with heightened vigilance.**" (Page 10, para 12).

Under the new National Counter Terrorism Plan (para 20) there will be four levels of alert;

- **Low** - no information to suggest a terrorist attack in Australia
- **Medium** - medium risk of a terrorist attack in Australia
- **High** - high risk of a terrorist attack in Australia, and
- **Extreme** - terrorist attack is imminent or has occurred.

Threat ratings, issued by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) are used by State and Territory jurisdictions to decide "the appropriate responses for specific sectors, events or individuals within their jurisdictions" (para 21 NCTP). Those threat levels are reproduced below for the information of the Committee;

Threat Levels

In the descriptions of these levels, 'mission' is used as a generic term to cover the above threat assessment subjects. The wording is amended as appropriate to circumstances. What remains the same are the levels of the threat elements. ('A' refers to terrorist threat and 'B' refers to protest threat.)

Six levels of threat as categorised by ASIO for missions.

Very Low

- Level 6: There is no basis for assessing that a threat to the *mission* exists in Australia.
- Level 5A: The *mission* represents a country assessed to be at threat. However, the group(s) concerned is/are not assessed to have a current intent or capability of operating in Australia.
- Level 5B: While the *mission* may attract protests from members of the Australian community, there is no information to show, or basis to believe, such protests will be violent.

Low

- Level 4A: The *mission* represents a country assessed to be at threat. However, the group(s) concerned would have a low intent and/or capability of targeting the mission in Australia.
- Level 4B: Protest action against the *mission* is planned by, or expected from, groups or individuals from whom incidental acts of violence are a possibility.

Medium

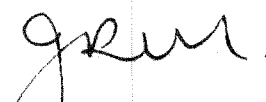
- Level 3A: The *mission* represents a country assessed to be at threat. However, the group(s) concerned would have a medium-high intent and/or capability of targeting the *mission* in Australia.
- Level 3B: Protest action against the *mission* is planned by, or expected from, groups or individuals from whom there is, or is likely to be, intent to commit acts of violence, and/or to disrupt the visit.

High

- Level 2: Current intention and capability to attack the *mission* in Australia are established circumstantially but not confirmed by reliable intelligence.
- Level 1: Current intention to attack the *mission* in Australia has been confirmed by reliable intelligence.

I trust this information assists the Committee in its deliberations. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,


JR McROBERTS
SUPERINTENDENT
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2 May 2003

COUNTER TERRORISM ALERT SYSTEM

Levels of Alert

The Commonwealth operates a three-level system of alert to initiate security precautions taken by and within departments and authorities in dealing with threats of politically motivated violence affecting Australia. The level of alert is based on intelligence assessments prepared by ASIO and is considered at least monthly by the Special Interdepartmental Committee for Protection Against Violence (SIDC-PAV) or, at short notice by the Special Incidents Task Force (SITF), a sub-element of the SIDC-PAV. The level of alert can be revised at any time in response to a changed threat assessment. ASIO is responsible for recommending changes to the level of alert. The three levels are:

- a. **Level 1 - Standard Level of Alert.** The Standard Level of Alert maintains an appropriate range and level of standard preventive measures consistent with the operational response schedule.
- b. **Level 2 - Special CT Risk.** The Special CT Risk may be declared on the basis of an ASIO threat assessment or for other precautionary reasons. It will involve enhanced preventive measures implemented generally or in relation to a specific event or category of risk and may include partial activation of the crisis management arrangements.
- c. **Level 3 - Full CT Alert.** This level of alert will be implemented when a terrorist incident has occurred. Planned operational and policy responses will be implemented according to the nature of the incident and may include full activation of the crisis management arrangements.

Responsibility for Notification

2. The PSCC will notify SAC-PAV member agencies of changes in the level of alert made by the Commonwealth.

Response

3. Responses by Commonwealth departments and agencies to changes in the level of alert are outlined in the SIDC-PAV Handbook.