

US encourages Indo-Pacific CT and CVE co-operation

[Content preview – Subscribe to **Jane's Intelligence Review** for full article]

States across the Indo-Pacific region face a range of challenges in designing and implementing effective counter-terrorism and counter-violent extremism strategies. *Andrew White* reports from the Daniel K Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii on how the US is providing support and assistance

Key Points

- The US Department of Defense promotes the development of legal frameworks for combating terrorism, including the criminalisation of terrorist financing and support for terrorism on social media.
- Professional education for security personnel not only allows the sharing of best practices, but also encourages connectivity between the staff of different services.
- There are enduring challenges around encouraging Indo-Pacific governments to share intelligence and to adopt whole-of-society approaches to counter-terrorism.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) encourages interoperability and co-operation between partner states across the Indo-Pacific region. The DoD-funded Daniel K Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) was founded in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1995 to educate, connect, and empower regional allies to enhance security co-operation.

Jane's visited the APCSS in July 2018 for an exclusive roundtable briefing with senior faculty members as well as the center's director, Rear Admiral (ret'd) Peter Gumataotao. The briefing outlined trends and concerns regarding counter-terrorism (CT) and countering violent extremism (CVE) across the Indo-Pacific region.

The APCSS is focused on the development of new partnerships and networks with priority partners across the Indo-Pacific, including Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. Areas of focus include defence reform and institution-building initiatives with Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and maritime and border security with India, Indonesia, Japan, and the Philippines.

Emerging threats

The return flow of foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria was described by APCSS officials as a key concern. In addition to the threat of returnees from the Middle East, the risk of fighters returning from regional hotspots, including Marawi City in the Philippines, was also noted. Dr Christopher Harmon, the manager for the Comprehensive Security Responses to Terrorism (CSRT) course at the APCSS, told *Jane's*, “[The Indo-Pacific] has some of the same global terrorism problems currently being witnessed elsewhere in the world, and now all countries in the region are really concerned about this [return flow of fighters].”

Harmon noted that the APCSS was also tracking the threat of online radicalisation. “We feel efforts to track these [radicalised] people on the world wide web have been improving and in some places

– where they have been countermanded by governments – we are happy about progress.” However, he noted that the APCSS regularly hears from security professionals with ongoing concerns about Islamic State social media activities. “There are routinely new cases in which social media or the web has formed a central part of radicalisation,” Harmon told *Jane's* .



Indonesian police stand guard outside Surabaya police station following an explosion on 14 May 2018. Indonesia is one of the partner states that works through the Daniel K Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies to strengthen regional security. (Ulet Ifansasti/Getty Images) 1728260

The potential for in-person radicalisation through Islamic study groups was another area of concern for the APCSS. Harmon told *Jane's* that “among the Salafists, the [study group] is a central place where radicalisation occurs, where people can get together in small groups to work on texts and decide whether and how to act.”

He highlighted the risk that migrant workers from the Indo-Pacific region could be radicalised through study groups while working abroad. These individuals could then return home to carry out attacks or work as facilitators. This would pose a challenge for regional security services because the individuals involved might not have any previous connection to terrorism. “This is an area we are watching very closely, but not hearing much about,” Harmon said.

Harmon highlighted the arrest of two alleged Bangladeshi terrorist cells by Singaporean security forces over the past “several” years as an example of the development of a “foreign labour [terrorist] cell”. In January 2016, the *Straits Times* newspaper reported that 27 Bangladeshi foreign workers had been arrested under Singapore’s Internal Security Act (ISA) between November and December 2015. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong stated that the men “had become radicalised”. In April 2016, eight Bangladeshi foreign workers were arrested under the ISA; the Ministry of Home Affairs

announced that they had been planning terrorist attacks in Bangladesh. Four of the men were convicted on charges relating to the financing of terrorism in July 2017. Harmon said that similar patterns were being observed in Indonesia, where the study circle remains an “important recruiter” for insurgent groups.

In the Indonesian case, “study groups are used to recruit, raise [the] education levels of recruits, and distinguish between those that might be violent as opposed to those that just want to do a book talk”. Harmon claimed that this was “exactly what the Bangladeshis were doing in Singapore. They had not yet had a concrete plan, but they were interested in making one, although they had not even distinguished themselves between ISIS [the Islamic State] and Al-Qaeda”.

Legal and co-operative response

According to Harmon, one of the most important lessons the APCSS teaches is the requirement for proper CT legislation. He said, “We try to suggest to partners that a lot of CT is law-based.” Harmon told *Jane's* that many of the representatives coming to the APCSS had “a sense that US CT is DoD driven. It's really not and we try to do a whole of government approach”.

[Continued in full version...]

(758 of 2168 words)

For the full version and more content:

Jane's Military & Security Assessments Intelligence Centre

This analysis is taken from [Jane's Military & Security Assessments Intelligence Centre](#), which delivers comprehensive and reliable country risk and military capabilities information, analysis and daily insight.

*IHS country risk and military capabilities news and analysis is also available within **Jane's Intelligence Review**. To learn more and to subscribe to **Jane's Intelligence Review** online, offline or print visit: <http://magazines.ihs.com/>*

For advertising solutions visit [Jane's Advertising](#)