

Bin Laden's death is only the beginning

But co-operation can defeat terrorism, writes **Robert Imre**.

THE assassination of Osama bin Laden represents a moral victory for the United States but there is a great deal of work to be done regarding the reduction of terrorist threats.

In all likelihood, this represents the waning of a particular form of terrorist activity, but we can expect to see minor reprisals.

Bin Laden and al-Qaeda have waned in importance over the past decade for a number of reasons. His victory and the victory of radical Islamists was achieved in the fear and disinformation they generated throughout the world.

Reasonable voices were drowned in the cacophony of "war on terror" cries as governments used it as a catch-all to crack down on their own citizens.

The fragility of democracy was exposed in the fear of the citizenry too quick to follow political leaders down a path of reducing individual freedoms and liberties.

What was once regarded proudly as the "world's longest undefended border", between the US and Canada, became a serious diplomatic point of contention as unfounded suspicion and paranoia changed the way the border was administered. Muslims living in democratic countries for generations were suddenly held to account for events caused by co-religionists and suffered discrimination and abuse.

However, once this was achieved, there was nowhere else to go for radical Islamists, as it became clear that Muslim political leaders were just as willing to drag their own societies into the mire of suspicion and heavy-handed state control.

Defeating terrorism requires old-fashioned "gumshoe" detective work. It requires patient investigation, friendly police forces, and authorities willing to engage and talk to groups within nation-states to attempt to stem violence.

Countries such as Egypt and Pakistan, who have jailed dissidents and used torture to try to rid themselves of radical Islamist elements, have had the most difficult time as their methods bred



CELEBRATIONS: Crowds cheer outside the White House after news that Osama bin Laden was killed.

both corruption and more violence as a response from radical groups.

The US and its allies, and all governments experiencing difficulties with domestic terrorist activities, need to press home their advantage.

Remember that in the recent uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, the radical Islamists were very much in the background, and not seen as enthusiastic reformers of the regimes they had previously labelled as "Western-puppets". This has led to loss of credibility for al-Qaeda and other radical Islamists in every country.

By emphasising peace-building and development initiatives, the terrorist organisations can be pushed back even further. Engagement with democracy initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa is paramount, to take away the radicals' main argument.

There will be no terror cells emanating from Pakistan and Afghanistan if young men and women emerge from those societies with basic education, the

opportunity to see other parts of the world, and an end to the perpetual violence that makes up their lives.

The much more difficult tasks of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the position of Iran will remain in the short-term, but there must be a strong push for support of democratic initiatives, peace-building efforts, and fostering economic prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa to sustain the dignity and freedom of people living there.

Recent events represents the problematic "double-dealing" that we have seen with Pakistan.

In past decades, Pakistani military and strategic institutions have been caught in a conflict between a burgeoning middle class seeking prosperity and segments of the population left behind in the great change of the 1970s and '80s.

Having had East Pakistan leave and become Bangladesh in 1971 after a brutal war, Pakistani military and political leaders have had great difficulty holding together rebellious provinces.

One way to attempt to do this was to support Islam as a unifying force for the nation, and thus the dead end of having to support radical Islamists who inevitably sought to destroy the Pakistani nation.

There is a difficult road ahead for Pakistan as its security services; segments of the military and government are rife with corruption. Drones and missiles can't change this, but prosperity and co-operation can.

In short, Bin-Laden is a symbolic figure, not a strategic security one.

His assassination marks the end of a long manhunt, an indication that radical Islam is waning, and represents an opportunity to stress the importance of choosing to co-operate with countries in their attempts to build free and prosperous societies.

Dr Robert Imre is a politics and international relations lecturer at the University of Newcastle and an author on global terrorism.

Population growth makes us smarter, richer

Economists forget: people aren't units, writes **Stephen Kirchner**.

WHAT are the long-term implications of population growth and immigration for living standards?

Economists have typically given ambiguous answers to this question, because they have struggled to find an economically meaningful role for population in their models of economic growth.

Traditionally, they have reduced people to little more than labour inputs into the production process. The accumulation of capital and productivity improvements raise living standards, not labour.

Indeed, too many people can dilute the stock of capital, leading to a decline in productivity and living

standards. More people can increase the demands made on current and future resources.

Economists typically think of population growth as leading to a trade-off between the gains from the division of labour, increased specialisation and economies of scale on the one hand, and diminishing returns on the other.

In the long run, diminishing returns dominate and population growth has no long-term benefits to living standards.

However, another perspective, associated with the late economist and professor of business administration Julian Simon argues that the economic significance of more people is not in the contribution made by their hands or their mouths, but their minds.

New ideas and innovations come from the minds of people. The more people, the more new knowledge

gets created. It's the growth in knowledge that drives the improvement of living standards.

The increased pressure on resources and resource prices is a good thing in the long run. The greater these pressures, the greater the incentive to solve problems and acquire new knowledge.

This results in an apparent paradox. Short-term scarcities lead to long-term abundance. Rising commodity and other prices leave us better off in the long term, even though worse off in the short term.

Similarly, increased population and economic growth are more likely to lead to solutions to climate change than policies that retard growth. The costs associated with emissions abatement, climate change adaptation and related innovations become easier to bear the richer we become.

Increased population density is

also an essential part of the process by which population growth leads to rising living standards.

Proximity to other people confers benefits on the inhabitants of big cities, which is why they are willing to incur significant costs in the form of increased congestion and higher land and house prices.

This is not necessarily an argument for a bigger population or higher immigration, but it is an argument for being much more relaxed about short-run costs and for a greater policy focus on the long-run benefits of population growth and immigration.

Dr Stephen Kirchner is a research fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney. He will speak on population growth and living standards at the centre tonight.



CBD tall storey

LAKE Macquarie City Council's plan to allow buildings up to 15 storeys high in part of Charlestown's central business district was met with mixed feelings by online readers.

Goodbye Newcastle, hello Charlestown.

— Slacker

What about future earthquakes – the bigger they are, the harder they fall! How much ancient underground mining activity was there, which has no mapping attached to it. There are a lot of questions.

— Rose-Lake Macquarie

It would be the best thing for Charlestown and Lake Macquarie.

— roger

Ought not we fill the existing new 10-storey buildings first?

— JB

Why stop at 15?

— Steve

Welcome Charlestown as the new thriving hub of the Hunter, while Newcastle continues to decay under a procrastinating council.

— Durka

We have so many stakeholders telling us of the need to revitalise the Newcastle CBD yet at the same time we have another council making decisions that will potentially enhance Charlestown's claim as the CBD of the region.

— Conflicting Interests

Charlestown is like Newcastle's Chatswood. Newcastle will always be the business and administrative heart.

— P

Ugh, Charlestown is starting to resemble Gordon in Sydney. I avoid Charlestown like the plague.

— Hayley

Maitland looks more like a city than Lake Macquarie and it has less than half Lake Macquarie's population. At least Maitland has an obvious CBD. Lake Macquarie is generally perceived as being just Newcastle suburbia.

— Newcastle is the Hunter's CBD

ONLINE poll

