

Announcer: Welcome to Tram Talks, a little taste of Deakin University here in the world's first mobile lecture theatre. You've chosen to listen to podcast number 7, 'Stemming the Tide of Terror'. Professor Greg Barton from the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation discusses how Islamic politics are represented and misrepresented in the media.

Prof. Barton: In 2016, it's difficult to argue that Islam has nothing to do with politics, and that groups like ISIS or al-Qaeda or Boko Haram are completely unrelated to the 14 centuries of tradition and ideas that have shaped the belief of the 1.6 billion Muslims of the world today. At one level, it's certainly true that this sort of violent extremism of a group like ISIS is completely unrelated to the daily faith of the majority of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims, or indeed of Australia's 500,000 Muslims. Just as Christian extremism, or Jewish violent extremism, or Hindu fundamentalism represents an outlier not recognised by the majority of people holding to that faith, so it is with ISIS.

But the way in which this group has come to power caught us by surprise by emerging in the middle of 2014 with a declaration of a caliphate at the end of June 2014, having taken over Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, in the space of five days, taking all of the towns along the Tigris River, having already taken the major populations of the Euphrates River north of Baghdad. This has caught us by surprise, and the last 18 months has seen us wrestling with what to make of a group that has declared itself to be an Islamic state.

On the one hand, we have those who say that to talk of a link between this kind of terrorism or political violence and religion is completely mistaken, and there are those who are outraged by the fact that some would not even discuss these matters. There was a lot of confusion about the advice of head of ASIO, Duncan Lewis, to some members of Parliament to be careful about the way they talk about Islam. What was not understood was that Duncan Lewis perfectly well understands that we're dealing with a particular kind of toxic fundamentalism when we're dealing with groups like al-Qaeda or ISIS, but that these groups cleverly exploit a sense of alienation and of prejudice, which finds ready material in a lot of media coverage, and they try and reach out and seduce young people with their argument that the world or Australia is against Islam and against Muslims. Duncan Lewis recognises the danger of this and cautions care in discussing these matters.

As much as it's true that a group like ISIS is a product of a particular kind of toxic fundamentalism that is certainly linked with a religious tradition and a distortion of Islamic belief, it's also true that there is a significant level of bigotry and antagonism towards Islam and Muslims. A mistake made by those who take this position is to think that the fundamentalist position by which ISIS

or al-Qaeda define themselves represents the view by which most of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims have defined themselves, either now or over the last 14 centuries. Of course, none of this is true, but extremists on both sides serve to advance the interests of each other. And in a ironic fashion, we have a kind of symmetry of co-radicalisation.

Fortunately, Australia is largely exempt from these problems. But in the age of ISIS, no one is safe from the influence of social media and from ideas that not only mess with people's thoughts but steal away their sense of alliance to the point where they're prepared to travel to a conflict zone and perhaps never to return again. Hundreds of Australian families have been affected by this. Around 50 young Australians have gone on to the Middle East and will not be coming back because they've lost their lives there. And the threat of Islamist terrorism, whether or not it is as sharp in Australia as it is in Western Europe, has grown in intensity.

If we're to overcome an enemy that works on fear and prejudice and plays with a sense of alienation to seduce and to recruit, then we need to be clever about the way that we respond, and we need to focus on building social cohesion and understanding and inclusion, and not succumb to the temptation to name-calling and to the politics of fear. It should be obvious to anyone that the example of Donald Trump in the American primaries is not an example that anyone, whether in America or Australia or Europe, should see as an example to follow.

It is true that the current challenge of mass migration in Europe, linked very much to the civil war in Syria but also problems in the Middle East and North Africa, presents unprecedented challenges, not just to Europe, but to the world. But to describe these challenges or the challenges represented by Islamist terrorism in simple terms is to only make matters worse. Australians are smarter than this, and Australians are better than this, and Australians can and will rise above these challenges. But we face difficult and turbulent times ahead. These are times of anxiety and confusion, and we need to do our best to break down the confusion, to gain understanding, and to rise above our fears and our anxieties.

Announcer: Thanks to Professor Greg Barton. This has been another Tram Talk from the world's first mobile lecture theatre, just a small sample of what's available at Deakin University. Visit [study.deakin.edu.au](http://study.deakin.edu.au) to learn more.