

# State Security Operations Group on the frontline of APEC Security

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) brings together delegates from 21 nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In terms of world events it is considered second only to the G8 summit.

Australia hosted APEC in 2007 and far from being a single event, more than 100 days of ministerial meetings were held across the nation, culminating in the Leaders' Summit in Sydney in November.

In the words of the then Commonwealth Attorney-General Phillip Ruddock, APEC 2007 was "the biggest security event" in Australian history.

With the announcement of APEC some 12 months earlier, Australian police services and security agencies were faced with the mammoth task of security planning. Not surprisingly much of the focus was on Sydney, the location of the Leaders' Summit which the American, Russian, and Chinese Presidents were to attend.

The State Security Operations Group (SSOG) was at the forefront of planning and delivering the Queensland Police Service's APEC response.

A key consideration for SSOG was that intensive security surrounding the Leaders' Summit in Sydney may have opened up other APEC meeting locations, such as those hosted in Queensland, as potential terrorism targets.

The Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting at the Cairns Convention Centre and the Finance Ministers' Meeting at the Hyatt Regency in Coolum were the two most senior APEC meetings after the Leaders' Summit. A successful attack on any APEC event could have resulted in loss of life,



property damage, and disruption or cancellation of the Forum.

Detective Superintendent John Sheppard, SSOG, said the Queensland Police Service's response centred on collecting and sharing information effectively with other agencies.

"Effective security depends on effective intelligence—that was the central tenet of our strategy," Detective Superintendent Sheppard said.

"Staff from our own Security Intelligence Branch (SIB) collaborated with ASIO and the Australian Federal Police. Intelligence officers from police regions throughout Queensland were also involved."

"This collaborative process allowed us to identify potential threats to the events or the delegates, and from there we were able to preemptively draft responses to these threats."

"While the overseas connections and analytical skills of Federal agencies shouldn't be underestimated, our SIB staff played a key role at ground level.

"Local level and 'human source' (previously known as 'informants')

field intelligence was crucial in monitoring suspicious activity, tracking emerging community issues, and identifying potential targets.

"It wasn't just terrorism we were looking at. We also needed to be sensitive to individuals who may have been motivated to undertake maverick acts, militant protestors looking for a global audience, issues like that."

In the immediate lead up to the meetings in Cairns and Coolum, SSOG assumed responsibility for coordinating and implementing dignitary protection. Contrary to popular perception, dignitary protection is much more than 'guys in suits with earpieces'.

Detective Superintendent Sheppard said preparations for the protection of APEC dignitaries involved advanced reconnaissance and assessment of the meeting venues, accommodation and transportation routes.

"The unique environment of Cairns and the separation of the meeting and accommodation venues in the Cairns central business district provided challenges. We also had to be conscious of not impacting on the delegates' business."

Foreshadowing the possibility of serious threats, SSOG deployed its own Automatic Weapons Team and CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear) Response Officers to 'stand-by' status as a precautionary measure.

"We also had to be conscious that certain delegates, for instance those from the United States and the People's Republic of China, were classified as high-risk and as such required their own individual security teams."

Security teams were on active standby for airport arrivals, formal ministerial meetings, ceremonies and significant movements, and were posted at accommodation venues. These teams worked closely with uniformed police officers and private security staff to form protective layers, taking the critical inner cordon role.

Ultimately more than 50 SSOG intelligence dignitary protection staff, supported by regionally based trained officers drawn from regions across the state not directly affected by APEC, provided protection for more than 40 high-ranking delegates over 14 days across 10 venues. The provision of dignitary protection is a service-wide responsibility and State Crime Operations Command is well supported by the trained regional members.

The key meetings were highly successful and enhanced the reputation of the Queensland Police Service, underlining its capacity to deal with serious, complex security threats.

*By Detective Inspector Peter Fleming, Security Intelligence Branch*