

Martin Place, Sydney, December 15, 2014 – “Take the shot”

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Six days after the Sydney Siege, a sense of calm has returned to Australia. But even before this tragic episode, the first of its type on Australian soil, there was an eerie sense of inevitability that we, as a nation, will at some point in time confront the worst of all our fears – a terror attack. We did, and we came out of this crisis stronger and perhaps more united.

There are of course always the [critics](#). Their target – the New South Wales (NSW) Police and its handling of the situation. The hostage-taker, Man Haron Monis, was clearly seen any number of times pacing in front of the Lindt café’s plate glass windows, sufficiently away from the hostages. So why wasn’t the shot taken?

Following are some points of consideration:

- The NSW Police had no way of knowing whether the backpack Monis had on him was not an [explosive](#).
- Shooting through plate glass windows might have shattered the glass into the café, potentially leading to numerous fragmentation injuries that could have been fatal.
- The sniper’s bullet may not have found its mark. It may have just wounded Monis, which in turn may have caused him to use his weapon

on the hostages in rapid succession. The result – a much higher casualty figure.

In the end, the NSW and supporting Australian Federal Police (AFP) officers did the best they could under the circumstances they were given. Trying to talk Monis down netted the release of some of the hostages and ultimately defused the situation enough to limit the potential carnage that could have taken place. For this cool-headed approach, the police should be commended.

But, there are those in the community who are not so convinced.

Some of the more vocal critics say that had Monis been taken out as soon as he had been positively identified might have saved the two hostages who were killed in the siege. This of course is playing ‘hypotheticals’ after the fact. None of these critics were on the ground; were part of the police command and control structure; or had any real knowledge of the complexities involved when dealing with hostage situations in the Australian political context. ‘Going hard’ might be something that people see on real-life American news footage or in Hollywood movies, but it has to be remembered that as pro-American as most Australians are, and as ‘Americanised’ as we may appear to those living outside of the Anglosphere, we in Australia are not Americans. Therefore, injecting an American-style solution on to an Australian cultural and political context, is neither easy nor wise. The political fallout, had the police aped American

‘decisiveness’ and failed, would have sent shockwaves throughout the Australian policing establishment and would have demoralised their special forces at a time when the country needs them on heightened alert. So in hindsight, it was better they acted in a considered manner. While the loss of mother of three, [Katrina Dawson](#), and Lindt café manager, [Tori Johnson](#), is not to be in any way minimised, we have to remind ourselves that at anytime, things could have been much, much worse. Monis after all had taken 17 people hostage.

However, there were other aspects to this case that left a lot to be desired.

Monis was a known felon. He came to Australia as an asylum seeker from Iran in [1996](#). He was granted political asylum in



2001. At that time, the Australian government simply followed their senior alliance partner – the United States – which did not have a nuanced approach to Iran. Washington

was locked in a ‘cold war’ with the Iranian government and Canberra ‘band wagoned’ with Washington. In 2000, when the Iranian government asked for Monis to be extradited

back to Iran, Australia, the country that gave Monis asylum, also gave him the benefit of the doubt and condemned Iranian authorities for wanting to persecute this individual. Moreover, allowing Monis to be extradited back to Iran would have been in contravention of the [Refugee Convention](#). So Australian authorities were bound by two external factors that they could not escape: (a) being a good ally and (b) being a good international citizen.

Monis went on to become a self-styled healer and occultist. He lured women into his orbit and [sexually assaulted](#) them. By the time of the Sydney Siege, Monis had wracked up over 40 sexual assault charges. He was even charged as an accessory to his ex-wife’s murder. So Monis was not just a felon, he was a violent felon with most of his violence directed at women. During his time in Australia, at some point, it is assumed he became politically radicalised. Although originally a Shia, he changed to Sunni Islam and began publicly protesting against the injustices of Western intervention in the Middle East. His actions were focussed and extremely tactless. He sent (and it has been stated that he even hand-delivered) letters to the [families](#) of Australian service personnel who were killed in action overseas.

As far as we can tell there was no connection to any Islamist group, individual or cause within Australia or overseas, that prompted Monis to undertake the dramatic Sydney Siege. He was a ‘lone wolf’, and to most Australian authorities – invisible. The

NSW judiciary had recently introduced laxer conditions of [bail](#). So, while Monis was awaiting sentencing, he was released into the community by a magistrate in whose considered opinion Monis would pose no threat to public safety.

In summary, from the available evidence on Monis so far, the following points can be surmised:

- There must be a better way of vetting asylum seekers entering Australia. Not all asylum seekers are genuine or nice people who deserve a second chance. Some are in fact criminals, others perhaps harbour ill intent toward elements within the Australian community, or public safety as a whole.
- The social good, civic order and public safety must always come before international obligations. It is nice being considered a good ally and a good international citizen, but not at the expense of domestic security. People choose to come and live in Australia because it is safe to do so. Those wanting to maintain the chaos and violence of their home countries should not be considered worthy candidates for residency in Australia, under any circumstance.
- Foreign governments with oppressive systems are politically unsavoury and we may not want to deal with them at any level, but they are not always wrong in their assessment of their nationals. Arguably Iran had a case to be made against Monis in 2000, but for political reasons, Canberra chose to ignore this.

- The police can catch a felon and put him/her behind bars, but if the supporting judiciary cannot properly weigh up the evidence and release a felon who then re-offends, or, in the case of Monis, commits a threat to national security, it is the judiciary that has failed.
- Mental illness is something that is getting more traction in the Australian political vernacular due to public awareness campaigns being launched by groups such as [Beyond Blue](#). But the dark underbelly of mental illness, where the person who suffers a psychotic break and commits a violent act because of some deeply held delusion, is still relatively taboo. Better ways of identifying people prone to this are needed. Monis was not well psychologically. His behaviours and propensity to commit sexual assaults, should have alerted someone.

It is generally assumed that a person with a mental illness has deficiencies so profound, that they cannot operate with any degree of internal coherence and logic and can therefore not be held responsible. On December 15, 2014 Monis was sound of mind. He had a plan. He took a gun through inner city Sydney, took hostages and brought Australia's commercial heart to a halt for two days. While thankfully the action of a rank amateur and as such cannot be considered a true act of terrorism, it was nonetheless an act of terror which will remain with Sydneysiders and fellow Australians for some time to come.

– Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of SAGE International –

Images Accessed: 21/12/2014

Man Haron Monis image

http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/03138/man_haron_monis_2_3138685k.jpg