

Knee-Jerk Reaction to Sydney Hostage Siege

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Religion](#), [Terrorism](#)

Western media reported what happened as expected. Muslims are their targets of choice.

Saying an Islamic gunman took hostages in a Sydney cafe. A black and white flag with Arabic writing like those used by Islamic State (IS) terrorists reportedly visible.

Raising fears of radicalized Islamic militants running wild. Home-grown or of Middle East origin.

Planning other attacks. Australia on high alert. Mindless of a flag unrelated to IS. Or its message saying:

"There is no God but Allah, and Mohamed is his messenger." Hardly a call to violence. Urging widespread terror attacks.

Islam teaches love. Not hate. Peace. Not violence. Charity. Not selfishness. Tolerance. Not terrorism.

Its five pillars include profession of faith. Prayer five times daily. Fasting during Ramadan.

Charity. Performing the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime for those able to afford it.

No matter. Muslims are stereotypically portrayed as dangerous gun-toting terrorists. Hate messages repeat regularly. Fear stoked.

Imperial wars target Muslim countries. Western homeland ones are vilified. Persecuted for their faith. Ethnicity. At times, prominence. Activism. Charity.

Relentlessly targeted. Hunted down. Rounded up. Held in detention. Treated like common criminals.

Held on secret evidence. Convicted on bogus charges. Given long prison sentences. Without just cause.

Australia like America and much of Europe. A police Martin Place operation began. In Sydney's central business district. Including heavily armed SWAT teams.

People advised to avoid the area. Trains and buses halted. Roads blocked. Surrounding streets sealed off. Helicopters overflew Sydney.

A portion of its central business district on lockdown. Affecting its New South Wales Parliament. Reserve Bank. Opera house. Law courts. State library.

Sydney Harbor Bridge traffic halted. A Martin Place bomb threat reported. Reports said Australian authorities focused on cracking down on radicalized Islamists.

Scare headlines included the [Washington Post](#) claiming “Australia’s jihadist problem is much bigger than Sydney’s hostage crisis.”

Things lasted 16 hours. Gunman called a self-styled sheikh. Things ended when heavily armed police stormed the downtown cafe Tuesday pre-dawn.

Live television showed what happened. Reported intense gunfire. At least two deaths followed. Including the gunman.

At 2:45AM, Sydney police twittered: “Sydney siege is over. More details to follow.”

Prior to its ending, reports said at least six hostages escaped. The hostage-taker identified as Man Haron Monis.

A mid-50s Iranian man. Allegedly calling himself Sheikh Haron. Australian media reporting his lawyer saying he acted alone.

According to Australian national broadsheet The Age, he was free on bail. Involving two separate criminal cases.

Charged with being an accessory before and after the fact. In the murder of his former wife – Noleen Hayson Pal. Reportedly stabbed. Her apartment set ablaze.

Also charged with sexually assaulting a woman in western Sydney. In 2002.

Police claimed he self-styled himself a spiritual healer. Conducted business openly. On Station Street at Wentworthville.

In 2013, he pled guilty to 12 charges. Related to sending so-called poison-pen letters. To families of Australian servicemen. Killed overseas. In NATO war theaters.

A web site reportedly connected to him includes US and Australia condemnations. For military action against Afghanistan and Iraq.

Sydney Muslim community leader, Jamal Rifi, was quoted saying “everything he stands for is wrong.” His actions have nothing to do with Islam.

He’s “never been associated with any mainstream mosque, and he is not associated with any of our religious leaders whatsoever. He is self-proclaimed.”

Rifi knows Monis’ family well. Not him personally. He’s not a sheikh, he said. His dress is traditional. Including a beard. Common everywhere. Including in Western countries.

Media reports say it’s unclear if he had accomplices. Australia remained transfixed for hours. So did many other parts of the world. Featuring what happened. Ignoring other news.

Australia’s right-wing Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, went on national television. From Canberra. Australia’s capital. Before things ended.

Saying “an armed person claiming political motivation” is involved. It’s “profoundly shocking that innocent people should be held hostage. This is obviously a deeply disturbing incident.

“But all Australians should be reassured that our law enforcement and security agencies are well trained and equipped and are responding in a thorough and professional manner.”

Earlier Abbott convened a cabinet security meeting. Considering how to respond to what happened. Almost as though Australia was invaded. Or faced an imminent major threat.

Lindt Cafe’s Lindt & Sprungli CEO Stephen Loane at first thought a holdup was in progress. Maybe gone awry. When he arrived on site, he realized otherwise.

Throughout the siege, television coverage was non-stop. Nearby buildings were evacuated. Including Washington’s consulate. A block away.

People nearby remaining inside were told stay away from windows.

Islamophobia grips Australia. Fear-mongering persists. Without just cause. It bears repeating. Like in America. Much of Europe. Israel.

Dozens of Australian Muslim men had their passports revoked. On suspicion of planning to join Islamic State terrorists. In Syria or Iraq. Despite no credible evidence proving it.

Early Monday, Federal Police arrested a 25-year-old man. From suburban Sydney. On suspicion of financing terrorism. Authorities called him unconnected to hostage siege conditions.

Islamic Council of Victoria general manager, Nail Aykan, expressed concern about “repercussions for prejudice-motivated crime. We don’t want a domino effect in wider society,” he said.

University of Wollongong terrorism researcher Professor Adam Dolnik called what happened either “a lone wolf sympathetic to the issues of the Islamic State and the goal of jihad more generally” or a case of “psychopathology in search of a cause.”

Australia is home to around half a million Muslims. Half or more in Sydney. Many fleeing 1970s/80s Lebanese violence.

Ordinary people. Some prosperous. Assimilating well. With community members. People of other faiths.

Imagine a different scenario. If an average-looking Anglo-Saxon white male committed the same act. In Australia. A European country.

Especially America. Militarized police terrorize people of color. Eastern Kentucky University’s School of Justice Studies Professor Peter Kraska estimates around 50,000 annual nationwide SWAT raids. Around 137 daily.

Not in Middle American white communities. Or downtown business districts. In cases similar to what happened in Sydney.

If an average-looking Anglo-Saxon white male suspect was involved. Media coverage would be local. If any. Not non-stop. Blocking out other news.

Obama wouldn't go on national television. Commenting like Tony Abbott. Or convene his national security team. Or dispatch National Guard forces.

Most people if asked wouldn't know what happened. Wouldn't care. No connection to radicalized terrorists would be cited.

Or imminent threats. No scare headlines. Or downtown lockdowns. Or community ones.

Calm would return. Life would go on normally. Polar opposite if a Muslim was involved. An entire community would share blame.

Vilifying people for their faith would continue. More justification for America's war on terror. Scapegoating Muslims for their faith.

Federal, state and local authorities take full advantage. Expect the worst of things to continue.

Expect Sydney's hostage siege to affect Muslims in America adversely. Rogue states operate this way.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III." <http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III." <http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio

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