



# Talk to me: Lessons from the Lindt Café siege

Editorial Advisory Panel Member **Andrew Brown**, who served as an expert witness into the Lindt Café siege inquiry in Australia, provides an insight into some of the findings of the final report on the incident, which resulted in several fatalities

**B**lack September terrorists took 11 Israeli Olympic athletes hostage at the Munich Games in 1972. The confrontational police response resulted in the death of the athletes, a police officer and ten terrorists. This event, along with others, fuelled concern about the loss of life in hostage incidents.

This motivated the New York Police Department, utilising the talents of Harvey Schlossberg, a detective with a PhD in psychology, and Lieutenant Frank Boltz, to develop tactics that lead to the resolution of high conflict incidents without the loss of life. These tactics emphasised the importance of: Containing and negotiating with the hostage-taker; understanding the hostage-taker's motivation and personality in a hostage incident; and slowing an incident down so that time can work for the negotiator.

On January 19, 1973, four armed robbers entered Al's Sporting Goods Store on a busy commercial block of Broadway, New York City, threatening employees and customers with sawn off shotguns and handguns.

They were soon shot at by the attending officers, who injured one of the perpetrators. Rather than storming the store, officers began to negotiate and were successful in getting a hostage released to talk to police. The robbers' demands for a doctor to tend to their wounded companion were met and another hostage was released.

Several Muslim clergy were allowed to talk to the perpetrators to establish good dialogue through the use of provided walkie-talkies. Sporadic gunfire occurred throughout the incident and eventually the remaining hostages escaped. Without their hostages, the perpetrators had lost their bargaining power and were convinced by negotiators that to continue to fight for oppressed minorities they must first stay alive. To this day, the motto of the NYPD Hostage Negotiation Team remains 'Talk to Me'.

The FBI developed and launched its Hostage Negotiation training programme at the FBI Academy in Quantico in the same year, thus making negotiation a legitimate law enforcement strategy for critical hostage incidents. This went onto form the framework and foundation for hostage negotiator training worldwide that exists to this day.

On Monday, December 15, 2014 at 09:41hrs within the Lindt Café, Martin Place, Sydney, Man Haron Monis, a self-declared Islamic Scholar and manipulative narcissistic criminal, told the manager, Tori Johnson, to call the emergency number 000 and say that all 18 people within the café had been taken hostage by an Islamic State operative who was armed with a gun and explosives. Monis also indicated that he had positioned

*Police snipers at the scene during a siege at Martin Place in Sydney, while hostages were held at gunpoint at the Lindt café*

Richard Dobson | Rex

his collaborators with bombs throughout the city.

Police swiftly cleared and contained the area surrounding the café, situated in the heart of the city and located opposite the headquarters of a commercial television station. This, along with other factors, resulted in the uninterrupted live coverage of the unfolding incident.

Over the following 16-and-a-half hours, police attempted to negotiate with Monis to resolve the incident peacefully, but he would not talk to negotiators and only passed on his messages and demands via the hostages. Twelve of the 18 hostages managed to escape during four separate points in the incident, which fuelled tension within the café until Monis, in a highly agitated state after the last escape of hostages, discharged his gun at the fleeing hostages then calmly executed a kneeling Tori Johnson.

Police immediately stormed the café in the belief that Monis was armed with a gun and bomb. In the ensuing fire fight, Monis was killed and fragments from a deflected police bullet(s) fatally struck hostage Katrina Dawson.

The coronal inquest began almost immediately with its focus on two principal tasks:

To investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Tori Johnson, Katrina Dawson and Monis; and to examine the actions of police and authorities before and during the siege in order to assess whether they could be improved.

This was an inquisitorial rather than adversarial process to determine lessons learnt.

The role of an expert witness is to provide a report for use as evidence in proceedings and to give evidence of opinion. They are not an advocate for a party and have a paramount duty, overriding any duty to the proceedings or other person retaining the expert witness, to assist the court impartially on matters relevant to the area of expertise of the witness.

I gave expert testimony on the negotiation aspect of the police response and will focus on some of the challenges faced in dealing with what was a complex, dynamic and highly emotional hostage siege.

The Coroner returned a report with some 45 recommendations following detailed investigation of the Lindt Café siege and this is available in full at the link provided at the end of this article.

The primary strategy of the police for responding to sieges is one of containment and negotiation. It involves securing the scene and then establishing dialogue with the hostage-taker and hostages, with an overall purpose of a negotiated safe release of hostages, the safe surrender of the hostage-taker(s) and a peaceful resolution for all. In the Lindt Café siege this approach failed.

'Contain and negotiate' was the appropriate initial response to the siege, but it is a strategy that must be continually and robustly evaluated to measure its effectiveness. Not every siege is the same; they are all unique because we are dealing with human beings.

Hostage negotiation uses an array of proven communication techniques to engage the hostage taker in direct dialogue, in order to influence and ultimately change his or her behaviour towards a peaceful resolution.

This is not a wait and see approach, but a real option that de-escalates tension, gathers vital

intelligence, reassures hostages held and ultimately works to influence and change the actions of the hostage-taker towards a peaceful resolution, while commanders can consider other tactical options.

Negotiators were continually faced with the fact that Monis refused to engage in direct dialogue with them, using hostages to convey his messages and demands to the police. While you can listen, talk and reassure hostages, it is challenging to try to negotiate indirectly with the hostage-taker, especially when you do not know the exact circumstances in which the hostages find themselves. In this incident, the challenge was further compounded by the real fear of what was being portrayed as the first attack on Australian soil by the so-called Islamic State.

Using intelligence from Monis's background could have opened up avenues of negotiator dialogue that might have sparked response and engagement in dialogue. There were a number of elements that could have been utilised, the first being that Monis had been deprived access to his children and had fought this decision

through the courts. This indicated the importance of his children to him and provided a potential emotional hook for dialogue.

His religion and cultural beliefs could also have been used to open dialogue. As a self-proclaimed Islamic scholar, Monis had recently made the conversion from Shia to Sunni Islam, and attended Islamist rallies that promoted conspiracy theories about Australian security agencies. Also, while on

bail and facing a likely lengthy imprisonment before the siege, he declared allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. These were all indicators of his beliefs and allegiance, thus providing negotiators the opportunity to seek both cultural and religious guidance that might have informed their negotiation strategy.

No doubt this is a challenging subject matter to enter into, but again, it may have been one that provoked direct dialogue.

Consideration of using third party intermediaries (TPIs) is a challenging and complex area, but one that should not be dismissed. Using someone who already has a relationship with the hostage-taker could potentially create direct dialogue. However, this must be considered carefully, with the person being briefed and coached throughout the negotiations. Controlling what another person says is the challenge.

Other communication methods can also encourage direct dialogue. Carefully crafting media broadcasts by notable officials can help to send a message to the hostage-taker and play to their heightened sense of importance, especially given their history and narcissistic tendencies.

Unfortunately negotiators continued to speak to hostages and did not gain direct dialogue with Monis. Faced with such an incident, negotiators need to think outside the box to consider alternative strategies to engage the hostage-taker in direct dialogue.

Monis had a list of demands from the early stages. His demand to speak to the Prime Minister was rightly declined, albeit in a dismissive manner. A clear explanation of why a demand is not possible allows negotiators to

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align the hostage-taker's expectations. Misinterpretation of the restrictions not to make concessions to terrorists, imposed under the National Counter Terrorism plan, may have contributed to this decision.

Monis's demand seeking an on air debate could have been explored through asking him to provide a written statement as to his purpose and motivation behind the incident, allowing him to express himself, while at the same time permitting negotiators to understand what had brought him to this point. Such understanding would have made negotiators better placed to enter into productive dialogue. The refusal only increased the hostages' frustration and sense of abandonment.

The hostage-taker's demand for an IS flag was quite rightly met with refusal, but negotiators did not explore why he wanted the flag, nor did they explain why it would not be provided. This was counterproductive and again increased the anguish among the hostages.

Moving police and parked vehicles out of Phillip Street in response to demands by Monis was reasonable and appropriate, although it should have been used as a positive police action to pursue some reciprocation.

His demand for the lights in Martin Place to be extinguished appeared to have been mismanaged by both the negotiators and command. This could have been granted and might have provided yet another opportunity to engage in direct dialogue with Monis. Instead, the prolonged failure not only agitated his anger, but also exacerbated the sense of frustration experienced by the hostages.

To measure the effectiveness of any strategy you must be able to measure your progress towards your ultimate goal. Unfortunately, no progress towards a negotiated settlement of the siege was made at any stage.

Negotiators failed to undertake robust evaluation and assessment of where they were in the negotiations and what they had not achieved in line with their strategy, nor was there a system or process in place that allowed them to do so. This affected tactical negotiator advice to the various levels of command, which saw no change to the 'contain and negotiate' strategy.

While not definitive, progress in negotiations may be measured through:

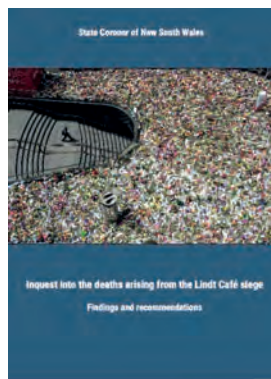
- Emotional outbursts are declining and conversations are getting longer;
- Hostages are released;
- Weapons are surrendered;
- Absence of physical injury to hostages;
- The incident is static; and
- A routine has been established.

The role of a consultant psychiatrist or psychologist in the response to a hostage siege is beneficial and can provide an excellent clinical insight for negotiators on how to communicate effectively when dealing with a hostage-taker who is suffering from a personality disorder.

The consultant can also assess the hostages' behaviour, which helps advise on how best to reassure them during their captivity.

A psychiatrist or psychologist may also be used to monitor the negotiation team to assess how they are managing under the high stress of an incident, and to offer psychological support where required.

Their advice, while invaluable, must be taken in the context of the cultural, religious and situational factors that give influence to a hostage-taker's behaviour and



The full report is available at: [www.lindtinquest.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/findings-and-recommendations.pdf](http://www.lindtinquest.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/findings-and-recommendations.pdf)

actions. It is from this, based on training and experience, that negotiators make informed judgments about their strategy, its effectiveness and to identify ways forward in dialogue, especially if a stalemate has been reached.

In this case the consultant psychiatrist was permitted to give advice about negotiation strategy and tactics, but made erroneous and unrealistic assessments about what was occurring in the stronghold, gave ambiguous advice about the nature of Monis's behaviour, and was allowed to go beyond his area of expertise and give advice about Islamic terrorism. This, combined with other factors, led to an underestimation of Monis's capability and the danger he posed to the hostages.

In addition, a total of eight calls by hostages to a number they had been told would connect them with a negotiator went unanswered – four around 20:00hrs and another four between 24:30hrs and 01:00hrs. An unknown number of calls were also diverted to other telephones within the Police Forward Command Post.

## Missed calls

Missing these calls highlights a significant failure in a basic component of siege management. It was likely that the calls between 24:30hrs and 01:00hrs were not answered because all the negotiators were involved in a handover briefing in a separate room.

Handovers between teams on long running sieges are commonplace and must be handled with care and diligence to continue to provide open communication and ensure a smooth transition to a fresh team.

Negotiators had not received adequate training in dealing with terrorists. The training of negotiators focuses on dealing with the high incidence of domestic high-risk situations, but did not adequately equip them to engage effectively with terrorist/s in a siege. Negotiators should have at least a basic understanding of terrorist negotiations and a cadre should be developed that mirrors the counter terrorism command to ensure capability and capacity across all of the tactical options.

There was no policy requiring commanders or negotiators to record negotiation positions and tactics, the demands made by a hostage-taker, or any progress or lack of it in moving a high-risk situation towards resolution.

Recording negotiators' observations on the stage and progress of negotiations allows them to make recommendations in further negotiation tactics, or ultimately declare to commanders that negotiations are not working to allow other tactical options.

There is a train of thought in legal circles that if it something is not recorded then it did not happen. Recording decisions, tactical advice, progress updates and negotiator dialogue can be viewed as hard work, but advancements in technology allow it all to be captured with ease.

Thankfully incidents of this nature are rare but, when they do occur, they present a significant danger to innocent people caught up as hostages and pose complex challenges to the agencies that must be prepared to respond to such events.

History has taught us that successful resolution by force from law enforcement agencies or military requires exceptional training, planning and execution.

Globally, negotiators form a small community that willingly shares the challenges of the incidents so that others can learn from their experience; they will no doubt also learn the lessons from this incident.

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