

From Woolwich to Ottawa and now Sydney, **Anthony Tucker-Jones** reports on the 'lone wolf' menace spreading around the world

JIHAD DOWN



To the world's media, the Sydney café siege at the end of 2014 seemed to herald the unwelcome arrival of "lone wolf" terrorism to Australia. In reality, over the past decade Australia has not been spared the threat of homegrown jihadists, and in recent years the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has had its hands full. At the beginning of 2015 it was reported that more than 20 Australians who had returned home after serving with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terror group were being monitored by the Australian security agencies.

Australia has become a victim of exactly the same type of militant Islamist attacks experienced in the UK, US, France and Canada. The perpetrators of these attacks have often been known to the authorities; the problem has been gauging the level of threat they pose. The police and intelligence services simply do not have the manpower and resources to monitor every suspect espousing militancy. Australia's recent experiences have also starkly highlighted the consequences of the security agencies not working in a coherent and co-ordinated manner. The result has been that, as in the case of the Boston, Woolwich and Ottawa attacks, known "lone wolves" slipped through the cracks even when the intelligence organisations were well aware of their activities.

Security experts are increasingly of the view that organised or lone jihadists have actually morphed into

something else. Islamist terror attacks are increasingly motivated by simple intolerance and grievance-led anger rather than pure religious ideology seeking an Islamic caliphate. Former head of counter-terrorism at Scotland Yard, Peter Clarke, argues that the term "lone wolf" itself is misguided. "They are not lone wolves," he said of the attackers. "All these people share the same intolerant ideology; it's just a different method of attack."

Impulsive human reactions such as anger are all but impossible to completely safeguard against – society functions through the twin pillars of mutual co-operation and social conformity. Pundits argue the battle to win hearts in minds, whether it is in European capitals or in Sydney, is being lost. An anti-Western stance forged by a desire to take revenge for Western foreign policy decisions allows for a highly dangerous "pick-and-mix" ideology. This enables individuals to feel that even when acting alone they are part of some much wider cause. With their ego duly stroked, an individual can easily grandstand without the support of a network.

Until 2014, ASIO had been quite successful in thwarting Australian jihadists. The most prominent of these was Faheem Khalid Lodhi who, in 2006, was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for plotting to bomb Australia's electricity supply system as well as three military facilities. Such was the measure of his intent that the court ruled

Human shields:
hostages held in the Lindt café in Sydney were forced to hold up Islamist flags in the window

UNDER



he must serve a minimum of 15 years before parole would be considered. Mohammed Abderrahman (aka Willie Brigitte) one of Faheem Lodhi's associates was later implicated in the murder of famed Afghan Mujahideen leader Ahmad Shad Masood at the hands of al-Qaeda.

That same year, "Jihad Jack" – aka Joseph T Thomas – was placed under a control order despite the fact his terrorism conviction was quashed. Just two years later, the Melbourne Benbrika Group led by Muslim Cleric Abdul Nacer Benbrika were found guilty of planning to assassinate Australian Prime Minister John Howard, as well as launch attacks on major sporting events. Similarly, Somali terror group Al-Shabaab are believed to have been behind a plot to attack Holsworthy Barracks in Sydney, which resulted in the arrest of four men.

In 2010, the "Sydney Five" were convicted of conspiring to commit religiously-inspired terror attacks. Throughout 2014, the Australian security forces were alert to this growing threat; indeed, last summer the Australian Federal Police raided premises across Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne which led to a number of arrests.

Things actually came to a head almost three months before the Sydney café siege when, on 23 September 2014, 18-year-old Numan Haider stabbed two officers outside Endeavour Hills police station, Melbourne. In response, officers shot and killed Haider who was armed with two knives and carrying an Islamist flag. Anti-terrorism police stated they had thwarted an attempt to behead Victoria Police officers and drape the bodies in the flag.

Then on, 15 December 2014, Man Haron Monis, an Iranian refugee and self-styled sheik, entered Sydney's Lindt café in Martin Place and took 18 hostages, initiating a 16-hour siege. The police were called at 09:45 following reports of an armed robbery, and a tense standoff followed as hostages were forced to stand in the café window holding an Islamist flag. Between 16:00-17:00 around half a dozen hostages managed to escape. At 02:00 the following day the police stormed the building after shots and a possible explosion were heard. Monis and two hostages – barrister Katrina Dawson and café manager Tori Johnson – were killed during the operation.

Following the siege it transpired that Man Haron Monis had been an irritant to the Australian authorities for over a decade. After fleeing Iran, he arrived in Australia on a three-month business visa in 1996. The following year he sought the help of Amnesty International under his birth name Manteghi Boroujerdi. He claimed he had defected with Iranian intelligence secrets and was in regular contact with ASIO. Monis also claimed he worked in the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and that he had been privy to the planning of the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996 that left 19 US servicemen dead.

The Iranian Embassy denied all this, claiming Monis

was wanted for fraud back home. Although he refused to support Monis' asylum application, Sydney-based Iranian refugee advocate, Cyrus Sarang, believed Monis was an Iranian intelligence insider. In response to such allegations, a spokesperson for Australian Attorney General George Brandis said, "It is the longstanding practice of the Australian government not to comment on specific intelligence or operational matters." Ironically, such denials always give credence to this type of claim.

After Monis was finally granted asylum in 2001, he was soon using his adopted country as a place to propagate hatred and intolerance. That year he chained himself to the front gate of the New South Wales Parliament, claiming Iran had seized his wife and two children to keep him quiet. This was because he alleged he had firsthand knowledge that Iranian former defence minister, Ahmad Vahidi, and Chief of Staff of the Iranian armed forces, Major General Hassan Firouzabadi, had been involved in the Khobar Towers attack.

Due to his activism, Monis was placed on a security watch list until 2009 but for some reason dropped off. In 2010, under the name of Sheik Haron, he visited Amnesty International a second time complaining he was being threatened and harassed following his letters sent to dead Australian servicemen's families. Amnesty found he had received death threats, but these were not surprising given what he had written in the first place to spark them.

Monis was found guilty in 2012 of sending threatening and offensive letters to the families of eight Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan in protest at the Australian government's support for the war. On top of this, he reportedly was facing more than 40 charges of sexual and indecent assault. In 2013 he was also charged with being an accessory to the murder of his ex-wife, but was still granted bail. The day before the siege, Monis was refused the right to appeal against his conviction over the offensive letters.

The Australian Police and ASIO face difficult questions over why Monis reportedly lived on welfare for many years although physically able, was able to obtain a gun licence and was granted bail for the murder charge despite a record of violence and instability. It is not clear why he was taken off the watch list, particularly as in 2010 fellow Iranian sheikh, Mansour Leghaei, who lived in Sydney had failed an ASIO security assessment. It was claimed he was working for Iranian intelligence. Cyrus Sarang was of the view that Monis was equally dangerous and, despite reporting his concerns to the police, no action was taken.

Although the Australian authorities were swift to deny Monis had any known links with international terrorist organisation, the man himself made his position clear during the siege. News footage showed hostages being forced to display a black and white flag showing the Shahada, a testament to the faith of Muslims. This type of flag – or at least those similar to it – are very popular with Sunni Islamist militant groups such as Islamic State and al-Qaeda. The damage was done – joint statements by the Grand Mufti of Australia and the Australian National Imams Council condemning Monis did little to allay public

JIHAD DOWN UNDER



© Getty Images

Moving in: tactical officers prepare to enter the café after a gunshot is heard

concern over the motives for the attack.

Despite his evident religious stance, Monis' true rationale remains cloudy. In light of his mounting criminal charges and convictions, it may be that he simply decided to go out in a blaze of glory that would secure him a place in the history books. Certainly his ideological stance appears to have been smoke and mirrors, with his claims of Iranian intelligence skulduggery and his secret meetings with ASIO remaining unsubstantiated. While he was prepared to accept Australian sanctuary from Iranian persecution, he was not prepared to support Australia's "war on terror" in Afghanistan. As with all home-grown militant Islamists, there is a sense of biting the hand that feeds it despite such views only being tolerated to a limited extent by Western democracies. Graham Thom, Amnesty's refugee co-ordinator, has observed: "He clearly had an agenda and it was a confused agenda, and we could clearly see that in what he was presenting us. It was all just very, very strange."

Paris Massacre

Just as *intersec* was going to press, Paris endured its latest Islamist terror attack. On 7 January 2015 two hooded gunmen dressed in black paramilitary style fatigues shot at least 12 people, including two police officers, at the offices of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. Another ten were injured during the attack. The men, armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles and rocket propelled grenades, burst into *Hebdo's* offices and opened fire on staff. Despite a firefight with police, the men hijacked a car and sped off eastward. *Charlie Hebdo* has courted controversy in the past for its satirical stance toward Islam and was firebombed in 2011.

France was already on heightened alert after calls by Islamist militants to attack French citizens and interests in reprisal for French air strikes against Islamist strongholds in the Middle East and Africa. Clearly this increased security did no good. The attack was well orchestrated and executed and clearly caught the French authorities by surprise. Once again this was an attack driven by intolerance as much as religious dogma. It follows an attack in December, in which a psychiatric patient shouting "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) injured 13 by ramming a vehicle into a crowd in the eastern city of Dijon.