

Doctor **Allan Orr** considers the lessons that can be learned about rescuing hostages following events in the Lindt Café in Sydney

HOSTAGE RECOVERY

Breachers' responsible for assaulting the Lindt Café in downtown Sydney – and thus prosecuting the first live-feed hostage rescue operation in a Western nation for a generation – employed 5.56mm military-grade assault rifles designed for open-warfare and capable of firing rounds able to reach distances of up to 300-500m accurately, or at least predictably at the longer 500m range with standard 14.5in barrels. Using these weapons inside the compact, dense café, hostage Katrina Dawson fell victim to an astonishing seven ricochets during a breach where only two 'operators' were ever able to manoeuvre into an engageable position.

Meanwhile, first time, untrained, unaffiliated terrorist Man Haron Monis fired two shots from his 'sawn-

off' pump-action shotgun and killed one hostage, having the luxury of taking point-blank aim. At best information, NSW Police's Tactical Operation Unit (TOU) members threw 11 'nine-banger' non-lethal flash-grenades and fired 22 shots from their M4s, hit Monis 13 times, hit another four hostages plus somehow one of their own. Mathematically – with the seven 'fragments' to impact Ms Dawson, at 55 grains totalling the weight of one whole M4 bullet (one 'fragment' severed a major artery), the three wounded hostages and one wounded police officer – on average one in two police rounds injured or killed hostages or team members during the final tactical assault.

Given the location of the wounds on Dawson and the firing distances inside the café, it is probable each

Terrified members of the public run from the café as the chaos ensues



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EVERY EXAMINED

of her ricochet injuries were due to individual round deflections. With Monis hit 13 times (only four times directly), Dawson seven times, three other hostages hit once each and a TOU officer hit twice (likely from his own round/s, meaning the 5.56mm bullets had enough energy to ricochet backwards), this adds up to 25 injuries from 22 rounds fired. If the above thesis is accurate, two of the rounds injured two people each or caused multiple wounds, possibly no better testament to the unnecessary maelstrom inside the café. Using military-grade 5.56mm assault rifles and ammunition with four times the kinetic energy over the 9mm rounds used by the SAS at Princes Gate, meant the ricochets that killed Dawson were practically inevitable.

The findings that the choice of assault rifle over sub-machine gun were based on seem to invalidate the latter, post-Lindt (regardless of NSW or UK police force declarations made to the New South Wales Coronial Inquiry into the Sydney Siege). Somehow more than every round, in part or whole, resulted in a hit during the final gun fight, intended or not, or a little over 120 percent round-impact ratio. The TOU was able to acquire Monis and hit him cleanly four times out of 22 rounds fired. Under 25 percent of shots enjoyed clear line of flight, for whatever reason. Under such real-world metrics, do tactical teams still assume to hit and base tactics around the metric of 'over-penetration' and so the sole concern of a bullet passing through a target into a hostage/bystander?

Final averages of the Lindt Café 'Emergency-Action'; after firing 22 rounds the TOU achieved intentional and unintentional hit rates hovering around 50 percent (simply the product of the rounds employed and a very small space packed with a high number of hostages), while one 'fragment' or ricochet roughly resulted in a hostage or operator death or injury per every two rounds discharged. In another metric, again at best information, with five of the 18 hostages escaping well before the EA, six escaping at 2:03am and one more escaping at 2:11am seconds before the TOU breached. Six hostages were left in the café. Four of those were killed or injured by police ricochets – approaching a 70 percent hostage casualty rate.

Consider this crude, somewhat unfair but still damning quantitative comparison; Monis, an untrained first-time terrorist with an aged 'sawn-off' shotgun was thus more accurate and less dangerous to the hostages than the TOU during the final gun battle by a ratio of 1:5 injuries and deaths, or 1:1 deaths and 0:4 injuries. Overpowered rounds are thus the very reason the recently concluded Coronial Inquiry was undertaken. Whether the casualty rate was the result of accidental firing or mis-aiming, we will never know. What the rate definitely was the result of was

the kinetic energy of the weapons systems used to assault the small café holding such a high number of hostages, as to put down threats as violently and quickly as possible rather than surgically and safely (cross-fire injuries would logically have been more had not 11 of the 18 initial hostages escaped pre-shootout).

Flashback to 1980 and Operation Nimrod, where the British SAS set the hostage recovery bar at the dawn of modern terrorism with the first successful intra-Western complex domestic hostage rescue operation – also under 'live-feed' conditions. The success of the iconic operation was in large measure due to doctrinal focus and flow on tactical training and, therefore, operational outcomes. One outcome due to doctrinal bias was the preferred tactical load-out, where the SAS employed pistol-calibre 9mm HK MP5 sub-machine guns to break the London siege over 5.56mm M4 Colt carbines. These weapons are specifically designed niche tools that fire much lower velocity 9mm rounds, hold 30 bullets in the magazine and are capable of automatic fire as well.

The Iranian Embassy Siege saw terrorists take 26 hostages for political purposes. The simply and softly named Red and Blue team troopers assaulted an embedded hostile force numbering six when a hostage was executed on the sixth day of the siege. Losing one more hostage in the operation to SAS fire, the 30-35 SAS troopers eliminated five of six hostage takers dug into a large multi-storey space. The operation was infinitely more complex to be sure, though what comprised the key differential between the two operations again were the underlying training/operational doctrines.

Ignoring the 'cool at all costs' factor and prioritising hostage safety over operator safety, the SAS assaulters reined in their indoctrinated militarism and deliberately chose a less powerful, more ballistically surgical bullet and weapon system with rounds generally designed to be utilised not past 50m in lethality terms. In practice, the SAS simply trained for 'head-shots' or the 'Mozambique drill' with the smaller calibre MP5, happily and selflessly trading operator safety for civilian safety. The size of the weapons, being shorter and lighter than M4s, is far more 'dynamic' in what is termed 'close quarter battle'. In short, they were manufactured specifically for situations like the Lindt Café – an incredibly confined area packed with 'friendlies'.

Employing the right tactical tool can have a profound strategic effect. Nimrod solidified the SAS' international reputation as the world's best counter-terrorism unit and deterred generations of terrorists from conducting hostage-taking attacks in not just the UK or even mainland Europe, but the wider West. The



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Armed officers prepare to enter the café

Sydney Siege response has in large measure deleted that precedent. The base tactics of the TOU, which is world class, were sound, responsible and backed by Australian Defence Force liaisons on the day, which also favours the M4 in hostage rescue. In both cases, 'contain and negotiate' strategies were apt and armed response was a last resort with assaults triggered under an 'EA' tactical schema. However, by choosing the wrong tools, backtracked to the wrong doctrinal approach of operator safety first and/or an overly aggressive ethos, Lindt backfired.

Counter-terrorism is a different beast in grand-strategy terms to everyday policing, even high-risk operations. No matter the outcome, the 'game' is played at the grand-strategy level and so tactical inputs gestate strategic outputs. Employing the wrong tools can do vast damage in strategic terms, for instance in degrading deterrent capacity through high 'friendly-fire' rates.

The concept of strategy must be incorporated into tactical counter-terrorism approaches, including operational load-outs, which must be intelligently calibrated and remain more sophisticated than the one-tool-fits-all approach defended at the inquiry by the NSW and British police forces alike. Lindt serves as a lodestar in all these metrics; ballistic, tactical and strategic. The instances where an assault rifle is required can essentially be reduced to running gun-fights with roving 'active shooters', and those platforms should not be semi-automatic stock AR-15s as employed by UK and Australian Police forces, but fully automatic-capable M4s. Any tactical teams with a strategic counter-terrorism remit must retain weapons capable of automatic fire, sub-machine guns, personal defence weapons and assault rifles across the board.

Operation Nimrod provides a comparator in the load-out debate at not only the tactical level, but also the high-end of counter-terrorism doctrine. The body-count of Lindt, a direct result of doctrinal misconceptions and/or unduly offensive mind-sets, and hence the choice of assault rifle over sub-machine gun, has also broken public faith and thus degraded the most important metric in counter-terrorism praxis – the

homeland sense of security – in the worst possible way. The new public fear in government responses as much as the initial terror attack/s in this way has marked the Sydney Siege in the public and sympathiser psyches as a successful intra-Western terror attack.

The vast majority of counter-terrorism tactical operations demand a sub-machine gun like the H&K MP5 or UMP series (9mm - .40/.45 calibre) or at most a personal defence weapon like the FN P90 or the H&K MP7 (4.6mm/5.7mm) – domicile raids, hostage rescue, ship/aircraft boarding, airport ops or protective details, all occurring inside densely populated, highly constricted space urban environs and so DO NOT require a mid-long range rifle/round combo as employed during Lindt. In strategy terms, prioritising the 'background' over the 'target' is the tactical and strategic lesson of Lindt. Hostage rescue in counter-terror contingencies is strategic theatre, to have an audience-winning final act, the right script must be followed.

'Bodycount' metrics driving tactical training and broader operational doctrine, if to be strategically productive, must revolve around the concept of avoidance in terms of the public as opposed to infliction in terms of the attacker. Rather than concentrating on 'over-penetration' metrics (which only marginally favour the 5.56mm because the long, pointed round tumbles upon impact to kinetically dump its energy in the first bio-mass it penetrates), and assuming the need to shoot though the environment to get 'at' the target, should operators assume the only obstacle between them and the target is a hostage?

Tactical operators are an offensively emplaced bio-shield driven between the public and the terrorist in times of dire need. The core driver of domestic counter-terrorist operations is public safety/defence not offensive 'kill/capture'. The operational outcomes of Lindt *vis-a-vis* Nimrod are a reflection of grand-strategy more than tactical prowess. Why tactical teams conduct 'the fight' must always be doctrinally focused upon, as opposed to how tactical teams conduct 'the fight'. Where the fight *per se* takes over the counter-terrorism matrix, Lindt style outcomes invariably compile.

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