

Islamist terror, the hatred that shall remain nameless

Cameron Stewart, The Australian, 12:00AM June 25, 2016. Cameron Stewart is an Associate Editor of The Australian who combines investigative reporting on issues of foreign affairs, defence and national security with feature writing on a wide range of topics for the Weekend Australian Magazine.



US President Barack Obama has shied from fingering radical Islam.



Malcolm Turnbull has taken a softer tone than Tony Abbott.

Orlando Police Dispatcher (OD)
Shooter (OM)

ORLANDO TRANSCRIPTS

June 12 - 2:35 am.

OD: Emergency 911, this is being recorded.

OM: In the name of God the Merciful, the beneficial [in Arabic]

OD: What?

OM: Praise be to God, and prayers as well as peace be upon the prophet of God [in Arabic]. I let you know, I'm in Orlando and I did the shootings.

OD: What's your name?

OM: My name is I pledge of allegiance to [omitted].

OD: Ok, What's your name?

OM: I pledge allegiance to [omitted] may God protect him [in Arabic], on behalf of [omitted].

OD: Alright, where are you at?

OM: In Orlando.

OD: Where in Orlando?

[End of call.]

Orlando transcripts: Omar Mateen's 911 call with parts redacted.

When the Orlando massacre gunman Omar Mateen was 15 he openly rejoiced as he watched live coverage of the second plane hitting New York's twin towers in 2001, boasting to classmates that Osama bin Laden was his uncle. As an adult he told workmates he had links to Islamic terrorists and wanted to become a martyr. He bragged about having shared acquaintances with the Tsarnaev brothers who carried out the Boston marathon bombings.

The US-born Muslim was interviewed three times by the FBI for alleged extremist views. A witness told the FBI Mateen watched al-Qa'ida videos. And as the bodies of those he shot at Orlando's Pulse nightclub lay around him, he called 911 to profess his allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He then wrote on Facebook: "The real Muslims will not accept the filthy ways of the West ... now taste Islamic State vengeance."

Yet the Obama administration is going out of its way to censor the notion that Mateen was a radical Islamic terrorist. Barack Obama has described the Orlando shooting that killed 49 people as an act of terror and an act of hate but pointedly has avoided using the word Islamic when describing Mateen's act of terrorism.

This week, the push to suppress any connection to Islam became farcical when the FBI released a partial transcript of Mateen's call to 911 during the shootings but edited it so that all reference to Islamic State were deleted. Mateen's claim to have carried out the massacre in support of Islamic State was hardly a secret; it was reported on the front page of virtually every newspaper in the world. The FBI's censored transcript read: Mateen: "I pledge of allegiance to (omitted). I pledge allegiance to (omitted) may God protect him (in Arabic), on behalf of (omitted)."

US Attorney-General Loretta Lynch initially defended the censorship decision, arguing that to release the full version would merely help Islamic State's propaganda. "What we're not going to do is further proclaim this man's pledges of allegiance to terrorist groups, and

further his propaganda,” Lynch said. But the decision was quickly reversed amid a storm of criticism from Republicans. “Selectively editing this transcript is preposterous,” House Speaker Paul Ryan said. “We know the shooter was a radical Islamist extremist inspired by ISIS. We also know he intentionally targeted the LGBT community. The administration should release the full, unredacted transcript so the public is clear-eyed about who did this, and why.”

A chastened FBI then released a transcript that included Mateen’s references to Islamic State, but the fiasco has triggered fresh debate about attempts by the Obama administration to decouple the words Islamic and terrorism when most terror attacks against the West are carried out by Muslims in the name of Islam.

Former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani warned this week that censorship on Islamic terrorism was counter-productive. “Why didn’t they do this with the Mafia, to spare Italian-Americans?” he asked. “Why? Because if you did, you would never make the connection (that ultimately) brought them down.” The irony is that while the Obama administration has been reluctant to call Mateen an Islamic terrorist — in part to protect the feelings of American Muslims — the Muslim community in the US instantly saw him as a soldier for Islamic State. “I have a word for Islamic State and their supporters,” Council on American-Islamic Relations head Nihad Awad said the day after the shooting. “You do not speak for us. You do not represent us. You are an aberration. You are an outlaw. (You) don’t speak for our faith.”

The presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has called on Obama to resign for not saying the words “radical Islam” in response to the Orlando shootings. “I am trying to save lives and prevent the next terrorist attack. We can’t afford to be politically correct any more,” Trump said. His attack has forced Democratic rival Hillary Clinton to toughen her rhetoric and to draw an Islamic link to the Orlando massacre where Obama has not. “This was a terrorist attack. ISIS appears to be claiming credit for it, whether it had anything to do with it or not — at a minimum, they seem to have inspired it,” Clinton said. But Clinton, like Obama, previously has been reluctant to use the term radical Islam when describing terrorism. “The problem is that (radical Islam) sounds like we are declaring war against religion,” Clinton has said. “It helps to create this clash of civilisations that is actually a recruiting tool for ISIS and other radical jihadists.”

The debate in the US over the description of Mateen as an Islamic terrorist has parallels to the debate over Lindt cafe siege gunman Man Haron Monis. Some did not see Monis as an Islamic terrorist but as a mentally unstable man. Similarly, some in the US have interpreted the Orlando shooting as purely a hate crime because Mateen targeted a gay nightclub. But Monis can still be mentally unstable and have been an Islamic terrorist, just as Mateen’s targeting of gays does not preclude him from being an Islamic terrorist. No terrorist is well adjusted. The bottom line is that both men killed in the name of Islamic State and had a history of Islamic radicalism.

The reluctance of some to use the term Islamic terrorism stems from a belief that it insults Islam and will anger moderate Muslims. But because terrorists from Mateen to Monis to bin Laden have all killed in the name of Islam, it is disingenuous to decouple Islam from the terror debate in the way that Obama has sought to do so. “To deny that there is any link to Islam is patently foolish,” says terrorism expert Greg Barton from Deakin University. “Those

drawn to Islamic State have been drawn by a personal conviction that it is a purer form of Islam.”

Rodger Shanahan, associate professor at the Australian National University, agrees Islam cannot be divorced from the terrorism carried out by Muslim extremists. “I think you should just call it what it is,” he says. “If you just call it terrorism it’s not the same, it could be referring to Basque separatists. Islamic terrorism has a specific world view that it wants to come to fruition, so you need to call it what it is and deal with the consequences of what it is. There is a direct link (to Islam): it’s a reality, you can’t shy away from it.”

In Australia, the rhetoric used when talking about Islamic terrorism also has been controversial. Malcolm Turnbull has used a softer tone when talking about terrorism compared with Tony Abbott, who regularly described Islamic State as a “death cult” and openly questioned aspects of the Islamic religion. Turnbull has been more upfront than Obama about the links between Islam and terrorism but is wary of rhetoric that could be seen to taint all Muslims rather than the small minority of extremists. “In this age of terrorism — overwhelmingly inspired by radical Islamist ideology — our security agencies must have the trust of Islamic communities in order to succeed,” the Prime Minister told *The Australian* this week. “We must not tag all Muslims or their religion with responsibility for the crimes of a tiny terrorist minority, which is precisely what the extremists want us to do.”

Last year Abbott as prime minister provoked a thinly disguised rebuke from ASIO chief Duncan Lewis after Abbott called for a “religious revolution” inside Islam, declaring “all cultures are not equal” and that “we can’t remain in denial about the massive problem within Islam”. Days later, in a newspaper interview, Lewis warned that Muslim-baiting rhetoric could fuel a dangerous backlash against Muslims that would make it harder for ASIO to do its work. In comments that came close to decoupling Islam and terrorism, Lewis said: “I don’t buy the notion (that) the issue of Islamic extremism is in some way fostered, sponsored or supported by the Muslim religion. I think it’s blasphemous to the extent I can comment on someone else’s religion.” He then provoked controversy by calling MPs directly and warning them not to use overly robust language when discussing Islam and terrorism. Lewis’s actions, co-ordinated by the PM’s office, annoyed some conservative Liberal MPs who saw it restricting freedom of speech.

The sensitivity of ASIO, the FBI and Obama over the term Islamic terrorism betrays a fear that many in the Muslim community cannot accept that those of the lunatic fringe of their faith are the problem. Yet if the Muslim community cannot accept the link between terror and Islam without seeing it as a broader attack on their religion, then the terror debate becomes mired in self-delusion. Obama believes using terms such as radical Islam makes it harder to defeat extremism but he has offered no explanation why this is the case.

“The reason I am careful about how I describe this threat has nothing to do with political correctness and everything to do with defeating extremism,” Obama said. “That’s the key, they tell us: ‘We can’t beat ISIL unless we call them radical Islamist.’”

What exactly would using this label accomplish? What exactly would it change? This is a political distraction.” The FBI also described as a distraction the fuss it created when it chose to edit Islamic State from Mateen’s 911 call.

In explaining its subsequent decision to release the unedited 911 transcript, the FBI said with not a trace of irony: “We have reissued the complete transcript to include these references (to Islamic State) in order to provide the highest level of transparency under the circumstances.” But since the attack in Orlando, transparency is coming a distant second to censorship in the debate about Islam and terror.