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## Islamist extremism: dance with an enemy we dare not name



Bollards arranged to protect shoppers in Sydney's CBD. Picture: Hollie Adams

[Chris Kenny](#), The Australian, 12:00AM December 30, 2017

The Islamist extremists are winning. Victory is unlikely and, in any event, a long way off but their immediate aims are being achieved, if not in the battlefields of Iraq and Syria, then at least in the democracies of Europe and the Western world.

The signs are ominous in Australia, where 15 years after the Bali bombings this is the enemy whose name we are too often too timid to mention. The extremists have us second-guessing the cultural superiority of our Western liberal democratic model and have conjured a collective and misplaced guilt among us about the treatment of Muslims.

From the fundamentalist preachers to the bloodthirsty terrorists, the ultimate goal of Islamist extremists is simple: global Islamic dominance. To achieve it they need to weaken and harm the West, fuel Muslim grievances and assert their cultural power through demographic changes and political influence.

They loathe our tolerance, freedom of expression and plurality, yet skilfully use these Western strengths against us as they subvert our ways by convincing

many of us that we are to blame for their atrocities. We can see the Islamist success in shaping this narrative all around us.

The Palestinian cause is used as a constant irritant. Just this month, popular singer Lorde was bullied into cancelling a concert in Israel while no one seems to care that she will sing in Vladimir Putin's Russia. Likewise, we saw the UN General Assembly vote by an overwhelming majority to condemn the US for recognising the obvious reality that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. And after I argued last week that Melbourne's Flinders Street horror was an Islamist terror attack — because that was the motivation cited by the Afghan-Australian attacker — Anglican priest Rod Bower described my comments as "poison" that could "drive fragile psyches over the edge". See what he did there — it is always our fault.

The success of Islamist propaganda can be seen in the fact after a Muslim man allegedly mowed down 19 people on a Melbourne city street and referred to "mistreatment of Muslims" to explain his actions Victorian police denied there was any evidence of a connection to terrorism. Given this is the season for resolutions, is it too much to ask that we start being forthright about the grave threat of Islamist extremism?

The paradoxes generated by the politically correct virtue-signallers who have taken over our politics, bureaucracies and, it seems, even the upper echelons of our law enforcement agencies are deeply worrying. After the Martin Place siege in Sydney and the Flinders Street attack, police and media downplayed terrorism but talked up mental health issues. Even ASIO once denied links between terrorism and refugees despite the truth that each contemporary, fatal, Islamist terrorist incident in this country has involved refugees.

Unpalatable as they are, we must start with the facts. We are told not to stigmatise mental health issues yet we see it used as an explanation for mass casualty attacks. As bollards go up in our cities are we to believe this is to protect us from the mentally ill or the drug-addicted? Why has this suddenly become a problem?

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies need to maintain strong links with Muslim communities to foster co-operation. They also want to maintain social cohesion and avoid the divisions between Muslim and non-Muslim people that the extremists seek to accentuate. And we should take care not to overstate the extent of the problem. We are talking about individuals of concern in this

country who number only in the hundreds and a pool of people susceptible to radicalisation that may number in the thousands. Still, the dangers are obvious.

Yet obfuscation in public information about terror attacks and police actions can only undermine confidence in law enforcement and create concern about government responses to the extremist threat, therefore creating the conditions for the mistrust the authorities want to avoid.

Besides, it is insulting to Muslim and non-Muslim Australians to deny the realities they can observe. It suggests people cannot deal with facts as they fall. We are intelligent enough to understand the threat of Islamist terrorism and sensible enough not to blame all Muslims for any attacks. Time and again we see that despite self-conscious warnings so-called Islamophobic backlashes never materialise.

Politicians and police are servants of the public and should have a clear bias towards sharing information in a forthright fashion rather than keeping secrets, unless confidentiality is important for operational reasons. Initially ruling out terrorism should not be difficult; if the offender is a non-Muslim and not espousing any religious or political cause then police may be able to announce early on that they do not suspect terrorism.

But if the attack is perpetrated by a Muslim immigrant who specifically cites Muslim grievances, the public ought to be told immediately that there are indications of a terrorist motive. Additional qualifiers about other factors and ongoing investigations would be understood but the public deserves to hear as many of the relevant facts as possible. Melbourne's new loudspeakers will be a waste of time unless someone is prepared to speak into them.

At Martin Place, NSW police delayed action and hoped to wear down Man Haron Monis as they would in a domestic siege situation, rather than treating it as an Islamist terror attack where loss of life was inevitable. Yet while this was unfolding they launched an operation to protect Muslims in public places from a Martin Place-inspired backlash. (Of course the backlash never came; even the "I'll ride with you" hashtag campaign was based on a fabricated episode.)

When Curtis Cheng was assassinated in an Islamist killing at Parramatta the police hierarchy told the public hours later that there was nothing to suggest terrorism. Yet we soon learned the attacker, dressed in black garb, had yelled "Allahu akbar" at the scene before he was shot dead.

There is a disturbing pattern here of police and politicians bending over backwards to discount terrorism even when there are obvious indications Islamist extremism is the motivation. Experts have long pointed to the overlap between disaffected, mentally disturbed and even drug-addicted people and the Islamist cause. It is a dangerous cocktail that can self-generate lone-wolf terrorists or be exploited by extremist manipulators.

In the wake of Martin Place, Clive Kessler, emeritus professor at the University of NSW's school of social sciences, wrote how the interception of any future "psychotic loner" attacks could be a matter for mental health and security agencies. "But most such incidents are the work of psychotic, sociopathic, disturbed or even ostensibly normal individuals who fall in with, and whose ideas and perverse impulses mesh them into, small like-minded groups, sometimes even broad social movements," he said.

Kessler wrote of the importance of serious debate within and about our Muslim communities covering the triumphalist and resentful elements of the faith that are shared by the mainstream but taken to violent ends by the extremists. This is the core of the debate. Unless we intelligently confront reforms needed to undermine the Islamist extremist ideology, all the bollards in the world cannot save us.

Psychiatrist and author Tanveer Ahmed, who comes from a Bangladeshi Muslim background, also has written about the overlap between disaffected individuals — particularly refugees — and Islamist extremism. He points out that attacks do not need to be well organised or sanctioned by groups such as Islamic State or al-Qa'ida to be categorised as terrorism. It is about motivation. Ahmed has written about how paranoid individuals may project their personal resentments through Islamist ideology. Those who are mentally ill or have criminal backgrounds have a higher risk of adopting extremist and violent practices. "None of these factors make the contribution of Islam and particular interpretations that encourage attacks upon non-Muslims irrelevant," he explains.

Yet it is the essence of the motivation — the Islamist ideology — that politicians and authorities seem most keen to avoid. They prefer to talk about hardware and firepower — and mental health.

Will the loudspeakers installed in Melbourne's CBD warn of mental health outbreaks? Are the military weapons of the NSW police to be trained on people who are disturbed and ill?

Or do we need to accept that the Islamist aim of disrupting our society by targeting infidels and innocents cannot be truly defeated until the ideology itself is exposed, confronted and eradicated?