

Leaked information confirms police refused to negotiate with Sydney siege gunman

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Even as the December 15–16 police siege of a Sydney café continues to be cited by governments around the world to help justify the global “war on terror,” selective media leaks by police sources underscore the fact that the entire affair was exploited from the outset by the Australian government for political purposes.

Whatever the precise reasons for the police leaks, they confirm that Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the security forces refused to negotiate with the lone gunman and hostage-taker, ensuring that the incident could only end in a violent shoot-out.

This refusal was in line with the Abbott government’s decision, backed by the Labor opposition and the media, to elevate the hostage incident from a serious but routine police affair to the level of a national crisis. Immediately after the siege began, Abbott convened the cabinet national security committee. A massive police mobilisation was ordered, covering Sydney, and extending interstate.

Even though the siege was not a terrorist incident but involved a lone disturbed gunman, proclamations of an attack on “home soil” were used to call for national unity and try to stampede public opinion behind the US-led war in the Middle East and the handing of ever-greater powers and resources to the police-intelligence apparatus.

At 9.45 a.m. on December 15, Man Haron Monis entered a cafe in Sydney’s Martin Place armed with a shotgun, taking 18 people hostage. The ensuing siege ended tragically in the early hours of December 16, with three people—two hostages and Monis—killed after police stormed the building with stun grenades and bullets.

The incident remains shrouded in official secrecy. The New South Wales police and state government

have refused to issue any information about what took place, claiming that nothing can be divulged until an internal police investigation is completed and a report handed to the coroner.

An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, however, on January 10, said “multiple police sources” stated that 38-year-old lawyer Katrina Dawson, one of the hostages killed, was shot by two police bullets. The sources alleged that the bullets, which were among 25 rounds fired, hit Dawson as “ricochets.”

In another article yesterday, the newspaper reported that “several hours” before the commandos charged into the café, police drew up a “direct action” plan to storm the building by surprise. Late in the evening, however, a “command decision” overruled the plan in favour of a “reactive strategy” that involved police reacting to an outburst by Monis.

According to earlier leaked versions of the events, Monis fired a single shot into the ceiling or a door at 2.03 a.m., after six of his 13 remaining hostages escaped. At 2.10 a.m., Monis allegedly shot cafe manager Tori Johnson after the two wrestled for control of his shotgun, triggering the police decision to storm the café.

The *Herald* article claimed that a “direct action” strategy “is high-stakes and likely to result in some casualties among hostages,” so police “weighed up the risks of not going in, including changes in Monis’s demeanour and the prospect that he would start killing hostages if police did not act first.”

This is simply false. In fact, police shut off all contact with Monis. As the *Herald* article itself states, Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione said at 5.33 p.m., and repeated at 6.07 p.m. and 7.46 p.m., that “in fact we’re not dealing directly with him.”

Monis offered to release hostages in return for an

ISIS flag, a live on-air conversation with Abbott, and a government statement that his was an act of terror. The government rejected all these requests, and insisted that the media suppress any mention of them. The media, which integrated itself into the police operation, complied.

Police also rejected offers from Muslim figures—including the Grand Mufti of Australia, Ibrahim Abu Mohammad and Islamic Friendship Association spokesman Keysar Trad—who believed they could negotiate with Monis and de-escalate the situation. As negotiation experts have stated, the police methods could only increase the anxiety of the hostage-taker and hostages, and thus the danger of a violent outburst.

Monis was well known to police and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) as an unstable individual, having just lost a long-running court case, and facing homicide and sexual assault charges. He had made a bizarre recent conversion from Shiite Islam to Sunni, but had no known connections to any terrorist organisation.

Another *Herald* article yesterday, titled “Muslims feel ‘set up’ over flag request,” further underscores the refusal of the authorities to seek a peaceful resolution to the incident. It states that Rebecca Kay, an Australian-born Muslim, was “one of several people” that the police contacted during the siege, asking her to source an ISIS flag for Monis.

As commentators have pointed out, if the police wanted to obtain an ISIS flag, which is composed of commonly-found Islamic emblems, they could have laser-printed one within 30 minutes. The authorities, however, had no intention of meeting Monis’s demand. The police request to Kay was instead aimed at entrapping Muslims in the population into revealing that they had an ISIS flag.

In other words, the situation was utilised to stage arrests of alleged ISIS sympathisers, in a bid to boost the government’s efforts to present the hostage standoff as a national terrorist crisis. Kay told the *Herald* she called up to 50 contacts to ask if they had an ISIS flag, only to be later told by the police that they had sourced their own flag, which they never provided to Monis.

At 2 a.m. the next morning, the police raided the western Sydney home of one of the men Kay had

contacted, followed later that morning by the homes of another two. “Obviously, they were listening to all our phone calls,” she said. Kay said the police surveillance was part of a wider pattern. Police and ASIO “stalk” Muslims and “instill fear in their families and ostracise them from their workplace and the people they know, so they become paranoid and they don’t interact with anyone.”

The political agenda underlying the government’s response to the siege was spelled out in an op-ed in yesterday’s *Australian* by Attorney-General George Brandis. “After the Martin Place siege and the atrocities in France, no rational person can dispute that the world—and the free and democratic West in particular—faces a profound threat,” he declared.

Brandis insisted it was an “urgent priority” for parliament to pass the final tranche of the government’s so-called anti-terrorism laws, which provides for mass surveillance of the population by requiring Internet companies and social media providers to retain all metadata for two years.

The government is seeking to overcome the public opposition to these anti-democratic laws by using the crisis atmosphere it manufactured. Under conditions of deepening economic crisis and militarism, such police-state measures are being prepared for wider use against the working class.

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