

**Murder in Martin Place – Islamism denialism avoids reality.** By Chris Kenny, Associate Editor, The Australian. 17 December 2014

**ONE of our greatest handicaps in overcoming the pernicious threat of Islamic extremism is the emergence of Islamist denialism — a stubborn refusal to confront the reality of our dilemma.**

Even in the wake of this week’s death and trauma, there are deliberate attempts in public debate to ignore the jihadist flag, terrorist modus operandi, video demands on behalf of Islamic State and anti-West grievances.

The ABC managed to run an online profile piece entitled “Who was Man Haron Monis, the man behind the Sydney siege?” without including the words Muslim or Islam and mentioning terrorism only in a quote from Monis’s lawyer stressing the gunman had no links to organised groups.

On Twitter, ABC host Rebecca Huntley and former ABC host Monica Attard were eschewing the terrorist descriptor and focusing on mental health issues.

Others on television were looking for legal, domestic and mental health explanations — anything but jihad.

Yet it is precisely this sort of solo attack that has been foreshadowed by security agencies and has been exhorted by terrorist groups.

Former ASIO chief David Irvine warned about the risk of homegrown “lone wolf” attacks as far back as 2012.

“That is the issue that I think keeps both me and my international colleagues awake at night,” he said.

While 17 blameless citizens endured hours of unspeakable terror that the nation hoped — en masse and in vain — would be resolved safely, a misguided social media campaign highlighted our national incomprehension of Islamist terror.

It proclaimed solidarity with Muslims who might feel uneasy travelling on public transport, through a Twitter hashtag of #Iwillridewithyou. Nice thought. Except it was an empty response to an imaginary problem.

And in the real world, at that time, innocent lives were in the balance.

This was political correctness on steroids as people distanced themselves from a possible Islamophobic backlash to an act of Islamist violence still unfolding.

We understand the lurch for an empathetic embrace but it ignored and demeaned the harsh reality.

No doubt across the nation most people would have been preoccupied with the fate of the hostages. But while social media is self-selecting and introspective, it also plays strongly into mainstream media.

So we saw a grotesque turning away from the horrific plight of innocent people in real peril to focus on empathy for Muslims in our midst who faced no threat.

Some participants, such as ABC presenter Virginia Trioli, argue that #Iwillridewithyou was one “bright spot” on a dark day, demonstrating our shared humanity.

And what could be wrong with a little love on such a trying day?

Priorities might be a good place to start. The Martin Place siege was a callous and life-threatening episode, and focusing on possible future personal abuse on public transport seemed a trite miscalculation. There would be time enough to deal with consequences — afterwards.

And the suggestion that mainstream Australians would indulge in an Islamophobic backlash smacked of leftist self-loathing — with the awful implication that the heinous actions of a gunman were somehow linked to our bigotry.

Worse still, this melds into the narrative of Muslim victimhood. Islamist terrorists rely on such grievances; the woes of the Muslim world are blamed on the West and violence justified as a response to persecution (even when the ultimate aim is Islamic supremacy through a caliphate).

In this respect (and clearly not deliberately) a social media campaign aimed at harmony echoed the Muslim victimhood claims being made in Martin Place.

In a security and ideological struggle set to last many decades, such arguments matter.

When extremists target us because of our values, we ought to stand up for them rather than demean ourselves.

In this country, Muslims are not victims.

By and large, our fellow citizens are inclusive and tolerant.

And while, sadly, every society sees individuals and incidents of prejudice, few nations can match our plurality and harmony.

We saw this unfold in Melbourne yesterday when a Muslim woman was heckled on a train but, of course, was defended by her fellow Australians.

No hashtag required.

We should talk up our robust tolerance, not undermine it.

Our multicultural success should be one of our key strengths as we deal with extremism, not something to be attacked so we can display superior virtue.

We shouldn't forget that our Muslim population of about 500,000 exists because immigrants strive to enjoy our freedom and tolerance.

Perversely, this same liberal pluralism offends the Islamist extremists and makes us their target.

So, if we are looking for a unity ticket, it is obvious.

The politically moderate Muslim community — the overwhelming majority — and Australia's non-Muslim community have a shared enemy and are exposed to the same threat.

We need continued and intensified co-operation to combat Islamist extremism — this is our common project.

Prominent Lebanese community leader Jamal Rifi notes the absence of a Muslim victimisation this week: "There is nothing whatsoever, the community has felt no backlash."

Importantly, as someone involved in community liaison with governments after 9/11 and the Bali bombings, Rifi says there has never been any backlash to speak of, just "isolated incidents", as he puts it.

At Sydney's Lakemba Mosque on Monday night, a rabbi addressed the crowd, reading from the Torah, as prayers were offered for the Martin Place hostages.

"This was unprecedented," Rifi says.

"And the rabbi was listened to, he wasn't heckled."

At Martin Place, Australians of all races and creeds placed flowers yesterday.

This is the real Australia, and Islamist extremists are its enemy.

Some seem to think the terrorists will ignore us if we ignore them; but denying the problem will not make it go away.