

Understand the process, prevent the attack.

By David Harding

Understanding the Criminal Development Pathway, the process that a criminal or terrorist undergoes prior to an attack, can provide opportunities to guide, counter or neutralise the criminal before they commit the crime.

The attack at Parramatta Police Head Quarters on Friday 2 October 2015 serves as a reminder of the development pathway that a criminal takes prior to making an actual attack. Using the incident that occurred at the Parramatta Police Head Quarters as a case study, and accepting that at the time of writing there is little evidence available to make educated judgements, it is possible to develop an understanding of the process that the perpetrator went through prior to his attack. It may also be possible to identify some measures that could have been utilised to guide, counter or neutralise the offender prior to that attack. The purpose of this article is to illustrate that by focusing on the criminal and their development pathway it is possible to guide counter or neutralise a criminal or terrorist prior to them making an attack.

As a brief outline, a criminal or a terrorist's development commences within the communities that the person belongs to, where there is an acceptance of a particular criminal behaviour. From this point a person will seek out likeminded associates that share similar views to the person. Those views may develop a person's intent to harm others. However, intent to harm others still requires the physical actions of planning, preparation and intelligence gathering if a successful attack is to be made. For the law enforcement and security professional, be it at policy or tactical level, it is imperative to understand this process. For understanding the process can lead to early identification of a threat actor, prior to that actor making an attack.

The first stage of a criminal's development pathway commences with the community that the person comes from. In this case the offender, named Farhad Jabar Khalil Mohammad, is believed to have been of Kurdish decent originating in eastern Iraq or western Iran. Some media reports state that it was assessed as unlikely that members of an ethnic group that is currently bearing the brunt of the attacks made by the Islamic State (IS) would undertake an attack in a Western country such as Australia. This reporting is unfortunate, as it does not take into account the fact that that particular area of Iraq and Iran is the birthplace of the violent Jihad Salifits terrorist group Ansar al Islam, which has close links to the tribes of that area. Ansar al Islam is currently still operating within the Kurdish Regional Governate of Iraq. It was also Ansar al Islam that was instrumental in the initial development of Al Qaeda

in Iraq, which is now currently known as the Islamic State. If Farhad Jabar Khalil Mohammad origins lie within this community, then he almost certainly would have had acceptance to harm others, especially Westerners.

However, just because parts of a particular community accept criminal or terrorist behaviour, does not mean that the community will undertake that behaviour. It is therefore common in a criminal's development to seek out likeminded persons within their community who have similar belief patterns to themselves. Again, using current media reports, it would appear that the individual perpetrator of the above incident had not come to the attention of police. However, several close associates had. Although difficult to prove at this point in time, it is likely that it was these close associates that may have turned the perpetrators intent into action.

However, intent alone does not necessarily transform into a crime. It requires the physical actions of planning, preparation and intelligence gathering to undertake a successful attack. In this case, media reports have identified that the perpetrator acquired a firearm, went to a mosque, and then travelled to the exact spot where he was able to make his attack. This shows that the perpetrator had indeed made a plan of the attack he was going to undertake, he appears to have prepared himself both physically and spiritually, and then proceeded to a identified location to make his attack. Once in location he appears to have waited for some time and in such a way that appeared so unusual that some witnesses were able to take pictures and video, which was reportedly uploaded to YouTube prior to the fatal shooting.

Of course understanding, and even identifying a criminal or terrorist's development pathway may still not be sufficient in preventing a criminal attack. Measures must be put in place that will guide, counter or neutralise the perpetrator prior to an attack. Continuing to utilise the incident that occurred on Friday 2 October as a case study, the first stage for security professionals is to develop an understanding of the communities that may come into contact with facilities under their responsibility. Then, identify which communities may accept particular types of criminal behaviours, and develop ways to guide the community away from such belief systems. In this case, engagement with some segments of the local Kurdish community that illustrated the open nature of Australian society may have proved useful. In addition, closer attention may be required by both governments and facility holders to develop contacts within 'at risk' communities that may provide early identification of small groups of individuals that may develop more stringent intentions to harm others. And finally in the last line of defence, more attention may be required in the training of access control security guards. The current training often centres on reaction scenarios and drills, with primary focus on a person's ability to access a facility. It may be prudent to enhance this training to include a focus on what is happening outside their area of responsibility.

Unfortunately, such a shift in thinking is away from the current research into the causal reason for criminal behaviour and the management of the likelihood of that behaviour. However, focus on the pathway that a criminal takes can lead to ways and means to guide, counter or neutralise that criminal prior to an attack.

About the author David Harding

David has over 30 years experience working within government and private security fields, including service in the Australian Army's Special Air Service Regiment, and the Australian Federal Police's Air Security Officer Program. David is a Director of Anshin Consulting, a Threat Management consultancy that focuses on identifying and managing the process that a criminal/terrorist takes. David has developed strategy, policy and tactics to guide, counter or neutralise criminal/terrorist threat actors prior to physical attack. David has conducted threat management operations across the Middle East, Asia and Australasia. This includes advising leading business persons and diplomats on non-state security threats. David holds a Masters degree, and has researched, lectured, written, and [blogged](#) about international risk, threat and security management.