

OpTac International News Bulletin

Organizational Conditions and Hostage Rescue

Tactical operations involving the rescue of hostages are arguably the most difficult missions on which a SWAT team will deploy. Each hostage rescue operation has an element of danger to the hostages, as well as team members, requiring tactical precision and an ability to adjust to unique and ever-changing circumstances. This is especially true if terrorists or suspects committed to dying for their cause are involved.

Operational failures can occur when incident managers and responding tactical teams are unprepared to accomplish their missions. This edition of the **OpTac International News Bulletin** presents the importance of organizational conditions and their corresponding impact on mission success.



On December 15, 2014, Man Haron Monis, a Muslim extremist, took 18 people hostage inside a cafe in Sydney, Australia. He subsequently shot and killed one of the hostages, thereby precipitating an immediate tactical entry. Last week, a government inquest revealed that of the five shots fired by Monis, only one impacted a hostage. While members of the police tactical team shot and killed the suspect, they also shot and killed one of the female hostages. The inquest found that she "was struck by six fragments of a police bullet or bullets." Police bullets also struck three other hostages and one tactical team member (in the face).

Although tactical team performance is a factor in the outcome of this incident, organizational conditions are an often overlooked and vital element in successful team performance. These conditions include a team's selection process, group development: command and team structure, frequency and type of training, equipment, and prescribed critical incident operational procedures; all having the ability to affect an incident's outcome.

Tactical teams are expected to perform at a high level even when their organizational conditions and operational experience do not reflect a SWAT priority within their law enforcement agencies. Too often, individual officers are considered solely responsible for their operational mistakes/poor decisions, when the responsibility actually lies with their department having not placed these officers in a position to be successful.

Frequently, agencies mistake previous success with the good fortune that a suspect was not fully committed to fight. Conventional perspectives on what is considered sufficient preparation must be challenged and well-defined organizational conditions implemented in order to increase the *consistent* likelihood of successful incident outcomes.