

**Tim Priest**

## THE RISE OF MIDDLE EASTERN CRIME IN AUSTRALIA

I believe that the rise of Middle Eastern organised crime in Sydney will have an impact on society unlike anything we have ever seen.

In the early 1980s, as a young detective I was attached to the Drug Squad at the old CIB. I remember executing a search warrant at Croydon, where we found nearly a pound of heroin. I know that now sounds very familiar; however, what set this heroin apart was that it was Beaker Valley Heroin, markedly different from any heroin I had seen. Number Four heroin from the golden triangle of South East Asia is nearly always off white, almost pure diamorphine. This heroin was almost brown.

**But more remarkable were the occupants of the house. They were very recent arrivals from Lebanon, and from the moment we entered the premises, we wrestled and fought with the male occupants, were abused and spat at by the women and children, and our search took five times longer because of the impediments placed before us by the occupants, including the women hiding heroin in baby nappies and on themselves and refusing to be searched by policewomen because of religious beliefs. We had never encountered these problems before.**

As was the case in those days, we arrested every adult and teenager who had hampered our search. When it came to court, they were represented by Legal Aid, of course, who claimed that these people were innocent of the minor charges of public disorder and hindering police, because they were recent arrivals from a country where people have an historical hatred towards police, and that they also had poor communications skills and that the police had not executed the warrant in a manner that was acceptable to the Muslim occupants.

The magistrate, well known to police as one who convicted fewer than one in ten offenders brought before him during his term at Burwood local court, threw the matter out, siding with the occupants and condemning the police. I remember thinking; thank heavens we don't run into many Lebanese drug dealers.

### **Lebanese family terrorises neighbourhood**

In 1994 I was stationed at Redfern. A well known Lebanese family who lived not far from the old Redfern Police Academy were terrorising the locals with random assaults, drug dealing, robberies and violent anti-social behaviour. When some young police from Redfern told me about them, curiosity got the better of me and I asked them to show me the street they lived in.

Despite the misgivings of the young police, I eventually saw this family and the presence they had in the immediate area. As we drove away in our marked police car, a half brick bounced on the roof of the vehicle. The driver kept going.

I said, 'What are you doing, they've just hit the car with a house brick!' The young constable said, "Oh, they always do that when we drive past."

The police were either too scared or too lazy to do anything about it. The damage bill on police cars became costly and these street terrorists grew stronger and the police became purely defensive. You see, the Police Royal Commission was about to start and the police retreated inside themselves knowing that the judicial system considered them easy targets. The police did not want to get hurt or attract Internal Affairs complaints.

Call me stupid, call me a dinosaur, but I made sure that day that at least one person in the group that threw the brick was arrested. I began by approaching the group just as that magistrate had lectured me and the other police involved in the Croydon search warrant. I simply asked who threw the brick. I was greeted with abuse and threats. I then reverted to the old ways of policing. I grabbed the nearest male and convinced him that it was he who had thrown the brick. His brave mates did nothing. By the time we arrived at the police station, this young fool had become compliant, apologetic and so afraid that he kept crying. You may not agree with what I did, but I paraded this goose around the police station for all the young police to see what they had become frightened of.

For some months after that, police routinely rounded up the family whenever it was warranted. However, some years later, with a change of Police Commander and the advent of duty officers under Peter Ryan, the family got back on top and within months had murdered a young Australian man who had wandered into their area drunk. They had set up a caravan where they sold drugs twenty four hours a day. They tied up half the police station with Internal Affairs complaints ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous, but under Peter Ryan, these complaints were always treated seriously.

In effect, this family had taken control of Redfern. Senior police did their best to limit police action against them, fearing an avalanche of IA complaints that would count against the Commander at Peter Ryan's next Op Crime Review.

I hope the examples I have just used don't give the impression that I am a racist or a bully. The point I want to make from the start is that policing has never been rocket science. It is about human dynamics, street psychology, experience, a little bit of theatre and a substantial quantity of common sense. Sure, forensics and the advances of DNA, rapid fingerprint identification and electronic eavesdropping have taken policing to a new level of sophistication, but ultimately, when an offender is identified by whatever means, scientific or otherwise, it all comes down to the interaction between the investigator and the offender during the arrest and interview process. Violent and abusive offenders do not respect the law or those who enforce it. But they do respect the old style cop who doesn't take a backward step and can't be intimidated. When they encounter cops like that, they fold quickly there is rarely much behind the veneer of bravado.

In 1996 with the arrival of Peter Ryan, and the continued public humiliation of the New South Wales Police through the Wood Royal Commission, a chain of events began that have affected the police so deeply and so completely that, as far as ensuring community safety is concerned, I fear it will take at least a generation to regain the lost ground.

### **The rise of Middle Eastern crime groups in NSW**

It was about 1995 to 1996 that the emergence of Middle Eastern crime groups was first observed in New South Wales. Before then they had been largely known for individual acts of anti social behaviour and loose family structures involved in heroin importation and supply as well as motor vehicle theft and conversion. The one crime that did appear organised before this period was insurance fraud,

usually motor vehicle accidents and arson. Because these crimes were largely victimless, they were dealt with by insurance companies and police involvement was limited. But from these insurance scams, a generation of young criminals emerged to, become engaged in more sophisticated crimes, such as extortion, armed robbery, organised narcotics importation and supply, gun running, organised factory and warehouse break ins, car theft and conversion on a massive scale including the exporting of stolen luxury vehicles to Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries.

As the police began to gather and act on intelligence on these emerging Middle Eastern gangs the first of the series of events took place. The New South Wales Police was restructured under Peter Ryan. Crime Intelligence, the eyes and ears of all police forces throughout the world, was dismantled overnight and a British style intelligence unit was created. The formation of this unit and its factions has been best described by Dr Richard Basham a library stocking outdated books. The new Crime Intelligence and Information Section became completely reactive. It received crime intelligence from the field and stored it. Almost no relevant intelligence was ever dispensed to operational police from 1997 until I left in 2002. It was a disgrace.

One of the fundamental problems that arose out of the new intelligence structure was that it no longer had a field capacity or a target development capacity. With the old BCI there were field teams that were assigned to look into emerging trends. Vietnamese, Romanian and Hong Kong Chinese groups were all targeted after intelligence grew on their activities. When the alarm bells went off over growing intelligence concerns about a new or current crime group, covert operations were mounted.

### **Lebanese gangs intimidate police**

When the Middle Eastern crime groups emerged in the mid to late 1990s no alarms were set off. The Crime Intelligence unit was asleep. I know personally that operational police in south west Sydney compiled enormous amounts of good intelligence on the formation of Lebanese groups such as the Telopea Street Boys and others in the Campsie, Lakemba, Fairfield and Punchbowl areas. The inactivity could not have been because the intelligence reports weren't interesting, because I have read many of them and from a policing perspective they were damning. Many of the offenders that you now see in major criminal trials or serving lengthy sentences in prison were identified back then.

But even more frustrating for operational police were the activities of this ethnic crime group, activities that set it apart from almost all others bar the Cabramatta 5T. **The Lebanese groups were ruthless, extremely violent, and they intimidated not only innocent witnesses, but even the police that attempted to arrest them.**

As these crime groups encountered less resistance in terms of police operations and enforcement, their power grew not only within their own communities, but also all around Sydney except in Cabramatta, where their fear of the South East Asian crime groups limited their forays. But the rest of Sydney became easy pickings.

The second in the series of events began to take shape with Peter Ryan's executive leadership team. Under Ryan's nose they began to carve up the New South Wales Police and form little kingdoms where a senior police officer ruled almost untouched by outside influence. They then appointed their own commanders in the police stations. Almost all of them had little or no street

experience; but they in turn brought along their friends as duty officers, similarly inexperienced. Some of the experience these police counted on their resumes included stints at Human Resources, the Academy, the Police Band in one case, the various cubby holes in Police Headquarters, almost no operational policing experience yet they were tasked to lead. Never has the expression "the blind leading the blind" been more appropriate.

The impact that this leadership team had on day today operational policing was disastrous. In many of the key areas that were experiencing rapid rises in Middle Eastern crime, these new leaders became more concerned with relations between the police and ethnic minorities than with emerging violent crime. The power and influence of the local religious and minority leaders cannot be overstated. Police began to use selective law enforcement. They selected targets that were unlikely to use their ethnic background and cultural beliefs to hinder police investigations or arrests. It was mostly Anglo Saxons and Asians that were the targets, because they were under represented by religious leaders and the media. They were soft targets.

An example of the confrontations police nearly always experienced in Muslim-dominated areas when confronting even the most minor of crimes is an incident that occurred in 2001 in Auburn. Two uniformed officers stopped a motor vehicle containing three well known male offenders of Middle Eastern origin, on credible information via the police radio that indicated that the occupants of the vehicle had been involved in a series of break-and-enters. What occurred during the next few hours can only be described as frightening.

**When searching the vehicle and finding stolen property from the break-and-enter, the police were physically threatened by the three occupants of the car, including references to tracking down where the officers lived, killing them and "fucking your girlfriends". The two officers were intimidated to the point of retreating to their police car and calling for urgent assistance.**

**When police back up arrived, the three occupants called their associates via their mobile phones, which incidentally is the Middle Eastern radio network used to communicate amongst gangs. Within minutes as many as twenty associates arrived as well as another forty or so from the street where they had been stopped. As further police cars arrived, the Middle Eastern males became even more aggressive, throwing punches at police, pushing police over onto the ground, threatening them with violence and damaging police vehicles.**

When the duty officer arrived, he immediately ordered all police back into their vehicles and they retreated from the scene. The stolen property was not recovered. No offender was arrested for assaulting police or damaging police vehicles.

**But the humiliation did not end there. The group of Middle Eastern males then drove to the police station, where they intimidated the station staff, damaged property and virtually held a suburban police station hostage. The police were powerless. The duty officer ordered police not to confront the offenders but to call for back up from nearby stations. Eventually the offenders left of their own volition. No action was taken against them.**

In the minds of the local population, the police were cowards and the message was, Lebs rule the streets. For a number of days, nothing was done to rectify this

total breakdown of law and order. To the senior police in the area, it was more important to give the impression that local ethnic relations were never better. It was also important to Peter Ryan that no bad news stories appeared that may have given the impression that crime in any area was out of control. Had these hoodlums been arrested they would have filed IA complaints immediately via their Legal Aid lawyers and community leaders. To senior police, this was a cause for concern at the next Op Crime Review.

So the incident was covered up until a few local veteran detectives found out about it and decided to act. They went quietly to the addresses of the three main offenders early one morning and took them away with a minimum of fuss and charged them. Some order was restored, but not nearly enough.

By avoiding confrontations with these thugs, the police gave away the streets in many of these areas in south-western Sydney. By putting in place inexperienced senior police who had never copped the odd punch in the mouth or broken nose in the line of duty, the police force hung the community and the local police out to dry. Most of these duty officers had retreated to non-operational areas early in their careers because they couldn't stomach the risks of front line policing. Yet they put their hands up to take vital operational roles because the positions are highly paid duty officers receive about \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year more than a detective sergeant, which is ludicrous.

When I say that this type of policing was condoned and encouraged across wide areas of New South Wales, I am not exaggerating. The problems in south-western Sydney are a direct result of covering up criminality because it went against the script that Peter Ryan and his executive had continually pushed in the media, day after day after day - that crime was on the decrease and Peter Ryan was the world's best police commissioner.

**In hundreds upon hundreds of incidents police have backed down to Middle Eastern thugs and taken no action and allowed incidents to go unpunished. Again I stress the unbelievable influence that local politicians and religious leaders played in covering up the real state of play in the south-west.**

### **Spread of criminal gangs aided by incompetent police leadership**

The third event was the reforming of Criminal Investigations into a centrally-controlled body called Crime Agencies. All the specialist crime squads were done away with: Arson, Armed Robbery, Drugs, Organised Crime, Special Breaking, Consorting, Vice, Gaming, Motor Vehicle Theft were wrapped up into one size fits all. Ryan once boasted that by the time he finished retraining the New South Wales Police, constables could investigate a traffic accident in the morning and a homicide in the afternoon, a statement that summed up his Alice-in-Wonderland policing theories. All the expertise and experience evaporated overnight.

It was as if the public hospitals had suddenly lost every surgeon and had GPs perform major surgery. No matter how bright and dedicated these GPs were, they would simply not have the expertise, the training and the experience to take over. It would be a disaster. Well, that is what happened to criminal investigation in this state. Crime Agencies was an unmitigated disaster. Yet those who designed and ran this farce have gone on to highly paid government jobs.

The final straw for the New South Wales Police was the OCR Op Crime Review, which Peter Ryan and his executive team came up with. It was loosely based on the groundbreaking Compstat program of the New York Police Department, the

brainchild of Commissioner William Bratton. The difference between Ryan's OCR and the NYPD Compstat was that the NYPD model covered everything on the criminal waterfront. The Ryan-inspired OCR had just six crimes. And those six included domestic violence, random breath testing, theft, robbery, assaults and motor vehicle theft - no drugs, organised crime, firearms, shootings, attempted murders or homicides. The crimes that instil fear into the average citizen were ignored, and with plenty of innovative answers as to why. The OCR focused police attention on a limited number of crimes and allowed far more serious and deadly crimes to get out of control.

**So with a police force on the verge of bankruptcy, the Middle Eastern crime problem was an explosion waiting to go off.** I had observed the beginnings of Asian organised crime whilst at the Drug Squad and later at the National Crime Authority where I worked on two task forces, one of which was on Chinese organised crime.

When I look back on the influence of Chinese organised crime in Australia, I see a gradual but sustained trend, not one of high peaks in terms of activity or incidents, but one of a well planned criminal enterprise that attracts little attention. It's there but you can't always see it.

**It probably took twenty years for the Chinese to become a dominant force in crime in this city. But Middle Eastern crime has taken less than ten years. So pervasive is their influence on organised crime that rival ethnic groups, with the exception of the Asian gangs, have been squeezed out or made extinct.** The only other crime group to have survived intact are the bikies, although the bikies these days have legitimised many of their operations and now make as much money from legal means as they do illegally. In many ways they have adopted US Mafia methods of legitimate businesses shrouding their illegal operations.

With no organised crime function, no gang unit except for the South-East Asian Strike Force, the New South Wales Police turned against every convention known to Western policing in dealing with organised crime groups. In effect the Lebanese crime gangs were handed the keys to Sydney.

## **Extortion and attacks on Australians**

**The most influential of the Middle Eastern crime groups are the Muslim males of Telopea Street, Bankstown, known as the Telopea Street Boys. They and their associates have been involved in numerous murders over the past five years, many of them unprovoked fatal attacks on young Australian men for no other reason than that they are "Skips", as they call Australians.**

They have been involved in all manner of crime on a scale we have never seen before. Ram-raids on expensive stores in the city are epidemic. The theft of expensive motor vehicles known as car-jacking is increasing at an alarming rate. This crime involves gangs finding a luxury motor vehicle parked outside a restaurant or hotel and watching until the occupants return to drive home. The car is followed, the victims assaulted at gunpoint, and the vehicle stolen. The vehicles are always around or above the \$ 100,000 mark and are believed to be taken to warehouses before being shipped interstate or to the Middle East.

Extortion on inner city nightclubs is largely unreported because of the dire consequences of owners reporting these incidents to police. When I worked at City Central Detectives just before I retired, I was involved in the initial

investigation of one brave nightclub owner in the inner city who did report this crime. The Lebanese criminals were arrested after a sting operation. However, I believe that after many violent threats the owner sold up and now lives interstate. He once had a thriving business that for a nightclub ran a reputable service, keeping out drugs, maintaining safety for patrons and co-operating with the police.

The tactics used by the gang were simple. A large number of Middle Eastern males would enter the club, upwards of twenty at a time. **They would outnumber the security staff and begin assaulting Australian male patrons, sometimes stabbing them.** The incident would be over in minutes and the gang members would be long gone before police arrived. A few days later, senior members of the gang, well dressed and business-like, would approach the club owners and offer to provide protection from similar incidents for around \$2000 to \$3000 a week. Many of the owners paid up and considered it a necessary expense in keeping their business viable. If they didn't pay up, or contacted the police, the gangs would wait some weeks, even months, before returning to the nightclub and extracting a terrible revenge on the owners, who would pay up or leave.

**There is compelling intelligence that in one well-known entertainment precinct in the city, nearly all the bars, nightclubs and hotels pay protection money to Middle Eastern crime gangs.**

What sets the Middle Eastern gangs apart from all other gangs is their propensity to use violence at any time and for any reason. I thought I would never see the level and type of violence that I saw with the South-East Asian gangs in Cabramatta, particularly the 5T, the Four Aces and Madonna's Mob, which were a breakaway from the old 5T. But the violence, although horrific, was almost always local, that is within the Cabramatta area and almost always against fellow Asians. As a result of that locally based violent crime it was relatively easy to identify the culprits and break them up once we were given the resources after the police revolt of 1999-2000.

### **Racial attacks against young Australians**

The Middle Eastern cycle of violence is not local. It can occur on the central coast, around Cronulla, Bondi, Darling Harbour, Five Dock, Redfern, Paddington, anywhere in Sydney. Unlike their Vietnamese counterparts, they roam the city and are not confined to either Cabramatta or Chinatown. **And even more alarming is that the violence is directed mainly against young Australian men and women. There is a clear and definite link between violent attacks on our young men and women being racial as well as criminal. Quite often when taking statements from young men attacked by groups of Lebanese males around Darling Harbour, a common theme has been the racially motivated violence against the victims simply because they are Australian.**

**I wonder whether the inventors of the racial hatred laws introduced during the golden years of multiculturalism ever took into account that we, the silent majority, would be the target of racial violence and hatred.** I don't remember any charges being laid in conjunction with the gang rapes of south-western Sydney in 2001, where race was clearly an issue and race was used to humiliate the victims. But then, unbelievably, a publicly funded document produced by the Anti Discrimination Board called "The Race for Headlines" was circulated, and it sought not only to cover up race as a motive for the rapes, but to criticise any accurate media reporting on this matter as racially biased. It

worries many operational police that organisations like the Anti-Discrimination Board, the Privacy Council and the Civil Liberties Council have become unaccountable and push agendas that don't represent the values that this great country was built on.

The extent to which Middle Eastern crime gangs have moved into the drug market is breathtaking. They are now the main suppliers of cocaine in this city and are now developing markets in south eastern Queensland and Victoria. They are major suppliers of heroin in and around the inner city, south-western Sydney and western Sydney.

Many of you would have heard of the horrific problems in France with the outbreak of unprecedented crimes amongst an estimated five million Muslim immigrants. Middle Eastern males now make up 45,000 of the 90,000 inmates in French prisons. There are no-go areas in Paris for police and citizens alike. The rule of law has broken down so badly that when police went to one of these areas recently to round up three Islamic terrorists, they went in armoured vehicles, with heavy weaponry and over 1000 armed officers, just to arrest a few suspects. Why did it need such numbers? Because the threat of terrorist reprisal was minimal compared to the anticipated revolt by thousands of Middle Eastern and North African residents who have no respect for the rule of law in France and consider intrusions by police and authority a declaration of war.

The problems in Paris in Muslim communities are being replicated here in Sydney at an alarming rate. Paris has seen an explosion of rapes committed by Middle Eastern males on French women in the past fifteen years. The rapes are almost identical to those in Sydney. **They are not only committed for sexual gratification but also with deep racial undertones along with threats of violence and retribution.** What is more alarming is the identical reaction by some sections of the media and criminologists in France of downplaying the significance of race as an issue and even ganging up on those people who try to draw attention to the widening gulf between Middle Eastern youth and the rest of French society.

That is what we are seeing here. The usual suspects come out of their institutions and libraries to downplay and even cover up the growing problem of Middle Eastern crime. Why? My opinion, for what it's worth is that these same social engineers have attempted to redefine our society. They have experimented with all manner of institutions, from prisons to mental institutions and recently to policing.

Some of the problems we now see with policing are the result of Peter Ryan's dream of restructuring and retraining police. The Police Academy was changed from a police training college into a university teaching social sciences and very little else. Constantly I would see young police emerge from the academy with a view that as police officers they were counsellors, psychologists, marriage guidance experts, social workers and advocates for social change. but with almost no skills in street policing. Their training had placed not only them in danger, but also their workmates and the community.

Policing is about enforcing the rule of law. It has never been about analysing every offender for the root causes of crime. That is not our job. The police enforce the law and protect the community regardless of race, colour or religion. What we have seen in south-west Sydney is ethnic communities being policed selectively. The implications for this are frightening when you look at Paris. They had selective policing of a particular community, which as a result is now out of control.

In February 2001 when I appeared before the Cabramatta inquiry, I gave evidence which at the time was controversial and attracted the usual claque of ratbags and lunatics from the ABC and their associates at the Sydney Morning Herald as well as that fruit loop Mike Carton from 2UE. I said that this city is going to be torn apart by gang warfare the likes of which we have never seen before. In 2003 I was finally proven right, but I take no comfort from that. However, the criticism I received was unprecedented. I was a nutter, a liar, a racist, a disgruntled detective - but I was right.

### **Ethnic gangs aided and protected by multicultural industry**

The critics still refuse to concede that we have a problem. They are still clinging to the multicultural theme. To highlight the problems with Middle Eastern communities in this city is to threaten to tear down the multicultural facade.

The amount of money spent on the multicultural industry beggars belief. It is a lucrative and sustainable position for many. Governments pay huge money to anything that bears the word multicultural. Indeed the police department, like other government departments, spends vast amounts on multicultural issues, multicultural jobs, multicultural consultancies, education packages, legal advice, public relations and the rest. Having expended large amounts of money on multiculturalism, they are hardly likely to criticise it. Those that feed off multiculturalism are not likely to question it.

When I gave evidence to the Cabramatta inquiry, I risked my career and my safety in coming forward. I did it because I had sworn an oath to protect the community I served. That community was Cabramatta. Cabramatta is made up almost entirely of residents born outside this country, mostly South East Asians, and their children. But when I went forward and exposed the shame of Cabramatta, the residents were not Asians in my eyes, but Australians no matter where they came from. It was my duty to speak up for them and to protect them. Race was never an issue. I have received many awards in my police career but the ones I hold dearest are those I received from the Cabramatta community.

One old man who had spent seven years in refugee camps in South East Asia before coming to Australia said the day he landed in Australia was like dying and coming to heaven. Cabramatta was a community of ordinary people like that old man, who recognised the problems of drugs and organised crime in their community and spoke up and agitated for change. It was a slightly built Vietnamese man named Thung Ngo who led the charge on behalf of a community that had had enough of crime and forced a parliamentary inquiry into Cabramatta which ultimately saved their community from destruction. Not once during that inquiry did I hear any member of the Cabramatta community - apart from the Anglo Saxon local member - complain that they were being racially discriminated against because of the inquiry or its aftermath. They wanted change; they wanted a safe law-abiding community. It was my duty to do everything I could to honour my pledge to protect and to serve.

But I have not heard anything like that from the Middle Eastern community. **Initially the gang rapes were the fault of Australian culture, according to one religious leader in the south west.** I note that he has now softened his stance and is calling for change among Middle Eastern youth. But they are just words; there seem to be no Thung Ngos among them.

What is it that draws such defence for this community from certain sections of the media? Why didn't they join in to defend the Asian community during the fallout

from the Cabramatta inquiry? And where are these apologists when it comes to the plight of our first Australians, our indigenous peoples? Their cause is not trendy enough, not global like the refugee or Islamic issues. Yet one of the most depressing sights that has confronted me as a policeman is the shame of Redfern. I first saw Everleigh Street some twenty two years ago, and nothing has changed since. The atmosphere of sheer hopelessness and desperation still hangs around the neck of every young Aborigine who lives in those ghettos, yet they hardly ever rate a mention.

## **National threat**

**The Middle Eastern crime groups and their associates number in the thousands, not the hundreds as the government and senior police would have you believe. It is the biggest crime problem we have ever faced, and it is growing.**

Hardly a day goes past without some violent crime involving a "male of Middle Eastern appearance", though I see lately that description is watered down now to include "and/or Mediterranean appearance". To an operational policeman, there is a noticeable difference between an Italian and a Lebanese male.

That these groups of males can roam a city and assault, rob and intimidate at will can no longer be denied or excused. You need only to look at Paris and other European countries that have had mass immigration from Middle Eastern countries to see the sort of problems we can expect in years to come. **My prediction is that within ten years, Middle Eastern crime groups will spread rapidly across Australia as they seek to expand their enterprises. There will be no go areas in south western Sydney, just like Paris.**

Only recently I have seen quotes from senior police and retired police who claim that race is not the issue in organised crime. Those statements are stupid and dangerous. Organised crime groups with the exception of the bikies are almost always ethnically based - any experienced detective will tell you that. The days of Anglo Saxon gangs are almost gone, with the exception of one or two local beach gangs.

I also predict that there will be a dramatic rise in gang shootings as rival gangs compete for turf and business. This will be done with almost complete disregard for police attention, as they are well aware that the New South Wales Police has to be rebuilt from the ground up. We have seen in the past three years the phenomenon of drive-by shootings, Los Angeles style. Not only are the increasing incidents a major cause of concern, but also the use of automatic weapons that spray hundreds of rounds at their targets. This is virtually unprecedented in this country.

In many ways, what we are seeing is the copying of Los Angeles gangs: the Crips, the Bloods and others. The motor vehicles, the music, the dress codes, the haircuts, the weaponry and the attitudes towards authority are almost identical. These gangs in Los Angeles have been around for nearly thirty years and a culture has grown around them. The culture surrounding the Middle Eastern gangs is still in its infancy but the transition is not far away.

**When William Bratton, the most innovative police commissioner of modern times, took over as Los Angeles Police Chief recently, he declared the gang problems there a national security problem, so serious that it was beyond the resources of the state of California. There is a lesson for us there, but we have to learn quickly, or this problem will overtake us.**

The blame for the rise of the gangs in Los Angeles is being spread around - politicians who refused to acknowledge that it was more than just an ethnic brotherhood searching for their roots; police inaction because of political constraints as well as incompetence; the civil liberties movement particularly among the California superior courts that refused for decades to use lengthy sentences as a deterrent to ethnic based crime on the basis that it discriminated against minority groups. Whoever is to blame is now irrelevant, but they have left a terrible legacy for the young generations of citizens of Los Angeles who have to run the gauntlet of drug-crazed gangsters in the suburbs engaging in deadly shoot outs and drive-bys nearly every day.

The similarities between the situation here, with the denial by the government of the extent and the implications of Middle Eastern crime, and the early situation in Los Angeles is frightening. What we saw with Cabramatta was the covering up of a major problem by this government, who only acted when the game was up. It's all about denial. If they can get away with covering up it saves them the worry of making hard decisions and spending money on fixing problems that have been allowed to fester for years. The rail system that Michael Costa now has to fix is yet another example.

There is no investment in the future. It is about looking good day by day. The Peter Ryan-style policing of day to day media spin is still present. No one seems to have the courage to say that this is a problem that we need to fix before it gets worse. **The time when the Middle Eastern problem really takes root in this city, the point from which there is no return, just like Los Angeles, is but a few years away.** The leaders of our government probably hope this will be another government's fault and that they won't be around to see their legacy. Maybe we should all buy a property in southern New Zealand.

If the biggest threat to our society is not addressed honestly and effectively within the next two or three years it will take drastic action and enormous resources to bring it under control - if that is even possible. The action we can take now and the resources needed are a fraction of what it may cost in the future. The potential cost in human terms is unimaginable.

**There is also the serious possibility that some of these Middle Eastern youth that are engaged in organised crime and have no regard for our values and way of life may go a step further and engage in terrorist acts against Australia. The ingredients are there already. It is but a small step from urban terrorism to religious and political terrorism, as we have seen with groups such as the IRA, where organised crime often became interwoven with terrorism.**

I do not want to paint a picture of gloom, but as a policeman I have seen the destruction that gangs can wreak on innocent citizens who only want to live their lives in peace. I just hope we can trust the people in government and the police to ensure that we don't lose the values and the rights we have received from past generations.

It is fitting that one day after Remembrance Day, when we look to what was handed to us by the Second World War generation, probably the most extraordinary generation of Australians in our short history, we should ask ourselves: are we going to be remembered for handing a similar legacy to our children and grandchildren, or are we going to be remembered as the generation that did nothing about the scourge of gang violence and simply passed it on to them?