

Police claims raise new questions about “terrorist” raids in Australia

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For the past 10 days, Australian media outlets have bombarded the public with lurid headlines and reports designed to justify last week’s massive raids by state and federal police and intelligence agencies on homes in Sydney and Melbourne.

On the basis of unsubstantiated police leaks and prosecution allegations, the media—with Rupert Murdoch’s newspapers in the lead—have accused the 18 men arrested in the two cities of “stockpiling” weapons and explosives, training in remote locations, planning “violent jihad to cause maximum damage” and discussing “dying for holy war”.

After earlier nominating city landmarks such as the Harbour Bridge as the men’s targets, the police and media have switched to the even more alarming claim of a plot to bomb the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor in Sydney’s southern suburbs.

Meanwhile, the accused have been treated as highly dangerous criminals, locked away for 20 hours a day in isolation cells reserved for convicted prisoners classified as the worst offenders. While awaiting trial, they will be incarcerated for months, denied contact with their families and unable to defend themselves publicly.

When one of the men, Mirsad Mulahalilovic, appeared briefly in a Sydney court to argue unsuccessfully for bail, prison authorities paraded him in a Guantánamo Bay-style orange jumpsuit, with his arms and legs shackled. His barrister Philip Boulten commented: “Corrective Services wishes to emulate Guantánamo Bay.”

Omar Baladjam, who was shot in the neck by police when arrested, was removed from hospital to prison in Sydney’s largest ever “anti-terror” convoy, involving more than 100 heavily-armed police officers, 10 vehicles, patrolling sniffer dogs and two helicopters,

one with surveillance cameras.

The purpose of the media coverage goes far beyond demonising the accused, whose prospects of anything resembling a fair trial have been severely compromised. Its aim is, rather, to smother criticism of last week’s politically motivated raids, and to silence opposition to the unprecedented anti-terrorism bills currently being pushed through federal and state parliaments.

In an apparent effort to disguise the weakness of the case against the accused men, the federal Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) initially obtained a suppression order in a Sydney court on November 11, preventing publication of any of the details of the police allegations against them.



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