

# Australian Federal Police commissioner reveals scale of Haneef frame-up

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Testimony before a Senate estimates committee last month shed further light on the scale of the operation mounted by the Howard government last year to frame-up Indian Muslim doctor Mohammed Haneef on a charge of assisting terrorism.

Australian Federal Police (AFP) Commissioner Mick Keelty told a committee hearing that more than 600 police personnel worked on the Haneef case at its height. In an investigation that cost more than \$7.5 million, they obtained more than 300 witness statements and collected 349 forensic samples.

Keelty said the operation involved 249 AFP officers, 225 Queensland police, 54 Western Australian police, 40 New South Wales police, four police and 15 other officers from the Northern Territory, Tasmania and other agencies, six translators, six Customs officers, and two British police. Between them, they executed 22 search warrants on residential premises, conducted 16 telephone intercepts, operated six surveillance devices and seized 623 gigabytes of computer data, and racked up a \$1.6 million overtime bill.

These figures do not include the involvement of the Australian Intelligence Security Organisation (ASIO) and other security agencies, including the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), the overseas spy force, and the Office of National Assessments (ONA), the coordinating organisation in the Prime Minister's department.

For all these vast resources, the operation was unable to produce any credible evidence against Haneef. Amid lurid police-fed media headlines about a doctors' terrorist plot, Haneef was interrogated and detained for two weeks without charge. After a magistrate finally granted bail, the Howard government effectively overturned the judicial ruling by stripping Haneef of his visa so that he would be thrown into indefinite immigration detention.

Within a month, AFP claims that Haneef's former mobile phone SIM card was found in a jeep that exploded at Britain's Glasgow airport last July proved to be false. The Director of Public Prosecutions was forced to drop the charge. The Federal Court then ruled that former

Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews had unlawfully revoked the doctor's visa.

Facing defeat at last year's elections, the Howard government went to extraordinary lengths to vilify an innocent man—and try to jail him for up to 15 years—in a bid to whip up a new terrorist “scare”. As it had done during the 2001 and 2004 election campaigns, the government seized upon an overseas terrorist attack—in this case, the failed bombings in London and Glasgow last June—to beef up the “war on terror” at home.

The operation against Haneef was orchestrated at the highest level. Howard's inner cabal, the cabinet National Security Committee, discussed the cancellation of Haneef's visa, and the immigration minister acted in tandem with Attorney-General Philip Ruddock, who issued a Criminal Justice Certificate to keep Haneef detained while awaiting trial on the terrorism charge.

Keelty's testimony highlights the fact that the police-intelligence mobilisation was by no means solely a federal affair, directed only by the Howard government. State and territory Labor governments, particularly in Queensland, also committed substantial police resources.

Keelty gave a clear indication that as far as the security agencies were concerned, nothing would change under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's federal Labor government. Despite the distress and violation of basic rights suffered by Haneef, Keelty told the Senate committee that there was no need to change any practices within his force. “We have reviewed the Haneef matter as a matter of course and there is nothing that has arisen out of those reviews that required us to alter our policies or alter our approaches to those investigations,” Keelty declared.

Moreover, the commissioner insisted that the investigation was continuing into Haneef and his alleged connection to last year's bombings in London and Glasgow, suggesting that efforts could still be made to revive the witch-hunt. The ongoing operation could also be used as a pretext for the Rudd government to cancel, delay or narrow the judicial inquiry into the Haneef debacle that Labor promised before

last November's federal election.

Responding to media questions about Keelty's testimony, Labor Attorney-General Robert McClelland said he was still finalising plans for the judicial inquiry. His spokesman Adam Sims said: "The impact on ongoing national security operations is a factor being taken into account in arrangements for the inquiry." This is another indication from the Rudd government that any inquiry will be designed to protect the security agencies and strengthen their operations. Last year, when proposing the inquiry, Rudd emphasised that its purpose would be to "restore public confidence" in the anti-terrorism laws.

In an apparent move to shore up his own personal position, Keelty set up a closed-door review two days before the federal election to "report on the current role and responsibilities of the AFP and other relevant national security agencies, including ASIO and state police, in conducting national security operations". Keelty told the Senators he had personally selected the review's members: former NSW Chief Justice Sir Lawrence Street, ex- NSW police commissioner Ken Moroney, and Martin Brady, a one-time head of Australia's largest military intelligence agency, the Defence Signals Directorate.

Keelty established the review after another major fiasco for the Howard government in the case of Sydney medical student Izhar ul-Haque. The DPP had to drop all the terrorist-related charges against ul-Haque as well, after NSW Supreme Court judge Michael Adams ruled that AFP and ASIO officers had committed "the crime of false imprisonment and kidnap at common law" by trying to coerce ul-Haque into becoming a police informant.

The purpose of the ul-Haque and Hanif cases was threefold: to bolster the phoney "war on terror", divert deepening discontent over worsening social inequality; and introduce police-state measures that can be used to deal with political and social unrest.

The two cases collapsed, however, in the face of mounting scepticism and opposition among broad layers of people, as well as within the legal profession, to the assault on basic civil liberties and legal rights. Haneef's lawyers leaked police interview transcripts to the media, allowing the public, for the first time, to see the flimsy and concocted character of the police case.

Alarmed by this development, Keelty gave a speech on January 29, railing against the "court of public opinion" and called for a media blackout on coverage of all terrorism cases until legal proceedings and appeals had concluded. During his Senate testimony, Keelty revealed that he sent a copy of that speech to Attorney-General McClelland's office a day earlier, informing the government of what he was to say, and received no call to suggest that he modify his

remarks.

Any inquiry established by the Rudd government into the Haneef affair will be designed to appease the shift in public sentiment, while covering up the political calculations behind the "war on terror" and ensuring that the activities of the police and intelligence apparatus continue unhindered.

At the estimates committee, Keelty confidently declared that Haneef, who returned to India after his work visa was revoked and has not been able to return to his job at an Australian hospital, had no case for compensation. Attorney-General McClelland has separately ruled out compensating or apologising to ul-Haque.

Various calls have been made by media commentators for Keelty to be dismissed in order to help refurbish the AFP's reputation. Regardless of his personal fate, the methods of frame-up, damaging leaks to the media, presentation of false evidence and whitewash will continue, and the so-called counter-terrorism laws, which hand the security agencies unprecedented powers of surveillance, detention and interrogation, will be maintained.

The Rudd government is presiding over a major expansion of the AFP and ASIO, which was initially launched by the Howard government with Labor's support. At the estimates committee hearing, Keelty assured Senators that the expansion of the AFP, particularly the formation of a 1,200-member International Deployment Group (IDG) to intervene overseas, was on track, and would be immune from the government's "razor gang" budget cuts. He reported that the IDG had 944 officers, and he was confident of reaching the 1,200 target by June 30. Likewise, ASIO director-general Paul O'Sullivan said his agency had grown to 1,450, would number 1,530 by June 30, and would reach 1,863 by 2010-11. This means that ASIO has doubled since 2002 and will have trebled by 2010-11.



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