

Bipartisan unity on Australia's "terror alert"

Mike Head
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Australia's political and media establishment has totally backed the Abbott government's raising of the official terrorist alert level to "high," despite the blatantly contrived nature of the move, and its obvious connection to the government's escalating participation in the renewed US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

This morning's newspapers devoted pages of uncritical coverage to yesterday's announcement, with headlines proclaiming the unsubstantiated scare-mongering of the government and the intelligence chiefs. "Lone wolf terror fear" declared the Fairfax Media's *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Conveniently, according to the government, a so-called lone wolf terrorist is one who communicates his or her intentions to no one. Therefore, no evidence of any plot or preparation for a terrorist attack must be produced by the government before declaring that an atrocity is now "likely" in Australia.

On the pretext of thwarting terrorists, large-scale police and security mobilisations have already started, beginning with football finals last night and over the weekend in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

In announcing the alert, Prime Minister Tony Abbott admitted that the police and spy agencies had no evidence of any "specific" plans for an attack. Instead he claimed: "What we do have is intelligence that there are people with the intent and the capability to mount attacks here in Australia." The only indicator of this alleged vague "intent" is "chatter" among "possible jihadists."

Nevertheless, both Labor and the Greens immediately supported the alert declaration. Labor leader Bill Shorten effusively thanked Abbott for briefing the opposition in advance. "When it comes to fighting terrorism, we are in this together," Shorten said. "The prime minister and I are partners when it comes to national security."

Shorten joined the government in rejecting

suggestions that Canberra's plans to step up its military involvement in the US war in Iraq and Syria would make Australia more of a target for terrorists. "Australia would still be a target regardless of what we did in that region," he said, absurdly claiming that "terrorists" were simply "jealous" of Australians' "way of life."

The Labor Party leader also welcomed the "leadership" from President Obama in "responding to the atrocities that we are seeing in northern Iraq and Syria." Shorten echoed Abbott in declaring that it was "absolutely in our national interest" that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) be defeated.

In reality, Obama's extension of the war into Syria marks a resumption of Washington's plans, temporarily delayed a year ago, to conduct bombings designed to oust the regime of Bashar al-Assad, and assert unfettered US hegemony over the Middle East. Moreover, ISIS was regarded as an ally in that regime-change operation, and received arms and funds from the US-backed regimes in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, before it launched its incursion into Iraq.

Greens leader Christine Milne issued a statement backing the alert, saying her party "accepted the advice of ASIO." This alignment with the government and its domestic political spy agency, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), is consistent with the Greens' role in 2005 when the previous Liberal-National government of John Howard declared that the danger of an imminent terrorist attack—which never eventuated—required the urgent recall of parliament to rush through another set of "anti-terrorism" laws.

The Greens voted for laws that dramatically altered the legal framework by making it possible to arrest and convict alleged terrorist suspects for planning "a" unspecified attack, without evidence of any concrete plot, location, time or weaponry. Within weeks, legislation was passed to permit two new forms of

detention without trial—preventative detention and control orders—on top of arbitrary detention powers already handed to ASIO and the police in 2002.

Milne sought to cover her tracks by pointing out that “any military involvement in Iraq and Syria would increase the risk of an attack in Australia.” But the Greens have not opposed the war, but only advocated a parliamentary vote to authorise Australian involvement.

The politically fabricated 2005 “alert” by the Howard government was just one of many such scare campaigns whipped up to try to justify Australia’s participation in the criminal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the erection of a police-state framework at home.

One of the most notorious was the failed frame-up of Gold Coast Hospital doctor Mohamed Haneef in 2007, just before the Howard government was defeated in an electoral landslide. Amid blazing media headlines about a plot to blow up a Gold Coast high-rise apartment building, Haneef was imprisoned for nearly two weeks without charge before the concocted case against him unraveled.

The spectacular collapse of the Haneef frame-up only highlighted the torrent of lies and fabrications that underpinned the entire “war on terror,” such as the allegations that Iraq’s Saddam Hussein regime was in league with Al Qaeda and ready to strike Europe with “weapons of mass destruction.” Now, even greater frauds are being perpetrated, with ISIS as the new supposed threat to humanity.

Despite the concerted drive underway—aided by gruesome ISIS beheadings—to stampede public opinion in Australia, and in the US and other allied countries, there are already signs of deep distrust and hostility to the fear-mongering of the Abbott government, and the Labor Party.

Within several hours of Abbott’s announcement yesterday, a report on the *Guardian Australia* web site received 758 comments, mostly scathing. Some pointed to the government’s desperate domestic political calculations in trying to divert attention away from the widespread opposition to its budget austerity measures. “Well it certainly got the budget problems off the front pages,” one comment observed.

Other comments noted that ISIS would not even exist except for the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, and the devastation of the country that followed. “If governments had listened to the protests from ordinary

people around the world we wouldn’t have had an invasion, an illegal invasion, of Iraq and this situation would not be occurring,” one said.

Another remarked: “This is all so scarily predictable this government has to be stopped... It won’t be long before Tony Abbott is swanning around the planet an untouchable war criminal just like Blair and Bush!”

At least one comment drew attention to Labor’s backing of the Islamic fundamentalists in Syria. “Where was the ALP when the Government was letting young people take the anti-Assad side in Syria? Bit like tacit approval, wasn’t it? Now Abbott is saying that they’re liable to solitary imprisonment, on their return.”

Several comments recalled the only major terrorist attack in Australia in the past three decades—the 1978 bomb blast outside Sydney’s Hilton Hotel. It was used to boost the powers of ASIO, despite all the evidence suggesting that the bomb was planted by the security agencies themselves. “For those who remember, one of the biggest home soil terrorist attacks links straight back to ASIO ... Hilton Bombing,” one comment stated.

These sentiments find no expression whatsoever within the political and media establishment. This underscores the widening gulf between the ruling elite and the vast majority of the population, and the need to build a new socialist leadership in the working class.



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