

Australian police carry out largest-ever “anti-terror” operation

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18 September 2014

Australian police today carried out the largest-ever “counter-terrorism” operation in the country’s history based on vague allegations that “random acts” of violence were being planned.

Beginning at around 4 a.m., at least 500 New South Wales (NSW) state police and as many as 300 Australian Federal Police (AFP) officers and Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) agents raided at least 15 homes in 12 Sydney suburbs. At the same time, some 70 police stormed homes in three suburbs of Brisbane, reportedly as a “follow-up” on last week’s raid on an Islamic book store, which resulted in two arrests.

In Sydney, 15 men have been detained. One 22-year-old man has already been charged and brought before a court. Homes were surrounded by heavily-armed police. In one raid, a police helicopter was positioned over a house to beam a search light. One man who was not detained has alleged that the police used brute force during the operation.

Maywand Osman, whose home was raided in Marsfield told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC): “I opened the door this morning at 4:45 a.m. to about four police officers. They asked me to raise my hands. I immediately raised my hands. Four officers then jumped at me and one punched me in the face. They threw me to the ground and started hitting me in the head and pulling my hair. One officer grabbed me by the hair and said, ‘You piece of shit.’ While they were beating me I heard one officer say, ‘Just don’t make him bleed.’ They then went inside my house to conduct a search. They found nothing in my house and I was not under arrest or in custody at any point in time.”

The operation was orchestrated to ensure it received blanket media coverage as people were leaving for

work. The major news outlets were forewarned so they could have journalists and camera crews on the scene. NSW police provided updates on Twitter, using the hashtag #sydneyarrests. Photos and videos of the raids were uploaded to Twitter and Youtube within hours.

Everything about the raids reeks of a cynical and sinister attempt to justify Sunday’s announcement by the government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott—with the full support of the opposition Labor Party—to send Australian F-18 jets and Army special forces to join US military operations in Iraq against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as ISIL. As the police operation continued throughout the day, Abbott and Labor leader Bill Shorten came together to officially send off hundreds of Air Force personnel to the Middle East.

Today’s operation will also be used as the pretext to ram through, as early as next week, draconian new anti-terror legislation that will dramatically increase the powers of the intelligence and police agencies. At the same time, the alleged domestic terrorist threat will be exploited to amplify the climate of fear and paranoia, and outright xenophobia against Muslims, that has been whipped up by the political establishment and media as Australia has fully committed to the US-led war plans in Iraq and Syria. Just days before announcing the troop deployments, Abbott last week raised Australia’s “terrorist alert level” from medium to high. Police are now conducting stepped-up vehicle and personal searches at major events, airports and government buildings.

The purported danger posed by the men detained today—which will further heighten public anxiety and alarm—is almost certainly either fabricated or grossly exaggerated. The heads of both the AFP and NSW police admitted that they have no evidence that any

crime was either imminent or even being concretely planned by the detainees. As a media release stated, the police have “no information regarding a specific attack, including dates, time or location.” While police have seized computers and documents, only one weapon was reportedly found, a firearm of an undisclosed character, and no claim has been made that it was intended for use in a terrorist act.

According to the ABC, the detainees are well known to the intelligence agencies due to their alleged sympathies with organisations, including ISIS, that are seeking to overthrow the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. In the case of at least some of the individuals, their passports were revoked on the grounds they were intending to travel to the Middle East to join other Australian citizens fighting in the Syrian civil war. Their communications were under intense scrutiny and monitoring.

Today’s raids are the outcome of profoundly anti-democratic legislation that was pushed through the parliament during the 2000s on the pretext of the “war on terror” and with the support of the entire political establishment, including the Greens. People can be arrested, interrogated and ultimately charged with offenses that carry lengthy prison sentences on the basis of their alleged “intentions.”

At today’s court hearing, the government prosecutor indicated that the main evidence against the charged man was an intercepted phone call. He allegedly took part in a discussion about committing an act that, the prosecutor said, was “clearly designed to shock, horrify and terrify the community.”

Abbott confirmed media reports that the alleged act under discussion involved seizing a random person and filming them being beheaded, copying the manner in which ISIS has murdered American and British citizens. Abbott asserted: “Quite direct exhortations were coming from an Australian who is apparently quite senior in ISIL to networks in Australia to conduct demonstration killings here in this country.”

The media and political establishment as a whole has seized on the spectre of a terrorist atrocity in Australia to justify the dispatch of forces to the Middle East and attacks on democratic rights at home. Labor leader Bill Shorten declared: “The raids will no doubt come as a shock to many Australians. It does remind us that the threat of terror can actually occur on our shore.”

Prominent media commentator Paul Bongiorno stated on ABC Radio that the raids send “a strong message to the Australian public that the fight, the war if you like, against terror is not only in Iraq but right here at home, something the prime minister has been telling us, that ASIO has been telling us and that the federal [Labor] opposition believes.”

In the coming period, the purported danger of terrorism will be shamelessly invoked to divert from the immense class antagonisms that exist over the level of social inequality and to intimidate opposition to US and Australian militarism and intrigues in both the Middle East and internationally.



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