

Australian “beheading” plot based on dubious evidence

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19 September 2014

The Australian population is being saturated with claims by the political and media establishment, based on highly dubious allegations, that a massive police operation on Thursday morning prevented a terrorist cell that supports the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) from kidnapping a random person and filming them being beheaded.

Some 500 New South Wales (NSW) police and 300 Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) agents were mobilised for violent pre-dawn raids on 15 homes in 12 Sydney suburbs. Raids also took place in three suburbs of Brisbane.

The alleged terrorist plot is being trumpeted as justification not only for the deployment of Australian military forces to join the US-led intervention into Iraq and Syria, but for legislation that will grant sweeping new powers to the intelligence and police agencies, and for an unprecedented increase in police activity at public events and buildings.

Absent from the avalanche of lurid media stories about terrorists in Australia’s suburbs is any objective examination of the facts regarding the purported planned public beheading. The most detailed account, clearly written in close collaboration with both ASIO and the federal and state police, was published today by the *Australian*. Far from substantiating the claims, however, it indicates that what is unfolding is a sinister conspiracy to railroad a group of young men into prison on the basis of grossly exaggerated or completely fabricated allegations.

Buried away in the report is the fact that the word “behead” was not even used in the supposed incriminating phone call made to 22-year-old apprentice motor mechanic Omarjan Azari, who has been charged with the crime of “conspiring to act in

preparation for, or plan, a terrorist act or acts.”

This sweeping charge does not require the police to produce any evidence that an actual attack was planned—only to assert that one was being thought about. Such charges are only possible because of legislation introduced in 2005 by the former Howard government as part of a raft of draconian anti-terror laws that were passed with the support of both the Labor Party and the Greens.

The only evidence produced against Azari is that he allegedly answered a phone call on Tuesday from Mohammad Ali Baryalei, who can only be described as a highly dubious individual. Baryalei, an Australian citizen, has been in Syria since April 2013 fighting in the US-backed civil war to overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad. He reputedly enlisted with Jabhat al-Nusra, an Islamic extremist organisation, which is affiliated with Al Qaeda and has received massive physical and financial assistance from US allies such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Australian authorities claim that at some point he switched his allegiance from Jabhat al-Nusra to ISIS.

According to the police version of events, Baryalei told Azari over the phone to “kill a random kaffir [non-Muslim].” The *Australian* asserted that while the word “behead” was never uttered, “it was allegedly implied by a suggestion that a flag be draped around the victim’s head and that their death be videoed.” The newspaper declared that this would be “similar to the recent beheading executions by Islamic State of two US journalists and a British aid worker.”

Omarjan Azari was described by a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist who attended his court hearing yesterday as an “awkward, spotty youth” who “looked more like a teenager accused of shoplifting” than a potential murderer. During the court proceedings and in

the torrent of police leaks to the media, there has been not a single reference to how he reacted to Baryalei's alleged suggestion that he kill someone. No quote has been published that indicates he even verbally responded, let alone that he committed to carry out such an act.

Azari's cousin told the *Daily Mail* that he had "stopped using his phone because he was being followed by police and ASIO... He's been scared for a long time because he was being followed."

However, Baryalei, someone touted as a terrorist "ringmaster" and "mastermind," supposedly decided to ring a totally unsecure mobile phone from Syria and urge a young Australian man to commit murder in the name of ISIS. Conveniently for the government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Australian state as a whole, he did so at precisely the point when they needed something to substantiate their claims that there was a domestic terrorist threat and justify their dispatch of forces to the Middle East.

According to the authorities, Baryalei's single phone call provided the pretext for yesterday's state mobilisation, which saw helicopters, armoured vehicles and police squads armed with automatic weapons deployed into suburban streets, homes ransacked, women and children terrorised and 15 people dragged off for interrogation.

Within 24 hours, nine of the detained people were released without any charges. One person was charged with "possessing ammunition without licence and unauthorised possession of a prohibited weapon." Two women were charged for resisting the invasion of their homes. Two men are still being held by police.

No official explanation has been provided as to why 800 police and ASIO agents, and such extensive raids, were required to essentially arrest one young man. The entire operation was a political exercise, orchestrated with the government and the media to provoke the greatest public alarm and fear and further stoke anti-Muslim xenophobia.

The purported beheading plot was used by Prime Minister Abbott to assert yesterday that Australian military personnel were deploying to the Middle East to "protect the people of the wider world, including Australia" from people "who hate who we are and how we live." It will be used to extend ever greater powers to ASIO and the police.

The "beheading" claim is also being exploited internationally to justify the American war plans in the Middle East. US Secretary of State John Kerry declared in the Congress yesterday that Australia had "arrested a large group of people that they suspected of being ISIL [ISIS] members, supporters, sympathisers... who were planning some kind of extravaganza of brutality... So we have to decimate and discredit a militant cult masquerading as a religious movement and claiming with no legitimacy to be a state."

One obvious question is whether Mohammad Ali Baryalei works for Australian or US intelligence agencies. In case after case in Australia, police agents, provocateurs and informers have worked to entrap disorientated people in actions that the authorities have portrayed as evidence of "terrorist" conspiracies. Police entrapment was employed in the alleged 2009 Holsworthy suicide bombing plot, the 2008 trial of Abdul Nacer Benbrika and his colleagues, and the 2004 case of Zeky "Zak" Mallah (see: "Australian terrorism trial produces evidence of police entrapment").

In the current allegations against 22-year-old Brisbane man Agim Kruezi, who was arrested last week and charged with recruiting people to join ISIS in Syria, it has already emerged that the person he allegedly recruited was an undercover police officer who would no doubt have encouraged Kruezi to suggest he join the Islamist movement.

More information will surface over the coming weeks and months. Enough is known already, however, to state that the Australian establishment is using manufactured assertions of terrorist threats to promote a militarist and anti-democratic agenda.



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