

Australia: Questions over police killing of young Muslim “terrorist”

Our correspondents
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with and interviewed workers and young people in the suburbs surrounding Endeavour Hills, south east of Melbourne, where police shot and killed 18-year-old Abdul Numan Haider on Tuesday evening. People expressed their shock at the shooting and their suspicions about the official explanations.

The police account of the events leading up to a confrontation between Haider and two police officers in a car park near the Endeavour Hills police station is marked by a shifting combination of half-truths and outright falsifications. In initial statements on Wednesday, high-ranking police claimed that they “had no inkling that this individual posed a threat” and that Haider had voluntarily come to the station for an interview over a “routine matter.” The police alleged that as officers greeted him in the car park, he attacked them with a knife without warning and was shot dead in self-defence.

Throughout yesterday, the police story changed dramatically, with the teenager being portrayed as someone who had come to their attention as a potential “lone wolf” terrorist. They now claim the youth was under close scrutiny and surveillance because of an altercation several weeks ago at the Dandenong Plaza shopping centre where he displayed an Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) flag. The young man’s attempts to obtain a new passport were blocked by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) on the basis that he was planning to travel to Syria to join ISIS.

The establishment media has seized on the killing to whip up an atmosphere of suspicion and fear over further “lone wolf” terrorist attacks, as well as outright anti-Muslim xenophobia, based on gross distortion, unsubstantiated speculation and outright fabrication. The lack of any regard for elementary journalistic standards was highlighted by the publication in the Fairfax press yesterday of a photo, allegedly of a well-dressed version

of Haider, alongside an image from Haider’s Facebook page, showing him in military camouflage, wearing a balaclava and holding an Islamist flag. In fact, the well-dressed young man was not Haider, but another 18-year-old who told the media last night that he now fears going out in public.

Friends of Haider have released information indicating that he was a very troubled and possibly mentally ill young man. He had previous relations with a conservative Islamist organisation but had broken them off and become withdrawn. He was reportedly devastated by a recent break-up with his girlfriend. His family had been encouraging him to seek counselling. He was outraged over the massive anti-terror police raids last week in Sydney and Brisbane and also over the fact that he was prevented from obtaining a passport.

By yesterday afternoon, the police finally admitted that they gone to his house just hours before the incident in the car park and, not having a search warrant, had prevailed upon his parents to allow them to enter and look over the premises. According to family sources, Haider was angered by this intrusion and rang the police to complain about the “invasion of his privacy.”

It was under these conditions that police told Haider, who was highly agitated, to come to the station to speak with counter-terrorism officers. His parents and friends have stated that they urged him not to go out of fears for his safety. For reasons that have not been credibly explained, the police organised to meet a disturbed young man at 7.40 p.m., in the car park of a child care centre next door to the police station.

Haider allegedly arrived at the child care centre carrying not only a small knife, but a bag containing a larger blade and his black ISIS flag. Within minutes, two police had suffered knife injuries and Haider was dead from a single gunshot.

At Dandenong Plaza, local residents expressed their

deep concern over the police killing. Many drew attention to how the government used alleged domestic terrorist threats to justify the deployment of Australian military forces to the US-led war in Iraq and Syria and divert attention from its savage attacks on living standards.

Mohsen, who is currently studying international business, told the WSWS: “I thought it was strange that a person would go to the police station with knives. Frankly, I don’t believe the story we’re being told. I googled the story and I read that the police had searched his house without a warrant. He was probably angry with that and he had all the right to be angry. They could have pursued him legally. Instead, police intimidated him and they pushed him to the edge. It seems he attacked a police officer and that’s wrong, but he didn’t deserve to be shot.”

Speaking about the new US-led war in the Middle East, he said: “There have been killings in Iraq and Syria for a whole time, why are they campaigning about this now? The government must benefit from this. I thought it was interesting that Tony Abbott just happened to be at the [United Nations] Security Council yesterday or today. The only thing he had to say was that one Aussie citizen had carried out an attack and this is why we have to go to war against another country. I think if you’re going to justify war, you have to come up with something better than that.

“The prime minister calling him a terrorist so quickly, without any evidence, is the issue for me. They’re taking advantage of the situation, using the death of a young kid. It’s really sick. It seems they just want to target and attack Muslims and encourage others to do the same. The raids last week were very suspicious, as they coincide with their interests to bomb Iraq and Syria. They need to have the population scared to accept it. Divide and conquer is the best way for Abbott to get his budget cuts through.

“It’s just like during the Cronulla riots [in 2005]. Raids happened and then they encouraged young people to go out and attack Muslims. Now the police are doing the same thing by raiding people’s houses with no evidence. Today, I saw cops everywhere, with sprays and guns. They were going around in groups of four. I’ve never seen so many cops. There were 20-30 cops going around the Plaza. They’re trying to make people scared. I’m not a criminal, but I felt scared.”

Edgar, a psychology student at La Trobe University, told the WSWS: “It just seems too coincidental that Australian police would conduct such heavy acts at a time

when the US and Australia are moving troops to fight against ISIS. When I look at how much news coverage there is on ‘anti-terrorism’ and the protection of the public, it feels like the media is trying to justify the drive to war.”

A student from Lyndale Secondary College in North Dandenong, where Haider reportedly studied last year, commented: “I thought it was sad, but I don’t know the full story. I don’t think it’s fair that they just shot him. There seems to be more police violence, like what you see in the US. I watched a recent YouTube video showing the police going into a scuffle and instead of breaking it up, they made it worse and started firing on people. It’s like what happened to that guy in Ferguson in the US. The guy had his arms up and they still shot him. Then nothing happens to the police. We’re all humans and we should all be equal, but when these things happen you don’t think that is the case.”

Dean, a construction worker for 34 years, spoke with the WSWS: “It’s a big propaganda bandwagon. Abbott wants to look special. All this stuff in the paper about ‘terrorist this, terrorist that’. Let’s see it. Prove it. I think it’s a big media beat up myself.

“There was a lot of opposition to the budget. You can create a diversion over this and that and the media focuses on it and says ‘we’ve got to stop all this terrorism.’ And while they are doing that, all these domestic policies that affect our everyday living get pushed through while you’ve got this big red herring going on over there. It’s the old create a diversion and slip it through.

“They want to completely smash workers’ rights. The other day my daughter was telling me that there is now a whole generation with \$40,000 to \$50,000 in HECS [university debts]. They’re not going to have a life until they pay off these loans. My daughter’s one of them. You’ve already got a generation of 16- to 25-year-olds who don’t have a job because there are no jobs.”



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