

# More police raids in Sydney on the pretext of counter-terrorism

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Large numbers of federal and New South Wales state police raided and searched five homes and apartments in separate Sydney suburbs on Thursday night. Carried out just days after the killing of two innocent people and the man who had taken them hostage in Sydney's Martin Place, the raids have been used by the political and media establishment to maintain their drumbeat that Australia is under attack by domestic terrorists inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Video and photographs of heavily armed Public Order and Riot Squad police outside suburban homes, sniffer dogs searching gardens, police rummaging through boxes and cars, and an Australian Federal Police Forensic officer peering into a ceiling were published to add to the atmosphere of an imminent threat. The raids, however, ended with no-one being detained or charged.

A police spokesman stated that the raids were not related to the Martin Place siege but were carried out to "seek additional information" following the country's largest ever anti-terrorism operation on September 18. Over 800 heavily armed police and Australian Special Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) agents stormed into 15 premises across Sydney and detained 17 people. The raids took place just days after Prime Minister Tony Abbott had announced that Australian fighter-bombers and special forces personnel would be sent back to Iraq to join the US-led offensive on ISIS.

Lurid assertions were made that the raids were necessary because 22-year-old apprentice motor mechanic Omarjan Azari had held a phone conversation with Mohammad Ali Baryalei, an Australian citizen allegedly fighting for ISIS in Syria. Media reports claimed that Baryalei had instructed Azari to kidnap a random person and film them being beheaded in Martin Place.

US Secretary of State John Kerry, among others, seized upon the so-called terror plot in Australia to demand support in the US and internationally for Washington's military intervention in the Middle East. Within Australia, the alleged conspiracy was shamelessly used by the Abbott government and the Labor Party opposition to ram through further anti-terrorism laws that attack fundamental democratic rights and give even more draconian powers to the intelligence agencies and police.

Everything about the charging of Omarjan Azari raised serious questions. Of all those searched and detained on September 18, Azari was initially the only one charged with a terrorism offence—the sweeping charge of "conspiring to act in preparation for, or plan, a terrorist act or acts." As the wording of the offence makes clear, an individual in Australia can be imprisoned for lengthy periods on the basis of vague claims that they had thought about planning to commit a crime at an unspecified time and place.

Police later stated that the word "behead" was not used in the phone call with Baryalei, while no details were released as to what Azari did or did not say during the conversation. Baryalei's alleged decision to call Azari's insecure mobile phone from Syria was highly dubious, under conditions in which such communications are constantly monitored by ASIO and police agencies. It smacked of the actions of a police provocateur seeking to set up the young man in the interests of the political agenda of the government and the state. According to unconfirmed reports, Baryalei has been killed in Syria in an unspecified manner, so can never be questioned.

Azari and another 25-year-old man were subsequently also charged with providing \$15,000 to finance Australian citizens travelling to Syria to join

Sunni Islamic extremist militias fighting in the civil war to overthrow the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. Until ISIS emerged this year as a threat to US interests in Iraq, the Australian government, like US allies around the world, had been openly supporting the anti-Assad forces. When he was Australian foreign minister Bob Carr went as far as to publicly suggest that Assad be assassinated.

Amid Australia imperialism's ever escalating involvement in US-led military operations and intrigues, mass alienation from the political establishment, a mounting economic crisis and growing social tensions, the façade of democracy is rotting away. Emerging in its place is the edifice of a police-state. During a television discussion on November 3, Federal Police Assistant Commissioner Neil Gaughan spelt out the indefinite assault on civil liberties and wholesale state intimidation that is underway on the pretext of combatting terrorism and maintaining social order. "What we will now see is more raids like we saw in Sydney because the environment has changed," he declared.

Since the September 18 raids, other "counter-terrorism" episodes and police operations include:

On September 23, 17-year-old Numan Haider was shot dead in murky circumstances in Melbourne by two police. He allegedly attacked them with a knife when they met him in a car park to discuss the fact that police had entered his family house without a warrant. Haider was portrayed throughout the media as a "lone-wolf" ISIS terrorist. The teenager, who was likely suffering from serious mental illness, had been under sustained scrutiny by the police and his passport had been revoked.

On September 29, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop boasted that she was cancelling people's passports on "a virtual daily basis" and that she had revoked at least 50 by that date. Unknown numbers of people, especially young Muslim males, have had their houses visited by police or been stopped and questioned in the streets. As appears to be the case with Numan Haider, police intimidation and harassment can be the triggers that push unstable people over the edge into violence.

On September 30, in an operation coordinated with the American FBI, seven homes were raided in Melbourne and one man, 23-year-old Hassan El Sabsabi, charged with sending money to an American

citizen fighting for Islamist groups in Syria.

In the lead-up to the G20 Leaders Summit in Brisbane in November, the media lauded the intense surveillance and scrutiny being carried out by police of alleged "threats" such as Muslim hardliners, anarchist groups and protest organisations. Over 7,000 police and 2,000 military personnel were deployed to lockdown the city during the summit, with snipers on roofs, jet fighters in the sky above and constant CCTV monitoring of peoples' movements and activities.

Police in the Brisbane area, hyped up and operating with a shoot-to-kill policy, have killed or wounded five people in incidents since September.

The massive police mobilisation in Sydney and across Australia that was ordered in response to a lone gunman taking hostages in a café on Monday, and the violent manner in which the siege ended, is the outcome of the dramatic lurch toward authoritarian forms of rule.



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