Australian police kill 15-year-old in purported "terror" incident

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Just after 4.30 p.m. last Friday, 15-year-old Farhad Jabar allegedly walked up behind 58-year-old police accountant Curtis Cheng and shot him dead with a handgun as he left the New South Wales Police Crime Command complex in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta. Within minutes, plain clothes detectives killed the boy in a brief exchange of gunfire. By the officers' own admission, no non-lethal attempts were made to end the stand-off.

At a press conference on Saturday, NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione, flanked by NSW premier Mike Baird, declared that the killing of Cheng was "politically motivated" and therefore an "act of terrorism." This theme was amplified throughout the media, with Farhad Jabar portrayed as a "radicalised Muslim" who had carried out a "lone-wolf terrorist attack" on Australian soil.

On Saturday, newly-installed Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull repeated the allegation, declaring that Cheng's murder "appears to have been an act of politically-motivated violence so at this stage it appears to have been an act of terrorism." He called for the Muslim community to work with his government and police to combat "radicalisation." On Saturday night, he convened a phone conference with a number of Muslim leaders, senior police and federal and state ministers.

The editorial of today's *Australian* praised Turnbull for continuing the "war on terror" propaganda to the effect that Australia is being threatened by Islamist-motivated violence. A comment by the newspaper's international editor Greg Sheridan declared that by labelling Cheng's killing "terrorist," Turnbull had "passed his first test as a national security leader."

At the same time, the entire media has welcomed what the *Sydney Morning Herald* labelled Turnbull's "more conciliatory tone," compared with the cruder rhetoric employed by former prime minister Tony Abbott. His overtures to Muslim organisations are intended to draw them more closely into cooperation with intelligence and police agencies in combatting "terrorism."

The rush to conclude that Farhad Jabar was a terrorist, without any conclusive proof, underscores the political agenda being pursued. The assertions provide the all-embracing pretext not only for Australian military deployments in the Middle East and Afghanistan, but also sweeping powers for the intelligence and police agencies at home.

No evidence has been provided that the 15-year-old boy in western suburban Sydney had links with any terrorist organisation or terrorist conspiracy.

All that has been made public is that Farhad Jabar was a Muslim of Iraqi Kurdish background; that he had prayed at a local mosque prior to the incident and was wearing his prayer robe; and that he was recorded shouting "Allah, Allah" before he was gunned down by police. He had displayed no prior signs of being "radicalised" by extremist Islamist-based ideology. The police, who extensively monitor the Muslim community, had not profiled him.

Media reports point to the need for more complex explanations for Jabar's alleged actions, involving the social conditions and pressures on youth in Australia, especially migrant youth.

Jabar's Sunni Muslim Kurdish family had been living as refugees in Iran when he was born, and later migrated to Australia. After a childhood spent in a refugee camp, his teenage years were shaped by the experience of coming to a new country and trying to accustom himself to it. He attended a working-class public school in Parramatta, where other students have

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described him as “religious” and “quiet.” He liked watching a reality television music talent program, played basketball and allegedly tried to go to mosque services regularly. He had few friends, but they included youth of Shiite and non-Muslim backgrounds.

According to fellow students, Jabar was reportedly “picked on a lot” by other boys and was an “easy target.” One said he “always seemed really cautious. He always looked upset.” While nothing has been released about Jabar’s mental state, the pressures on all youth have created epidemic levels of depression, anxiety and, in the worst cases, suicidal tendencies.

Like thousands of youth of his age, Jabar was at a point where he would have begun to consider what he was going to do after leaving school. In Sydney’s western suburbs, youth unemployment is as high as 20 percent. Young people of Muslim background, however, face even greater challenges finding work due to prejudices created against them in the course of the “war on terror.” They are also regularly singled out for harassment and intimidation by the police, who have been instilled with the conception that every youth of Middle Eastern appearance should be treated as a potential terrorist or crime suspect.

The tremendous insecurities felt by youth about their future are only compounded by their complete alienation from the official parliamentary parties and institutions. In the case of Australia, both major parties have deployed military forces to the US-led wars that have devastated Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, killed hundreds of thousands and turned millions into refugees. Footage of the horrific outcome is broadcast each evening on television news programs, as desperate refugees confront walls, barbed wire and troops as they try to reach sanctuary in Europe.

All that can be said definitively at this point about the actions of Farhad Jabar last Friday is that they were those of a highly disturbed boy. Police Commissioner Scipione admitted during his press conference that shooting a random person outside a major police station and waiting for the reaction had the character of “suicide by cop.”

Given the history of incidents declared “terrorist acts” in Australia, the murder of Curtis Cheng and subsequent killing of a 15-year-old boy will be used to push through further attacks on democratic rights on the pretext of combatting extremism.

Other recent cases of alleged terrorism that were followed by sweeping changes to legislation have left a host of questions unanswered.

Numan Haider, an 18-year-old who was killed by police in Melbourne on September 23, 2014 after he allegedly attacked them with a knife, had displayed erratic behaviour over the previous weeks as a result of the cancellation of his passport. Nevertheless, police arranged to meet him in the car park where he was killed, rather than in a secure building.

Man Haron Monis, who took hostages at Sydney’s Lindt café on December 15, 2014, was well-known to intelligence agencies and police as a highly unstable person with no actual links to ISIS or terrorist organisations. No attempt was made to negotiate an end to the stand-off, which ended with the deaths of Monis and two hostages. But the incident has been used ever since as justification for Canberra’s stepped-up involvement in the criminal US-led war in Syria.

In the wake of Friday’s events, the media is whipping up a witch-hunt against alleged “radicals” operating from the Parramatta mosque where Jabar prayed, including a member of the Islamist organisation Hizb-ut-Tahrir, who allegedly preached there just hours before the killings. The mosque was raided and searched by police on Saturday evening, presumably to uncover evidence of support or advocacy of terrorist acts.

Today’s *Australian* declared that the Turnbull government should “again review the strategies and practices in place and consider if changes are needed to strengthen their hand in this ongoing fight.”

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