

Two young Australian Muslims arrested as “extremism” summit prepares surveillance of youth

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Relying on circumstantial evidence, police yesterday arrested two young Muslim men in Sydney over alleged connections to a 15-year-old boy’s fatal shooting of a police staff member outside the state police headquarters in Parramatta on October 2.

This morning, Raban Alou, 18, was charged with aiding, abetting, counseling or procuring a terrorist act, after being detained and questioned by police for more than a week without charge. These offences carry maximum sentences of life imprisonment.

Talal Alameddine, 22, was today charged with the lesser offences of supply of a firearm, breach of a firearm prohibition order, and hindering police. Both were denied bail.

Speaking outside court, Alou’s lawyer Moustafa Kheir said his client would fight the accusations, pointing out that the evidence was circumstantial. “This means there is no direct evidence...We ask that the legal process is respected and left for determination by the court, according to the evidence and not speculation.”

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull’s government immediately seized on the arrests yesterday, the same day that it convened a “Countering Violent Extremism Summit” in Canberra. It foreshadowed further draconian “terrorism” laws, in addition to those it announced on Monday, and called for pervasive monitoring of young people, including at school and on-line.

Police provided few details of the allegations against the two young men. But the comments made by state and federal police chiefs suggested that they had no evidence that the October 2 incident was a terrorist plot orchestrated by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or any other fundamentalist organisation.

The teenager, Farhad Jabar, 15, who shot police accountant Curtis Cheng was gunned down by police and

killed, preventing him from speaking about what drove him to his act. No group, including ISIS, has claimed responsibility for it. Nonetheless, Turnbull joined the police and the media in labelling the tragic event as an “Islamic extremist” attack.

Alou and Alameddine were among four young men, aged between 16 and 22, arrested in police “counter-terrorism” raids after the fatal shooting. Alameddine and two others were released, indicating that the police had no evidence against them. Alou was kept in custody, subjected to the maximum 168 hours of interrogation without charge permitted under the terrorism laws introduced since 2001.

Following yesterday’s arrests, police sources told the media that Alameddine obtained a gun, which Alou allegedly gave to Jabar inside the Parramatta mosque on October 2, yet admitted having no direct evidence. Police cited CCTV footage, apparently taken inside the mosque itself.

According to the *Australian*: “Police will allege CCTV shows Alou then meeting for several hours with Jabar at the Parramatta Mosque but again there is no evidence of the gun being handed over because during pivotal moments, the pair went to the female section where there were no security cameras.”

At the media conference to announce the arrests, New South Wales Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione and Australian Federal Police (AFP) chief Andrew Colvin refused to say if Alameddine, Alou or Jabar might have links with any organisation, including ISIS. “As part of the charge we don’t need to link this to a terrorist organisation, we are not going to speculate on this,” Colvin said.

The police chiefs made prejudicial statements insinuating the guilt of the two young men, violating the

presumption of innocence and cutting across their right to fair trials. Colvin stated: “The laying of charges against these two men should reassure the community that where there is evidence of criminal offending, we will find it and act.”

Justice Minister Michael Keenan likewise hailed the arrests as “another example of the world-class law enforcement that we have protecting us here in Australia.”

Extraordinarily, after two weeks of inflammatory media coverage linking Jabar to ISIS, the *Australian* stated this morning: “Contrary to previous reports, law enforcement agencies said Jabar did not have online contact with ISIS recruiter Neil Prakash or the British man Raphael Hostey, who is also believed to be fighting with the group.”

This has not stopped other Murdoch outlets, like the Sydney-based *Daily Telegraph*, continuing to assert that Jabar, Alou and other teenagers are members of a group of about 20 ISIS supporters. Allegedly, they have been under close watch by counter-terrorism agencies since early last year, when many of them had their passports cancelled.

On Wednesday night, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s 7.30 program provided a platform for AFP Commissioner Colvin to declare that one of the boys “on the police radar” is 12-years-old. The government is exploiting such claims to foreshadow lowering the age for control orders after announcing on Monday the reduction of the age from 16 to 14.

Today, Turnbull said control orders could be introduced for children as young as 12, insisting that the government must be “constantly vigilant” in fighting “extremism.”

Earlier, Attorney-General George Brandis revealed that children were already being subjected to surveillance by the domestic spy agency, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). Brandis said he had signed off on ASIO warrants against 14-year-olds on “more than one occasion.”

These operations against ever-younger children are being defended under the banner of combatting terrorism. However, they are establishing a broader framework. Political alienation over soaring unemployment, constant police harassment and escalating Australian involvement in the US-led wars in the Middle East and confrontations with Russia and China, exists among an entire working class generation, not only Muslim teenagers.

That is the context of yesterday’s “anti-extremism” summit that Turnbull convened in Canberra. Federal and state police and intelligence chiefs were joined by education, welfare and “multicultural” government

officials and other organisations to discuss “earlier interventions” to counter “radicalisation” among young people.

Turnbull opened the gathering by declaring: “The shocking murder of Curtis Cheng, a shocking act of terrorism perpetrated by a 15-year-old boy, reminds us yet again that radicalisation, extremism, can be seen in the very young, people that we would regard as children.”

No concrete proposals were reported from the gathering, but the focus was on establishing a spying web, targeting children and teenagers, across the Internet and throughout schools, families, communities, official welfare agencies and non-government organisations. Teachers and social workers will be asked to report to authorities on youth exhibiting signs of becoming “radicalised.”

Justice Minister Keenan, speaking after the summit, said concerned family members, friends and teachers needed to come forward about suspected extremists. He referred to “teacher training to identify young people at risk,” working with school communities and social workers, and training communities to better use social media.

Other participants told reporters of “family hotlines” where people could inform on teenagers without using the existing national security hotline. Reportedly, the meeting’s recommendations will go to the Council of Australian Governments, when Turnbull meets with state leaders, expected to be at the end of November.

One model suggested is Britain, where schools and local councils are legally required to report any concerns. Between June and August, 796 people in England and Wales were reported to the “de-radicalisation” program known as “Channel” for possible intervention. More than a third of the total, 312, were aged under 18.

No new funding was announced from yesterday’s summit. Over the past year, the Liberal-National government has already announced extra spending of almost \$1 billion on “counter-terrorism and national security measures.” Most of this money was allocated to the police and intelligence agencies, but millions of dollars were set aside for so-called community-based interventions, and that offensive will now intensify.



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