

Australian government boasts of helping US kill its own citizens in Middle East

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Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and his senior ministers this week welcomed the reported assassinations, via US airstrikes, of two young Australians in Iraq and Syria and declared that Australia was directly involved in targeting them.

Interviewed on Sky News on Thursday, Turnbull went further, warning that other Australians allegedly supporting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East “will be targeted” in the same manner.

Turnbull hailed the news as a “very positive development in the war on terror,” while Attorney-General George Brandis said “we should be gladdened by this news.”

These remarks—and Turnbull’s chilling threat of further assassinations—have not received the slightest criticism in Australia’s political and media establishment, even though they amount to sanctioning extra-judicial killings as a matter of government policy, without the pretence of any legal process.

This development demonstrates the readiness of Australia’s ruling elite to abrogate even the most fundamental legal and democratic rights as part of the fraudulent “war on terrorism.” Officially, the death penalty has been banned by Australian law for more than four decades, but these young people were summarily executed, without trial.

One victim, 24-year-old Neil Prakash, was said to have been killed by an American airstrike in Mosul, northern Iraq, on April 29. The joint media release of Brandis and Defence Minister Marise Payne said Prakash was targeted because he was a “terrorist recruiter” and “attack facilitator.”

Prakash was not accused of being an ISIS fighter, nor was he killed on a battlefield. Instead, he allegedly appeared in “propaganda videos” and “encouraged acts of terrorism.” These activities may have been crimes

under the terrorism laws introduced since 2001, but Prakash was not charged or convicted of any offences. Instead, in the words of Brandis, he was “taken out.”

The other victim, Shadi Jabar Khalil Mohammad, a student believed to be in her 20s, was apparently even further removed from any military combat. According to the official media release, she was killed “near Al Bab, Syria, on 22 April 2016, along with her Sudanese husband,” Abu Sa’ad al-Sudani.

Both were said to be “active recruiters of foreign fighters” and “had been inspiring attacks against Western interests.” The only other fact cited to justify Mohammad’s murder was that she was the sister of Farhad Mohammad, a 15-year-old boy who was shot dead by police in Sydney last October after fatally shooting a police employee.

Despite offering no evidence of any involvement in fighting, Turnbull justified the killing of these two young people, both of whom grew up in Australia, declaring they were “enemies of Australia” who were “waging war against Australia.”

Turnbull indicated that other Australian citizens were on a death list. Asked if Prakash was specifically targeted, Turnbull replied: “Yes, and has been for some time.” While refusing to elaborate for “operational” reasons, he declared: “We are unrelenting in the war against terrorism ... Australians will be targeted.”

This “war” has nothing to do with protecting people against terrorism. For more than 15 years, the “war on terror” has been waged by the US and its allies, with Australia in the frontline, to seek to establish American hegemony over the resource-rich and strategically-vital Middle East. Entire countries have been devastated—Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria—fuelling the rise of ISIS. In fact, the US and its partners have funded and armed ISIS and similar militias linked to Al

Qaeda in order to oust governments, and then exploited the atrocities of their proxies to escalate their predatory interventions.

Interviewed on Sky News, Brandis echoed the assertions of the Obama administration that the US president has the power to routinely select citizens for assassination. At least three American citizens have been killed so far, in flagrant breach of the US law and constitution: Anwar al-Awlaki, his 16-year-old son Abdulrahman al-Awlaki and Samir Khan.

Brandis confirmed that Australia cooperated with the US in “the identification and location of Prakesh.” He insisted that it took “quite a while” to isolate a target in order to avoid “killing innocent people” and “family members of targets.” Australia took this responsibility, under international humanitarian law, “very, very seriously,” as did the US.

In reality, the targeting is based on unproven allegations, as well as family links. Moreover, tens of thousands of innocent civilians have been killed throughout the Middle East by US drone attacks and Allied airstrikes.

The attorney-general pointed to the integration of Australia’s military and intelligence agencies into the global operations of the US, referring to the cooperation throughout the Five Eyes countries, which also include Britain, Canada and New Zealand. The joint US-Australian spy base at Pine Gap in central Australia plays a crucial role in pinpointing targets and coordinating US military operations across the region.

The Liberal-National government’s blatant celebration of the assassinations of Prakash and Mohammad marks an escalation of a bipartisan policy of placing Australian citizens on US hit lists. In April 2015, the *Australian* reported that an Australian citizen, Mostafa Farag, had been selected for drone execution in Syria, initially by the previous Labor government. A year earlier, another citizen, Christopher Harvard, and a dual Australian-New Zealand citizen, Muslim bin John, were killed in a US drone strike in Yemen.

Significantly, Turnbull’s government proclaimed the two killings on the eve of calling a “double dissolution” election of both houses of parliament in an attempt to remove a political blockage to the imposition of deeply unpopular social spending cuts and other austerity measures. Once again, the fraudulent “war on terror” is being ramped up to try to distract the

population and whip up support for militarism abroad and unprecedented attacks on basic democratic rights domestically.

In the media, Prakash has been demonised for alleged procurement of young Muslims to attempt a series of terrorist attacks in Australia. These unsubstantiated claims have been splashed throughout the media, prejudicing the trials of a number of teenagers whose cases have yet to get to court.

The allegations are also being utilised to bring forward another package of “anti-terrorism” laws, which will feature detaining and interrogating suspects, as young as 14, for up to 14 days without charge. These measures, agreed to by a meeting of federal and state leaders last month, will also include keeping prisoners convicted of terrorism offences incarcerated indefinitely after they have completed their sentences.

In his Sky interview, Brandis said “jihadists” had to be kept in prison beyond their sentences because they were “driven by ideology to violence.” This logic could be used against a wide range of supposed “extremists,” including political opponents, allegedly motivated by ideology.

These draconian laws, like the unlawful executions, have the full support of the Labor Party. The Greens, while previously professing opposition to aspects of the terrorism laws, have remained silent on the latest assassinations, as they were on the earlier ones.

This alignment behind the criminal activities of Washington goes far beyond killing Australians in Syria and Iraq and victimising vulnerable Muslim youth at home. It is a warning to workers and young people of the brutal methods that will be used by the political and security establishment to suppress opposition to the underlying agenda of war and austerity.



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