

# Terrorist arrests injected into Australian election

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28 May 2016

Ongoing arrests by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) have led to inflammatory government warnings of terrorist plots, and sensationalised headlines about “radical Islamist-inspired violence,” in the campaign for the July 2 double dissolution election.

The latest occurred yesterday. Police announced that a man, 25, was detained in Melbourne’s northwest on suspicion of offences relating to five men arrested on May 10, accused of trying to travel to Syria to join Islamic State (ISIS). No further details were provided.

Many questions are raised about the timing of each arrest, suggesting definite political calculations. The Liberal-National government, with Labor’s bipartisan backing, is again resorting to terrorist scares to divert attention from the deepening economic and social problems affecting millions of working people.

Attorney-General George Brandis seized on the arrests to declare that the threat of terrorist acts remained “real and present.” As well as seeking to whip up an atmosphere of fear, Brandis’s comments insinuated that those arrested were all guilty—even though they have yet to face trial—violating the legal presumption of innocence.

However, as the cases reveal, the police detentions are based on threadbare evidence and dubious charges.

Farhad Said, 24, who was arrested outside his Bankstown home on Thursday, was charged for alleged involvement in supposed 2014 plots to attack Sydney’s Garden Island Naval Base and AFP headquarters. The AFP said it expected to charge him with conspiracy to conduct an act in preparation for a terrorist act.

Such vague “conspiracy” charges, exploiting the draconian anti-terrorism laws introduced since 2001, permit people to be arrested and, if convicted, sentenced to life imprisonment, for allegedly “preparing,” “assisting” or “facilitating” an

unspecified terrorist act.

According to media reports, fed by the police, Said is alleged to have been involved in preparing handwritten notes that police seized during raids across Sydney in December 2014. The AFP offered no explanation for why his arrest was made 18 months later while saying he posed no immediate threat to the public.

The Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, a Murdoch tabloid, reported that Said’s arrest was believed to relate to an alleged planned attack by Sulayman Khalid. Khalid was detained in December 2014, charged with possessing documents connected with the preparation for an unspecified terrorist act. He was due to stand trial last November, but this was postponed.

Last week, police carried out raids on eight homes across Melbourne connected to five men arrested in Cairns on May 10 and accused of planning to travel to Syria to ISIS, starting with a motorboat trip from northern Australia to Indonesia.

The men, aged between 21 and 31, all previously had their passports cancelled by the government. They were charged with preparing to enter a foreign country “for the purpose of engaging in hostile activities,” an offence that can mean life imprisonment. The five were detained after towing a small (seven-metre) boat from Melbourne to Cairns.

Towing a boat is not a crime, yet police commanders claimed that the long road trip over several weeks showed the men were “incredibly committed” to joining the fighting in Syria. Again, there was no explanation for the timing of the arrests. AFP assistant commissioner Neil Gaughan said the men had been under investigation for “a number of weeks.”

While the police officially did not disclose the five men’s identities, the media was full of allegations that they included a “notorious Islamic preacher” and a

brother of a “hardline Islamist preacher.” Attorney-General Brandis fuelled the claims, saying it was the first attempt to leave Australia by vessel of which authorities were aware, but “I can’t rule out the possibility that there may be others.”

Under the “foreign fighters” legislation, the Australian foreign minister can, by executive decree, deem parts of the Middle East “declared areas” because a “listed terrorist organisation” is “engaging in a hostile activity” there. The criminal law onus on the police to prove that a trip is illegal is also reversed. An accused person must show that an intended trip was *solely* for a recognised “legitimate” purpose, such as a family visit.

Last week’s arrest of Tamim Khaja, 18, in Sydney points again to the role of police undercover agents in enticing vulnerable Islamic teenagers into making statements or taking steps that are used to arrest them. He became the second teenager to be entrapped by a police provocateur in recent weeks.

Under police surveillance for more than a year, Khaja was invited by a disguised police agent to buy a gun. He was promptly arrested for allegedly planning to obtain a weapon to commit a terrorist act, possibly targeting public buildings in Sydney. The police claimed his attack was “probably imminent,” although he had not decided on a location.

Following Khaja’s first court mention last week, his lawyer, Osman Samin, urged the public to recognise the principle of “the presumption of innocence.” That was after the police effectively declared Khaja guilty.

AFP Deputy Commissioner Neil Gaughan stated: “This young person’s life changed today. When he made those decisions he took two weeks ago, he’s now looking at life in prison.”

New South Wales Deputy Police Commissioner Catherine Burn boasted that Khaja’s arrest was the direct result of police involvement with the teenager, who was “known to police for some time.” Burn added: “We have been doing particular things with him. Today it’s culminated in his arrest.”

Earlier this month, evidence emerged that a 16-year-old boy arrested in Sydney on April 24—the eve of the annual Anzac Day war commemorations—was also a victim of police entrapment. In conversations on a social networking app, an undercover agent posing as an overseas Islamist persuaded or provoked him into saying he wanted to obtain a firearm and learn how to

make a bomb.

Police entrapment is becoming endemic in Australia and internationally, generating sensational allegations of planned terrorist attacks. These scare campaigns are used to justify an increasing assault on basic legal and democratic rights.

This is an escalating offensive. As the Socialist Equality Party election statement warns: “For 15 years, Labor and Liberal governments, with the collaboration of the media, have manufactured terrorist scares and incidents as the pretext for handing draconian powers to the intelligence agencies and police to detain and interrogate ‘suspects’ without charge and conduct rampant surveillance and spying.”

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