

# Australian government exploits attack by mentally-ill man to whip up terrorism scare

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Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, the police and the mass media seized upon a knifing in a Sydney suburb on Saturday by a young man suffering from schizophrenia to declare it was a “lone wolf” terrorist attack inspired by Islamic State (ISIS).

Before any of the facts were known, police commanders asserted that the stabbing represented a new wave of Islamic terrorism. The media ran screaming headlines, such as “Terror on our streets” and “Global terrorism strikes on suburban streets.”

Turnbull went further, equating the incident to the 9/11 mass terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, which were used to proclaim an endless “war on terror,” invade Afghanistan and Iraq and impose far-reaching attacks on basic legal and democratic rights.

Ishas Khan, a 22-year-old Australian-born man from a Bangladeshi family, allegedly chased and stabbed Wayne Greenhalgh, 59. The older man was walking his dog on Saturday afternoon in front of Khan’s house in Minto, a working-class suburb. Greenhalgh, who lives several houses away from Khan, suffered multiple stab wounds before being rescued by local residents.

Anonymous police sources admitted to journalists that Khan had no known links to ISIS and had serious mental health problems, including schizophrenia. Residents told the media that Khan, once a high-performing school student, had acted erratically for weeks, especially since his mother died after a long illness two weeks ago. He had paced up and down the street, shouted at passers-by and pushed a car axle up and down the road.

Despite these signs of severe mental illness, New South Wales Deputy Police Commissioner Catherine Burn yesterday declared that although Khan was not on a terror watch list, “we know that this person has strong

extremist beliefs inspired by ISIS.”

“Police sources” told the media that a search of Khan’s home discovered an electronic copy of Islamic State’s magazine *Dabiq* and evidence that he had searched for “extremist” YouTube videos. Apart from these flimsy and unsubstantiated claims being used to vilify Khan, they directly prejudiced any criminal trial. Khan was yesterday charged with committing a terrorist act and attempted murder. He was refused bail.

Media outlets highlighted reports that Khan had shouted Islamic slogans and called out: “You killed my brothers and sisters in Iraq.” These reports suggest that the unstable young man opposed the escalating US war in Iraq and Syria, in which Australia is closely involved and in which thousands of civilians have been killed.

But the corporate media and the government proclaimed that the entire population was now “at war” with Islamic extremism. The first seven pages of Murdoch media’s Sydney tabloid, the *Daily Telegraph*, today featured lurid headlines like: “White-robed IS radical’s mission to kill ‘Aussie,’” “Wolves at the door” and “Victim of unholy war at home.”

Turnbull, whose fragile government is under intense pressure from the corporate elite to demonstrate its capacity to impose deep budget cuts on the population, seized upon the fact that the attack occurred on the eve of the 9/11 anniversary to insist it signalled a new assault on Australia’s “way of life.”

The prime minister declared: “On one level they seem very different, 15 years apart, very different events. But connecting them both is a violent Islamist ideology which perverts the religion of Islam and seeks to destroy and threaten our way of life.”

While the September 11 attacks were “elaborate” and planned months in advance by Al Qaeda, Saturday’s stabbing was emblematic of an evolved terror threat,

Turnbull said. “What we have seen on Australian soil and elsewhere in the world is increasingly this type of lone actor attacks,” he said.

Of course, Turnbull made no mention of the fact that Al Qaeda groups have been fighting for several years on Washington’s side in its drive to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, just as they once did in Afghanistan during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the US-led operation to oust the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime.

Turnbull’s comments reportedly followed high-level discussions within the intelligence and police apparatus. He said he received a briefing from Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) director-general Duncan Lewis, Australian Federal Police commissioner Andrew Colvin, Justice Minister Michael Keenan and Counter-Terrorism Co-ordinator Tony Sheehan.

As well as providing the pretext for frontline Australian involvement in the US-led wars in the Middle East, the 9/11 attacks were utilised to introduce more than 60 pieces of so-called terrorism legislation. These vastly expanded the powers and surveillance activities of the security agencies, defined terrorism in sweeping terms and overturned fundamental rights, such as no detention without trial.

While the initial targets of these measures were vulnerable young Islamic men like Khan, they form part of a developing police-state framework that can and will be used to suppress social unrest and political dissent as the drive to war and austerity intensifies.

Since being narrowly returned to office in the July 2 election, Turnbull’s Liberal-National government, with the bipartisan backing of the Labor Party, has brought forward four further measures to bolster the powers of the police, intelligence and military forces.

Attorney-General George Brandis seized on Saturday’s stabbing to proclaim the necessity for two new terrorism laws. One bill will permit control orders—a form of house arrest—to be imposed on teenagers as young as 14. The other will allow for individuals convicted of terrorism-related and other offences, including treason, to be detained indefinitely, even after they have served their prison terms.

The other two measures will effectively give the military the authority to kill civilians in Iraq and Syria, and speed up the procedures for calling out the troops

domestically to suppress opposition and unrest.

Today’s editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* provided a taste of the toxic atmosphere being whipped up by the ruling elite. It declared that the Minto stabbing marked an escalation of the “war” that commenced on 9/11. “Our citizens and suburbs are the frontline of this war,” it stated. “Their country is at war. It is a war unlike any we have ever fought.”

There is a clear connection between this inflammatory rhetoric and the financial elite’s demand for severe cuts to health, education and other social spending. That was illustrated by twin editorials today in the *Australian Financial Review*. One insisted that Saturday’s “Islamic State-inspired terror attack in Sydney” had “reminded Australians that the threat of global Islamic terrorism still looms large.” The other demanded that, with parliament resuming today, Turnbull “set a strong economic agenda and begin repairing the budget,” starting with the passage of \$6.5 billion worth of cuts in an Omnibus Bill.

The ratchetting up of communal and military tensions is both an attempt to derail the widespread public opposition to this austerity offensive, and a means of boosting the repressive powers of the state apparatus to impose the dictates of the corporate establishment.



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