

Australian government exploits “Christmas terror plot”

Will Morrow
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More than 400 heavily-armed police and intelligence agents carried out coordinated raids on five family homes across Melbourne late on Thursday night, allegedly in response to a Christmas Day “terror” plot. Although the circumstances of the raids remain entirely unclear, the political establishment and media are using the events to create an atmosphere of crisis.

A wall-to-wall media barrage has featured lurid accounts of a foiled “Christmas Day massacre” (the *Australian*) in Melbourne’s central business district. Today’s front page of the Fairfax-owned *Age* newspaper declares: “Threat to the city’s heart.” Murdoch’s *Daily Telegraph* tabloid features a front-page image of one of the suspects with the caption: “Xmas evil.”

Prejudicing any chance of a fair trial, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews declared that the alleged plot was an “act of evil.” He declared that police numbers would be further boosted throughout the Christmas-New Year period.

Likewise, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull quickly called a press conference yesterday morning, declaring: “This is one of the most substantial terrorist plots that has been disrupted in recent years.” Without any evidence, he connected the arrests to the December 19 Berlin truck attack and terrorist events in North Africa and the Middle East. “Islamist terrorism is a global challenge that affects us all,” he said.

Turnbull, whose fragile government is under intense pressure from the corporate elite to demonstrate its capacity to impose deep budget cuts on the population, repeated his previous claims that Australia’s “way of life” was under threat.

Queensland Senator Pauline Hansen, the leader of the anti-immigrant One Nation party, repeated her call for a ban on Muslims in Australia. “You’re not welcome

here,” she declared.

Despite police statements that none of the suspects had any connection to terrorist organisations, Labor opposition leader Bill Shorten used the arrests to justify Australia’s involvement in the US-led Iraq war. “We are well-served by our defence forces, by our police and our security agencies,” he said.

Nothing said by the police, media and political establishment can be taken at face value. What little is known is the result of police reports and vague anonymous leaks by agents to the media. No evidence has been presented of any specific plot. Broadcasting vague and unsubstantiated police accusations has become the modus operandi of the “war on terrorism” over the past 15 years.

Three young men—24-year-old Ahmed Mohamed, 26-year-old Abdullah Charaani and his cousin, 21-year-old Hamza Abbas—were charged yesterday with the vague offence of “acts done in preparation for, or planning, a terrorist act.”

Abbas was visibly bruised on his face, and sustained back, hip, and shoulder injuries from the raid. Ibrahim Abbas, 22, Hamza’s brother, was charged with the same offence today.

According to the *Australian*, the men had been under surveillance for more than a year. Ibrahim was “under the radar” of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) “for about two years,” according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The men have been remanded in custody until April 28, after police claimed it would take weeks to examine evidence from the raids.

Three other people were arrested in the raids by the Victorian and federal police and ASIO, which targeted houses in Melbourne’s northwestern suburbs of Meadow Heights, Campbellfield, Dallas, Gladstone

Park and Flemington. With no public explanation, however, they were released without charge.

Zac Daboussi, 21, was arrested and later released, after his Gladstone Park family home was raided at 9.30 p.m. by dozens of tactical police, armed with high-powered rifles. His two brothers, Mohamad and Ahmed, reported that police assaulted the family. Mohamad Daboussi, 20, told Nine News: “I was kicked with steel-capped boots. I was playing PlayStation and all I heard was police rage in and say ‘get on the ground,’ so I laid down, hands behind my back, and that’s when they started assaulting me.”

When police discovered that Zac Daboussi was not at home, the entire family was forced to lie on the floor in silence while police waited to trap Daboussi. According to the *Australian*: “An officer stood in a room with five children—one three years old—while others kept watch over the results in the living room, all lying prone with no way of communicating.”

Lacking any evidence of links to terrorist organisations, the police and media claimed the men were “self-radicalised.” According to an “inside story” published in the *Australian* today, based on anonymous sources, about 10 days before the raids, ASIO intercepted a phone call whose contents remain “closely guarded.” But “ASIO’s message to the Victorian police was plain enough: the men were planning to attack on Christmas Day.”

After the phone call intercept, the police observed “several members” of the group “loitering” around St. Paul’s cathedral in Melbourne. “The more they watched, the more they suspected that a group of Islamic terrorists was casing potential targets.”

It is unclear if any evidence exists of a specific plot with a chosen target, except that they were “loitering” in the city. Nonetheless, the *Australian*’s front-page article was headlined: “Alleged terrorists planned to hit cathedral’s midnight service.” The article acknowledged that this was based on the “fears” of unnamed “sources.”

Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton said police had seized “the makings of an improvised explosive device,” though it is uncertain what that means. Ashton said the police “believe” there was an “intention to conduct what we call a multi-mode attack.”

Over the past 15 years, numerous supposedly-foiled

“terror plots” have been used to whip up an atmosphere of hysteria. Police raids in Melbourne and Sydney in September 2014 were followed by claims of an ISIS-inspired plot to “behead” a random person. A month later, media accounts revealed that a sword seized by police was actually made of plastic.

More recently, in August last year, government prosecutors quietly dropped the sole “terrorism” charge against a Melbourne teenager accused of plotting an attack for Anzac Day 2015, due to “insufficient evidence.” The 18-year-old was held in solitary confinement for four months.

Justice Minister Michael Keenan yesterday declared that “since the middle of 2014, we’ve had four terror attacks on our soil.” Keenan was referring to the siege of the Lindt Sydney cafe in December 2014 by a deranged individual, Man Haron Monis; to Naiman Haider, 18, who was killed by police after stabbing two officers in September 2014; to the shooting of a police officer by 15-year-old Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar; and to the stabbing in September last year of a 59-year-old man by Ibsas Khan, a schizophrenic.

In each case, the attack was carried out by an unstable person who had been under police or ASIO surveillance. There has been a similar pattern internationally, including the Paris terror attacks of January last year and the recent Berlin truck attack, involving individuals known to the intelligence agencies.

This week’s arrests point to an escalation of the Turnbull government’s efforts, assisted by Labor and the corporate media, to ramp up the “war on terrorism” under conditions of a deepening offensive against jobs, working conditions, welfare entitlements and essential social programs.

This campaign, accompanied by the witch-hunting of Muslims, seeks to divide the working class along communal and ethnic lines, and to justify Australian involvement in US-led wars in the Middle East and the expansion of police-state measures.



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