

# Australia: Unanswered questions over police killing of Melbourne teenager

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The inquest into the death of Numan Haider, a working-class teenager shot by police on September 23, 2014, has raised further questions about his relations with the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).

Haider, 18, the son of Afghan migrants, was shot in the head at point-blank range in a police station parking lot in suburban Melbourne after he allegedly attacked two police officers with a knife. For reasons that have never been explained, the two Joint Counter Terrorism taskforce agents arranged to meet Haider there that evening.

The media and political establishment seized on Haider's death to fuel a scare campaign about "lone wolf" terrorist attacks. Police initially claimed they asked to meet Haider over a "routine matter." It later emerged that the teenager was closely monitored by ASIO over several months.

The coronial inquest, which is yet to release any findings, relies upon the police and intelligence agencies to provide the evidence, which is limited, given that it could also be used to investigate their own conduct. Even so, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's government is determined to prevent light being shed on the agencies' relations with Haider.

The *Herald Sun* reported on May 23 that the government "is believed to be so anxious about the inquest findings it has written, on behalf of ASIO and the AFP [Australian Federal Police], to Coroner John Olle asking for an advance copy of his report."

Evidence has emerged that Haider may have been an ASIO informant when he was killed. The *Herald Sun* reported that "call charge records apparently show [Haider] made a call to an ASIO agent's phone after he accidentally stabbed a friend." The incident is alleged to have taken place in Haider's home on September 10,

two weeks before his death.

The *Herald Sun* article suggested it was "not clear if ASIO had signed Haider up as an asset." It offered the implausible counter-hypothesis, that Haider "simply had the number of an agent and decided to contact the agent in a panic after hurting his friend."

The newspaper reported that the two unnamed police counter-terrorism officers are preparing a law suit against ASIO for sending them into the meeting with Haider without providing background information about the danger he may pose. This included that he posted a Facebook image of himself holding the al-Shahada flag used by Islamic State, and purchased two knives.

The article declared that "it is difficult to imagine [the law suit] would be allowed to proceed," given potential "embarrassment" to ASIO and "the risk it could reveal operational tactics."

Australian intelligence agencies have a long record of entrapping vulnerable and mentally-unstable young men in supposed "terror" plots. One notorious case was that of Zaky Mallah, another unemployed youth, who was charged and later acquitted of two terrorism offences in 2005. In 2004, an undercover police agent, posing as a journalist, offered Mallah, then 19, \$3,000 to make recorded statements threatening violence against diplomatic and intelligence officials.

Like the recent "terrorism" cases in London and Manchester, most of the individuals involved in purported terrorism plots in Australia over the past 16 years were well known to the security authorities.

ASIO reportedly began monitoring Haider in May 2014 after he came into contact with one of its "persons of interest" at the Al-Furqan mosque in Melbourne. That month, Haider applied for a passport to travel to Afghanistan and Germany with his father, who has

testified that the trip was aimed at finding his son a potential bride.

ASIO suspended the passport application, claiming Haider had plans to travel to Syria and fight with Islamic State, but it is unclear whether evidence of such a plan ever existed. An agent testifying at the inquest under the pseudonym of Julie Carrington said it “was difficult to assess the seriousness of Numan’s intent [to travel to Syria], as he would often joke about such things.”

Over the following months, ASIO placed increasing pressure on the teenager. On July 31, two ASIO agents visited Haider’s home and spoke to him and his family, allegedly to warn him to remain away from the Al-Furqan mosque.

At some time in mid-September 2014, Haider travelled by car to Sydney. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, the trip occurred “two weeks” before his death. This was about the same time as his September 10 phone call to an ASIO agent, showing that he was in phone contact with ASIO during this period. Haider allegedly went to the Sydney suburb of Bankstown and spoke with “extremists.”

On September 18, more than 800 police and intelligence agents carried out the largest “anti-terror” raids in Australian history on homes in Sydney and Brisbane. The media had been forewarned in advance, providing the raids with blanket coverage in order to justify the decision days earlier by then Prime Minister Tony Abbott, supported by the Labor Party opposition, to dispatch Australian fighter jets to the US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

Haider was apparently disturbed by the Sydney raids. On the same day, he was confronted by police agents at a shopping plaza after publicly waving an al-Shahad flag. The police alleged that Haider told them: “You will pay for what happened in Sydney and Brisbane today.”

On September 22, Haider was informed that his passport application had been rejected. On 5pm the following evening, two police agents—informed by a surveillance team that Haider was not home—visited Haider’s house and prevailed upon his parents to allow them to search his room.

After Haider returned home, the agents called him and asked him to meet them. Haider asked to meet a public place, at a nearby fast-food restaurant, but the

police insisted that the meeting occur at the police station.

According to the inquest testimony of another ASIO agent, Natalie Mayfair, she had decided that Haider was too dangerous for ASIO agents to meet, and the meeting should be conducted instead by police officers. The *Herald Sun* reported that the police had organised a “soft” approach to dealing with Haider, because he had “no criminal record” and “had co-operated with police in the past.”

No evidence has been presented that Haider planned to commit any specific terrorist act. His actions suggest that he was a mentally unstable young man, and was an ideal target for police manipulation. He was neither working nor studying in 2014, and had become depressed following a break-up with his fiancée.

Haider’s family has stated that they believe his death was caused by heavy-handed police actions.

All the indications are that Haider was a victim of the bogus “war on terror.” Governments have whipped up and exploited fears of terrorism in order to justify handing massive powers and resources to the police and intelligence agencies, and joining the predatory US-led wars across the Middle East, aimed at securing access to resources and geo-strategic hegemony.



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