

Australia: “Terror case” against university employee falls apart

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Mohammad Kamer Nilar Nizamdeen, a University of New South Wales (UNSW) employee accused in August of preparing “lone-wolf” terror attacks, was granted bail last week after the chief piece of evidence against him fell apart.

The ruling is a serious blow to the government’s bogus “anti-terror” campaign, and an indictment of corporate media outlets that uncritically repeated police claims that Nizamdeen was plotting to assassinate politicians and attack well-known landmarks.

The 25 year-old contract business analyst and commerce graduate at Sydney’s UNSW campus was arrested on August 30, allegedly after a tip-off from a fellow employee who handed in a notebook supposedly belonging to Nizamdeen. The following day, at 2am, police raided his home. He was later charged with terror-related offenses.

In Sydney’s Central Local Court last Friday, the prosecution admitted that handwriting analysis of the notebook was inconclusive. Magistrate Robert Williams stated: “The Crown has conceded... the notebook is the main evidence which is relied upon.”

Nizamdeen’s defence solicitor, Moustapha Kheir, said outside the court: “The case against [my client] is extremely weak, almost non-existent.”

Nizamdeen had appeared in court via video link. For the previous four weeks, he had been consigned to solitary confinement in a maximum security prison as an alleged “terrorist.”

In what has become a regular media staple, his arrest immediately triggered a barrage of frenzied coverage, aimed at creating an atmosphere of crisis. Vague and unsubstantiated police accusations were broadcast, with corporate outlets seeking to convince the public that Nizamdeen, who has never previously been charged with a crime, posed a grave threat to society.

The news bulletin of Channel 10, one of the country’s

largest television networks, blared: “He looks like a squeaky clean student but our top anti-terror police claim that Mohammad Kamer Nilar Nizamdeen is a dangerous lone-wolf hiding in plain sight at the University of New South Wales.”

The Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper baldly asserted that Nizamdeen had targeted the former prime minister and foreign minister, headlining a September 1 article, “Malcolm Turnbull, Julie Bishop on ISIS-linked student’s list.”

In reality, no proof was ever provided that Nizamdeen had ties to the ISIS terror organisation. Police made vague claims that the notebook indicated he had “planned to associate” with the group. The media made no attempt to square the contradiction between claims that he was affiliated to a terror group and descriptions of him as a “lone wolf.”

The media alleged that a notebook owned by Nizamdeen “contained graphic assassination threats” and named several individuals and locations as “potential targets.” Landmarks on the list supposedly included the Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, railways and police stations.

Detective Acting Superintendent Mick Sheehy told a media conference after the arrest: “These are symbolic locations within Sydney.” Federal Police Superintendent Michael McTiernan added: “The charges laid against this person are serious and significant and should not be underestimated.”

Nizamdeen has been described as a “poster boy” for UNSW, having featured as one of the faces of the university’s Hero Program for talented graduates. He had helped New South Wales police develop several projects aimed at stopping identity theft. Following his arrest, UNSW administrators immediately took all promotional material featuring Nizamdeen off the university’s website.

Nizamdeen is also the nephew of a Sri Lankan cabinet minister, Faiszer Mustapha. The politician sought to distance himself from the relationship, telling the media Nizamdeen is “his wife’s nephew” and declaring his respect for Australia’s judicial system.

None of the media outlets that slandered Nizamdeen and prejudiced his right to a fair trial have retracted their claims. Reports on the collapse of the case have been discretely buried inside newspapers, and it has barely been mentioned on the television programs that functioned as mouthpieces for the police allegations.

The rapid discrediting of the case against Nizamdeen expresses the bogus character of the 17-year “war on terror.” It has served as the pretext for the passage of some 60 laws containing sweeping attacks on fundamental democratic and legal rights, by Labor and Liberal-National governments at the state and federal level.

Police powers to detain individuals, raid homes and properties and effectively criminalise organisations have been dramatically expanded. As the case against Nizamdeen demonstrates, police and prosecutors are able to arrest individuals, raid their houses and lay the most serious charges without possessing any evidence. The onus is then on the accused to establish their innocence.

The Nizamdeen case is the latest in a string of supposed “terror plots” to be revealed as concoctions of the police and the media.

In 2007, Dr Mohammed Haneef was released after terror charges against him were dropped. It emerged that there was nothing to connect the Indian medical professional to terror-related activities. The case had been instigated with the support of the federal Liberal-National government of John Howard, which was seeking to whip up hysteria over “terror threats” to stave off defeat in the 2007 election.

In 2014, claims of an ISIS-inspired plot to “behead” a random person failed to hold up to any scrutiny when it was revealed that a sword seized by police was made of plastic. In 2015, a Melbourne teenager accused of plotting an attack on Anzac Day was released from solitary confinement, after charges were withdrawn due to “insufficient evidence.”

Terror convictions over the past two decades have almost all been the product of police entrapment techniques. In many cases, individuals who played a key role were later revealed to have unexplained contacts with police and intelligence agencies.

In a sign of growing public opposition to this anti-

democratic modus operandi, over 16,000 people signed a “Justice for Kamer” petition in the weeks before Nizamdeen was released on bail.

One supporter wrote: “How predictable when the LNP [Liberal National Party] is in trouble, pull out the terror card irrespective if the evidence stacks up.”

Another commented: “If George Bush, the President of the USA and Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of the UK can lie on the WMD and Iraq, the Australian Federal Police superintendent Michael McTiernan, can certainly lie as well.”

The battery of anti-terror laws is part of a broader turn to police-state forms of rule, aimed at suppressing mounting opposition to war, social inequality and the erosion of democratic rights.

The context of Nizamdeen’s arrest underscores the politically motivated character of the allegations against him, and the accompanying media witch-hunt.

The arrest took place just one week after the ousting of former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, in a party-room coup aimed at shifting official politics even further to right, including through the unbridled promotion of anti-immigrant xenophobia and total commitment to the US military alliance.

In late June, less than two months before the arrest, the Liberal-National government and the Labor Party opposition rushed two “foreign interference” bills through parliament. The laws, which were not the subject of any public discussion or debate, constitute the most extensive, anti-democratic legislation in the country since World War II.

They are aimed at legitimising Australia’s central role in the US plans for war around the world, including against China, branding opponents of militarism as “foreign agents,” and creating the conditions for the illegalisation of anti-war organisations and activities.



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