

# Australia: Police shoot dead 16-year-old accused of extremist stabbing

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A strange and still unexplained incident in the Western Australian (WA) city of Perth over the weekend has been used by the political and media establishment to intensify an atmosphere of fear and hysteria over purported “extremism.”

According to WA Police, on Saturday night after 10pm a 16-year-old boy stabbed a man in a parking lot in the south Perth suburb of Willetton. Police who attended claim that when they arrived the boy refused to put down the knife, instead running towards them. He was shot dead.

On Sunday morning, WA Labor Premier Roger Cook and Police Commissioner Col Blanch called a press conference about what had occurred. The death of the boy and the stabbing of the man notwithstanding, the decision to hold such a high-level event, and so rapidly over what on its face appeared to be an isolated act of violence, was unusual in itself.

Blanch proclaimed that the stabbing “certainly has all the hallmarks” of being a terrorism-related incident. He said, however, that police were not making an official designation at this stage, which triggers far-reaching and draconian powers such as the ability to search and detain people without a warrant. Cook said there were indications that the boy had been “radicalised online.”

The exaggerated response to the incident extended to the federal government as well. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese made known that he had been personally briefed by Mike Burgess, director of the domestic spy organisation ASIO and by Australian Federal Police Commissioner Reece Kershaw.

Despite acknowledging those briefings had indicated no ongoing or broader threat, Albanese declared: “We are a peace-loving nation and there is no place for violent extremism in Australia.” The prime minister thanked police for their actions, which was entirely

inappropriate given there has been no investigation into the fatal shooting. Questions remain as to why tasers were not used instead.

There has been no explanation as to why a purported terror attack would be staged in a quiet suburban carpark. Details about the victim of the stabbing have not been made public, but it appears likely the unfortunate target was chosen at random.

Eyewitnesses have said the boy was running around erratically, with at least one suggesting he appeared to be on drugs or having a mental episode.

Police and media have claimed that prior to the stabbing, an unidentified individual, presumably the boy, called triple-zero and said he was about to commit an act of violence. They have also stated that he sent a text message to phone contacts saying he was going to do “jihad.”

Authorities have revealed that the boy had been in an official “deradicalisation” program for up to two years since he was 14 years old. Such programs, established under the rubric of the anti-democratic “war on terror” involve intensive monitoring by policing and intelligence agencies, as well as instruction from state-aligned religious figures.

How and why the boy came to be placed in the program at such a young age has not been clearly explained.

The details that have emerged do not seem to paint a picture of a hardened religious extremist, but of a young person who was likely struggling with serious mental health issues.

The 16-year-old does not appear to have been from an Islamic family. According to some reports, he did not attend any local mosques.

His behaviour at school has been cited in the media. However, much of it has the character of a naughty

child. A video has been published, allegedly showing him throwing some sort of firework into the school toilets, before running away laughing with friends. Parents of other children at the school have described the boy as “kind” but as having displayed signs of mental instability.

The sensitivity of that response is diametrically opposed to that of the media. The Murdoch-owned *Australian* and *West Australian* both published the boy’s full name and photograph, despite the fact that he is under the age of 18. The *West Australian* seemingly gloated over the tragic death of a child, with its headline describing the dead boy as now being a “free radical.”

That is part of a broader media campaign over recent weeks alleging a wave of youth “extremism.” It has been deliberately instigated and encouraged by the federal Labor government, the state administrations and the whole political establishment.

On April 22, a 16-year-old boy stabbed an Assyrian bishop at a Church in the southwestern Sydney suburb of Wakeley. Within hours, the event had been designated a terrorist incident, with the involvement of Albanese, the AFP and ASIO largely on the basis that the boy was Muslim. That activated the sweeping police anti-terror powers which override many basic civil liberties.

Then, on April 24 over 400 police officers conducted raids across working-class areas of Sydney, detaining seven teenagers, some of them alleged associates of the Wakeley attacker. The boys have been charged with a range of terror-related offenses, some of them carrying a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, despite official admissions that there was no specific plan for any sort of terror attack.

Chats, in which the boys allegedly participated, form the basis of the charges and have also been leaked to selective media outlets. As has previously occurred during the “war on terror,” youths are being targeted on the basis of what may well have been idle loose talk.

The Perth incident also raises troubling questions. Why was the 16-year-old placed in a deradicalisation program at such a young age and why did his issues apparently worsen while he was compelled to participate? It is not hard to see how compulsory and intrusive involvement with police and intelligence agents at such a young age could negatively impact

mental health.

Deradicalisation programs have previously been associated with police entrapment. In a case that was publicly revealed last February, the parents of a 13-year-old autistic boy reported to police in Victoria that he had a troubling fixation on the Islamic State terrorist group. Parallel with his placement in a deradicalisation program, the boy was targeted by undercover police agents who encouraged his interest in extremism and helped to fit him up on terrorism charges.

None of these issues are raised in the current media coverage. Together with politicians, the corporate pundits use incidents like the Wakeley attack and the Perth stabbing to suggest the need for greater police and state powers. The Internet and social media in particular are blamed for supposedly encouraging violent extremism, in a line that justifies a broader drive of censorship.

One of the major issues that is not raised is the impact of the eruption of imperialist war and militarism on vulnerable youths. Over the past seven months, the Labor government, along with the US and the other imperialist powers, has aggressively supported Israel as it has massacred 40,000 or more Palestinians in Gaza. That “violent extremism” on a vast scale, which is only the sharpest manifestation of a broader turn to world war, is undoubtedly a factor in the events of recent weeks.



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