

New Australian Federal Police units to enforce “social cohesion”

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Backed by the Albanese Labor government, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) has set up unprecedented National Security Investigations (NSI) teams to target groups and individuals allegedly causing harm to Australia’s “social cohesion.”

According to the official media statement: “The NSI teams began operations in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra in September as part of the AFP’s well-established Counter Terrorism and Special Investigations Command.”

This marks a drive to use the 8,000-strong AFP as a force to spy on, disrupt, threaten and prosecute any political activity regarded as a danger to what the government’s recently appointed AFP chief Krissy Barrett has called the country’s “social fabric”—essentially the existing capitalist order.

Officially, the “NSI teams” will work closely with the domestic political surveillance agency, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), and the state and territory police forces “to provide a nationally coordinated, consistent and intelligence-led response” to “security threats” to “deliver the most effective and disruptive policing response.”

Terms such as “social cohesion” and “security threats” are deliberately vague. They go far beyond the already vast scope of what is legally classified as “terrorism,” “politically-motivated violence” or “hate speech.”

There is a definite echo of the Trump administration’s use of the amorphous label “antifa” to target all, especially left-wing, opposition to its fascist program and support for the genocide in Gaza.

Significantly, the AFP statement emphasised the wide scope of the NSI operations and their collaboration with the “Five Eyes” surveillance and policing network. This global network, now led by the Trump White House and its FBI and CIA commanders, also includes the UK, Canada and New Zealand.

“Many groups of concern are dispersed across Australia and, in some cases, connected to international groups of concern,” the statement declared. “The AFP will attack

these groups on a global level through operations, capabilities and relationships with the international law enforcement intelligence community—including the Five Eyes Law Enforcement Group.”

Technically, the AFP is responsible for federal law enforcement, while the state and territory police forces deal with most criminal cases. Increasingly, however the AFP has become the central political policing instrument. At a Senate estimates hearing this week, Barrett defined the AFP as a “national security agency.”

In the AFP media statement, Barrett used sweeping language. She referred to “current and emerging groups who are eroding our country’s social fabric by advocating hatred, fear, and humiliation.” She said these activities “may not meet the threshold of terrorism” but “could escalate to politically-motivated violence or hate crimes.”

This offensive is directed by the Labor government. When Prime Minister Anthony Albanese personally announced Barrett’s appointment at a parliament house media conference in August, he described her ascension as “historic.”

Albanese said Barrett was renowned for her leadership capability. “I’ve certainly seen that firsthand in the dealings that I’ve had with Ms Barrett, as well as the way that she has represented the AFP on matters before the national security committee [of cabinet].” He said the AFP was “critical” to “keeping the nation safe.”

In a round of media interviews this week to mark the start of her term of office, Barrett went further, saying the AFP would be “laser focused on protecting our sovereignty, our democracy, our social cohesion, our financial sector and our future prosperity.” That specifically covers any opposition to the corporate elite, as well as its parliamentary servants.

Barrett also linked the AFP’s NSI focus to the mass opposition to the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza and the Albanese government’s active complicity in this historic crime. “In the past two years, particularly post-October 7, 2023, we have seen a changing operating environment for law enforcement in Australia,” she told the Australian

Broadcasting Corporation.

Barrett insisted that “hate crime” laws rushed through parliaments earlier this year, spearheaded by the federal and state Labor governments, may need to be made even more far-reaching.

To impose the “hate speech” laws—which can criminalise almost any criticism of participants in, or supporters of, the Gaza genocide—governments exploited supposed antisemitic incidents, including the discovery of expired explosives in a Sydney caravan.

Months later, in March this year, the AFP and New South Wales (NSW) Police admitted that the alleged caravan plot was an organised crime operation that had nothing to do with antisemitic terrorism, as the governments and the media had claimed. Instead, the caravan was a set-up by alleged criminals, seeking to use it to barter with the police for changes to their criminal status.

In fact, the police revealed that an entire “wave” of supposed antisemitic attacks in Sydney between last November and this January, had been organised by the same criminal network as was behind the caravan ploy.

The fraud of the Labor governments’ claims became further exposed this week when the NSW police admitted that “a significant number” of the 367 cases its taskforce had branded as antisemitic since October 2023 were incorrectly categorised as such, many supposedly due to “filing errors.”

For example, the “antisemitism” files included a sticker picturing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with the words “wanted” and “accusations of genocide” found near the Sydney Cricket Ground in January this year.

In other words, any condemnation of the Zionist regime, which is opposed by many Jewish people, was falsely labelled antisemitic, along with numerous other unrelated incidents.

Nevertheless, in her media appearances this week, Barrett reiterated the unsubstantiated police-ASIO claim that the Iranian government was behind a plot that allegedly involved hiring a complex web of proxies and local criminal networks to carry out the firebombing of the Adass Israel Synagogue in Melbourne last year.

This week’s AFP media statement said it would utilise its “unique capabilities and legislation, including electronic surveillance powers,” was well as “new technologies” to “detect violent extremist material and decode criminal language.”

Over the past two decades, the AFP, ASIO and other parts of an expanding police and intelligence network have been handed extensive powers of surveillance, detention and interrogation, without trial or conviction, mostly under the banner of the post-2001 “war on terrorism” proclaimed by governments internationally.

As the WSWS warned from the outset, this created the scaffolding for police-state measures that went beyond “terrorism” to rising social and political unrest under conditions of ever-greater economic inequality, deteriorating social conditions and mounting war dangers.

The NSI announcement is not an isolated initiative. In July, on the first business day of parliament after winning the May 3 election, the Albanese government introduced legislation to make permanent and significantly expand ASIO’s compulsory questioning powers.

ASIO will get powers to coercively and secretly question people to demand that they provide “information,” including documents or other material allegedly relating to four further topics beyond “terrorism”: (1) sabotage, (2) promoting communal violence, (3) attacking defence facilities and (4) threatening border security.

As these broad topics indicate, the Labor government is trying to suppress the deepening opposition to its complicity in the Gaza genocide, its commitment to AUKUS and other US war plans against China, and its repulsion, detention or removal of refugees.

The AFP’s Labor government-backed NSI operation is another warning of preparations for political suppression as the Albanese government further pledges itself, despite widespread public opposition, to a partnership with the dictatorial Trump regime.

The threat to free speech and basic democratic rights was underscored this week when the NSW Court of Appeal, in a judgment hailed by the state Labor government, declared that unprecedented “contempt of court” charges—potentially carrying indefinite terms of imprisonment—could be laid against anyone defying the court’s prohibition of an anti-genocide march to the Sydney Opera House tomorrow.



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