

# Australian ruling elite demands stepped-up assault on opposition to Gaza genocide

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The conclusion of public hearings in the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion last week was the occasion for demands from sections of the ruling elite for an even greater assault on mass opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The commission was ostensibly called in response to the December 14, 2025 terrorist attack at Bondi Beach targeting a Jewish Hanukkah event. But it has scarcely examined that atrocity at all, including the many unanswered questions about the failure of the intelligence and policing agencies to hinder the Islamic State-inspired gunmen, despite them being “on the radar.”

Instead, the commission has been an exercise in witch-hunting the anti-genocide movement, based on the endless conflation of opposition to Israeli war crimes with antisemitism. The complaints that have been voiced by some of the most hawkish sections of the political establishment is that the commission’s operation did not go far enough.

In an extraordinary intervention last Wednesday, 30 former military and intelligence leaders issued a statement demanding an extension of the commission. They bemoaned the fact that government ministers had not been called to testify, and declared: “The speed with which the royal commission has been forced to conduct its hearings has not allowed a detailed review of the rise of antisemitism, Islamist and other forms of extremism in Australia.”

The signatories included David Hurley, a former chief of the defence force who was later the governor-general, effectively Australia’s head of state. He was joined by previous heads of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, the foreign spy agency, the Australian Federal Policy and various branches of the military.

This intervention by the national-security establishment into an issue of domestic politics had an unmistakably authoritarian character.

The reference in the statement to “other forms of extremism” was particularly menacing. ASIO, the domestic spy agency, has increasingly warned of supposed “left-wing extremism,” and earlier this month unveiled its first

investigation into purported “left-wing terrorism” over a murky incident of vandalism targeting a defence company in Melbourne last year.

What the military and intelligence officials are angling for has been made explicit by the Murdoch press, which promoted their demand for an extension of the commission.

A feature article in Murdoch’s *Australian* on the weekend described the Royal Commission as a “lost opportunity.” It stated: “After almost three years of conflict that filled Sydney streets, occupied campus lawns, tested police powers and turned the language of the intifada into a fixture of Australian law and politics, it was striking that none of the central players was asked, much less compelled, to appear.”

The article was based on the method of amalgam, lumping together disparate and opposed political tendencies, including neo-Nazis, who are actual antisemites, hardline Islamist preachers and the pro-Palestinian movement that has opposed the genocide.

But the focus was very much on the latter. The article named various groups involved in that movement, including the Palestine Action Group and the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network. It menacingly declared: “The inquiry missed a chance to put the PAG’s and APAN’s increasingly influential Nasser Mashni in the witness box. The source of funding of both groups is a tightly held secret that might have deserved examination.”

Mashni, the head of APAN, and the PAG are avowedly anti-racist and have very explicitly opposed all forms of antisemitism. The protests and other actions they have organised have involved the high-profile participation of many anti-Zionist Jewish people.

The *Australian* was complaining that such activists had not been compelled under law to testify by the commission and to be subjected to McCarthyite questioning about their politics. The clear implication of the demand for such an exercise is that organisations that oppose the genocide should be subjected to state persecution and illegalisation.

That is not a hypothetical danger. The federal Labor government responded to the Bondi shooting, not only by

calling the Royal Commission, but also by passing sweeping hate speech laws that potentially outlaw strident condemnations of Zionism and imperialism. Parallel legislation allows the government to ban organisations on the same nebulous and highly political grounds without judicial review.

The *Australian* and the military-intelligence chiefs were essentially insisting that having set in place that framework, the government must now employ it.

The complaints about the Royal Commission from these quarters were all the more striking, given how right-wing and anti-democratic its hearings were.

Many of the hearings centred on the testimony of “lived experiences of antisemitism.” These too were almost invariably based on the method of amalgam. Instances of anti-Jewish bigotry, generally emanating from the far-right, were referenced, but the thrust was on the upset of Zionist supporters of the Israeli regime over the widespread opposition to its war crimes. No evidence of antisemitism connected to the pro-Palestinian movement was presented.

University students recounted discomfort at the presence of pro-Palestinian stalls and bake sales at their campuses. Witnesses said that hearing the slogan “Free Palestine” made them feel “tired” and complained of seeing coverage of Israeli atrocities on television.

The “lived experience” witnesses were not subjected to cross-examination. Many of them were permitted to make inflammatory accusations behind a veil of anonymity. And their absurd complaints about popular opposition to a genocide were treated as good coin.

Calls for a massive assault on civil liberties were legitimised.

In his testimony, multimillionaire businessman Steven Lowy called for the establishment of police units that dealt exclusively with issues confronting people of Jewish descent. He advocated the introduction of compulsory national service instilling patriotism in young people and enforcing social cohesion. Those proposals, clearly based on far-right politics and having nothing whatsoever to do with combatting antisemitism, were not countered at all.

Jillian Segal, a Zionist lobbyist appointed by the Labor government as Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, repeated her demands to be granted police-state powers. Segal absurdly claimed that the publicly-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation had demonstrated an anti-Israeli bias in its coverage, when in reality it has faithfully repeated Zionist talking points. She advocated the creation of an oversight body, presumably to be led by her office, which would continuously censor and direct its coverage of Israel-Palestine.

Segal described the Gaza Health Ministry’s figure of

70,000 Palestinians killed by Israel over the past three years as “grossly inflated.” In fact, even the Israeli state has accepted the accuracy of that toll, which is likely a massive understatement. The commission repeatedly permitted witnesses to make false statements, defending the Zionist regime and its slaughter of the Palestinians.

One of the complaints of the *Australian* and other hawkish pro-Israeli outlets was that lawyers for APAN and the PAG were granted very limited leave to cross-exam a handful of witnesses.

In one instance, a prominent Zionist leader claimed that a protest on October 9, 2023 had been held before Israel had commenced its assault on Gaza. When it was put to him that the blanket bombardment of Gaza began on October 7, he was unable to counter. In another, an expert witness claimed that the word “anti-Zionist” was antisemitic when it was hyphenated, including in speech. When questioned on how he could identify a hyphen in the spoken word, the expert was flummoxed.

The difficulty that confronted the commission and that confronts the political establishment as a whole is that the pro-Israel line is so at odds with reality, is so discredited and so reactionary, that its coherent elaboration and defence is almost impossible. The answer of the national-security chiefs and of the *Australian* is that the pro-war line should simply be enforced with the brute fist of police-state repression.

The demands for a continuation of the witch-hunting after the commission are a warning. The turn to authoritarianism is not simply directed against mass opposition to the genocide. It is aimed at suppressing hostility to war generally, as Australia plays a key role in US-led militarism not only in the Middle-East but globally, above all in the preparations for a catastrophic conflict with China in the Indo-Pacific.



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