

Islamic State, Lone Wolf Attacks, and Australia

The Value of False Expectations

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Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)

Australia's distance from various centres of power has been called a tyranny. But flip that tyranny over, and you have an assortment of benefits for local development, the mighty laboratory that bred a middle class experiment supposedly egalitarian and oiled by principles of social justice.

These days, such distance is said to have been overcome, the effects of instant communication, rapid travel, and transport. People still think Australia might be somewhere in Europe, but that mistake does not get away from assumptions that a wandering finger on a globe would be able to land safely on Sydney or Melbourne.

Those imaginative creatures scribbling for *Rumiyah*, an Islamic State publication that combines wishful thinking with equally wishful views of the world, decided to shine a spotlight on Australia. Well done indeed. "Light the ground beneath them aflame and scorch them with terror."

This agitated language had been motivated, in part, by the death of Ezzit Raad, an Australian jailed in connection with the 2005 plot to blow up the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Raad left Australia with brother Majed in 2013, months after his release. Islamic State subsequently announced that Raad was killed in July in the Syrian city of Manbij or, as *Rumiyah* preferred, when "a piece of shrapnel struck him and tore his chest open."

Childish exhortations to target "a land cloaked in darkness and corrupted by kufr, fornication and all forms of vice" follow in the heated note. "Kill them on the streets of Brunswick, Broadmeadows, Bankstown and Bondi. Kill them at the MCG, the SCG, the Opera House, and even in their backyards." Like many ideologues steering the wheel, the authors mistake hyperbolic desperation for substance. "Stab them, shoot them, poison them, and run them down with your vehicles."

Such a piece might well have been dismissed as the fantastic meanderings of a mind not only addled but lazy. Islamic State is getting a battering in a territorial sense, losing ground in Syria and northern Iraq.

Much of this is pure non sequitur stuff - Islamic State is merely a manifestation of circumstance. Here today, replaced tomorrow by something similar. The entire hot house of Middle Eastern politics needs to be disassembled before any genuine work can be done.

Incapable of creating and organising military units on a global scale, the frazzled ideologues have opted for recruitment on the cheap: words, words, words. Messages relayed globally to incite, to enrage, to even titillate. Draw them out of the rooms; turn couch potatoes into

assault rifle bearing, virgin seeking converts.

In so doing, the security services of various countries are put in a bind. Ignore the rant, or hunker down for the inevitable rise of the crazies? The obvious equation of idiocy is that it takes one to know one, and the State apparatus is always going to supply credence where none should be given. To play the terrorist game, the line between mere reaction and becoming reactionary is a fine one indeed.

Australia's prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, deemed the message worthy of extensive public comment. Speaking in Laos, Turnbull's prognostication was grim. "As Daesh comes under more and more pressure on the battlefield in Syria and in Iraq – as it is rolled back, as its territory is being taken back – it will resort to terrorist activities outside of the Middle East" (ABC News, Sep 7).

The gold dust here lay in the solitary attacker, that convenient confection of security studies. Australians, urged Turnbull, "have to be very alert to the actions of these lone actors – individuals who, as I've described in the national security statement last week, for a variety of reasons, may be radicalised."

Others did not see that same urgency, let alone gravity. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews made little fuss about it, despite taking "every threat... very seriously." The Victorian Police Chief Commissioner, Graham Ashton, noted that "the only new content is essentially a poem making reference to a number of Australian locations." It had also been released in other languages (German, French, Indonesian) with threatened targets accordingly adjusted. What to make of it? Propaganda, he calmly, suggested.

Other outlets were similarly lukewarm about any impending calamity. The *Sydney Morning Herald* did not feel an increased sense of urgency, noting that "there has not been any chatter by counter-terrorism authorities." [1] Nor did staff at the Sydney Opera House.

The Turnbull government has already demonstrated that speculation is a far better milch cow in the making of security policy than evident threat. It promises police state measures, extensive detention periods for those convicted of terrorist charges (even the flimsier ones). Assessing intelligence generally demands dull, hallucinatory free sobriety; the reactionary posture, all the hallucinatory visions needed. All it takes these days is a threatening word to change the world, to command attention. Forget the actual value of the evidence, the value, in other words, of *action*.

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Note

[1] <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/islamic-state-issues-chilling-new-threats-against-australian-iconic-sites-after-syria-death-20160906-gr9r6i.html>

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