

Tactical Paranoia: Australia's Peter Dutton's Palestinian Problem

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The philosophy of the dunce, and the politics of the demagogue, often keep company. And Peter Dutton has both of these unenviable traits in spades. The Australian opposition leader, smelling weakness in his opponent, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, has again gravitated to something he is most comfortable with: terrifying the kaka out of the Australian public.

The method of doing so is always unimaginatively dull and almost always inaccurate. Select your marginal group in society. Elevate it as a threat, filling it with a gaseous, nasty fantasy. Condemn said group for various fictional and misattributed defects. When all is done, demonise its members and tar any alleged supporters or collaborators as foolish at best, unpatriotic at worst.

The group of late to rankle Dutton and his front bench of security hysterics are Palestinians, notably those fleeing the odious war in Gaza and seeking sanctuary in Australia. Since the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel, only 2,922 visas have been granted to those possessing Palestinian Authority travel documents, with roughly 350 being visitor visas. Much larger total of 7,111 visa applications [have been refused](#) by the federal government. So far, a mere 1,300 of them have made it to Australia, placed on temporary visitor visas that do not enable the holders to receive government aid or engage in meaningful employment. The Albanese government is ruminating on whether to create a new category of visa that would lift such impediments.

On such figures, Dutton has little to work with. Undeterred, he has spent the best part of a week playing the role of the tactically paranoid. "If people are coming in from that war zone and we're uncertain about their identity or allegiances," [he told](#) Sky News on August 14, it was "not prudent" to let them in.

Education Minister Jason Clare, who represents an electorate in Western Sydney with a sizeable Muslim population, [mockingly invited](#) Dutton to pay a visit. "There are people from Gaza here now, they live in my electorate, I've met them, great people." They had "had their homes blown up, their schools blown up, their hospitals blown up, who have had their kids blown up."

The Shadow Home Secretary James Paterson has also [drummed up the concern](#) that the government has simply not convinced "us and the Australian people that the security and identity checks that they're doing are sufficiently thorough and robust to protect the Australian people". While Australia had an "important role to play" in confronting "a very serious need," safety and security of the Australian populace came first.

What constitutes a satisfactory measure for Paterson? A blanket refusal to grant visas to any supporters of Hamas would be a start. “We are several days now into this debate, and they still have not clearly said whether they will or whether they won’t accept someone who is a supporter of Hamas into our country.” All applications from Palestinians fleeing Gaza had to be referred to the domestic intelligence service, ASIO and “robust in-person interviews and biometric tests” conducted.

In [comments](#) made to *The Australian Financial Review*, Paterson revealed the true intention of this dash into demagoguery’s thicket. “Governments make choices all the time about who they prioritise to bring to Australia. If the Albanese government picks this cohort ahead of others it will be a revealing choice.”

These objections have an air of stifling unreality to them. For one thing, they are scornful of the views of Mike Burgess, the current ASIO director general, who, on August 11, [stated](#) that “there are security checks” or “criteria by which people are referred to my service for review and when they are, we deal with that effectively.”

Burgess, showing uncharacteristic nuance, drew a distinction between the provision of financial or material aid to the organisation, something which might tickle the interest of a screening officer, and that of “rhetorical support”. “If it’s just rhetorical support, and they don’t have an ideology or support for a violent extremism ideology, then that’s not a problem.”

The logic of preventing individuals coming to Australia purely because of a supporting link with Hamas shows a dunce’s principle at work. It falsely imputes that the individual is a potential terrorist, eschewing any broader understanding. Immature and unworldly, such a perspective ignores the blood-spattered political realities of the conflict. The insinuation here is that the only acceptable Palestinian is an apolitical one mutely acknowledging the primacy of Israel power, humble in expressing any claims to self-determination.

The Coalition opposition to granting visas to Palestinians voicing support for Hamas is also implausible in another respect. While claiming to be defenders of that most weaselly of terms, “social cohesion”, Dutton and his stormtroopers seek to demolish it. Manufacturing insecurity, much like the mafia’s credo, becomes the pretext for battling it.

Boiled down to its essentials, the views of Dutton and his colleagues, wholly picked from the cabinet of Israel’s security narrative, is that any support for Palestinian autonomy and independence, manifested through any political or military arm, must be suspect. You had to be, as Paterson put it, “a peaceful supporter of Palestinian self-determination” and an opponent of “using violent means”. Be quiet, remain subservient, and wait for the oppressor’s good will.

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