

# Australian government uses “terrorism” alert to target anti-genocide protests and wider political discontent

Mike Head  
6 August 2024

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese convened a cabinet National Security Committee meeting, followed by a full cabinet meeting and a media conference on Monday to announce the raising of Australia’s National Terrorism Threat Level from “possible” to “probable.”

Lifting the level to “probable” alleges that there is a greater than 50 percent chance of a terrorist attack or planning in the next 12 months. That level was last declared in 2014—supposedly in response to the threat of the Islamic State in Iraq—before being lowered to “possible” in 2022.

On the pretext of averting unsubstantiated threats of terrorism, the Labor government and the domestic political surveillance agency, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), are seeking to create an environment to use police-state powers to suppress mounting social and political disaffection.

The real anxiety in the ruling class is the collapsing support for the Labor government and the growing hostility toward the political establishment as a whole. This unrest is particularly driven by widespread working-class anger over the worsening cost-of-living crisis and the government’s support for the US-armed Israeli genocide in Gaza, which has produced large demonstrations in Australia, as elsewhere.

Flanked by the ASIO chief—Director-General of Security Mike Burgess—and Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus, Albanese denounced protests against the mass killings in Palestine, essentially conflating them with terrorism.

Albanese doubled down on his previous condemnations of anti-genocide protests outside parliamentarians’ offices. “It’s not appropriate for people to encourage some of the actions outside electorate offices and to dismiss them as being just part of the normal political process,” he declared.

The prime minister demanded that because “the temperature of the security environment is rising, we must lower the temperature of debate.” He depicted the protests as threats to the “national asset” of “social cohesion.”

Burgess spoke in even broader terms, saying “politically-motivated violence” had become a “principal security concern” and ASIO anticipated it would increase as “polarisation, frustration and perceived injustices grow.”

Burgess declared: “Unfortunately, here and overseas, we are seeing spikes in political polarisation and intolerance, uncivil debate and unpeaceful protests. Anti-authority beliefs are growing. Trust in institutions is eroding. Provocative, inflammatory behaviours are being normalised.”

The ASIO chief directly linked the discontent to the Gaza genocide, saying it had “fuelled grievances, promoted protest, exacerbated division, undermined social cohesion and elevated intolerance.”

Burgess said this would be inflamed by a wider war in the Middle East—which the Israeli regime, backed by the Harris-Biden US administration, is seeking to instigate against Iran. “An escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, particularly in southern Lebanon, would inflict further strain, aggravating tensions and potentially fuelling grievances,” he stated.

Without providing any detail, Burgess asserted: “More Australians are embracing a more diverse range of extreme ideologies and more Australians are willing to use violence to advance their cause.”

He sought to connect this to terrorism, claiming that in the past four months there had been “eight attacks or disruptions that have either involved alleged terrorism or have been investigated as potential acts of terrorism.”

There was one revealing exchange when a journalist asked about “exacerbating factors” such as “sustained economic hardship.” Burgess said, “the economic grievance or issue can be a driver for violence in this environment... yes, it is a potential factor.”

That points to the fears in ruling circles that the opposition to the genocide and the Labor government’s underlying commitment to US militarism could be compounded by the intensifying unrest over declining working-class living

conditions.

Raising the terrorism threat level will further activate vast ASIO and federal and state police powers of surveillance, intimidation and potential detention and questioning. These were introduced or expanded by barrages of “anti-terrorism” laws under the banner of the “war on terrorism” declared by the US and its allies following the still-unexplained 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001.

Burgess indicated that ASIO was targeting the internet, social media and the use of encryption. He depicted these as the primary platforms for “radicalisation,” effectively adding to calls for political censorship.

Despite the scare-mongering, there is no evidence of anti-genocide protests involving violence. As has always been the case historically, however, the police-state powers will be mobilised against left-wing and socialist parties, not the far-right groups like those fomenting anti-immigrant riots in Britain.

Making an appearance on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s 7.30 television program, Burgess made an unclear but calculated reference to ASIO investigating one person who included neo-Nazi references in a manifesto but allegedly joined Antifa, an anarchist group depicted in the corporate media as extremely left-wing.

Since it was established by the Chifley Labor government in 1949, ASIO has had a long and notorious record of surveillance, harassment, undercover infiltration, incitement and frame-ups against left-wing individuals and parties as well as alleged terrorist plotters.

The terror alert takes to a new level the desperate moves by Albanese and his senior ministers to falsely associate political protests, especially over the Gaza genocide, with violence and terrorism. Slogans and banners such as “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” have been demonised by the Labor government and Zionist groups as advocating terrorism.

Protest participants, including Jews denouncing the genocide, have been slandered as “antisemitic” and purveyors of “hate speech” for opposing a monumental war crime that has already killed at least 186,000 Palestinians according to estimates published in the respected medical journal, *The Lancet*.

In July, Albanese even linked the attempted assassination of former US President Donald Trump with the Gaza demonstrations, depicting them as a threat to democracy. The then Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neil accused anti-genocide protesters of “terrorising politicians” and adopting the methods of “despots.”

Such charges, combined with inflammatory allegations of denying access to services and damaging buildings, represent the true assault on basic democratic rights.

Already, state Labor governments have threatened the mass anti-genocide demonstrations while directing major police mobilisations against them, some of which have involved groundless arrests and police violence.

The actual terrorism is being perpetrated daily by the Israeli regime, armed and defended by the US and all the imperialist governments, including Albanese’s. The massacres in homes, schools, hospitals, refugee camps and aid facilities are taking to a horrific new level decades of Zionist terrorism against the Palestinian population.

The Labor governments have combined their backing for, and assistance of, the Israeli genocide with supporting the escalating US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the related US-led confrontation with China. This is the real violence—a drive for US global hegemony even at the potential expense of millions of lives in a nuclear conflagration.

This is a bipartisan corporate-backed agenda. Liberal-National opposition leader Peter Dutton greeted Monday’s terror alert announcement by asserting that it was needed because anti-Semitism was “occurring on a common basis in our country” at an “unprecedented” level.

An editorial in yesterday’s *Australian*, a Murdoch media flagship, demanded an indefinite resort to measures to suppress opposition to the genocide. “For Australia, and much of the world, the elevated terror threat will be no passing phase,” it insisted.

“It is symptomatic of uglier, angrier societies in which divisions are sharpened by the sewer of social media. In the face of these factors, government and security authorities should not shy away from pointing out that the greatest threats are likely to arise from anti-Semitic Islamist extremism.”

That must be taken as a warning of preparations for repression of dissent, including political frame-ups and arrests, as the US and its allies plunge humanity into war, and impose the burden on workers and youth amid already rising job losses and signs of global slump.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**