

The Senate and Constitutional Legislation Committee  
The Senate  
Canberra  
Australian Capital Territory

By email 11 November 2005

Re: The Anti-Terrorism (No 2) Bill 2005

Dear Senators,

In the very short period since publication of the request for comment on 'The Anti-Terrorism (No 2) Bill 2005', I have wanted to write to you and find that today's date perhaps clarifies a few issues.

Politics is hard-ball. No quarter is given or taken. But sometimes one is selfish in a more long-term strategy. One might win the battle but lose the war, or vice versa. So it is with radical political ideas, like the Malcolm Fraser-John Howard sanguinity with breaking "convention". At that time, 30 years ago, it was the stupid naïve Labor Party that followed Conservative/Tory "convention", while their finest legal dissemblers Garfield Barwick and others, said "Don't worry, it's not written down."

And so we find ourselves today with John Howard using the political process and all the power of a nine year Prime Ministership, to push forward an agenda for the reasons best enunciated by his nemesis, the urbane, handsome and articulate Paul Keating: "In government you have to keep your foot on the accelerator just so you don't look like you're going backwards."

A government that says, "Life's good. Enjoy!" is doomed. There will always be an Andrew Bolt to tell us the sky is falling.

I come to the point. I am one of very few Australians to have interviewed, interrogated and lived with a few of the world's leading terrorists. I refer of course, to my work for the BBC World Service, The Guardian, the New Statesman and in Australia, ABC Radio and The Sydney Morning Herald. Waiting for an Israeli reprisal raid I interviewed Khalil al-Wazir (Abu jihad) in his home in Amman in 1985. I have met senior leaders of the Intifada of 1987 and during Gulf War I (1990-91) I met Palestinian leaders in Amman and neighbouring countries.

Australia simply was not on the map.

After the Australian Government and Qantas stopped funding British media advertising for the 1988 Bicentennial, I'm sorry compatriots, we dropped off the map entirely. Australia musters about one paragraph a fortnight in most British newspapers and much much less elsewhere. As I wrote in The Australian at the time, it was an ABC journalist, not Osama bin Laden, who declared Jihad on Australia. With much hectoring of an elderly cleric, who clearly had no idea of where Australia was, he agreed that anyone who attacked him would be attacked in reply.

Notwithstanding the bizarre activity of this week, in which the Prime Minister has created a police raid to substantiate (transubstantiate?) his claims for more powers above and beyond those used this week in Sydney and Melbourne, against people previously known, I do not believe - or did not believe at all until this week - that there was anyone in this country with both the motive and the means to carry out a serious terrorist attack.

I have always believed that a maddie could wreak havoc, but maddies are not terrorists. Worse, maddies can't be stopped. In 1975, Dr John Grigor told my group of Melbourne University psychology students a terrible story of sitting with a suicidal patient at Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital (recently closed by the Victorian Labor Government and turned into apartments) who said he was going to kill himself as they sat on a standard park bench. A moment later, the patient had performed a back-flip and landed on his head, successfully breaking his neck. All the CCTV and security passes in the world won't stop that.

Is this logic clear enough for everyone?

Yes, please guard against serious real terrorists, which this country does not have, but what on earth are you going to do about mono-maniacs, disgruntled divorced fathers, disenchanting university candidates and the rest of society left behind in the Liberal/Labor rush to corporate profits?

I do not believe John Howard on any subject. I do not trust him on a subject area with which I am much more familiar than most. I know the Federal Police are totally under-powered.

After I identified that the FBI and CNN had named the wrong suspects in the September 11, 2001 bombings, (<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dingonet/bukhari.htm>) I received a phone call from the Australian Federal police from a young woman officer who wanted to know how I, an Australian, knew that the FBI had got the wrong people? I explained to her how to find the Google website (it was only about a year old at that time) and how to type in a search for the name, which disclosed that one of the alleged suicide pilots had actually died a year earlier. One does not need to be a John Le Carre fan to understand identity theft. Our intelligence services truly are an oxymoron.

In my time in the UK I watched “gobsmacked”, as the English say, as the police were shown to have “fitted up” the Birmingham Six, Guilford Four and Maguire Seven. Hello? If the people in jail are innocent, where are the actual real bad guys? Pissing themselves laughing, that’s where.

I have reported on enough crime to know that whatever the police charges and sub-judice media statements are at the start of a case, they have very little to do with what actually occurred. In one specific case, I saw police use the media shamelessly to colour a case and the defendant was absolutely and clearly “fitted up”. I believe that is so with this week’s raids. A court will decide at some time in the future – if the court ever hears all the evidence.

In the meantime, Senators, you have to consider this bill.

1. This week’s raids prove it not necessary;
2. I doubt there is a serious credible terrorist threat to Australia;
3. You can’t stop obsessed mad people, perhaps including our Prime Minister;
4. If there is a threat, John Howard created it for his own purposes, like children overboard, Pauline Hanson and all his other Goebbells-esque ruses. (The Nazis not only worked to the dictum of the bigger the lie the more people will believe it, but specialized in creating problems where there weren’t any, in order to “solve” them by blaming ethnic minorities – sound familiar?)
5. Never forget the penultimate scene of Bogart’s Casablanca after Bogey kills the Gestapo officer. Vichy Police Prefect Louis Renault orders: “Round up all the usual suspects.”

If this legislation is passed I, Rod Quantock, Michael Leunig and John Pilger could all be jailed and so could you, Senators, if you tell anyone.

On the other hand, if Bob Brown and the Greens win half a dozen lower house seats and form a coalition government, then it could be the shareholders and management of Gunns, ERA, BHP and Rio who find themselves guilty ... sorry accused of, sedition.

Hard cases make bad law.

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