
ISLAMIC STATE RECRUITER NEIL PRAKASH KILLED BY US STRIKE IN IRAQ

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As one of the men involved claims police assaulted him and racially abused his parents, links have emerged between the five suspects arrested and IS's recruiter for Australia.

The most senior Australian fighting with Islamic State, Neil Prakash, has been killed in a US air strike in Iraq.

Prakash, who was at the centre of a web of recruitment that inspired terrorism plots in Australia and drove adherents to join the group in the Middle East, was directly targeted in the strike by a US fighter plane on Friday, the Australian government has been told by US officials.

Shadi Jabar Khalil Mohammad, the sister of Parramatta shooter Farhad Jabar, was killed in a separate US strike a week earlier in Syria, government sources have also revealed. Again they were advised of her death by US counterparts.

She was with her Sudanese husband, Abu Sa'ad al-Sudani, who was also killed. Both were regarded as active recruiters for Islamic State.

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Prakash, 24, originally from Melbourne, was killed along with up to 10 other Islamic State jihadists when the building they were in was struck in Mosul, the group's defacto capital in Iraq. Prakash himself was a key target.

His death brings to an end more than a year in which he was a key figure in pushing Islamic State's ideology into Australia.

Prakash was a high-value target because of his prominence as a recruiter not just for his native

Australia but in other countries as well. He had starred in one of the jihadist group's promotional videos. He was linked to multiple extremist plots in Australia, and also to calls for lone-wolf attacks in the United States.

He was regarded as an enemy combatant under international law and is understood to have been on a so-called "kill list".

It is not clear whether Australian authorities played any role in the targeting or intelligence collection that led to either of the strikes, but Australian defence and intelligence officials work closely with US counterparts.

Prakash's death is particularly significant because, while he filled the shoes of a previous successful recruiter, Mohammad Ali Baryalei, he has no obvious successor.

Greg Barton, a terrorism expert at Deakin University, said Prakash was the last known high-profile link between the Syria-Iraq battlefield and the extremist networks in Melbourne and Sydney.

He is believed to have been involved in influencing the alleged Mother's Day pipe bomb plot in Melbourne last year, last year's alleged Anzac Day plot in Melbourne and the recent alleged Anzac Day plot in Sydney. He also helped radicalise Numan Haider, who was shot dead in Melbourne after attacking two policemen with a knife.

"His death is very welcome in that he's the last prominent Australian that we're aware of who served as a key link with friends back in Australia," Professor Barton said.

"It doesn't mean the end of these exchanges, but it certainly marks the closing of the first chapter."

He was linked to the al-Furqan centre in Melbourne and also the al-Risalah group in Sydney.

The fact he was killed in Iraq is significant because he spent most of his time in the group's Syrian stronghold of al-Raqqa. His movement underscores the solidity of the large territory Islamic State still holds spanning Syria and Iraq, despite significant territorial losses it has suffered.

A source said his death was "a very, very significant disruption to recruitment" because he was "a

very prolific recruiter of vulnerable young people".

Prakash travelled to Syria in 2013 and a year later appeared in his own highly produced video.

Prakash had long been extremely active on social media pushing his messages, but recently he had gone quiet, apparently out of fear that his location would be picked up.

Shadi Jabar, the sister of Farhad Jabar, who shot dead police accountant Curtis Cheng in Parramatta last year, left for Syria the day before the shooting, raising suspicions she had forward knowledge. She and her Sudanese husband were regarded as Islamic State recruiters.

The number of Australians fighting with extremist groups recently fell for the first time in the Syrian war, from 120 to 110.

Intelligence-gathering in the US-led campaign against the Islamic State appeared to be improving and the resulting air strikes becoming more successful, Professor Barton said.

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