

OPINION

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TOP COP ROLE FIRST IN TRIO OF THREATS



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Put your money on Switzerland, the headline on the comment piece in December 2014 said. It read: "The mysterious political dogfight which is Strikeforce Emblems threatens to tear the senior ranks of the police force apart in a way that has not been seen in this town for a decade."

The argument I made at the time was that the government would have to go for a "Switzerland" option — someone who was not Nick Kaldas or Catherine Burn to be the next police commissioner after Andrew Scipione to stop divisions and recriminations occurring with the appointment of a new police commissioner.

That looks likely to happen tomorrow. As I wrote several weeks ago, the most likely appointment as police commissioner to be announced after cabinet, as I understand it, will be Assistant Commissioner Mick Fuller. If Fuller gets the job, as I expect, his challenge will be multi-pronged — to tackle terror threats, gang-related crime and the ice epidemic.



Who will it be? From left: Nick Kaldas or Catherine Burn and Mick Fuller.

It will not be a job for the faint-hearted. And, rest assured, should anything go wrong, particularly on the terror front, my old mate Ray Hadley may well be crowing "they should have picked Kaldas!" and his stablemate Alan Jones will be pronouncing "they should have picked Burn!"

But a fresh approach could mean that instead of hearing Kaldas's and Burn's names on a rotating basis — which ordinary people have no interest in — we can actually focus on the sort of job police are doing for the state. Because those three issues — terror, ice and shootings — are of real concern for NSW.

Whoever takes the commissioner's job will also have to contend with the fact that the police budget is in the red by \$100 million a year and there are some hard financial decisions to be made.

But there's no doubt — particularly with the Lindt Siege coronial inquiry report looming — that the citizens of Sydney need reassurance and vigilance on the terror front. There's a reason why the recent blow-up at Punchbowl Boys High saga has got so much attention. We all fear extremism in Sydney.

Police Minister Troy Grant said to me two years ago that some of the things he heard about what young

people were accessing in term of pro-ISIS material "scares the hell out of me".

This is one of three big issues that Premier Gladys Berejiklian faces as she passes the two-year hump of the government's term this week.

The second of Berejiklian's big political issues is undoubtedly housing affordability. And there's an irony in this in that NSW is paying the price for its — and the government's — economic success. There is no doubt the massive infrastructure program embarked on by the government has fuelled the boom.

Yet, rather than it just being a matter of people being grateful for the boom,

many are concerned about their children ever being able to afford to live in Sydney.

Young people are despairing. Come budget time this year, the Berejiklian government will be putting a renewed emphasis on supply, no doubt about it.

The Daily Telegraph revealed on Saturday that the Urban Taskforce said there were 50,000 housing approvals stuck in the system.

But the mail I have is that development levies will not be cut. And a stamp duty concession for first home buyers could happen — but, if it does, it is unlikely to be large.

In short, there is no answer to the fact many houses have almost doubled in value in four years. So even though Berejiklian nominated it as the number-one issue to address, I don't think the government really knows what to do about it.

The third important challenge for the government is to continue on with infrastructure delivery and growing the economy.

When I say this, I mean the priority is ensuring no dramas with the road and rail projects but also that the construction of schools and hospitals go ahead to meet the burgeoning population needs and ensuring that we can attract the sort of staff that we need in those areas. The old — "teachers, nurses and police".

But keeping those staff here is where the housing affordability issue comes back to bite again.