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The Price of Complacency: Why Australia Must Rethink Prevention After Bondi Beach

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On Sunday, December 14, 2025, at approximately 6:45 pm AEDT near Archer Park of Bondi Beach, Australia, [two gunmen opened fire](#) on a crowd of approximately one thousand people. Brutal and methodical, the event was a “[targeted attack on Jewish Australians... \(inspired by\) Islamic State ideology](#)” as stated by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. The perpetrators were armed with [multiple firearms](#) and [explosive devices](#), with additional firearms and [explosive devices discovered at the scene the following day](#), indicating a chilling level of premeditation. The reported aftermath thus far is devastating; at least [15 people were murdered](#), with some [reports placing the death toll at 16](#), including [Rabbis Eli Schlanger and Yaakov Levitan, and a child](#). Dozens more were wounded, with [25 people](#) remaining hospitalized in the days following the attack. This tragedy is [now recorded as the deadliest mass shooting in Australia](#) since the [1996 Port Arthur massacre](#) and the deadliest terror incident in the nation’s history. The heroic actions of a bystander, [Ahmed al-Ahmed](#), the Muslim father-of-two who was injured while tackling and disarming one of the gunmen, undoubtedly prevented an even greater loss of life. While the Australian and International community is certainly thankful of Ahmed al-Ahmed, the systemic failures that allowed this attack to happen remain.

Systematic Failure

The foremost glaring failure was in the systems designed to vet and control access to weapons. Australia boasts some of the strictest gun laws in the world, a direct legacy of the [Port Arthur massacre](#), yet this framework proved insufficient to stop the attackers. Police confirmed that one of the alleged gunmen was a licensed firearms holder, [legally entitled to](#)

[possess a weapon under New South Wales law](#). This admission highlights the policy issues between *objective data* (background checks) and *subjective risk* (intent, radicalization, mental health); as the very system that focused on the “what” (the type of gun) and the “who” (a person without a criminal record) failed to adequately assess the “why” (the individual’s ideology and intent). In a nation where the national terrorism threat level is “[probable](#)”, meaning there is assessed to be a 50% chance of an attack (according to the director general of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization, Mike Burgess), the vetting process for firearm ownership must be far more sophisticated than a simple background check. Such proactive defensive measures must incorporate an assessment of an applicant’s digital footprint, susceptibility to radicalization, and association with known extremist groups or ideologies. Such changes could have, in retrospect, noted the potential process from pre-radicalized to radicalized and beyond; from potential extremist online behavior to the discovered travel to the Philippines, in where the perpetrators are suspected to have received “[military-style training](#)” from known foreign terror organizations such as Abu Sayyaf and IS-Lanao. The New South Wales premier’s admission that it is “[time to change the state’s gun legislation](#)” is an all too late but necessary acknowledgment that the status quo is not fit to counter the modern threat of ideologically motivated violence.

Antisemitic Radicalization

However, focusing solely on gun control is a dangerously incomplete solution. The second and arguably more profound failure was the societal and governmental inability to confront and contain the escalating tide of antisemitism that made this attack tragically predictable. Jillian Segal, a prominent Australian lawyer and current inaugural Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, stated that the Bondi shooting was shocking but “[something that we maybe felt was inevitable because of the rising antisemitism in the country](#)”. This was not a sudden eruption of hate towards the Jewish community, but a years long culmination of mounting violent rhetoric and actions. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry [documented an almost five-fold rise in incidents](#) like firebombing, arson, graffiti, and hate speech since the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attacks on Israel. This period saw horrific precursor events, [including the firebombing of a Melbourne synagogue and vandalism focused as a daycare center in Sydney](#),

both of which were treated as suspected terror attacks or hate crime investigations. In March 2025, a kosher deli in the Bondi area was deliberately set on fire in an [antisemitic](#) arson attack. These were not isolated incidents; this shows a clear and escalating pattern of violence that should serve as a dire warning. And while not addressed fully enough at a systematic level, the targeted community was so aware that [Rabbi Schlanger himself highlighted](#) the tightened security measures and doubled attendance at the Chanukah by the Sea event just this year. The system failed not only because it lacked warning signs, but because it lacked mechanisms to act on them decisively.

Rethinking Prevention

The path forward demands a radical rethinking of our approach to prevention, built on two pillars; criminal intelligence and investigative focus vetting, and proactive community integration. Firstly, firearm licensing must evolve from a bureaucratic checklist into a dynamic intelligence led process that includes periodic reviews and a [“digital duty of care”](#) made note of in the *2025 Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy*. This requires empowering agencies like Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) as well as other federal and local law enforcement entities to monitor online hate forums and share intelligence with applicable law enforcement bodies. A person purchasing multiple firearms or expressing extremist views online should trigger an immediate and in-depth security review, regardless of their prior criminal history.

Second, active measures to combat radical threats in the future require nation states actors to abandon the passive model of multiculturalism for an active, interventionist one. This means moving beyond “lip service” platitudes and funding robust community interaction programs. The government must mandate and facilitate structured dialogue between different faith and cultural leaders to build trust and identify at-risk individuals before they radicalize. Such efforts may require a national educational curriculum that explicitly teaches the dangers of extremism and the value of social cohesion. The Bondi Beach Terrorist Attack was not an unforeseeable act of force, nor a wholly unpredictable event perpetrated by unknown, masked gunmen. It was a predictable and therefore preventable consequence of systemic failures in vetting and community engagement. To honor the victims, we must build a system that is as vigilant in

preventing hate as it is in prosecuting violence.

**image credit: AA.*

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