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THE AUSTRALIA ATTACK AND ISIS'S CALL FOR JIHADIST SOLIDARITY

Introduction

EVALUATION NOTE

The loss of territorial control by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), increasing recruitment constraints, the incorporation of jihadi movements into regional struggles for dominance—as seen in the cases of the Taliban, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and various African contexts—and Israel's brutality in Gaza have collectively reshaped contemporary radicalism.

Recent attacks, including the one in Australia, demonstrate that such violence is no longer necessarily carried out by organized ISIS cells but increasingly takes the form of individual radicalization. Similarly, many attacks in both Western contexts and in Turkey, including the most recent incident in Izmir, have not been directly organized by ISIS. The organized and hierarchical operations once characteristic of the group have given way to more individualized acts. ISIS no longer possesses strong and expansive operational networks. This development is ambivalent: while it limits the group's recruitment capacity and resources, it also produces forms of violence that are more unpredictable and difficult to track.

Decentralized Jihad

Forced to abandon its objective of establishing a territory-based caliphate, the organization has gradually shifted toward a less hierarchical structure and a more decentralized operational model in order to increase its chances of survival and the resilience of its regional structures. This shift has not been observed only in ISIS. Following the death of Ayman al-

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Zawahiri, al-Qaeda has likewise moved toward a looser structure while refraining from announcing new leadership.

In Africa, as organizations such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and al-Shabaab expand territorial control and enter into competition for regional dominance, al-Qaeda, in the aftermath of the grave situation in Gaza, has begun to issue calls for more global actions. For instance, in the tenth issue of *Inspire*, a periodical published by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) through the al-Malahim media outlet, Muslims in the United States and the West are called upon to join the ranks of the “lone mujahid” and to carry out individual attacks. Such actions are claimed to constitute a borderless individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*). In addition, attackers are advised to record their actions using head-mounted cameras, livestream them, and, prior to the action, contact media outlets or police stations in order to broadcast their messages. The magazine praises an attack targeting a demonstration held in support of Israeli hostages on Sunday, June 2, 2025, at an outdoor shopping center in Boulder, Colorado, in the United States. In this attack, Muhammad Shabri Sulayman threw Molotov cocktails at a crowd described in the magazine as a “Jewish crowd,” and 13 people were seriously injured.²

Likewise, the eleventh issue of *Inspire* addresses the lone-actor attack carried out by Jihad al-Shami at the Heaton Park Synagogue in the city of Manchester on October 3, 2025. The magazine opens by celebrating the attack carried out on October 2, 2025, at the Heaton Park Synagogue in Manchester and glorifies the attacker, Jihad al-Shami, as a “hero and mujahid.” The issue contains detailed propaganda themes that exalt and encourage lone-actor actions against both the British and Jews in the name of Palestine and Gaza.

Lone Mujahid

The most significant issue neglected by Western academics is their tendency to read radicalization and jihadi violence solely through the ISIS lens and to frame every attack in relation to ISIS. Yet for a long time, calls for lone-actor actions have also been frequently articulated by al-Qaeda, and attacks of this type have been glorified and supported in this vein. Neither ISIS nor al-Qaeda has directly claimed these attacks. However, in recent years, both organizations have demonstrated solidarity in highly similar ways, particularly following the genocide in Gaza, by urging actions against Jews and the West. More recently, the language and calls to action in ISIS's periodical *al-Naba'* have converged markedly with those in al-Qaeda's publications *Inspire* and *Sada al-Thughur*. This similarity can be read as a joint call for action against a shared enemy, namely Jews and “Western Crusaders.”

It is even possible to read this similarity as a return to al-Qaeda's early post-9/11 form. For jihadists who, after 9/11, were unable to communicate with al-Qaeda's central command, which had been forced underground and remained unseen for a prolonged period, *Inspire* published materials foregrounding Abu Musab al-Suri's “Lone Mujahid” doctrine. Beginning with the magazine's second issue, each issue addressed this theme and called on Lone Mujahids to carry out actions without being tied to a central “organization” (*tanzim*) hierarchy. This strategy emerged as necessary because large, centralized organizations, characterized by hierarchical structures, were easily targeted and dismantled by security forces in the post-9/11 period. After ISIS lost its central caliphate, it effectively reverted to al-Qaeda's strategy. From this perspective, the Sydney Bondi attack and the language of *al-Naba'*, which embraces

² Jewish Community Faces Unprecedentedly High Threat Environment | Adl, “Jewish Community Faces Unprecedentedly High Threat Environment,” ADL, November 18, 2025, <https://www.adl.org/resources/article/jewish-community-faces-unprecedentedly-high-threat-environment>

the action without formally claiming it, indicate that the current wave represents not merely an operational adaptation but also a theo-political reframing. Talal Asad's concept of "discursive tradition" and Saba Mahmood's work on normative regimes of piety demonstrate that categories such as *fard 'ayn* are not simple slogans, but rather norm-producing mechanisms that construct action as a moral necessity.³ For this reason, the term "lone mujahid," as used in publications such as *Inspire*, together with the glorification of an act in *al-Naba'* without direct attribution, transforms the perpetrator into an individual who does not await organizational instructions but instead positions himself as the executor of an obligatory duty. This mechanism also explains the automatic mental reflex that immediately framed the attack in Australia as an "ISIS cell." When Carl Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction and Agamben's discussion of the state of exception are considered together, it becomes apparent that crises such as Gaza generate an idiom of exception that suspends ordinary political ground and transforms the target from a party to a local conflict into a global enemy figure.⁴ In this context, even if the action was not planned by the organization, it is incorporated into its ideological domain, "jihadi solidarity" is kept alive, and the imitation threshold is lowered. In this context, I treated with caution the immediate statements claiming that the perpetrators of the attack against Jews at Sydney's Bondi Beach in Australia were ISIS members, and I stated that I found the likelihood of the attack being an ISIS operation to be very low.⁵ Western journalists and commentators nevertheless quickly declared that the perpetrator was ISIS, although Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese stated on Tuesday that "the Bondi attack was inspired by ISIS, but no concrete link to ISIS leaders has been found after police raided the gunman's home and hotel room."⁶

It is well-known that ISIS readily assumes responsibility for its own actions. After a prolonged period of silence in response to this attack, the editorial of the 526th issue of *al-Naba'* gained prominence under the headline "Sydney's Glorious Act." Even without claiming the operation, ISIS declared that it supported the act and encouraged such actions, asserting that—regardless of whether it was carried out in its name—actions against Jews and Crusaders are a requirement of jihad. It emphasizes that all mujahideen should pursue individual actions without waiting for ISIS's direct orders and instructions. ISIS claims that its ideology inspires every action against Jews and Crusaders.

Previously, in the 477th issue of *al-Naba'*, ISIS likewise embraced an attack in the United States carried out by a 42-year-old U.S. citizen from Texas named Shamseddin Jabbar using a vehicle, in which 15 people were killed and more than 50 were injured. By describing the ISIS flag found in the attacker's pocket as a pledge of allegiance to ISIS, it labeled him not as a jihadist but as a mujahid.

The magazine states: "While the cost of some planned attacks exceeds one hundred thousand dollars, the operational cost of such attacks is almost negligible. In the darkness of night, a

³ Ovamir Anjum, "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors," *Comparative Studies of South Asia Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 3 (November 12, 2007): 659, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-2007-041>.

⁴ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, trans. George Schwab (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226738840.001.0001>. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, çev. Kevin Attell (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36. Tareq Baconi, "Gaza and the One-State Reality," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 50, no. 1 (December 17, 2020): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0377919x.2020.1842002>.

⁵ Hilmi Demir, "ISIS usually claims responsibility for its attacks. So far, it has not claimed responsibility for the attack in Australia," X, December 16, 2025, <https://x.com/ProfHilmiDemir/status/2001021024197075098?s=20>.

⁶ Jalabi, Raya, ve Nic Fildes. "Bondi Beach Massacre Renews Fears of Isis-inspired Attacks." *Financial Times*, Aralık 17, 2025.

vigilant media mujahid broadcasts an inciting speech in Arabic; a supporter who knows English translates and disseminates it; and a Muslim with a living heart receives this address and turns it into action.” As is evident, ISIS is effectively issuing a call for solidarity by arguing that such individual actions are not the product of its own direct orders and planning but are inspired by its ideology.

Call for “Jihadi Solidarity”

Therefore, both ISIS and al-Qaeda are, in effect, issuing a form of revolutionary solidarity similar to that observed in Marxist leftist organizations. As is well known, revolutionary solidarity requires support “through action” against imperialism and the collaborators of dictatorships. Since the only way to respond to dictatorships’ “repressive violence” is “revolutionary violence,” all groups must show solidarity to diffuse violence. For this reason, solidarity actions often manifest as attacks—such as bombings or shootings with automatic weapons—against embassies, banks, or military centers of repressive regimes. Calls to action also include the rejection of ideological divisions and sectarianism, which are regarded as among the main obstacles to revolutionary solidarity.⁷

In this context, even if both al-Qaeda and ISIS have recently been unable to plan operations directly, they are nevertheless demonstrating revolutionary (jihadi) solidarity by calling for action against Jews and their shared Western enemies, whom they regard as Crusaders. This approach can be understood as a form of “solidarity of the oppressed” against the “solidarity of oppressive states”—that is, jihadi solidarity against the West. The most fundamental question here concerns how revolutionary (jihadi) solidarity will affect the nature of the conflict. In my view, it will first lead to an expansion of the conflict’s geographic theater. Second, it will globalize the definition of the enemy and the targets. As the repertoire of action expands, global jihadi actions will spread in the form of a wave of individualized and rogue radicalization.

Just as imperialism and capitalism are the principal enemy of the revolutionary solidarity movement, for al-Qaeda and ISIS the shared enemy is Jews and Crusaders. Some acts of violence against Jews in the West should be assessed not as organizational ISIS terrorism but as a causal form of radicalization triggered by a perception of collective victimization stemming from the war in Gaza, directed at symbolic targets, and shaped by individual processes of moral legitimization. Such attacks can be seen not only as ISIS-linked, but in fact as the product of vengeful individual radicalization across radical jihadi movements more broadly. The attack in Australia is one such example. Indeed, on the Telegram channel of Saraya Ahl al-Sunna—an organization whose name has recently begun to be heard frequently in Syria—support was voiced for ISIS’s statements after the Sydney attack, and a call for revolutionary solidarity was issued.

In recent years, the focus of jihadi organizations has increasingly shifted toward conducting attack campaigns via social media. These organizations generally prefer to run campaigns designed to encourage individual radicalization against the West, as rivalry over zones of dominance has diminished considerably, with the African theater as an exception. The publications of al-Qaeda and ISIS, as well as the brochures and posters they produce, praise and encourage simple individual attacks that do not require heavy weapons. From a sociological standpoint, explaining the rise in lone-actor attacks cannot be adequately achieved either by attributing the phenomenon solely to individual pathology or by searching

⁷ Albert Meltzer, ed., *The International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement: A Study of the Origins and Development of the Revolutionary Anarchist Movement in Europe 1945–73 With Particular Reference to the First of May Group* (1976; repr., Elephant Editions, 2013), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/albert-meltzer-ed-the-international-revolutionary-solidarity-movement.a4.pdf>.

for an organizational command trace in every case. More explanatory is the simultaneous operation of the meaning-making frames that confer significance on violence, the affective climate that carries these frames, and the network infrastructure that rapidly circulates them.

From the perspective of Snow and Benford's framing approach, propaganda constructs war crimes such as the genocide in Gaza as a "victimization and attribution-of-blame narrative," defines the solution through action, and generates a "jihadi/revolutionary solidarity" motivation through the language of obligation and honor.⁸ This construction removes the attack, in the perpetrator's eyes, from the realm of contingent violence and turns it into an action regarded as morally necessary.

Collins's micro-sociology of violence underscores that violence is a difficult practice for most people and that the threshold of tension and fear can only be overcome through specific performance patterns and rituals. Considered together with Girard's logic of sacrifice, this mechanism shows that, in periods of crisis, violence becomes concentrated on symbolic targets and turns into a ritual of scapegoating that simultaneously produces a sense of order and a sense of vengeance.⁹

On this basis, the discourse of "jihadi/revolutionary solidarity" functions as a symbolic indicator of an effort to construct an overarching frame that renders factional differences insignificant and legitimizes action around a shared enemy. This overarching frame is produced and replicated most rapidly within the digital network ecosystem, thereby lowering the imitation threshold. Therefore, the current situation allows for an increase in low-cost, high-visibility lone-actor actions, even during a period of weakened organizational hierarchy.

What has been decisive in this transformation is the redesign of violence within a media logic, even as organizational capacity has weakened. Violence is increasingly constructed not as an operation on the ground, but as a form of communication suited to digital circulation. The head-camera and livestream practices proposed in *Inspire* show that action is planned not only to produce outcomes, but also to produce visibility.

At this point, the "mediatization" approach shows that the capacity of violence to set agendas and generate symbolic effects has become increasingly dependent on media formats. The digital ecosystem, in turn, accelerates this transformation. Through content production, translation, clipping and repackaging, and circulation across platforms, a form of intra-network division of labor has emerged. In this process, remote radicalization is sustained through micro-facilitators, short-form content, and repeated calls, rather than through central command. The actions carried out also demonstrate the effectiveness of social media campaigns. The most recent example is the attack on a police station in Izmir carried out by a 16-year-old identified as E.B., which stands as a clear case.¹⁰ Therefore, the call for jihadi solidarity appears likely to push terrorist violence toward more individualized forms of radicalization and to lead to an increase in lone-actor attacks.

In addition, the perpetrators in Sydney were a father-son pair; kinship-based perpetrators are a common dynamic in modern terrorism. Many previous high-profile terrorist incidents,

⁸ Robert D. Benford ve David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1 (August 1, 2000): 633, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611>.

⁹ Randall Collins, "The Micro-sociology of Violent Confrontations," in *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 1–36. Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 43–50.

¹⁰ Hilmi Demir, "16 Yaşında Bir Çocuk Nasıl İŞİD'li Oldu?," *Fikir Turu*, September 15, 2025, <https://fikirturu.com/toplum/16-yasinda-bir-cocuk-nasil-isisli-oldu/>.

including the Boston Marathon bombing, the Charlie Hebdo attack, the San Bernardino attacks, and the attack on the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Philippines, were carried out by siblings or spouses. Although less common, parent-child attacks are not unheard of. Osama bin Laden and his son Hamza bin Laden, as well as Halis Bayancuk and his father Hacı Bayancuk in Turkey, can be cited as examples.

Family members not only reinforce radical beliefs due to their proximity, relationships, and levels of trust; the fact that close family members live within an extremist milieu should also be recorded as a factor that accelerates radicalization. It can therefore be expected that jihadi campaigns may create a faster and more secure space for intra-family radicalization.

The Triggering Role of the Atrocity in Gaza

In this context, it should also be noted that, in the face of the tragedy and genocide in Gaza, the failure of international law and international institutions to stop the atrocity has created conditions that trigger and intensify radicalization. Palestinians did not receive the assistance they expected from international institutions, which has contributed to the entrenchment of the belief that justice will never arrive. When radical groups call on individuals to carry out attacks in order to exact revenge for Gaza, such appeals may resonate with people who are frustrated and who have lost their sense of justice. Individual acts should not be attributed to entire communities, and it is not correct to assume that all Jews are responsible for what is happening in Gaza.

Mediatization also expands the repertoire of enemy-making in this context. In the Gaza case, equating Israel with Jews everywhere produces precisely this form of categorical totalization. From the perspective of Hall's approach to regimes of representation, the category of "Jew" is fixed through specific images and templates, thereby rendering diverse political and moral positions within Jewishness invisible or ignored.¹¹ Conspiratorial language, meanwhile, operates not through evidence but through a schema of closed explanation and insinuation. Here, it can be argued that the aim is not to understand the truth, but to sustain hostility through an attitude that simplifies the world.¹²

Ultimately, digital networks reward categories rather than nuance, continuously intensify anger and the desire for revenge, and facilitate the moral legitimization of violence. However, this does not mean that Jews can be treated as a monolithic political agent. A segment of Jewish intellectuals, politicians, and civil society actors openly oppose the Israeli government's Gaza policy. Senator Bernie Sanders's position, Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari's criticisms, and former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's assessments that diverge from the government line stand out as visible examples of this internal differentiation. At the institutional level, Israeli human rights organizations such as B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights Israel, as well as Jewish organizations in the United States—including Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, and J Street—continue, in differing tones, to call for a ceasefire, humanitarian assistance, and accountability. These differing positions demonstrate that attributing Israeli policies to Jewishness as a whole is analytically erroneous. Nevertheless, the way digital circulation fuels categorical totalization and simplification turns the escalation of antisemitic content into a radicalization climate that magnifies security risk—not merely through an increase in hatred, but through the singularization of the enemy and the normalization of the idea of collective

¹¹ Stuart Hall, Sean Nixon, and Jessica Evans, eds., "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2025), 157–234, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781036232825>.

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (Schocken Books, 1947).

punishment. Yet many narratives that promote conspiracy theories claiming that Jews rule the world continue to find resonance through social media and to influence broad audiences.

Closely related to this is the identification of “Israel” with “all Jews everywhere,” as well as the recurring “what about that?” arguments that follow nearly every criticism of the Gaza war between Israel and Hamas. Conspiracy theories and hostility toward Jews appear to interfere not only with people’s moral compasses, but also with their capacity for accurate orientation and judgment. The dark reality of human history is that the impulse to justify violent collective punishment against a perceived other is very powerful; many groups are able to instrumentalize tragic events for this purpose and to channel violence toward the other. Unfortunately, social media has become a space in which toxic and racist content—both exploited by radical groups for their own interests and amplified by external actors—is disseminated in overwhelming volume. Taken together, these dynamics have created an environment that has contributed to the global resurgence of anti-Jewish sentiment. In this respect, Australia provides a relatively typical example. Across Australia, data indicate that the monthly average number of “old” antisemitism tweets, which stood at 34 in the year before October 7, rose to 2,021 in the following year. “New” antisemitism cases increased even more sharply: research shows that the monthly average number of cases, which was 505 in the year before October 7, rose to 21,724 in the year after.¹³ The increase in content that holds the Jewish community collectively responsible for events in Israel reached striking levels. In other words, hostility toward Jews in online environments has escalated overall. In this sense, the rise in anti-Jewish sentiment in Australia can be seen as having foreshadowed the attack.¹⁴



Conclusion

Just as Marxist revolutionary groups and Islamist groups once trained together in the Beqaa Valley, a line of hostility in which different factions converge around a shared antagonism toward Jews is now playing both an enabling and a propulsive role in individual radicalization worldwide. Unfortunately, during the atrocity in Gaza, the failure of Netanyahu and his policies

¹³ Matteo Vergani, “Bondi Attack Came After Huge Increase in Online Antisemitism: Research,” *The Conversation*, December 15, 2025, <https://theconversation.com/bondi-attack-came-after-huge-increase-in-online-antisemitism-research-272045>.

¹⁴ Nandika Chatterjee, “A Timeline of Rising Antisemitism in Australia Since the Gaza War,” *Time*, December 14, 2025, <https://time.com/7340731/anti-semitism-australia-bondi-attack/>.

to face the judgment they deserve in the conscience of humanity has placed both Jews and Western societies as a whole at serious security risk. It appears more accurate to expect that this security risk will continue to grow, and that calls for jihadi solidarity will build new arenas of action by feeding on this risk.

After losing its central power, its caliphate, and its territorial sovereignty, ISIS appears to have reverted to al-Qaeda's post-9/11 tactics. In this sense, as ISIS undergoes a process of "al-Qaeda-ization," al-Qaeda, in its post-Gaza operational style, is also drifting toward ISIS. This convergence suggests that we are likely to see an increase in actions referred to as those of the "lone mujahid."