

# Australia: Bondi terrorist was on ASIO radar in 2022

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What little information that has emerged about the antisemitic terrorist attack on last December's Hanukkah event at Bondi Beach that claimed fifteen lives only raises further questions about the failure of the security agencies to prevent it.

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the domestic spy agency, revealed last week that the younger attacker, Naveed Akram, had been on a security threat list in 2022. That means Akram was on the radar of the intelligence agency some three years later than first admitted and only three years prior to the attack.

The revelation was contained in ASIO's written submission to the Royal Commission purportedly examining the attack. The real character of the commission, as a cover-up, has been evident over the past week, with most sessions in the segment of the inquiry examining the policing and intelligence response held behind closed doors.

ASIO chief Mike Burgess was not questioned about the revealing admission. The inclusion of the statement in his written submission had the character of a limited disclosure, aimed at minimising the threat of future exposures of the agency.

The statement blandly reported: "Naveed Akram had been subject to residual risk processes in NSW [New South Wales] in 2022."

An article in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) noted the sentence appeared to be a reference to the "Known Entity Management Framework," a database accessible to the intelligence and policing agencies containing the details of people previously investigated for national security offences.

The ABC pointed out that the explicit rationale of the list is that people who came to the attention of the authorities could pose a threat in the future and so need to be monitored.

The information, as scanty as it is, continues a pattern. Over the six months since the Bondi atrocity, what little has been publicly revealed has indicated a more and more intensive surveillance of the attackers by the intelligence agency, over a longer period than originally acknowledged.

On the night of the attack, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Burgess and other national-security officials delivered a press conference. They raised that Akram had been known to the authorities, but presented the connection as peripheral and long past.

Over the following days, they revealed that Akram had in fact been investigated by ASIO for six months in 2019. That was triggered by Akram's close association with Isaac El Matari, an Islamic State supporter who had been convicted of terror offences, including for engaging in discussions about orchestrating attacks on prominent public locations in Sydney. ASIO claimed its assessment was that Akram did not pose a threat.

Then the *Sydney Morning Herald*, (SMH) not ASIO or the government, revealed that Akram had been designated as a "known entity" sometime "around 2021." That had involved the exchange of information about him between ASIO and the NSW Police.

Then in February, an ABC "Four Corners" program featured the comments of "Marcus," an ASIO whistleblower.

"Marcus" claimed to have been directed by the agency to infiltrate a small jihadist milieu in Sydney that included El Matari. He alleged that Akram had been subjected to intensive grooming in that milieu in support of Islamic State. He also claimed that Naveed's father Sajid Akram, the other Bondi attacker, was even more open in his support of the Islamic State than his son. "Marcus" claimed to have reported all of this information to his ASIO handlers.

As with those revelations, the information that Naveed Akram was on a "known entity" list in 2022 raises a whole host of questions. They include:

- Why, as per the SMH, was he placed on the list in 2021 or 2022, two or three years after the ASIO investigation of him had purportedly ended. Had new information about his terrorist sympathies or connections come to light?
- What surveillance and monitoring was he subjected to while on the list?
- Why was he removed from the list in 2022, if that is

what occurred? Notably, the ASIO statement is vague on that point. It declares that Akram was “subject to residual risk processes...in 2022,” a formulation that leaves open the possibility that he remained on the list over the following years.

Two issues make the 2022 date particularly significant.

In another case of information leaking out to the media, rather than being revealed by the government, it was reported by the ABC and other outlets that the Akrams had travelled together to Uzbekistan in 2022.

That seems an exceptionally unlikely holiday destination. There is no indication that the Akrams had any familial connection to the austere Central Asian country. Together with the broader region, however, it has been a site of Islamist extremist groups who have done battle with the despotic regimes established there in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Uzbekistan shares a border with Afghanistan, and has been targeted by ISIS-K, the Islamic State branch in that country. If someone on a terror watchlist were travelling to such a country, their visit would be a subject of interest, not only for ASIO and the Australian authorities, but also for their international counterparts, particularly the US Central Intelligence Agency.

The other issue is the gun license that was granted to Sajid Akram in 2023, with which he assembled the arsenal that would be used in the Bondi attack. Akram had initially applied in 2020, but for reasons that have never been explained, the application was not approved for three years.

The 2022 date of Naveed Akram remaining on the “known entity” list indicates that for most of the time that the gun license was pending, Sajid’s son was on the radar of ASIO. Given that the entire ostensible purpose of the “known entity” list is to manage the risk of those previously subjected to terrorist investigations, the ability of the pair to take steps towards assembling a high-powered arsenal, in the open and through official channels, is completely inexplicable.

Even more questions were raised by a Sky News report on Sajid Akram. Sky News is a frothingly right-wing component of the Murdoch media stable. Its interest in the Bondi attack is to exploit it to push for a deeper assault on democratic rights, including through the demonisation of all Muslims. Its reports must be taken with a grain of salt.

Sky claimed in an exclusive last week that Sajid Akram had first been reported to the security agencies in 2007, via a tip off to the national security hotline warning that he had a disturbing interest in explosives.

That was only six years after Al Qaeda’s September 11 attack on New York, five years after the 2002 Bali bombing that claimed dozens of Australian lives and two years after

another terrorist blast in that city targeting tourists, including Australians. If Sky’s report is true, Sajid Akram was reported to the authorities near the height of the “war on terror,” under conditions where it was being used to justify a massive assault on democratic rights.

Sky claimed that a second report was issued about Sajid Akram in 2014, warning that he was a supporter of Islamic State. Again, if the claims are factual, the Akrams were known to ASIO and the authorities over a period of twenty years, and kept popping up “on the radar” at intervals of seven and then five years.

There is a longstanding history of Islamist extremists being utilised by imperialist governments, abroad, to prosecute proxy wars and regime-change operations. That is what occurred with the massive CIA backing of forces that would go on to establish Al Qaeda, in the 1980s war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. It is also what the imperialist agencies carried out in a massive regime-change operation in Syria, based on funnelling guns and money to groups that founded ISIS.

Domestically, terrorist attacks have frequently served as the pretext for far-reaching attacks on the civil liberties of the population, aimed at suppressing opposition and buttressing the rule of the state. That has been the case with Bondi, which has been invoked by the federal Labor government to introduce “hate speech” legislation potentially barring strident condemnations of Zionism and imperialist war, and parallel laws providing for the illegalisation of groups or even political parties that fall foul of those strictures.

The more that emerges about the Akrams, the more sinister the unanswered questions become. Were they allowed to go about their activities, largely unhindered, because monitoring their networking and travel provided useful sources of intelligence? Did elements of the state know that the Akrams were preparing something last December, but made a decision not to intervene to use the attack for political purposes?



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