

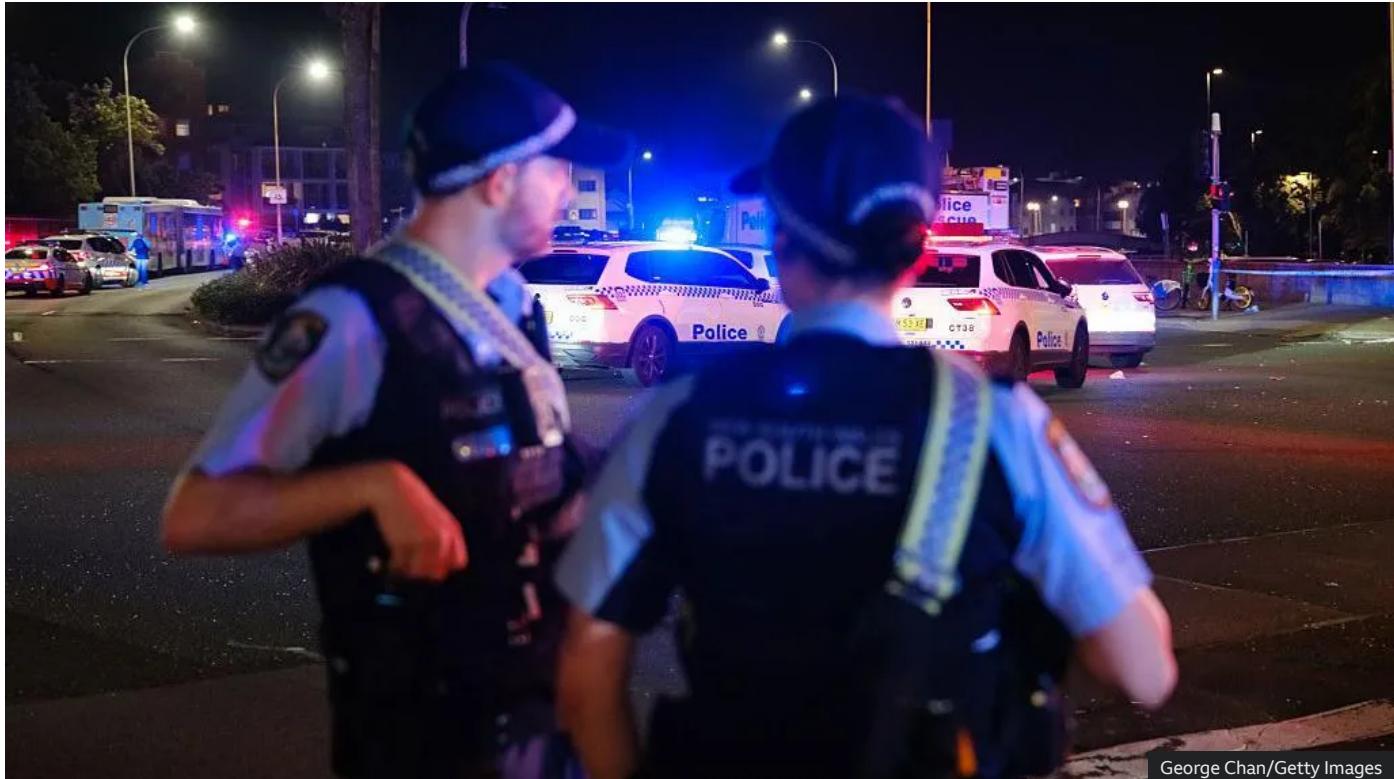
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What we know about the Bondi shooting suspects

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Patrick Jackson



George Chan/Getty Images

Two gunmen opened fire on hundreds of people marking a Hanukkah event on Sydney's Bondi Beach on Sunday, killing 15 and leaving 27 in hospital with injuries.

A father and son have been identified by Australian authorities as the suspects. The father was killed in an exchange of fire with police at the scene while the son was wounded and is in hospital with critical injuries.

The country's worst mass shooting in decades, the attack targeted Jewish people and is being treated as a terrorist incident.

Among the victims are a 10-year-old girl, a Holocaust survivor and two rabbis.

There have been extraordinary stories of bravery, including a man who tackled one of the gunmen, and a couple who tried to intervene and protect others, before they were killed.

The suspects are both said to have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group. Here is what we know about them.

Father and son

The relationship between the suspects was confirmed by Australia's Minister for Home Affairs, Tony Burke, who didn't name the men.

Australian public broadcaster, the ABC, did name them as Naveed Akram, 24 - who is in hospital under police guard - and his dead father Sajid Akram, 50.

Burke indicated the father had held permanent residency in Australia, without giving details of his nationality, but Indian police sources have since said he was originally from the Indian city of Hyderabad.

Sajid Akram had travelled to India just six times since moving to Australia and his family "expressed no knowledge of his radical mindset or activities", the Indian police official added.

Burke said Sajid Akram had arrived in Australia on a student visa in 1998. Later, in 2001, he transferred to a partner visa and subsequently obtained Resident Return Visas after trips overseas.

The son, the home affairs minister said, is an Australian-born citizen.

'This felt inevitable': Australian Jews react to Bondi attack with grief and anger
What we know about Bondi Beach Hanukkah shooting

'Allegiance to Islamic State'

The son, Naveed Akram, first came to the attention of the Australian intelligence agency (ASIO) in 2019, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has confirmed.

"He was examined on the basis of being associated with others and the assessment was made that there was no indication of any ongoing threat or threat of him engaging in violence," he said.

The two suspects had acted alone, Albanese said, and were not part of a wider extremist cell. They had been "clearly" motivated by "extremist ideology", the PM added.

The ABC says it understands that investigators from Australia's Joint Counter Terrorism Team (JCTT) believe the gunmen pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group (IS).

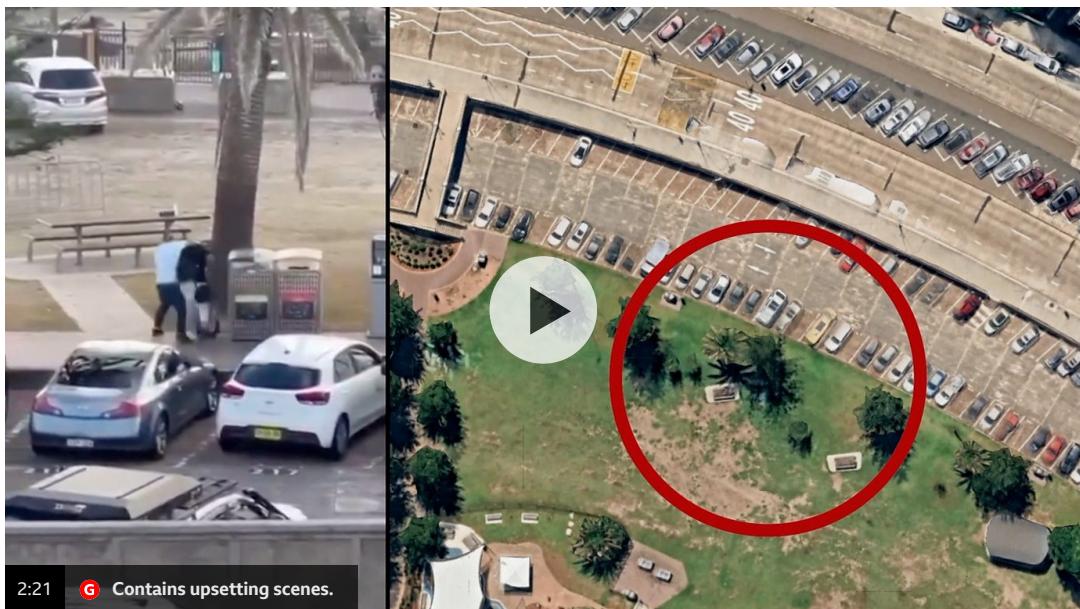
Formerly based in Iraq and Syria, IS was behind or claimed devastating attacks on civilians worldwide, including the Paris attacks of 2015 when 130 people died and the Crocus concert hall attack in Russia last year which killed 145 people.

Two IS flags were found in the men's car at Bondi, senior officials told the ABC, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A senior JCTT official, again speaking on condition of anonymity, said the ASIO had taken an interest in Naveed Akram in 2019 after police foiled plans for an IS attack.

The official said that Naveed was "closely connected" to Isaac El Matari, who was jailed in 2021 for seven years in Australia for terrorist offences.

Matari had declared himself the IS commander in Australia.



How Bondi Beach shooting unfolded minute by minute

Possible links to Philippine militants

Australian police have confirmed that they are investigating a trip taken by the suspects to the Philippines last month.

National Security Council spokesman Cornelio Valencia said the council was checking the mens' possible links to militant groups in the Philippines, and their specific activities while there.

The Philippine immigration bureau has confirmed that Sajid and Naveed Akram travelled to the Philippines from Australia on 1 November.

It seems they were there for four weeks, flying back to Sydney on 28 November.

The father and son declared Davao City in the Mindanao region as their destination, an immigration spokesperson told BBC News. Mindanao is home to the Muslim minority in the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines.

Militants pledging allegiance to IS fought a five-month war with the government in the south of the Philippines in 2017, but insurgent activity has abated significantly since then.

A peace accord struck with the country's largest Muslim rebel group remains in effect, although authorities do say they are continuing to chase "terrorist" groups.

The Philippine military said that there was as yet "no validated confirmation" that the Akrams had performed "military-style training" in the country.

Firearms licence

The suspects appear to have used long-barrelled guns during the attack, firing them from a small bridge.

A number of improvised explosive devices were also found in their car, Albanese said.

New South Wales Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon said the force had recovered six firearms from the scene and confirmed that six firearms had been licensed to the father.

Australia has some of the strictest gun laws in the world, and anyone seeking to possess and use a firearm must have a "genuine reason".

The father had met the eligibility for a firearms licence for recreational hunting, Commissioner Lanyon said.

"In terms of a firearms licence, the firearms registry conducts a thorough examination of all applications to ensure a person is fit and proper to hold a firearms licence," he said.

Eligibility for a game hunting licence in NSW depends on the type of animal individuals wish to hunt, the reason for hunting and the land they want to hunt on.

'Normal people'



Watch: BBC's Katy Watson reports from Bondi gunmen's house
Naveed and Sajid Akram lived in the south-west Sydney suburb of Bonnyrigg, about an hour's drive inland from Bondi.

A few weeks before Sunday's shooting, the two men moved into an Airbnb in the suburb of Campsie, a drive of 15 to 20 minutes.

Three people at the house in Bonnyrigg were arrested on Sunday night during a police raid but released without charge and brought back to the property.

BBC News tried to approach them on Monday but they would not come out to speak to the media.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, a woman who identified herself as the wife and mother of the gunmen said that the pair had told her they were going on a fishing trip before heading to Bondi.

Reuters news agency describes Bonnyrigg as a working-class, well-kept enclave with an ethnically diverse population.

Local residents told Reuters that the Akram family had kept to themselves but seemed like any other family in the area.

"I always see the man and the woman and the son," said Lemanatua Fatu, 66. "They are normal people."

'Not everyone who recites the Quran understands it'

Naveed Akram studied the Quran and Arabic language for a year at Al Murad Institute in western Sydney after applying in late 2019, the ABC reports.

Institute founder Adam Ismail said the Bondi shooting was a "horrific shock" and such attacks were forbidden in Islam.

"What I find completely ironic is that the very Quran he was learning to recite clearly states that taking one innocent life is like killing all of humanity," he said on Monday.

"This makes it clear that what unfolded yesterday at Bondi is completely forbidden in Islam. Not everyone who recites the Quran understands it or lives by its teachings, and sadly that appears to be the case here."

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