Bondi Beach Shooting: Salient Reminders for Singapore

Mohamed Bin Ali and Zhou Jinquan

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By Mohamed Bin Ali and Zhou Jinquan

SYNOPSIS

Authorities described Sydney's Bondi Beach shooting as a terrorist attack driven by the Islamic State's ideology. It is a stark reminder of how ethnoreligious ideology can spread beyond national borders and intensify both antisemitic and Islamophobic currents. This commentary advocates three priorities to strengthen Singapore's social cohesion: reassurances for minority groups, continuous counterterrorism strategies in response to shifting threat profiles, and moderated avenues for the lawful expression of grievances.

COMMENTARY

The recent Bondi Beach shooting might have occurred far from Singapore's shores, but its implications will be felt closer to home and should prompt analysis and action to secure our much-cherished social peace. Early official indications reported by major outlets suggest that the attack was inspired by the Islamic State. The violence was perpetrated during a Hanukkah gathering – a Jewish event – making ethnoreligious targeting central to how the incident is publicly understood. The attack also occurred amidst ongoing international concern about the rise in antisemitic incidents arising from the ongoing Israeli-Hamas war and Islamophobic hostility, where narratives of overseas conflicts influenced local identity politics.

Singapore is not immune to these international currents. Offensive acts or remarks directed at Jewish and Muslim communities have drawn official attention, and the Government has warned against importing foreign quarrels and politics into Singapore's communal relations. Minister for Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam has also emphasised that hate speech and hostility along ethnoreligious lines are

unacceptable, and that all communities must feel safe, regardless of one's views on Palestine or Israel.

High-profile terrorist violence directed at an ethnoreligious target can take on a life of its own. Its effects extend beyond the immediate victims as fear, suspicion, and identity-based interpretations develop and distort.

It is therefore vital to treat the Bondi Beach shooting not as an isolated act of violence but as a signal event that can intensify both antisemitic and Islamophobic currents worldwide, including the risk of backlash, scapegoating, and broader social mistrust. This act of terrorism should remind Singaporeans of three salient points regarding the maintenance of social cohesion.

Reassurances for Minority Groups

First, responses to terrorist violence directed at an ethnoreligious group require more than condemnation. They need visible reassurances from the authorities and the public across minority groups. Although surveys suggest that [trust between racial groups have grown](#), violence against a specific minority group can still generate insecurity well beyond the immediate victims.

When a gathering of Jews becomes a target in a major global city, Jewish communities everywhere else can understandably feel that public visibility carries risk and that public spaces are no longer entirely neutral. However, the Muslim community may also face a backlash because violent extremist acts are often interpreted through broad-brush identity frames that can stigmatise by association. This "transferable fear" mechanism explains why reassurances should be presented as equitable protection for all communities, rather than episodic sympathy for one.

Antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents are not new to Singapore. In a written reply to Parliament, the Ministry of Home Affairs reported that the Police received [43 reports](#) alleging offensive remarks or actions targeted at members of the Jewish or Muslim communities between 7 October 2023 and 31 March 2024. It also reported antisemitic incidents, including vandalism in schools and verbal abuse of Jews, which indicates the impact of international crises arriving at our shores, mainly through social media.

When acts of terrorism against ethnoreligious communities occur overseas, our priority should be to reinforce public safety and emphasise that equal respect applies to all. We should also strengthen interfaith signalling and communication, allowing communities to reassure one another of their shared commitment to racial and religious harmony.

Counterterrorism as a Continuous Project

Second, radicalisation and mobilisation are best seen as ongoing processes rather than isolated incidents, as counterterrorism efforts demand constant vigilance and adaptable assessment. Public reports indicate that [Naveed Akram](#), one of the two terrorists in the Bondi Beach shooting, was investigated by Australian intelligence

beginning in October 2019 due to his extremist links. Still, he was not under active surveillance in the period leading up to the attack.

While it is easy to consider the Bondi Beach shooting as another instance of Islamist terrorism, fuelled and funded by violent extremist ideologies from the Islamic State, we should not evaluate it based on this detail alone. The act of terrorism illustrates how threat profiles can change as individuals move between phases of attention, disengagement, re-engagement, and escalation.

As reported, investigators found [Islamic State flags and improvised explosive devices](#) in a vehicle linked to the suspects after the attack, which was consistent with a violent Islamist ideological orientation. However, investigations should aim to establish causal links between ideology and mobilisation.

It is important to note that reducing terrorism to a single trigger or a simple one-way causal chain of exposure and radicalisation is analytically weak. Instead of triggers, external crises can act as accelerants that influence timing, target choice, and justificatory narratives for actors already inclined towards extremist violence. Meanwhile, violent extremist ideologies provide the grammar and language that enable violence to take shape.

The Bondi Beach shooting, which specifically targeted the Jewish community during a significant religious occasion, could catalyse individuals already inclined towards violence, prompting them to commit acts motivated by their personal ideologies. Therefore, it would be relevant to continuously review threat profiles of those who are vulnerable to violent ideologies and provide community reassurance. Security measures should be regarded as an ongoing effort rather than a response to isolated incidents.

Avenues for Expression of Grievances

Third, even when there are claims of links to the Islamic State and jihadist ideological markers, the psychological and social effects of international crises, such as the Gaza war, on ordinary citizens must not be overlooked. This is especially true in a media environment where conflict content is persistent, emotionally charged, and often decontextualised.

For Singapore, the key analytical issue is not whether the war in Gaza acts as a root cause of terrorism or hate crimes, but whether it fosters an enduring grievance narrative that magnifies othering and can be weaponised.

Such an occurrence can happen through antisemitic frames that merge minority identifiers like "Jews" into "Israel", or Islamophobic frames that depict Muslim solidarity with Palestinians as incendiary latent extremism. When social media and news coverage repeatedly cause moral shocks, they can lead to distorted perceptions, hardened boundaries, and social mistrust, even without explicit extremist ideologies.

Singapore should broaden and legitimise safe avenues for expressing grievances, such as those related to Gaza/Palestine, through structured, moderated, and supported channels. These channels make lawful civic action meaningful and discourage individuals from seeking emotional release through confrontation, doxxing, harassment, or intimidation. The aim is not to depoliticise public emotions, but to channel moral passion into civic practices that are compatible with a multireligious state. This strategy aims to reduce the space for intimidation, hatred, and violent mobilisation.

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