



**Jihad Transformed:
The Australian Experience of Islamic
State Terrorism and Extremism**

Levi J. West • September 2022

Program on Extremism

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About the Author



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About The Program on Extremism and *Nexus*

The Program on Extremism at George Washington University provides analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism. The Program spearheads innovative and thoughtful academic inquiry, producing empirical work that strengthens extremism work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study. The Program aims to develop pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public.

This report is released as part of The Global-Local Jihadist Nexus project (*Nexus*). *Nexus* draws on a global network of subject matter experts and locally-based researchers to monitor Islamic State and al-Qaida affiliates across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, as well as their support and enabling networks in the West. Our products analyze the interplay of several pairs of forces that have the potential to drive or constrain the global Islamic State and Al-Qaida nexus, including: global and local contexts, ideological and pragmatic drivers, individual and group appeals, leader-inspired and organizationally-enabled change, foreign influence versus local interest, and more.

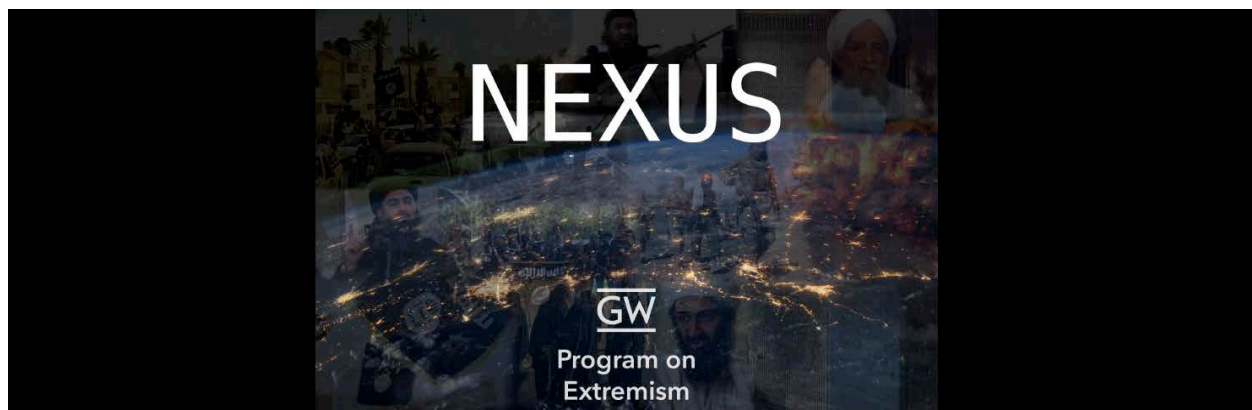


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Executive Summary

Prior to 2014, Australia's direct experience of jihadist terrorism had been limited, abstract, and remote. Australia had not experienced a jihadist terrorist attack within its borders, and only limited numbers of foreign fighters had departed for offshore conflicts. From 2014 to 2020, however, the country experienced a dramatic surge in jihadist-related activity, driven largely by the emergence of the Islamic State and its so-called caliphate. This report examines the transformative impact of the Islamic State's emergence on Australian jihadism, and the counterterrorism arrangements that have been implemented in response. It finds that:

- ❖ The most consequential manifestation of this transformation was the nine Islamic State-inspired terrorist attacks, and substantial outflows of foreign fighters and attempted foreign fighters. Approximately 500 Australians attempted or succeeded in travelling to Syria and Iraq to participate in jihadist activity.
- ❖ Informing this transformation were a number of individuals who shaped and influenced Australians' perception of the Islamic State. These 'Jihadi Influencers', through their actions and the propaganda associated with them, pushed the Islamic State to the forefront of Australian national security and political discourse.
- ❖ In response, successive governments implemented an array of innovative, effective, and at times controversial counterterrorism measures, which contributed to the prevention of further attacks.
- ❖ Australia, much like comparable jurisdictions, has witnessed a substantial decrease in jihadist activity following the territorial demise of the Islamic State's caliphate in Iraq and Syria. However, the country is also experiencing an equally transformative resurgence in extremist and terrorist activity by individuals and groups motivated by extreme right-wing ideologies. This additional transformation presents several new challenges, and Australia's counterterrorism community is seeking to respond appropriately.

Introduction

The emergence of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq had a transformative impact on jihadist activity in Australia. Australia's first ever jihadist attack took place in September of 2014,¹ followed by an additional eight attacks between 2014 and 2020,² as well as over 500 individuals who either travelled to, or attempted to travel to, the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq.³ Jihadists from Australia also contributed to and influenced the domestic and global discourse regarding terrorism, and shaped the development of additional counterterrorism legislation and policy innovations.

The Australian experience of jihadist terrorism began prior to 9/11, with an ultimately abandoned al-Qaeda (AQ) plot to bomb the Israeli embassy in Canberra and to assassinate a high-profile Jewish business figure.⁴ The post-9/11 period witnessed a relatively low level of jihadist activity, characterized primarily by two major disruptions and associated prosecutions known as Operation Pendennis⁵ and Operation Neath,⁶ as well as the prosecution of Faheem Lodhi, one of the first Australians to be prosecuted for a terrorism offense.⁷ In addition, Australia's relatively limited, abstract, and remote exposure to jihadist terrorism was informed by the controversial cases of David Hicks⁸ and Mamdouh Habib,⁹ two Australian citizens who were detained at Guantanamo Bay. It was the 2002 Bali Bombings in Indonesia,¹⁰ however, that overwhelmingly shaped the Australian public's experience of jihadist terrorism. Prior to the bombings—which killed over 200 people, including 88 Australians—jihadist terrorism had been a distant, albeit ever present, component of Australia's national security discourse and experience post-2001. While informed by the involvement of the Australian Defense Force (ADF) in operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and a range of other theaters related to the broader American-led effort to counter transnational jihadist terrorism, the 2002 Bali

¹ Coroners Court of Victoria, "Finding into Death with Inquest – Ahmad Numan Haider" (Melbourne, Victoria, 2017), https://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-12/ahmadnumanhaider_491714.pdf.

² Note that two of these 11 are currently before the courts. Mike Burgess, "Statement: Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Budget Estimates" (Canberra, ACT, 2022), <https://www.asio.gov.au/publications/speeches-and-statements/senate-estimates-march-2022>.

³ Grant Donaldson, "Independent National Security Legislation Monitor Annual Report 2020-2021," Annual Report (Canberra, ACT: Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, 2021), https://www.inslm.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-01/inslm-annual-report_2020-21.pdf.

⁴ Shandon Harris-Hogan and Andrew Zammit, "Mantiqi IV: Al-Qaeda's Failed Co-Optation of a Jemaah Islamiyah Support Network," *Democracy and Security* 10, no. 4 (November 15, 2014): 315–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2014.964860>.

⁵ Sam Mullins, "Islamist Terrorism and Australia: An Empirical Examination of the 'Home-Grown' Threat," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 2 (March 11, 2011): 254–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2010.535717>.

⁶ Andrew Zammit, "The Holsworthy Barracks Plot: A Case Study of an Al-Shabab Support Network in Australia," *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 6 (2012), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-holsworthy-barracks-plot-a-case-study-of-an-al-shabab-support-network-in-australia/>.

⁷ Sebastian Rotella, "The Man Behind Mumbai," ProPublica, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.propublica.org/article/the-man-behind-mumbai?token=1JnHj13X1W6l-3sY3eH0gXMKhLKfuqUw>.

⁸ Leigh Sales, *Detainee 002: The Case of David Hicks*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2007), <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5739409>.

⁹ Dr Vivienne Thom, "Inquiry into the Actions of Australian Government Agencies in Relation to the Arrest and Detention Overseas of Mr Mamdouh Habib from 2001 to 2005," n.d., 116.

¹⁰ Sidney Jones, "The Changing Nature of Jemaah Islamiyah," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59, no. 2 (June 1, 2005): 169–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357710500134475>.

Bombings served as an historical flashpoint for Australian discourse and experience of international terrorism. The emergence of the Islamic State over a decade later would serve as another historical flashpoint, fundamentally altering the dynamics of jihadist terrorism in Australia and further shaping the evolution of Australian counterterrorism.

Australia's experience of Islamic State-related terrorism can be understood through three operational manifestations. First, Australia experienced multiple Islamic State inspired and facilitated terrorist attacks, as well as the disruption of numerous plots, including the complex, multinational 2017 Sydney plane plot.¹¹ Second, a substantial number of Australians travelled to Syria and Iraq to participate in hostilities with the Islamic State and other jihadist groups, and a large number of individuals were prevented from departing. And third, Australia also contributed several high-profile figures who played disproportionate roles in the global Islamic State propaganda ecosystem.

This analysis will provide insight into these three manifestations of Australia's experience of Islamic State terrorism and extremism, as well as their transformative impact on the jihadist movement in Australia. It will also provide a brief assessment of the evolving nature of the jihadist terrorism threat in Australia, and identify some of the emerging challenges that confront counterterrorism authorities. Today, Australia faces a changed terrorism threat environment, and as with its experience of jihadist terrorism, these changes reflect the global permutations of the dynamic threat that terrorism constitutes.

¹¹ Andrew Zammit, "Operation Silves: Inside the 2017 Islamic State Sydney Plane Plot," *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 4 (2020), <https://ctc.usma.edu/operation-silves-inside-the-2017-islamic-state-sydney-plane-plot/>.

Islamic State Terrorism in Australia

On September 23, 2014, less than 24 hours after the release of Abu Mohammad al-Adnani's infamous *Indeed Your Lord is Ever Watchful*,¹² the 18-year-old son of Afghan refugees, Abdul Numan Haider, confronted two Australian counterterrorism police officers in the carpark of Endeavour Hills Police Station in Melbourne, Australia. He was carrying a knife and attacked both officers before being shot and killed.¹³ Haider had not only become the first jihadist to perpetrate an attack on Australian soil, but also the first of many globally who responded to the call to arms issued by al-Adnani. This incident, which occurred just over one month after the release of the horrific video of the death of journalist James Foley and the associated shift in U.S. posture towards the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, heightened the terrorism threat dynamics within Australia.

Australia would experience an additional eight Islamic State-linked terrorist attacks between 2014 and 2020.¹⁴ The perpetrators of these plots were ethnically diverse and pursued a range of attack tactics. What they had in common was a commitment—albeit evidenced in varyingly explicit ways—to Islamic State ideology. In some cases, there was little question over the perpetrator's ideological commitment to the Islamic state. Some incidents, however, raised questions regarding their categorization as terrorist attacks, or their consideration as an Islamic State-linked attack. For example, the coronial inquest into the Sydney siege incident in December 2014 stated that,

*Even with the benefit of expert evidence, it remains unclear whether Monis [the perpetrator] was motivated by IS to prosecute its bloodthirsty agenda or whether he used that organisation's fearsome reputation to bolster his impact.*¹⁵

Despite public debate regarding whether the so-called 'Sydney Siege' constituted a terrorist incident, Professor Bruce Hoffman, one of the experts consulted during the coronial inquest, "expressed the view that the siege was a terrorist incident... motivated and perhaps inspired by Islamic State through al-Adnani's widely disseminated statement of September 2014."¹⁶ The uncertainties surrounding the exact role of Islamic State ideology in driving Monis—as well as other subsequent Islamic State-linked perpetrators—¹⁷ to violence failed to diminish the Australian public's support for

¹² Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, and Charlie Winter, *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020).

¹³ Coroners Court of Victoria, "Finding into Death with Inquest – Ahmad Numan Haider."

¹⁴ Author's data. See

¹⁵ State Coroner of New South Wales, "Inquest into the Deaths Arising from the Lindt Cafe Siege: Findings and Recommendations" (Sydney, NSW, 2017), p. 17. <https://www.lindtinquest.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/findings-and-recommendations.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 238.

¹⁷ Jonathan Hair, "Man Who Said Stabbing Neighbour Was 'like Eating Chocolate Bar' Guilty of Committing Terror Act," *ABC News*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-02/sydney-man-guilty-of-terror-attack-after-stabbing-neighbour/11073416>.; Kimberley Bernard, "Inquest Date Set for Double Murder 'Terrorism Event,' Police Shooting in Logan," *ABC News*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-09/pre-inquest-into-logan-shooting-and-double-murder/100446662>.

the various policy measures that were taken in response. The establishment of the caliphate and the call to arms issued by al-Adnani had brought jihadist terrorism's reality to Australian shores.

The most explicit indication of the transformation in Australian jihadist activity post-2014 was the dramatic escalation in successful jihadist terrorist attacks. For context, Australia had not experienced a single jihadist terrorist attack on its soil prior to 2014, but has experienced nine since.¹⁸ The underlying connection behind these nine attacks was the presence of Islamic State ideological affiliations and tactical consistency.¹⁹ All the perpetrators, to varying degrees and in varying ways, expressed ideological commitment to the Islamic State, and for each some form of expression of allegiance to or support for the movement was evident. Additionally, while their specific tactics varied, each can be categorized as lone actor terrorists in the operational sense. For example, Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar shot a civilian New South Wales Police employee in Sydney in October 2015, and was supported by a cohort of Islamic State supporters.²⁰ They had all pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and donated funds to the movement, including by financing the firearm used by Jabar in the attack. Despite this support, Jabar perpetrated the attack alone, in keeping with the broad guidance provided by al-Adnani.

Beyond the dramatic increase in the number of successful attacks, the U.S. State Department 2019 Country Report on Australia highlighted that,

Since September 2014, Australian CT authorities have conducted 16 major counterterrorism disruption operations in response to potential or imminent attacks in Australia. A further 98 people have been charged as a result of 44 counterterrorism-related operations around Australia.²¹

In stark contrast, between 2001 and 2014, Australia only conducted three major counterterrorism disruption operations in response to potential or imminent attacks in the country, and “by the start of 2015, 46 people – all men and almost all identifying as Muslims – had been charged with terrorism offences.”²² Australia has prosecuted nearly twice as many people on terrorism offenses in the five

¹⁸ Recent statements by Director General of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation noted the total number of attacks, regardless of ideology, is 11. Both of these additional matters are before the courts and it would sub judice to discuss them herein. Burgess, “Statement: Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Budget Estimates.”

¹⁹ Note: There has been one additional terrorist incident that was perpetrated by a right-wing extremist: Tim Fernandez, “Windang Siege Accused Had ‘Fixation with Nazism’, Police Say, as Australian-First Charge Laid.” *ABC News*, February 23, 2022. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-23/windang-gunman-charged-with-terror-offence-after-standoff/100853802>.

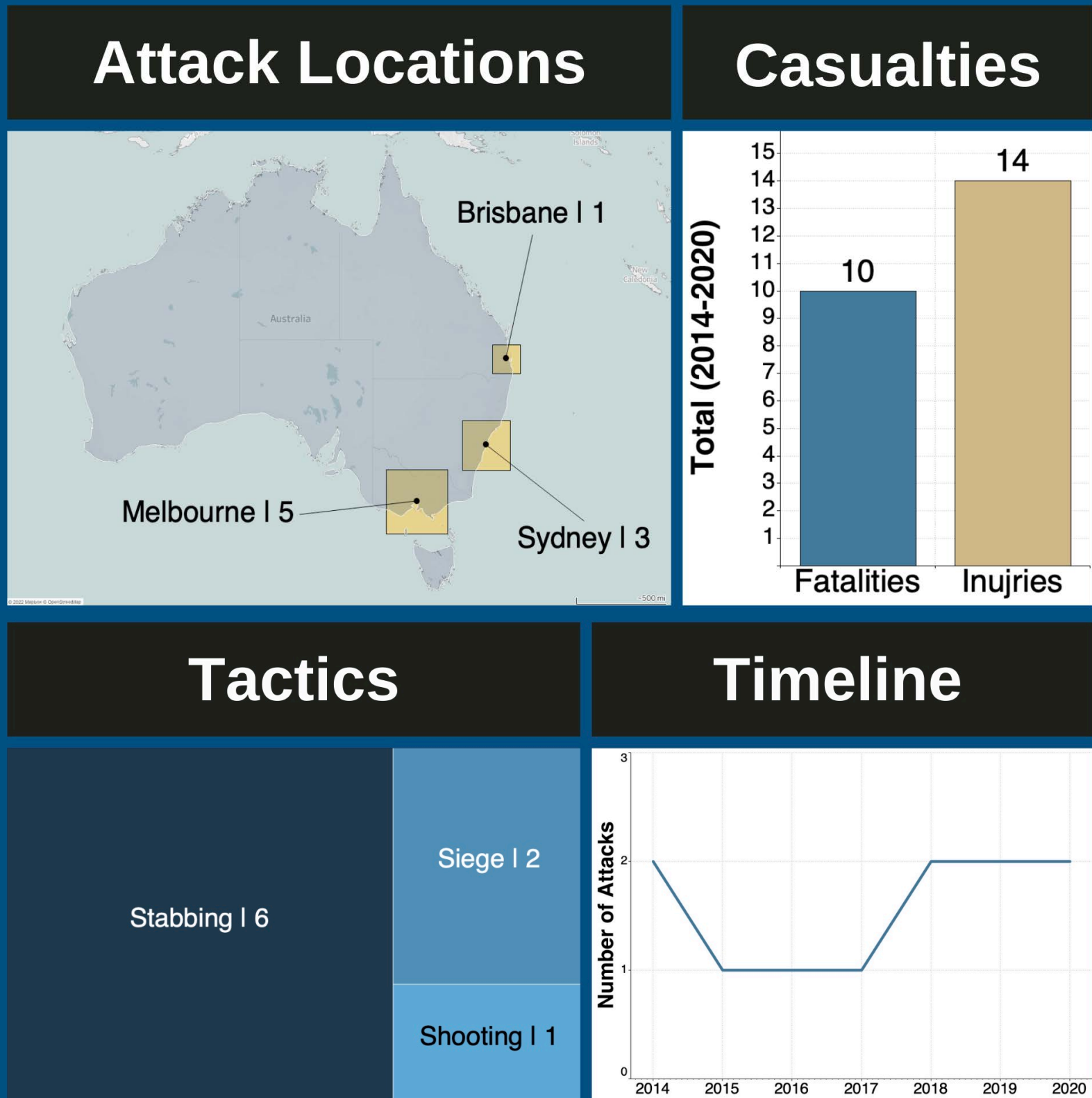
²⁰ Australian Associated Press, “Curtis Cheng Killer ‘Died for the Sake of Allah’, Said Man Who Allegedly Supplied Gun,” *The Guardian*, May 4, 2017, sec. Australia news, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/may/04/curtis-cheng-killer-died-for-the-sake-of-allah-said-man-who-allegedly-supplied-gun>.

²¹ Bureau of Counterterrorism, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Australia,” *Country Reports on Terrorism* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/australia/>.

²² Andrew Lynch, Nicola McGarrity, and George Williams, *Inside Australia's Anti-Terrorism Laws and Trials* (Sydney, N.S.W.: New South Publishing, 2015), p. 92.

years since 2014 as it did in the 12 years between 2002 (when Australia first introduced terrorism offenses) and 2014.

Figure 1: Islamic State-linked Attacks on Australian Soil, 2014-2020



Australian Foreign Fighters

Australians began travelling to Syria as early as 2012 to join various jihadist organizations, but these were not the first instances of outbound jihadist foreign fighters from Australia. According to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), prior to the start of the Syrian conflict, “ASIO investigated 30 Australians who travelled to Afghanistan or Pakistan between 1990 and 2010 to train at extremist camps and/or fight with extremists.”²³ In stark contrast, since 2012 at least 230 Australians successfully departed the country for Syria, and whether through passport suspension, cancellation, or denial on application, another approximately 250 citizens were prevented from departing.²⁴ In total, according to these ASIO figures, nearly 500 Australian citizens supported jihadism sufficiently enough that they were willing to travel to Syria and Iraq to join a number of different jihadist causes. These statistics reflect the broader and dramatic escalation in jihadist activity in Australia since the advent of the conflict in Syria, and especially in the aftermath of the declaration of the caliphate.

The public understanding of the foreign fighter phenomenon in Australia was shaped significantly by the experience of Khaled Sharrouf, albeit disproportionately compared to his actual significance to the Islamic State. Sharrouf had previously been charged and incarcerated on terrorism offenses in association with the aforementioned Operation Pendennis, and originally served four years for “possessing a thing [sic] connected with preparation for a terrorist act.”²⁵ It was not his original terrorism offense, however, through which he achieved global notoriety.

In 2013, Sharrouf fled Australia using his brother’s passport and joined the Islamic State in Syria. In August 2014, shortly after the declaration of the caliphate, Sharrouf tweeted out a photo of his then seven-year-old son holding the decapitated head of a Syrian soldier in Raqqa. The image was referred to by then U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry as, “one of the most disturbing, stomach-turning grotesque photographs ever displayed.”²⁶ It was this image that re-centered terrorism and national security in Australian political and media discourse, and provided the dominant frame for public understanding of the foreign fighter phenomenon. Coverage of the image was global, with CNN,²⁷ the BBC,²⁸ and other international news outlets republishing the story. Although several

²³ Brett Walker SC, “Independent National Security Legislation Monitor Annual Report 2014,” Annual Report (Canberra, ACT: Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, 2014), <https://www.inslm.gov.au/sites/default/files/inslm-annual-report-2014.pdf>.

²⁴ Grant Donaldson, “Independent National Security Legislation Monitor Annual Report 2020-2021,” Annual Report (Canberra, ACT: Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, 2021), p. 14. https://www.inslm.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-01/inslm-annual-report_2020-21.pdf.

²⁵ Regina (C’Wealth) v Sharrouf, No. 1002 (Supreme Court of New South Wales September 24, 2009).

²⁶ Dan Lamothe, “New U.S. Defense Deal with Australia Underscores Deeper Relationship,” *Washington Post*, August 12, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/08/12/new-u-s-defense-deal-with-australia-underscores-deeper-relationship/>.

²⁷ Hillary Whiteman, “Father of Boy Holding Severed Head Has Mental Illness - CNN,” accessed June 27, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/12/world/asia/australia-boy-severed-head-syria/index.html>.

²⁸ BBC, “Australia Boy ‘Displays Severed Head in Syria,’” *BBC News*, August 11, 2014, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-28736345>.

Australians had traveled to Syria prior to Sharrouf's departure,²⁹ it was Sharrouf's tweet that catalyzed public sentiment and political action. Not even the 2013 release of a video by Jabhat al-Nusra depicting *Abu Asma al-Australi*, who is understood to have been the first Australian suicide bomber, had the global impact of Sharrouf's photo, both on the public and on the broader jihadist cohort in Australia.

At the time of the 2013 *al-Australi* suicide bombing video release, the Australian Federal Police noted that the numbers of individuals departing for Syria were increasing, and that, "In just a year the number had risen from a few to 20 or 30, possibly more."³⁰ These initial departures were only the beginning of what became a flood of outbound foreign fighters from Australia. By 2014, with the declaration of the caliphate and the Islamic State's *hijrah* [emigration]-focused recruitment campaign in full swing, Australia saw a dramatic escalation in foreign fighter outflows. Amongst the at least 230 individuals who left to join the Islamic State and other jihadist organizations were not only fighters such as Sharrouf, but also numerous families who travelled to Syria and Iraq with young children, as well as Australians who responded to jihadist calls for foreign professionals. Perhaps the most infamous figure in this latter category is the Australian doctor, Tareq Kamleh, who appeared in an April 2015 'National Health Service-style' video release and called on other Muslim medical professionals to make the journey to Raqqa, Syria.³¹

Ultimately, Australia's outbound foreign fighter flow slowed as various domestic and international measures were implemented. As is demonstrated by the approximately 250 individuals who had their passports cancelled, suspended, or their application for a passport denied, Australian policy measures made substantial progress in diminishing the number of outbound fighters who were able to successfully make the journey to Syria and Iraq. Additionally, if controversial, measures in 2015 enabled the federal government to revoke the citizenship of dual nationals on national security grounds.³² Rather than seeking to prevent the departure of foreign fighters, these measures sought to prevent those who had departed from returning to Australia. These policy changes reflected a broader reorientation by dozens of nations whose citizens had joined the Islamic State as the caliphate began to be degraded and global concern shifted to the return of foreign fighters.³³

²⁹ Andrew Zammit, "Tracking Australian Foreign Fighters in Syria," *CTC Sentinel* 6, no. 11 (2013), <https://ctc.usma.edu/tracking-australian-foreign-fighters-in-syria/>.

³⁰ Matt Brown, "Video Shows Man Claimed to Be Australia's First Suicide Bomber," *ABC News*, November 11, 2013, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-12/new-video-man-australia-syria-suicide-bomber/5084664>.

³¹ Patrick Hatch, "Australian Doctor Tareq Kamleh Appears in Islamic State Propaganda Video," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 25, 2015, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/australian-doctor-tareq-kamleh-appears-in-islamic-state-propaganda-video-20150425-1mt603.html>.

³² Cat Barker, "Citizenship Revocation on National Security Grounds: Context and Selected Issues," Australian Parliamentary Library, 2015, Australia, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1516/CitizenshipRevocation.

³³ Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, "Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," Policy Paper, Foreign Policy at Brookings (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2014), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/be-afraid-web.pdf>.

Outbound Australian Travelers

Tareq Kamleh

As he appears in "Health Services in the Islamic State- Wilayat al-Raqqah", Islamic State propaganda video, April 2015

1990-2010

30

2012-2020

230 Successful

250 Attempted



Figure 2: Australian Jihadist Travelers

Jihadi Influencers

The Australian jihadist milieu and the public and political discourse post-2014 was shaped by a few key personalities. Sharrouf, discussed above, was the first of these high-profile jihadists who were given substantial media coverage, and whose individual journeys have shaped the narrative of Islamic State jihadism in Australia. The fate of Sharrouf's wife and children has ensured sustained media coverage, with three of his children being repatriated to Australia in 2019.³⁴ Other high-profile Australian jihadists succeeded not only in becoming active participants in the conflict, but also in achieving substantial media attention. And, as with Sharrouf, national and international coverage was often inversely correlated with their importance within the Islamic State movement.

Jake Bilardi, or 'Jihadi Jake', as he became referred to in media coverage, was one of them. Bilardi was 18-years-old when he drove a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device into an Iraqi Security Forces building in Ramadi in 2015. While he was still in the planning phases of his eventual departure for Syria and Iraq, however, Bilardi had conceived of what he referred to as his 'Plan B' before becoming convinced he would be discovered. In his own words, if prevented from departing the country, he would instead proceed by,

*...launching a string of bombings across Melbourne, targeting foreign consulates and political/military targets as well as grenade and knife attacks on shopping centres and cafes and culminating with myself detonating a belt of explosives amongst the kuffar.*³⁵

Much like Sharrouf, Bilardi was given substantial media attention. Young, white, and atheist, he converted to the Islamic State's interpretation of Islam and left the suburbs of Melbourne bound for Syria. Bilardi was frequently depicted in photos wearing his Chelsea Football Club shirt, and the media regularly emphasized his youth, the death of his mother, his conversion, and his "intriguing" blog.³⁶ A dedicated 60 Minutes story aired in 2015 featuring interviews with Bilardi's father and former classmates, referring to him as the "frightening new face of religious extremism,"³⁷ despite having been "mocked by ISIL propaganda as having a "weak body" and selling "his soul to Allah cheaply."³⁸

³⁴ Dylan Welch and Suzanne Dredge, "Australian Orphans Freed from Syrian War Zone in Secret Rescue Mission," *ABC News*, June 23, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-24/australian-orphans-freed-from-syrian-warzone/11239534>.

³⁵ Jake Bilardi, "From the Eyes of a Muhajir: An Australian Muhajir in the Land of the Khilafah," *Quadrant*, 2015, <https://quadrant.org.au/opinion/qed/2015/06/jake-bilardis-deleted-blog/>.

³⁶ Charlie Winter, "An Integrated Approach to Islamic State Recruitment," 2016, 20.

³⁷ *Jihad Jake*, Television, 60 Minutes, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSV8NL5AWLI>.

³⁸ Ben Caló et al., "Islamic Caliphate or Nation State? Investigating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's Imagined Community," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 3 (July 2020): 727–42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12616>.

But of all the Australians who became involved with the Islamic State, Neil Prakash was arguably the most high-profile and the most dangerous.³⁹ Prakash, also known by his Islamic State *nom de guerre*, *Abu Khaled al-Cambodi*, was connected to multiple terrorist plots both in Australia and in the United States,⁴⁰ and was referred to by the Australian government as, “the principal Australian reaching back from the Middle East into terrorist networks in both Melbourne and Sydney.”⁴¹ Prakash would star in one of the first ever English-language media releases from the Islamic State’s al-Hayat Media Center, the now infamous *There Is No Life Without Jihad*. He would also feature in the eighth edition of the Islamic State’s English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, which promoted the upcoming video, *The Story of Abu Khaled al-Cambodi from Australia*, released on April 21, 2015. Along the way, Prakash reportedly became a key member of the group referred to by the FBI as “The Legion”⁴², and alongside his infamous colleague, Junaid Hussain, sought to emulate the career of Anwar al-Awlaki by remotely planning and coordinating Islamic State attacks on Western shores from the caliphate. Prakash eventually became high-profile enough that he was targeted for “removal from the battlefield” by Coalition forces in an air strike on his location in Mosul in April 2016,⁴³ which he survived. He was later detained by Turkish authorities while attempting to flee Syria to the north, charged with membership of a terrorist organization, and sentenced to seven and a half years in prison.⁴⁴

³⁹ Levi J. West and Andrew Zammit, “Australia’s Most Dangerous Islamic State Member: The Arrest of Neil Prakash,” *Militant Leadership Monitor* 8, no. 12 (2017), <https://jamestown.org/program/australias-dangerous-islamic-state-member-arrest-neilprakash/>.

⁴⁰ SBS, “Australian IS Leader Prakash Linked to US Case,” SBS News, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/australian-is-leader-prakash-linked-to-us-case/ynzid0sew>.

⁴¹ “Neil Prakash: Australian Jihadist Stripped of Citizenship,” *BBC News*, December 29, 2018, sec. Australia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-46706710>.

⁴² Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Seamus Hughes, “The Threat to the United States from the Islamic State’s Virtual Entrepreneurs,” *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 3 (March 10, 2017), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-threat-to-the-united-states-from-the-islamic-states-virtual-entrepreneurs/>.

⁴³ Department of Defence, “Joint Media Release - Death of Australian Citizens Neil Christopher Prakash and Shadi Jabar Khalil Mohammad,” Text (Defence Ministers, November 9, 2016), <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-releases/joint-media-release-death-australian-citizens-neil-christopher>.

⁴⁴ Eric Tlozek, “Australian Islamic State Recruiter Neil Prakash Sentenced to Jail in Turkey,” *ABC News*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-16/neil-prakash-sentenced-to-jail-in-turkey/10907510>.

Jake Bilardi

(Left) as he appears in a photo circulated by pro-Islamic State social media accounts on Twitter.

Neil Prakash

As he appears in "The Story of Abu Khaled al-Cambodi from Australia", Islamic State propaganda video, April 2015



Figure 3: Prominent Australian Jihadist Influencers Jake Bilardi and Neil Prakash

Counterterrorism in Australia

It is difficult to overstate the substantial impact that Australia's Islamic State-aligned jihadists would have on jihadism in the country, and in turn on Australian counterterrorism. Because of the numerous challenges posed by Australia's sizable Islamic State mobilization, a slew of new counterterrorism and countering violent extremism policies were unveiled that sought to both prevent radicalization and mobilization to violence, and rehabilitate those who had become radicalized. Australia introduced several innovative, if at times controversial, measures to address the Islamic State threat that included citizenship revocation,⁴⁵ extended sentencing,⁴⁶ and the continued practice of what Professor Kent Roach has previously referred to as "hyper-legislation,"⁴⁷ which by 2019 brought the "total number of substantive anti-terrorism laws enacted by parliament to 82 since the Sept. 11 attacks, with a further six bills either currently before parliament or about to be introduced."⁴⁸

As the Islamic State was increasingly degraded and its capacity to recruit from, and effect operations in, Western jurisdictions diminished, so, too, did the dominance it held on the broader public's perception of terrorism threats. The 2019 Christchurch attacks—perpetrated by an Australian citizen—served as a transition point in both the perception and the reality of the terrorism threat in Australia. ASIO has identified this transformation in the threat environment in recent public statements, noting that investigations into ideologically motivated violent extremists, such as racist and nationalist violent extremists, had grown to nearly 50% of what they refer to as onshore priority counterterrorism cases.⁴⁹ The diminished operational tempo of Islamic State activity has been supplanted by a dramatic increase in activity by the extreme right, again reflective of broader trends internationally. Australia has prosecuted numerous right-wing extremists,⁵⁰ currently has multiple extreme right-wing cases before the courts on terrorism or related charges, and has listed the National Socialist Order (NSO), Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD), and The Base as terrorist organizations.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Susan Hutchinson, "The Debate over Australia Stripping Citizenship from Terrorists," *The Interpreter* (blog), 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/debate-australia-stripping-citizenship-terrorists>.

⁴⁶ High Court reporter Elizabeth Byrne, "High Court to Decide What Makes Someone an Islamic State Member after Adelaide Woman's Conviction Overturned," *ABC News*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-03/high-court-islamic-state-membership-question/12622098>.

⁴⁷ Kent Roach, *The 9/11 Effect Comparative Counter-Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴⁸ Jessie Blackbourn and Nicola McGarrity, "Australia Has Enacted 82 Anti-Terror Laws since 2001. But Tough Laws Alone Can't Eliminate Terrorism," *The Conversation*, accessed June 28, 2022, <http://theconversation.com/australia-has-enacted-82-anti-terror-laws-since-2001-but-tough-laws-alone-cant-eliminate-terrorism-123521>.

⁴⁹ ASIO, "ASIO Annual Report 2020-21" (Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, 2021), p. 4, <https://www.asio.gov.au/sites/default/files/Annual%20Report%202020-21%20WEB.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, "Phillip Galea Jailed for Terrorist Offences," Text (Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, December 21, 2020), <https://www.cdpp.gov.au/case-reports/phillip-galea-jailed-terrorist-offences>.

⁵¹ Australian National Security, "Listed terrorist organisations," available at: <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/what-australia-is-doing/terrorist-organisations/listed-terrorist-organisations>.

The transformation of Australia's terrorist threat environment by Islamic State was substantial, manifested itself across a broad spectrum of activity, and reflected many of the dynamics of Islamic State-related mobilizations in comparable jurisdictions. The responses undertaken by counterterrorism authorities assisted in minimizing the violent manifestations of jihadism within Australia's borders, although aspects of the broader counterterrorism regime are now being reviewed both as the threat environment evolves, and in the context of a change in government at the federal level. Terrorism will remain an enduring threat to Australian national security, albeit in a distinctly different and arguably more challenging manifestation. Australian counterterrorism will necessarily have to continue to evolve to remain effective, while maintaining the difficult balance that is inherent in undertaking counterterrorism in a liberal democracy.

Appendix

Table 1: Islamic State-linked Attacks in Australia- 2014-2020

Date	Location	Perpetrator	Note: Fatality counts include perpetrator
Sept 23 2014	Melbourne	Abdul Numan Haider	Stabbing, 2 injured, 1 fatality
Dec 15 2014	Sydney	Man Haron Monis	Siege, 4 injured, 2 fatalities
Oct 02 2015	Sydney	Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar	Shooting, 2 fatalities
Sept 10 2016	Sydney	Ihsas Khan	Stabbing, 1 injured
Jun 05 2017	Melbourne	Yacqub Khayre	Siege, 3 injured, 2 fatalities
Feb 09 2018	Melbourne	Momena Shoma	Stabbing, 1 injured
Nov 09 2018	Melbourne	Hassan Khalif Shire Ali	Stabbing, 2 injured, 2 fatalities
Oct 30 2020	Melbourne	Momena Shoma (in prison)	Stabbing, 1 injured
Dec 17 2020	Brisbane	Raghe Mohammed Abdi ⁵²	Attempted stabbing, 1 fatality

⁵² Note: This author undertook a report into this matter, and his possible motivations in relation to the alleged murder of an elderly couple, and his presence on the motorway and subsequent death, as part of the Queensland Police Service submission to the coronial hearing into the matter. That report will be public after the coronial hearing is complete.

Program on Extremism

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