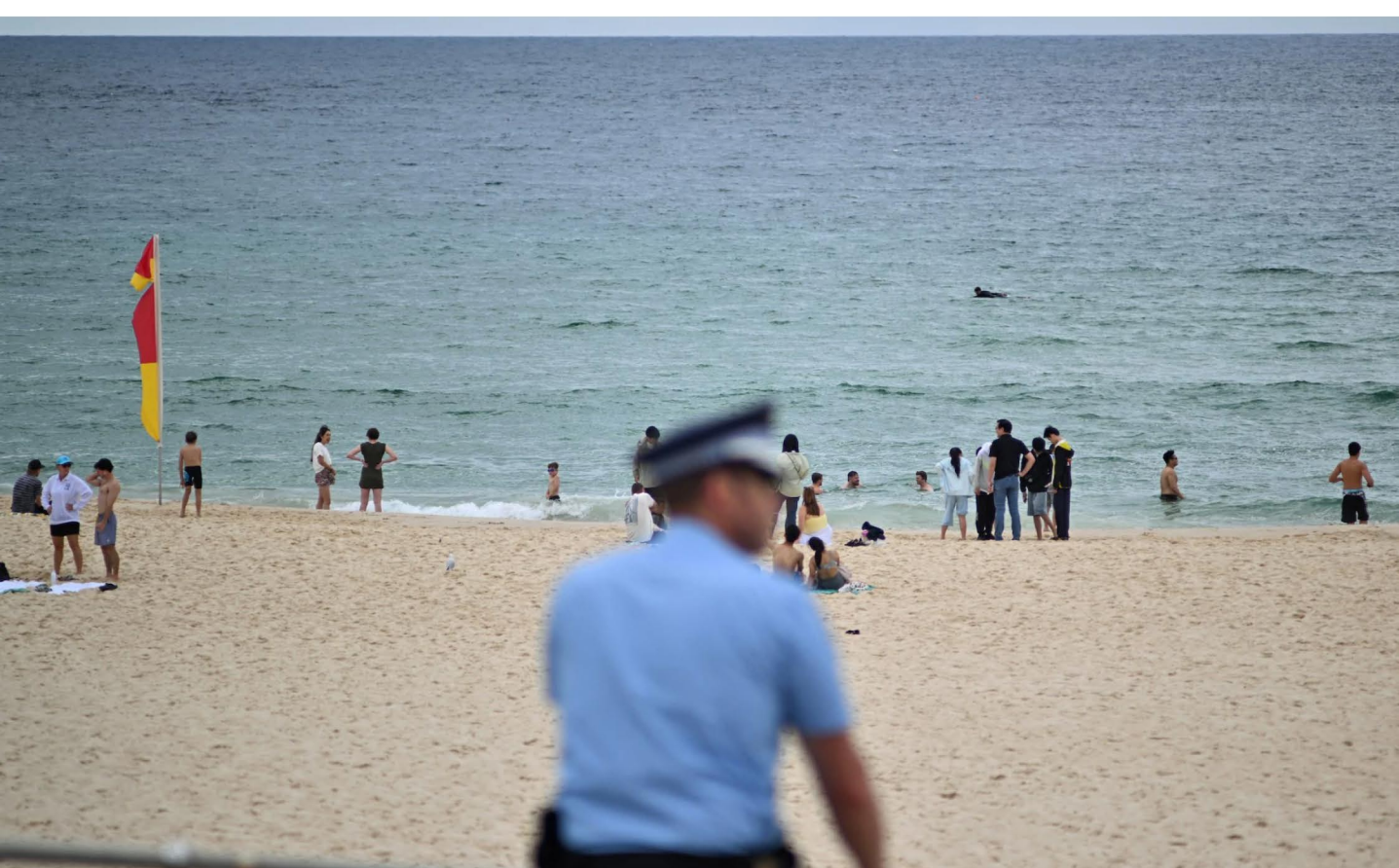


Barry O'Halloran

Complacency on anti-Semitism is no longer an option

This outrage must be confronted, and no longer denied or minimised



A policeman looks over Bondi Beach as life gradually returns to normal, Dec 22 Credit: SAEED KHAN/AFP

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As I came in to land at Sydney Airport at the start of last week, all the well-known landmarks came into view; the Opera House, Circular Quay and the Harbour Bridge. While still in the air on Sunday evening, I had no inkling that another of Sydney's iconic sites had become a Jihadist killing ground.

In response to endless calls to "Globalise the Intifada" by pro-Palestinian protesters across the West, on a summer's evening last week, the Intifada came to Australia. The peace of a Jewish Hanukkah candle-lighting ceremony was shattered on, of all places, Bondi Beach.

That evening, a group of Australian Jews were expressing their religious identity on Sydney's public space for fun and recreation. It was a celebration of Hanukkah's essential message of spiritual light overcoming oppression and darkness. They had thought themselves safe to conduct their ritual in public, without risk. They were wrong.

Little did they know that their lights of hope, along with many of their lives, would soon be extinguished by the dark and deadly forces of Islamic fundamentalism. When the shooting finally stopped, the white sands of Sydney's iconic beach ran with the blood of innocent Australian Jews. Before the sun had set again on Bondi Beach, 15 would be dead and over three dozen wounded, some seriously.

The Gurmans were out for a Sunday evening stroll in the heavily Jewish area of North Bondi. They quickly realised the danger at hand when they saw the older terrorist, Sajid Akram, emerge armed from behind an ISIS banner that was draped across his Hyundai hatchback. Mr Gurman immediately tackled and disarmed the gunman. But Akram simply took another rifle from his car boot and shot the Russian-Jewish couple at close range. They were the first to die as the killing spree began.

Reuven Morrison, had driven from Melbourne that day for the Hanukkah celebration. Bondi had always been special for this 62-year-old grandfather. As a teenage refugee from Kyiv – then part of the Soviet empire – it was on Bondi Beach that he met the woman who would become his wife when she was 17.

As the first shots rang out on Sunday, the unarmed Mr Morrison charged at the terrorists throwing bricks and stones and shouting at them to stop. He too was shot dead. His daughter explained later how one of her children "slept with a bottle of soda water that night, worried that grandpa would want his favourite fizzy drink if he came back".

87-year-old grandfather, Alex Kleytman, had survived the holocaust and had moved to Australia from Ukraine with his wife in the 1990s. As the bullets began to fly, he jumped in front of his wife, Larisa, to protect her with his body. She survived; he died instantly. An orgy of anti-Semitic terrorism succeeded in doing what the Nazi death camps had failed to accomplish.

In an incredible act of bravery, Ahmed al-Ahmed stalked, tackled and then ripped the rifle from one of the terrorists. The video of his actions has already been seen by many millions on social media. Still in hospital recovering from severe gun-shot wounds, his swift action saved many Jewish lives.

From a village near Idlib in war-torn Syria, the Sydney tobacco shop owner has become a celebrity across the Arab world. People express both pride and relief that an Arab – reportedly a Muslim – had shown the kind of bravery and compassion that transcended the ethnic and religious divide.

As in Britain, anti-Semitism is no stranger to Australia. Within hours of the October 7 Hamas invasion of southern Israel, a large crowd had gathered outside the Sydney Opera House chanting "F**k the Jews" and "Gas the Jews".

Police have recorded numerous incidents of attacks on synagogues and Jewish schools, with graffiti painted on homes and cars. In Australia, as elsewhere, these are sharp reminders of something that the Irish author, politician and public intellectual, Conor Cruise O'Brien, had written decades previously: "anti-Semitism is a light sleeper".

In a largely secular age, the existence of such untrammelled evil is something that many may struggle with. Yet, being physically close to a place where unconscionable violence has taken place is deeply disturbing.

In the national reckoning that is now underway, Australian Jews blame the Albanese Labour government for failing to rein in their Left-wing supporters in the pro-Palestinian movement. They are vocal in their demand that the unprecedented rise in anti-Semitism that contributed to this outrage must be confronted and no longer denied or minimised. After Bondi, complacency regarding the evil of anti-Semitism is no longer an option.