

**Submission  
No 107**

## **MEASURES TO PROHIBIT SLOGANS THAT INCITE HATRED**

**Name:** Mr Maher Mughrabi

**Date Received:** 8 January 2026

The antisemitic massacre which took place at Bondi Beach during Chanukkah festivities on December 14 is likely to have a number of profound effects on Australian society, beyond the irreparable pain and loss it has inflicted on the loved ones of the 15 people murdered.

One effect that some commentators and members of society hope to see is a change to laws around speech, and in particular a designation of the Arabic word “intifada” and the slogan “Globalise the Intifada” as hate speech or harmful speech that should be prohibited or at least attract penalties in law.

As an Arabic-speaking journalist of Palestinian parentage who has been working in newspapers for three decades and who has dedicated a considerable portion of his career to improving understanding of Arabic terminology and Arab perspectives, I respectfully submit that such an approach would be misguided.

The evidence I will present to support this view falls into three sections:

- The meaning of the word itself and its history
- How it is used by protesters today
- Islamic State and intifada

### **The meaning and history of the word intifada**

The terms of the debate over the word intifada were rehearsed during an exchange between myself and ABC journalist Patricia Karvelas in May 2024, in response to a television audience member’s question about what constitutes antisemitic speech.<sup>1</sup> From the outset it was clear that the actual meaning of the word was deemed of far less importance than its associations or implications. When I mentioned that for Palestinians the word intifada summoned up memories of strikes and civil disobedience, Karvelas responded by referring to suicide bombings and the deaths of Israelis.

The word intifada has, as I pointed out later in the same program<sup>2</sup>, been used to describe uprisings across history and not simply those of Palestinians against Israeli occupation. But if we look specifically at the two uprisings given the name intifada by Palestinians, the first between 1987 and 1993 and the second between 2000 and 2005, a number of points can be made about the associations of the word in those instances.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDj-aDbbQb0> “Gaza, Ukraine and the Public Space”, Q&A, from 17 minutes 35 seconds onwards.

<sup>2</sup> 27 minutes 10 seconds onwards.

The first intifada began as a popular uprising against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which given the overwhelming preponderance of Israeli military might was from the outset chiefly marked by shop and business closures, labour strikes and refusal to pay taxes to Israel or buy Israeli-made goods<sup>3</sup>.

The response to such measures by the so-called Civil Administration in the territories (an arm of the Israeli Ministry of Defence founded in 1981) was punitive and carceral. Amid rising concern over the lethal use of live ammunition to suppress protests, then Israeli defence minister Yitzhak Rabin declared in January 1988 that “the first priority is to use force, might, beatings”. Rabin also banned shipments of food into the territories until such time as merchants reopened their shops<sup>4</sup>.

The incursions of troops bent on strike-breaking and inflicting corporal punishment on demonstrators led to Palestinian violence of a type that has become symbolic of the first intifada: youths throwing stones at the occupation’s soldiers<sup>5</sup>.

The leadership of this uprising was formed from grassroots civilian organisations and came to be referred to variously in English as the Unified National Command (UNC) or Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU). From the outset its aim was to form economic and social structures parallel to the occupation’s, building a proto-state as an expression of Palestinian self-determination. Among its earliest demands (in its second communique) was for the municipal councils elected by Palestinians to be restored after the Civil Administration had summarily replaced them with councillors it appointed<sup>6</sup>.

A crucial point to be made at this juncture is that while some of those who formed the uprising’s leadership were members of Palestinian political movements, the Palestine Liberation Organisation and its various factions outside historical Palestine could not and did not control the UNLU<sup>7</sup>. Even more importantly, at no point was Hamas – which at this stage was only emerging as a movement – part of the UNLU. Indeed, as the intifada grew, Hamas took to issuing its own communiqués, separate from and at times conflicting with those of the intifada’s leadership<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Rigby, *Living the Intifada* (Zed Books, 1991), pp. 114-138.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4327780>

<sup>5</sup> <https://meanjin.com.au/latest/those-who-do-things-and-cry-and-those-who-do-things-and-laugh/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communique%C3%A9s\\_of\\_the\\_Unified\\_National\\_Leadership\\_of\\_the\\_Uprising](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communique%C3%A9s_of_the_Unified_National_Leadership_of_the_Uprising)

<sup>7</sup> Rigby, pp. 19-30.

<sup>8</sup> Rigby, pp. 35-38.

Suicide bombings – the type of violence which Karvelas and other commentators have sought to associate with the word intifada – were not a feature of the first intifada at any point from its onset in late 1987 until the end of 1992.

The first suicide bombing of the conflict was carried out by Hamas in April 1993, not as part of the intifada but as part of Hamas' escalating conflict with Israel after the abduction and murder of an Israeli border police officer led to the mass expulsion of the Hamas leadership into a no man's land in southern Lebanon known as Marj al-Zuhour<sup>9</sup>. It was there in December 1992 that Hamas first came into direct contact with members of the militant Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah, who had adopted suicide bombing as a tactic a decade earlier.

The first intifada subsided in the years 1991 to 1993 as hopes grew among the Palestinians living under occupation for a negotiated settlement to the conflict. Hamas, on the other hand, rejected a negotiated settlement at this time and escalated their attacks. But when hopes of a negotiated settlement collapsed in 2000, a second intifada began.

While it is true that this intifada saw more widespread use of suicide bomb attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian factions, it is also true that once again the intifada began as a civilian uprising, including demonstrations in Jerusalem and within the internationally recognised borders of Israel. The response of the Israeli authorities to these protests – some of them by their own citizens – was overwhelming armed force.

In Israel itself, 13 demonstrators – 12 of them Palestinians with Israeli citizenship – were shot dead by police in October 2000, at the very beginning of the intifada, leading ultimately to an Israeli commission of inquiry<sup>10</sup>. A month into the intifada, the third-most senior officer in Israel's military, Major-General Amos Malka, asked an officer for a report on how many of a certain type of bullet had been fired by Israeli forces in the occupied territories since the protests began<sup>11</sup>:

*“Kuperwasser got back to me with the number, 850,000 bullets. My figure was 1.3 million bullets in the West Bank and Gaza. This is a strategic figure that says that our soldiers are shooting and shooting and*

---

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.hrw.org/reports/lebanon\\_1993.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/reports/lebanon_1993.pdf);

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346861646\\_We\\_Were\\_Getting\\_Close\\_to\\_God\\_Not\\_Deportees\\_The\\_Expulsion\\_to\\_Marj\\_al-Zuhur\\_in\\_1992\\_as\\_a\\_Milestone\\_in\\_the\\_Rise\\_of\\_Hamas](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346861646_We_Were_Getting_Close_to_God_Not_Deportees_The_Expulsion_to_Marj_al-Zuhur_in_1992_as_a_Milestone_in_the_Rise_of_Hamas)

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Or\\_Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Or_Commission)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.counterpunch.org/2004/10/20/quot-did-you-two-squabble-quot/> and <https://www.miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=3973&CategoryId=5> for the context of this remark.

*shooting. I asked: “Is this what you intended in your preparations?” and he replied in the negative. I said: ‘Then the significance is that we are determining the height of the flames’.*”

As we saw in the Syrian uprising in 2011, where Syrian demonstrators in Daraya at first held up roses<sup>12</sup> and chanted “peaceful, peaceful”, only to be met with massive force, the state facing such protests can often decide that escalation into violence will work to its advantage, since state violence can be (and often is) normalised as underpinning “security” and “safety”, while any violence on the part of non-state actors is depicted as terrorism and seen as a threat to the established order.

During the second intifada, this escalation was more likely to produce armed clashes, and hence the impression of a war between two opposing nations, due to the creation of the Palestinian Authority with its own armed forces and the division of the occupied territories into areas with varying degrees of Israeli military control. This meant the media’s depiction of the second intifada was very different from that of the first. But both took place in the context of an occupying state and a stateless subject population<sup>13</sup>.

In neither the Syrian<sup>14</sup> nor the Palestinian nor the Lebanese<sup>15</sup> case was violence or terrorism inherent in the use of the term intifada. Rather in each case it was the subsequent reaction of the state that led to escalating violence.

### **The use of intifada by protesters**

It has been abundantly clear since the massacre at Bondi Beach that it is the understanding of the word intifada alluded to by Karvelas in May 2024 – one drawn primarily from media depictions of the second intifada which foreground Palestinian violence – that those seeking to prohibit or stigmatise the term wish to see inscribed in law. One commentator told protesters in Australia to examine the Wikipedia page relating to the second intifada<sup>16</sup> and pro-Israel figures in media and politics across the globe linked protesters’ use of the word to the attack<sup>17</sup> with such uniformity that it suggested a scripted campaign.

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://eaworldview.com/2018/10/roses-v-killing-syrias-peaceful-protesters-erased-by-the-assad-regime/>

<sup>13</sup> For more on this subject see Ghassan Andoni, “A comparative study of Intifada 1987 and Intifada 2000”, in *The New Intifada* (Verso, 2001), pp. 209-218.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.counterfire.org/article/syria-the-popular-intifada/>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/maher-mughrabi-4058311b\\_i-asked-my-syrian-friend-about-the-word-intifada-activity-7407914943683022848-aPJ0](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/maher-mughrabi-4058311b_i-asked-my-syrian-friend-about-the-word-intifada-activity-7407914943683022848-aPJ0)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/what-kind-of-australia-do-we-want-to-be-let-s-stop-dodging-the-hard-questions-20251217-p5noc3.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://x.com/caitoz/status/2001055324376363274>

But if we turn our attention to another script – that followed by those organising weekly mass protests in support of the rights of Palestinians – we will see a remarkable consistency across more than two years. In media coverage of more than 90 such protests drawing tens and at times hundreds of thousands of Australians, protests have appealed to Australian authorities and institutions to implement sanctions against Israel and to boycott and divest from businesses linked to Israel. They have also called for the implementation of existing international law and attention to the rulings of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court with regard to the conduct of Israel and individual office holders within the Israeli government.

Above all, the protesters have sought a ceasefire and committed themselves to non-violence. There is a clear distinction made between fighting for Palestinian rights in the context of a democratic polity, where moral suasion and political mobilisation may yield outcomes, and the fight for those rights under a decades-long military occupation that seeks to buttress the supremacy of a single ethnic group and is prepared to use extreme violence to do so.

When the word *intifada* is chanted against this backdrop, as it has been at weekly demonstrations from early on<sup>18</sup>, it has always been accompanied by a distinction between the Palestinian and Australian settings. Given the emphasis of the protests themselves on divestment and sanctions and ending violence, an interpretation of the word *intifada* that connects to its history of labour and tax strikes and civil disobedience is surely far more obvious than trying to give it a meaning which contradicts all the surrounding messaging and characterises it as incitement to violence<sup>19</sup>.

But in saying this we owe it to those killed and injured in the attack at Bondi Beach to ask: can a credible connection between the perpetrators and the use of the word *intifada* be made?

### **Islamic State and *intifada***

*"Though we'll probably learn more in the weeks ahead about the mind-set of Sunday's killers, it's reasonable to surmise that what they thought they were doing was 'globalizing the intifada'."*

– Bret Stephens, *The New York Times*, December 14, 2025<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/thousands-of-palestine-protesters-rally-in-cbd-20231021-p5ee09.html> and <https://www.smh.com.au/national/victoria/we-know-your-pain-thorpe-addresses-free-palestine-crowds-in-melbourne-20231126-p5emu0.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.crikey.com.au/2025/07/14/jillian-segal-antisemitism-envoy-plan-nasser-mashni/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/14/opinion/bondi-beach-shooting.html>

In a situation of heightened threat and fear, as an enlightened and democratic society we should recognise that reactions and even legislation based upon surmise – supposing that something is true without having evidence to confirm it – are most likely to end up being misguided and even harmful. Instead our actions should proceed from a basis in the known facts.

What we know is that Sajid Akram and his son Naveed placed the flag of Islamic State in their car<sup>21</sup> and that in a video they made prior to the attack, they appeared with the flag and appeared to recite passages from the Qur'an<sup>22</sup>. From early on in media coverage it has been accepted that the two men were inspired by the ideology of Islamic State and that a number of their associations had been linked to that group.

If we accept these facts as established, then the argument that calls to intifada by activists for the Palestinian cause in Australia or anywhere else inspired the actions of these attackers is unsustainable.

The word intifada does not occur anywhere in the Qur'an. It is not a religious term. But more importantly, given the position held by many Muslims that Islamic State's ideology is a perversion of Islamic principles and teaching – a point repeatedly emphasised by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in the immediate aftermath of the attack<sup>23</sup> – the word is also not used by the group in its own literature,<sup>24</sup> as major academic and governmental surveys demonstrate.

The Palestinian intifadas were driven by a secular nationalist ideology that prioritised Palestinian identity and held aloft the Palestinian flag. One of the most celebrated tax strikes of the first intifada – to which Israel responded with a six-week blockade – was held in the predominantly Christian Palestinian town of Beit Sahour<sup>25</sup>.

Islamic State is driven by an ideology that rejects the man-made boundaries and symbols of nationalist movements and insists upon the hegemony of a divinely approved caliphate. It appropriates the religious

---

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/bondi-shooter-s-indian-family-unaware-of-his-radical-mindset-police-20251217-p5nobj.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/alleged-terrorists-pictured-planning-bondi-attack-as-new-evidence-emerges-20251222-p5nplf.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/once-untouchable-albanese-ends-the-years-under-siege-20251219-p5np3z.html>;  
<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/bondi-shooting-live-updates-albanese-s-approval-rating-plummets-as-social-cohesion-frays-vigil-hosted-at-bondi-beach-marks-one-week-since-massacre-20251222-p5npdc.html>;  
<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/former-royal-commissioner-says-federal-inquiry-must-be-held-into-bondi-shooting-20251223-p5nppn.html>

<sup>24</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/book/36890/chapter-abstract/322112770>;  
<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1791&context=jss>;  
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-114shrg22714/html/CHRG-114shrg22714.htm>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-11-01-mn-77-story.html>

term “jihad fi sabil Allah” – “struggle in the path of God” – to describe its use of violence and the shahada, or Islamic creed, appears on its flag. Ironically given the current argument surrounding the use of the word intifada, it is precisely the fact that the word jihad and the words of the shahada have a wider religious use that it is accepted is not axiomatically connected to terrorism that has so far prevented them being prohibited by law<sup>26</sup>.

Since the Hamas attacks on Israel of October 7, 2023, the Israeli government has undertaken a propaganda campaign to impress on the global English-speaking public the idea that “Hamas is ISIS”<sup>27</sup> (an alternative acronym for Islamic State<sup>28</sup>), despite the distinctions between the outlook and the origins of the two Islamist movements being well known<sup>29</sup>.

Such distinctions are equally important in any consideration of the Bondi Beach atrocities. If it is indeed self-evident that the perpetrators were inspired by the ideology of Islamic State, then seeking to adduce a further source of inspiration in the use of the word intifada by pro-Palestinian protesters presents us with a contradiction in terms<sup>30</sup>. To introduce punitive curbs on freedom of speech and political expression that rest on such a contradiction would erode Australia’s democracy, discriminate against its citizenry and write misinformation into the statute book.

I humbly submit that those are outcomes we should strive to avoid.

**Maher Mughrabi**

**January 7, 2025**

**Should copies of any of the materials cited or further materials or information be required, I am happy to be contacted at [REDACTED]**

---

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/muslim-groups-alarmed-by-push-to-ban-flag-used-by-islamic-state-20230802-p5dt8q.html>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.usmcu.edu/Outreach/Marine-Corps-University-Press/MES-Publications/MES-Insights/Excommunicating-Hamas/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/world/would-a-daesh-by-any-other-name-smell-as-bad-20150226-13pafr.html>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/11/21/hamas-isis-are-not-the-same-00128107>

<sup>30</sup> During the Syrian conflict which began in 2011 and pitted an array of Islamist and nationalist movements against the Baathist Syrian regime and its allies, the only group to use the term intifada in identifying itself was a Palestinian nationalist movement fighting in support of the regime: <https://aymennjawad.org/2018/12/fatah-al-intifada-in-syria-interview>