

Iran link to Australian synagogue attack uncovered via funding trail, spy agency says

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Security services in Britain and Sweden warned last year that Tehran was using criminal proxies to carry out its violent attacks in those countries.

By Reuters and [Algemeiner](#)

Australia's intelligence agency traced the funding of hooded criminals who allegedly set fire to a Melbourne synagogue, linking the antisemitic attack to Iran, officials said, even as those charged with the crime were likely unaware Tehran was their puppet master.

A 20-year-old local man, Younes Ali Younes, appeared in Melbourne's Magistrates Court on Wednesday charged with the Dec. 6 arson attack on the Adass Israel synagogue and theft of a car.

He did not enter a plea and did not seek bail. His lawyer declined to comment to *Reuters*.

A day earlier Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Australia's intelligence agencies had shown the attack, and another in Sydney last year, were directed by the Iranian government, and expelled Tehran's ambassador, becoming the latest Western government to accuse Iran of carrying out hostile covert activities on its soil.

Security services in Britain and Sweden warned last year that Tehran was using criminal proxies to carry out its violent attacks in those countries, with London saying it had disrupted 20 Iran-linked plots since 2022.

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A dozen other countries have condemned what they called a surge in assassination, kidnapping, and harassment plots by Iranian intelligence services.

Australia's spy chief Mike Burgess said a series of "cut outs," an intelligence term for intermediaries, were used to conceal Iran's involvement in the attacks, and warned that it may have orchestrated others.

Security forces "have done rather extraordinary work to trace the source of the funding of these criminal elements who've been used as tools of the Iranian regime," Albanese told the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* on Tuesday.

The investigation worked backwards through payments made onshore and offshore to "petty and sometimes not so petty criminals," he said in parliament on Wednesday.

Albanese was briefed by the Australian Security Intelligence Organization on Monday on evidence of a "supply chain" that he said linked the attacks to offshore individuals and Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Australia's diplomats in Iran were discreetly told to leave, making it out of Iranian airspace just after midnight, he said.

A public announcement, with Albanese flanked by his spy chief and foreign and home affairs ministers, came on Tuesday, prompting accolades from Israel.

Iran's Foreign Ministry said it "absolutely rejected" Australia's accusation.

The turning point in the investigation came weeks earlier, as Australian Federal Police and the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) seized mobile phones and digital devices from suspects arrested in Victoria state over the synagogue attack – and highlighted a stolen blue Volkswagen Golf sedan used in unrelated attacks.

[Israeli FM blasts Dutch anti-Israel policies, may interfere with hostage deal](#)

CCTV footage of the night of Dec. 6 released by police shows three hooded figures unloading red jerry cans of fuel from the boot of the car, one of whom was wielding an axe, at the entrance of the synagogue and setting it alight before speeding away.

Victoria's Joint Counter Terrorism Team alleged Younes, 20, stole the car to carry out the attack and recklessly endangered lives by setting fire to the A\$20 million synagogue when people were inside, a charge sheet shows. No one was wounded in the attack.

A co-accused, Giovanni Laulu, 21, appeared in court last month on the same charges.

Police have referred to the sedan as a "communal crime car" linked to other attacks that were not politically motivated.

In a press conference on July 30 to announce seven search warrants had been executed and a man arrested over the synagogue attack, the Australian Federal Police's then deputy commissioner Krissy Barrett said it was politically motivated and involved offshore criminals.

"We suspect these criminals worked with criminal associates in Victoria to carry out the arson attack," she said, also confirming a major Australian crime figure deported to Iraq in 2023 was "one of our ongoing lines of inquiry."

Police were working with the Five Eyes intelligence network that also includes Britain, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand, she said.

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Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke told *ABC Radio* on Wednesday that those involved locally would not have necessarily known "who had started it."

"You have a series of intermediaries so that people performing different actions don't in fact know who is directing them or don't necessarily know who is directing them," he said.

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