

Josh Frydenberg blames ‘problem within Islam’ for terror attacks

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Josh Frydenberg lays a wreath at a makeshift memorial for the victims of the Paris terror attacks.

Cabinet minister Josh Frydenberg says “a problem within Islam” is to blame for recent terrorist attacks and extremist activity, as he warned the country was “not winning the battle of hearts and minds” of the Muslim community.

In a scathing attack against the Grand Mufti of Australia, Mr Frydenberg also declared the nation’s most senior Islamic cleric had made a “graphic” leadership failure after the violence in Paris.

While Mr Frydenberg praised “wonderful” Islamic community members like doctor Jamal Rifi, he said he wanted to hear more “moderate voices” in the conversation on terrorism. “We need to hear more of those voices because clearly we’re not winning the battle of hearts and minds and we do need to win them,” he said.

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“You have seen a graphic and dramatic increase in the number of extremist attacks. He pointed out that since September 2014 when Australia’s terrorist threat level went to “high” there had been a third of all terrorist related arrests — 26 — carried out since 2001.

Asked if he was concerned that the wider public debate in Australia had a “large element of denial in it when it comes to confronting the fact that this is a problem within Islam”, Mr Frydenberg replied: “I would say it is a problem within Islam. “The point about Islam is that this is a minority of extremists, and you could argue it’s even a small minority of extremists but it’s a significant minority of extremists and it does pose a challenge to our way of life in Australia.

“We need to acknowledge the significance of this threat, to acknowledge that religion is part of this problem, and thirdly, because this is the key point, we need to deal with it at a hard edge — with a military response — but we also need to deal with it with a counter narrative.”

The Grand Mufti, Ibrahim Abu Mohamed, drew criticism from government MPs when he and the Australian National Imams Council argued the violence in France was provoked by “causative factors” such as racism, Islamophobia, security laws and foreign policy decisions.

He then “unequivocally condemned all forms of terrorist violence” following [calls by senior Liberal ministers to clarify the comment](#), claiming it had been misinterpreted and he never intended to provide “justification for these acts of terrorism”.

But Mr Frydenberg, the Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia who was in Paris after the attacks, said the Grand Mufti’s secondary comments were merely a “cover up” of his “instinctive reaction” to the terrorism. “The Grand Mufti failed in his leadership with his statement,” Mr Frydenberg said on Sky News’s Australian Agenda program.

“He sought to cover that up subsequently but it was a graphic failure and he has more of a responsibility not only to the Muslim community but to the community at large because all of our security is at risk. “His first reaction was his instinctive reaction. You only make a clarification after you realise the response to your first comment. That was the first comment that I’m sure many in the Muslim community heard and certainly that’s what the rest of Australia heard.”

As he described defeating Islamic State as the “greatest challenge of our generation”, Mr Frydenberg said there would have to be “other strategies” implemented by the US-led coalition in Syria and Iraq in order to destroy the terrorist group.

It comes after former prime minister [Tony Abbott warned that a reluctance to accept military casualties abroad “could easily lead to more civilian casualties at home”](#) and argued the government should be prepared to do more to defeat IS. “You can be successful from the air but there will have to be other strategies over time but that will be talked about,” he said.

“I’ll leave that to the experts on the National Security Committee to decide as to how we go about doing that. “It’s very clear that what is happening in Syria and Iraq is spreading terrorism across the globe and we’re feeling it in Australia and we cannot afford to have another failed state like Afghanistan was when it became the headquarters for global terrorism.”

Mr Frydenberg declined to say whether he thought the Grand Mufti should resign but urged him to “show greater leadership”.



Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohamed, Mufti of Australia.