

## NATIONAL SECURITY STATEMENT

24 November 2015, Parliament House, Canberra

Prime Minister

Subjects: Paris; ISIL; Russian airliner; intelligence; threat advisory system; counter-terrorism; multiculturalism

Mr Speaker,

When innocent people are dying at the hands of violent extremists, no matter where in the world this is happening, hard questions are asked of societies like our own -- hard questions for which there are no easy answers. For all freedom-loving nations, the message could not be clearer: if we want to preserve the values that underpin our open, democratic societies, we will have to work resolutely with each other to defend and protect the freedoms we hold dear.

Following the recent mass killings of innocent civilians in Paris and around the world, I take this opportunity to update the House on Australia's global, regional and domestic policies to respond to terrorist attacks.

Let me start by once again expressing my condolences to all the victims. Our hearts go out to the families who have lost their loved ones and to those recovering from their injuries. We should grieve and we should be angry.

But we must not let grief or anger cloud our judgment. Our response must be as clear eyed and strategic as it is determined. This is not a time for gestures or machismo.

Calm, clinical, professional, effective. That's how we defeat this menace.

The threat from ISIL is a global problem that must be addressed at its source, in the Middle East, by ensuring our involvement in coalition efforts in Syria and Iraq is resolute and effective. ISIL aims to overthrow all the existing governments in Muslim societies, and beyond. It regards as apostates any who will not submit to its own perverted view of Islam.

Strategically, ISIL wants to create division by fomenting resentment between non-Muslim populations and Muslims. ISIL emerged as an extremist, terrorist group out of Al Qaeda in Iraq and Syria. Their territorial gains in Syria and Iraq have fed into their narrative of conquest.

By most measures, however, ISIL is in a fundamentally weak position. We must not be fooled by its hype. Its ideology is archaic, but its use of the Internet is very modern. ISIL has many more smartphones than guns, more twitter accounts than fighters.

It does not command broad-based legitimacy even in those areas under its direct control. It is encircled by hostile forces. It is under military pressure.

And, through its depraved actions, ISIL has strengthened the resolve of the global community, including Russia, to defeat it. The 60 nation-strong coalition's objective is to disrupt, degrade and ultimately to defeat ISIL. This will require a patient, painstaking full spectrum strategy. Not just military, but financial, diplomatic and political.

This involves a combination of air strikes in both Syria and Iraq and support and training for Iraq's army. Australia's contribution to coalition forces on the ground in Iraq is second only to that of the United States and large relative to our population and proximity to the conflict.

Larger, for example, than any European nation, larger than Canada or any of the neighbouring Arab States. We have six FA-18s involved in missions in that theatre, with 240 personnel in the air task group, 90 special forces advisers, and around 300 soldiers training the Iraqi army at Taji.

The special forces are authorised by our Government to advise and assist Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service in the field at headquarters level. However the Government of Iraq has not consented to any of our defence forces being deployed outside the wire on ground combat operations. The Government of Iraq believes that large scale Western troop operations in its country would be counterproductive.

Australia's servicemen and women are making a significant contribution to the Coalition campaign and we will continue to support our allies as our strategies evolve in what is likely to be an extended campaign. In Iraq, ISIL's momentum has been halted.

Its capabilities degraded. Kurdish and Iraqi forces have won back territory with coalition support.

I have to report to the House that the consensus of the leaders I met at the G20, at APEC and at the East Asia Summit is that there is no support currently for a large US-led Western army to attempt to conquer and hold ISIL-controlled areas. In Syria, the broader conflict and the absence of a central government that the West can work with makes action against ISIL even more complicated.

Following the destruction of the Russian airliner over the Sinai and the Paris attack, Russia and France have raised their operational tempo against ISIL.

Ultimately a political solution is needed in Syria. Only this would allow attention to turn more fully to eliminating ISIL as a military force. We support the negotiations in Vienna to find a pathway to a political resolution in Syria.

Under the circumstances I have outlined, and mindful that Australia has a range of security priorities across the globe and in our own region, there are currently no plans for a significant change in the level or the nature of Australia's military commitment in Iraq and Syria.

No such change has been sought by our allies - if one were we would of course carefully consider it. We will always proceed on the basis of the considered advice of our military professionals in the Australian Defence Force, just as we rely on the advice of our counter-terrorism experts domestically.

Current advice to the Government is that the unilateral deployment of Australian combat troops on the ground in Iraq or Syria is not feasible or practical. As a supplement to our already significant military commitment, our interests – and those of the countries and people in the region – are served by supporting stability in countries neighbouring Iraq and Syria, particularly Jordan. We will continue to look for ways to further strengthen cooperation with Jordan.

The rise of ISIL and the conflict in Syria have increased the threat environment in Southeast Asia. I have discussed this issue at the East Asia Summit and in depth with the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.

We are working more closely than ever to share intelligence and counter messaging strategies.

From an Australian perspective, we see a real risk that terrorist groups in the region might be inspired by attacks such as we have seen in Ankara, Beirut, Bamako and Paris and we are very mindful of the fact that hundreds of thousands of Australians visit Southeast Asia every year, for business, study or holidays.

Just as Australia cannot fight any military conflict against ISIL unilaterally, we cannot counter violent extremism alone, particularly online. In my recent discussions with regional colleagues at the East Asia Summit and APEC I further committed Australia as a leading partner in this area.

We look forward to supporting the new Malaysian counter messaging centre and to further cooperation with Indonesia, beginning with the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, who is also the Minister assisting me on Counter Terrorism, shortly taking up an offer to visit Indonesia in December to hold discussions focused on furthering our countering terrorism and violent extremism efforts in the region.

The Paris attacks demonstrate ISIL has an ability to launch concerted attacks in Western cities. It was also a reminder that, while coordinated, there is not much sophisticated planning required for armed fanatics to slaughter unarmed civilians with military assault rifles and suicide vests.

As Prime Minister, and speaking on behalf of the heads of ASIO and the AFP, as well as the Chief of the Defence Force, I want Australians to be aware that a terrorist incident on our soil remains likely but also that Australians should be reassured our security agencies are working diligently and expertly to prevent that happening.

In addition to being the most successful multicultural society in the world, Australia, as an island continent, has some natural advantages over Europe, which is currently facing the uncontrolled movement of hundreds of thousands of people.

Unlike the Europeans we are in control of our borders. For example, people who successfully enter Greece are moving at will throughout much of the EU.

We are an island nation. The people smugglers' business model has been broken. The boats have been stopped.

We also have very strong gun laws that make access to weapons more difficult and play a vital role in keeping our public safe.

As your Prime Minister my highest duty, and that of my government, is to keep Australians safe. We cannot eliminate entirely the risk of terrorism any more than we can eliminate the risk of any serious crime. But we can mitigate it. We will continue to thwart and frustrate many attacks before they occur.

We are examining closely the implications of the Paris attacks for our own domestic arrangements. I am receiving updated intelligence on this every day. We are working more closely than ever with our European partners.

Public safety is the highest priority. And a major part of this is to be as open and transparent with Australians as possible about both the threat and what everyone can do to help.

In September last year, the alert level was raised to HIGH, and it has remained there ever since. We have subsequently seen terror attacks against police officers in Melbourne, the Sydney Siege and the murder of a police worker in Parramatta by a radicalised young man.

The tempo of our domestic counter terrorism efforts has increased and our capabilities have been tested. Since September 2014, 26 people have been charged as a result of 10 counter terrorism operations around Australia. That's more than one-third of all terrorism related charges since 2001. Counter Terrorism Units at our airports are also stopping people leaving for, and returning from, the conflict zone.

The fact that there has to date been no mass casualty attack owes much to the vigilance of our security agencies. ASIO and the Federal Police have advised me that there is no evidence that the recent attacks, including Paris, will materially affect the threat level in Australia but we are constantly on watch for any evolving or emerging threats.

The Council of Australian Governments agreed in July to develop a new threat advisory system to make it clearer to the public what our security experts believe to be the current threat from terrorism. The new framework, recommended by ASIO, has been subject to extensive consultation and review. I can inform the House that the National Threat Assessment Centre (or NTAC) that sits within ASIO will this week transition to the new National Terrorism Threat Advisory System. The new system will provide the public with more information on the nature of the threat we are facing. The adoption of a five-tiered threat system will also provide ASIO with greater flexibility in determining threat levels, reflecting the need to adapt to an evolving security environment.

Rapid developments in communications technology present both opportunities and challenges for our agencies; modern messaging and voice applications are generally encrypted in transit. Human intelligence, relationships with communities, are more important than ever.

I have therefore asked that ASIO and other relevant agencies work with our international intelligence partners to address the challenge of monitoring terrorist groups in this new environment.

I will be meeting with my State and Territory colleagues next month. Co-operation between all tiers of government and state and federal agencies is vital in the counter-terrorism effort. At COAG on December 11, I will continue our discussions with Premiers on how to best counter violent extremism. I will raise with them initiatives under consideration to address the problem of radicalisation in prisons.

I have also asked that our law enforcement agencies test their responses to a mass casualty attack. Such an attack leaves little, if any, room for negotiation. This work is in addition to the extensive reform of our national security laws which has already seen the introduction of five tranches of legislation. These laws ensure our agencies have all the tools required in the effort to keep us safe. Within Australia, our Counter-Terrorism Strategy calls for partnerships between all levels of government, community and the private sector.

It emphasises the need to limit the spread and influence of violent extremist ideas. The root cause of the current threat we face is a perverted strain of Islamist extremist ideology. Not all extremism ends in violence but all politically motivated violence begins with extremist ideology.

Any war with ISIL is not just one in a military sense, but also a war of ideas. Through their extensive use of social media, they seek the maximum propaganda advantage from any territorial gains as cover for their fundamental military weakness and the barbaric nature of their mindset.

The Government's investment in Countering Violent Extremism programs has tripled over the past four years to more than \$40 million.

The Government's approach has four tiers:

- maintaining a strong, multicultural society
- helping institutions and sectors of our community combat violent extremist ideology where it emerges
- challenging and undermining the appeal of terrorist propaganda, especially online, and
- intervening to divert individuals away from their violent extremist views.

Importantly, governments cannot win this battle alone. Community leaders and groups have great responsibility both in denouncing violent extremism and teaching unity in diversity, mutual respect instead of hatred.

The condemnation of ISIL and the promotion of authentic, modern and tolerant Islam by the leaders of big majority Muslim nations - including Indonesia, Turkey and Malaysia - has been especially important.

To this end, I thank all those Muslim groups and leaders who made statements denouncing the Paris attacks. A strong and trusting relationship between the government and communities is crucial to

ensuring the right messages reach the hearts and minds of those who might be vulnerable to the propaganda of terror groups.

Part of the message is promoting the truth that Australia not only does its part in the military coalition to defeat ISIL but in the humanitarian cause. Australia has committed to accepting over four years an additional 12,000 people who have fled the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Australia has also provided around \$230 million in humanitarian assistance since 2011 to support Syrians and Iraqis affected by the conflict.

This is a significant humanitarian initiative by Australians. We have one of the strongest records of any nation for resettling people facing persecution in their homelands. Since the end of World War Two, Australia has resettled more than 825,000 refugees and others in humanitarian need. The focus of the 12,000 intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees is on persecuted minorities and those assessed as being most vulnerable - women, children and families with the least prospect of returning to their homes. All applications are rigorously assessed on an individual basis – in line with Australia's existing refugee and humanitarian policies. Our national security interest is always the first and abiding priority. Strict security, health and character checks will not be compromised.

In Iraq and Syria, ISIL must be defeated militarily - enabled by a durable political settlement in both countries that will reduce the capacity of the extremists to recruit and mobilise. The threat of ISIL-inspired terrorism must be addressed through domestic, regional and global counter-terrorism efforts; as an ideological threat, it needs to be confronted globally.

There are no quick fixes. We will redouble our efforts in support of domestic and regional counter-terrorism efforts.

Across the region, our engagement will intensify, pursuing collective counter-terrorism objectives by better prioritising and coordinating with regional partners.

We will defeat these terrorists. And the strongest weapons we bring to this battle are ourselves, our values, our way of life. Our unity mocks their attempts to divide us. Our freedom under law mocks their cruel tyranny. Our mutual respect mocks their bitter intolerance. And the strength of our free people will see off these thugs and tyrants as it has seen off so many of their kind before.