

Turnbull -Press Conference Manila 18/11/15

Press Conference

18th November 2015 | [Comments](#) | [Transcripts](#)

E&OE...

PRIME MINISTER:

We've been a very sad little party here in Manila, to learn of the fires in Esperance in Western Australia and of four deaths. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who've lost their loved ones in this bushfire and our great admiration is with the firefighters and the SES of Western Australia as they battle against the fires.

Summer is a, can be a very challenging and dangerous time in Australia, as we know, and this is a very tragic event, four lives lost in this fire in Esperance.

So as I said, the Federal Government is committed to providing the support that it does in these circumstances. I've spoken to the Justice Minister Michael Keenan who's responsible for emergency response and I've also spoken to the Premier of Western Australia, Colin Barnett and given them both, both Western Australians of course, our sympathy, but our solidarity as well.

JOURNALIST:

Did Mr Barnett seek any federally coordinated assistance?

PRIME MINISTER:

At this stage, Colin said that he's keeping federal agencies briefed of course but at this stage there is not a need for a federal, for the involvement of federal agencies as such, but we are obviously ready to provide assistance whenever required.

JOURNALIST:

On APEC matters, you had a meeting with the President last night and spoke about being on the same page with strategy in the Middle East. Was there no critical examination of the mission and the success or failure of the last 12 months?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well as you know, we spoke for about an hour and a half so we had a very lengthy discussion of the strategy and a very lengthy analysis of it in the course of that discussion. The President's position on the and this is cutting straight to the chase, is as he has stated publicly – as he said he could send 50,000 marines into Syria and they would be able to retake Raqqa and Mosul of course in Iraq and they could achieve that success but what happens after that and when they come home?

His view... and I have to say this is the view of all of the countries' leaders with whom I spoke in Turkey, all of them. His view is that the presence of foreign armies in that theatre at the present time would be counterproductive given the lessons of history, relatively recent history.

The United States is carefully calibrating the level of its response with a view to it being effective.

The critical thing is the outcome of what you do and the plainly a political settlement is the objective, it is enormously difficult you know the enmities run very deep. But plainly, when you look at Daesh or ISIL, its base is a Sunni population that has felt disenfranchised or oppressed in Syria - and with very good reason and also has felt left out of the new government in Iraq.

And plainly, a political settlement that brings, that is inclusive of the various groups in Syria would, were that strategy to be effective, to be successful, that process of inclusion, it would of course deprive Daesh of its support base in that, within that country. So the military dimension is of course, extremely important and it is being, the air war as you've seen, is being escalated. But the solution longer term will restore stability to Syria and that will enable refugees to go home to their homes, which is where they want to go, has to be essentially a political one.

JOURNALIST:

With the intensity of that campaign being increased Prime Minister, we've seen France and now Russia and America talking about added momentum, does that mean that the intensity of Australia's

involvement is increased and does that not make us a bigger target for the sort of Paris attacks being a member of this coalition now intensifying the airstrikes?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I think all Western countries are targets. You can go all through all of these various terrorist incidents some of them claim to be related to particular military activities others are simply a political assault on our way of life an attempt to make a political, religious political attack on our way of life.

I think the, in terms of the military response we have the second largest military commitment, from foreign countries, in that area after the United States as the President acknowledged yesterday and we of course will work very closely and intensely with the United States as that response evolves. I'd have to say that the President and I had a very candid and deep analytical discussion of the nature of the problem.

I think we both have a good understanding of each others thinking on the area and in terms of the analysis of the nature of the problem, the excruciatingly difficult problem that we have to solve, we've got very, the same, very cleared eyed view of it.

JOURNALIST:

Where are the negotiations at over the French request for Australia to send a Navy frigate to the Persian Gulf?

PRIME MINISTER:

We are considering all of those requests, considering that request. As you know we have had a naval presence in the Persian Gulf for some time regularly involved principally in the, you know anti-piracy and smuggling campaign there. But we will obviously take all of these requests into account. We are working very closely, I think everyone should be assured that the nations of the world, in particular the nations that work together most closely, our allies if you like, our close friends and allies, are working very, very closely. The cooperation, the dialogue, the conversations have never been as close as they are today.

JOURNALIST:

You spoke with Vladimir Putin a couple of days ago.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

JOURNALIST:

Do you get the sense that Russia is looking to be more cooperative?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the Russian President has a, he has, the purpose of my discussion with him was firstly to request again Russia's cooperation in ensuring that the criminal investigation process into the shooting down of MH17 is completed and that the prosecution is undertaken. So I raised that matter with him. In terms of Syria which we spoke about at some length, I was very interested to understand his perspective on it. He also believes a political settlement is required. He has a view as to how that can be achieved as I think all parties do.

But the, as I said the challenge [inaudible]. I mean where Syria, in an ideal world would end up, if you like, is with a regime or a form of government that involved power sharing between the various groups. Obviously the example of Lebanon is one that springs to mind you know given its proximity – where there is representation for people for the various religious groups. That's very important.

How that is reflected in terms of the security forces is another difficult question. The reality is that trust is broken down and that some degree of trust has to be re-established slowly and then over time, because plainly the position is catastrophic. As you know this is the, it's described as the biggest humanitarian disaster since the Second World War.

This is certainly an enormous one. I mean there are 2.5 million refugees living in Turkey alone, let alone the numbers in Jordan and in other countries. So a resolution along those lines is what needs to be achieved. But of course, there has to be a commitment to come to some agreement and of course

once and that is one of the keys in undermining and moving in effect the support that Daesh has, because they are preying on and taking advantage of the deep unhappiness of large parts of the Sunni population in both Syria and Iraq.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister there's a debate back home about the response of the Grand Mufti to the Paris attacks. Have you had a look at that debate back home? What are your thoughts about the way he responded?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well all I can say is that I've been paying a lot of attention to the very strong responses of the leaders of some of the largest Muslim countries in the world. We've seen the very strong statement that President Widodo made in utterly rejecting this Daesh terrorism and pointing out that this is not Islam. They do not speak for Islam.

They are not speaking for God. They are godless, they defame religion, they are blasphemers. And his denunciation of Daesh was echoed to the letter by President Erdogan of Turkey our host at the G20, by Prime Minister Najib of Malaysia and of course by the King of Saudi Arabia himself who was there at the G20.

Now as for the Grand Mufti I understand, I've seen the controversy reported in the press, I've noted also that he has clarified that initial statement and that seems to have cleared up the issue but I don't want to, while I'm here in Manila, engage in a textual debate, but I am pleased to see his condemnation of Daesh, and of that terrorist attack, has been made very clear in his subsequent remarks.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Turnbull you have talked about power sharing in Syria as part of the transition, you've been in the room with him now and you've been in meetings...

PRIME MINISTER:

In the room with who?

JOURNALIST:

...with Vladimir Putin now.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes I have.

JOURNALIST:

...and with other world leaders over the last few days. What's your real world scenario about whether or not Putin will step back from Assad, because without him stepping back there is no power sharing? And also would Australia conduct freedom of navigation exercises or participate with America in freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well in terms of the second part of your question, our position is that we believe that we have no claims in the South China South Sea; we believe that disputes should be settled in accordance with international law, and that international law, including the law of the sea, should be respected. We believe it is in everybody's interest, including China's, including obviously neighbouring countries like the Philippines who's President I just met with. It's in everybody's interests for these matters to be resolved peacefully, consensually and in accordance with the rule of law. Now turning to the question...

JOURNALIST:

But will Australia participate, Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER:

We will consider our position in respect of all of these matters with great care but as to the manner in which we respond to this issue and you've raised the issue of freedom of navigation, we believe in freedom of navigation, obviously, that is one of the objectives. But the way in which we deal with the

issue in terms of our discussion with China and the United States, we will manage that in a very thoughtful and measured way that is designed to achieve the outcome. The test of every action by government, whether it is in the military sphere, whether it is in the diplomatic sphere, whether it is in the economic sphere domestically is the outcome. Is what you are doing calculated to achieve the outcome that you want and that is why we address these things in a very careful way.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, will there be any change to Australia's approach to taking in refugees from the Middle East, given what has happened in Paris? And are you still leaving open the option of increasing that number of 12,000?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, the options are open but we don't have any plans to increase it from 12,000. But, let me make a couple of observations about the refugee intake. Firstly, Australia has a very long and proud history of taking in refugees. We have a very substantial humanitarian program, we always have done.

We, because of tradition, of history, and no doubt because of our distance from the northern hemisphere, when we bring in refugees they come in almost invariably to settle. So, we put a lot of effort into the settlement program. It is in Turkey, for example, there are 2.5 million Syrian refugees and they are there literally waiting to go home when peace is restored, they are not planning to live in Turkey for the rest of their lives and the Turks certainly aren't planning on them to do so.

So, when we bring in refugees, they are coming to Australia almost invariably for a new home. So, our settlement services are very important and that takes a lot of resources, so it is important that we take no more refugees than we are able to satisfactorily settle, and settle well. So there are constraints on us, people sometimes simplistically say Australia is a big country, there is no limit to how many you can take, well, there is. We have got to make sure that they are settled well.

Now, in terms of the question of the security dimension, all immigrants to Australia, we check all immigrants to Australia and in particular through the humanitarian stream, coming from theatres like Syria or the Middle East, the security checks are very extensive. Now, this is the, and they have always been so, and they remain so. There's great care gone into that, we saw the Director General of ASIO talking about that on television just the other night. I'd also remind you of what the federal police Commissioner, Andrew Colvin, observed a few days ago, that historically, individuals within Australia who have been guilty of involvement in terrorist activities have been second or third generation Australians.

The involvement of refugees who come to Australia has been, it is not entirely absent but it has been rare, by comparison. The issues are with, if you like, Aussie, you know, home-grown Aussies, and that is, so I think that is very important to understand that as well. But we take nothing for granted, where there is no complacency and the keenest attention is paid to the security checks on all of the, even people that come in through the humanitarian program, including the 12,000 that will come from Syria.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think that domestic politics in TPP countries could kill that deal off?

PRIME MINISTER:

Okay, now, I am glad you raised trade because this is really what a APEC is all about. This is the Asia-Pacific economic community, as I said in my remarks after the meeting with the President of the Philippines, the best way that countries, and firms, companies for that matter, can respond to the nature of the global economic environment, which is one of rapid change, is to be as agile and flexible as they can be. And that means open markets domestically, free markets, it means more trade.

So, the greater freedom there is, the more ability there is for individuals and governments and firms to respond, so yes, trade is absolutely critical. Now the TPP is a huge step, you know 12 nations and it is right here in the most exciting part of the world. We are here, we are right here, despite the challenges we have from terrorism, despite other challenges we have, we are nonetheless living in the most the most exciting times in human history.

JOURNALIST:

But are you worried that this deal could...?

PRIME MINISTER:

... and the TPP is a very big part of that, just as the ChAFTA is and the Korean Free Trade Agreement, the Japanese Free Trade Agreement is.

Now, you've asked me about whether the TPP will be accepted, it is, the principal challenge I would see is its ratification by the U.S. Congress. The President is optimistic about it being passed by the Congress, but that is, that seems to me to be the major domestic obstacle.

JOURNALIST:

Of the 12 nations?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yeah, of the 12 nations, yeah, among the 12 nations. Across-the-board, in so far as there have been domestic concerns about the TPP, they appear to have been most strongly expressed in the United States. So, that's President Obama's challenge, we obviously encourage all those legislators in Washington to give the TPP their support, but I imagine they will be taking the advice of their own constituents rather than foreign governments.

Okay, thank you, nothing else?

JOURNALIST:

Can we get your comments on Jonah Lomu?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, well, thank you for asking me about Jonah Lomu. That is, I will be seeing John Key tonight and I will pass on to him our condolences. A great, one of the greatest rugby greats, and so sad that he died so young.

JOURNALIST:

Can I ask you, just on Syria Prime Minister, your call for some power-sharing there, how open are you to extending that to include some of the Sunni elements that are part of or linked to Daesh?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, this is, you know, in Australia we are, what you need, what we need there is a political settlement. And it is clear that the principal determinants of, the people that will decide who can be in or out are going to be the people in Syria. You know the dictating terms from foreign capitals is unlikely to be successful. So, clearly the, as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, said in Turkey, and I endorse what he said, the approach of all the parties to a resolution in Syria has to be one undertaken in the spirit of compromise, and in a spirit of pragmatism.

I mean, ultimately, there have been hundreds of thousands of people killed, there have been millions of people driven out of their homes, it is a complete catastrophe as we know. What is needed is a pragmatic settlement, as quickly as possible. There needs to be a ceasefire as has been asked for in Vienna, and there needs to then be a power-sharing deal, as I mentioned, you know the example of Lebanon is given, I mean, that obviously has had its imperfections as well. But nonetheless, there needs to be a power-sharing deal and you know whatever works to get that done is what I believe the parties will undertake.

You can sense in the room in, you could sense in the room in Antalya, there is a feeling of real urgency that there has to be a pragmatic resolution. This has gone on, this has gone on for far too long and the military measures are important, are absolutely critically important. The degradation and ultimately the defeat of Daesh is critical. But if the question is when will peace, stability, return to Syria, when will people be able to go home? That will be when there is a political resolution, and that's what's needed now. On that note, I should leave. I've got to go and see the present of Mexico.