

ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT - NATIONAL SECURITY UPDATE ON COUNTER TERRORISM

23rd November 2016 | [0 Comments](#) | [Transcripts](#)

E&OE...

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you Mr Speaker.

I returned yesterday from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Summit in Peru. While APEC is a meeting where issues of trade and economic integration dominate, all of the leaders of economies, great and small, understand the threat that terrorism poses to our security and indeed to the relative peace in our region, which has itself been the foundation for the economic growth on which our futures, and those of our children, depend.

In discussions with the leaders of the United States, China, Canada, Malaysia, the Philippines, Japan and others - co-operation on counter terrorism was a key focus of attention. Few places in the world are unaffected by terrorism - whether it is returning foreign fighters or home-grown terrorists.

Today, I assure the House and the Australian people of my Government's steadfast commitment to ensuring Australians remain safe, secure, and free.

Mr Speaker, Australia's starting point is a stronger foundation than most other nations. Our strengths are our freedom, our diversity, our security. These attributes are not mutually exclusive; rather they are mutually reinforcing.

Security is a prerequisite to the trust and confidence that allows a diverse and free society to flourish. But we do face real challenges. And we must be open to them, and learn lessons from events at home and abroad, in order to deal with them. We must be clear-eyed and hard headed as we assess the evolving threat. There is no bliss in ignorance, and no comfort in complacency.

Mr Speaker, recent terror attacks in Nice, Baghdad, Brussels, Quetta, Orlando, Kabul, Jakarta and elsewhere, remind us that terrorism is a global challenge that affects us all. That's why a critical part of our strategy is to engage internationally and to contribute to global counter-terrorism efforts. Nowhere is this engagement more important than in South East Asia.

This region and its people are part of the fabric that shapes and defines the Australian community and our national identity. But the rising influence in our region of terrorist organisations, such as ISIL or Daesh, demands the attention and the action of Australia and its neighbours. Daesh's insidious influence was demonstrated by terrorist attacks in Jakarta on 14 January, and again in the attack on Indonesian police on the outskirts of Jakarta on 20 October.

As I told the House in my Counter Terrorism update on 1 September, the next mass casualty attack on Australian victims could be somewhere in South East Asia, where Daesh propaganda has galvanised existing networks of extremists, preyed on vulnerable young people and attracted new recruits. In response, my Government, alongside key partners in our region, is at the forefront of regional efforts to combat terrorism and counter the destructive narratives of violent Islamist extremism.

No one country can fight terrorism on its own. And over the past decade, we have built closer diplomatic and security relationships with our neighbours, including Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.

So Mr Speaker, it is in this context that we continue to contribute to the global fight against Daesh and other terrorist organisations. Daesh's control of territory and resources in Iraq and Syria boosts its ability to promote virulently anti-western ideology and inspire terrorist attacks internationally. Only last week we saw Daesh's latest propaganda, which used footage of Australian locations and Australian icons in a call for further attacks against the West.

Daesh will continue doing this in an attempt to intimidate us.

But they will not succeed. My Government and our agencies are committed to decisive action to combat and defeat Daesh through the United States-led coalition in the Middle East. Mr Speaker, in this fight, as with virtually every other significant security challenge facing our country, our Alliance with the United States is the foundation of our national security architecture.

Australia's trusted solidarity with the United States is based on mutual respect - we and we alone determine whether and how our forces are put in harm's way - but the closeness of our relationship ensures that no ally has more influence than we do. That influence is one which is highly valued now and in the future, as President Obama reminded us in Lima on Sunday.

Those who assert that our ties and our Alliance with the United States should be reconsidered, fail to recognise that a strong, trusted, forthright Australia is a powerful force for good whether it is on the fields of conflict or in the corridors of power in Washington.

The fact is that the United States remains our most important strategic and defence ally. This was on display only last week when I took part in the first Australian flight of the new P-8A Poseidon aircraft - developed between Australia and the United States Navy.

And in relation to counter-terrorism cooperation, our collaborative screening of refugees from the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts has identified 22 persons of national security concern.

Mr Speaker, right now, Iraqi defence forces, including units trained by the Australian Army, are making real progress in the liberation of Mosul from Daesh. The contribution of the ADF to the defence of Iraq, working with the United States and other Coalition forces, has been critically important - as has been acknowledged by President Obama and indeed by the Prime Minister of Iraq itself.

Daesh is under increasing pressure. It is losing territory, finance and fighters. Its so called caliphate and its illusion of invincibility is being shattered. And as Daesh loses ground, many hundreds of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq may seek to return to their countries of origin, including in our region - especially Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines as well as Australia itself.

Our law enforcement and security agencies have long been prepared for this challenge and are constantly monitoring for any shift in the threat environment ahead. Indeed we have seen in the recent weeks three individuals charged with foreign incursion offences. These latest arrests bring to 55 the number of people charged from 24 counter-terrorism operations around Australia since September 2014. The acts of terror we have witnessed demonstrate that the international security environment has flow-on effects for Australia's domestic threat environment.

The Director-General of Security has informed me that he has reviewed the National Terrorism Threat Level and that it remains unchanged at probable. We have been at this elevated level of threat since September 2014, in which time we have experienced four attacks and eleven successful major disruptions. And despite Daesh's heavy territorial losses in Iraq and Syria, we do not expect this threat to diminish for some time. If anything, the threat has become more dispersed and new challenges are emerging.

Increasingly widespread use of encrypted communication platforms makes the detection and interception of terrorist communications far more difficult. Human intelligence, and the strong relationships and trust on which it depends, are more important than ever.

Around the world, the increase of attacks by lone actors, who are by their very nature, so much harder to detect, presents new challenges for disruption and deterrence by our security and law enforcement agencies. The truck attack in Nice highlighted just how devastating an attack by a single perpetrator can be.

Mr Speaker, to ensure Australia is best placed to respond to the evolving global threat environment, and immediately following the Nice attack, in July I requested the Commonwealth's Counter-Terrorism Coordinator to review the lessons from recent terrorist attacks overseas and specifically the threat from lone actors. While the full review will remain classified, I am pleased to be able to report it found Australia already has robust legislative, policy, and operational arrangements in place to protect us from those threats. However, it also identified some areas requiring further work. A key finding was the need to continue working on how to best protect public places. I can confirm that in response to the Review, we have committed, as a priority, to develop a national strategy for places of mass gathering, including a nationally consistent approach to risk assessment for such places. The Review also confirmed there are a diverse range of factors that could make someone vulnerable to radicalisation, from mental health issues to a history of criminality.

The Review also confirmed, there found that such factors might increase the vulnerability of lone actors to the propaganda of terrorist organisations offering them, some perverse sense of inclusion.

We need to better support our frontline professionals including health professionals, to respond to Australians who may be at risk of radicalising towards violent extremism.

I have therefore asked our agencies, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Minister Assisting me on Counter-Terrorism, to work with the states and territories, peak bodies, international partners and the community, to identify what more can be done in this area to help both carers and patients, taking great care we do not stigmatise some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

In relation to the nexus between criminality and terrorism, a pilot of the National Criminal Intelligence System - now underway in the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission - will allow us to better understand this correlation and identify threats.

Mr Speaker, it is clear from the Review that our international partners face very similar challenges.

One of the key issues some international partners are addressing is the role played by their defence forces in domestic counter-terrorism arrangements. In Australia, a review is already underway to examine the support Defence provides to domestic counter terrorism operations, looking at both the legislative framework and the Australian Defence Force posture and capability in view of the current threat environment.

Mr Speaker, the evolution of terrorism since 9/11, the adaptability of terrorist groups like Daesh and the insidious allure this group has held for too many often very young and vulnerable Australians, should put each and every one of us in this House in no doubt, that to defeat them we also must adapt. And it has been the Coalition Government that has acted proactively to the challenge of the threat posed by Daesh.

We have increased our counter-terrorism funding by \$1.5 billion since September 2014. Our counter-terrorism laws are designed to be the most robust and proportionate response possible in the current threat environment. This Government has shown it is willing and agile enough to amend these laws to sufficiently empower those agencies that are responsible for keeping us safe.

In the past year alone we have introduced three vitally important Bills.

The amendments to the Commonwealth Criminal Code introduced in October will empower our military to target and kill a broader range of Daesh operatives, consistent with international law. The bill applies to ADF operations fighting Daesh in theatre - including our airstrikes in support of the liberation of Mosul. Less well known, but of increasing importance, is that this fight against Daesh is also conducted through cyberspace. Now when I launched Australia's Cyber Security Strategy in April, I acknowledged our nation's offensive cyber capabilities.

Those capabilities are housed within the Australian Signals Directorate, and they provide us with a capacity to deter and respond to cyber-attacks against Australia. Those same capabilities also have important military applications, including in support of Coalition operations against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

While I won't for obvious reasons, go into the details of these operations, I can say that they are being used, that they are making a real difference, and that all offensive cyber activities in support of the ADF and our allies are subject to the same Rules of Engagement which govern the use of our other military capabilities in Iraq and Syria, such as our FA18 Hornets.

The Australian Signals Directorate's support for these operations is subject to stringent legal oversight and is consistent with our support for the international rules-based order and our obligations under international law. This is just another example of our partnership with the United States, and is of critical importance to global, regional and domestic security.

We've also introduced the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 to allow, among other things, control orders to be placed on persons 14 years or older with appropriate safeguards. It is a sad reality that young people are being drawn to this violent ideology.

Ideally, we want to stop them getting to this point in the first place. And on most occasions, the work of families, communities, law enforcement and other agencies ensures people are turned away from radicalisation. But it is the Government's, and the Parliament's, responsibility, to do what we can to mitigate and manage these risks by ensuring the necessary measures are in place.

The third bill, Mr Speaker, is the Criminal Code Amendment (High Risk Terrorist Offenders) Bill 2016, which creates a new regime to allow for the ongoing detention of high risk terrorist offenders who are approaching the end of their custodial sentences but continue to pose an unacceptable risk of committing a serious terrorism offence if released. Mr Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, and the leadership of its Chair the Member for Deakin, for its careful consideration of these bills and its recommendation that they be passed.

These laws are part of my Government's ongoing reform to Australia's national security legislation. And this started in 2014 and continues to provide our agencies with the tools they need in an ever changing security environment, and provides the public with the confidence that they can safely go about their daily lives.

From the time we came into Government in 2013, the Coalition has understood the evolving nature of the threat that terrorism poses. And has been as adaptive and as agile in its response as the people who seek to do us so much harm.

Mr Speaker, above all else, the most effective defence against terrorism is to prevent people from becoming terrorists in the first place. All levels of Government and communities must continue working together to help prevent people from being drawn to violent extremism. Particularly to prevent the radicalisation of our young people – to stop terrorists stealing our children's futures. Continuing to build on our inclusive society where everyone has a place is vital.

Countering violent extremism is a shared effort of course with the states and territories and it will be reported on and considered at the upcoming Council of Australian Governments meeting on 9 December.

Mr Speaker, terrorist groups seek to identify weakness and vulnerability and drive fear and division. Actions and behaviours that target particular sections in society merely play into their hands. We are one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world – from the oldest human cultures of our First Australians, to the newborn baby in the arms of its immigrant mother. We are stronger because of our diversity.

But that does not mean we should be blind to or ignorant of the challenges our society face. When we see extremist behaviour it should be called out for what it is. And when we see vulnerability it should be addressed.

By all Australians. Government; business; the community. We all have a stake in this. For it is the combination of our national attributes of security, diversity, freedom and the prosperity which they enable that make us best placed as a society to unite against terrorism and violent extremism.

As I have said many times, the glue that holds us together is mutual respect – the recognition that each of us is entitled to, the same respect, the same dignity, and opportunities. And as we look forward Mr Speaker to this Christmas season, I can assure the House that my Government is taking every action possible to keep Australians and their families safe, secure and free.

[ENDS]