



Subjects: Liberal Party; National Security Statement; Iraq; Daesh death cult; Martin Place Siege; David Hicks.

ALAN JONES:

The Prime Minister of Australia is on the line. Prime Minister, good morning.

PRIME MINISTER:

`Morning, Alan.

ALAN JONES:

Could I just begin by saying it seems as though another hand grenade has been thrown across your path today – leaked emails on the resignation from the honorary unpaid Federal Treasurer of the Liberal Party, Philip Higginson, talking about the organisational conflict of interest created by the marriage of the Liberal Party Federal Director, Brian Loughnane, to your Chief of Staff, Peta Credlin. This is designed, of course, to damage and destabilise you. How do you react to that?

PRIME MINISTER:

This is just one of those things, Alan, but the important thing is that the Treasurer has signed off on the Party accounts. As for this so-called conflict of interest, Brian Loughnane has been the Federal Director for 12 years. For the last 10 years, Peta Credlin has been a Chief of Staff to a Minister, or a Chief of Staff or Deputy Chief of Staff to a party leader. So, if this is a problem, it's been a problem for 10 years. In fact, it is no problem. If Peta Credlin was able to be Deputy Chief of Staff to Malcolm Turnbull when Brian Loughane was Federal Director, then there was no problem then and there is no problem now.

ALAN JONES:

Right, so, I mean, you've got to get on top of all of this, haven't you, so that you can get on with the business of governing the country?

PRIME MINISTER:

That's right, and that's what we're getting on with, Alan. Every day we are getting on with governing the country and just to go through a list of things that we have done over the last few days: we've lowered the screening threshold for foreign purchases of agricultural land, we've changed the deeming rates so that part pensioners get more money in their pockets, we've announced a major series of dams in northern Tasmania, there's an asset recycling initiative because the ACT Labor Government is privatising assets and with the proceeds building public transport infrastructure, we've got a clear pathway forward so we can make a decision on the next generation of submarines by the end of the year and not have the capability gap and the weakness in the nation's defences that Labor had been creating, and just yesterday, as part of the National Security Statement, I announced that we would strip dual nationals of their Australian citizenship if they're involved in terrorism and we would strengthen the prohibitions on racial and religious incitement, because what we can't have is people running around in our country saying things like, "Death to all those who insult the prophet" and meaning it – and meaning it. I mean, this is the problem, Alan. There are exhortations coming out of the Middle East death cult which people in Australia are taking seriously. That's why we had the frenzied attack on policemen in Victoria last September and the Martin Place siege. That's why we had an imminent attack in Sydney 10 or 12 days ago. Well, I want to assure your listeners, the Government is on the job. I am on the job. Our police and security services are on the job. We will keep this country safe.

ALAN JONES:

But what is the agenda when you pick up the weekend papers and find that 'Abbott wanted to unilaterally – unilaterally – send troops on the ground into Egypt and Syria – unilaterally?' What does that mean? Barack Obama had already committed troops and to my understanding of it, you have never opened your mouth in relation to putting troops into Egypt or Syria.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, look, it was just a fanciful story and both the Chief of the Defence Force and the Secretary of the Defence Department made a very rare public statement yesterday to say that the thing was completely false and baseless.

ALAN JONES:

And have you already slipped into your charitable mode again? You'd call it fanciful, wouldn't I call it dishonest?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, it was simply false. I mean, I'm not going to speculate on how this kind of nonsense got beaten up into a story...

ALAN JONES:

It was designed to damage.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well look, Alan, plainly there is this desire on the part of some to damage and destroy this Government, but I'm not going to be distracted by that and I'm going to be focussed every day – every day – on doing the right thing by the people of Australia and as I've just outlined, in the last fortnight that's exactly what we've been doing – despite a barrage of criticism. We are just getting on with government, because that's what the people of Australia expect us to do. When I stand up before audiences, particularly audiences in marginal seats, and I say to them, "Look, there has been some excitement in Canberra, but I want to assure you that we've put it behind us and now we are absolutely once more focussed on you, the people of Australia", there's normally spontaneous applause and cheering.

ALAN JONES:

Yeah well, well done, because yesterday, an outstanding speech saying the things that Australians want to hear. There was some very grim news, nonetheless, you said, quote, "These are testing times for everyone sworn to protect democratic freedoms". You said, "The terrorist threat is rising at home and abroad and it's becoming harder to combat."

PRIME MINISTER:

That's right. There are some 400 people here in Australia who our security agencies believe

are threatening to harm their fellow Australians and this is a grim, grim reminder of the world we live in. We shouldn't despair, Alan, because we have the best police forces in the world, we have the best security agencies in the world, and we have a Government with the will to deploy them effectively for the defence of our country and its citizens. But, nevertheless, these are testing times and this is yet another reason why this focus on internals is so dismaying to the general public and why the best thing I can do and the best thing all of my colleagues can do is refuse to be distracted by it and get on with governing.

ALAN JONES:

There's a statement that's come out this morning which you would have drawn your attention drawn to, I'm sure. The Islamic Council of Victoria has released a statement. In part it says, quote, "It's very convenient for Mr Abbott to pass the buck on this", that is that the Sydney siege was not the result of a breakdown of the system and they're saying, "It's very convenient for Mr Abbott to pass the buck on this. He's very keen to make this a broader issue about Muslims, but it is quite obvious, like many of his political problems, he's very good at shifting the focus from himself to others."

PRIME MINISTER:

Look, I just want everyone who is a part of this country to subscribe to our democratic freedoms – to those rights and liberties I respect, to those laws I will uphold and obey – as we

say in the citizenship pledge. Now, that's what I want everyone to do and I am pleased that more and more Muslim leaders are coming out and saying Islam is a religion of peace; there is no place in Islam for the kind of abominations that we have seen recently done in its name. I am pleased about that and I hope that the Council of Victoria will get with the programme.

ALAN JONES:

Is the national terrorist threat, which you alluded to yesterday, is the national terrorist threat level still High?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, it is.

ALAN JONES:

Which means a terrorist attack is likely?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes. It means that there are people with the intention and the capability of carrying out attacks and an attack is likely. That's correct.

ALAN JONES:

Now, in many instances I'm saying this to my listeners, they say, "Oh well, the Prime Minister's judgement is crook." Didn't you raise this issue about the terrorist alert being High last September and the critics said you were exaggerating for your own political ends? We subsequently only months later had Martin Place and the attack on two police officers in Melbourne.

PRIME MINISTER:

That's correct, and about a month or so after we started strengthening security at Parliament House we had the attack on Parliament House in Canada. So, without wanting to blow my trumpet, Alan, I think that the Government has proven to be reasonably far-sighted on all of these things.

ALAN JONES:

And you said that yesterday – and we'd like you to blow your trumpet and sell that story. They do want to see a bit of Mr Whippy in you: ring the bell and let them know what the product is that you're selling! But you made the point yesterday, in the decade after 9/11 you said, our intelligence agencies, I mean this is stuff that most probably the electorate didn't know, you said our intelligence agencies and police structures, quote, "Have disrupted elaborate conspiracies to attack our electricity supplies, the Grand Final at the MCG and the Holsworthy Army Barracks in Sydney."

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes. These were large-scale plots involving significant numbers of people attempting to do dramatic, high profile things. What's happened in the last year or so is that we've seen a change in the emphasis of those who would do us harm away from those rather sophisticated, difficult to organise and prepare plots for mass casualties to sort of random demonstration executions, and this is why the exhortations coming out of the Middle East now to the people susceptible to the death cult are – go out into the street, grab an infidel or a kafir or whatever the term is, take that person and kill them. This is why I say that these days terrorism requires a camera phone, a knife and a victim, and that's what we've seen on the streets of London, that's what we've seen in Paris and other parts of France, and that's what we've seen attempted here in Australia.

ALAN JONES:

Now, just in relation to this Martin Place thing, there's an argument in the report – Joint Report by Mike Baird's head of department, by your head of department, that the process didn't fail, the system did. Just take one example – because there's a stack of people sitting in front of me here listening to this – they walked in today to get welfare payments. You'd expect they'd have to jump through some hoops. Now, this bloke was a frequent recipient of welfare payments. Didn't someone fail to do the appropriate checks – not the system – didn't someone fail the appropriate checks?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, that is a very fair point and for about half of his time in Australia, the Martin Place murderer was on some kind of welfare payment. Look, the rot started when he lied to gain his initial visa to Australia and then...

ALAN JONES:

But does that mean that someone hasn't done the appropriate checks?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, that's right, Alan, and this is where we are much more conscious of trying to ensure that this is no longer the case. It is no longer just the Department of Immigration, it is the Department of Immigration and Border Protection because its function now is not just waving people through. Its function now is keeping Australia safe.

ALAN JONES:

That's right but I mean the Government of Iran, they wanted this bloke on criminal charges – the Government of Iran. Someone – not the system – someone has ignored the Government of Iran because we don't have extradition treaties with Iran, just forget about it, but this was a bloke who was wanted by the Government of Iran on criminal charges or he was an accessory to the murder in relation to his former wife. Someone – not the system – gave him bail.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, that is one of things, I think, has long staggered people. How could someone who was involved in the murder of his former wife; how could someone with an extraordinary litany of sexual assault charges against him, be out on bail?

ALAN JONES:

So, someone – not the system has failed here. I mean, there is some trendy left-winger out there who has got more sympathy for the villain than for the victim. I mean, what really stirred Australians up and I can remember the reaction on this programme, when this bloke was convicted for sending abusive letters to the families of Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

PRIME MINISTER:

And \$300,000 was spent by the taxpayer providing legal aid for the appeal.

ALAN JONES:

Correct. Correct. He got to the High Court!

PRIME MINISTER:

It staggers people, Alan. It absolutely staggers people and it shows how our system is not working as it should. Well, it takes a long time to change the direction of an oil tanker, but believe me, Alan, under this Government that oil tanker is turning down. The system, sure, continues to respect the rights of the individual but it also has a very heavy emphasis on the safety of our community and on the national interest.

ALAN JONES:

Now, people appreciate you using that language but all I am saying is, people listening to you now would say, well I can tell the Prime Minister what is wrong: the bench, the judiciary, the magistrate is full of all these bleeding hearts and this goes on all the time. The villain gets more attention than the victim. They are concerned about the nature of the appointments of some of these people who now have sympathy for a bloke like this. I mean when he reckoned he had information about the 1996 bombing of Saudi Arabia's Khobar Towers did anyone check whether what he was saying was true? Iran has rejected all of this – they weren't believed. Someone was on Monis' side rather than on the side of the truth.

PRIME MINISTER:

The tragedy of all of this, Alan, is people knew he was a fantasist, they didn't realise – until he

was too late – that he was a menace and that is the problem.

ALAN JONES:

That's right. Nine aliases in New South Wales – God knows how many more federally. I mean you tomorrow, anyone sitting here, think I have an injustice done to me I am going to go to the High Court with all of this – you wouldn't know where to start. This bloke got himself to the High Court on taxpayer's money. Who the hell allowed this to happen?

PRIME MINISTER:

And there are people who are expert at gaming the system and at every level what we are doing is cracking down on people who are gaming the system. To give you just one example, Alan, before Christmas we changed the rules so that you can't get the disability support pension anymore unless you have gone through a government doctor. So, you can't go to those doctors who are known to be on the game, get the relevant certificates and what have you from them – you can't do that anymore. You will have to go to a government doctor before you get on the disability support pension. Now, I am perfectly happy for people with genuine disabilities to be on a pension. The last thing we want to do is to deny people in need the support that they deserve, but people should not be allowed to rip off the system and under this Government it will be increasingly difficult for that to happen.

ALAN JONES:

Just finally, you know, this question about Australians, really keeping it simple, want you to provide a secure and solvent, are the two issues. Solvent, of course you are fighting this battle in the Senate with the Labor Party and a whole lot of nincompoops up there but on the secure bit, your speech yesterday said that ASIO currently has over 400 high priority counter terrorism investigations. That's a lot.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yep, and that is 400 people who we reasonably believe are talking about doing harm to their fellow Australians. It is a lot. That is why we have boosted ASIO resources with this \$630 million boost to counter terrorism in August of last year. It is a big job, Alan. It is a big job. But you can't even begin to do it unless you recognise the problem and have the will to tackle it. As this Government has demonstrated on border protection, as we have demonstrated, although we haven't yet succeeded, on Budget repair, we never shirk the tough jobs.

ALAN JONES:

Well, the alternative Prime Minister, Bill Shorten said last week that no one has a better record about national security than the Labor Party. Can I ask you this question: how can anyone boast about their commitment to national security when you have destroyed the economy and the currency and plunged the country into debt? The first capacity for national security lies in a strong economy, doesn't it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, that is right Alan. Look, I should say two things about the Opposition Leader. First of all, Labor has been pretty cooperative when it comes to national security. But we also see things like making excuses for David Hicks! And this is where I say to people: you need a government which is absolutely single-minded on these issues and this Government has the will to protect our community. No ifs, no buts – we have what it takes to protect our community.

ALAN JONES:

Ok, well you have beaten off some adversity in the past. I have no doubt you will beat it off again.

Stay on the front foot in the interests of all Australians. Great to talk to you. We'll talk to you next week.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you, Alan.