



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**MOTIONS**

**National Security**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 3 June 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 3 June 2013  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** O'Connor, Brendan, MP

**Source** House  
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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR** (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (15:23): I have listened to both honourable members, but the reality is that this issue is being dealt with by our agencies. As I say—and it is very important for people to understand this—there have been no offences committed by this person while in Australia, and this person has been in detention all along. Indeed, there is no doubt that there has been monitoring and surveillance of that person in detention.

What we have always made clear is that we are very happy to provide briefings to the opposition. If they choose to actually have briefings—

**Mr Frydenberg:** That is outrageous.

The SPEAKER: The member for Kooyong is being outrageous.

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR:** on information that matters, that relates to national security matters, I can assure you we will provide those briefings. However, on the last occasion we provided such briefings to the opposition, to the shadow Attorney-General, we saw that some of that information was actually used publicly in a manner that was not proper—that was, in fact, improper. So we are very happy to convey to the opposition, so that they are aware of the facts, information in relation to these matters. But what we will not do in this case, or in any case equivalent to this, is to allow the opposition to play with national security like it is a political football. That is not something that an alternative government would ever contemplate doing.

This matter has been, of course, examined in estimates. Indeed, I have answered a question in question time in relation to the person and the circumstances in which he was detained. I also made it very clear that our agencies were involved beyond the detention itself, and I have made clear, too, that the person is now in high security detention.

But the fact is: the reason why this motion is being brought on today is that the member for Cook and the member for Stirling are of course trying to scare the Australian people in a way that really is quite outrageous—they are trying to scare the Australian people. What we know is: when they have nothing positive to say in relation to a whole range of areas of public policy, the opposition leader authorises a number of frontbenchers to try and create fear and anxiety in this country. Well, that is not going to be the appropriate response in this instance, and nor is it the way in which we should be dealing with these matters.

I make it very clear again: if the shadow minister, the member for Cook, or the member for Stirling want to be briefed more fully on this, then I can assure those members opposite that those briefings will be forthcoming so that they can actually be provided with all of the information. And if they have any questions arising out of such briefings, I am certainly happy for those questions to be put—with one caveat, and one caveat only: that that information is not disclosed publicly or used as a political plaything. Yet that is what we have seen done by the shadow Attorney-General and indeed other members of the opposition in recent times.

We have, of course, some very serious issues to deal with here, but it is quite extraordinary that the opposition want to, on the one hand, raise issues of national security and border protection but, on the other hand, not listen to the experts when it comes to dealing with our borders. It is quite extraordinary that they want to raise matters here today but, when it comes to the experts making recommendations about protecting our borders, where are they then? Where is Tony Abbott then?

**Mr Keenan:** Did you know this guy was in Inverbrackie? Were you even aware?

The SPEAKER: The member for Stirling is warned!

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR:** Well, clearly, he is not there to support the experts. He has never been there to support a plan that would reduce boats. Indeed, he wants to see more boats come. He wants to see more boats come and rubs his hands every time a vessel arrives in our waters.

This was obviously made even clearer last Friday. Last Friday, the Indonesian ambassador made it very clear that they will not support the opposition leader's plan to turn back boats. He made it unequivocally clear. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition may seek to make a liar of the Indonesian ambassador, but I have to say: it is a pretty outrageous thing to verbal the Indonesian ambassador in such a way.

The Leader of the Opposition is in a situation where he effectively says yes to the country that says no, Indonesia, and no to the country that says yes, Malaysia. What a ridiculous situation! We have a transit country, Malaysia, that wants to transfer arrivals in a safe manner. But the Leader of the Opposition says no to it! Yet we have a country that does not want to see an unsafe way to transfer arrivals on the high seas, in the case of Indonesia, and the opposition leader pretends he has an agreement. Well, if we want to have a debate about national security, let us talk about the lack of responsibility and leadership by the opposition leader in dealing with transit countries and countries in our region in order to put in place a very important regional response to what is a complex regional problem.

We do not have that, of course, because we do not have a compact in this parliament, and we do not have a compact in this parliament because the Leader of the Opposition has yet again refused to accept the advice of the experts. If I were to consider who I might take advice from, would I be taking it from the former chief of the Australian Defence Force, appointed by the Howard government and this government; Michael L'Estrange, a very eminent diplomat and former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; and Paris Aristotle, with 25 years of refugee settlement history—three eminent Australians coming from different positions, putting a perspective, and forging recommendations for us to consider? And all we get from the opposition leader is: 'No, no, no.' That, of course, has really been exposed as being an absolutely hollow shell, because last Friday the Indonesian ambassador made it very, very clear that that unsafe proposition—unsafe, as has been advised by the chief of our Navy—to turn back boats on the high seas is unacceptable to the Indonesian government, and will not fly. That proposition—

**Mr Briggs:** Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. This is a motion about the suspension of standing orders for an inquiry as to why there is a terrorist in a low-security facility in the Adelaide Hills—

The SPEAKER: The member for Mayo will resume his seat. The minister has the call and will speak to the motion.

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR:** I oppose the motion because, clearly, the opposition are entirely disingenuous when it comes to this issue. They do not seek to find a compact with the government on national security matters. They have always sought to object and oppose anything that might reduce the chances of people endangering their lives at sea. They have always sought to get in the way of policies as recommended by experts which would see a reduction of vessels arriving in our waters. They have done that for political purposes. They have done it with a disregard for the men, women and children on those vessels, and they have done it with a disregard for our men and women on Customs and Naval boats that go out each and every day to interdict and stop those vessels. This disregard for our personnel is outrageous.

On top of all of that, if they think they are going to cut the Public Service by the thousands and not cut the staff of ASIO, the Australian Federal Police and Customs and Border Protection then they are kidding themselves. On one hand they have made it clear they are going to cut public servants; on the other they are trying to pretend that they will ensure those agencies will continue to have the resources they have now. They will not. If we want to talk about undermining national security, if the Abbott government were ever elected and Mr Abbott ever became leader he would be cutting the staff in ASIO, in the Australian Federal Police, in Customs and Border Protection and, indeed, in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. I oppose this motion because it is put up deliberately to cause concern within our society and to create fear within our community.