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THE SENATE
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Islamic State

SPEECH

Tuesday, 10 February 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania) (20:39): I recommend to members of the Senate—indeed, to all Australians—a BBC Radio documentary which examines 'The brutality and bureaucracy of Islamic State.' The introduction to the 30-minute radio report on ABC Radio National states

While Western countries urge their Muslim citizens to embrace the secular values despised by Islamic extremists, the self-declared Islamic State group is using brutality, bureaucracy and a steady cash flow to control their 'Caliphate' in Syria and Iraq.

We have become familiar with images of Islamic State brutality, triumphantly uploaded to the world—although the murdered foreign captives represent a tiny fraction of the number of people put to death, according to human rights groups monitoring the territory controlled by IS. We know about the young men, and some young women, who have been attracted from afar to IS, including more than 100 Australians who have entered the self-declared caliphate and joined the fight. We know less about the way IS rose to control large parts of Iraq and Syria, and how it goes about governing that territory.

A unique insight is provided by a former jihadist, schooled in Saudi Arabia, who first joined the Mujahedeen in Bosnia during the Balkans War and later hooked up with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Aimen Dean told the BBC he became disillusioned with the group's focus on terrorism and began working as a spy, gathering information and providing analysis for the British Foreign Office. His knowledge of IS is based on long-established networks. Dean says he still engages in discussion and debate with IS operatives. He says:

Through debate you start to ask questions that basically lead them to reveal some of at least their thinking, some of their strategy. But since there is nothing confidential that will lead to a drone strike, let's say, or to an arrest, then it's fine, it is an ongoing discussion and dialogue.

One of the people he talks to is a former childhood friend from Saudi Arabia, now in his early thirties, who is a judge in an IS court. They communicate via a messaging app. Dean says the judge is proud of the sentences he has handed down—of lashes, crucifixion and beheadings—because he says he is following the example of God.

IS has established a bureaucracy, much of it overseen by its Department of the Public Good, says Dean. There are professions you cannot practise without a licence from the department, such as being an Imam, a teacher, a pharmacist, a doctor or a lawyer. Dean says:

You cannot get a licence unless you take a Sharia course for one week, organised by them to indoctrinate you.

Dean says the beginnings of what would become Islamic State emerged soon after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Senior figures that were with al-Qaeda at the time used hundreds of millions of US dollars—stolen from the Iraqi Central Bank—to set up their networks. Dean says:

They were buying existing businesses like cafes, restaurants, farms, butcher shops, tailor shops, and they were buying those that are conveniently located close to government headquarters and security headquarters. The purpose was for security purposes, intelligence gathering and espionage, but also to recruit insiders.

The most important recruits for the future Islamic State group were the many members of the professional class, members of the Iraqi Army and the civil service who had been supporters of Saddam Hussein and were forced out of their jobs after the US-led invasion. Aimen Dean went on:

The parties who made the Iraqi government at that time in 2004/05 started to expel professors of economics and politics and planning and urban generation from universities, because they were Baathists.

He says many of them joined the jihadist movement because they needed work, money and protection:

When people [ask why] they have this cadre of oil engineers, of financial planners, of business executives, it all boils down to the fatal decisions taken in 2003 and 2004 by the new American administration and by the then Iraqi Council.

It would be easy to dismiss the followers of Islamic State as lunatics and depraved humans who are lucky to now occupy one-third of Syria and over a quarter of Iraq. However, this documentary highlighted the extremely sophisticated nature of the bureaucracy and financial planning that has helped establish the Islamic State, which, according to the Islamic spy Aimen Dean, helps to release the inner psychopath in many of the followers and supporters of Islamic State. Given the acts of barbarity and savagery carried out daily around the world by Islamic State supporters, who would argue against him?

I will repeat the introduction to this documentary, seen on the ABC website, because it has great relevance to a matter I would like to address today. You will remember the introduction says:

While Western countries urge their Muslim citizens to embrace the secular values despised by Islamic extremists, the self-declared Islamic State group is using brutality, bureaucracy and a steady cash flow to control their 'Caliphate' in Syria and Iraq.

It is IS's steady cash flow that I would like the Senate chamber to think about. Where is IS receiving its steady cash flow from? What are potential sources of Islamic State finances?

I receive about 400 emails a day from Tasmanians and other Australians. In recent days, I have received hundreds of requests for me to investigate halal certification as a possible source of income for Islamic terrorists. As a crossbencher, I have limited resources to conduct investigations which are not sanctioned by a committee of the parliament. However, I commissioned a Parliamentary Library study which examined the laws and rules surrounding halal certification in Australia. This exposed some surprising facts in response to my questions and I was alarmed by the official researchers' answers to my key question, which was:

In Australia is there a reporting/auditing process for the money raised by halal certification to ensure the funds are not misused for terrorist activities?

The short answer provided by the Parliamentary Library was no. The brief said:

Importantly, it is for each certifying organisation to set the amount of its fees. Some certifying organisations publish the relevant fee on their website. Others do not. There is no legal requirement that these fees be disclosed.

Even more disturbingly, the library's brief goes on to state:

As halal certification is undertaken on a purely commercial basis, there is no formal reporting or auditing mechanism to ascertain whether monies paid for certification are misused.

I will close by asking these very important questions. Given that our enemies in the Islamic State, by all reports, are receiving a steady cash flow to control their caliphate in Syria and Iraq, why isn't there a legal requirement in Australia for halal certification fees to be disclosed? Given that our nation is on high terrorism alert while hundreds of Australian Islamic State sympathisers are fighting our Australian Defence Forces in Iraq, why is there no formal reporting or auditing mechanism in Australia to ascertain whether moneys paid for halal certification are misused? If the government fails to answer these questions, I will be forced to introduce a private member's bill which closes these legal loopholes that could allow financing of terrorists and Australia's enemies through halal certification moneys.

Our major political parties failed to take proper action over the last decade to prevent acts of sedition, treason and terrorism. They have failed to ensure Australian citizens who have assisted or fought alongside our enemies are charged with crimes such as sedition and treason. The Abbott government has sent our troops to Iraq in an expensive, dangerous, futile, flag-flying exercise. America have only about 3,000 troops in Iraq. They are not fair dinkum about defeating Islamic State. We must bring our diggers home from Iraq, secure our home soil and reconsider our military involvement until America and the rest of the world get fair dinkum about wiping out these Islamic savages. Australian taxpayers should not be forced to pay \$360 million a year for our military in Iraq when the Iraqi government make a surplus of billions of dollars each year.