

## Director-General of Security – Opening Statement

### Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Additional Estimates – 14 February, 2022

Good evening. Thank you Chair.

Australia's security environment remains complex, challenging and changing.

The terrorism threat level remains at PROBABLE. We know there are violent extremists who possess the intent and capability to kill Australians.

As I pointed out last week in my Annual Threat Assessment, COVID-19 added considerable volatility to the threat environment.

We have seen increased radicalisation, particularly of minors, and a growth in specific issue motivated extremism.

Threat to life will always be a priority for ASIO, but it is important to note that espionage and foreign interference has now supplanted terrorism as our most serious security concern.

This is not to downplay the significance of terrorism.

In terms of scale and sophistication, though, espionage and foreign interference threats are outpacing terrorism threats, and therefore demanding more of our attention and resources.

Parliamentarians such as yourselves often ask me to spell out what political foreign interference looks like in practice so you can identify it more easily.

In my Threat Assessment, I chose to do this with a case study.

I deliberately chose not to identify the election, jurisdiction, party, individuals that were targeted, or the country attempting to conduct the interference.

As I stated in the speech:

*“I’m not going to identify the jurisdiction because we are seeing attempts at foreign interference at all levels of government, in all states and territories.”*

*“Attempts at political interference are not confined to one side of politics, and you’d be surprised by the range of countries involved.”*

Predictably, there has been media speculation about who was involved.

Unfortunately, some of the speculation missed a key point – we stopped the plan before it was executed and the targets were not aware that they were targets.

As I explained last week:

*“While attempts to interfere in our democratic processes are common, successful interference is not. Our democracy remains*

*robust, our parliaments remain sovereign, our elections remain free and the overwhelming majority of our politicians remain thoroughly resistant to even the most sophisticated and subtle approaches.”*

My Threat Assessment addressed several other important matters but I will not repeat them here.

Of course, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have about them, or any other matters. Thank you.