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**TRANSCRIPT OF SENATOR THE HON. ARTHUR SINODINOS AO  
INTERVIEW WITH EMMA ALBERICI, LATELINE**

*Subjects: Terror laws, Superannuation, Kevin Rudd, Female representation in the Liberal Party.*

*EO&E.....*

**EMMA ALBERICI**

Cabinet Secretary Arthur Sinodinos is one of the Prime Minister's closest allies and most trusted advisors. The New South Wales Senator joins me now.

Arthur Sinodinos, welcome back to Lateline.

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Good to be back, Emma.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

The Government's decision to indefinitely detain terrorists - realistically though, it's almost impossible, isn't it, to know if someone is going to be an ongoing threat because presumably if they know there's a prospect of a longer sentence, they're likely to be on their best behaviour while they're in prison being watched?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

I think it's wrong to say it's a regime of indefinite detention. It is subject to review and it's subject to quite a high bar of evaluation because you take into account psychological profiles, how the person has reacted to rehabilitation programs in prison, and of course, there's always the danger that someone will try and game the system. But we're trying to do something here which is very important, it is to say to the community: just as we do with very violent offenders and with sex offenders in quite a few of the states, we want to try and keep the community safe by putting people who potentially can reoffend and can meet the quite high bar we're talking about here behind bars for longer.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

On the question of keeping the public safe, hasn't the Prime Minister to an extent undermined his own efforts on that score when just last week he agreed to expand Australia's military involvement in Iraq?

## **ARTHUR SINODINOS**

We've been a target because of who we are. We're an open society. We're a society that took a stand for example in East Timor. And Osama bin Laden after that complained about the "crusaders down south", the "Australian crusaders" and what they were doing in East Timor. Our foreign policy can't be subject to terrorists. We can't be held to ransom by the terrorists. We do what we do because we think it's the right thing to do and when it comes to terror, we fight them over there and then we take whatever action we can to keep people safe here at home.

## **EMMA ALBERICI**

The Chilcot report in Britain was quite critical in many respects to the US, the UK and Australia for invading Iraq in the first place in terms of the kind of jihadist movement it certainly inspired. Is the Government certain that this latest round of military involvement by Australia in Iraq and Syria will quash rather than foment global terrorism?

## **ARTHUR SINODINOS**

I believe that we've got to take every action to deal with terrorism as we find it. George W. Bush, one of the things that he said that was right was that we are facing a very long war when it comes to terrorism and it comes in a number of forms. And I don't think we can take the view that you can somehow quash it by withdrawing from standing for the principles that we hold dear as an open society. The open society will have its enemies. We have to meet people in the public square, argue squarely about what it is that we stand for and we have to fight for that.

## **EMMA ALBERICI**

On that score, your colleague in the Senate, Eric Abetz, has today applauded a call for a crackdown on Muslim immigration in Australia to, in their words, "Protect women and gays from abuse." What's your view on that?

## **ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Look, we operate a global non-discriminatory immigration policy. We have certain principles that underpin that policy, including maximising the contribution that prospective migrants can make to Australia, and we have security checks. We have the skilled immigration program - that's one stream. We have the Refugee Humanitarian Program. And I believe by having a strong border control policy, we're also in the best position to make sure the Australian people understand that we're doing our best to control our borders and thereby then facilitate a generous immigration program, but one which draws from the best around the world. Don't forget that many of the victims of terrorism around the world have been Muslims. It's very important to understand this. Many of the victims –

**EMMA ALBERICI**

It sounds like you ought to convince your own colleagues rather than me.

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Look, it's fine in a society like this, as I said, open society for people to say what they want, but I'm giving you a view as an individual based on my own experience and the fact that I'm from an ethnic background, but also based on the fact that as a member of the Government, we operate a generous, non-discriminatory policy. We look at the individual, we check them out and that's the basis on which we operate, and don't forget, we are also a secular society.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

In an environment where de-radicalisation is what most experts say has the best prospect of success in terms of keeping Australians safe from terrorism, it can't be helpful though for a senior Government figure to be stoking the community's fears by suggesting that we're somehow at war with a religion?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Look, in our society, people are free to express what they want and we argue and debate that in the public square. That's one of the great things about the country. So my colleagues are free to say what they want. But I'm telling you what the policy of the Government is and I think what's also important to understand is that we want, when we bring migrants to Australia, to settle them as quickly and as well as we can into the broader society. We have very generous settlement programs, probably the best in the world, to help us do that. And one of the ongoing challenges for us is to continue to make sure that no sector of Australian society feels marginalised or feels they can only exist in an enclave.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

Can we move on to the Government's superannuation changes? Several Liberal MPs say their constituents were alarmed and upset about the measures. Presumably you heard similar things during the campaign?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

I had emails from people. Yes, people were upset and I still continue to get them. For me though, the starting point of this exercise - and I was one of the people from before I became Cabinet Secretary who was arguing that we should look at the generosity of super tax concessions. Because if we are going to argue as a government to all sections of the community that they have to do their fair share in terms of budget repair, then we can't say to one section of the community which may have particular benefit from the generosity of superannuation tax concessions that you're exempt, you don't - you don't - you should in fact be looked after and quarantined from the need for budget repair.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

Pardon me for the interruption, but I think part of the concern has been the retrospective nature of the changes you're proposing.

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

I don't believe they are retrospective in the sense that we're not asking people to go back and open up their tax returns from previous years and pay more tax than they were levied at the time. The taxes -

**EMMA ALBERICI**

You've put on a \$500,000 lifetime cap on after-tax contributions, but it's dated back to 2007.

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

It's back-dated to 2007 when records first became available, but if you have already exceeded that cap, you don't have to then reduce your contributions back to \$500,000, or if you're below the cap, you can go up to the \$500,000. So it's not retrospective -

**EMMA ALBERICI**

You don't get penalised back to 2007?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

So it's not a case of something where it's back-dated in the sense that I think you are now seeking to suggest. It's no more retrospective than Labor saying they'll tax earnings in the retirement phase above \$75,000. These taxes are prospective, they're not retrospective.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

OK. So, the Government won't change any part of their superannuation policy from the Budget?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

All I can do is comment on the process from here, which is that Kelly O'Dwyer and Scott Morrison are putting together the legislation. It's going to be an exposure draft which will go out for consultation with stakeholders and with our party room. We have backbench policy committees. The economic policy committee will look at these particular pieces of legislation. And then there'll be a process for the cabinet to look at the reaction that there's been. If you're asking me to rule things in and out, I can't do that because ultimately it's a matter for the cabinet and for the party room on the final.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

But during the consultative phase, there is a prospect that you'll tweak it?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Well what would happen during - what would happen during the consultative phase is there is an opportunity to discuss with people the implications of the legislation and understand that in better detail from the - from the perspective of the various stakeholders. But from my point of view, I would prefer to see the package go through as a whole because I'm concerned that if we pare away at the package, it reduces the contribution of that package to budget repair and to our capacity to fund the \$3 billion worth of concessions which we're putting into the system for low income earners, for women coming in and out of the workforce and for other groups that can benefit from more flexible superannuation rules.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

I wanted to ask you about Kevin Rudd's bid to take over as Secretary-General of the United Nations. Will the Government endorse his nomination?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Kevin Rudd. Now, you know, it's funny, isn't it? 2016 and we're still talking about Kevin. You know, which I think he would love. He loves the idea we're talking about him. Look, -

**EMMA ALBERICI**

Well he wants to be the leader of the world.

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Um, of the free world, yes, indeed. But sadly, he can't be President of the United States. Look, on the issue of Kevin, that will be discussed probably at the first or second cabinet meeting of the new government, so I'm not -

**EMMA ALBERICI**

Well New Zealand's Conservative PM, John Key, has wholly and roundly and glowingly recommended one of his predecessors, Helen Clark, who's from the Labour side of politics, who's also going for the position. Why the delay in coming out publicly and endorsing Australia's candidate?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Well there's no delay. It's only in very recent times that Kevin Rudd has indicated he will be running for the position officially and has asked the Australian Government for support. So, quite properly, the Prime Minister said well that's a matter to go to the cabinet. Now, I'm

not spilling any secrets to say that there would be a lot of people on our side of politics who would have reservations about supporting Kevin. The politics of that era are still pretty raw and the idea that he could be on the world stage seeking to overshadow Australia in other ways does grate with some of my colleagues. But on this program, I can't give you a personal view because there's going to be a cabinet that's going to have to discuss this.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

And just finally, while we're discussing the possible appointment of a woman; that is, Helen Clark, to a senior position - I'll use the as a segue to mention that a commentator has labelled the Government's failure to attract, preselect and promote women a national embarrassment. How do you explain the fact that you've got less women in the Parliament today than were there when John Howard was elected in 1996, indeed when Tony Abbott took government in 2013?

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Well in an arithmetic sense what's happened is that we lost seats and we lost some very good candidates or some very good members, including some very good female members, as a result. Now Linda Reynolds, who's one of the up-and-coming Senators from Western Australia, wrote a very good report along with others for the Liberal Party on what we do to change the culture and the structure of the party to facilitate more women coming through. Now, we do have women's councils which help to mentor and train women and help bring them through within the party, but clearly, we've got do more to change the culture. But I believe a combination of making the party even more open, particularly in states like NSW, through a system of plebiscites, can help in this regard. But, ultimately, we've also got to look, frankly, at the way the Parliament operates because the way the Parliament operates is actually quite discriminatory, particularly towards younger women with families.

**EMMA ALBERICI**

So much more to talk about, but we're out of time. Senator, thank you so much.

**ARTHUR SINODINOS**

Thanks, Emma.

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