



Selling Australia's Security and Refugee agenda. Prime Minister Turnbull as Fantasist

Par [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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Island mentalities do not travel well. When their sellers hawk the agenda before world forums, these start looking ludicrous. Coming close to this ludicrous display is Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, who has done what other Australian prime ministers have in previous years: sell the great discovery, the great hit of life on how best to protect borders in the face of threats.

No greater hits in the Australian record of cruelty and mania come close than the approach of outsourcing refugee obligations and the conjectures of global terrorism. The former stance assumes that refugees are disposable on arrival, repellent jumpers of a fictional human queue who can be shifted and trafficked to global outposts that have little bearing to the recipient country.

The latter stance sees terrorism as rampant bacilli in need of urgent quarantining, notably through stretching the context of the terror charge, and assuming that anybody who gets a whiff of the seductive Quran may lose his marbles and fitfully radicalise.

At the United Nations, Turnbull has been achieving feats of visible self-inflation, readying himself for meetings and selling an Australian product on national security he knows will have some adherents. In New York, he has matters of security on the brain, avoiding any humanitarian impulse in favour of rough and ready anti-refugee measures. In a fearful United States, the sell is on.

This all jars with the whole point of the meeting, instigated by the Obama administration on the basis of increasing funding to humanitarian and resettlement programs with various measures touching on education and "self-reliance".[1]

Indeed, "Welcoming Refugee Week" received much fanfare on Thursday, a few days after Congress was informed that the United States would be increasing the number of refugees being accepted upwards of 30 per cent. In the 2017 fiscal year, the administration plans to resettle 110,000 refugees gathered from Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Burma, among other troubled states.

None of this interests Turnbull, who has beaten off efforts to adopt a more generous approach to refugees in light of camp scandals and the litany of cruelties characterised by the offshore processing regime. "Public opinion will not accept a strong and generous humanitarian program, a generous migration program, unless the Government is seen to be in command of its borders."

This contrivance of policy has been intentional since the 1990s. Fortress Australia has, since the end of the Cold War, assumed that those arriving by boat are exceptionally dangerous, incubating ill-motives and grave intentions. They should, rather, take a number, and line up.

The point is being ventriloquised via GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump, who has promised, should he win the White House, a stop to the refugee resettlement program from suspect countries, most notably Syria. Conservative commentators such as Daniel Horowitz, in embracing the Trump line, see any alternative, notably that of a Clinton presidency, to be the road to localised suicide. "Just today," he squawked, "Germany arrested three Syrian refugees on suspicion that they have ties to the Islamic State." [2]

The refugee is the greatest of dangers, instrumentalised as a promising threat. "We are facing," claimed Turnbull in New York, "an extraordinary challenge of refugee movements, of authorised movements and migrations of people around the world, greater than at any time since the Second World War."

This means brutality and compassion, the disciplinary paternal figure accompanied by a generous maternal one. "Strong borders, a commitment to strong borders - demonstrating that the Australian Government is in command of who comes into Australia - and at the same time one of the most generous humanitarian programmes in the world and the two go together." [3]

For Turnbull, sealing off the global pathways to human movements should be complemented by greater channels for unregulated free trade. It is fine to be protectionist against humans, but not against capital.

Turnbull remains dedicated ideologue and near fanatical foot soldier for the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, an arrangement that finds less appeal in Washington with each day of presidential campaigning.

The prime minister has, in this venture, an Attorney-General who has single-handedly attacked the fragile corpus that is Australia's civil liberties. Having torn up any vestige of a human rights mentality, Senator George Brandis is now insisting that Turnbull will be bulldozing himself into the history books as being potentially one of the country's greatest prime ministers. "We've had a great week, in fact we have had a great fortnight," Brandis insisted.

This assertion has the element of the fantastic about it. Turnbull took his government to near defeat; he miscalculates repeatedly on a range of policies, falling flat down with few hands to help him up, and finds himself at the risk of losing key votes.

In its refugee policy, his government faces the closure of one a key hub of human processing - Manus Island - urged on by the legal ruling of the PNG Supreme Court. His record is that of a prime minister who is, as his deposed rival Tony Abbott reminded him, in office, rather than power.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Notes

[1] <http://sd.iisd.org/news/un-prepares-for-summit-on-refugees-and-migrants/>

[2] <http://www.wnd.com/2016/09/obamas-110000-refugees-only-half-the-story/>

[3] <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/malcolm-turnbull-talks-up-australias-border-protection-as-the-best-in-the-world-ahead-of-un-talks-2016-9>

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