

Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Islamic State: The Case for Removing the "Fantasist-in-Chief"

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

Region: [Oceania](#)

Global Research, February 23, 2015

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott is full of predictable surprises. Stomping and punching his way into the history books, his government finds itself teetering before the electoral precipice. As it should. His domestic policy lies in stagnant waters. His foreign policy has entered the comic books - a Marvel animation with misguided perceptions of world power, his seemingly rehearsed idiocy lead to threats of "shirt-fronting" Vladimir Putin and prosaic speculations at world summits. His dangerous union with Peta Credlin, his tyrannical bully of a chief of staff who keeps ministers in line and leaks to please, continues to thrive with ominous energy.

All of that simply suggests the usual, malfunctioning government in desperate need of removal, despatched by the usual electoral bloodbath the Australian electorate delves a leader who has gone beyond the pale. Australia's generally tepid electoral landscape doesn't tolerate the brash and the distant. Nor do one's own backbenchers, the first ones to go under the knife.

The time for Tony's removal, it would seem, is nigh. Not necessarily because of his inability to listen to a range of opinions, his failure to digest and synthesise the complex world around him, or his own unchanging sense of where women relate in his disjointed cosmos, though these do play a part. No - his removal is required to save the state. (One might say Constitution, but such legal chest thumping doesn't quite wash down under.)

Even a publication such as Rupert Murdoch's The Australian, which has done its best to feather the nest of the Abbott government since its monstrous inception - has gotten nervous. While it continues to have its demagogic spouters write the government script - Chris Mitchell as editor-in-chief, and the frothing Chris Kenny - the revelations about various meetings Abbott had over the course of his short term as prime minister is instructively dangerous. They reveal a fantasist-in-chief, a self-appointed suicidal villain keen to send thousands to their death at a moment's trigger-happy notice.

The story, written by John Lyons in The Weekly Australian, makes the claim that, on November 25, 2014, the Prime Minister "suggested a unilateral invasion of Iraq, with 3,500 Australian ground troops to confront the Islamic State terrorist group." The purpose: to assist in halting the surge of the IS group in northern Iraq. There was no resistance from his chief of staff, or any others, leading Abbott to raise the possibility with military planners who "were stunned". Without "US or NATO cover", it would be "disastrous". "They argued that even the US was not prepared to put troops into Iraq and it would make Australia the only Western country with troops on the ground."

Andrew Bolt at the Herald Sun (Feb 21) gives the observations no credence. He claims that US President Barack Obama was already contemplating sending in US troops in early November on the grounds of assisting Iraqi forces, bolstering an existing group of advisors. Special force deployments were already being made by Canada. Ergo, "Lyon's story is bull - t."

Abbott has similarly claimed that the story "as reported was false," claiming that the Chief of the Defence Force "is as mystified by this as I am." Finance Minister Mathias Cormann has called the story a "fabrication" (Daily Telegraph, Feb 21). The first rule of political survival is avoiding soapbox deniability - the more adamant one is in one's rejoinders, the greater the clout to the claim. Refutations become full-blown confessions.

Even if the story was partly true, it shows Abbott the mad monk in hermetic action. While it would have been virtually impossible to imagine Australian soldiers in such a theatre without NATO or US support, what matters is the Tony worldview, the lunatic assessment that requires such numbers against such a foe, the need to throw Australian muscle into a historical meat grinder.

And it is entirely consistent with previous conduct from the PM, not to mention his extravagant insistence that a thousand Australian troops be deployed to eastern Ukraine after the shooting down of Malaysian Airliner MH17. Australian defence planners were similarly shaken by the logistical vision that was seemingly gestating in Abbott's mind. Monolingual and resoundingly ignorant for such a task, Australia's defence personnel would be incapable of speaking either Ukrainian or Russian, let alone distinguishing between Ukrainian or Russian militia.

While there is a case to be made for holding Australian politicians to account for surrendering sovereignty to such powers as the United States, be it via the security channel of deploying soldiers without direct discussions with Parliament to distant theatres; or the secret, and secretive Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, the case against Abbott is even stronger. He shows that he is incapable of being a steward of any sort, a steroid-charged Biggles with an immolating streak.

He, of course, argues that such manic decisions have not become reality, suffering their predictable self-abortions. He misses the vital issue: they should never have been on the agenda to begin with. Coups have been launched for less, and it can be well argued that the dismissal of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1975 took place in less imperilling circumstances. High time for a re-enactment.

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

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