

Comment from Michael C H Jones

Paul Kelly is and has been for more than 40 years a very clever journalist; you have to do your due diligence on him to determine where he is coming from and the intentions of each article. In some respects a worthy contestant for the Chinese. His religious inspiration is the key.

An analysis of this article concerning the Gillard Government policy on Afghanistan is just another example - one of many. In it he has set the scene for the demise of Australia's first woman Prime Minister in a vote of no-confidence on the floor of the House of Representatives in the Australian Parliament during the forthcoming debate brought on by the Greens Party. The ALP could split.

Some would argue that the article is nothing more than the usual journalist "beat-up" barely worth reading. However in my view Kelly has, unknowingly I suspect, identified the fault-line in Australian foreign policy and therefore the uneasiness in the Australian domestic psyche, namely the America-China dilemma.

Australia is in Afghanistan because America is in Afghanistan - it is as simple as that and most Australians know it. But how does the government of a supposedly sovereign nation phrase its justification for involvement and explain the reasons for the deaths of Australian military personnel? What influence on Government decisions does the country's biggest trade partner, China, have or will have in the future?

Kelly is a master of the use of emotive language and the insinuation of vile motives.

The article is riddled with emotive comment, such as "duck responsibility"; "the usual cliches concerning strategic reality"; "complacency"; "exploited"; "banality"; "reluctant"; - and this is just in the first four short paragraphs.

The allegation of improper motives is more profound such as "Gillard tied Houston to Labor's fate" and "It is not good enough. It is time for Labor to accept full political responsibility for the Afghanistan commitment....." and "proof of complacency in an ally insufficiently diligent about the consequences of the war and its outcome".

However in talking of "Barak Obama's dilemma" Kelly does acknowledge as a cover for his story "a psychological, financial and strategic equivocation at the heart of Western policy". Is he inferring that Australia should have, or could have, or might be able to influence US policy in Afghanistan?

Kelly goes on to say "Obama knows the US public cannot tolerate stalemate in Afghanistan; he knows that with US government debt heading towards 90 per cent of gross domestic product by 2020, he cannot spend a trillion dollars in Afghanistan; he knows that with American spirits fragile and its economy precarious, his priority must lie on the home front. And he would know the Soviet story: they killed one million Afghans and lost the war". Surely this is verification of the many years of opposition to continuation of the war in most participating countries including Australia.

He refers to the June statement of former defence minister John Faulkner wherein he states "Australia's aims were to deny sanctuary to terrorists, to help stabilise the country and to uphold our alliance with the US". Clearly with Pakistan sanctuaries the terrorists can not be defeated in Afghanistan - there is unlikely to be much assistance from Iran. Again the ingrained corruption throughout the government and civil society of the country is not conducive to political stability. Thus we are back to the US Alliance!

Kelly openly admits it:

"Of course, the politics are obvious: Australia went into Afghanistan with the US and it will leave Afghanistan with the US. This is how responsible allies behave".

But then he continues with his assertions and provides the answer - a conversation with himself:

"But that cannot exempt Gillard from the responsibility Labor has ducked: a proper strategic assessment of the war. If Labor refuses this task there is only one explanation, that the truth is so bad it cannot be told".

Thus there is really no need for a debate on Afghanistan. The truth is brutal.

Australia is involved in Afghanistan because the Americans are involved with a UN cloak and NATO troops which permitted the Bush military expedition to Iraq, always the real objective of the Neo-Cons. The "US alliance framework" must be protected no matter what.

However the above ground target of the article is superficially the Greens Party:

The opening sentence states emphatically:

**"LABOR, now in alliance with the Greens, can no longer continue to duck responsibility".**

And the last sentence provides the punch line:

"For this first time this debate should bring focus to the Greens' foreign and security policy. It is a world view, documented point by point, stunning in its isolationist utopian pacifist philosophy, unsuitable for the responsibility of nationhood. Long ignored, it needs to see sunlight".

I wonder what the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party, the real Government in the PRC, thinks? Especially given the fact that the Bob Brown Greens have taken the strongest stand of any party in Australia against Chinese policies. John Howard's Liberal Government gave the Chinese everything free of charge - Developed Nation Status and closed-door Human Rights Dialogue are just two examples - with little return to Australia or the world. At least the Kevin Rudd Labor Government was prepared to publicly challenge China on human rights reform. But then Murdoch ran a media campaign and got his

many duchess-ed trade union officials to sack Rudd.

The Greens philosophy/policy has never been "isolationist, utopian or pacifist" and whether right or wrong - a debatable proposition - is infinitely more suitable "for the responsibility of nationhood" than Kelly has ever been - some might even use the words unilateral traitor and appeaser of US corporatism when discussing his writings.

However the real shaft of the article is directed obviously at Gillard and the current Labor minority-government. Will they continue to fall into the trap? To continue to accept the emotive terminology of the Conservative forces in Australia and their News Corporation scribes like Kelly who set the framework for discussion?

"Gillard's dilemma is significant yet underestimated. It can be stated precisely: she will be caught, on the one hand, between an Afghanistan strategy unlikely to work and, on the other hand, the intolerable prospect of being seen to succumb to the Greens' demand for retreat. She will not retreat yet she will need substantive reasons to stay the course".

It is not a question of "retreat" nor "to succumb to the Greens" - the "intolerable prospect" god forbid - rather to debate and implement foreign policies that actually work. Afghanistan is lost - today, tomorrow or the next day? Is another dead Australian soldier worth Kelly's, and other heartless journalist's, pay cheques?

Unless the Gillard Government openly and honestly considers withdrawing from Afghanistan like the Dutch and UK, and when the decision to do so is announced clearly and passionately articulates to the Australian people why there are national policy priorities beyond the US Alliance, it is destined to oblivion like so many allegedly Social Democratic Governments of the past. You just have to look at the number of past and present Labor politicians expressing the "correct" views in various media outlets - it will collapse.

More importantly Afghanistan is a test of the Labor Party's grit and strength of purpose. The Chinese are watching closely. From the CCP perspective a Liberal Party Abbott Federal Government may be better - certainly than a Labor Rudd Government - because it could quiet easily roll over puppy dog like and simply change Masters - the economics of China surpassing the politics of the USA. Many of the more progressive elements of the ALP and most of the Greens are more concerned with the real national interests of Australia.