

## The Liberal shambles is not about Tony Abbott, it's actually about Malcolm Turnbull

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RUBBISH. Complete and utter rubbish. The idea that if Tony Abbott would just go away, the massive and manifest problems, the failings and sheer ineptitude of both government and prime minister would be miraculously resolved.

That indeed, Abbott's departure could be hailed as the moment: "when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal — the moment when we ended a war and secured our nation." Oh, sorry, that was Barack Obama's (self-proclaimed) "arrival" after which he should have been laughed unanimously right out of the 2008 presidential campaign. Except that almost the entire US (and indeed global) mainstream media were rendered (figuratively) speechless by the (literal) drool coming out of their mouths.



Tony Abbot can't be blamed for the shambles of the election campaign.

The claimed — stated or inferred — consequences of an Abbott departure aren't so far behind, so far as the massed ranks of the Canberra Press Gallery and assorted other commentators are concerned. Those mostly same commentators who also all but unanimously told us in 2013, as *The Australian* detailed yesterday, that Kevin Rudd was "dead, buried, and cremated", that he could never return as Labor leader, in some cases up to just a few weeks before, well, he did.

So presumably, if only Abbott would disappear, the PM would be able to deliver lower electricity prices and tackle — nay, Obama-like, conquer — climate change. That suddenly the proposed cut in company tax would sail through the Senate, personal tax cuts would

follow, jobs would sprout — why, the car industry might even spring back to life. And presiding over all this would be a confident, articulate, decisive Malcolm Turnbull. Well, maybe not the last: an Abbott departure can't work miracles quite that big.

The unified lament that it's "all about Abbott" overlooks one fundamental and inconvenient truth: it's actually "all about Turnbull".



Malcolm Turnbull ran arguably the most inept election campaign we've seen.

It is Turnbull who is the dud. The utter dud and from the moment he walked into the PM's office in 2015. It was Turnbull who ran arguably the most inept election campaign we've ever seen — or at least since John Hewson lost the "unlosable election" in 1993 — to end up in the totally precarious position he (and the government) did.

That was after "cleverly" changing the Senate voting rules to produce the rabble of crossbenchers we've now got. That in particular, Turnbull elevated Pauline Hanson from a likely one seat to four — dramatically increasing her political persona and clout, dramatically increasing the threat she poses to both the Liberal and National parties.

Turnbull certainly can't blame Abbott for the shambles of both the campaign and the outcome.

ABBOTT did not engage in the sort of sabotage that Rudd did in 2010 which produced the slightly worse outcome of the hung parliament for his nemesis, PM Julia Gillard. Further, Turnbull deliberately chose to not use Abbott in the campaign, where he could have been of huge benefit to Turnbull's right.

It is also again entirely Turnbull's choice not to have Abbott in the Cabinet and so bound by solidarity and confidentiality.

As former US president Lyndon Johnson famously advised: it's better to have (a potential opponent) inside the tent and micturating — he actually used a more Johnsonian word — out. Actually, excluding Abbott is probably the best and wisest thing that PM Turnbull has done. If not for himself personally, more broadly for both the party and the government, and indeed the country.

While Abbott might not be speaking truth to power, he is most certainly speaking truth to stupidity. Turnbull's stupidity. The Coalition's stupidity (political; and policy). And indeed, both media and national stupidity. The media attacks on Abbott fall into two categories. One is the raging, totally unhinged ravings of the Abbott haters, of which the AFR's Laura Tingle's weekend piece was arguably the most emblematic.

I'll just replay the start. "Politics is full of catastrophic debacles ... The Soviet Union comes to mind. All that work. All that butchery. All those millions killed. And then pffft! It was gone." "Similarly, Tony Abbott."

The second category is epitomised by The Australian's Paul Kelly, lamenting politics is no longer being conducted by the learned "right-thinking" centre. What Canadian commentator Mark Steyn acutely described as the only "acceptable" political conversation is between the "right-of-left-of-right-of-left-of-centre" party and the ever-so slightly "left-of-right-of-left-of-centre" opposition.

But while both types of column might have had some currency a year ago, Brexit and Trump — and indeed our own Pauline — has blown that right of the water. Both Tingle's hysteria and Kelly's sophistication are so yesterday. Yes, Tony goes away. But the issues that matter to ordinary people otherwise known as voters won't suddenly evaporate or be cured as a consequence.

What Abbot was doing with his five-point plan to "win the next election" was to spell out precisely (some of) those issues — power bills, immigration, housing prices. Yes, he could be criticised for not having tackled them when he was PM. But that is to miss the point: they are still there; they still need to be tackled; you still need a PM prepared to tackle them.

Take the — utterly bipartisan — mad rush to wind power. Billions of dollars of taxpayer money will be spent and billions more added to direct consumer power bills and we still won't get to even the government's lower target. Abbott shutting or being shut up would just work to elevate Hanson & Co. The government and the PM would still be doomed. And the real challenges still remain.