



Seriously? Australian diplomatic strategy was unable to endure the withering onslaught of four disapproving columnists?

It's always interesting to see how newly elected leaders respond to stimuli. And Kevin Rudd gave a clear indication of his tolerance for criticism at the beginning of April.

The Prime Minister's trip abroad had a peculiar schedule. He was to visit China, which had just reemphasised its military control of Tibet. But he was to shun Japan, whose only crime seemed to be that its citizens like dining on whales. Rudd's implied priorities—that whales are more important than human rights—is sadly indicative of the warped moral calculus of the modern environment movement. And it is worrying that the Australian federal government is taking its diplomatic cues from environmental populism.

This strange diplomatic decision was identified by Tony Parkinson, writing in this edition of the *IPA Review*. As he writes, 'any hint Australia is into the business of picking winners, giving undue priority to one over another, would be contrary to the national interest.'

The Institute of Public Affairs' Executive Director, John Roskam, referring to Parkinson's upcoming piece, wrote in *The Age* on March 26 that this contradicted Labor's election campaign line that the ALP would pursue a gentler, nicer, more loving foreign policy: 'Australia would do more to uphold international standards of human rights, and we wouldn't acquiesce so easily to alleged human rights violations committed in the pursuit of the war on terror.' China's activities in Tibet, surely, fall under some of those categories. Andrew Bolt in Melbourne's *Herald Sun* on the same day, and Greg Sheridan in *The Australian* on March 27 made similar points.

And so, just a few days later, the Prime Minister announced that he had changed his plans, and was now going to go to Tokyo in June. Parkinson, Roskam, Bolt and Sheridan are excellent writers. Their critiques of Rudd's initial decision to shun Japan were eloquent and well made. John Roskam's was particularly good. (He is, after all, my boss).

But: *seriously?* Australian diplomatic strategy was unable to endure the withering onslaught of four disapproving columnists? Is that really all it takes to change federal policy?

Winston Churchill once said there is no such thing as public opinion—there is only published opinion. But it's not even as if

Rudd was castigated across the board by the commentariat. Other columnists defended Rudd, arguing that China will be a far more important trading partner than Japan over the next few decades.

Perhaps this is fair enough—perhaps our relationship with Japan should be sacrificed for the sake of the Labor Party's green vote.

Kevin Rudd is proud of his diplomatic background. But decisions made as a foreign affairs bureaucrat are very different from the highly public and highly scrutinised diplomatic decisions made as a Prime Minister. Avoiding Japan and flattering China may be great diplomacy—the nuances of

high geopolitics are, we are told, a Rudd speciality. But foreign affairs is as much about domestic politics as international diplomacy. As John Kunkel, John Howard's former

speechwriter, reflects in his retrospective of the Howard Project in this issue of the *IPA Review*, Rudd's predecessor understood the necessity for foreign policy to be just as democratically minded as domestic affairs. With his Japan stumble, Kevin Rudd may have begun to realise that.

This edition of the *IPA Review* continues our 'What Next for Liberalism?' feature, asking whether it is ever going to be possible for government to be shrunk, considering that no Australian government has ever managed to do so. Sinclair Davidson, Des Moore and Alan Moran look at the strategies for reducing the size of the state and its powers. Christopher Pyne argues that only major reform to the Liberal Party's approach to selecting candidates and leaders will re-engage the party's supporters, and John Pyke crunches the numbers to find a startling level of support for the republic amongst those who voted against it nearly ten years ago.

Richard Allsop reveals how the left have managed to convert the sporting field into yet another battlefield for the culture wars. Greg Melleuish looks at why smart people believe stupid things, and Scott Ryan looks behind the health debate to the health providers who are holding back reform. And of course, the usual book reviews, regular columns and cultural snippets that have helped the *IPA Review* become Australia's longest running political magazine.



Inside this issue

Volume 60
Number 2
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- 1 **Editorial**
- 3 **From the Executive Director**
- 4 **Budget holidays matter, of course.**
Christian Kerr
- 6 **Shorts**
Baby bonus, trade policy, fear of education profit making, global warming science, train station parking, inflation
- 10 **Reflections on the 'Howard Project'**
John Howard's former speechwriter on the success and failures of the Howard message. *John Kunkel*
- 15 **Castro's retirement brings out the narcissism of the Western left**
Cubans will regret Castro. *Andrew Kemp*
- 17 **Rudd's summit misses the point of policy**
2020 is more soundbite than policymaking.
Wolfgang Kasper
- 18 **How the left made sport the new battlefield in the culture wars** **COVER STORY**
The culture warriors have opened up a new front.
Richard Allsop
- 24 **Rudd's Asia hypocrisy**
Grandstanding about whales means little for human rights.
Tony Parkinson
- 28 **Breaking through medical myths**
Lifting the veil of health 'stakeholders'. *Scott Ryan*
- 32 **Can government be restrained?**
Making the state small is a huge task. *Des Moore*
- 34 **Can we starve the government beast?**
The 'starve the beast' trick may not work. *Sinclair Davidson*
- 36 **Can regulation be reduced?**
Numerically, we have more regulation than at any other time in history. *Alan Moran*
- 38 **Voting for the leader is next step for Liberal reform**
The Liberal Party must embrace participatory democracy. *Christopher Pyne*
- 40 **The republic: has Labor got the perfect wedge?**
The electorate wants a republic more than you think.
John Pyke
- BOOKS AND CULTURE**
- 42 **Why smart people believe stupid things**
Greg Melleuish reviews *Scared to Death*, *Counterknowledge* and *Curious Obsessions in the History of Science*.
- 45 **John Stuart Mill's odd combination**
Andrew Kemp reviews *John Stuart Mill: Victorian Firebrand*.
- 47 **Misbehaving models and missing mammals**
Jennifer Marohasy reviews *Science and Public Policy: The Virtuous Corruption of Virtual Environmental Science*.
- 49 **Microtrends may be small, but that doesn't mean they are important**
Tim Wilson reviews *Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Today's Big Changes*.
- 50 **Australian history's forgotten capitalists**
John Roskam reviews *Colonial Ambition*.
- 52 **'God is love': The politics of bills of rights**
Eddy Gisonda reviews *Bills of Rights and Decolonization*.
- 53 **News flash: war exciting, federation dull**
Richard Allsop reviews *History's Children*.
- 54 **A hatchet job and the holocaust**
Why is Irene Nemirovsky being abused by the left?
Sinclair Davidson
- 55 **The left need to get social capital right, read IPA Review**
Louise Staley
- 56 **Strange Times**

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