

The Nuclear Option

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These days it seems our Federal government's best plan to stay in power, is to go for distractions. The Prime Minister who on his own admission can't hold a hose in a bushfire or a mop after a flood, wants to talk about anything but bushfires, floods and pandemics. The things for he was elected to provide leadership. Instead, this week saw Morrison at his desperate best, hitting the nuclear button, launching the weapon of mass distraction. Nuclear submarine bases on the east coast of Australia!

A khaki election is his only hope the pundits tell us. That may be, but putting a nuclear target on the backs of the battlers will prove dumb politics. It doesn't help his credibility that the plan seems to have been put together on the back of an empty envelope. Oh, and there is the delivery date, 2040 which makes your current Ebay delivery times from China seem competitive.

But what if he is serious and does proceed with his plan? The first thing to understand is that if a nuclear submarine base were to be built in Port Kembla, we will have no control or access to a very large part of our Port and will effectively hand it over to a collection of military interests including foreign powers. Anything nuclear involving the US navy means a large exclusion zone from other activity and the people who live here. For a practical example look at the bases in Subic Bay in the Philippines. Closer to home have a look at the operation that will be conducted on the weekend involving an armada of police, spooks and transport agencies closing the highway for 5 hours in the dead of night just to move a small amount of what we are told is mid grade radioactive medical waste from the Port to Lucas Heights. This happens once every few years and our region reluctantly puts up with the risk because there is a medical purpose. Imagine having that turbo charged for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to service nuclear war machines which put a nuclear target on our region.

There is another problem. Reliance on nuclear systems means a reliance on foreign powers to service and reprocess the nuclear fuel rods. You can't get this stuff from Bunnings and so we will be reliant on foreign powers to run the entire fleet. Don't just take my word for it, the former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull called it an "abandonment of sovereignty". The Government is naturally a little sensitive about this stuff and is likely to call it a "Joint Facility". Unfortunately, this normally means that the only thing Australian in the joint will be the flag. And that will probably be manufactured in China under this government's procurement policies.

But what does this really mean for our Port, our industry and our jobs? Think of it this way. The anchor to our port is the steelworks and related industry. We are at the cusp of multi billion dollar investments in hydrogen production and storage and a massive off-shore wind power generation industry which will support and reinforce our steel production and grow the manufacturing base in our region. Why jeopardise our industries and expected investment? Just to be crowded out by a cabal of foreign military industrial interests?

Further, there are obvious dangers in allowing nuclear weapons capable vessels into our nuclear free Port since the US Navy has a strict policy of not confirming or denying they are carrying nuclear weapons. Billions of dollars of our taxes on a nuclear pipe dream that will do little more than antagonize our neighbours for 20 years before they are even scheduled to be delivered. Choices.

By then, Putin and Xi Jinping will be long gone. So will the hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars that could have been spent on rebuilding the houses that were burn down in the fires and destroyed by the floods. Billions that could give us the best hospitals and schools in the world and the extra nurses and teachers we so desperately need. Choices, that are not distractions.