

Scott Morrison all at sea over asylum seeker solution

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The Minister for Immigration, Scott Morrison, should resign. He is not a fit and proper person to be responsible for vulnerable lives.

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Riots at the Manus Island detention camp on February 16 and 17 have seen more than 70 asylum seekers injured, and at least one killed.

Various accounts suggest tension and frustration led to anger and then physical violence on the part of asylum seekers.

The protest on February 16 was apparently contained. However, further violence is said to have occurred the following day. It is unclear whether this was a continuation of the earlier protest or whether it was instigated by angry locals, including police, fearful of the prospect of disturbances spilling into nearby housing areas.

Apparently Australian staff, including guards, left the scene and played no part in seeking a resolution to the problem. But most of this information has come from sources other than the minister and his department. All that Morrison has confirmed is one death and several injuries.

The government justifies this lack of detail by throwing over its blanket ban on information relating to operational security. Under the circumstances, this is a nonsense excuse for avoiding proper scrutiny.

When the going gets rough, the head of the so-called Operation Sovereign Borders, General Angus Campbell, is pushed to one side while Morrison aggressively seeks to justify the unjustifiable. Bully is a gentle word for Morrison. Campbell is little more than a figurehead.

Without any help, Morrison has taken the relationship with Indonesia to its lowest point since the mid-1980s. He appears to understand nothing and listens to no one.

Edward Snowden and the Indonesian spy allegation have not helped. However, intelligence agencies and the governments they work for understand the spying game and the byzantine rules governing operations.

It is the issue of boats and the lies and deception surrounding their return, together with the arrogance of Morrison and Tony Abbott in dealing with the Indonesian governing elite, that have caused the rupture, accompanied by anger and resentment that will find expression to Australia's cost.

Morrison claims success in stopping boats over the past eight weeks or so. We only have his word for that.

The only means by which a sustainable policy can be implemented is in co-operation with the Indonesian government, but Morrison has burnt his bridges with respect to that possibility. With elections due shortly in Indonesia, he can expect to reap what he has sown from what is likely to be a less tolerant government.

Abbott and Morrison have created a vacuum in Australian foreign policy in the region. It should have been Abbott in Jakarta talking about climate change rather than US Secretary of State John Kerry.

In mid-November I wrote: "Implementing policy under a veil of secrecy carries with it risks - big risks if there is a significant stuff-up.

"In a situation of seriously flawed governance with which I was familiar, the white South African government, in their implementation and administration of apartheid, threw a veil of secrecy over political prisoners. When they died in detention, as their treatment was wont to cause, there was a significant domestic and international outcry, just as there will be when asylum seekers are found to have died in Australian detention camps."

It didn't take long - just three months. The government's policy is unsustainable. In the long term, it will not stop boats taking to the high seas, and for all we know, it may not be working in the short term. All we have is Morrison's word that his blunt instrument of Operation Sovereign Borders is working, but nothing about the operation to date has built much confidence into his word.

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This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/scott-morrison-all-at-sea-over-asylum-seeker-solution-20140219-3318v.html>