

Leaked transcripts provide ugly picture of Trump and Australian prime minister

Mike Head
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Amid intense political infighting within the US ruling elite, the *Washington Post* has published transcripts of President Donald Trump's phone calls in late January with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.

Both transcripts display Trump's thuggishness, bald-faced lying, hatred of Muslims and refugees, and his readiness to bully other countries, including supposed allies, in pursuit of his "America First" agenda.

In his call with Turnbull, Trump repeatedly berated the Australian prime minister for trying to hold him to a "horrible," "stupid" and "disgusting" deal signed with the Obama administration. The agreement was ostensibly to permit entry to the US for refugees who have been detained for years in Australia's offshore prison camps on Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.

Referring to the executive order he had just issued to ban entry to people from a list of Muslim-majority countries, Trump complained that the Australian deal "will make me look terrible." He declared: "Here I am calling for a ban where I am not letting anybody in and we take 2,000 people."

From the outset of the call, Turnbull identified himself with the executive order, which US courts later struck down because it was patently discriminatory toward Muslims. He boasted that "we have, as you know, taken a very strong line on national security and border protection here" and "our policies have helped to inform your approach."

"We are very much of the same mind," Turnbull continued. "It is very interesting to know how you prioritise the minorities in your Executive Order. This is exactly what we have done with the program to bring in 12,000 Syrian refugees, 90 percent of which will be Christians."

In other words, Turnbull and his government have adopted an explicitly anti-Muslim policy, while trying to camouflage their policies for public consumption.

Turnbull was at pains to reassure Trump that the Australian deal involved a quid pro quo, with Canberra offering to take a number of Latin Americans detained in US refugee camps, without actually obliging the US to take a single person from Nauru or Manus.

The agreement, Turnbull explained, "does not require you to take 2,000 people. It does not require you to take any. It requires, in return, for us to do a number of things for the United States."

Later, as Trump continued to rail against the deal, Turnbull emphasised: "Every individual is subject to your vetting. You can decide to take them or to not take them after vetting... The obligation is to only go through the process."

Trump pushed the point. "I hate having to do it, but I am still going to vet them very closely. Suppose I vet them closely and I do not take any?" Turnbull replied: "That is the point I have been trying to make."

This confirms that the refugee agreement was always a cruel hoax, purely for public consumption. Even if some of the detainees in the Australian camps want to be sent to the US, on the other side of the world, none might be accepted.

Turnbull told Trump the detainees were "basically economic refugees from Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan... They have been under our supervision for over three years now and we know exactly everything about them."

Trump referred repeatedly to the fact that the refugees were "actually in prison," implying that they were criminals and should not be allowed into the US. "Why haven't you let them out? Why have you not let them into your society?" he asked.

In a revealing comment, Turnbull insisted: “It is not because they are bad people.” He told Trump all refugees are barred from arriving in Australia by boat, no matter what their plight, supposedly to stop “people smugglers.” Even a “Nobel Prize winning genius” would not get in.

Trump replied: “That is a good idea. We should do that too. You are worse than I am.”

In reality, the majority of the detainees have been classified by the UN as refugees fleeing persecution, as per the 1951 Refugees Convention. Vilified by the Australian media and political establishment, the refugees are guilty of no crime yet have been detained indefinitely in breach of their basic democratic rights to deter any asylum seekers trying to reach Australia.

Turnbull’s comment underlines the contempt of his Liberal-National government, and the previous Labor government that initially incarcerated the detainees, for international law.

The entire conversation had undertones of racist hostility toward the millions of people fleeing the US-instigated wars in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. Both men spoke scathingly of German Chancellor Angela Merkel for not shutting Germany’s border. Trump said it was “crazy,” because “you do not want to destroy your country.” Turnbull said he agreed with Trump, adding that “letting one million Syrians walk into their country” was a big factor in the Brexit vote.

Ultimately, Trump said he would honour the refugee pact, at least in public, but reiterated his displeasure. “As far as I am concerned that is enough Malcolm,” he said. “I have had it. I have been making these calls all day and this is the most unpleasant call all day. [Russian President Vladimir] Putin was a pleasant call. This is ridiculous.”

The conversation commenced and finished with fawning efforts by Turnbull to ingratiate himself to Trump personally and to reiterate his government’s unwavering commitment to the post-World War II strategic and military alliance with the US.

“I know we are both looking to make our relationship which is very strong and intimate, stronger than ever—which I believe we can do,” Turnbull began. Trump replied: “Good.”

At the end of the call, Turnbull was anxious to assist Trump more broadly, notably in Syria, where

Australian military forces are on the frontline of the US-led intervention, and over North Korea, which Washington is threatening militarily.

“Do you want to talk about Syria and DPRK [North Korea]?” Turnbull asked. Trump was still fuming about the refugee pact. His reply was recorded as: “[inaudible] this is crazy.”

Nonetheless, Turnbull persisted. “Thank you for your commitment. It is very important to us,” he said, adding: “You can count on me. I will be there again and again.”

Trump’s reaction was: “I hope so. Okay, thank you Malcolm.”

With that, the US president abruptly ended the call after just 25 minutes, making it the shortest call he made to a head of government in the days following his inauguration.



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