Kevin Rudd's last words as foreign minister . . . and what they mean

*February 23, 2012*

* Read later
* [Vote](http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/political-news/kevin-rudds-last-words-as-foreign-minister----and-what-they-mean-20120222-1todj.html#poll)

**Analysis: Rudd's declaration of war**

What does Kevin Rudd's resignation really mean for the Labor party? National affairs editor Tony Wright explains.

WELL, ladies and gentlemen, it is with great sadness that I announce that I will resign as Australia's minister for foreign affairs.

I am sad because I love this job. I'm totally dedicated to the work that we are doing in Australia's name around the world. I believe that we've achieved many good results for Australia, and I'm proud of them.

It's therefore been for me a great privilege to serve our country as foreign minister, to represent our people abroad, and I thank the people of our country for their support as I have discharged these responsibilities. But while I am sad to leave this office, I am sadder still that it has come to this.

Advertisement: Story continues below



Kevin Rudd resigning in Washington in the early hours of Wednesday morning (local time).

The last time I resigned from a position in public office was when I resigned as prime minister of Australia. And, regrettably, there have been some similar factors at play today.

It's time for some plain speaking on this. The truth is, I can only serve as foreign minister if I have the confidence of Prime Minister Gillard and her senior ministers.

In recent days, Minister Crean and a number of other faceless men have publicly attacked my integrity and therefore my fitness to serve as a minister in the government.

When challenged today on these attacks, Prime Minister Gillard chose not to repudiate them.

I can only reluctantly conclude that she therefore shares these views.

The simple truth is that I cannot continue to serve as foreign minister if I do not have Prime Minister Gillard's support.

I therefore believe the only honourable thing, and the only honourable course of action, is for me to resign, and I do so with a genuinely heavy heart and after much personal reflection.

There are other factors too that I have had to take into consideration today. The truth is the Australian people regard this whole affair as little better than a soap opera.

And they are right. And under current circumstances, I won't be part of it.

It is also, I believe, a distraction from the real business of government. I also believe it's affecting the business community. And I agree with recent statements by peak bodies to this effect. It is important that business confidence is maintained in Australia. The economy and jobs are core to what any responsible government is about.

I also believe that this ongoing saga is bad for my good friend Anna Bligh as she fights the fight of her life in Queensland.

She's a great premier, she's a good friend, and I believe the good people of Queensland deserve some clear space over the coming month as they make up their minds on a very important decision on the future of Queensland, my home state, a state I'm very proud to be from.

The truth is, I also feel very uncomfortable doing this from Washington, and not in Australia. But I don't feel as if I have a choice, given the responsibilities I have before me over the days ahead, here in Washington, in London on the future of Somalia and piracy in the Indian Ocean, and in Tunis on the future of Syria.

These are important challenges for the world where a responsible Australian voice needs to be heard, a voice which I have sought to inject in my period as foreign minister on these core challenges.

And under no circumstances do I want Australia's international reputation brought into disrepute because of this ongoing saga. Therefore Ambassador Beazley will discharge my functions here on my behalf in Washington tomorrow and the permanent secretary of my department, Dennis Richardson, will represent me in London and in Tunis.

I will return home to Brisbane tomorrow, arriving back there on Friday morning. Over the days ahead, I will be consulting openly and honestly with my family, with my community and my parliamentary colleagues, taking their counsel on what I should do next and what my next step should be.

I will then make a full statement to the Australian people on my future before Parliament resumes next Monday.

I deeply believe if the Australian Labor Party, a party of which I have been a proud member for more than 30 years, is to have the best future for our nation, then it must change fundamentally its culture and to end the power of faceless men.

Australia must be governed by the people, not by the factions. But I can promise you this — there is no way, no way, that I will ever be party to a stealth attack on a sitting prime minister elected by the people. We all know that what happened then was wrong and it must never happen again.

I would like to thank very much, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Their Secretary, Dennis Richardson, Australia's former ambassador here in Washington, is a first class Australian diplomat and through him I would thank the department's executive and all the deputy secretaries I've worked with day after day, week after week, in advancing Australia's interests around the world.

These are good people, and all the Ambassadors and High Commissioners, who proudly stand there every day, in Australia's name, are doing good things for our interests and expressing our values right across the world, and I publicly acknowledge them with heartfelt thanks.

I would also like to thank my exceptionally loyal and hardworking staff, led by my chief of staff, Philip Green, and his deputy, Kate Sieper.

These are a great team, phenomenally loyal and hardworking, and together we have done good things.

In my letter of resignation to the Prime Minister, I have asked her to give effect to my resignation 48 hours after my return to Australia, so that I can affect the best transition for my staff as possible under these circumstances.

I'd think you would understand, there's a human dimension to all this.

Together with the foreign policy team, the department, my office and other great public servants responsible for foreign policy in the Australian public service, I'm proud of our achievements.

I'm proud of the fact that we built a new institution in Asia, which, for the first time in the history of Asia, brings the United States, China, Japan, India, Australia, and all the other countries in the region, around a single table, able to discuss and negotiate a peaceful security future for Australia.

I'm proud that we have reformed fundamentally our development partnerships with the island states of the South Pacific, to lift their living standards and reduce infant and child mortality, according to our responsibilities under the Millennium Development Goals.

I'm proud of the fact that we're on track to lift our overseas development assistance to 0.5 percentage gross national income, as I promised prior to the 2007 election.

Also our opening to Burma - the first Western foreign minister to go in there - six or seven months ago, hopefully helping to pave the way for Burma's opening to the rest of the world.

Early action on Libya, a call of which we are all - in our office and in our department - very proud.

Our re-engagement with Europe, and Africa and Latin America - these major economic regions of the future.

And, of course, I am deeply proud of our decision to appoint Australia's first ever ambassador for women and girls, and the announcement, which I now trust the government will give effect to, that is, that during this term we will appoint our first Indigenous Australian as an ambassador, in one of our embassies abroad.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is one overriding question for my caucus colleagues and that is who is best placed to defeat Tony Abbott at the next election.

Mr Abbott, I believe, does not have the temperament or the experience to ever be elected and hold the office, the high office, of Prime Minister of Australia, but at present, and for a long time now, he has been on track to do just that.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would also like to express my appreciation for the support of my family: Therese, Jessica, Nicholas, Marcus. Chatting to them over the course of the last several hours, I thank them for their encouragement and their support, as always.

And you'll appreciate I now have much, much to do and therefore I propose to conclude my statement here and I do not propose to take questions.

Thank you.

**And what what he was really saying**

By Tony Wright

''I feel very uncomfortable doing this from Washington rather than Australia, but I don't feel I have a choice.''

**I'm running out of time to marshal the numbers. I'm declaring war right now.**

''I cannot continue to serve as Foreign Minister if I do not have the Prime Minister's support and so I have decided to do the honourable thing and the honourable thing is to resign.''

**Julia Gillard has no honour - not like me. I have so much integrity I'm prepared to step off the international stage, which you all know I love so dearly, and place my career on the line.**

''I promise you this - there is no way, no way, that I will ever be party to a stealth attack on a sitting prime minister who was elected by the people. We all know that what happened then was wrong and it must never happen again.''

**Julia Gillard and her ''faceless men'' took the prime ministership from me and the Australian people by foul means. She is therefore an illegitimate leader. By the way - that claim that I have been the architect of a stealthy campaign of destabilisation? Not true, even if Gillard deserved it.**

''There is one overriding question for my colleagues and that is who is best placed to defeat Tony Abbott.''

**You all know Julia Gillard can't beat Tony Abbott. I can.**

''Tony Abbott is on track to win and has been for a long time.''

**Julia Gillard has proved herself a hopeless Labor prime minister. She'll take you all to a terrible defeat. Without me, your careers will be over.**

''I will return to Brisbane and consult my family and colleagues before deciding my next step.''

**The real number-crunching, arm-twisting and promises start now. I'm challenging Julia Gillard. Got that?**

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/political-news/kevin-rudds-last-words-as-foreign-minister----and-what-they-mean-20120222-1todj.html#ixzz1nA0eDxS9>