

## **ENGLISH: *THE RUGMAKER OF MAZAR-E-SHARIF***

**“Conflict changes both those with power and those without it”**

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### Statement of Intention

I feel that the persuasive form best enables me to demonstrate my understanding of conflict by allowing me to choose a contention and argue for it, which I believe is one of my strengths. The prompt explores the idea of those with and those without power, and I was immediately able to see the link between this and the comparison between Najaf Mazari, a simple powerless citizen of Afghanistan, and Tony Abbott, the federal leader of the opposition who, comparatively has much power. To explore this idea further, I am writing as a seemingly powerless voter who used to be a strong supporter of Tony Abbott and especially his policy of stopping the boats. This person origin a letter to Tony Abbott which initially appears to be a letter of support, congratulating him for his efforts in stopping the boats, and agreeing with this idea. However, my character then reveals that he was curious about how anyone could believe otherwise about the idea of stopping the boats, and in order to hear both sides he read the book *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif*. This dramatically changed his perception of Asylum Seekers, enabling me to discuss why and how a powerless person can change in the face of conflict. I have also drawn on the example of Tajwar Kakar, a simple woman whose story appeared in *The Age* on 19/01/2012, and who changed because of the conflict in Afghanistan. My character explores how people without power find it relatively easy to change in the face of conflict as they have nothing to lose. Najaf is used as an example, as he was able to adjust from a world where war was normal to peaceful Australia.

I will then address the former component of the prompt, that those with power can also change by encountering conflict, but my character will emphasise that this is a rare occurrence. It is highlighted that those without power find it relatively easy to change, as their change has few consequences. However, when those with much power such as politicians change, it can have far-reaching consequences, with a change in opinion being branded a “flip-flop,” and often hurting them politically. The example of Naoto Kan, the former Prime Minister of Japan is cited as an example of someone who changed because of the conflict surrounding the use of nuclear power and decided that it should be gotten rid of. My letter finishes with an appeal to Tony Abbott to change his views, and the letter is deliberately left open as to whether Tony Abbott really can do this, showing how hard it is for the powerful to change.

My letter uses formal language appropriate for a letter to a politician, but at times uses emotive language and a variety of persuasive techniques such as flattery, rhetorical questions, sarcasm and logic to attempt to persuade Abbott. By presenting a powerless person who changed their views on Asylum Seekers, Tony Abbott, a powerful person, is encouraged to change his views as well.

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Monday 4 June 2012

Mr Tony Abbott MP  
Leader of the Opposition  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Mr Abbott,

Stop the boats. We both know that Australia needs a strong policy that has worked in the past. The Howard government proved that Temporary Protection Visas, offshore processing on Nauru, and towing the boats back where safe works. It worked then, it would work now. We cannot allow the people smuggling trade to continue. We cannot allow people to risk their lives at sea. Australia, very generously, has a humanitarian intake of refugees every year, humans patiently waiting in refugee camps. People must be discouraged from jumping the queue and coming by boat, as to simply invite them in would be in breach of the Australian spirit of fairness. And so, Mr Abbott, I commend you on your efforts to stop the boats.

Or at least, I used to. In the past I was a strong supporter of your refugee policy. I had no idea why anybody would be against stopping the boats. The ever present comment tacked to the end of every asylum seeker related news report from “refugee advocates” always filled me with curiosity. How could anyone advocate for selfish queue jumpers? So eventually in order to hear the other side of the debate, I read the book *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* by Najaf Mazari. It tells the true story of a young Afghan man who, due to his ethnic group, is unfairly persecuted by the Taliban. With his life in great peril, he makes the brave decision to flee the land he has lived in all his life, and eventually comes to Australia. As I read, I realised that my whole perception of asylum seekers was flawed. Najaf Mazari didn’t want to jump the queue; in fact he didn’t even know that it existed. He didn’t choose to come by boat either; that was entirely the choice of the people smugglers. If Najaf and the other asylum seekers he came with were towed back to Indonesia, they would continue to face much danger and would have no chance of security or safety. I am thankful for the democracy I live in; it allowed other people to express their views, it allowed me to hear them, and it allowed em to change. Because I now believe that the boats should not be towed back. We should not stop the boats.

It is relatively easy for an ordinary, powerless person like me to change my opinion when conflict arises. Peaceful debate about an issue allows everyday citizens to hear other points of view, and become more informed. This can potentially allow them to change their opinion. A change in a powerless person is often easy as it may often have little effect on others, and could benefit the person concerned. Tajwar Kakar, a woman in her sixties, had such a change in 1989. At that time she lived in Afghanistan, where her life and the life of her children was often in danger. She even had to sleep with her rifle by her side so she could protect her children if necessary. In order to give them a greater chance of survival she bravely decided to change by moving to Australia. She had nothing to lose and everything to gain by such a choice, and her decision to change was therefore not exceedingly difficult. It was also a comparatively easy decision for Najaf Mazari to flee from Afghanistan, and whilst he did find it challenging he did not have great difficulty adjusting to Australian life. To adapt from a land where he describes “war had become normal...it was peace that was strange” to peaceful, free Australia is an enormous shift in an individual’s life, and as a powerless person Najaf managed very well. Whilst I personally thought it was a tricky decision to

make, the change in my views regarding asylum seekers I must admit was easy when compared to a powerful person wishing to change, as my decision had no effect on anyone else.

Unlike an everyday voter like me or a simple Afghan man or woman, I believe that it is very difficult for a powerful person such as a politician to change. When such a person changes it can have many repercussions, often being branded as a “flip-flop” and making the person in question seem untrustworthy. Being a powerful politician yourself, I am sure you know this, but what you may not fully understand is that people in your position can change if the issue in question is important enough that they do not mind risking their political career. Nato Kan, who you may know as the Prime Minister of Japan, used to believe that nuclear power was necessary, and as a cheap, clean source of power it was worth the seemingly remote safety risk. Before 2011 there was little conflict on this issue, but the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011 caused much debate around whether nuclear power should continue but be made as safe as possible, or whether it should be removed altogether as a safety hazard. This conflict presented a choice for Kan; should he continue with his former point of view and potentially have greater political security? Or should he put the safety of the nation first and risk being seen as untrustworthy? Kan decided to change, and has been a very active opponent of all nuclear power. It is therefore clear that the powerful can change, but this is rare, and only occurs if they are very brave.

It is also possible, Mr Abbott, for you to change. You could change your asylum seeker policy. Towing boats back, as you continually remind us you'd do, would do nothing to help people's safety, and would only leave many people in great danger. You are right when you say that we cannot simply let people drown at sea; to do so is inhumane. So why not break the people smuggler's business model completely? Why not bring asylum seekers over ourselves? We could have an Australian-owned centre in Indonesia, where people escaping persecution could flee to. After a quick security check, the Australian government could bring asylum seekers over however they see fit, whether it be in a seaworthy vessel or by plane. Asylum seekers could then be processed in the community while being given the right to work. If this was your policy it would save money in the budget as we would no longer have to spend billions of dollars keeping detention centres operating. There would be no more leaky boats travelling to Australia putting the occupants at risk. Most of all, Australia would be helping desperate people living lives that would otherwise be fraught with danger. Perhaps the numbers of people fleeing to Australia would increase; if so, good. Australia is a wealthy country that should be accepting our fair share of refugees. By the standards of some other countries the amount we currently accept is pitifully low.

Such a change in you would be difficult, given what your stance on refugees has been for so long. It would require much bravery, and there may be some adverse consequences you could face. But a little political damage is a tiny consequence compared to the consequences others have faced who have changed to help desperate people. Recently, Tajwar Kakar moved back to Afghanistan, putting her life at risk so she could educate the poor. A simple decision by you could do even more at a smaller cost; it would be catalyst for more humane treatment of those we have an obligation to help. Or you could continue your policy of turning back the boats. Because letting people who fight for their lives, possibly with children, be towed back into danger is so helpful.

Can you do it? Can you change?

Yours sincerely,  
Larry Kewell