

Hidden hand behind cut. Whiff of One Nation in Abbott plan to slash foreign school aid

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ABSTRACT

Foreign Affairs Minister Kevin Rudd said he was shocked the Coalition would dump the policy created by John Howard to fight terrorism and the only person who would be pleased would be radical Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir.

FULL TEXT

SENIOR Liberals have expressed concern that Tony Abbott's surprise plan to slash a \$448 million scheme to build schools in Indonesia may have been inspired by One Nation.

Foreign Affairs Minister Kevin Rudd said he was shocked the Coalition would dump the policy created by John Howard to fight terrorism and the only person who would be pleased would be radical Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir.

One Nation's Queensland spokesman Ian Nelson told the Herald Sun an email had been sent by one of his colleagues to Coalition MPs urging them to slash Australia's \$4.4 billion foreign aid.

"Foreign aid is getting out of hand. Every now and again we send through things we'd like to be done," he said.

Liberals confirmed the email had been widely circulated and there had been strong lobbying for the idea.

The email, seen by the Herald Sun, does not mention One Nation but has the Indonesian school scheme listed as the top foreign aid item to be cut.

It asks why Queensland flood victims were receiving only \$17 million from Canberra but Prime Minister Julia Gillard was giving "nearly \$500 million for Indonesia's Islamic schools".

"Stop the overseas aid now and divert those funds to Queensland. When Queensland has been rebuilt and back on its feet, then we can help build more Islamic schools overseas," it said.

Liberals said they were surprised by Mr Abbott's proposal, which foreign affairs spokeswoman Julie Bishop is believed to have opposed.

When Mr Abbott announced a policy of cuts to pay for flood repairs instead of Ms Gillard's levy, he said help at home was a priority.

"With so many schools destroyed or damaged in Australia we do think that charity begins at home," he said.

Mr Abbott's office said he had not seen the email and he was a well-known opponent of One Nation.

Mr Howard created the scheme after the Bali bombings over concerns about anti-western teaching in Indonesian schools.

Mr Rudd told Parliament the scheme had helped build 2500 schools and train students and principals.

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Credit: Phillip Hudson, national political editor

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