



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

**Afghanistan**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 27 October 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Georganas, Steve, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (5.49 pm)—I appreciate the Main Committee giving me time to get here to speak in this debate on the ministerial statement on Afghanistan. I extend my gratitude and thanks to the Prime Minister for speaking openly and freely on Australia's involvement in Afghanistan. I think it is important for all of us in this place to talk about our views and thoughts on where we are heading, what is happening in Afghanistan and how we feel about it. As members of this parliament—and some of us represent over 100,000 people in our electorates—I think it is important to have this discussion and to air the thoughts and views that we have.

Many members have already spoken about Afghanistan this week. Members have spoken of what Australia has provided in terms of military deployment, reconstruction and training work being performed in Afghanistan. I am sure all Australian personnel, military and other, are doing an excellent job under extremely difficult circumstances. I congratulate all who have been involved, especially those on the ground in Afghanistan. We can talk as much as we like about it, but we will never know what it is like for all those Defence Force personnel and others who are actually on the ground in Afghanistan.

We all regret the loss of Australian personnel. We have supported and continue to support all of our personnel. We thank the families of the brave and selfless soldiers who have paid the ultimate price for Australia's involvement in this conflict.

It is difficult to speak on Australia's involvement in Afghanistan now and in the foreseeable future without being able to reflect on the detail of the deployment, the composition, the task, the allocation, the objectives and the time frames of the coalition as a whole. Without information from the ground—the detail of what in particular, for example, the US is doing towards various tactical objectives—it is hard to offer specific comments on the timely resolution of coalition activity in that country, but I suppose I can offer my own views in broad terms.

In my view, I think we should approve the concept of a sustainable nation-state of Afghanistan run by Afghans, and we should do what we can to help them establish this ongoing state of existence. By 'sustainable' I mean defensible, a nation-state that is strong enough to rebuff the coordinated attacks of insurgents, as we have seen in the past, and strong enough to uphold its laws and bring those who break them to justice. We have had any number of commentators airing their views on the potential outcomes of engagement in that war—whether we can win the war, for example, or what will happen if we lose the war. Again, in my view, the only loss would be the loss of the nation-state of Afghanistan, such that it currently is, and all that has been established by people of Afghanistan over the last decade and all that they are working towards which would be laid to waste, burned to the ground and replaced by the whim of an inherently destructive, sadistic and ideologically perverse force.

Toward this end I do not expect there to be peace and tranquillity throughout the region immediately before or after our engagement in this particular effort comes to an end. It will end sooner or later and there will continue to be those with rifles or explosives and a desire to destroy, just as there are in many, many other countries around the world. That is something we cannot control. But I hope that Australia and the coalition parties continue to strive with renewed vigour and determination for the realisation of an Afghani military and security force capable of successfully dealing with and resolving Afghani problems as they arise over time. That is fundamental. Whether it be likely or unlikely in the case of Afghanistan; whether it is even assessable at this point, I cannot say. I am deeply concerned by the thought of a force assuming effective control over large areas of populations within Afghanistan instituting a purge of people, the hundreds of thousands currently supportive of the development of the nation-state as it currently exists.

I am also deeply concerned that the greatest letting of blood would come after the withdrawal of coalition forces, if that were to occur, prior to the Afghans being ready to defend their state. The potential for human beings to be sickeningly brutal is common knowledge, and we saw it just a few years ago on our own doorstep, in East Timor and in other places. I recall Laurie Brereton was up in East Timor at the time and he witnessed hordes of frenzied people wielding machetes et cetera running around hacking people to bits, and we can all remember those horrendous pictures on our TV. We have seen systematic brutality around the world in many countries over

the years including the deep and bloody trauma that occurred on the subcontinent after the British partitioned India and withdrew effective control. We saw what happened there. At that time the loss of one million lives occurred. So I deeply, deeply hope that Australia and other coalition forces persist with their support of the training and the development of effective Afghan military and security forces in order to prevent, as best any force realistically can, any bloodletting into the future. To this end I stress the importance of doing all we can. I stress the importance of all coalition parties doubling and redoubling their effective efforts to help Afghanistan develop the demonstrated and proven capacity to defend itself and make itself secure.

Of course we know this will take time. The front-line battles that continue to take place clearly show that much more is needed in combating the enemy forces prior to coalition forces departing for home. To those who say that our presence is just making things worse, I say that the obvious task is to progressively deploy the Afghan military as they are trained and as they are able to be deployed, whether there be 100,000 for 200,000, as many as they need. Their ownership of their defence of their state is what sustainable countries do, and that is the way to go, after all.

All participants in this debate would no doubt have done quite a bit of soul-searching in preparation for this debate. We have all been considering the situation specific to Afghanistan. There have also been the strategic considerations of problematic areas in other countries and some of those have been mentioned in this debate by other members. There have also been examples of other Australian deployments over the last decade or so, peacekeeping forces in our own region and the like.

I would like to briefly look at a number of questions about us—Australia, our values and where our values place us in the world and how they guide our engagement in countries around the world. Will Australia help impoverished, underdeveloped and developing peoples and countries improve their lot in life? Will Australia respond favourably to countries' explicit requests for our direct assistance? Will we assist people to resist violent takeovers of their people, region or country? Will we oppose oppression in all its forms—oppression of people on the basis of their race, ethnicity, sex, political views or religious beliefs, and government by terror? Will we stand by and allow systematic extremist violence to be perpetrated against the innocent? Each of these questions is applicable to our connection with Afghanistan. To varying degrees each question is applicable to our engagement with other countries in the world and in our region. Each of these questions points to the type of country and people we are—our ethics, our values, our degrees of self-centredness and our active compassion towards others. So I would hope that we as a people and as a nation are secure enough in our society and in our place in the world to be able to give assistance to those less fortunate than ourselves or facing much greater threats than we do. I hope that we would do such things anywhere around the world to the best of our ability wherever assistance is needed. And we have many agencies that do this. Through AusAID, for example, we help nations in our immediate region and beyond in the areas of health and disease prevention, infrastructure, training and the development of skills necessary for their improved self-sufficiency, and it is good and right that we do.

On the question of responding favourably to countries' explicit requests for our direct assistance, where assistance is sought to avert or respond to grave or disastrous outcomes, in all honesty I cannot see how, as a member of the international community, we can morally decline requests for our assistance. Whether we assist in response to the damage caused by tsunamis or other natural disasters, or in the conduct of a nation's first election, as was the case in Cambodia some years ago, or in the establishment of a new and secure nation, such as independent East Timor, I believe we must provide help when it is requested, as we are able. This is especially the case in response to the third question. We should, I believe with all my heart, assist people to defend themselves from violent assault; help people to defend themselves, their region and their nation; and help people to resist violent takeover. Australia should oppose oppression. There is nothing more abhorrent and contrary to us and our values than sadistic, dictatorial rule. We should defend and promote the ideals for which we stand, share the freedoms we enjoy with those who aspire to similar freedoms, and support those around the world who similarly aspire to ongoing peace within a just society, free of systematic and barbaric violence against and denial of sacred human rights.