



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

**Afghanistan**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 27 October 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Nash, Sen Fiona

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**Senator NASH** (New South Wales) (2.50 pm)—I rise to make a contribution to the debate on Australia's involvement in Afghanistan. It will be a brief contribution. I feel it somewhat inappropriate to do so. I have not been to Afghanistan; neither do I have family or friends serving in Afghanistan. However, what I do have is a deep and sincere respect for those that are serving and a strong sense of responsibility that our country has a moral obligation to contribute, to act, to defeat the threat of terrorism.

We all remember September 11. It is quite extraordinary that an event of that nature is defined by a date. We all remember the horrific nature of the attacks. In some ways what was even worse was that it changed the world forever. Never before had we seen an attack of that nature. To watch it unfold, as we all did, was to all of us unbelievable and unimaginable. It was right that our response was to contribute to coalition operations against terrorism, joining 23 other nations. As the former Prime Minister John Howard said in his address to the Australian Defence Association on 25 October 2001:

Whilst the destruction of the Al Qaida network must be our first priority, the long-term aim of this war is to demonstrate that organised, international, state-sanctioned terrorism will not be tolerated by the world community.

And the former Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson said in 2002:

The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington last year can only be described as evil. They reminded us of how inhumane man can be to man and awoke in good people everywhere a deep awareness of the need to ensure that the attacks will be proven over time to have been utterly futile and self-defeating.

John Anderson has arguably one of the strongest social consciences of any who have taken their seats in this place. He understood, as did so many others, that we had a moral responsibility to contribute, to act.

I have two sons: Will, who is nearly 18; and Henry, who is nearly 16. Throughout their lives I have tried to instil in them a sense of what is right; a sense of responsibility; a sense that they have an obligation to their society and their fellow man. Imagine if I had had to tell them growing up about those attacks in New York, about the growing emergence of terrorism, and yet that in the face of that our country had done nothing—that we had stood by and chosen not to face the evil but to avert our collective eyes and do nothing.

I am incredibly proud that this country had the courage to make a contribution to the war in Afghanistan. I am incredibly proud that we had the courage to say that in spite of the magnitude of the task we were prepared to be part of a mission with a goal to secure a better future for the world. Up to 17,000 terrorists were in training camps in the late nineties. We cannot forget the history. We cannot forget our obligation. Our role is to ensure that Afghanistan is not a safe haven for terrorists and to do all possible to ensure the future stability of the region and the globe.

To be involved in the mission was not an easy decision for this nation to take. However, we did need to fulfil our responsibilities under the American alliance. Far from being at the beck and call of the United States, as some would like to term it, we had an obligation to the alliance—to show that we believe in what it stands for and to act accordingly. There are some who voice the belief that we should withdraw our troops from Afghanistan. I do not share those views. There will be an appropriate time for our involvement to end. But we should not give up on our contribution to a cause just because we get tired or just because we think we have had enough. The reasons we joined the war in Afghanistan continue to exist. I mentioned my sons earlier and what I have tried to instil in them. I have also tried to teach them not to quit when the going gets tough.

The 21 Australians who have died have made an incredible sacrifice for their country. We cannot honour them highly enough for what they have done, not only for their own country but for global security. It is so important that not only now but in decades to come we understand the magnitude of what they have done. We must give all Australians who are making a contribution in Afghanistan the respect they deserve for their willingness to serve. They do not expect others to do the job for them; they are putting their lives on the line for us and for the security of future generations.

This country made the right decision. We were right to decide to play our part in joining the fight against terrorism. We are right to be in Afghanistan. We have a moral obligation, a moral responsibility as a nation, to play our role to try to ensure a secure future for the world for future generations to come.