

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2007-2008**  
**Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2007-2008**  
**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS) BILL**  
**(NO. 1) 2007-2008**  
**Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2006-2007**  
**Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2006-2007**  
**Second Reading 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007**

[Mr KELVIN THOMSON](#) (Wills) (7.05 p.m.)—The budget contained a \$2 billion increase in the defence budget to what was a record \$22 billion. We now have the defence budget at 9.3 per cent of total government outlays, which is 10.6 per cent higher than last year's figure of \$19.8 billion, and the government has in fact allocated an additional \$14 billion to defence over the next 10 years in budget initiatives. That means that the defence budget has increased from \$10.6 billion in 1995-96 to \$22 billion this year, which is a 107 per cent rise over a 12-year period.

Defence spending has soared in part to cover the cost of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I want to speak to these issues in some detail. Just last night, Colonel Mike Kelly, who is widely regarded as the most senior Australian soldier in Iraq, and who is now the federal Labor candidate for Eden-Monaro, was reported by *The 7.30 Report*, and in the *Canberra Times* today, as stating that he raised with appropriate authorities both bribes paid by AWB to Saddam Hussein and the issue of torture and prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison long before the government says that it was actually aware of these matters. In the case of Abu Ghraib, Colonel Kelly revealed that he had told the government of abuse of prisoners as early as mid-2003. Yet the government claims it was only made aware of the allegations in January 2004.

The issue here is: what happened to Colonel Kelly's statement? This is a most serious matter. It should be the subject of independent inquiry. It is the same with AWB. As Colonel Kelly stated, AWB's conduct would be regarded by some as treason, yet we do not know what became of his reports, which ministers' offices may have received them and what they did with them afterwards. This should also be the subject of independent inquiry.

It is no use the government claiming that we have had the Cole inquiry. The Cole inquiry's terms of reference were limited to AWB and to two other companies. They did not include the government or government officials. The inquiry did not call Colonel Kelly or investigate his reports. Colonel Kelly's revelations point to monumental government failure and cover-up and they warrant—indeed, they require—an independent investigation.

Let me turn to the war in Iraq. I ask the question: who said the following and when?

I think that the proposition of going to Baghdad is also fallacious. I think if we were going to remove Saddam Hussein we would have had to go all the way to Baghdad, we would have to commit a lot of force because I do not believe he would wait in the Presidential Palace for us to arrive. I think we'd have had to hunt him down. And once we'd done that and we'd gotten rid of Saddam Hussein and his government, then we'd have had to put another government in its place.

What kind of government? Should it be a Sunni government or Shi'i government or a Kurdish government or Ba'athist regime? Or maybe we want to bring in some of the Islamic fundamentalists? How long would we have had to stay in Baghdad to keep that government in place? What would happen to the government once U.S. forces withdrew? How many casualties should the United States accept in that effort to try to create clarity and stability in a situation that is inherently unstable?

I think it is vitally important for a President to know when to use military force. I think it is also very important for him to know when not to commit U.S. military force. And it's my view that the President got it right both times, that it would have been a mistake for us to get bogged down in the quagmire inside Iraq.

The speaker was in fact Dick Cheney and he was speaking at the Washington Institute in 1991.

To understand what is going wrong today in Iraq and why, it is important to recap on the genesis of the Iraq war. In the wake of September 11 there was a huge outpouring of international support for the United States. Indeed, one French newspaper famously declared, 'We are all Americans now.' International consensus built rapidly in support of the strike on Afghanistan to end the Taliban regime which had harboured al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. That attack initially proved highly successful although bin Laden escaped. There was every sense that a new democratic nation could be created in the country.

However, pretty soon after the apparent victory in Afghanistan, talk within the Bush administration turned to its next target—Iraq. Opinions differ on the real basis for this shift. There was, of course, the issue of weapons of mass destruction. It turned out that there were none. There was the issue of Iraq being a rogue state in league with al-Qaeda. There was no evidence for that. Indeed, it was initially rejected as sufficient justification for war by our Prime Minister. There was the issue of Iraq breaching United Nations resolutions and sanctions. Of course, we should contrast that with AWB, which was actually breaching sanctions to the tune of \$300 million to Saddam Hussein under the Howard government's watch. There was the issue of regime change, democratisation and nation building. Once again, that was rejected as justification for invasion by the Australian Prime Minister.

Others more conspiratorially suggest oil. Certainly oil and other geopolitical and strategic interests would have been part of the US President's calculations and would have been factored into the ultimate decision. But I think the simplest explanation or Ockham's razor is that President Bush sought a mandate as a war president to define his presidency and to assist in creating Republican political dominance in future decades. Certainly, there is plenty of evidence from Bob Woodward in the book *State of Denial* and other commentators such as Frank Rich in the book *The Greatest Story Ever Sold* and Thomas Ricks in *Fiasco* to support this contention. Similarly, President Bush may well have learned a lesson from his father, George Bush senior, and the Gulf War mark I—that is, do not actually have the war end. In the end, as a Downing Street memo of July 2002 highlighted, weapons of mass destruction were merely the most convenient and most sellable of the rationalisations for the invasion. Ultimately, the intelligence and the facts were being fixed around the prescribed policy to invade.

Since the original invasion we can see rhetorical shifts from our government, which is continuously seeking to argue support for the war using reworkings of key phrases out of the US playbook like 'stay the course' and 'we must not cut and run' and so on. Unfortunately, the facts on the ground have undercut all of these lines. Along the way, the public has witnessed not just the deterioration of the invasion into civil war but also other shocks, scandals and revelations. There was the looting of Baghdad immediately following the invasion. There was Abu Ghraib. There was the AWB scandal.

There was the civilian death toll, which ranges from 60,000 to as high as 600,000. It is a disgrace that there is no accurate data and that the government strongly denies the legitimacy of the higher figure despite the fact that the United

Kingdom's department of defence says that the *Lancet* survey—the '600,000 Iraqi civilians dead' survey—was credibly based. There is no evidence of postwar planning. Iraq is now a terrorist haven, so the invasion has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Afghanistan continues to remain highly problematic and requiring of greater troop commitment and materiel due to the loss of focus caused by the invasion of Iraq.

Colin Powell famously told the US President prior to the invasion, 'If you break it, you own it.' Certainly, with over 3,000 servicemen dead, countless tens of thousands seriously wounded and a financial cost of several hundred billion dollars, the United States has significant interest in the outcome of the war. We have had former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointing to the paradox of the United States being in the position where it cannot stay and it cannot leave.

When asking ourselves what is going wrong, we have to reflect on the fact that bad faith and bad motives have led inevitably to bad outcomes. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that, increasingly, Australians do not believe the current government on many issues of public policy, whether it is kids overboard or missing weapons of mass destruction. There is plenty of evidence of a government being loose with the truth and a decade of this sort of behaviour finally starting to take its toll.

In the past, the Prime Minister was prone to suggest that the Iraq war was at a tipping point and, more recently, that we are witnessing a 'hinge point'. We have had Iraqi leaders talking about the next month as being crucial. Well, in fact the United States witnessed a tipping point last November. We are obviously going to have to wait and see whether Australians require some penalty from a government which has supported such a rolled-gold strategic disaster as the Iraq invasion.

Prime Minister Howard says that the real question is: what should we do now? He also says that if the Americans pull out there will be a massive loss of American prestige, to which I make the following responses. (1) If this had happened under a Labor government, the world would have stopped and stood still until we departed the political stage in disgrace. The Liberals would be demanding our heads for such a monumental debacle. (2) The government should have thought about the prestige issue before they went in in the first place. The invasion did not have bipartisan support in Australia. Indeed, it did not have United Nations mandate or authority. But the Bush administration and the Howard administration were the know-all's who knew better. (3) How many military personnel and civilians are going to die in order that the Americans suffer no loss of face? You would think that we would have learnt something from Vietnam, but this war is no better; it will go on and on until we get out of there. Finally, yes, we ought to be good friends of the Americans and support them, but sometimes being a good mate involves not going along with every silly idea that your mate comes up with—it involves telling your mate that they have got it wrong.

So what is the best way forward now? How should Australia disengage from Iraq? First, it is important to recognise the nature of the current conflict in Iraq, and also to distinguish it from the situation in Afghanistan. Along with the broad world community, and in the immediate aftermath of September 11, Labor supported, and still supports, action in Afghanistan to combat and defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda, which have provided the foundations for extreme Islamist terrorists for close to two decades and provided the kernel of support for jihadists

in our region, including those involved in the Bali bombing. So we recognise our obligations under the ANZUS treaty and also that bin Laden and the Taliban need to be destroyed. But we also have to bear in mind that, for several years, the government withdrew from this theatre, before the job was done, to get involved in the Iraq adventure. So, in committing more troops now, we are simply seeking to make up for lost time.

In contrast with Afghanistan, Iraq has now become effectively a civil and sectarian war, involving interethnic and interreligious forces. Tragically, rather than mitigating and decreasing the risks of global terrorism, the Iraq invasion has merely spawned new terror in the region and created a training zone for jihadists. The fact that the current US and Australian administrations conflate the two conflicts demonstrates a failure to comprehend reality. As distinct from Afghanistan, in Iraq the international community sees the need to find political solutions.

This is recognised even within the US foreign policy establishment. If you look at the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group report of late 2006, and you look at recent moves made by the Democrat controlled congress and senate in the wake of the mid-term elections last year, and the defeat of the Bush Republicans, you can see an understanding that Iraq is a civil war which demands political reconciliation between disputing Islamic groups and that the Iraqis are the only people who can ultimately resolve their security crisis. The only people who are in denial and do not seem to see this reality are the Bush-Cheney presidency and the Howard government. The PM seems to have personalised the ANZUS treaty and, because of his relationship with the current US President, Australia is committing itself to self-defeating support for President Bush's high-risk, low-percentage surge strategy.

Out of the work of the Iraq Study Group and others, the broad framework for how the international community manages the Iraq situation going forward would include: first, the need to set performance benchmarks for the phased withdrawal of allied troops in line with the Baker-Hamilton report; second, setting elements to our involvement so that we send a message to the al-Maliki government that it must do more to curb sectarian violence; and, third, defining the mission and the exit strategy. The opposition have sought to define both our mission and an appropriate exit process such that, on election, a Labor government would take measured steps to withdraw Australian combat troops from Iraq, but we would do that in a sensible and responsible way in consultation with both the US and the UK. In reducing our troop commitment in Iraq, Australia would be doing no more or less than countless other nations that have either removed or withdrawn troops, including the UK, Spain, Italy, Japan, the Ukraine, the Philippines, Thailand, Norway, the Netherlands, South Korea and others.

Australia has about 1,400 military personnel in its various Iraq commitments. Of these, approximately 900 will not be affected, including those involved with HMAS *Toowoomba* on gulf duties, overflight missions by P3C Orion aircraft and its personnel, and the Hercules C130 detachment providing supply and medical assistance. There are also over 100 personnel protecting the Australian embassy and officials in Baghdad. However, some 500 combat troops will be withdrawn in a sensible and responsible way. It is worth noting that even the Minister for Defence recently acknowledged that they have not been involved in direct military actions as such. By conflating the Afghanistan and Iraq missions, the government demonstrates a denial of reality and exposes that its foreign policy is being dictated by considerations other than Australia's genuine national security interests.

We need to repair Australia's reputation as a good international citizen. In 1996, on coming to office, the Howard government removed reference to Australia being a good international citizen as an objective of Australian foreign policy—and they certainly achieved that. The last decade has seen the effect of this strategy across a number of key areas. We have had a lack of respect for international law, as highlighted in our decision to participate in the invasion of Iraq. We have had a diminished human rights reputation and increasing disengagement from promoting human rights via increased criticism of human rights bodies. We have been involved in undermining international labour standards. We have been isolated from what our shadow foreign affairs minister referred to as inconvenient truths—for example, AWB committing the largest breaches of UN sanctions even while one of the reasons we invaded Iraq was in the name of its breaching these sanctions. We have had a failure to defend the rights of our citizens to due process. In David Hicks's case we supported the Guantanamo Bay process. We did not support the rule of law; we did not support a fair trial. Consequently, our capacity to advocate Australian national interests from a position of strength as a good international citizen has been severely compromised and this affects our international bargaining power over issues as diverse and as important as global warming, trade policy, disarmament and international security.

In the remaining time I have I want to mention the issue of military and civilian casualties. It is a disgrace that the coalition of the willing, including Australia, has failed to make any attempt to maintain or publish any figures concerning civilian deaths of Iraqis as a consequence of the invasion of Iraq. One can only assume that this failure means that the alleged concern of that coalition for the fate of Iraqi citizens under Saddam Hussein amounted to crocodile tears. But it is clear that, in relation to both military deaths and civilian casualties, we have an ongoing debacle on our hands and that things are getting worse rather than better. Measurements of things like bomb blasts that kill more than 50 people have doubled in recent times and mortar attacks that kill civilians have quadrupled. The last year has been simply the worst in terms of civilian casualties. Fatal suicide bombs, car bombs and roadside bombing attacks have doubled from 712 to 1,476.

While the PM and others sought to dismiss and devalue the *Lancet* study showing upwards of 650,000 civilian deaths as a consequence of the war, we now know that the UK department of defence has confirmed that the methodology of the original study—and hence the results—was valid. This has been an ongoing humanitarian debacle, and it is time that this government listened to what the international community, the opposition and the Australian people are saying and came up with, however belatedly, an exit strategy that enables us to repair our reputation as good international citizens.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)**—I understand it would suit the convenience of the Committee if the debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for the next sitting.